

Social-Emotional Learning in Authentic Ways: Generating Solutions for the Early Childhood Program

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In the post-pandemic field of education, the inclusion of social-emotional learning into early childhood education has been stressed as highly important. But what is social-emotional learning, exactly, and why is it so important now? Social-emotional learning is the practice of teaching the whole child, not simply core subjects and the arts. Along with being an incredibly valuable incorporation into early childhood learning programs, the majority of states across the country have included social-emotional learning as a formal standard of learning. Programs incorporating social-emotional learning include practices such as helping children build relationships with their peers and managing their behavior and impulses while partnering with families to accomplish these goals. CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, defines social-emotional learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

While social-emotional learning is not a new trend in education, educators and caregivers alike share the concern about children’s lack of exposure to social-emotional learning during the pandemic when most children were no longer able to learn in their classrooms due to COVID-19 protocols or due to caregivers choosing to keep children at home. Because a substantial number of children on the path to preschool or kindergarten were forced to learn in isolation, or their caregivers opted out of formative programs entirely, delays in education and general lack of kindergarten readiness are increasing. Furthermore, children who had previous school experience found their routines interrupted and lost the consistency of a typical school day as teachers across the country struggled to provide some semblance of online learning through virtual programming.

Unfortunately, learning in purely remote settings doesn't always offer genuine opportunities for children to practice the skills and tenants of social-emotional learning. In asynchronous spaces, children do not have to wait for their peers to finish responding before they submit their own responses to questions posed by teachers. More problematically, in asynchronous spaces, children aren't regularly aware of the emotions or responses of their peers, making building relationships incredibly difficult for young children. As such, the incorporation of social-emotional learning in early childhood programs has maintained a key priority in the post-pandemic environment.

As educators cite a lack of materials, lessons, and tools to address social-emotional learning in their curriculum, the need for these materials continues to grow. Teaching social-emotional learning tenants such as taking turns, for example, seems as though it might be easy. However, given that teachers must first divide children into small groups while considering academic abilities, developmental levels, and compatible personalities, and then try to create authentic situations in which children practice the art of taking turns, all the while giving feedback and guidance to multiple groups at the same time – it's understandable how complex teaching social-emotional learning in the classroom can be. Consequently, many companies and curriculum developers have scrambled to help provide educators with lessons, activities, and programs to address this issue.

In response to these critical issues in the early childhood market, Hatch Early Learning, a leading provider of hardware and software in the early childhood space, has developed software with the education of the whole child in the forefront, addressing social-emotional learning alongside core learning domains. In fact, Ignite by Hatch™ is the only digital learning tool for preschool, pre-K, and kindergarten learners that is proven to accelerate whole child development

across seven domains of learning with an emphasis on social-emotional development, mathematics, and literacy. Studies have shown that in as little as 30-minutes of independent play per week, children make meaningful progress towards their school-readiness goals, providing teachers real-time, objective, and actionable data that can further inform their classroom instruction.

Product developers at Hatch Early Learning understand there is a strong connection between children's early relationships and behaviors and their development. For this reason, assessing children's social-emotional development accurately and supporting their growth in this area is especially important. As such, Ignite's social-emotional learning domain encompasses skill development in the area of executive functioning, identifying emotions, solving social problems, and responding to emotions. The learning experiences within Ignite are presented through beautiful, engaging graphics and interactive scenarios with digital characters, offering rewards to further pique children's motivation and engagement. When children are presented with questions about social-emotional learning skills that they may answer incorrectly, they are given opportunities to further learn the skill or tenant in guided practice environments. In this way, children are provided with a safe space to learn the tenants of social-emotional learning to then practice in offline spaces with their peers.

Expanding upon modalities for social-emotional learning, Hatch Early Learning also offers the IgniteTable for the opportunity to develop social-emotional learning skills in small-group environments. The IgniteTable offers similar dynamic, engaging digital learning experiences for early childhood programs; however, it presents these collaborative play experiences on a large-scale, interactive table for two to four children so they can learn and play together. Hatch's interactive-touch table fosters social-emotional development in preschool students by providing access to developmentally appropriate

interactive games, encouraging conversations and collaboration among peers. Because it's hard to know how young learners are feeling, an embedded video feature captures an unbiased view of children's interactions with peers, providing teachers with an added layer of documentation. With this information, teachers can develop assessments and create individualized, meaningful instruction. In this way, the IgniteTable supports authentic, genuine situations for social-emotional development in the early childhood classroom.

In a time where authentic social-emotional learning tools are critical for early childhood educators, Hatch Early Learning offers valuable solutions through multiple modalities. Ensuring a whole child approach to learning, Hatch Early Learning is one of the primary early learning providers intentionally embedding social-emotional learning competencies into its products. By engaging with powerful digital learning tools, children can achieve one level of growth in just 3 months, demonstrating the potential for the rapid narrowing of learning gaps. To correct the trajectory of the growing learning gap in the U.S. school system, interventions must occur in the early childhood space. Therefore, incorporating a tool that addresses seven domains of learning with an emphasis on social-emotional development, mathematics, and literacy has never been more important than now.

Works Cited

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