

## Facilitating Social Emotional Development In Early Childhood Classrooms

'SKIP Research Bites' is a series of short summaries based on findings from the Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project.

### What does research tell us?

Social and emotional competencies promote children's engagement and capacities in learning (Denham & Brown, 2010), influence academic outcomes (e.g., literacy, Montroy et al., 2014) and impact on future employability (e.g., Jones et al., 2015). Singapore's Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework describes five social and emotional knowledge and skills:

- **Self-awareness and positive self-concept:** an understanding of personal strengths, abilities, and emotions, e.g., identifying likes and dislikes
- **Self-management:** the awareness of various feelings, appropriate expression of negative emotions and behavioral self-regulation, e.g., expressing unhappiness verbally instead of hitting others.
- **Social awareness:** the ability to recognize others' feelings and perspectives as well as the appreciation and respect of diversity, e.g., celebrating festivals of various ethnic groups.
- **Relationship management:** building positive relationships and demonstrating socially acceptable behaviors when working with others, e.g., showing appreciation, care and thinking about others.
- **Responsible decision-making:** the ability to reason decisions and understand the consequences of their actions, e.g., exploring options to address a problem.

The frequency and nature of facilitating social and emotional development (SED) depends on many factors, such as teaching styles, school characteristics, and national policies (OECD, 2015). Factors relevant to the classroom include group size, type of activity, and type of teaching opportunity.

### To Learn More:

- ☺ Ng, S. C. & Bull, R. (2018). Facilitating social emotional learning in kindergarten classrooms: Situational factors and teachers' strategies. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 50(3), 335-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-018-0225-9>
- ☺ Ministry of Education. (2013). *Nurturing early learners: Social and emotional development*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.
- ☺ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2015). *Skills for social progress: The power of social and emotional skills. OECD skills studies*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- ☺ Yoder, N. (2014). *Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social and emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, Center on Great Teachers and Leaders.

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### What is this study about?

In this study, we wanted to know...

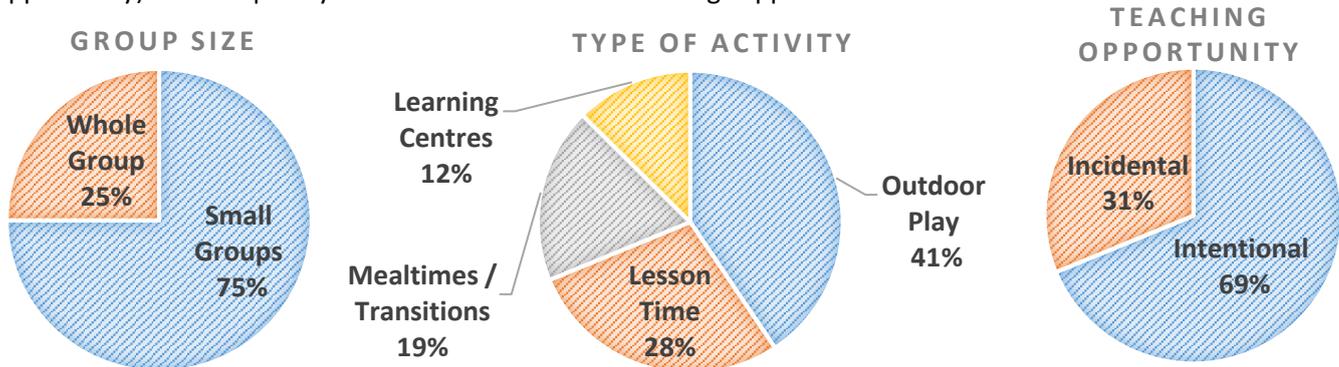
1. How do situational factors (i.e. group size, activity type, and type of teaching opportunity) influence the frequency of SED support in early childhood classrooms?
2. What types of strategies do teachers use to facilitate SED in the classrooms?

Six K1 classrooms from six preschools were video-recorded for up to 4 hours, capturing a variety of activities that occur on a typical day. Based on the descriptions in the NEL Framework, 32 instances of teachers' facilitation of SED were identified in the classroom recordings.



## What did we find?

To understand teachers' efforts in facilitating SED in early childhood classrooms, the 32 instances of teachers' support for SED were considered in relation to the three situational factors (group size, activity type, and type of teaching opportunity). The frequency of social and emotional learning support observed were:



Teachers used four strategies (involving verbal and non-verbal techniques) to facilitate SED in early childhood classrooms. Arranged from the most frequent to least frequent, the strategies were:

1. **Setting a Positive Tone:** Provide opportunity, assistance, and encouragement, e.g. to complete a task independently.
2. **Suggestion of Solutions:** Highlight problem, suggest solutions and guide children to explore options to resolve the problem, e.g. resolve conflict when using climbing equipment in outdoor playground.
3. **Extension:** Build on children's responses with comments or questions, e.g. discussion of ways to take care of peers with varying needs in the playground.
4. **Task Allocation:** Assigning a leadership task to children during group activities, e.g. children take turns to lead a read-aloud session.

## What does it mean for teaching and learning?

Educators may face challenges implementing SED-focused activities within a preschool day due to the lack of time, resources, or priority in achieving curricular demands. The examples from our study illustrated that potential social and emotional learning opportunities arise when teachers anticipate and facilitate day-to-day interactions in order to cultivate skills related to the five areas of social and emotional competencies. Through our study, we found that in order to ensure daily opportunities for SED were not missed out, teachers tended to intentionally plan for opportunities to promote these skills, particularly during small group and outdoor play activities.

International guidelines (e.g., Yoder, 2014) and the NEL Framework for SED highlight and support both the explicit teaching and learning of social and emotional skills, as well as its development within informal (i.e., day-to-day) settings. To promote learning of social and emotional knowledge and skills, teachers may intentionally:

- Assist children to express their preferences when making choices within activities, e.g. choice of materials for artwork.
- Demonstrate and encourage new activities, as well as acknowledge children's accomplishments, e.g. through classroom displays of children's experiences and creations.
- Provide more activities that encourage children to interact freely with peers, e.g. through outdoor free play and in learning centres.
- Increase opportunities for working in pairs or small groups and scaffold these interactions with clear roles and expectations e.g. through shared tasks.
- Offer opportunities for children to exercise independence and responsibility e.g. assigning tasks through a duty roster.
- Guide children to consider consequences and build awareness on how personal actions could affect peers e.g. through stories and role play.

