

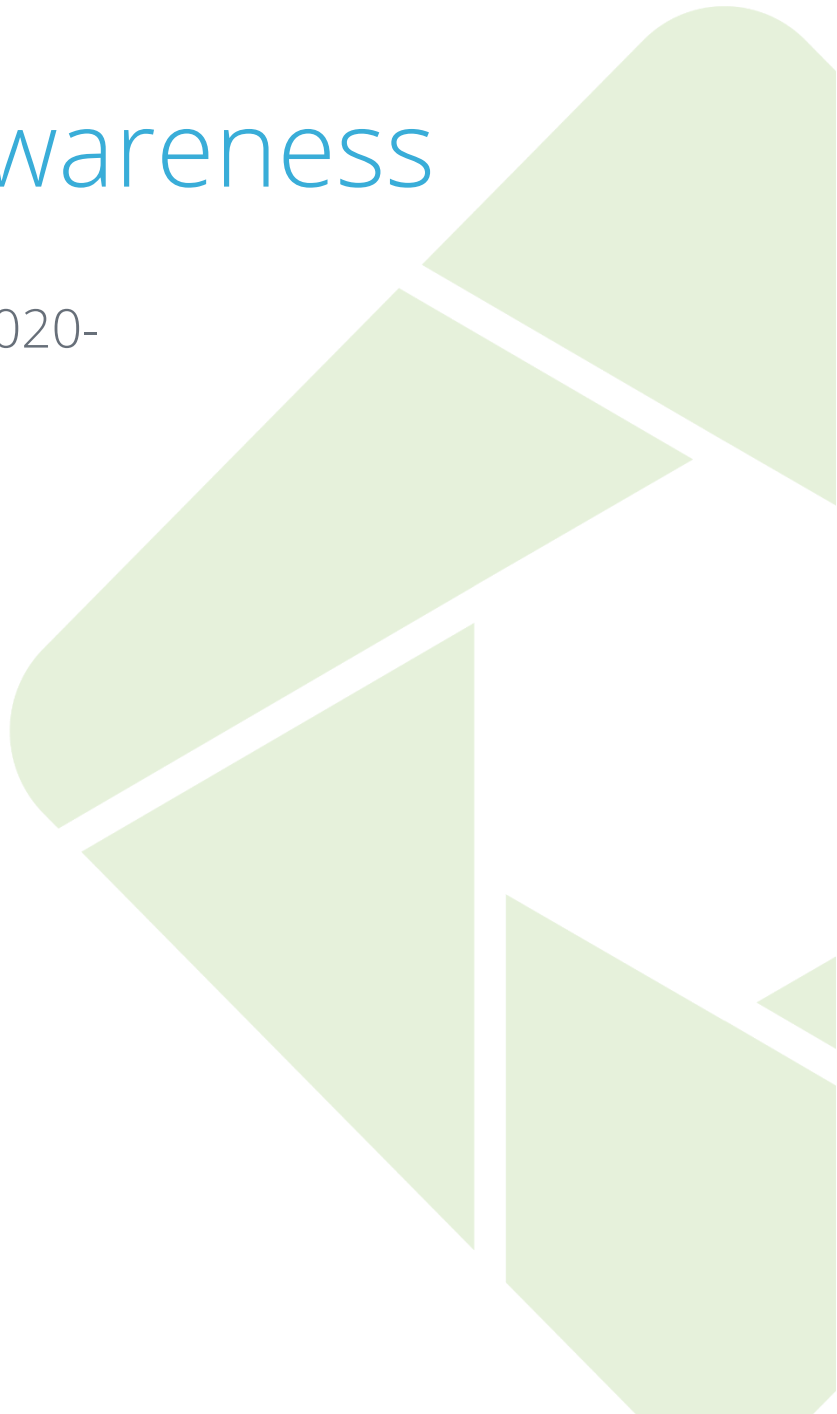


APERTURE EDUCATION

STRATEGIES GUIDE:

Social-Awareness

-2020-



Social-Awareness

A child's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for ideas and behaviors, recognizes their impact on them, and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations.

What is Social-Awareness?

Social-Awareness is a child's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for ideas and behaviors, recognizes their impact on them, and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations. Children and adolescents who are socially aware work and play well with others despite their differences. These children may be observed cooperating, respecting others, managing conflicts nonviolently, working effectively in groups, taking others' perspectives, and sensing the emotions of others (Elias, 2004). For example, a socially aware middle school student may be asked to work on an assignment with a group of students selected by the teacher. The members of this group may differ in ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, ability, and opinion. The socially aware student is able to cooperate with each of the group members, sharing supplies and listening to their opinions. When the socially aware student disagrees with the opinion of another student in the group, she can consider the other student's perspective and feelings, and respectfully resolve the disagreement, finding a way to get the assignment done cooperatively.

There are many concepts related to the competency of Social-Awareness. Social perspective taking, tolerance, cooperation, empathy, sympathy, and respect are all associated with the construct. However, these terms represent components of the broader construct of Social-Awareness as measured by the DESSA. This is also reflected in the definition of Social-Awareness as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which describes Social-Awareness as, "The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports" (CASEL, 2012, pg. 9). The DESSA definition of Social-Awareness best aligns with the first part of the CASEL definition. It focuses on the ability of the child or adolescent to interact cooperatively, and with tolerance and respect, in one-on-one or group settings. The DESSA definition does not stress the

recognition of resources and supports in the family, school, or community. However, the skills of seeking advice and using available resources are measured as components of the Decision Making scale on the DESSA, which encompasses the skills needed to effectively problem solve and make positive choices.

In addition to some overlap with Decision Making, it can be easy to confuse Social-Awareness with the Relationship Skills construct on the DESSA. Keep in mind that Relationship Skills emphasizes behaviors which form and maintain positive relationships, whereas Social-Awareness emphasizes the ability to respectfully tolerate and cooperate with different types of people, individually and in groups. Because Social-Awareness is highly related to interactions with others in groups in addition to one-on-one, it may also be helpful to differentiate Social-Awareness from Personal Responsibility. Personal Responsibility emphasizes careful and reliable behaviors in contributing to group efforts, while Social-Awareness focuses on using respectful cooperation and tolerance with different types of people.

The DESSA for grades kindergarten through 8 (DESSA K-8) and DESSA-High School Edition for grades 9-12 (DESSA-HSE) measure Social-Awareness with the following items.

DESSA K-8	DESSA-HSE
8. cope well with insults and mean comments?	6. get along well with different types of people?
11. get along with different types of people?	10. show respect for others in a game or competition?
17. act respectfully in a game or competition?	12. respect another person's opinion?
19. respect another person's opinion?	15. contribute to group efforts?
22. contribute to group efforts?	17. share with others?
25. resolve a disagreement?	
27. share with others?	
31. cooperate with peers or siblings?	
34. forgive somebody who hurt or upset her/him?	

The items on the Social-Awareness scale can be broken into two key components: *respectful tolerance*, and *respectful cooperation*. *Respectful tolerance* is represented by items 8, 11, 19, and 34 (DESSA K-8) and items 6 and 12 (DESSA-HSE). *Respectful cooperation* is represented by items 17, 22, 25, 27, and 31 (DESSA K-8) and items 10, 15 and 17 (DESSA-HSE). Underlying each of these components of the Social-Awareness construct are the abilities to consider the perspectives of others, and to recognize one's impact on others, essential skills for empathy, "the feeling that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions" (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

The Different Aspects of Social-Awareness

As you use the Social-Awareness strategies, you'll notice that they may focus on one or more aspects of the competency. As mentioned above, we have identified two key aspects of Social-Awareness: *respectful tolerance* and *respectful cooperation*. You will see that an awareness of one's interactions with others is at the heart of each of these interrelated aspects.

RESPECTFUL TOLERANCE

An important aspect of Social-Awareness is a child's ability to display *respectful tolerance* when interacting with others. Tolerance has been defined as "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own," also as "the act of allowing something" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). The authors of the DESSA have added "respectful" to the practice of tolerance to emphasize the importance of moving beyond passive indulgence or allowance of differing beliefs and practices whenever possible. "*Respectful tolerance*" highlights the value of regarding the differences of others with esteem, deference, and appreciation (Hoss & Wylie, 1997). The DESSA views a tolerant child as one who copes well with insults and mean comments, gets along with different types of people, respects another person's opinion, and forgives someone who hurt or upset him or her.

RESPECTFUL COOPERATION

A second aspect of Social-Awareness is the student's ability to show *respectful cooperation* when interacting with others. To cooperate is defined as "to act or work with another or others; act together or in compliance" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Cooperation has been described as "any activity that involves the willing interdependence of two or more children" (Jewett, 1992). It is important to distinguish cooperation from compliance, which may represent obedience to rules or authority (Jewett, 1992). Cooperation, as a social-emotional skill, refers to more active involvement with others – often peers or siblings.

As with tolerance, "respectful" is used to describe the cooperation aspect of Social-Awareness. This is done to fully highlight the advantages of cooperating with different types of people - to encourage individuals to regard the unique contributions of others with esteem, deference, and appreciation when working towards a common goal. Cooperative children act respectfully in games

or competitions, contribute to group efforts, resolve disagreements, share with others, and cooperate with peers and siblings.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EMPATHY

At the heart of genuine and effective Social-Awareness is empathy. To meaningfully practice respectful tolerance and cooperation, we must work to connect with others; we must develop empathy and recognize our impact on the individuals around us (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011; Titus, 1998). Empathy is defined as “the feeling that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions; the ability to share someone else's feelings” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Similarly, The Committee for Children (2008) also defines empathy in the *Second Step Curriculum* as “The ability to identify, understand, and respond thoughtfully to the feelings and perspectives of others.” Consequently, the first step toward establishing empathy is to consider the perspectives of others. The ability to do so is often referred to as “social perspective taking” (Selman, 2003). A child with the ability to engage in social perspective taking can recognize the emotional state of another child, while also identifying beliefs and ideas that may have influenced that emotional state (Harwood & Farrar, 2006). A child's social perspective taking ability develops over time with a more complex understanding of others emerging in the middle school years (Selman, 1971; 2003).

Without the ability to take others' perspectives and empathize, practicing tolerance and cooperation can be superficial, a mere rehearsal of scripted interactions, or the result of learned and reinforced behaviors, lacking the meaning and motivation that comes from genuine understanding of, or care for, others. Engendering care and understanding for others, even those who differ from oneself, is a pivotal step toward creating a safe and healthy community in which individuals can work, learn, and play.

However, developing empathy broadly in communities can be a challenge. During his presidency, Barack Obama spoke of an “empathy deficit” in our communities stating that it is “the biggest deficit that we have in our society, and in the world right now.” With this statement, he suggests that individuals in our society lack the ability to consider the perspectives, experiences, and feelings of others (Schumann, Zaki & Dweck, 2014). A recent meta-analysis supports this premise, finding that empathic concern and perspective taking have been declining over time in American college students (Konrath, O'Brian, & Hsing, 2011). Cultivating these abilities – the abilities to

empathize - will enable children and youth to genuinely embrace the practices of respectful tolerance and respectful cooperation necessary for Social-Awareness.

The Development and Importance of Social-Awareness

As young children enter into social interactions from early education settings and preschool, to kindergarten and beyond, they make attempts to share and seek social harmony (Jewett, 1992). Educators of these children continually strive to build classroom environments of inclusion that will engage diverse learners with the curricula, and with each other. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and age.

The necessity for adults to promote Social-Awareness, building environments that minimally achieve tolerance, and ideally reach beyond tolerance to build respect and appreciation for the individual differences of each person, has become even more pressing as increasing levels of bullying and school violence erupt in the media, and too often in the lives of our children (Cobia & Carney, 2002; Hollingsworth, Didelot, & Smith, 2003). Furthermore, with globalization and worldwide immigration, the diversity of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and language, within nations is increasing (Banks, 2004; Brown, 2007; Hoss & Wylie, 1997; Titus, 1998; Wan, 2006). This diversity often extends to the communities and schools in which our children and youth learn and play.

Thus, school environments can be very different from students' home environments, encouraging and sometimes even demanding that students interact with adults and peers that are very different from them. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that merely being in diverse communities does not increase one's Social-Awareness. Getting to know individuals who differ from us, and building meaningful relationships with these individuals, however, can support the development of these skills (Godwin, Ausbrooks, & Martinez, 2001). Therefore, students must develop the "knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function in their cultural communities, and beyond their cultural borders" (Banks, 2004, pg. 292). It is also important for students to feel safe, relaxed, comfortable, and confident in the school setting so that they are ready and able to learn (DeLara, 2008). Consequently, developing the skills for Social-Awareness in our children and youth can be an important step in helping students achieve success in school.

The National Collaboration for Youth, the longest-standing coalition of national agencies committed to positive youth development, has outlined a basic list of outcomes for youth

development organizations. The indicators for these outcomes include many of the skills that comprise the Social-Awareness construct: development of coping skills; development of cultural competence; advancement of diversity in a multicultural world; respect for diversity; the ability to consider the implications of one's actions on others, their community, and their environment; and the ability to work effectively in groups (National Collaboration for Youth, 2012). The acknowledgment of the importance of these skills across youth development organizations underscores the necessity of including the skills for Social-Awareness in the social-emotional skill repertoire of children and youth.

DEVELOPING SOCIAL-AWARENESS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Modeling is one of the most powerful ways that children learn (Bandura, 1971). Therefore, the behaviors and actions of individuals surrounding children, such as siblings, teachers, neighbors, grandparents, out-of-school time staff, and peers, will guide a child's acquisition of Social-Awareness (Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2002). As children age into adolescence, parents often think that they become less important in the healthy development of their children; however, research on social competency in adolescence highlights the continued need for these supportive relationships (Hair, Jager, and Garrett, 2002). Deeply embedded societal norms for behavior make it even more important that adults model acceptance and appreciation of differences for the children in their lives (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014). It is exceedingly important that adults demonstrate tolerance, respect, and optimism. This sets an example for children, allowing them to imagine themselves growing up to live this way as well.

Adults must keep in mind, though, that children are acutely aware of discrepancies between expressed beliefs and our actions (Weissbourd & Jones, 2014). Unfortunately, adults can unintentionally perpetuate bullying, discrimination, and harmful behaviors by being unaware, turning a blind eye, and intentionally, or unintentionally allowing these behaviors to happen. Internal values or attitudes, whether conscious or unconscious, can influence adults' motivation to intervene in bullying or harassment. These subtle biases can also influence adults' treatment of children and youth, more generally. By not recognizing and confronting their personal biases, adults can create or perpetuate cultures where differences are openly or discretely disapproved of (DeLara, 2008; Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014; Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003; Titus, 1998). This reinforces the importance of adhering to the rules, values, and beliefs we lay out for children, and of being willing to

openly re-evaluate our values and attitudes if they are called into question (Weissbourd & Jones, 2014). Adults must deal with personal biases and diversity deficits in order to be the examples necessary to promote Social-Awareness in children – we must make a deliberate effort to live the values to which we aspire (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014; Titus, 1998).

It follows then that adults should consider their mindsets regarding the characteristics of individuals and groups. A fixed, or static mindset is a view that the characteristics of individuals are ingrained and cannot easily be changed, whereas a growth, or dynamic, mindset is a view that traits can be changed, molded, or developed. Holding a fixed mindset can increase stereotyping behavior. For example, a fixed mindset can lead individuals to draw more extreme conclusions (positive or negative) about the characteristics of an individual from experiencing a small sample of his or her behavior. It can also lead an individual to make generalizations about the behavior of a larger group after observing the behaviors of a small sample of individuals. Individuals with a fixed mindset are also less likely to believe that two groups described differently share concerns, likes, or dislikes (Levy & Dweck, 1999).

Individuals who have a growth mindset about specific traits, such as the ability to empathize, are more likely to put effort into developing or utilizing these traits (Schumann, Zaki, & Dweck, 2014). Therefore, in order to effectively model acceptance, disengage from stereotypes, and develop an open mind about the potential of all individuals in our lives, adults must personally cultivate a growth mindset – a belief that traits of an individual can develop and change. This type of mindset can be encouraged for children to develop in order to enhance Social-Awareness as well as other social-emotional skills such as optimism (Levy & Dweck, 1999, Schumann, Zaki & Dweck, 2014).

Adults may discover opportunities to develop children’s Social-Awareness by merely listening to the language children use when talking about differences. If children or youth use hurtful or stereotypical language, adults can take the opportunity to talk through it, generating and suggesting alternatives (Wan, 2006). Helping children create a common language they can use to actively eliminate putdowns and increase supportive peer-to-peer comments can facilitate more socially aware interactions. Furthermore, in addition to learning about and acknowledging differences, it is helpful and important for children to spend time identifying and acknowledging similarities between individuals and groups (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014).

Open conversations with adults, peers, and siblings can help children learn to understand and appreciate different perspectives – a key to Social-Awareness (Cassidy, Werner, Rourke, Zubernis &

Balaraman, 2003; Selman, 2003). Children have a natural curiosity about differences. Therefore, it is important that adults are not “blind” to differences - pretending that they do not exist- but rather that adults teach children to appreciate and learn about them (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). Children and youth can benefit from opportunities to hear about the unique experiences and perspectives of others, and from opportunities to share their own experiences and perspectives, whether cultural, or personal (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003; Selman, 2003; Titus, 1998). Welcoming guest speakers who are comfortable discussing their unique identities, such as individuals with disabilities, who identify as LGBTQ, or who have unfamiliar cultural and ethnic backgrounds can also provide important learning opportunities (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). Keep in mind that the atmosphere adults create is pivotal for this type of open communication to be a success. For students and adults to feel safe discussing differences, disclosing discouraging or hurtful words they’ve heard—and to be willing to publicly share the language that they personally value and that helps them feel respected and supported by others, an atmosphere of trust and caring is essential (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014).

Holding classroom meetings (sometimes referred to as “classroom circles” or “group discussions”) can be a structured way of inviting open dialog among peers. These meetings can be an effective way to develop and practice many social-emotional skills including elements of Social-Awareness such as cooperation, respect for the opinions of others, contribution to group efforts, forgiveness, conflict resolution, and the ability to get along with different types of people (Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2010; Edwards & Mullis, 2003; Selman, 2003). Classroom meetings typically have a set agenda which allows students to: 1) share an appreciation or compliment for another member of the classroom, 2) collaboratively solve a problem, 3) evaluate previous problem-solving efforts, 4) discuss or make decisions about other things in the classroom, and 5) participate in an activity to provide encouragement to the whole class. Effective classroom meetings are held regularly and allow every student the opportunity to speak. Classroom meetings should also allow students the time to practice social-emotional skills, giving students ownership of their solutions to problems and the chance to try them out and fail (Edwards & Mullis, 2003).

Classroom meetings can also provide opportunities to promote forgiveness and acceptance. This may happen through conflict resolution, problem solving, or open dialogue (Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2010). When adults create a classroom or home with a caring, accepting atmosphere in which adults and children make mistakes and own up to them, cause hurt feelings and authentically

apologize, and accidentally inflict pain or upset but make amends, you create the conditions for forgiveness and the uplifting fresh start that results from offering it to others.

Teaching specific skills for working cooperatively can also be beneficial to students in learning Social-Awareness (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). It is of critical importance that classroom strategies promote cooperative, rather than competitive, endeavors (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003; Jewett, 1992). Teachers can encourage and facilitate cooperative group work by arranging classroom seats in sets of 3s or 4s so students are already in groups (Zukauskas, 1998). Through group work, students will not only learn the skills of cooperation important to Social-Awareness, but participation in cooperative learning activities helps students develop and choose friendships with children who differ from them, for example, outside racial groups, and develop more positive racial attitudes (Slavin, 1983; Titus, 1998).

To develop school and classroom environments which cultivate Social-Awareness, educators can also embrace culturally responsive teaching methods (Brown, 2007; Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching is the use of “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002). While professional development is highly encouraged to most effectively prepare teachers with the knowledge, attitude, and skills to teach in culturally responsive ways (Brown, 2007; Gay, 2002), some general strategies are shared below. Many resources can be found in professional literature and online to further support the development of culturally responsive teaching skills (Brown, 2007).

The first step toward teaching with cultural responsiveness is for adults to increase their knowledge about cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups. This may include values, traditions, communication styles, learning styles, and relationship patterns. For example, which cultures prioritize the community, and cooperative problem solving? What are cultural expectations for children’s interactions with adults, or for children of each gender in various cultures? What detailed facts about cultural and ethnic groups can be integrated into the curriculum? This may include significant contributions of ethnic groups to science, technology, medicine, math, theology, ecology, peace, law, and economics (Gay, 2002; Titus, 1998). This type of knowledge can be applied when selecting strategies, examples, or methods of communicating with diverse students.

Teachers are also encouraged to learn to conduct deep evaluations of the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of existing curricula and to revise the curricula for better representations of diversity (Gay, 2002; Titus, 1998). Instructional interventions and curricula can help students to

develop more positive racial attitudes (Titus, 1998). Therefore, as developmentally appropriate, curricula should deal directly with controversial issues such as racism, historical atrocities and powerlessness, study a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups, contextualize issues within race, class, ethnicity, disability and gender, and include multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives. Studying and celebrating differing cultural values, traditions, and family living concepts can have a positive effect on students, enriching them with a greater acceptance and understanding of the diversity within their community and country (Hoss & Wylie, 1997; Titus, 1998).

It is also important that the images displayed in classrooms – bulletin boards, books, posters, rules, and celebrations - represent diversity in age, gender, ability, time, place, and social class within and across ethnic groups. These should accurately relate to what is taught in the curriculum itself (Gay, 2002). Children should also be encouraged to evaluate the representations of various cultural and ethnic groups in the mass media in order to become discerning consumers of information (Gay, 2002). “We must nurture, support, and affirm the identities of students from marginalized cultural, ethnic, and language groups if we expect them to... work to make their local communities, the nation, and the world more just and humane” (Banks, 2004, pg. 297).

Community service, or service learning projects, provide excellent opportunities to promote Social-Awareness, particularly when coupled with opportunities for reflection (Elias, 2006; Woerhle, 1993). During these types of experiences, students often encounter a variety of people, ideas, and circumstances that broaden their sense of perspective and build empathic understanding and caring connections to the world around them (Elias, 2006). Service opportunities can be embedded in classrooms, schools, and curricula and can be adapted to be appropriate for children of all ages (Elias, 2006; Woerhle, 1993).

Meaningful opportunities to practice the skills of Social-Awareness can also be creatively derived from reading stories and novels, or watching movies or vignettes (Hollingsworth, Didelot, & Smith, 2003; Selman, 2003; Spence, 2003; Titus, 1998). Reflecting upon and interpreting the perspectives and feelings of characters and then discussing with others can expand children’s capacities to perspective take, building foundational skills for Social-Awareness (Selman, 2003; Spence, 2003; Titus, 1998). Through this work students can begin to recognize themes and emotions common to the human experience (Hoss & Wylie, 1997; Wan, 2006). It follows that libraries can be wonderful resources for Social-Awareness work (Wan, 2006). In addition to developing the skills for perspective taking, the written word provides opportunities such as conducting research projects on

diverse cultures, their family traditions, holiday celebrations, religious ceremonies, and folktales, or reading multicultural storybooks in order to analyze, compare, and contrast similar stories, passed down through different cultures (Wan, 2006).

The ability to consider different perspectives can also be developed through pretend play and role plays related to a variety of subjects: individuals in history, characters in a novel or story, or imaginary characters (Cassidy, Werner, Rourke & Zubernis, 2003; Titus, 1998). Fostering dramatic play techniques and reflective strategies for thinking about and discussing social interactions can enable children to get to know and trust each other and work towards truly interdependent activity (Jewett, 1992).

Social-Awareness, like skills in sports, the arts, and academic subjects, are carefully built through practice, coupled with reinforcement. Many of the strategies described above for developing Social-Awareness in children and youth can be used as opportunities to practice and develop these skills. Parents can also introduce simple opportunities for practicing Social-Awareness by providing opportunities for children to interact with friends or potential friends (Jewett, 1992). However, adults must keep in mind that children's ability to understand the perspectives of others as well as cultural differences develops over time (Banks, 2004; Quintana, 1998; Selman, 2003; Szarkowics, 1997). "Teachers should be aware of and sensitive to the stages of cultural development that all of their students may be experiencing and facilitate their identity development" (Banks, 2004, pg. 295).

Genuine reinforcement, such as specific praise and recognition following the practice of socially aware behaviors can be very effective and meaningful (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Jewett, 1992). Parents and teachers should acknowledge children's efforts to initiate social interactions in appropriate ways, affirm helping behaviors, communicate positive regard and high expectations for all children, and support each child's struggle to resolve interpersonal conflicts (Jewett, 1992). Hearing that adults value these ways of interacting with others can support a child's willingness to work at developing their own Social-Awareness skills (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). It also can strengthen their appreciation of other students who are working on building these skills, too.

The Benefits of Social-Awareness

Social-Awareness, like all social-emotional competencies, is necessary for success in all areas of children's lives. With this in mind, the DESSA Growth Strategies were written to include activities

for developing children's social and emotional skills in the home, at school, and in the out-of-school time program. The benefits of Social-Awareness can be observed across these environments and contribute to student success at present and in the future.

IN THE HOME

Children who are socially aware will contribute to a peaceful and cooperative setting at home, in part because their relationships with siblings will be characterized by cooperation, sharing and respect. These children will have open minds when it comes to listening to the opinions and ideas of others in conversations, games, and during collaborative chores, and they will often make respectful contributions when they are part of these activities. Social-Awareness is not just important for positive interactions; it can also offer important skills when children are dealing with conflicts or misunderstandings at home as well. These children will be able to cope well with insults and mean comments and forgive family members who hurt or upset them. The skills of Social-Awareness can also decrease problem behaviors. This is not just because of these children's ability to positively cope with insults and mean comments, but also because these children are able to resolve conflicts and disagreements.

When children do not resolve conflicts successfully, it can result in physical and verbal aggression, or even property destruction. However, if respectful cooperation and tolerance are taught, practiced, and mastered, children are more likely to steer away from aggressive solutions and towards more constructive solutions (Jewett, 1992). Children with Social-Awareness are able to coordinate their own perspective with those of others about whom they care (Selman, 2003). This is essential when a child is experiencing an opposite feeling of his or her friend or sibling (Harwood & Farrar, 2006). Without the ability to understand the source of someone else's frustration or anger, it is unlikely that the child can resolve a disagreement and get along well with others.

IN THE SCHOOL OR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM

The development and application of Social-Awareness skills in school or out-of-school programs can be vital, leading to more harmonious environments that encourage academic achievement (Dohrn, Holian & Kaplan, 2001). Socially aware children, particularly those who are good at cooperating, will have high quality, reciprocal, mutually satisfying relationships (Jewett, 1992;

Zukauskas, 1998), and those who are particularly good at perspective taking may be more socially competent and have better friends and play partners (Cassidy, et. al., 2003). Furthermore, as discussed above, developing the skills to get along with different types of people, appreciate diversity, and cooperate, will lead to friendship development among students who might not have had the opportunity to get to know each other because of differences such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender (Slavin, 1983).

Social-Awareness strategies with students can foster acceptance, belonging, and participation, sending a message that all students matter, and that the unique thoughts and decisions of each student are valued in the classroom. These important factors can prevent children from feeling isolated, marginalized or alienated at school and may even reduce feelings which can lead children to drop out of school (Banks, 2004; Edwards & Mullis, 2003). In fact, programs that develop the skills of Social-Awareness may increase school attendance and decrease truancy at school (Neace & Munoz, 2012). Furthermore, strategies which build Social-Awareness, such as cooperative learning and classroom meetings, contribute to more positive learning environments through increasing positive behaviors and peer acceptance (Zukauskas, 1998; Vernon & Shumaker, 1995). Classroom meetings, in particular, can directly discourage bullying behaviors, teach prosocial skills, and reduce discipline problems (Edwards & Mullis, 2003).

Fewer behavioral problems and more positive classroom environments achieved through developing Social-Awareness at school can open the doors to improved learning and academic achievement. "When children become more tolerant, their self-confidence is increased. This creates the ability to be comfortable and thus learn to interact in all kinds of situations with all different people" (Hoss & Wylie, 1997). In order for students to work together and learn from one another, they must first respect each other's differences (Elias, 2004). Students who are better able to manage conflicts (a sub-skill of Social-Awareness) have been found to retain academic material better (Doerhn, et. al., 2001). Furthermore, culturally relevant teaching strategies have been used to address underachievement in ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002).

IN THE FUTURE

Social-Awareness and the practice of its associated skills continue to challenge individuals into adulthood (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). Adults must continue to develop these skills in

order to have healthy relationships at work and at home with a diversity of individuals. To be successful at this and be the best role models for the youth in their lives, adults may need to push themselves to continue to grow their own Social-Awareness. However, adults who have developed and sustained Social-Awareness through childhood are more likely to be confident and competent and better equipped to develop knowledge and appreciation of new cultures and experiences.

Socially aware adults are likely to perform better in the workplace. These adults will be prepared to work with individuals from diverse populations and will possess skills which are particularly beneficial to the work environment (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). In fact, The Career Readiness Partner Council (2012) and the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1999) identify several characteristics outside of academic and technical knowledge and skills that are necessary for career readiness and employability. A number of these skills fall under the umbrella of Social-Awareness including the ability to: work cooperatively with others and contribute to groups with ideas, suggestions, and effort; work toward an agreement that may involve exchanging specific resources or resolving divergent interests; and work well with men and women and with a variety of ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds.

Beyond the workplace and home, socially aware adults contribute to social justice and can make progress towards unifying individuals and communities from different backgrounds (Titus, 1998). When individuals and groups overcome divisions, and begin to understand each other, social harmony develops, and has the potential to influence national and international cohesion. Adults with the skills for Social-Awareness are likely to be good citizens who make positive choices regarding the advancement of humanity (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003). The underlying components of Social-Awareness are intertwined with democratic values, and if internalized, can reduce prejudice, promote positive attitudes towards tolerance, respect, and appreciation of differences, and can contribute to the establishment of cultural pluralism (Hollingsworth, Didelot & Smith, 2003; Titus, 1998). In other words, developing Social-Awareness has the potential to assuage society's empathy deficit, through spreading respectful tolerance, and respectful cooperation. "The world's greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write. They result from people in the world – from different cultures, races, religions and nations – being unable to get along and to work together to solve the world's intractable problems..." (Banks, 2004).

Social-Awareness skills are critical to students' short-term and long-term success across settings, from the home to the classroom to the college campus or workplace. Promoting Social-

Awareness can benefit students in a number of ways and can create a solid foundation for the development of other social and emotional skills, such as Relationship Skills. Adults can intentionally help students build and develop Social-Awareness skills through simple and straightforward strategies that can be incorporated into everyday interactions. The strategies in this guide are a starting point for developing and supporting children as they acquire and strengthen their Social-Awareness skills, which will benefit them now and into the future.

Social-Awareness Reflection Questions

We encourage you to explore this social-emotional competency in more depth by reflecting on the following questions:

- How do you see this competency providing opportunities for growth in your educational setting?
- What aspects of this competency would you like to learn more about?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges for building this competency in your students?

This guide does not represent a comprehensive literature review, but a foundation for exploring the strategies found in the DESSA Comprehensive SEL System. Please feel free to use the references below to further explore the construct of Social-Awareness.

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