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Social-Emotional Confidence

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The Tangible Impact

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5 Domains of Learning

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Social-Emotional Confidence Matters for Adolescents'

Positive Outcomes

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For many years, motivation researchers have established the importance of confidence for academic success.

Academic confidence denotes students' sense that they can be effective within a particular academic domain, such as their confidence in mathematics or science. Confidence beliefs are critical in motivation theories. When individuals believe they are capable at something, they are more likely to go forth and act in alignment with that. As a result, individuals with high confidence tend to experience greater success than those with low confidence.

More recently, researchers have started to consider the role of confidence within the social and emotional domains of life, such as navigating friendships or understanding complex emotions. This work shows that social-emotional confidence lays an important foundation for subsequent human functioning and wellbeing. In this article, I summarize recent research that my colleagues and I have conducted and that advances knowledge on this topic of social-emotional confidence.

What is Social-Emotional Confidence?

Social-emotional confidence, which is called perceived social-emotional competence in academic research, refers to individuals' beliefs that they are capable and effective in relation to their social-emotional reactions and interactions.

In our research, this construct is defined through five dimensions. Social-emotional confidence for...

- Assertiveness — feeling confident to express your thoughts and concerns clearly and standing up for those who may not be able to do so themselves. It's about being confident to be a voice for yourself and a supporter for others.
- Tolerance — feeling confident to be open-minded and accepting of other people's viewpoints. It involves feeling that you can listen to and understand different perspectives, and so create a more inclusive and respectful environment.

- **Social Regulation** — feeling confident to adjust your behavior to fit different situations. This includes feeling capable to stay focused and avoid distractions to meet the expectations of various contexts.
- **Emotion Regulation** — feeling confident to manage your emotions to experience fewer negative feelings and more positive ones. This involves the sense that you can use strategies to maintain a balanced and positive outlook.
- **Emotional Awareness** — feeling confident to identify your emotions and recognize them as they arise. This involves feeling able to be mindful of your feelings and understand their impact on your thoughts and actions.

Together, these five dimensions capture broadly accepted factors examined in research on social-emotional competence. The five dimensions also have some alignment with models of social-emotional skills. For example, CASEL describes five core social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

It is important to note, though, that whereas the CASEL model focuses on social-emotional skills, social-emotional confidence focuses on perceptions relating to those core skills and behaviors. This shift might seem subtle, but it is crucial to motivation theories where it is what an individual believes that is foundational to how they think, act, and feel.

What Does Research Say About Social-Emotional Confidence?

Over the past few years, my colleagues and I have conducted several studies on social-emotional confidence among adolescent students. In one study, we examined social-emotional confidence and students' emotional well-being. Emotional well-being was measured by asking students about their experiences of positive emotions (e.g., joy) and negative emotions (e.g., frustration).





We found that students who reported higher levels of social-emotional confidence across the five dimensions were more likely to experience greater emotional well-being by way of more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions.

A second study of ours involved examining links between social-emotional confidence and students' prosocial motivation, prosocial behavior, and conduct problems. Prosocial motivation is when students want to be kind and help others because they believe it is important to do so. Prosocial behavior refers to actions that are intended to help or benefit other people (e.g., apologizing if we accidentally bump into someone, or helping someone who has dropped their belongings).

In contrast, conduct problems involve

behaviors that are harmful or disruptive, like being aggressive, breaking rules, and stealing. In the study, students rated their own social-emotional confidence and prosocial motivation.

Parents/carers then reported on students' prosocial behavior and conduct problems. Findings from this study revealed that students who reported higher levels of social-emotional confidence across the five dimensions were more likely to report greater prosocial motivation. They were also reported by their parents as exhibiting more prosocial behavior and fewer conduct problems.

Alongside those important social-emotional outcomes, an important remaining question is whether social-emotional confidence is linked with academic outcomes. In a recent study,

we set out to answer this. We examined students' homework application and their disengagement from school. Homework application refers to students' efforts to complete their homework assignments to a high standard. Disengagement occurs when students are putting in little effort and have largely given up at school.

Students reported on their social-emotional confidence and disengagement. Homework application was reported by parents. Once again, results highlighted the importance of social-emotional confidence. Students who reported higher levels of social-emotional confidence were reported by their parents as engaging in more effective homework application, and also tended to report lower disengagement.

In combination, these three studies provide evidence that feeling confident in the social-emotional domains is important.

What Do the Findings Mean for Teachers and Parents?

Teachers and parents may want to support social-emotional confidence in their interactions with children and adolescents. A strategy to foster confidence for the dimensions of assertiveness, social regulation, and emotion regulation is to encourage students to think about an event where they could

have engaged more confidently, or regulated their behaviors or emotions in a more effective way. Then, students can be encouraged to brainstorm different ways of reacting next time a similar situation occurs, and to put those ideas into practice. This step can then be followed with conversations to assess the effectiveness of the strategy after it was applied, with further refinements made as needed.

To build confidence for tolerance and emotional awareness, teachers and parents can use stories to build students' abilities to take on board the perspectives and viewpoints of others, and to extend their social-emotional vocabulary. Activities might include role-playing or imagining how a character in a story might respond in a different situation, or reflecting on the perspectives, motives, and emotions of different characters.

Alongside the outcomes described above, our studies have also examined teaching and parenting practices linked with social-emotional confidence. In particular, we have found that autonomy-supportive practices are linked with higher social-emotional confidence among adolescents. Autonomy support involves seeking the student's perspective to understand their point-of-view.

Some strategies for autonomy-support-



Research suggests that students' social-emotional confidence matters, and it also provides direction for practices aiming to better support this self-belief in school and at home.

For more information about the research studies, see Rebecca's research profile on ResearchGate, visit (<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rebecca-Collie>)

ive teaching and parenting include:

- Explaining why students are being asked to do a task (e.g., "Practicing taking turns during this game can help you build better friendships by showing respect and patience with others.").
- Being attuned to students' needs (e.g., "I noticed you seem a bit upset at the park today. Can you share what's bothering you so I can understand better?")
- Acknowledging any negative feelings that students may have in relation to a task (e.g., "I know sharing your thoughts in front of the class can be nerve-wracking, but it helps everyone learn from each other and grow together.").



About the author:

Rebecca J. Collie, Ph.D., is a Scientia Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Rebecca conducts research in the broad areas of wellbeing, motivation, and social-emotional development using quantitative research methods. Previously, Rebecca worked as a primary school teacher in Melbourne.