Affective Social Competence
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Abstract

A theoretical model for affective social competence is described. Affective social competence (ASC) is comprised of three integrated and dynamic components: sending affective messages, receiving affective messages, and experiencing affect. Central and interconnected abilities within each component include awareness and identification of affect, working within a complex and constantly changing social context, and management and regulation. The dynamic integration of the components is emphasized and potential mediating factors are outlined. The model is placed within the context of previous research and theory related to affective social competence; how the model advances future research is also explicated for each component. Research with special populations of children is described to highlight the importance of affective social competence in social relationships and the promise of the ASC model for future research and practice.

Keywords: social competence; emotion regulation; peer relations; nonverbal skills; emotion competence

Jasper sees a group of his classmates playing in the kitchen area in his preschool. He is excited and wants to play, too. How should he approach them? Should he bound over to Antonio, expressing his exuberance by grabbing a spoon and helping him stir the pot? Should he edge over to the group and wait until he is invited to play? Should he approach Mickie, who has turned her back to him, or Annika, who is smiling at him?

Kenya is being teased by the third-grade classroom bully again. She is fed up and wants the taunting to stop. How can Kenya get the bully to stop teasing her? Should she smile and try to act as if the teasing doesn’t bother her? Should she frown at the bully and speak forcefully? What if the bully starts to push her? What if the bully backs down in class, but waits for her after school?

Jasper and Kenya are facing two key social situations, initiating peer contact and responding to provocation (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, McClaskey & Feldman, 1985; Hubbard & Coie, 1994). As these examples make evident, emotions are primary elements in social interactions. Jasper’s and Kenya’s abilities to express and experience their own emotions and to recognize the emotions of the other children involved...
will determine whether their strategies in these interactions are successful. These examples involve children; however, emotions are basic elements in social interactions throughout the life-span. First, they are a significant source of information to both the person communicating and the person receiving the communication. Emotional content (communicated verbally, facially, or through other channels) often determines the meaning of an interaction. Second, emotions are integral to social interaction; as dynamic processes they create and are created by relationships with others (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989). It is difficult to imagine any single interaction that does not include communicating some affective information, receiving affective information, and/or experiencing some affective state.

Because skill in experiencing and expressing one’s own emotions and in recognizing others’ emotions are central in successful social interactions, it is important to define and study what we are calling affective social competence. We define affective social competence as the efficacious communication of one’s own affect, one’s successful interpretation and response to others’ affective communications, and the awareness, acceptance, and management of one’s own affect. We distinguish affective social competence from the broader rubric of social competence which is well described as ‘effectiveness in interaction’ (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Social competence has traditionally been operationalized using the four general approaches of social skills, peer status, relationship success, and functional goal-outcome assessments (Rose-Krasnor, 1997); none of these include intra-psychic or relational aspects of emotion in any explicit manner. Of course, effective communication, interpretation, and personal experience of emotion is likely to have substantive impact on one’s interaction success; it makes sense that affective social competence and general social competence are overlapping constructs. Nevertheless, because emotion aspects have been largely underdeveloped in the social competence literature, it is valuable to explore the concept of affective social competence as a distinct entity in its own right.

We are not the first to notice the need for a distinct and comprehensive description of affective social competence. Indeed, many researchers have called for greater awareness of emotions and/or emotion communication skills in social competence (e.g., Buck, 1991; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Lemerise & Gentil, 1992; Nowicki & Duke, 1992a; Thompson, 1990), and Goleman (1995) has also popularized the notion of emotional intelligence with lay readers. Table 1 summarizes the research models of Crick and Dodge (1994), Mayer and Salovey (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1993, 1995, 1997), and Saarni (1990, 1997, 1999) in comparison with our proposed model of affective social competence. Each model has important elements pertaining to the phenomena of interest here.

Crick and Dodge (1994) developed a powerful model of information processing mechanisms in social encounters. They include a comprehensive discussion of how children interpret and react to social cues, and include some of what we will call the ‘self-factors’ influencing the skills of sending, receiving, and experiencing. Their goal is primarily one of delineating the information-processing aspects of social competence, however, so there is less emphasis on the effective sending of affective information, and on the awareness, understanding, and management of one’s own affect.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) carefully outlined the construct of ‘emotional intelligence.’ In their view, the ways in which individuals generate, perceive, and regulate emotions figure prominently in their positive growth and adaptation. Additionally, emotions facilitate thinking, and regulation of emotions can promote intellectual
growth. We concur about the importance of emotions. We are less concerned about the relations between socio-emotional skills and traditional estimations of intelligence, however, and are more concerned about the dynamic aspects of developing emotional understanding, communication, and experience within relationships.

Saarni (1990, 1997, 1999) emphasizes these aspects in her rich account of ‘emotional competence’, ‘... how [children] can respond emotionally, yet simultaneously and strategically apply their knowledge about emotions and their expression to relationships with others, so that they can negotiate interpersonal exchanges and regulate their emotional experiences as well’ (1990, p. 116). She is the first modern theorist to emphasize internal experiential aspects of competence and the importance of genuineness of emotional experience, and explicitly asserts that emotional competence is ‘contextually anchored in social meaning... (1999, p. 2).’ Saarni’s account includes eight skills of emotional competence that individuals draw upon to demonstrate self-efficacy during emotion-relevant social interchanges. She also stresses the role of culture in determining how these aspects are expressed.

Saarni emphasizes the importance of process, but how these eight skills develop and the specific components involved in the process of achieving these competencies remain undelineated. Second, abilities clearly work in coordination with each other, but there is no coherent, conceptual structure to organize how the dynamic, transactional processes interrelate. Third, the term ‘emotional competence’ may emphasize the experiential portion at the expense of sending and receiving, and suggest a more intra-psychic rather than social experience. We chose the term ‘affective social competence’ for our model because we want to emphasize the integral and dynamic relationship between affect and social interaction. Thus, in many ways we build on Saarni’s work, developing the promise of her account in a dynamic, transactional model that allows for precise measurement of more fully specified processes.

As can be seen in Table 1, we draw upon the strengths of these theorists in our model. We go substantially further, however, in that we (a) integrate these broad but related domains, (b) carefully delineate the specific abilities within each domain, (c) suggest a developmental sequence for these abilities, and (d) place all these processes within an ongoing and dynamic social context.

We believe that it is vital to provide a detailed, fine-grained, comprehensive view of affective social competence. Such a multifaceted model provides a clear, more comprehensive yet specifiable theoretical account, and suggests where extant research is ‘thin’ or potentially confounds elements of affective social competence. For example, suppose that Jasper tends to bound up to other children, forcefully attempting to join play, and that his attempts tend to be rejected by other children. Is this rejection a result of Jasper being unable to understand other children’s ‘calm down’ messages, sent through body language, facial expressions, and verbalizations? Is the rejection a result of Jasper being unable to understand and modulate his own excitement? Or are both of these factors combining to decrease Jasper’s peer entry success? A fine-grained model of affective social competence can help us to design studies to better disentangle and more conclusively examine the separate components of affective social competence in specific contexts. Finally, on a more applied note, a comprehensive model of affective social competence might help practitioners remedy delays or deficiencies in children’s affective social competence within various settings. It is likely that children demonstrate different patterns of strengths and weaknesses across the components of affective social competence. Finding a profile of affective social competence strengths and weaknesses for individual children (or groups of children) could...
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<tr>
<td><strong>Construct</strong></td>
<td><em>Emotional competence</em> refers to ‘the demonstration of self-efficacy in the context of emotion-elicitng social transactions* (1990, p. 116).’</td>
<td><em>Features emotional intelligence</em> as ‘the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions &amp; emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth* (1997, p. 5).’</td>
<td><em>A social information-processing model,</em> ‘including emotion at every step’, with memory, rules, social schemes, and social knowledge as the data base for behavior. No specific definition of affect or emotional competence within social interaction.</td>
<td><em>Affective social competence is the efficacious communication of one’s own affect, one’s successful interpretation and response to others’ affective communications, and the awareness, acceptance, and management of one’s own affect.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
<td>Lists 8 skills: 1. Awareness of own emotional state 2. Recognition of other’s emotion 3. Use of emotion and expression language 4. Ability to be empathic 5. Realization that inner</td>
<td>Includes four abilities, with increasingly complex subcomponents in each ability: 1. Perceiving, and appraising, others’ and one’s own emotions and expressing one’s own emotions</td>
<td>Identifies six steps: 1. Encoding of internal and external cues 2. Interpretation of cues—causal and intent attributions, evaluation of goal attainment, etc. 3. Clarification of goals, arousal regulation</td>
<td>Organized around three basic components: 1. Sending affective messages 2. Receiving affective message 3. Experiencing affect</td>
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</table>
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2. Accessing and generating emotions so construction progresses or not always correspond.

4. Response access or construction essential to successful social relationships are largely defined by emotional immediacy and reciprocity.

8. Emotional efficacy: Feeling in control and accepting of one's own emotional experiences.

Awareness, Coping adaptively with analyzing emotion in aversive or distressing others does not correspond. Relationship should not always correspond.

Regulating emotion, so as to promote intellectual growth.

Behavioral enactment in skills 3, 5, 7, & 8. Context and management that needs to be sent, and send behaviors are implied because others notice when an individual is sent in a given context. They send affective messages appropriately, clearly and concisely. They send affective messages appropriately, clearly and concisely. They send affective messages appropriately, clearly and concisely.

Context and management within a social context. They send affective messages appropriately, clearly and concisely. They send affective messages appropriately, clearly and concisely.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Coverage of Skill Areas</th>
<th>Saarni</th>
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<th>Halberstadt, Denham &amp; Dunsmore</th>
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<tr>
<td>Receiving: Awareness, Identification, Context, and Management</td>
<td>Ability to discern others’ emotions, based on culturally agreed-upon situational and expressive cues (skills 2, 3, 4). Ability to realize that inner and outer emotional states need not coincide (skill 5). Again, receiving often presented in combination with other areas.</td>
<td>Awareness and labeling of emotions in others whether same as or different from own emotion states (abilities 1 &amp; 3). Ability to identify others’ accurate vs. dishonest expressions of feelings, complex feelings, and emotional transitions (ability 1).</td>
<td>Encoding and interpreting emotional cues of others are central to this social cognitive information processing model (step 2). Context and management are implied.</td>
<td>Affectively competent individuals notice when an affective message has been sent. They appropriately identify and interpret the affective information within the situational context. They receive the message without confusion or needing repetitions. They appropriately manage the receiving of both real and false signals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing: Awareness, Identification, Context, and Management</td>
<td>Awareness of one’s own emotional state, including multiple emotions (skills 1, 7, &amp; 8). Capacity for empathic involvement in others’ emotional experience (skill 4). Interpersonal context relevant to skill 7; also, a basic pillar of the theory is the social construction of emotional experience. Capacity for coping</td>
<td>Self-awareness, staying open to feelings, both positive and negative, but also detaching from feelings when necessary (abilities 1, 2, &amp; 4). Ability to reflectively monitor emotions in self (abilities 1 &amp; 2). Ability to moderate negative and enhance positive emotions, without repressing or exaggerating the</td>
<td>Awareness implied within ‘encoding internal cues’ (step 1). Identification implied within step 2. Management implied within arousal management (step 3)—contagion of others’ arousal in social interaction must be managed.</td>
<td>Affectively competent individuals notice when they are experiencing emotion(s) in a given context. They appropriately identify and interpret their emotional experience within the situational context. They experience emotion(s) without ruminating. They appropriately manage whether to attenuate, retain, or enhance their emotional experiences.</td>
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Adaptively with aversive emotions, and acceptance of one's feelings (skills 6 & 8).

Transactional Approach/ Focus on Process

Children learn specific emotional behaviors, norms, and symbols for their culture as an unintended result of social interaction; social experience is central. Recognition of various transactions within self and between self and others (e.g., understanding of flow of emotions and that inner states and outer expressions need not be isomorphic; interaction between own sending style and understanding of cultural display rules; coping adaptively with aversive emotions).

List of components suggests increasing complexity across development.

Information they convey (ability 4).

Less transactional than the other theories—the model is centered within the person, with the goals of emotions enhancing thought, and of thinking intelligently about one's own and others' emotions. List of components suggests increasing complexity across development.

Social processing and social adjustment are reciprocal and ongoing processes; 'Recognition of the ongoing, transactional nature of social exchange leads to mental processes that help direct the next behavior (1994, p. 78).'
Steps are located within a social exchange or series of social exchanges.

Emphasizes transactional and contextual processes in social interaction and the dynamic relations between components: First, ASC is enacted within relationships, so affectively skilled behaviors are often dependent upon partner characteristics.
Second, relationships exist within a past, present, and future, so affectively skilled behaviors involve an understanding of timing both in the immediate interaction and across previous and hoped for (future) experiences with the interaction partner.
Third, ASC is, at least partly, a product of past transactions (socialization).
Fourth, ASC develops and becomes more complex with maturation and increasing...
Table 1. continued

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<tr>
<td>Self-Factors</td>
<td>Experience and within a dynamically changing self-system. That is, an individual's developing maturation and experience within the self-system will also impact ASC.</td>
<td>Self-factors as moderators are not elaborated.</td>
<td>Several self-factors are mentioned as possible moderating factors; these include attributions of causality and hostile attributional biases, implementation strategies, gender and age.</td>
<td>Other skills, knowledge bases, motivational aspects, degrees of arousal, and schemas may influence affective social competence, including, but not limited to: world view, self-concept or self-schema, demeanor, temperament, process orientation toward relationships, knowledge of display rules, knowledge of implementation strategies, motivation to interact with others and to be skilled in these interactions, and behavioral and schematic flexibility.</td>
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Note: Other researchers not included here have presented at least partial models, such as Eisenberg & Fabes (1992) and Thompson (1994) who focus on emotion regulation; and Nowicki & Duke (1992, 1993), who focus on assessment.
Our major goal, then, is to provide a comprehensive model of affective social competence. First, we outline a model that organizes our understanding of affective social competence. Second, we describe the components of this model in detail. To do so, we focus on affective social competence within peer relations, as one’s peer relations provide an important social context beginning early in the lifespan and continuing in importance for most individuals throughout their lives. In this section, we also highlight and generate techniques that can be used to measure the abilities that we have identified.

Third, we discuss the dynamism across the model components, as well as potential mediating factors, primarily self-factors, in affective social competence. Fourth, we discuss extant research relevant to our model of affective social competence conducted with special populations of children, which informs our discussion of normative development by shedding light on potential causes and effects of perturbations in affective social competence. We conclude with suggestions for future research efforts directed at further describing and understanding this important concept, and maintain that the most fruitful examination of these issues can be achieved by consolidating developmental and social psychological perspectives. We believe that the difficulties many researchers face in testing hypotheses about emotional and social competence stem from a lack of clarity about what the various elements of these constructs are and how they are interrelated. Thus, our goal is to organize what we do know about ASC and to generate ideas for further testing the discrete components of ASC.

A Model of Affective Social Competence

Overview

Affective social competence includes three basic components: sending affective messages, receiving affective messages, and experiencing affect. Within each component, the four progressive abilities that are essential to successful social interactions are: (a) awareness, (b) identification, (c) working within a social context, and (d) management and regulation. We depict our model as a pinwheel, a children’s toy that rotates in the wind, to emphasize the constantly changing nature of social interactions, and the knowledge of process that is implied in the continual integration of the various components of affective social competence within the ever-changing social world. There is no one source of wind, nor is there one force tilting or turning the pinwheel; the child and his or her social partners, and the contexts in which they interact, give the pinwheel its unique impetus at any given time (Planalp, 1999). This model is shown in Figure 1.

Developmental Process

We believe that the four abilities (awareness, identification, working within the social context, and management and regulation) within each component (sending, receiving, and experiencing) develop in sequence as children mature and become more experienced with their own emotions and with social interactions. In our model, each ability is linked hierarchically within each component and across components. Although individuals may continue to increase their skill throughout the life-span, we believe that
at least rudimentary forms of preceding abilities within each component must be present for an individual to start developing subsequent abilities. For example, at least some level of awareness of one’s emotional experience must be present before one can begin to identify what the experience is, and so on. Once there is a modicum of skill for each ability, however, it is probable that development of further skill becomes transactional, and skill (or lack of skill) for any ability impacts development of skill in other abilities. Thus, for example, developing skill in identifying messages that are communicated by others may later reverberate back to greater development of skill in becoming self-aware when experiencing one’s own emotions. Furthermore, though development of the abilities likely involves quantitative change, as abilities increase through practice and experience, we expect that qualitative, transformative changes also occur concomitant with other aspects of development, such as cognitive maturation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully address all the developmental

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**Figure 1.** Pinwheel depiction of affective social competence.
processes involved in ASC. We do note, in keeping with the relational nature of our construct, that development of the abilities involves a dynamic interplay between individual maturation and the opportunities provided by socialization experiences with interaction partners.

Additionally, the abilities in all three components of affective social competence may be enacted consciously, unconsciously, or automatically. We suspect that in the early stages of developing skill at least some aspects of the process are engaged in quite deliberately. One of the noteworthy aspects of ASC is that, over time, these abilities become largely automatic and quick, and we become unaware of the actual sequential nature of the process. As with development of cognitive and motor skills (such as learning to walk or learning to drive), quite complex processes may be engaged in with rapidity and seeming effortlessness by even young children. In everyday life, when interactions are going well, these general abilities are constantly interwoven in a seamless manner as the individual interacts with others.

**Behavioral Instantiations of ASC**

We believe that the underlying structure of affective social competence and the processes underlying the development of ASC are robust across the life-span and across culture. The particular instantiations of these abilities, however, will vary across the life-span, across cultures and sub-cultures, across social contexts, and across goals. What might be considered as competent at one age, in one culture, in one context, or for the achievement of one specific goal might not be considered as competent at another age, in another culture, in another context, or to achieve a different goal. For example, some school-age children express anger on the playground to assert dominance, and within the school-yard peer culture this works quite well. The same snarling demeanor may be less likely to help achieve a child’s goals with parents or to achieve later career goals as a stockbroker or a diplomat. Also, some cultures value masking of negative emotions such as anger, whereas in others, socializers work to increase their children’s ability to express anger and thereby improve their ability to protect themselves (Miller & Sperry, 1987). Thus, we do not try in this paper to be prescriptive or to identify specific actions that are always considered as affective social competence. Rather, our focus is on the underlying processes involved in affective social competence.

**Integration of ASC Components**

A fourth part of the model includes what we call ‘self-factors’—other skills, knowledge bases, motivational aspects, degrees of arousal, and schemas that may influence the three areas of sending, receiving, and experiencing. The relationship between the three components and self-factors should be seen as transactional in that skill in sending, receiving, and experiencing may reciprocally influence the self-factors. A final part of the model depicts the interconnections between the three components of affective social competence. Again, skill includes a unique balancing, a dynamism, an integration between the three components.

We now describe the specific components of the model in detail. As we outline these components, please refer to Tables 2 and 3 for descriptive examples of how the components of ASC might be enacted in everyday situations. We focus our examples and our description on the preschool and elementary school years only because most
research related to emotional and social competence has focused on this age range. However, we intend our model to encompass the life-span, and, examples of affective social competence through adolescence and adulthood may easily be generated using this model.

Components of the Model of Affective Social Competence

Sending

We begin, somewhat arbitrarily, with sending as our entry point into the pinwheel; as every parent knows, even newborns are quite effective at signaling their emotional state. In fact, for very young infants, sending and experiencing affect may be inseparable, so that the experience of displeasure (hunger, wetness, etc.) and the act of crying are one and the same (Izard, 1977).

Increasingly during the first year of life, emotional expressions become more instrumental, as infants attempt to influence the social world around them. Smiling is one of many examples, with infants beginning to smile socially in the second month of life, and using unfelt smiles with strangers by the tenth month of life (Fox & Davidson, 1988). As children continue to expand their social world, sending emotional messages comes to serve the more complicated function of providing peers with information about the child's intentions. Sending skill can 'make or break' the social encounter. And, children need to quickly incorporate information from the other skill areas (receiving others' emotional signals and experiencing emotion) to gauge how successful their strategies are proving to be, and to determine whether they should—and can—modify their strategies in the current interaction. Individuals may choose to send affective messages that are consonant with, or that oppose, their emotional experience, and their choices of which affective messages to send will have a synergistic relationship with the affective messages being received from other participants in the interaction.

We know that skill in sending messages is an important aspect of peer acceptance. Children more adept at sending expressive messages were rated as more likable by peers (Field & Walden, 1982; Nowicki & Duke, 1994), and more accurate senders in the laboratory were rated by their teachers as more extroverted, more positive affectively, more popular with peers, and/or better adjusted (Custrini & Feldman, 1989; Walden & Field, 1990; Zuckerman & Przewuzman, 1979). Additionally, many researchers have found that children who are more positively expressive—at least verbally—have better peer relations (Asher, 1983; Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; LaFrenière & Strode, 1985; Putallaz, 1983; Strode, Schork, Motti, Lawroski, & LaFrenière, 1984; Walden, Leminger, & Gentil, 1992) and some researchers have found that children who are more negatively expressive have poorer peer relations (Denham et al., 1990; Rubin & Clark, 1983). But what is it that successful children (and adults) are doing? We posit four steps.

Awareness that an affective message needs to be sent. The first sending ability is awareness that an affective message needs to be sent. For infants and toddlers, awareness that an affective message needs to be sent may be inseparable from awareness that they are experiencing an emotion. By the preschool years, children may begin to have a rudimentary awareness of the need to send messages (Blurton-Jones, 1967; Cheyne, 1976), but no one has examined whether early awareness is or is not associated with higher levels of skill. For example, awareness at ages 3 or 4 years may be
### Table 2. Descriptive Example of ASC: Entry into a Peer Group

Jasper sees a group of his classmates playing in the kitchen area in his preschool. He is excited and wants to play, too.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of ASC</th>
<th>Descriptive Example for Peer Group Entry Situation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sending: Awareness</td>
<td>Jasper realizes that he must send an affective message to the other children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sending: Identification</td>
<td>Jasper decides that he should signal that he is willing to play <em>with</em> the other children, rather than trying to enact a hostile takeover.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Sending: Within Context | Regarding display rules, Jasper is eager to join the play scenario that the group has developed. His full exuberance upon approach, however, might cause him to be perceived as too aggressive, and thus lead to a rejection of his bid for entry. Modulating his expression to warmth and interest might cause him to be perceived as friendly and fun, and thus lead to a more successful bid for entry.  
Regarding the ongoing flow of the context, and the characteristics of the interaction partners, Jasper may have learned through repeated interactions that Annika responds well to his exuberance, but Mickie needs to be approached more gently. Regarding background processes, Jasper may be aware that Antonio has a cold, and needs to be approached more gently than usual. |
| Sending: Management | In sending clearly and concisely, Jasper needs to communicate his interest in joining the play, without being repetitive or ambiguous.  
In managing his false signals, Jasper may not be feeling confident that he will be accepted into the group in the kitchen area, but he knows that he needs to communicate confidence to be accepted.  
In managing his real signals that are relevant and helpful, Jasper needs to communicate his willingness to be playful and to follow the groups’ already-chosen play scenario. At the same time, in managing real signals that are relevant but inappropriate, he needs to mask his anxiety about being rejected by the other children. In managing real signals that are irrelevant, Jasper needs to mask his disgust when Antonio sneezes and gets phlegm all over his hands and the pot he is holding. |
### Table 2. continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of ASC</th>
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<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td><strong>AWARENESS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Simply noticing who is responding to him will help Jasper to identify the child most (or least) likely to allow him entry into the kitchen play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td><strong>IDENTIFICATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>As Jasper approaches the group of children playing in the kitchen area, he must be able to distinguish between happy smiles of welcome and smirks of contemptuous rejection. As he becomes more skilled, he will be able to identify blended messages, such as cautious welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td><strong>WITHIN CONTEXT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Regarding display rules, suppose Jasper’s teacher has a rule that children can’t tell other children they can’t play. When Jasper bounds over and asks a group of children if he can play with them, he might more appropriately interpret a grudging response of ‘well, okay’ or closed body space as a rejection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Regarding background processes, Jasper knows that when Antonio has a cold, it takes Antonio longer to warm up to new playmates. So, a frown or ‘no’ from Antonio means ‘not yet,’ rather than ‘no.’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Regarding the ongoing flow of the context, and the characteristics of the interaction partners, Jasper may know from repeated experience that when Annika doesn’t answer, that means ‘yes’, but when Mickie doesn’t answer, she does not want to be approached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td><strong>MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>In receiving clearly and concisely, Jasper needs to join in the play when he is offered a spoon by Mickie, rather than repeatedly asking for verbal confirmation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>In managing receipt of false signals, Jasper knows that Antonio’s frown is actually part of Antonio’s role as the ‘mean cook’ and not a signal that he doesn’t want Jasper to join them. Mickie’s smile is forced, because she is worried that she will be left out when Jasper joins the group. Jasper acts as if Mickie’s forced smile is sincere, and makes sure to include her in their play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>In managing receipt of real signals that are relevant and helpful, Jasper knows that the group has accepted him when he is offered a spoon by Annika. In managing receipt of real signals that are relevant but inappropriate, Jasper receives a mixed message from Mickie of welcome to the group blended with fear that she would be left out once he joins the group. Jasper’s sensitivity in receiving both portions of that message will affect the course of his entry into the group and continued successful play. In managing receipt of irrelevant signals, Jasper is not put off by Annika’s wince when she has just had a pot dropped on her hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiencing: Awareness
Jasper needs to recognize that he is experiencing emotion(s), and perhaps its (their) affective valence, as he approaches the other children.

Experiencing: Identification
If Jasper is feeling primarily excitement, he may choose a different sending strategy as he approaches the group than if he is feeling primarily anxiety.

Experiencing: Within Context
Regarding display rules, Jasper may be worried that he will be rejected by the group but keeps smiling anyway because he knows that’s what people do when they greet each other. He might remain aware that he is really nervous about approaching the group of children even though he’s not showing it. However, it is quite possible that in remembering and emphasizing the emotion script of ‘be eager to join the group’, he would change his emotional experience as well.

Regarding the ongoing flow of the context and background processes, Jasper had a great morning at home and he even won a race during recess, so his good feelings about those events help him counteract his anxiety about rejection. Regarding his own interaction characteristics, Jasper may realize that he will just get more nervous if he waits to approach the group, so that it is better to go ahead and approach them while he is very excited about joining them.

Experiencing: Management
In experiencing clear and non-ruminative emotions, if Jasper’s anxiety begins to overtake his excitement at playing in the kitchen he may need to manage his internal experience of the emotions, to regulate the balance of his blended emotions in a way that facilitates his goal of joining the group.

In managing false signals, Jasper is feeling great about having just won a race. As he approaches the other children in the kitchen, he focuses on his joy about the race rather than his anxiety about possible rejection. In managing real, relevant, and useful emotional experiences, Jasper needs to enhance his joy at entering the group (without overdoing it). In managing relevant, but not useful, emotional experiences, Jasper may realize that some anxiety at approaching the children playing in the kitchen area is normal, but that overwhelming anxiety is not. More intense feelings of anxiety might indicate that he should choose a different strategy or perhaps a different group to approach. In managing irrelevant emotional experiences, Jasper chooses to ignore his disgust at the amount of phlegm Antonio is producing due to his cold.
associated with likability at age 7 years, because the other skills have developed from that awareness. Early awareness may even be associated with likability at that age simply because awareness alone may cause a child to slow down what she is doing to consider the situation more carefully, and that alteration of the social process may lead to more positive outcomes. Of course, knowing what to send is always desirable, and that is the next step.

Identifying what affective messages to send. Not just any message will do; the individual has to determine the appropriate message for the given social context. Children learn through experience which messages aid them in obtaining their goals, and they are also instructed by caregivers about situationally appropriate emotional expression, regardless of whether they are experiencing that emotion (Saarni, 1985). This skill is an important aspect of peer relations (e.g., Boyatzis & Satyaprasad, 1994; Field & Walden, 1982; Spence, 1987). In Field and Walden’s study, for example, children who were accurate producers of emotions were rated by their teachers as more affectively positive, popular, and extroverted. So, the most advantageous affective message for the situation needs to be determined, and the individual needs to be able to send it convincingly. This is the next step.

Sending the intended message within the social context. The third sending ability is understanding how to send the intended message within (a) the constraints of display rules (sending more, less, or different affective messages than those which are felt, based on familial or cultural expectations), and (b) the ongoing flow of a context. The ongoing flow includes the unique (and changing) characteristics of the interaction partners (both the recipient and the sender), background processes, and the overall flow of the interpersonal exchange. Sending the intended message within the social context involves choosing an appropriate method and intensity of sending. For example, a major milestone for toddlers occurs when they learn to express anger through words rather than by kicking, hitting, or biting others (Kopp, 1989; Shatz, 1994). And very young children know to wait until a parent is nearby or looking at them before expressing their dismay over a minor injury (Blurton-Jones, 1967). In other words, how and when the emotional communication is sent may be as key to its meaning and eventual success or failure as is the simple emotional content. And, both display rules and the ongoing flow influence what method and intensity of sending will be most effective. (Please refer to Tables 2 and 3 for illustrative examples.) This sending ability implies continual revision of sending strategies and expectations throughout the process of an interaction. It is one thing to know what to send when given a simple scenario in a hypothetical situation; it is more complicated to know what and how to send within the complex and changing action of an interaction. In addition, the most effective children will integrate their sending skills with their receiving and experiencing skills, and accommodate their particular sending strategies to unique characteristics of their interaction partners, of the situation, and of their current experience (e.g., Fuchs & Thelen, 1988; Underwood, 1997).

Managing the sending of affective messages. The fourth sending ability is managing one’s sending of affective messages. We identify three aspects of management. First, we believe that, for the most part, it is more affectively socially competent to be clear and concise in one’s communications, although there are always exceptions when it is more competent to be vague (e.g., in political negotiations or flirting), and these exceptions are likely to vary cross-culturally. Clarity also probably involves using normative expressions (as defined by the culture, sub-culture, or family to which interaction participants belong) so that the communication will be understood.
### Table 3. Descriptive Example of ASC: Peer Conflict
Kenya is being teased by the third-grade classroom bully again. She is fed up and wants the taunting to stop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of ASC</th>
<th>Descriptive Example for Peer Conflict Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sending:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Kenya realizes that she must send an affective message to the bully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Kenya chooses to signal confidence and anger to the bully, even if she isn’t really feeling confident and angry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Context</td>
<td>Regarding display rules, the school enforces strict rules about fighting in school. Kenya is aware that if she is caught fighting with the bully she may get suspended. Kenya has had previous success achieving some level of dominance over the bully with her wit, so she chooses to whisper a scathing insult when poked by the bully while the teacher has her back turned. Regarding the ongoing flow of the situation, and the characteristics of interaction partners, Kenya is aware that she gets less and less confident as the bully’s teasing continues, so she needs to send a strong signal soon to stop the teasing or put up with it all day. Regarding background processes, Kenya has to consider how to communicate a lack of fear despite being preoccupied with an argument she had with her sister that morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>In sending clear and concise signals, Kenya needs to communicate anger and confidence without repetition, and without communicating confusion and fear. In managing false signals, Kenya uses her proud and upright walking style to say ‘I am not afraid of you’ and thereby masks her fear. Or, Kenya might look with surprise beyond the bully who is about to hit her, to convey a false message that ‘the teacher is walking in the door right now, so watch out!’ And, Kenya chooses not to send a false signal of being willing to fight, because she knows she would be in trouble on a number of levels if the bully called her bluff. In managing real signals that are relevant and helpful, Kenya communicates a healthy appreciation of the bully’s strength concomitantly with masking her fear, so the bully does not perceive either an ego-challenging threat or an easy victim. In masking real emotions that are irrelevant, Kenya must mask her fear startle at the fire alarm that goes off just as she begins a confrontation with the class bully.</td>
</tr>
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Table 3. continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of ASC</th>
<th>Descriptive Example for Peer Conflict Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Kenya needs to notice the bully’s provocation in order to decide whether or how to respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>If Kenya misidentifies the bully’s glowering as sadness, rather than anger, she might try to approach the bully and would be in for quite a shock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Regarding display rules, Kenya may realize that the bully’s whispered taunting when the teacher is in the classroom is as threatening as shouted threats on the playground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Regarding the ongoing flow of the context, and the characteristics of interaction partners, Kenya has her own well-modulated sending style—she feels a lot, but sometimes keeps it to herself. To understand the bully’s ‘in your face’ sending style she may need to realize that the bully is not feeling more than is facially revealed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>Regarding background processes, if the class guinea pig had just died, Kenya might perceive some sadness in the bully’s message about losing the class mascot, rather than concern about winning the fight with Kenya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Context</td>
<td>Regarding the ongoing flow of the interpersonal exchange, Kenya might have noticed that the class bully becomes quicker and quicker to follow up threats with punches over the course of the day, so that the bully’s threats in the morning aren’t as much of a danger sign as the threats are in the afternoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving:</td>
<td>In receiving clearly and concisely, Kenya does not need repeated taunts to realize that the bully is attempting to provoke her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>In managing receipt of false signals, Kenya would recognize a red herring for what it is, and hold her ground when the bully feints at her to make her jump. And, if the class bully offers Kenya a token of peace after poking her, it might be advantageous for Kenya to accept it, even if she doesn’t believe that peace is the bully’s actual intention. If all of this is occurring publicly, then the bully might be induced to come to believe in that self-gesture toward peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In managing receipt of real signals (relevant and helpful), whether intentionally sent or not, Kenya may notice that the bully is trying to provoke a fight, and is trying hard not to feel lonely. Picking up on the message the bully is trying to bury under her anger may allow Kenya some choices in her response—to invite the bully into a friendship rather than an adversarial role. Kenya would need to decide which aspect of that message would be best for her to focus on in managing her conflict with the bully both in the immediate situation and long-term.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding irrelevant signals, Kenya would realize that the bully’s smile to a friend is not, in fact, a sign that the bully is no longer trying to provoke her.

### Experiencing:
#### Awareness
Kenya needs to recognize that she is experiencing emotion(s), and perhaps its (their) affective valence, in response to the bully’s provocation.

### Experiencing:
#### Identification
It is useful for Kenya to be able to distinguish whether she feels anger, fear, sadness, or a blend of emotions, in response to the bully’s teasing. If Kenya feels primarily anger, she may need to focus her efforts on regulating her physical expression of anger, unless she decides it is to her advantage to express anger in that way. If Kenya feels primarily sadness, she may need to focus her efforts on protecting her self-esteem.

### Experiencing:
#### Within Context
Regarding emotion scripts, Kenya may be aware that part of her desire to physically confront the bully is due to her greater acceptance of anger than fear in response to provocation.

Regarding the ongoing flow of the situation, and background processes, if Kenya has a cold or has had a previous squabble with her sister, she might recognize that her fear in dealing with the bully and her difficulty finding solutions is partially due to this factors. Regarding her own interaction characteristics, Kenya may also recognize that her confidence in her strategies wanes through the day if the bully is not deterred and in fact moves in to target her specifically.

### Experiencing:
#### Management
In experiencing clear and non-ruminative emotions, Kenya may need to regulate her anger at the bully if it becomes ruminative and interferes with her activities long after the bully has ceased to trouble her.

In managing experience of false signals, Kenya may be cold outside and shivering; she needs to recognize that her shivering is a sign of the changing weather, rather than her emotional experiences regarding the bully.

In managing real, relevant, and useful emotions, it may be important for Kenya to be able to ‘hang onto’ her anger with the bully. If Kenya moderates her anger too quickly, she may have a short-term gain of avoiding the unpleasantness of feeling angry, but she may not have sufficient motivation to attain her long-term goal of finding an effective way to stop the bully’s harassment. In managing relevant and unhelpful emotions, Kenya may need to moderate her fear in order to display an effective facade of confidence. In managing irrelevant emotions, if Kenya is still upset because of a fight with her sister that morning, she may need to let that distress go so that she can focus on the current situation with the bully.
Second, competence involves managing false signals. This includes knowing both when and when not to send false messages. We believe, as does Saarni (1990), that affective social competence generally involves sending emotionally genuine messages, unless there is some clear and appropriate goal for not doing so. See both Tables 2 and 3 for some of those exceptions in which sending false messages might be more affectively socially competent for children.

Third, competence involves managing real signals, and there are multiple aspects of this. The most obvious aspect is sending the emotions that are relevant and helpful to the social interaction. One of the author’s children is extremely skilled at knowing when to send the ‘good wishes’ messages that she feels in a conflict; these almost immediately lead to positive conflict resolution by all involved.

Knowing what not to send is sometimes as important as knowing what to send. Thus, a second element of managing real signals involves masking emotions that are relevant to the social interaction but are inappropriate for the context, and a third element involves masking emotions that are irrelevant to the social interaction. Although these skills are quite complex, even four-year-olds are working on achieving mastery of them (e.g., Cole, 1985, 1986), and as children age, they become expert in monitoring expressive behavior to facilitate social interaction (Saarni, 1979, 1984, 1989; Saarni & von Salisch, 1993; Zeman, Penza, Shipman, & Young, 1997). There is now substantial evidence that children’s skill in managing what not to send impacts peer relations (Black & Hazan, 1990; Dodge, 1983; Putallaz, 1987; Underwood, 1993; Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992).

Measurement. There are many ways to assess these skills. First, awareness of the need to send messages can be identified in ethological studies by observing changes in children’s facial and body expressions (e.g., Blurton-Jones, 1967; Denham, 1986; Strayer, 1980) or in studies using videotaped sequences in which children are asked to press a button when the protagonist should say or do something. Identifying what message to send can be assessed by creating videotaped sequences of events, stopping the sequence, and asking the child to say or show what should be communicated at that moment. Scenarios that assess sending within the social context are more difficult to create in the laboratory but children as young as preschool age can find themselves in a variety of situations. These might include: helping an older child (confederate) who is frustrated about completing her Lego structure, or confused about where the experimenter is, or has lost a computer game; or consoling an adult who has misplaced her props for her study, or sharing her joy when they are found. Saarni’s market researcher paradigm (1992), in which she asks children to try to cheer up the ‘market researcher’ could also be used to assess children’s management skills. Children’s use of clear, normative expressions; management of false messages; and managing real signals and masking conflicting feelings can all be measured in such experimental manipulations. In addition, the success of intervention modules (e.g., Denham & Burton, 1996), in which children are taught appropriate methods of and levels of intensity for sending messages, could be measured by assessing children’s subsequent social standing.

Receiving

The second skill area, receiving others’ affective signals, is crucial because it provides immediate feedback about the effects of our own behavior, along with information about others’ intentions and the advisability of interacting with them (Lemerise &
Gentil, 1992; Walden, et al., 1992). Again, the processes involved in receiving emotional communications have not been carefully delineated. That is our goal below.

**Awareness that an affective message is being sent.** As in many other models (e.g., the bystander apathy model of Latané & Darley, 1970), the initial appraisal of another’s emotion is the essential first step in receiving skill. A child trying to play with others or to react effectively to provocation must encode the occurrence of an emotion. Furthermore, ‘missing’ affective messages from others makes it more difficult for children to fine-tune their own sending of affective messages, meaning that they are less able to follow the process of a social interaction and are less likely to be effective in the interaction. At least rudimentary skill in awareness and interpretation of others’ affect begins in infancy (Haviland & Lelwica, 1987; Ludemann & Nelson, 1988), and is sharpened with time.

**Identifying the affective meaning(s) of the message.** The second receiving ability is identifying the affective meaning(s) of the message that has already been detected. Once perceived, the message must be interpreted accurately. There is substantial evidence that this skill is associated with peer relations (Boyatzis & Satyprasad, 1993; Custrini & Feldman, 1989; Denham, 1986; Denham et al., 1990; Edwards, Manstead, & MacDonald, 1984; Field & Walden, 1982; Goldman, Corsini, & de Urioste, 1980; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Nowicki & Duke, 1992b, 1994; Philippot & Feldman, 1990; Vosk, Forehand, & Figueroa, 1983; Walden & Field, 1990; Zuckerman & Przewuzman, 1979). Most of these tests assess accuracy in identifying static measures (e.g., posed photographs) in highly controlled settings (e.g., children’s attention is fully directed toward the experimental task), although these skills are ordinarily maintained in enormously complex settings. Further, some indirect evidence suggests that skill in knowing the meanings of affective messages in a static way is not sufficient; children need to be able to understand and apply that information within the ongoing flow of an interaction (Keane & Parrish, 1992). That is the next step.

**Understanding intended affective meaning(s) within the social context.** The third receiving ability is understanding affective meaning(s) within (a) the constraints of display rules, and (b) the ongoing flow of a context. Again, the ongoing flow includes the unique (and changing) characteristics of the interaction partners (both the sender and the recipient), background processes, and the overall flow of the interpersonal exchange. And, as with sending, receiving the intended affective meaning includes recognizing the appropriate intensity and style of the communication. Because of differences in individual and familial styles of emotional communications (e.g., Halberstadt, 1991), affectively socially competent receivers may need to disentangle their own sending styles from those around them, so as to effectively assess the level of intensity experienced by the sender (Halberstadt & Hess, 2000).

Research supports the importance of receiving information within the context of display rules; children who are more skilled at understanding affective messages within the constraints of display rules are better liked by their peers (Denham, 1986; Denham et al., 1990; Vosk, Forehand, & Figueroa; 1983). It also seems important for children not to be overly advanced in their understanding of display rules or deception, as compared to their peers. Such children may be less positive about school and less well liked (Denham, 1999; Dunn, 1995), possibly because that awareness may introduce a tendency to manipulate or doubt others’ genuineness. We know of no studies so far that have examined skill in receiving messages within the ongoing flow of a context in a naturalistic setting; please see Tables 2 and 3 for examples of why this skill is posited as important. In addition, it is important to consider the receivers’
relationship with the sender (which may vary along the dimensions of familiarity, friendship, and power), and, of course, the sender’s skill, as these may also influence receiving skill.

Managing receiving of affective messages. In this fourth ability, we again identify three aspects of management. Tables 2 and 3 provide illustrative examples. First, this ability involves receiving clear messages without needing multiple repetitions, or recognizing repetitions for what they are (as opposed to spending time on additional and unnecessary processing). The clarity of messages must be considered within the culture, sub-culture, and/or family environment shared between interaction partners. Families, for instance, may have shared ‘codes’ for communicating emotions, such that another family member would clearly understand the emotional communication sent by, say, a twitching lip, whereas someone who knows the family member less well might not even be aware of that emotional signal (Halberstadt, 1991). Skill would also involve noticing individual differences between people in how they send particular messages.

Second, competence involves managing receipt of false signals. One element of this is ignoring a false signal when it is more advantageous to do so. A second element of managing receipt of false signals is accepting a false signal as real when it is more advantageous to do so.

Third, competence involves the multiple aspects of managing receipt of real signals. One element of this is picking up on real signals that are relevant and helpful to the social interaction, whether intentionally sent or not. A second element of managing the reception of affective messages is choosing whether and how to deal with real signals that are relevant but not helpful to the social interaction. For example, a child who lost a game to a friend might unsuccessfully hide her disappointment at losing under happiness that her friend won. Depending on the circumstances, it might be more affectively socially competent for the friend to pay more attention to the ‘I’m happy my friend won’ portion of the message than to the ‘I’m disappointed I lost’ portion. Children begin understanding that there may be two messages, and perhaps even two opposing messages, during the later preschool years (Harris, 1989; Kestenbaum & Gelman, 1995. In fact, kindergartners’ understanding of mixed emotions is positively related to their sociometric likability (Denham, 1999), suggesting that children are capable of these skills, and that the relationship between this type of receiving skill and peer popularity may become evident as early as the kindergarten and early elementary years.

A third element in managing receipt of real signals is not picking up on (ignoring) real signals that are irrelevant to the social interaction. Highly expressive individuals are familiar with the experience of being asked ‘What’s wrong? I noticed you frowning just then’ when they were not aware of having made any particular facial movement. Low expressive individuals are familiar with another phenomenon, ‘Don’t you care? You’re not responding at all to what I’m saying.’ In both cases, the less affectively skilled individual is perceiving an affective message where none was intended. In the first case, the facial movement was ‘noise’ rather than ‘signal,’ and in the second case, the lack of signal had no important internal state meaning.

Measurement. There are many ways to assess these skills. First, awareness that a message is being sent and identifying what the message is may be assessed with videotaped sequences; children can be asked to press a button when they notice a message being conveyed, or they can be asked to identify what exactly the actors are conveying in their messages. Assessing the meanings of messages within the flow of the social interaction is more difficult, but can be approached in a variety of ways. For example, children can be asked to predict what the other person is feeling, or to say why someone else felt the way they did.
context, apart from sending skill, is more difficult. The Interpersonal Perception Test (Costanzo & Archer, 1986) includes videotaped vignettes in which cues are embedded within the social context. This test has been largely used as a measure of adults’ receiving skill; however, Lemerise and Gregory (2000) have adapted it for use with children. We recommend creating emotionally laden events in the lab. Examples of useful scenarios include (a) an experimenter is very sad because she cannot find the props for her study, (b) two experimenters get into a fight (e.g., Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985), (c) a confederate child is sad or angry (happy) because of a negative (positive) interaction in the presence of, or with, the participant child (e.g., Denham, 1986), and (d) a confederate child gets left out of a fun game. Judgments about whether the child received the message can be made based on changes in non-verbal behavior and post-event interviews. As for receiving management, creating win/loss sequences or hidden defects in a computer game (e.g., Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Underwood, Hurley, Johanson, & Mosley, 1999) or other situations in which there is a relevant (or irrelevant) signal to be ignored and a relevant signal to be noticed would be useful when accompanied by a post-event interview in which children were asked what they noticed and what they would respond to.

Experiencing

The third component of affective social competence is skilled experiencing of emotion. We intend for experiencing of emotion to refer not only to awareness and recognition of one’s own emotions, but also to effective regulation of one’s emotional expression in the context of an ongoing social interaction. However, emotional experience is important in more than just the service of sending and receiving affective messages. The success of long-term relationships depends on the ability of relationship partners to share genuine emotions in a sensitive manner (Saarni, 1990); that is, both partners need to be able to access and manage their own emotional experiences as well as be able to communicate with each other.

Historically, assessing the experience of emotion has been difficult. Several researchers have begun this challenging work, however, and there is now some evidence that children who are better able to understand their own emotions are more likely to have positive peer relations (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992). As with the other two components of affective social competence, there are four abilities to the skill area of experiencing emotion, and these are progressively mastered by children.

**Awareness of one’s own affective experience.** The first experiencing ability is the awareness or recognition that one is experiencing an emotion. This aspect of experiencing skill involves a simple recognition that one is experiencing an emotion, and possibly awareness of the valence of the emotion. Awareness is essential for understanding how what one is experiencing might affect one’s communications to others and one’s interpretations of others’ communications. As mentioned above, awareness of one’s own emotional experience is also an important first step in sharing that experience with a relationship partner. Saarni (1990) also adds that, with maturity, one might recognize that one doesn’t always have self-awareness due to a variety of unconscious dynamics.

**Identifying one’s emotions.** The second experiencing ability is appropriately identifying one’s feeling(s). Although a basic positive/negative distinction may be involved in the first experiencing ability, this second ability involves a more refined
interpretation of one’s emotional experience. For example, children who chronically interpret their own sadness as anger might be at risk for becoming aggressive with peers and therefore rejected by them. Children who chronically interpret their anger as sadness, on the other hand, might be at risk for becoming withdrawn from peers and therefore neglected by them. Appropriate interpretation is a critical ability because misinterpretation can lead to a cascade of feelings and behaviors which, once developed and enacted, may become increasingly resistant to reorganization.

Understanding one’s emotional experience within the ongoing social context. The third experiencing ability is understanding the meaning(s) of one’s own feeling(s) within (a) the constraints of emotion scripts and (b) the ongoing flow of a context, including the full context of the unique (and changing) characteristics of the interaction partners, background processes, and the overall flow of the interpersonal exchange. Understanding one’s emotional experience within the ongoing social context is no light task, given the time constraints, distractions of other messages occurring simultaneously, and often the necessity of an immediate response. Certainly we have had the experience of realizing only after a conversation is over that we were offended by something the other person had said. Knowledge of feeling rules may guide children in selecting aspects of blended emotional experiences on which to focus, in much the same way as adults are thought to do (Hochschild, 1979). Again, please refer to Tables 2 and 3 for descriptive examples.

Managing one’s emotional experience. The fourth experiencing ability is managing (regulating) one’s emotional experience. This component of affective social competence builds on the recognition that we have an increasing repertoire of situationally relevant coping behaviors over time—children slowly become able to keep their tempers, or hold back tears, when necessary (e.g., Maccoby, 1983; Kopp, 1992). As children develop skill in interpreting emotional situations and their own emotion experiences, they can then begin to negotiate within affective space to come to the emotional state that they choose as most appropriate. This is emotion regulation, a large, complex part of ASC which still is not defined to all developmentalists’ satisfaction. There are some assertions we can make, however: all elements of emotional experience—arousal, cognitive construal, and behavioral action—involves regulation. The arousal dimension of emotion regulation is generally organized around the goal of self-soothing and arousal reduction, but is also sometimes organized toward increased physiological arousal. The cognitive dimension of emotion regulation includes refocusing attention and problem-solving reasoning. Behavioral aspects of emotion regulation encompass expressing appropriate and/or inhibiting inappropriate expressions, thoughts, or behaviors related to the emotional experience, and getting organized for coordinated action in the service of one’s goal (Gottman & Katz, 1989).

It is no wonder, given this level of complexity, that researchers are both fascinated and baffled by the management of emotions. We do know that at least the most outward signs of emotion regulation are associated with peer acceptance. By preschool, children have a repertoire of coping behaviors (e.g., Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Kenealy, 1989). Children who can manage their emotional experience in the context of emotionally-arousing types of play are more successful in peer relationships (Hubbard & Coie, 1994), whereas children who routinely experience high intensity emotions, but who do not have constructive ways of managing those emotional experiences, often engage in socially inappropriate behaviors and are at risk for low peer status (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992; Eisenberg, et al., 1993, Eisenberg, Fabes, Nyman, Bernzweig, & Pinuelas, 1994; Eisenberg, et al., 1995; Rubin, Coplan, Fox, & Calkins,
Affective Social Competence

We are less successful, so far, at elucidating the less easily observed aspects of ASC inherent within the management of emotion. What is it, exactly, that successful children (and adults) are doing? We posit three aspects of management. As before, please refer to Tables 2 and 3 for descriptive examples.

First, this ability involves experiencing clear (rather than diffuse or vague) and non-ruminative feelings. Being clear about one’s feelings enables one to then make choices about whether to and how to manage that emotional experience. Second, competence involves managing false signals, for example, knowing when to ignore self-signals that don’t truly reflect one’s feeling states. Managing false signals also involves knowing when those signals may be used to facilitate communication and achieve a desired goal.

The third aspect of competence involves the multiple aspects of managing real signals—knowing what to feel and what not to feel. One obvious element is retaining and/or enhancing the emotions that are relevant and helpful to the social interaction. A second element in this is attenuating emotions that are relevant but not helpful to one’s goals (e.g., ‘I simply remember my favorite things and then I don’t feel so sad.’) It is a real accomplishment to be able to direct one’s own experience to something not initially experienced. A third element in managing real signals is dampening emotions that are irrelevant to the social interaction. It is important to note that these aspects of management do not always involve dampening negative or uncomfortable emotions. Being able to moderate emotional intensity when it threatens to be overwhelming, to enhance emotional intensity when necessary to reach short-term or long-term goals, and to shift between emotion states by using various coping means will help children to maintain more genuine, and satisfying, relations with others. Again, these are complex skills that many individuals struggle to achieve or further develop as adults. Nevertheless, we can generate multiple examples of children as young as kindergarten age showing evidence of these skills. The trick is in articulating what the phenomena are (our goal in this paper), and then measuring those phenomena as they are exemplified at different age levels. Ideas for developing measurement techniques follow.

Measurement. Knowledge of children’s experience of emotion has been difficult to obtain, however, new techniques may facilitate access of these relatively internal states. First, for awareness that one is experiencing a feeling, children might be exposed to emotion-inducing events or movies and asked to press a button to indicate when they experience emotional arousal (e.g., Chisholm & Strayer, 1995). Comparisons between children’s physiological indices and self-report (either to an experimenter or to a parent, or using the classic bogus pipeline technique which increases the likelihood of truthful self-report, Jones & Sigall, 1971) might also help assess children’s self-awareness and identification of emotional states.

As for understanding one’s own emotional experiences within the ongoing social context, in vivo situations might be videotaped in laboratory settings or captured on videotape in school or home settings so that children could watch these videotapes shortly after the event and report what they were feeling using a continuous self-rating dial (Levenson & Gottman, 1983) or verbal self-report. Saarni’s market researcher paradigm (1992) might assess this task of managing one’s own feeling signals; helping the market researcher cheer up requires an empathic response to the situation, without being flooded by the researcher’s sad affect. A game competition paradigm could also be utilized with middle-school children; this task might assess regulation of competitive feelings and anger if the game is rigged or if children are given conflicting sets of instructions.
of rules (Hartup, French, Laursen, Johnston, & Ogawa, 1993; von Salisch & Uhlendorff, 1999, Underwood, et al., 1999). If physiological measures such as heart rate elevation reflect contagion responses (Bugental, Cortez, & Blue, 1992), we can also measure children’s ability to regulate their own affective states. These techniques may well be applicable to preschool and kindergarten-age children. Of course, outcome measures may be different for children of different ages (Bugental, et al., 1992). The classic disappointment paradigm (Cole, 1986; Saarni, 1984) might also be used with young children to assess the degree to which and how children regulate emotion; immediately following the disappointment experience, children could be asked how they felt about getting the disappointing gift (manipulation check) and what they thought afterward (e.g., continue to think about the disappointing gift, their great toys at home, the new toy they might get from a parent, etc.).

**Interconnections among the Three Components of Affective Social Competence**

Ideally, in real life, the three components of affective social competence flow together seamlessly within the social interaction, so that they are transparent to the partners in the interaction. And, all three components must be integrated for the most advanced affective social competence. For example, individuals who are extremely skilled at sending and receiving affective communication, but are unable (or unwilling) to integrate their emotional experience would likely be perceived as ‘slick,’ perhaps as a manipulator, rather than as affectively socially competent.

Thus, an important aspect of affective social competence is the ability to integrate and control the overlap between these skill areas of sending, receiving, and experiencing emotions. One must maintain both one’s affective veracity and one’s affective control; that is, responding in a genuine and honest way, and being true to one’s emotional experience, while simultaneously monitoring one’s expression with respect to both the abilities and limitations of the other, in a transactional manner. During any social interaction, one must accurately judge the other’s affective state while distinguishing, and retaining when appropriate, one’s own affective experiences. And, one must regulate how much of one’s own emotional experience is communicated, how much the sending of one’s affective messages reverberates back into emotional experience, which messages to receive, how to interpret them, and how much they should influence one’s emotional experience.

We suspect that skilled receivers who can maintain an equilibrium in their own affective experience, without cost from knowing what others ‘really think,’ will have the most positive peer relations. For them, skill in receiving others’ negative communications may be advantageous—for example, the child whose feelings aren’t badly hurt when a friend suggests better hygiene may benefit from this feedback to fit in better with his group. Further, understanding how their feelings ‘fit’ with the situational context, and acceptance of those feelings, may help children choose more effective sending strategies, and more appropriately interpret the affective messages they receive from others. Thus, skill in managing experiencing also seems to interact with receiving. For example, it may be that the accurate interpretation of others’ emotions activates a sympathetic emotional response (Eisenberg, 1986).

To return to our two examples in Tables 2 and 3, Jasper and Kenya need to skillfully—and quickly—integrate all three skill areas as they deal with their social situations. Jasper needs to choose and act upon a sending strategy with which to approach
the children playing in the kitchen area. Jasper’s sending strategy must be at least somewhat congruent with what he is experiencing; if he is feeling somewhat anxious, a false front of confidence may be found out and lead to non-acceptance in the group. Jasper must also gauge the children’s responses to his bids to enter the group, and moderate his actions, based on his interpretation of their affective signals.

Being older, Kenya’s tasks are more complex. She needs to determine how serious the class bully is while taunting her, and choose a strategy for dealing with the bully based on her interpretation of the bully’s current emotional experience and her awareness of her own emotional reaction. While implementing a strategy for dealing with the bully, Kenya needs to monitor her own emotional experience to ensure that she is not leaking emotions in a way that will sabotage her sending strategy, to shift her emotional experiences in a way that will enhance her sending strategy, and to carefully monitor the bully’s reactions to her strategy to determine whether to continue with it or to try a new strategy. For both Jasper and Kenya, the social context demands a continual, seamless integration of their skills in sending, receiving, and experiencing emotions.

**Self-Factors influencing Affective Social Competence**

Additional factors that influence the three components of affective social competence also need to be recognized. These factors are not directly part of the affective social competence system, but they impinge upon it. Several factors that we have identified include one’s world view, self-concept or self-schema, demeanor, temperament, process orientation toward relationships, knowledge of display rules, knowledge of implementation strategies, motivation to interact with others and to be skilled in those interactions, and behavioral and schematic flexibility. Because of space limitations, we discuss only five of these factors below.

**World view**

An influence that seems integral to one’s affective social competence is one’s world view, which guides predictions or expectations of others. Social psychologists refer to these as person, role, and event schemas (Barone, Maddux, & Snyder, 1997); developmental psychologists refer to these as internal working models of the world (Bretherton, 1990). An example of what we mean might be, ‘do we tend to view others in a hostile way, expecting that they will use us for their own designs, or in a positive way, expecting that this person is a fun playmate of value, who can enrich our games and choices?’ Whether positive or negative, when these schemas fit the situation they may facilitate the receiving of affective cues. When they are different, they will inhibit accurate or alternative judgments of affective meaning. For example, if Kenya assumes that the class bully could be a fun person, her recognition of the affective meaning of the bully’s message might be altered. She might recognize that the bully has only learned one mode of social interaction (i.e., bullying), and, instead of focusing on the bully’s hostility, she might consider the bully’s underlying motive to avoid loneliness. This realization, in turn, might lead her to propose a more friendly interaction, such as running a race together. Mounting evidence suggests that children with a more secure internal working model are more skilled at accurately receiving emotional communication (DeMulder, Denham, Schmidt, & Mitchell-Copeland, 1999; Labile & Thompson, 1997). Similarly, those who view others through the lens of a hostile
attribution bias (i.e., ‘the world does mean things to me on purpose’) are unlikely to read their peers’ emotional messages accurately (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge & Somberg, 1987). Finally, those who perceive social interactions as anxiety-producing are less likely to send believable messages, whether they are telling the truth or not, at least in adulthood (Riggio, Tucker, & Throckmorton, 1987).

Self-concept and Self-schema

Children with positive self-concepts tend to be more persistent in sending positive or playful messages when attempting to engage peers in play activities, and they are also successful at keeping their own anxiety about the interaction at a relatively low level (e.g., Lopez & Little, 1996). This kind of self-optimism or self-belief maintains the turning motion of the affective social competence pinwheel, rather than getting it hung up in rumination or a positive feedback loop stuck in experiencing. By maintaining low levels of anxiety, positive self-concept allows system resources to be more exclusively devoted to the other tasks at hand. Children’s self-schemas, or their predictions and expectations about themselves, may aid or hinder their affective social competence in a similar manner as their world views. For example, children who place a great deal of importance on their own physical achievements may be more quick to respond physically to a challenge from a bully, whereas those who value their verbal skills may attempt to negotiate their way out of an altercation (Douthitt, 1994; Losier & Vallerand, 1994). Also, children who perceive themselves as worthy of being treated well may more quickly ‘make a stand’ against a bully. In contrast, children with more negative views of self may show their vulnerability via overreliance on others’ affective cues, rather than their own, to guide their behavior; they attend to others’ sent messages rather than their own experiences (Baumeister, 1993).

Demeanor

One’s demeanor can influence the sending of all messages, such that one can be perceived by others as generally hostile or generally positive (see DePaulo, 1992 for a summary). A persistent expression of hostility may reduce one’s affective competence by making it more difficult to send positive or sad messages, whereas an expression of positivity (whether intentional or the result of being physiognomically blessed) may increase the difficulty of sending any negative messages. Jasper’s demeanor, for example, may affect the likelihood of successfully gaining entry to the play activities in the kitchen, especially if these are children who do not know Jasper very well (Nowicki & Oxenford, 1989).

Temperamental

Dispositional characteristics (whether inherent in the individual or developed over early life experiences) may directly impact individuals’ affective social competence. For example, two important dimensions affecting how young children manage their own emotional experience are the stable individual difference characteristics of emotional intensity (e.g., latency, threshold, rise time) which define the parameters of stress, and the attentional processes which facilitate coping attempts (e.g., attentional shifting or focusing, and voluntary initiation or inhibition of action; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992; Eisenberg et al., 1993, 1994, 1995). Children who routinely experience
intense emotion and are less able to focus or shift attention could have difficulty in all three aspects of affective social competence; they may send messages inappropriately, they may have difficulty receiving accurate messages, and they may have difficulty becoming aware of and appropriately labeling their own emotions. Skill levels in one component (e.g., managing emotional experience) may also moderate the effects of temperament on skill in other components (e.g., sending appropriately or understanding others’ messages; Eisenberg, et al., 1996; Murphy & Eisenberg, 1997). Continued research linking dimensions of temperament with parental as well as peer relations could be very fruitful.

**Process Orientation**

Children who perceive the ebb and flow of interaction, the turn-taking, the continuous nature of relationship, and that a rejection at one moment may or may not predict rejection at a later moment, are probably going to achieve greater affective social competence (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983). If Jasper understands that initial rejection does not necessarily predict additional rejections, he may continue to try group entry even after an initial failure. Rather than internalizing his failure as something to do with himself (activating a positive or negative self-concept), he will continue to watch how others succeed in gaining entry. Perceiving friendships as a process, and as relationships that are developed and maintained, rather than dichotomous experiences that are ‘on’ or ‘off’ (Asher, 1983), Jasper may develop greater patience at achieving his goals. This patience may pay off when he allows himself more time to watch others’ skills, and in terms of developing greater self-awareness.

Thus, each of these self-factors may reverberate in a variety of ways through the three skill areas and the various interactive processes of affective social competence. Specifying their interaction with elements of affective social competence is useful to fully understanding its workings at any moment in time.

**Relevant Research with Nonnormative Populations**

Now we turn to discussion of affective social competence in nonnormative populations of children. Our purpose here is twofold, consonant with the organizational perspective of developmental psychopathology (Cicchetti, 1984). That is, examining developmental phenomena that are qualitatively or quantitatively different from those most children experience informs our understanding of normative development, and our understanding of normative development fuels new explorations that may benefit children who are not developing normatively.

Accordingly, we have chosen three nonnormative populations in which to examine perturbations in affective social competence. First, because autism is characterized by extensive deficits in both cognitive and social-emotional domains, autistic children may be expected to have both quantitatively and qualitatively impoverished abilities in the component areas of affective social competence. Second, diagnosed behavior disorder implies impulsivity and aggression, both of which could threaten a child’s affective social competence development. Third, child maltreatment entails an emotionally negative family environment that might compromise a child’s affective social competence development. For each group, we found major deficits in affective social competence, but despite the substantial literatures on each group, it is difficult to disentangle the specific abilities and sometimes the domains that are challenging these...
populations. This dearth has only reaffirmed for us the need to assess specific skills so as to develop specific intervention goals.

**Autism.** Autistic children’s affective sending abilities do seem to be compromised relative to non-diagnosed children’s abilities. Autistic children are less able to imitate others’ emotions than are mental-age-matched preschoolers (Hertzig, Snow, & Sherman, 1989), and although autistic preschoolers display facial expressions at a similar frequency to non-diagnosed children, they are often incongruent to the situation, for example smiling after being hit by another child (McGee, Feldman, & Chernin, 1991). We cannot tell, however, whether autistic children are challenged by all or just some of the first three sending abilities—are they not aware of the need to send messages, are they not clear about what messages to send, or are they unable to do so within the ongoing flow of social exchanges? It is also possible that the preschoolers’ incongruent facial expressions are accurately reflecting their internal state; thus, research assessing more specifically which processes are at risk will allow for successful interventions to be developed.

Autistic children’s affective receiving abilities also seem compromised. Dawson and colleagues have found that autistic children do not attend to social messages, such as having their name called (Dawson, Meltzoff, Osterling, Rinaldi, & Brown, 1998). This deficit is already evident in videotapes of autistic and normally developing children’s first-year birthday parties (Osterling & Dawson, 1994). This may indicate difficulty with awareness that a social message has been sent. Baron-Cohen (1991) found that autistic children’s understanding of basic, unequivocal emotional situations, such as going to the zoo, was delayed, but no more so than that of mentally retarded non-autistic children. However, autistic children did show deficits in comprehension of emotions caused by beliefs—Jenny is sad because she believes her brother is about to take her toy away forever. From these results, it is difficult to determine whether autistic children’s deficit in understanding emotions caused by beliefs is due to compromised receiving ability independently of the other abilities. Their deficits in belief-relevant emotions could be explained by the interaction of experiencing or sending with receiving abilities; that is, autistic children may not have developed schemas for such emotional situations.

Additionally, autistic children spend less time looking at distressed or fearful adults, and focus on objects instead (Sigman, Kasari, Kwon, & Yirmiya, 1992); thus, intervention to augment their affective social competence might need to occur at the awareness stage of receiving, or in regulating their experience of affect while processing affective information from others. Regarding autistic children’s experiencing abilities, research in this area is particularly sparse; we know of only one recent study that has addressed autistic children’s experience of emotion. Steinhilber, Jones, and Dunsmore (1999) found that autistic and age-matched normally developing children who were presented with a pleasant surprise (e.g., a live rabbit) showed similar increases in heart rate, suggesting somewhat similar physiological experiences of the emotion event. Autistic children’s facial expressions, however, were coded as more ambiguous than were normally developing children’s, suggesting either different self-interpretations of their physiological arousal, or different expressions of their experience of emotion. In conjunction with the many findings that autistic children rarely engage in joint attention (e.g., Dawson, et al., 1998; Lewy & Dawson, 1992; Osterling & Dawson, 1994; Steinhilber, et al., 1999), these results are also suggestive that more complex interactions of the components of affective social competence may be involved in autism. In particular, interactions involving the self-factor of motivation for engagement in (or
tolerance for) social interaction, and the interrelations between cognition and emotion, seem likely.

**Behavior disorder.** The emotional sending of behavior-disordered children is qualitatively different than that of non-disordered children. Behavior-disordered children send emotional messages that are proportionally more negative than those of non-disordered children (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Preschoolers at risk for behavior disorder, with more externalizing symptoms, showed more extreme responses to a negative mood induction film than did other preschoolers, showing either no negative emotion, or only negative emotion in response to the film (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, Fox, Usher, & Welsh, 1996; Cole, Zahn-Waxler, & Smith, 1994). It is possible that these extreme patterns may be related to ineffective or brittle efforts at managing their emotional experience as well as difficulties in the sending domain.

There is also robust evidence that children who are behavior disordered or at risk for behavior disorder show deficits in their ability to receive others’ emotional messages (Casey & Schlosser, 1994; Cook, Greenberg, & Kuschè, 1994; Nowicki & Duke, 1994; Russell, Stokes, Jones, Czogalik, & Rohleder, 1993; but see Cole, Usher & Cargo, 1993). Deficits appear during the early stages of receiving messages in that behavior-disordered children spend less time scanning the social environment and, consequently, recall fewer details of emotional stimuli (Casey & Schlosser, 1994). Receiving skill in these children is also moderated by self-factor differences; their hostile world views lead them to attribute hostile intentionality to others more often than nondisordered children (Casey & Schlosser, 1994; Dodge & Frame, 1982; Dodge, Murphy, & Buchsbaum, 1984; Dodge & Somberg, 1987).

Behavior-disordered children also appear to have deficits in their ability to experience emotions. They may have less awareness of their own affective experience, and they clearly have more difficulty identifying and understanding their own feelings compared to non-diagnosed children (Casey & Schlosser, 1994; Cook et al., 1994). Their abilities to constructively manage and regulate their emotions are also diminished. They may express emotions impulsively as they are felt (Greenberg, Kuschè, & Speltz, 1991), displaying their anger at inappropriate times (Cole, et al., 1994); alternatively, they may show brittle control or denial of negative emotion (Cole, et al., 1994).

Finally, behavior disordered children appear to be less well able to integrate their nonverbal skills compared to non-diagnosed children (Russell et al., 1993); they have more difficulty sending, receiving, and experiencing simultaneously. In summary, behavior-disordered children seem to have deficits in all three components of affective social competence. Again, our model may help in distinguishing the various levels of processing. When children are failing at the initial skills of awareness and identification, for any of the components, interventions need to begin there; when children are experiencing difficulties developing skill within the ongoing flow of an interaction, or with managing the complex aspects of real and false messages, or with interactions across domains, interventions need to begin there.

**Maltreatment.** In terms of sending ability, deficits appear at the initial skill of awareness. For example, maltreated toddlers are less likely to use internal state words compared to non-maltreated toddlers, and even when they do use internal state words, they do so in a more restricted manner than do non-maltreated toddlers (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994). This restriction in verbal sending of emotional messages also has implications for children’s regulation of emotions, as language use is one way of constructively managing emotion experience.
In terms of receiving, maltreated children seem less able to recognize photographs of child and adult expressions (During & McMahon, 1991) or to recognize ‘pure’ and ‘masked’ emotions (Camras, Ribordy, & Hill, 1988; Cassidy et al., 1992) than non-maltreated children. Maltreated children may also have difficulties with the intersection of receiving and experiencing. Maltreated children do not habituate to interadult hostility involving their mothers as non-maltreated children do. They become aroused and aggressive themselves, attempting to help or comfort their mothers, or intervene in the conflict on their mother’s behalf (Cummings, Hennessey, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994). Cummings’ research suggests that maltreated children may be receiving the emotional messages inherent in interadult hostility, but have trouble managing the contagion of affect they experience. However, their ability to receive affective messages from their maltreating mothers may be adaptive in their situation.

In terms of experiencing abilities, maltreated children, compared to non-maltreated children, show deficits on self-reported empathy measures (Straker & Jacobson, 1981) and show more inappropriate responses (such as anger, aggression, or withdrawal) to their peers’ distress (Howes & Eldredge, 1985; Klimes-Dougan & Kistner, 1990; Main & George, 1985). They also show more depressed/dysthymic and anxious affect than do non-maltreated children (Toth, Manly & Cicchetti, 1992), indicating that, along with sending very negative messages, they may be less able to constructively manage their emotional experience, or they may have more emotional experience to manage. It also is likely that maltreated children have difficulties with the intersection of sending and experiencing. They may not be identifying the appropriate messages to send (or to feel); they show more anger and more situationally inappropriate and inflexible emotions than do non-maltreated children (Erickson, Egeland & Pianta, 1989; Shields, Cicchetti & Ryan, 1994). Finally, being maltreated by parents exposes children to inappropriate models of social relationships, and may well affect self-factors such as children’s world view about others’ intentions, self-concept regarding self as in control, and behavioral and schematic flexibility; these differences in turn reverberate back into the affective social competence system.

There are many gaps to fill in our understanding of the affective social competence of maltreated children. Without precise focus on the four specific skills of experiencing affect, it is difficult to assess whether maltreated children are able to identify and understand their own feelings within the social context and to manage their own emotional experience as well as non-maltreated children, or whether maltreated children are constructively responding to the kinds of threats that their environment poses for them and their mothers.

Conclusions

The model we have delineated includes three components of affective social competence; and within each component, four abilities; and within the fourth ability, that is, management and regulation, three forms of management. In addition, there are at least nine self-factors that influence skill in each of the three components of affective social competence. Although we have begun a discussion of the numerous interactions between the components, it is probably safe to say that, given the transactional nature of those interrelationships, we have only seen the tip of the iceberg. Affective social competence is complex.

So what are Jasper and Kenya to do? At this point in our understanding of affective social competence, it is not possible to advise either Jasper or Kenya as to the
specific set of actions they should take. We might suggest initial actions with which to begin their interactions, but until we can predict responses (which are partially up to the affective social competence of the interactants as well), we cannot direct the course of their social relationships from our keyboard. Nor will we want to, because part of the concept of affective social competence is having the skills to create the kinds of social interactions one desires, *in vivo*. In addition, there are probably multiple paths to desired outcomes, and possibly multiple desirable outcomes. Thus, the ultimate goal in terms of application is to help developing individuals become more able to understand the social context of the moment so as to best determine action, to figure out what messages are appropriate at particular moments in time and to communicate those messages, and to maintain appropriate affect, given the particular social context. We need, therefore, to teach process, rather than specific lists of actions. Strategies that might help teach process include encouraging taking time out from the interaction to assess whether a particular strategy is working, persistence in trying strategies, patience with and acceptance of variability in others’ emotion states, and teaching children schemas for understanding others that focus on labelling behaviors rather than labelling persons (e.g., state rather than trait assessments).

This leads to the final question: what are we to do? As researchers following the time-honored tradition, our first step is to continue the process of description. Our model may not be complete, and we expect that studies using this model will be able to more fully explicate the various levels and skills that may be considered affective social competence. However, by organizing the multiple aspects of affective social competence into a coherent, hierarchically-layered, and dynamic whole, the complex reality of affective social competence becomes both understandable and manageable. As researchers we can now turn the pinwheel and better understand how all the pieces move, and move in synchrony. We can be clear with one another about what it is that we are investigating, within a level of complexity commensurate with the phenomena we are studying. We can plot developmental change in each of the abilities outlined here. Finally, by more fully describing the processes of affective social competence, we move closer to explanations of how or why those processes work, and to further optimizing development.

Continued description needs to pay close attention to the diversity of populations and settings, as well as to how contexts particular to populations or settings change with the child’s age (Boyle et al., 1998). Again, as with other developmental processes (Rowe, Vazsonyi, & Flannery, 1994), we believe that the processes of affective social competence will be fairly robust cross-culturally, although the goals and content of behavior will be somewhat culturally specific. Because we have such a plenitude of ‘one-shot’ studies in the laboratory that examine one skill or another, we now need to consider more than one component or ability level simultaneously, and to do so within the context of real interactions in real settings. And, because interaction partners and, in particular, socialization agents play a crucial role in children’s development and performance of affective social competence, how caregivers and teachers can scaffold developing others’ affective social competence is an important area of investigation (see for example, Dunsmore & Halberstadt, 2000; Hyson & Lee, 1996).

Moving beyond description, there are now multiple paradigms to recommend in studying affective social competence. First, we advocate a return to ethological studies in which children are studied in more natural contexts, with one or two tinkers within the setting. Second, we suggest further development of laboratory paradigms in which, for example, a market researcher needs cheering up (Saarni, 1992),

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a confederate peer wins a game (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Underwood, et al., 1999), a confederate child gets ‘hurt’ or makes personal comments about the participant child (Casey, 1993; Denham, 1986), the target child is invited to enter an already-constituted group of peers, or a confederate ‘bully’ enters the research room. Third, the Levenson and Gottman (1983) technique of videotaping in vivo events and then asking the participants to rate themselves continuously (using a dial) while watching their videotaped interactions may be useful for children in the elementary school years as well as older children and adults. Fourth, evaluating classroom interventions in which teachers use precise awareness and/or identification modules in their teaching compared to those who don’t will help validate the model (e.g., Denham & Burton, 1996; Greenberg, Kuschè, Cook, & Quamma, 1995; Hyson, 1994). The critical dimensions of more inclusive approaches to an ‘emotion-centered’ classroom could be carefully catalogued. And the affective social competence and peer relationship outcomes for children in these classrooms compared to children in classrooms that do not use emotion-centered curricula could be measured and used to assess the importance of each aspect of affective social competence.

With ‘normal’ populations there is much to be done. The opportunity to develop individual profiles is promising; trained observers can now provide comprehensive profiles of children’s behavior, thereby providing detailed information about strengths and weaknesses within the ongoing flow of particular contexts. We can also begin the process of measuring children’s skill levels in each of the components and assessing specific relations with various peer relations measures (e.g., sociometric status, close friendships, social problem-solving skills). Of course, we predict bidirectional causality between affective social competence and peer relations (Karn & Dunsmore, 2000).

With ‘challenged’ populations, there is also much to be done, particularly with an eye to intervention programs. First, now that the specific abilities within each component have been delineated, basic research can identify relative deficits within particular populations, and thus, help target goals for intervention programs. Second, our model can also lead to the generation of much needed assessment tools and methods (Denham, Lydick, Mitchell-Copeland, & Strandberg-Sawyer, 1996), ‘laying out all the puzzle pieces’ (Nowicki & Duke, 1992a, p. 20). Profiles of ASC abilities, even within groups, could be created from such assessments (e.g., Gottman, Guralnick, Wilson, Swanson, & Murray, 1997). Then, once the components and abilities of affective social competence can be assessed, individual and group interventions can proceed—‘the puzzle can be solved’ (Nowicki & Duke, 1992a, p. 25).

Maintaining social relationships is an integral part of being human. Individuals who are unable to maintain effective, satisfying social interactions not only have difficulty completing basic life tasks, but are also at risk for a plethora of mental and physical health problems (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). We believe that further investigation, beginning with and then building on our model of affective social competence, will be key not only in advancing our understanding of children’s developing affective social competence, but also in furthering efforts to maximize human potential.

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Affective Social Competence


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contribute to our understanding of social competence?' Symposium conducted at the Conference on Human Development, Atlanta, GA.


emotional cues. Symposium conducted at the meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans.


Notes

1. We would like to note, however, that affective social competence is not synonymous with peer status. Though we expect that more affectively socially competent children will have reciprocal friendships and tend to be better liked by their peers, we recognize that there are many factors that contribute to peer popularity and rejection. Thus, the most affectively socially competent children may not be the most popular children in their peer group.

2. It is important to recognize that the link between positive expressiveness and quality of peer relations may be related to children’s emotional experience in a cyclical manner. That is, children who have more positive emotional experiences may be more positively expressive, which leads to better peer relations and perhaps to more positive emotional experiences. Further, it is important to note that peer research is only now beginning to focus on sending affective communication—this literature has been surprisingly cognitive until recent years.

3. Although many emotion theorists might prefer the term ‘accurately’ to ‘appropriately’, work on the social construction of emotional experience no longer allows us to ignore the myriad ways in which we (and others) construct our affective worlds through labeling (e.g., Averill, 1982; Hochschild, 1979; Saarni, 1985, 1989), thus making the term ‘accurately’ a misnomer.


5. The affectively socially competent individual needs to be able to identify what the other person is communicating affectively, but should not necessarily incorporate that message into her own feelings or goals. In other words, if Jasper approaches the other children and receives a message of contempt, he shouldn’t ‘buy’ their message and feel self-contempt.

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