



Theoretical article

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS ON FOSTERING CHILDREN'S SOFT SKILLS

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Abstract

The development of children's soft skills is crucial for their later emotional, mental and social balance. One of the most important goals of education in the 21st century is to develop a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical requirements in order to establish a firm and broad basis for lifetime learning and well-being. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of teachers in supporting and promoting children's social development, and especially in the development and enhancement of soft skills of primary school children and the ways to achieve this.

Keywords: children, education, primary education, social skills, soft skills, teachers.

Introduction

From ancient times to the present day, the process of educating children and acquiring information has aimed, among other things, to facilitate their absorption into society. As stated in the Greek Regulation on the Operation of Municipal Children's and Nursery Schools (FEK 4249/2017), the primary objective of the Nursery School program is the all-around development of the child in all areas, i.e. the parallel development and cultivation of cognitive, physical-motor, language, emotional, and social sectors, in accordance with the requirements of modern society. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1990) asserts that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC) seeks to develop a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical requirements in order to establish a firm and wide basis for lifetime learning and well-being (OECD, 2006). Education whose primary objective is to address the requirements of the kid in all areas, depending on his individual growth rate, is known as all-around development. The specific developmental skills include gross motor, fine motor, linguistic, cognitive, and social domains. Each educator's goal for each kid as an individual and a whole is the social-emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual development, which requires the nurturing of the child's talents via an appropriate learning environment.

In recent years, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the social sector, as it has been observed that modern life rhythms and conditions provide limitless opportunities for diverse stimuli and a tidal wave of information, but equally important are the interactions between children, as they are essential for their future in society. Therefore, soft skills, with an emphasis on social skills, play an important role in the development of preschool children. The purpose of these study is to investigate the role of teachers in the development of soft skills of primary school children.

1. Define soft skills

A review of books and articles indicated that there is no official definition of soft skills, since a variety of terminology and related concepts, such as emotional intelligence, are used to describe them (Dell' Aquila et al., 2019). Soft skills are described as *"intrapersonal and interpersonal talents, abilities, behaviors, and attitudes that contribute to personal growth, happiness, social involvement, success, and overall advancement"* (Logaras, 2017, p. 28).

According to Goleman's (1995) definition, soft skills are a collection of qualities that influence how a person learn, control himself, and interact with others. The majority of the list of soft talents consists of social skills. Social skills, as defined by Lynch and Simpson (2010), are *"behaviors that foster good interaction with people and the environment"* (p.3). These abilities include communication, collaboration, empathy, adaptability, time management, anger control, organization, and problem solving. Literature demonstrates that they are often referred to as personal, life, soft, or simply social skills. In brief, soft skills are of utmost significance since they connect to the individual's holistic development and are established in early infancy to facilitate a seamless transition to school and the child's later life.

In actuality, soft skills are the talents that provide adaptability to the other skills, i.e., the hard skills, and complement them, and demonstrate how communicative, adaptable, responsible, creative, and inventive the individual is. Soft skills are the talents of the twenty-first century. The number of social and emotional skills on the educational policy agenda for the next years and in the public discourse is expanding, according to recent research (OECD, 2019).

2. Fostering the development of children's soft skills

Education has a significant part in the socialization and discipline of the kid since it *"provides them with values, information, and norms, or a secure framework, through which he will be able to comprehend the world and live a balanced life"* (Pechtelidis, 2015, p. 63). For the development of social and emotional abilities, education has to shift its focus from the cognitive to the social and emotional domain (Cole & Cole, 2001).

Mathieson (2018) argues that the educator also plays a role in fostering social skills, and that *"to a certain degree, the student's destiny is predetermined"* (p. 9). The adult's participation in the interactions between children is crucial, regardless of whether he must interfere every time or not; he may enhance communication skills for the benefit of children's social development in accordance with his aims.

Since institutions are responsible for ensuring the quality of the spaces and circumstances, it is the educator's obligation to arrange the spaces in a manner that meets all demands and promotes holistic development. According to Papanikolaou (1998), it is essential to shape the environment according to the social and emotional requirements of children. Accordingly, Doliopoulou (2006) argues that the space is the most influential aspect in the educational process, and he is thus the "third teacher" in the classroom.

Early Intervention Socio-Emotional Programs "aim in the short term to promote students' social and emotional skills and positive attitudes, while in the long term they aim to improve children's adaptability and academic performance, which is manifested by more positive social events, fewer behavioral problems, reduced emotional discomfort (distress), and better grades on assessments, competitions, and tests" (Kourmoussi & Koutras, 2011, p. 137). Without a well-defined systemic framework or supporting programme, even the most effective treatments may not produce the intended

results (Steedly, Schwartz, Levin, & Luke, 2008). Thus, the significance of the teaching situation is highlighted. The idea, however, is that it is vital to create interventions that try to improve the unique talents of students before they enter primary school (Sakellariou & Besi, 2014).

2.1 Assisting the development of social skills

To assist the development of social skills, both group-promoting and free-play activities should be created. The children's participation in the game reveals not just his perception but also the trajectory of his socialization (Mukhina, 1990; Nova-Kaltsouni, 2008). Thus, eventually, group play evolves into cooperative situations including decision-making and problem-solving, thus fostering soft skills (Broadhead, 2004).

Undoubtedly, all forms of play are essential and contribute to the development of several talents. The theatrical game nonetheless has a key position in this approach. According to Kouretzis (1991), the theatrical game possesses all the characteristics of a game, including communication, freedom of expression, spontaneity, the externalization of emotions, participation in the group's own activities, and mental relaxation, thus satisfying all his developmental requirements. Using free and structured play, dramatization, improvisation, role play, and social tales, social contact amongst children, team building, and the development and enhancement of social skills are facilitated.

More specifically, for a teacher to support and promotes children's social development need to:

- provide opportunity for one-on-one and small group interaction, encouraging friendship and initiative;
- enables them to express feelings, discover himself, and structure his identity;
- contributes to children's socialization by dividing them into small groups (Jayaraja & Tielemans, 2013);
- provide opportunities to develop empathy, active listening, and emotional intelligence;
- assists them in making frugal decisions;
- accord emphasis and consideration to children's vocal and nonverbal responses by assisting them;
- employ effective conflict management techniques;
- Stimulates them to learn, explore, experiment, test, and create;
- lead to the lessening of children's self-centeredness; and
- employ social narratives as a technique (Lynch & Simpson, 2010).

In these techniques, which are exemplary educational practices in general, the educator may make a major contribution to the development of these vital abilities in young children, whose effects will be evident throughout their lives.

Conclusion

The development of soft skills should be at the center of every educator's instructional planning. The educator's function is complex and varied. It may be described as directing, motivating, cooperating, mediating, counselling, facilitating, and socializing. To remain contemporary, the modern pedagogue must adhere to the present trends in Pedagogy. In order to be more successful in their work, educators must engage in personal and professional development owing to the expectations of

contemporary society. Assessments of each kid and pedagogical practice plays a significant part in the professional development of educators (Doliopoulou & Gourgiotou, 2008).

In conclusion, it is evident that a good educator is one who, via child-centered and game-centered curriculum, is able to maintain children's attention, inspire them to study, and contribute to their overall development.

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