I. Personal and Social Development

Background and Criteria

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The personal and social development domain includes the skills necessary for emotional and social competence in young children. Teachers learn about children's sense of responsibility to themselves and others and how they feel about themselves and view themselves as learners—their emotional development—through ongoing observation, conversations with children, and information from family members. Teachers acquire information about children's social competence and approaches to learning by interacting with them, observing their interactions with other adults and peers, and reflecting on how they make decisions and solve academic and social problems.

Note: Preschool-3 performance indicators are noted unless the indicator starts at a higher grade. In those circumstances, the performance indicator is written starting at the lowest grade with the grade level noted in parentheses.

A. Self-Concept

1. Demonstrates self-confidence.

Self-confidence is an important contribution to young children's accomplishments in early education and their achievement in the primary grades. During the early years, self-confidence is built on children's actual accomplishments, how these accomplishments are valued by important adults (such as parents and teachers), and later, how these accomplishments are valued by their peers. As children move through the early primary grades, self-confidence is also built on children's evaluations of their own achievements and their ability to achieve the expectations they set for themselves (Harter & Bukowski, 2012; Thompson, 2006).

In light of this, it is important to recognize that preschoolers tend to have an unrealistically optimistic view of their capabilities which causes them, at times, to expect that they can accomplish far more difficult tasks than they are really capable of doing (Stipek, 1984; Stipek & MacIver, 1989). This arises, in part, because of young children's belief that increased effort can yield better achievement regardless of differences in ability. As children proceed through the primary grades, they develop a more mature understanding of differences in achievement and their self-evaluations become more realistic (Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002). This can cause, however, a decrease in self-confidence as children realize that some things will be difficult for them no matter how hard they try. Adult support is important, especially in helping children appreciate how important their own efforts are to academic success.

2. Shows some independence and self-direction.

Owing to their natural curiosity and enthusiasm for mastery, children of all ages show initiative in learning situations (Thompson, 2002). However, there are developmental changes in children's initiative and self-direction that occur from preschool through early primary grades. Within this developmental period, younger children approach new learning situations with enthusiasm and self-confidence but not necessarily with persistence, especially when they confront difficult problem-solving situations. Older

children, by contrast, are more persistent, but are also more creative problem-solvers, proposing their own ideas, and approaching new learning opportunities with initiative and involvement (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Renninger & Wozniak, 1985).

Developmental differences in self-direction also derive from changes in the growth of self-regulation (Bronson, 2001; Kopp & Wyer, 1994). The growth of self-regulation is viewed by developmental scientists as consisting of development in three interrelated areas: *inhibition* (i.e., resisting a strong inclination to enact a primary response and instead acting in an alternative manner), *working memory* (i.e., holding information in mind while mentally working on it), and *cognitive flexibility* (i.e., being able to switch perspective, attention, or mental focus). Together, these three developing competencies are called *executive functions* (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011; Diamond & Lee, 2011; Zelazo, Muller, Frye, & Marcovitch, 2003). The development of executive functions is based on sophisticated brain systems that mature very slowly, with some not becoming fully mature until early adulthood (Bunge & Zelazo, 2006; Diamond & Taylor, 1996). As a result, limitations in self-regulation and self-directionin young children derive from the immature brain, with developing competencies slowly emerging as these areas of the brain develop and enable greater self-control of behavior, attention, and emotion. Similar brain maturity-compentencies development relationships occur in personal and social development and related areas.

B. Self-Control
1. Follows simple classroom rules and routines with guidance.

Research on early school achievement has found that children's cooperation with classroom rules and procedures is directly associated with early academic success. McClelland, Morrison, and Holmes (2000) found, for example, that "work-related skills" (e.g., compliance with instructions; completion of work) in kindergarten predicted children's academic achievement three years later, even after controlling for earlier academic achievement (see also Yen, Konold, & McDermott, 2004; and Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 1993).

The preceding discussion of the growth of self-regulation—consisting of the specific competencies known as executive functions—helps to explain the slow progress of young children in their abilities to follow classroom rules and routines. More specifically, in the early years children have difficulty following rules and complying with routines on their own *not* because they are egocentric, but rather because their immature brains support only limited capacities for self-regulation. In fact, it is easy to see how each of the components of self-regulation—or executive functions—accounts for young children's limited ability to follow rules without reminders. First, limited capacities for *inhibition* mean that young children are likely to act impulsively rather than in a rule-governed manner (e.g., may speak out of turn instead of raising his or her hand). Second, limited *working memory* means that young children are unlikely to keep a relevant rule in mind as they are engaged in activity (e.g., cleaning up food items after snack time). Third, limited *cognitive flexibility* means that young children are likely to be cognitively focused on a preferred activity (e.g., playing with sand in the sand table) rather than on a relevant rule (e.g., keeping all the sand in the sand table and off the floor).

The slow growth of self-regulation, or executive functions, has been described by the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011) as metaphorically similar to the slow emergence of the child's internal "air traffic controller" that manages competing demands for the child's attention, thinking, and behavioral regulation. Until that internal air traffic controller has fully matured (which takes many

years), children will struggle to manage these demands in a competent and flexible manner. In young children, this can sometimes make them appear egocentric. This explanation for their behavior is incorrect, however, because in other respects young children's behavior is very nonegocentric (e.g., in their sensitivity to others' feelings). By contrast, understanding the slow growth rate of children's capacity to follow rules and routines (with regard to the development of executive functions) offers a much more precise and appropriate description of the growth of these abilities. In addition, research has shown that carefully designed classroom environments and routines for young children can assist them in self-regulation by aiding in the exercise of these executive functions (Diamond & Lee, 2011).

2. Manages transitions.

One of the important accomplishments of early childhood is the development of event knowledge: the ability to understand and predict routine events in which the child participates (Hudson, 1993; Nelson, 1989, 1993). As a consequence, young children become increasingly competent at understanding how activities in the daily schedule are sequenced and conducted, and this enables them to prepare themselves for what comes next.

Classroom transitions are thus one of the most significant self-regulatory challenges faced by young children, especially if they are provided little preparation for transitions or little warning of changes in routines, locations, or procedures. One reason is their limited *cognitive flexibility* discussed earlier. Once they have achieved enough understanding of the daily schedule to predict the day's events, for example, it can be difficult for young children to flexibly adapt their expectations to a different schedule in order to accommodate a new activity. Limitations in *working memory* are also relevant, especially if young children are required to remember, during a transition, to enact a sequence of activities (e.g., stop a desired activity, clean up, go to another location, prepare for the next activity, and await further instructions). As a consequence, children may proceed through part of the sequence before forgetting the next steps and doing something else. Transitions thus become easier as children mature cognitively and neurobiologically. As the internal "air traffic controller" (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011) becomes more competent at remembering transitional events and understanding the standard routine in relation to occasional changes to the routine, the child can become more adaptable.

It is important to note that even as children are maturing in their self-regulatory capacities, limitations in these executive functions can still be seen. For example, one of the characteristics of children in early primary grades is their inflexibility with rules and routines: they insist that everyone adhere to the rules (even when they themselves sometimes forget), and they can be rigid in their insistence on a predictable schedule. This also derives from limits in *cognitive flexibility*, especially in the child's difficulty in distinguishing the broader purpose of the rule from apparent violations in its application, or understanding the difference between the predictable schedule and one day's exception to it. This illustrates the slow maturation of the higher brain regions underlying executive functions, and the fact that even as children are making progress on many aspects of self-regulation, other developmental challenges remain.

For these reasons, teachers and caregivers can be helpful to children throughout this developmental period by providing advance notice of changes in locations, routines, and events, and managing transitions by guiding children through the alterred sequences of activities required. They can also be helpful in providing patient support when young children feel anxious in the face of unexpected changes to which they are having difficulty adjusting.

C. Approaches to Learning
1. Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.

There is considerable evidence that curiosity and eagerness to learn are early-developing, possibly intrinsic characteristics in infants and young children (Jennings & Dietz, 2003). Besides developing instructional methods to enlist children's natural curiosity, classroom teachers must ensure that children's self-confidence as learners (discussed earlier) is supported and strengthened through their achievements in the classroom (Thompson & Raikes, 2007). In addition, helping to provide multiple avenues for the expression of their natural curiosity is important to children. This can mean the exploration of interests through art, movement, construction, emergent writing activities, conversation, and other approaches.

2. Attends briefly and seeks help when encountering a problem.

Although children of all ages sustain attention to tasks that capture their interest, there are developmental changes in children's persistence in academic work. Generally, children devote more sustained attention to tasks with increasing age. There are several reasons for this. First, children become capable of more focused and sustained attention with age owing to growth in the self-regulatory competencies discussed earlier (Bowman et al., 2000). In particular, growth in *inhibition* enables children to be less distractable and better capable of focusing their attention and thinking on relevant task-related matters. Second, when faced with difficult cognitive challenges, older children are more likely to persist at the task than younger children owing, in part, to the *cognitive flexibility* that enables them to devise more creative, novel problem-solving approaches (Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Renninger & Wozniak, 1985). By contrast, younger children are more likely to give up when conventional problem-solving strategies fail. Third, developmental changes in attention and task persistence also emerge because of older children's greater experience and self-confidence in tackling cognitive challenges. Taken together, the abilities to become cognitively engaged in a task with focused attention, to persist in the face of challenges and frustrations, and to generate new ideas and work on them are collectively described as "approaches to learning." These develop significantly during early and middle childhood, and are critical to success in kindergarten and throughout elementary school (Alexander et al., 1993; Duncan et al., 2007).

There are also individual differences in children's sustained attention and persistence in academic work that derive from their learning orientation (Dweck, 2002). Some children with a "mastery orientation" tend to persist when faced with difficult challenges because of a belief that enhanced effort will be rewarded with eventual success. Other children tend not to persist because they believe that their initial failures are due to poor ability that they do not believe can be improved through increased effort; this can contribute to learned helplessness in academic situations. These differences in learning orientation emerge early, and thus are apparent by the time that children are in primary grades.

3. Approaches tasks with flexibility and inventiveness.

With increasing age, young children approach tasks with greater inventiveness and flexibility that can contribute to more effective problem-solving approaches (Zelazo & Muller, 2004). To be sure, very young children can be creative in their use of materials, but this creativity typically does not transfer to creating better solutions to problem tasks. As children proceed through early primary grades, they are able to approach cognitive challenges with new ideas after their initial solutions have failed, and are often capable of devising new solutions on this basis. This makes their creativity more problem-focused and

useful. Indeed, children's inventiveness contributes to their experimental and systematic strategies to problem-solving (Kuhn, 2011).

D. Interaction With Others
1. Interacts with one or more children.

An important contributor to children's classroom achievement is their capacity to interact comfortably with others, including peers. Research has shown that children who are accepted by their peers look forward more to coming to school, participate more in classroom activities, and achieve more in the classroom compared to children who are low in peer acceptance (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kocherderfer, & Coleman, 1996, 1997). By contrast, peer rejection causes children to withdraw from involvement with peers in the classroom, express a desire to avoid school, and perform more poorly on academic achievement measures (Buhs & Ladd, 2001).

The preschool years and early primary grades are a period of rapid growth in peer interaction skills and the development of friendship (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Young children advance from simple activities with one or two classmates to more complex interactions with several other children in play or cooperative tasks. Older preschoolers and kindergarteners also become more adept at the skills that make for smoother peer interaction, including communication, emotional understanding, cooperative strategies (e.g., turn-taking), and conflict resolution. These are important foundational elements for peer relationships in the primary grades, where classroom group size is typically larger and where children are expected to participate actively in group learning tasks. Throughout early primary grades, children enhance their social repertoire with a growing comprehension of fairness in peer interactions (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001), an expanding range of social problem-solving skills (Crick & Dodge, 1994), and greater emotional understanding and sensitivity to others (Denham & Weissberg, 2004).

The sophistication and significance of children's friendships also grows during this period (Parker & Gottman, 1989; Rubin et al., 2006). During the preschool years, friendships become increasingly stable, exclusive, and reciprocal, involving mutual assistance. Older children are also more psychologically aware of the friendships they share, including the mutual obligations that friendship entails. Children typically engage in more sophisticated forms of play with their friends, exhibit greater prosocial behavior, and also experience greater conflict (owing primarily to the frequency of interaction between friends). With increasing age, children become more capable of both maintaining friendships and recovering from conflict (Hartup, 1996; Parker & Gottman, 1989).

2. Interacts with familiar adults.

Classroom learning requires the ability to interact comfortably with familiar adults as well as with peers. The adults with whom a child interacts can vary in familiarity, of course, ranging from a lead teacher who is present daily to occasional encounters with a custodian, school secretary, or volunteer staff. Not surprisingly, young children interact most comfortably with the adults with whom they are most familiar, and the adults with whom the child interacts most frequently are likely to have the greatest influence on classroom performance. These interactions with nonparental familiar adults contribute to developing social skills as well as to children's learning in the classroom (Dunn, 1993; Howes & Spieker, 2010).

Several studies have found that the security and warmth of a preschooler's relationship with the teacher predicts the child's classroom behavior, attention, and social competence in kindergarten and primary grade classrooms (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997; see Bowman et al., 2001, for a review). In a similar manner, the quality of the teacher–child relationship in kindergarten and primary grades is important to children's school adjustment and success in the classroom, while conflict in the child–teacher relationship predicts poorer academic performance and greater behavioral problems (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004a, 2004b). Children who develop warm, positive relationships with their teachers are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident, and achieve more in the classroom. A positive teacher–child relationship may be especially important for young children who are otherwise at risk of academic difficulty because of the support it can provide for their classroom participation and self-confidence (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995).

Developmental changes in young children's interactions with familiar adults are consistent with their developing social and emotional understanding, and also their growing social skills (Dunn, 1993). A preschooler shows growing ease in interacting with familiar adults. Children of this age may show off their accomplishments, seek the adult's assistance, and respond to the adult's initiatives or requests with increasing self-confidence. Older preschoolers are capable of taking greater initiative and they engage in more sustained interactions with an adult, such as participating in an extended conversation about the morning's events in which the child contributes new and relevant information. By primary school, children better understand the roles of the various adults they encounter at school, and they engage these adults in appropriate ways. Interactions with adults are also important sources of approval and affirmation.

3. Participates in the group life of the class.

Beginning in preschool and continuing through primary grades, children are expected to participate in classroom activities in developmentally appropriate ways. This includes understanding and cooperating with the roles and responsibilities of group membership, such as helping to prepare for and clean up after tasks, participating in group activities and projects, knowing what to do during daily routines (such as circle time or recess), managing transitions in classroom activities, complying with teacher requests, and cooperating with other children. Most of these skills require children to take other people's interests into consideration, and this is an important foundation for the social skills required of the classroom. Participating in the group life of the class is an essential component of school success and an integral part of classroom dynamics.

Young children are beginners in these aspects of classroom learning *not* because they are egocentric, but rather because they are just starting to acquire the component skills required for successful group participation. Fortunately, the preschool years and early primary grades are periods when these component skills develop significantly, as earlier noted. First, developing working memory and event knowledge increasingly enable children to remember the daily routines and the behavior that is expected of them (Hudson, 1993; Nelson, 1993). This allows children to anticipate transitions, know what they must do during daily activities, and plan for later events. Second, growth in self-regulation and, more specifically, in executive functions increasingly enables children to stay on task, apply behavioral expectations to their own conduct, and spontaneously self-correct to maintain compliance (Bronson, 2001; Kopp & Wyer, 1994). In particular, the growth of inhibition slowly enables children to better focus their attention and thinking on the task at hand (ignoring distractions), manage impulses and emotions, sit

still for longer periods without fidgeting, and participate in classroom activities that may require quitting a more preferred activity. Third, developing social and emotional understanding better enables children to comprehend others' perspectives and needs and coordinate them with their own desires, especially as cognitive flexibility develops (Harris, 2006; Thompson, 2006). This provides the basis for cooperation and compromise when disagreements arise. Fourth, children are also developing morally, which means that their desire to comply with adult requests and obtain adult approval is complemented by the motivation to comply in order to behave consistently with the self-image of a good person who seeks to do the right thing (Thompson, Meyer, & McGinley, 2006). These internal motivators of responsible conduct are important foundations for group participation.

As these component skills of group participation develop during the preschool years and early primary grades, children become increasingly capable of responsible conduct in the classroom. Moreover, their positive relationships with teachers and other adults throughout this period provide further motivation to cooperate with classroom routines and comply with adult requests.

4. Begins to identify feelings and responds to those of others.

Two of the important social skills relevant to children's interactions in the classroom are the abilities to empathize and to show caring for others. It is important to distinguish these abilities, especially when young children are concerned (Thompson, 1998). Empathy concerns a person's resonant emotional response to another's distress, and it can be observed even in infants and toddlers. Caring concerns a person's efforts to help another person, which may (but not always) derive from empathy. Distinguishing empathy and caring is important because a young child may feel empathy for another's distress but may not be capable or competent enough to respond in a helpful, caring manner. Knowing how to assist a distressed adult or peer is a challenging task for a young child, and thus a helpful response may not necessarily occur, even when the child empathizes with the distressed person. In such a situation, a young child may pay close attention to a distressed peer, for example, but their failure to help may cause an adult observer to regard them as egocentric. They are not necessarily egocentric, but may be constrained by their limited understanding of how to help. With increasing age, children become more reliable helpers when others are distressed.

Developing emotional understanding and empathy are important to children of all ages. Young children who are more competent in understanding others' feelings have been found, for example, to achieve more in elementary school, perhaps because of their more successful peer and adult relationships (Izard, 2002; Izard et al., 2001). Children who are more socially and emotionally perceptive are better playmates and get along better with adults, and this extends from preschool into primary grades (Denham, 2006; Denham & Weissberg, 2004). Emotional understanding emerges early in life and develops rapidly in early childhood as young children become capable of accurately identifying others' feelings, understanding the causes and consequences of those feelings, and linking emotions to people's desires, needs, goals, and thoughts (Denham, 1998; Harris, 2006; Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). This provides a basis for understanding how to provide assistance to another who is distressed, and this understanding continues to expand as children proceed through primary grades.

5. Begins to use simple strategies to resolve conflict.

When conflict inevitably arises between children and others (especially peers), social and emotional growth is reflected in their increasing skill at solving social problems flexibly and competently. Doing so

requires many of the abilities discussed earlier, including self-regulation (especially executive functions of inhibition and cognitive flexibility), social and emotional understanding, and knowledge of alternative strategies that are likely to be helpful. Each of these abilities grows significantly during the preschool years and the early primary grades (Howes, 1987, 1988). As a consequence, while young preschoolers may not be readily capable of solving peer conflict on their own, but instead require adult assistance, children in the primary grades show greater skill in negotiating, bargaining, compromising, and enlisting other simple problem-solving strategies on their own.

Although the self-regulatory limitations of young children (*not* egocentrism) help explain their difficulties in resolving social conflict, it is important to recognize also that the complexity of social problem-solving is also challenging to young children. As described by Crick and Dodge (1994), competent solutions to social problems involve several steps, including (a) interpreting social cues from other children or adults (is the person hostile? upset?), (b) formulating social goals for the situation (e.g., escaping a difficult conflict? defending self?), (c) generating alternative problem-solving strategies (e.g., compromise? aggression?), and (d) evaluating the likely consequences of each alternative strategy. When the heightened emotion involved in social conflict is also considered, social problem-solving becomes even more challenging (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). There is considerable research to indicate that children in the primary grades who have difficulties with peers are often deficient in one or more of these social problem-solving steps, sometimes interpreting social cues in a hostile manner, sometimes formulating limited or inappropriate goals for the situation (e.g., defeating the other person), and often considering an impoverished number of alternative strategies for resolving the conflict (Rubin et al., 2006). In light of this, the slow growth in social problem-solving skills can be appropriately understood as reflecting the complexity of the process and the knowledge systems that are required to make successful social decisions in situations involving conflict with another person.

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