CHAPTER ONE

Definitional and Conceptual Issues in Social–Emotional Learning

Comprehensive longitudinal studies, meta-analyses, and literature reviews have documented that poor peer relations in childhood are predictive of serious adjustment difficulties in adolescence and early adulthood (Cowen, Pedersen, Babigian, Izzo, & Trost, 1973; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993a; Parker & Asher, 1987; Prinstein, Rancourt, Guerry, & Browne, 2009). These difficulties in social–behavioral competence and peer relations lead to short-term, intermediate, and long-term challenges in the educational, psychosocial, and vocational domains of functioning (Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006; Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Newcomb et al., 1993a). This line of research accumulated over the past 35 years has prompted an intense interest in the development of preventive interventions among researchers studying the deleterious effects of peer relationship difficulties. This logic was based on the notion that timely interventions focusing on improving childhood peer relations could reduce exposure to the risks associated with peer rejection and social isolation, promote healthy socialization, and foster long-term positive outcomes (Bierman, 2004; La Greca, 1993; Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009).

A great deal of attention over the last 10 years has focused on children's social–emotional competence and includes assessment and intervention with social skills that contribute to the development of these social–emotional competencies. More recently, there has been a push by educators, policymakers, and researchers to focus on promoting the development of

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children's social–emotional competencies within the school context. This is evidenced by the recent inclusion of social–emotional learning (SEL) as distinct state learning standards in school districts across the country because these competencies are linked to positive academic and psychological outcomes (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). A large corpus of research involving over 500 evaluations from preschool to higher education has demonstrated the effectiveness of universal school-based SEL interventions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2012).

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

The construct of social competence has been conceptualized and operationalized from many different perspectives and theoretical orientations across the various specialties within psychology, special education, and applied behavior analysis. An adequate conceptualization of social competence is important because it guides evidence-based assessment and intervention strategies. At least three general conceptualizations of the construct of social competence have been discussed in the research literature.

Sociometric Conceptualization

One conceptualization is termed the *sociometric conceptualization* of social competence. This approach primarily uses indices of sociometric status to operationalize social competence. As such, individuals who are rejected or neglected by peers are considered to be socially incompetent and individuals who are accepted or popular with peers are considered to be socially competent. An individual's sociometric status refers to how a person perceives others in terms of likes and dislikes and how other persons perceive the individual (Hartup, 2009). Sociometric status is based on a large amount of information including who wants to associate with whom, who wants to engage is certain social activities with others, and who likes or dislikes someone within a social network. Comprehensive sociometric assessments are typically based on indices of *social preference* and *social impact* (Peery, 1979) and derivations of these constructs have been used to classify individuals as rejected, neglected, controversial, and popular (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).

Despite its relative objectivity, the major drawback of a sociometric conceptualization of social competence is that it often cannot identify the specific behaviors within specific situations that lead to peer acceptance or rejection. Some research does suggest that the behavioral correlates of various sociometric statuses are topographically different. For example, the

behavioral correlates of *peer rejection* typically include behaviors such as aggressive behavior, impulsivity, and negative social interactions with peers (Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990). In contrast, the behavioral correlates of *neglected sociometric status* include behaviors such as anxiety, social withdrawal, depression, and low rates of positive social interaction (Newcomb et al., 1993a). These behavioral correlates, however, are relatively low in magnitude and most certainly do not entirely explain or account for an individual's particular sociometric status.

In addition, positive or negative sociometric status can occur for reasons that have nothing to do with social skills strengths or weaknesses. For example, it has been shown that physical, attractiveness/unattractiveness, positive/negative reputational biases, critical negative behavioral events, race/ethnicity, and cross-sex nominations are related to positive or negative sociometric status (Rubin et al., 2009).

Social Learning Theory

Other researchers and theorists have used a *social learning conceptualization* of the social skill construct (Elliott & Gresham, 2008; Gresham & Elliott, 2008). In this view, numerous variables account for an individual's deficiencies in prosocial behavior and excesses in competing problem behaviors. Figure 1.1 depicts a model that identifies five major reasons for deficient social skills functioning: (1) lack of knowledge, (2) lack of practice and/or feedback, (3) absence or inattention to social cues, (4) lack of reinforcement, and (5) presence of competing problem behaviors. This particular model uses three distinct theoretical learning theories to explain social skill deficiencies and excessive competing problem behaviors.

Social learning theory, based on the early work of Bandura (1977, 1986), utilizes the concept of vicarious learning and the role of cognitive–mediational processes to explain which environmental events are attended to, retained, and subsequently performed when a person is exposed to modeling stimuli. The concept of reciprocal determinism is a central feature of social learning theory, which describes the role an individual's behavior has on changing the environment and vice versa (Bandura, 1986).

Cognitive-behavioral theory is a second learning theory used to explain deficient social skills functioning. This approach is based on the assumption that an individual's behavior in response to environmental events is mediated by cognitions or thoughts (Mayer, Van Acker, Lochman, & Gresham, 2009). Interventions based on cognitive-behavioral theory present individuals with social situations in which a variety of internal and external social cues are present. These cues are made more or less salient to a person based on past learning history and current environmental circumstances.
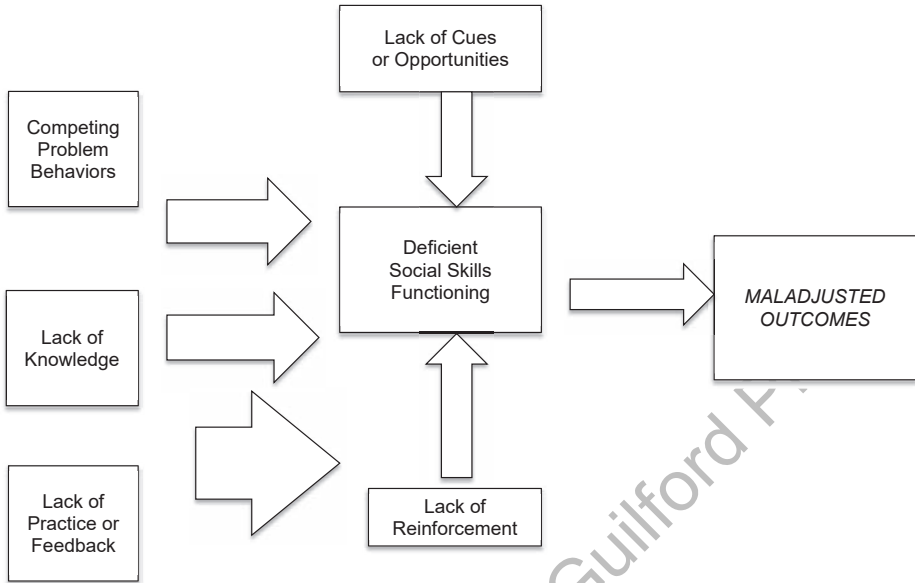
FIGURE 1.1. Five major reasons for social skills deficiencies.

The goal of cognitive-behavioral interventions is to change maladaptive self-statements, attributions, and perceptions to increase overt prosocial behavior and to decrease maladaptive social perceptions and attributions that lead to competing problem behaviors. Strategies such as self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-evaluation, and social problem solving are typically used in cognitive-behavioral approaches (Lochman & Gresham, 2009).

Applied behavior analysis is a third learning theory used to explain social skills deficits and competing problem behavior excesses. Applied behavior analysis is based on the work of Skinner (1953) in operant conditioning and is grounded in the concept of the three-term contingency that describes the relationships among antecedent events, behavior, and consequent events.

Applied behavior analysts identify the conditions that reinforce (positively or negatively) the occurrence of specific problem behaviors that need to be modified. Functional behavioral assessment is central to the identification of environmental conditions that are functionally related to the occurrence of problem behaviors (Gresham, Watson, & Skinner, 2001). In this approach to SEL intervention, applied behavior analysis is used to replace competing problem behaviors with prosocial behaviors that serve the same behavioral function. This process is known as positive replacement behavior training (Maag, 2005).

Social Validity Conceptualization

A final approach to conceptualizing social skills is based on the notion of social validity (Wolf, 1978). According to this conceptualization, social skills are those behaviors that, within a given situation, predict important social outcomes for children and youth. These important social outcomes might include peer acceptance, friendships, academic achievement, significant others' (teachers' and parents') judgments of social competence, consistent school attendance, and absence of school disciplinary referrals. This conceptualization has the advantage of being able not only to specify behaviors in which an individual is deficient, but also to directly relate these social behaviors to socially important outcomes that society values.

The issues of *social significance* and *social importance* are most relevant to a social validity conceptualization of the social skills construct. The social significance of the goals specified by an SEL intervention is an important consideration. For example, a practitioner may want to increase the number of "thank you" verbalizations exhibited by a child. Although this would appear to be a socially significant goal, significant others (teachers and parents) may not consider it a socially significant goal. A broader goal, such as increases in all positive verbalizations, might be considered more socially significant, and hence more socially valid by significant others in the child's environment.

It is important to recognize that the social significance of behavioral goals in SEL interventions is based on subjective evaluation (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978). Subjective evaluations are judgments made by persons who interact with or who are in a special position to judge behavior. Parents, teachers, counselors, social workers, and other significant persons in an individual's environment are likely candidates for subjectively evaluating the goals of SEL interventions.

Evaluating the social importance of the effects produced by social–emotional interventions is crucial. The question here is: Does the quantity and quality of behavior change make a difference in terms of an individual's functioning in particular settings? In other words, do changes in targeted social skills predict an individual's standing on important social outcomes? In this conceptualization, the effects of SEL interventions can be classified based on a social validity criterion. In this classification system, these measures represent socially valid treatment goals because social systems (e.g., schools, mental health agencies) and significant others (teachers and parents) refer children and youth on the basis of these treatment goals. These measures are socially valid in the sense that they predict long-term outcomes that are important to society including events such as school dropout, delinquency, adult mental health difficulties, and arrest rates (Kupersmidt et al., 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987; Walker, Ramsay, & Gresham, 2004). More

details on how one might quantify the social importance of the effects of social–emotional interventions are discussed in Chapter 3.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

An important distinction in the theoretical conceptualization of social behavior is the distinction among the concepts of social skills, social tasks, and social competence. *Social–emotional skills* can be conceptualized as a specific class of behaviors that an individual exhibits in order to successfully complete a social task. Social skills are best thought of as a response class that is defined as an integrated group of behaviors that have varying topographies or forms of behavior that produce the same effect on the environment. *Social tasks* include such things as peer group entry, having a conversation, making friends, or playing a game with peers. Social tasks require different response classes to successfully complete that social task. Asher and McDonald (2009) suggest that a social-task perspective is based on the assumption that the various tasks have their own distinct challenges and require various social behaviors that are task-specific. Table 1.1 shows examples of various social tasks that might be required of children and youth.

   Social competence, in contrast, is an evaluative term based on judgments (given certain criteria) that an individual has performed a social task adequately. Social agents make these judgments based on numerous social interactions with given individuals within natural environments (e.g., home, school, community). This conceptualization states that social skills are a specific class of behavior exhibited in specific situations that lead to judgments by significant others that these behaviors are competent or incompetent in accomplishing specific social tasks. It should be noted that

TABLE 1.1. Examples of Social Tasks

• Complimenting others	• Ignoring classmates who are distracting
• Asking for help	• Asking for help from adults
• Having a conversation	• Saying nice things about others
• Joining ongoing play activities	• Respecting the property of others
• Dealing with teasing or name calling	• Standing up for others who are being treated unfairly
• Negotiating with others	• Making friends easily
• Listening to others	• Participating in games or group activities
• Persuading others	• Resolving disagreements without getting angry
• Expressing feelings	
• Following teacher directions	• Making a compromise during a conflict
• Participating appropriately in class activities	

judgments of social competence or incompetence differ across social agents making these judgments. As such, social behaviors judged to be competent by classroom teachers might not be judged as competent by a child's peers. In fact, researchers have made a distinction between teacher-preferred and peer-preferred social skills (Gresham & Elliott, 2008; Walker, Irvin, Noell, & Singer, 1992).

Teacher-preferred social–emotional skills are behaviors that facilitate the process of children and youth meeting the behavioral demands and expectations that the majority of teachers require in order to successfully manage instructional environments. Behaviors such as compliance with teacher directives, following classroom rules, working independently, and listening carefully to the teacher are examples of these teacher-preferred social skills. *Peer-preferred* social–emotional skills are behaviors that facilitate the accomplishment of satisfactory peer relationships, that develop friendships, and that support and maintain social networks.

During middle school, a third form of social adjustment termed *self-related* social–emotional skills assume increased importance. Self-related social skills include behaviors such as managing one's emotions, being organized, regulating one's behavior, asserting oneself, coping with relational aggression, and protecting one's reputation. These types of social skills are most relevant to adolescent social development (Walker et al., 2004).

If children and youth fail to satisfactorily negotiate teacher-related, peer-related, and self-related social skills, they are at increased risk for later school failure and vocational adjustment in early adulthood. Figure 1.2 presents a conceptual model of teacher-related, peer-related, and self-related social skills with associated long-term positive and negative outcomes.

Social Skills as Academic Enablers

Researchers have documented meaningful predictive relationships between children's social behaviors and their long-term academic achievement (DiPerma & Elliott, 2002; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Wentzel, 2009). It has been documented that children who have positive interactions and relationships with their peers are academically engaged and have higher levels of academic achievement (see Wentzel, 2009, for a review). The notion of *academic enablers* evolved from the work of researchers who explored the relationship between students' nonacademic behaviors (social skills and motivation) and their academic achievement (Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Wentzel, 2005, 2009; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002).

Researchers make a distinction between academic skills and academic enablers. Academic skills are the basic and complex skills that are the primary focus of academic instruction. In contrast, academic enablers are the attitudes and behaviors that allow students to participate in and ultimately

Teacher-Related Adjustment		Peer-Related Adjustment		Self-Related Adjustment	
Adaptive	*Maladaptive*	*Adaptive*	*Maladaptive*	*Adaptive*	*Maladaptive*
• Asks for help • Follows directions • Ignores distractions • Follows rules • Shows concern • Stays calm	• Tantrums • Disobeys rules • Talks back to adults • Is impulsive • Is inattentive • Gets distracted	• Cooperates • Supports peers • Leads peers • Shows empathy • Affiliates with peers • Stands up for peers	• Bullies others • Fights • Gossips about peers • Excludes peers • Withdraws • Acts lonely	• Controls emotions • Regulates behavior • Asserts self • Protects reputation • Takes criticism well • Compromises	• Has low energy • Is lethargic • Is depressed • Is anxious

OUTCOMES

Positive	*Negative*	*Positive*	*Negative*	*Positive*	*Negative*
• Teacher acceptance • School achievement	• Teacher rejection • Referral for specialized services • School dropout and failure • Low performance expectations	• Peer acceptance • Positive peer relations • Friendships	• Rejection/neglect • Low social involvement	• School success • Respected by peers • Respected by adults	• Low self-esteem • Disciplinary referrals • School maladjustment

FIGURE 1.2. Social–behavioral competencies.

benefit from academic instruction in the classroom. Research using the Academic Competence Evaluation Scales (ACES; DiPerma & Elliott, 2000) showed that academic enablers were moderately correlated with students' academic achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests (median r = .50). In a major longitudinal study, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, and Zimbardo (2000) found that teacher ratings of prosocial behaviors in third grade were better predictors of eighth grade academic achievement than academic achievement in third grade.

Work by Wentzel (2005) has shown that various aspects of peer relationships are predictive of children's motivational and academic functioning at school. This line of research shows that children's level of peer acceptance are positively related to motivation, school satisfaction, goal-directed learning, interest in school, and self-perceived academic competence. Additionally, having friendships is related to school grades and achievement test scores in both elementary- and middle school-age children. Wentzel (2005) suggests that positive relationships with peers provide a context that supports the development of positive motivational orientations toward academic achievement.

Most researchers have concluded that positive peer interactions promote displays of competent forms of social behavior that in turn promote successful academic performance. Behaviors such as cooperation, following rules, and getting along with others create efficient classroom environments and allow students to benefit from academic instruction. Displays of prosocial behavior and restraint from disruptive and antisocial forms of behavior have been consistently and positively related to achievement motivation and academic success (Wentzel, 2009). Socially competent behavior provides the essential basis for learning that allows students to benefit from classroom instruction (DiPerma & Elliott, 2002).

Problem Behaviors as Academic Disablers

Although social skills function as academic enablers, it has been shown that problem behaviors, particularly externalizing behavior patterns, interfere with or compete with the performance of both social and academic skills (Gresham, 2010; Gresham & Elliott, 2008; Walker et al., 1992). In other words, these competing problem behaviors have been known to function as *academic disablers* in that they are associated with decreases in academic performance. Children and youth with externalizing behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, and/or teacher defiance often have moderate to severe academic skill deficits that are reflected in below-average academic achievement (Coie & Jacobs, 1993; Hinshaw, 1992; Offord, Boyle, & Racine, 1989). It is unclear whether these academic problems are primarily correlates (moderators), causes (mediators), or consequences of problem behaviors; however, there is little doubt that the presence of these problem

behaviors greatly exacerbates low academic performance. As these children progress through their school careers, their academic deficits and achievement problems become even more severe (Walker et al., 1992, 2004).

An important consideration in the conceptualization of social–emotional skills deficits is the influence of competing problem behaviors on an individual's level of social skill functioning (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). Competing problem behaviors effectively compete with, interfere with, or block the exhibition of a particular social skill. Competing problem behaviors can be broadly classified as *externalizing* behavior patterns (noncompliance, aggression, impulsive behaviors) or *internalizing* behavior patterns (social withdrawal, anxiety, depression). For example, a child with a history of noncompliant, oppositional, and impulsive behavior may never learn prosocial behavior alternatives such as sharing, cooperation, and self-control because of the absence of opportunities to learn these behaviors caused by the competing function of these externalizing behaviors (Eddy, Reid, & Curry, 2002). Similarly, a child with a history of social anxiety, social withdrawal, and shyness may never learn appropriate social behaviors because of avoidance of the peer group, thereby creating an absence of opportunities to learn peer-related social skills.

Some social–emotional skills deficits are due primarily to motivational variables rather than to a lack of exposure or knowledge concerning how to enact a given social skill. One of the most conceptually powerful learning principles that can be used to explain the relationship between social skills performance deficits and competing problem behaviors is the *matching law* (Herrnstein, 1961, 1970). The matching law states that the relative rate of a given behavior matches the relative rate of reinforcement for that behavior. In other words, response rate matches reinforcement rate. Matching is studied experimentally in an arrangement known as concurrent schedules of reinforcement, which refers to an experimental arrangement in which two or more behaviors are reinforced according to two or more simultaneous, but quantitatively different, schedules of reinforcement.

Matching deals with the issue of "choice behavior" in that behaviors having a higher rate of reinforcement will be "chosen" more frequently than behaviors reinforced at lower rates. Research in naturalistic classroom environments has consistently shown that behavior rates observed under concurrent schedules of reinforcement closely follow the matching law (Martens, 1992; Martens & Houk, 1989; Martens, Lochner, & Kelly, 1992; Synder & Stoolmiller, 2002).

Maag (2005) suggested that one way to decrease competing problem behaviors is to teach *positive replacement behaviors,* or what he called replacement behavior training (RBT). RBT may help solve many of the problems described in the social–emotional skills training literature such as poor generalization and maintenance, modest effect sizes, and social invalidity of target behavior selection. The goal of RBT is to identify a prosocial

behavior that will replace the competing problem behavior. Conceptually, RBT depends on identifying *functionally equivalent behaviors*. Behaviors are said to be functionally equivalent if they produce similar amounts of functionally relevant reinforcement from the environment.

IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIAL SKILLS STRENGTHS AND DEFICITS

An important consideration in conceptualizing social–emotional skills is to identify social skills strengths, acquisition deficits, performance deficits, and competing problem behaviors. Figure 1.3 provides a framework for conceptualizing social behavior. There are four steps in using the framework in Figure 1.3: (1) identifying social skills strengths, (2) identifying social skills performance deficits, (3) identifying social skills acquisition deficits, and (4) identifying excessive problem behaviors. Social–emotional skills strengths are represented by a child knowing and using a particular social skill consistently and appropriately. Social–emotional skills performance deficits are reflected in a child knowing how to use a social skill, but who does so inconsistently. A social–emotional skills acquisition deficit describes a situation in which the child does not sufficiently know the skill or how to use it appropriately. Finally, an excessive problem behavior interferes with a child's performance of a learned social skill. Specific procedural details regarding how to quantify social skills strengths, performance deficits, acquisition deficits, and excessive problem behaviors are presented in Chapter 3.
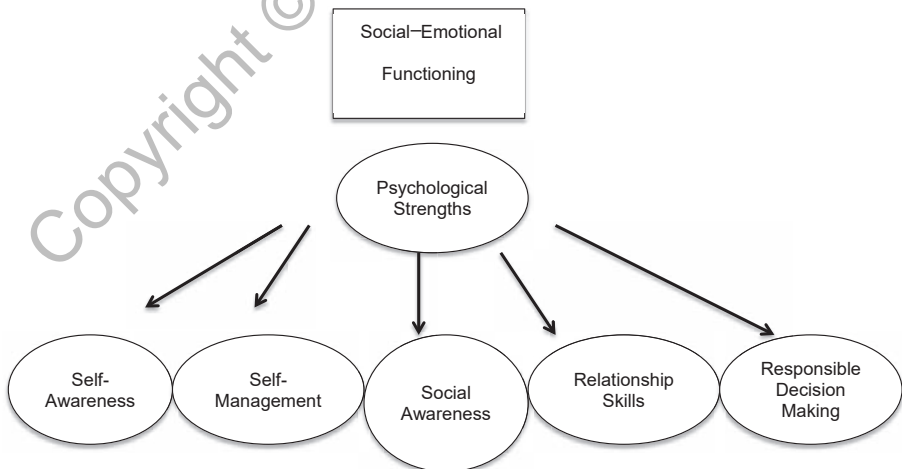
FIGURE 1.3. Framework for conceptualizing social behavior.

Acquisition versus Performance Deficits

The distinction between social skills acquisition and performance deficits is important because different intervention approaches are called for in remediating these differing social skills deficits. They also dictate different instructional contexts (e.g., general education classrooms vs. pullout groups).

Acquisition deficits result from a lack of knowledge about how to enact a given social skill, inability to fluently perform a sequence of social behaviors, or difficulty in knowing which social skills are appropriate in specific situations (Gresham & Elliott, 2014). Based on this conceptualization, acquisition deficits can result from deficits in social–cognitive abilities, difficulties in integrating fluent behavior patterns, and/or in appropriate discrimination of social situations. Acquisition deficits are perhaps best thought of as "can't do" problems because the child cannot perform the social skill under the most optimal conditions of motivation. Remediation of these types of deficits requires direct instruction of social skills in protected settings that will promote the acquisition of socially skilled behaviors.

Performance deficits can be conceptualized as the failure to perform a social skill at an acceptable level despite the child knowing how to perform it. These types of social skills deficits can best be thought of as "won't do" problems because the child knows what to do, but chooses not to perform a particular social skill in given situations. These types of social skills deficits can best be thought of as *motivational* or performance problems rather than learning or acquisition problems. As such, remediation of these types of deficits requires manipulating antecedents and consequences in naturalistic settings to increase the frequency of these behaviors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL–EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Many children and youth have deficits in social–emotional competencies that negatively impact their academic performance and social relationships. In a national survey of students in grades 6–12, less than half of these students reported that they had social competencies such as conflict resolution skills, decision-making skills, and empathy (Benson, 2006). Almost 30% of these students by the time they reach high school are involved in multiple high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, sex, depression, and attempted suicide. There is a consensus among educators and mental health professionals that universal school-based efforts to facilitate students' social–emotional competence represent a promising approach to enhance school and life success (Zins & Elias, 2006).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

CASEL is an organization devoted to evidence-based SEL as a key component to assist in the establishment of SEL from preschool-age children to those in high school. The goals of CASEL are to promote the science of SEL, to expand SEL practices, and to inform state and federal policymakers about the importance of these programs. CASEL (2005) has targeted five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: (1) *self-awareness*, (2) *self-management*, (3) *social awareness,* (4) *relationship skills,* and (5) *responsible decision making.* These competencies are intended to promote better adjustment and social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, diminished emotional distress, and improved academic achievement. Table 1.2 provides specific behavioral examples of these five core areas of SEL identified by CASEL

What evidence is there that universal SEL programs implemented in schools produce the intended outcomes? Durlak and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based universal SEL programs involving 270,034 students in kindergarten through high school across multiple outcome measures (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). These outcome measures included social/emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. This meta-analysis sought to answer the following four questions:

1. What outcomes are achieved by interventions that attempt to enhance children's emotional and social skills?
2. Can SEL interventions promote positive outcomes and prevent future problems?
3. Can SEL programs be successfully conducted in the school setting by existing school personnel?
4. What variables moderate the impact of school-based SEL programs?

The six primary outcome measure categories used in this meta-analysis are described below. *Social and emotional skills* included evaluations of different types of cognitive, affective, and social skills related to areas such as identifying emotions from social cues, goal setting, perspective taking, problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making. *Attitudes toward self and others* combined positive attitudes about oneself, school, and social topics. This category included self-perceptions (e.g., self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy), school bonding, and prosocial beliefs about violence, helping others, social justice, and drug use. All of these outcomes were based on student self-reports. *Positive social behavior*

TABLE 1.2. CASEL Competencies and Behavioral Examples

CASEL competency	Behavioral examples
Self-management	• Resolves disagreements calmly. • Stays calm when teased. • Makes compromises in conflicts. • Responds appropriately when pushed/hit. • Takes criticism without becoming upset.
Social awareness	• Tries to understand others' feelings. • Tries to make others feel better. • Forgives others. • Tries to comfort others. • Shows concern for others.
Relationship skills	• Makes eye contact when talking. • Speaks in appropriate tone of voice. • Makes friends easily. • Interacts well with others. • Invites others to join activities.
Responsible decision making	• Takes care of others' things. • Is well behaved when unsupervised. • Respects the property of others. • Takes responsibility for his or her own actions. • Does what he or she promised. • Takes responsibility for his or her own mistakes.
Self-awareness	• Understands his or her emotions. • Has a positive mind-set. • Has a sense of self-efficacy. • Is optimistic. • Recognizes how thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected.

included outcomes such as getting along with others based on teacher, parent, or observer reports. These outcomes reflected daily or typical behavior rather than performance in hypothetical situations. *Conduct problems* included measures of various types of externalizing behavior problems such as classroom disruption, noncompliance, aggression, bullying, school suspensions, and delinquency. Measures of these behaviors were based on teacher reports, parent reports, observations, or school records. *Emotional distress* consisted of measures of internalizing behavior problems and included teacher and parent reports of depression, anxiety, stress, or social withdrawal. *Academic performance* included standardized reading or math achievement test scores and school grades in the form of overall grade point average. Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated

significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. More specific detail on these universal SEL programs is discussed extensively in Chapter 2.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Clearly, the acquisition and performance of social skills, or what some call SEL, is an important aspect of a child's social development that also impacts academic performance and long-term life skills. The use of evidence-based approaches is an important topic in fields such as medicine, education, and applied psychology (clinical, counseling, and school). As expected, unfortunately a wide gap exists between research and practice in all fields, including the field of social skills and SEL.

Rogers (2003) presented a comprehensive *diffusion model* that helps us to conceptualize the various stages of diffusion of evidence-based practices. In the first stage, the concept of "dissemination" assumes priority. Dissemination refers to the communication of accurate and useful information to potential users about a given program. In the second stage, "adoption" becomes important; this occurs when other people decide to try out or adopt a particular program. The third stage of diffusion is "implementation," which refers to the implementation of a program in a high-quality manner to test a program's ability to produce changes. The fourth stage of diffusion is "evaluation," which describes a program's ability to achieve its intended goals. The final stage of "sustainability" describes a situation in which a particular program has become a routine feature or aspect of an organization's procedures. Weissberg and colleagues suggested several ways to make progress in the above different stages of program diffusion (see Weissberg et al., 2015). According to these authors the central feature of program diffusion is *collaboration* among relevant stakeholders interested in SEL programs. In short, relevant stakeholders should work together to in supporting broader implementation of evidence-based SEL programs. These stakeholders include educators, family members, researchers, policy-makers, advocates, and funding agencies.

CHAPTER SUMMARY POINTS

- Meta-analyses and literature reviews have documented that poor peer relations in childhood predict serious social adjustment issues in adolescence and early adulthood.

- Research over the past 35 years prompted an intense interest in the development of preventive interventions among researchers studying the deleterious effects of peer relationship difficulties.

- Much attention over the past 10 years has focused on the assessment and intervention of children's social–emotional competence.

- There has been a recent push by educators, policymakers, and researchers focusing on the development of children's SEL competencies.

- A sociometric conceptualization of social competence emphasizes the degree to which children are accepted, rejected, or neglected by their peers.

- A major drawback of a sociometric conceptualization of social competence is its failure to consistently identify specific behaviors in specific situations that lead to peer acceptance or rejection.

- A social learning theory conceptualization of social competence identifies five major reasons for deficient social skills functioning: (1) lack of knowledge, (2) lack of practice or feedback, (3) absence of or inattention to social cues, (4) lack of reinforcement, and (5) presence of competing problem behaviors.

- Three distinct learning theories have been used to address and explain children's social skills deficits: (1) social learning theory, (2) cognitive-behavioral theory, and (3) applied behavior analysis.

- A social validity conceptualization of deficits in social competence deals with the social significance and social importance of social skills in predicting short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

- Important distinctions are made between the concepts of social skills, social tasks, and social competence.

- Social skills are a specific class of behaviors that an individual exhibits in order to successfully complete a social task.

- Social tasks require the integration of different response classes to successfully complete a social task.

- Social competence is an evaluative term based on judgments that an individual has performed a social task adequately.

- Distinctions are made among teacher-preferred, peer-preferred, and self-related social skills.

- Teacher-preferred social skills are behaviors that facilitate the meeting of the behavioral demands and expectations that teachers require to effectively manage instructional environments.

- Peer-preferred social skills are behaviors that facilitate the accomplishment of satisfactory peer relationships, promote friendships, and support and maintain social networks.

- Self-related social skills include behaviors such as managing one's emotions, being organized, regulating one's behavior, asserting oneself, and coping with relational aggression.

- Social skills function as academic enablers in that children with higher levels of social skills generally have higher levels of academic achievement.

- Problem behaviors function as academic disablers in that children with higher levels of externalizing problem behaviors have lowered academic achievement.

- The relationship between social skills and competing problem behaviors is perhaps best explained by the matching law.

- The matching law states that the relative rate of behavior will match the relative rate of reinforcement for that behavior (response rate matches reinforcement rate).

- The two fundamental types of social skills deficits are acquisition deficits and performance deficits.

- Acquisition deficits reflect "can't do" problems because the individual cannot perform a given social skill under optimal conditions of motivation.

- Performance deficits reflect "won't do" problems because the individual knows how to perform the skill, but does so infrequently.

- CASEL is an organization devoted to evidence-based SEL strategies.

- CASEL targets five broad areas of social–emotional functioning: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision making.

- A comprehensive meta-analysis of 213 studies concluded that compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance.