

# The Cultivation Path of Children's Social-Emotional Competencies: A Cultural Studies Perspective

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**Abstract:** The cultural studies approach has had a comprehensive and profound impact on the research of children's social-emotional competencies, promoting the absorption, inclusion, and emphasis on culture in the study of social-emotional competencies. This paper explores three major paths for cultivating children's social-emotional competencies from a cultural perspective: the process-oriented approach under the concept of cultural identity, the structural-oriented approach from the perspective of cultural differences, and the integrated development approach from the perspective of cultural integration.

**Keywords:** Social-emotional competencies; Socialization; Cultural studies

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In January 2024, the Chinese National Institute of Education Sciences proposed the concept of "highlighting social-emotional competencies learning", which is one of the eight major trends in global basic education innovation. Social-emotional competencies (SEC) are a set of core abilities that children or adults master and apply in complex growth and developmental environments related to individual emotional and social development. A large body of research has shown that cultivating children's social-emotional competencies helps promote the development of their social and emotional abilities, enhance their prosocial behavior and resilience<sup>[1]</sup>, improve their well-being and future academic achievements, and enable them to effectively cope with various future challenges<sup>[2-3]</sup>. In today's world, there is a trend of globalization and diversification, where different cultural information collides, blends, and interacts with each other, which has an impact on the development of children's social-emotional competencies. With the emergence of cultural orientation in the study of children's social-emotional competencies, researchers' ways of thinking have also undergone a transformation<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, children's social-emotional learning and competence development inherently have cultural attributes. This article applies four major theoretical models of emotion, including the emotion regulation process model (Gross, 1998)<sup>[5]</sup>, the emotional intelligence model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)<sup>[6]</sup>, the social-emotional learning framework model (CASEL, 2020), and the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Starting from three different value orientations, a model of children's social-emotional competencies development path is constructed.

## 1. Process-Oriented Path: A Perspective of Cultural Identity

### 1.1 Cultural Perception

Cultural perception is the process by which individuals combine sensory experiences and their own cultural background to cognitively understand different cultures. What perceptual differences might occur in children with different cultural backgrounds? Let's take 5-year-old BinBin as an example. BinBin moved from a northern city to a southern city and started attending a kindergarten nearby. Recently, BinBin has been having poor interpersonal relationships at the kindergarten and often hits other children. Why did this change happen to BinBin? Due to differences in living environment and cultural background, BinBin has a cognitive bias towards the dialect spoken by his peers, mistakenly believing that they are intentionally hurting him. Over time, this forms a certain perceptual

stereotype. As adults, we can break BinBin’s specific cultural perceptual stereotype and actively guide children to understand different cultures by combining their own sensory experiences with cultural perception.

## 1.2 Cultural Assimilation

Cultural assimilation refers to the process in which individuals or groups live together with another cultural group, gradually accepting their attitudes, values, ways of thinking, and behavioral habits. In other words, one culture is gradually influenced, accepted, and even replaced by another. In the case of BinBin, adults need to assist him in gradually adapting and integrating. It should be noted that culture has both essence and dross, with strengths and weaknesses, and not all cultures are worthy of adoption and assimilation. As adults, we should enhance our discernment to promote the positive development of children’s social-emotional competencies.

## 1.3 Cultural Understanding

Beijing Normal University’s Institute of Education Innovation and the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) jointly proposed the 5C model of core competencies for 21st-century talent development <sup>[7]</sup>, which includes cultural understanding and inheritance. Cultivating children’s cultural understanding can prompt them to examine diverse cultures, deepen their awareness and understanding of their own and other ethnic cultures, foster attitudes of equality and respect, and actively practice values that contribute to harmonious human development. The process of cultural understanding is also a process of cognitive reconstruction, namely, looking at events in a more positive way.

## 1.4 Regulating Emotions

After experiencing the process of cultural perception, assimilation, and understanding, children are able to view multiculturalism from different cultural perspectives and subsequently regulate their own emotions. Emotion regulation is the process by which individuals attempt to change their emotional state, control their emotional experiences, and express their emotions. If BinBin goes through the process of cultural perception, assimilation, and understanding, he will be able to face peers positively and take adaptive behaviors and approaches using his own strengths, thereby eliminating peer ridicule and negative emotions within himself.

# 2. Structure-Oriented Path: A Perspective of Cultural Differences

## 2.1 Perceiving and Expressing Emotions

Perceiving and expressing emotions refer to an individual’s ability to identify and express emotions from their physiological state, emotional experiences, and thoughts, as well as their ability to recognize and express emotions from others, artistic activities, and language. Based on children’s unique learning styles and characteristics, adults can engage them in a series of experiential activities related to emotion recognition and expression. For example, a theme activity called “Say ‘No’ to Bullying” can be conducted, with specific activity arrangements as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Activity arrangement for the theme activity “Say ‘No’ to Bullying”.

Theme	What is Bullying	Friendship and Bullying
Warm-up Activity	Hug Teddy Bears	Simulating Situations
Theme Navigation	Experience the Feelings of Gaining and Losing a Team	Express Feelings about Friendship and Bullying
Inquiry and Experience	What is Bullying	Feelings in Bullying Scenarios
Summary and Reflection	Building a Happy and Safe Class	Building a Happy and Safe Class

## 2.2 Understanding and Analyzing Emotions

Understanding and analyzing emotions refer to an individual’s ability to comprehend complex emotions, understand the meaning behind emotional expressions, and recognize the possibilities of emotional changes. Adults can implement moral education to create a nurturing and caring teaching environment. They can incorporate each child’s family cultural background into the classroom, allowing children to share, accept, and respect these different cultures, and encouraging them to practice empathy by considering others’ perspectives. Responsive classroom teaching methods can also be used to create a safe, predictable, enjoyable, and inclusive positive community. This approach focuses on fostering children’s self-confidence, sense of responsibility, and empathy, rather than using blame and threats to force compliance.

## 2.3 Reflecting on and Regulating Emotions

By perceiving, expressing, understanding, and analyzing emotions, individuals can reflect on and regulate their emotions, thus

changing the way they express them. Reflecting on and regulating emotions refer to judging emotions based on known information and being aware of and adjusting the relationship between one's own emotions and others' emotions. When children experience negative emotions, adults should first accept their emotions and then help them alleviate negative emotions through methods such as using stress balls, expressive writing, practicing empathy, and engaging in emotional release.

### **3. Integrated Development-Oriented Path: A Perspective of Cultural Integration**

#### **3.1 Social Education: External Environmental Support**

Socialization refers to the process through which societies or communities enable their members to acquire symbolic systems (such as language, writing, and other symbolic representations) and accept social experiences in order to fulfill roles and participate in social activities.<sup>[8]</sup> An appropriate social-emotional learning curriculum plays a crucial role in developing children's social-emotional competencies. A social-emotional curriculum is a series of programs aimed at enhancing children's social-emotional competencies, including general classroom instruction and activity-based lessons. For example, the PATHS curriculum in the United States is one of the excellent programs specifically designed to cultivate children's social-emotional competencies.

#### **3.2 Internalization: Acquisition of Five Core Competencies**

Socialization and individual internalization are interdependent; without socialization, there would be no individual internalization, and without individual internalization, socialization would be meaningless. Children possess the ability to actively interpret and identify with culture, enabling them to understand and interpret culture from a unique perspective. Through the process of individual internalization, children gradually acquire five major abilities related to social-emotional competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making.

### **4. Conclusion**

The process of children's individual socialization is actually a process of recognizing and identifying with multiculturalism. By incorporating multiculturalism as the main theme in the study of children's social-emotional competencies, advocating for the coexistence of cultural differences, new methods and strategies have been provided for researching children's social-emotional competencies in multicultural contexts.

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