Building Young Children’s Emotional Competence and Self-Regulation from Birth: The begin to…ECSEL approach

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Neuroscientific advances and child development studies show 0-6 years represents a sensitive period for the development of emotional competence—the ability to identify, understand, express and regulate emotion, all foundational to self-regulation. Research suggests optimum teaching of emotional competence and self-regulation skills from birth is through interventions emphasizing co-regulation. This study aimed to examine begin to…ECSEL, an emotional cognitive and social early learning approach that promotes emotional competence and self-regulation by teaching emotion knowledge and emotion regulation through causal talk and causal talk in the emotional experience. The study collected data over three years from 100 students, aged 2-6, receiving begin to…ECSEL. Study goals were to: (1) examine growth over one academic year among students receiving begin to…ECSEL on measures of attachment/relationship, initiative, self-regulation, emotion knowledge, emotion regulation, and related constructs involving empathy, prosocial skills, positive reactions to frustration, negative emotions and aggressive behaviors; (2) examine differences between these students and national normative samples on measures of attachment/relationship, initiative, and self-regulation; and (3) explore differences between these students and normative samples on all the aforementioned constructs. Results demonstrated students significantly improved over time in these constructs and outperformed normative samples on emotionally regulated/prosocial skills, empathy, self-regulation, attachment and initiative.

Keywords: emotional competence, self-regulation, empathy, social emotional learning