Chapter 11
Supporting Affective Development of Children With Disabilities Through Moral Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

Children and youth with disabilities are challenged in many ways, including in the social and affective domains. The author provides a relatively simple and easily constructed intervention, involving a combination of concepts from social-emotional learning, values clarification, cooperative learning, bibliotherapeutic interventions, and character education to address areas of need within the social and affective domains for very young children with or without disabilities. Stories created by teachers and presented during reading readiness, addressing authentic dilemmas that children may face in their daily lives, can promote positive social interaction, facilitate identification and clarification of values, and cultivate social-emotional and character development. A lesson template and sample lesson are provided, as well as suggestions for adapting to meet the needs of individual children.

INTRODUCTION

"The morals your children learn as kids will impact how they see the world and behave as adults" (Ireland, 2017, para. 1). Ireland's words underscore the importance of early introduction of morals and values to children. Because these are so important, we begin introducing them to our children at a very young age. We influence children's affects through development of their social-emotional selves. Some children may absorb social-emotional learnings automatically, while others may struggle to understand them.

Children and youth with disabilities[1] are especially challenged in terms of their affective and social-emotional development. Students with disabilities are particularly challenged in maintaining friendships (Siperstein, Leffert, & Wenz-Gross, 1997), frequently due to influences of their disabilities. For example,

social-emotional development is linked to language development in Deaf children, which is an area of difficulty for them (Lytle & Olivia, 2016). Their language development evolves differently than that of hearing children, i.e. without auditory input. The cognitions are created without the auditory input, making it more challenging for the Deaf child to understand what someone is trying to communicate. This challenge may be frustrating and may frustrate social-emotional development. Children with delays "interact less with peers, engage in lower levels of group play but higher levels of conflicts" (Guralnick, Connor, & Johnson, 2011, p. 310). Students identified with learning disabilities (LD) may also demonstrate behavior disorders (inattention, ongoing disruptive behaviors, etc., causing problems in school as well as at home), lack acceptable social skills (unsuccessful communicating and interacting with others), and exhibit problematic classroom behavior. According to Bender (1994) these are "noncognitive issues" (p. 250); that is, they are issues typically not assessed or measured via cognitive assessments or norm-based achievement tests. Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder come from all backgrounds and cultures across the world. One characteristic they share is having difficulty with social interaction, and often appear self-absorbed and in a world of their own (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). In some countries, children with visual impairments frequently display no ability to cooperate or interact in socially acceptable ways and may be ignored by their typically developing peers (Salleh & Zainal, 2010).

Children with Down syndrome, for example, when interacting with typically developing peers within a school environment, can learn while developing and using social skills (Lucisano, Pfeifer, Panuncia-Pinto, Santos, & Anhão, 2013). This demonstrates that children with disabilities can benefit in terms of affective development by interacting in meaningful ways with their typically developing peers to learn social skills.

Academic content (that is, subjects typically taught in school such as reading, math and science) is not sufficient to address concerns related to social, emotional and affective development. Curricula and interventions are required to specifically address these additional issues of maturation.

This chapter examines a combination of concepts and practices from several important interventions, which provide viable learning opportunities for young children regardless of their ability or disability. A brief overview of each will help the reader to better understand the foundations of the suggested intervention.

Main Focus

The main focus of this chapter is to examine specific interventions, that is Values Clarification, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Cooperative Learning, Bibliotherapeutic Interventions, and Character Education principles, and demonstrate how, when these interventions are integrated and mediated by the teacher's creative thinking and development of materials, they can provide an opportunity for the teacher to address non-cognitive issues, often in combination with otherwise regular curriculum. An application of salient principles from these interventions integrated in the form of a bibliotherapeutic lesson—a "Raggedy Ann and Andy" lesson, inspired by the beloved stories for children by Johnny Gruelle—will be explained with directions for the teacher's use (see Figure 1).

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