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Book Review

Semrud-Clikeman, Margaret (2007). *Social competence in children.*
New York: Springer. 300 p., 65,99 EUR, ISBN 978-03-877-1365-6.

1. Context

What is social competence? How does it relate to child development? Is it something we are born with, or can we develop social competence over time? Although no singular definition exists, social competence is widely recognized as a multidimensional concept consisting of social, emotional, cognitive, and adaptive skills and behaviors. Discussions of social competence in research and literature often include the constructs of social skills, social communication, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Research on social competence as it relates to child development began in the early twentieth century with a study linking social competence to future mental health (Dodge, Asher, & Parkhurst, 1989). As a result of this study, great interest began to develop around how children interact with others and function in social situations. In the 1960s, more research around social competence and its effects on school performance began to unfold, and the field saw a shift in the definition of social competence to one that included problem-solving skills as a key component for academic and social success. Today, there is still a general lack of agreement about the definition and measurement of social competence, however, many researchers are now focusing on early intervention strategies for teaching social competence skills to children in an effort to reduce the likelihood of the development of maladaptive behaviors. There is also a large focus on understanding social competence as it relates to children with and without specific developmental challenges.

2. Overview

In response to growing interest around social competence in exceptional children, Margaret Semrud-Clikeman developed *Social Competence in Children* as a way of providing information for clinical practitioners and parents caring for children who are experiencing social difficulties. Her book combines information and experiences gathered over her 30 years of working with children in an effort to put a real face on the difficulties that many children face when struggling to make friends and interact in social situations. Semrud-Clikeman begins the book by walking the reader through the developmental framework necessary for understanding social competence. Here, she differentiates between typical child development of social competence skills to provide the reader with a frame for understanding

how such development may look different in a child with a disability or deficit. She then moves through social competence for various disorders and provides information on different challenges that often arise for children. Lastly, Semrud-Clikeman leaves the reader with strategies and interventions to support the development of pro-social skills in children with social competence concerns.

3. Introduction to social competence (chapters 1 through 3)

In the first chapter, Margaret Semrud-Clikeman introduces the scope of the book. She begins by introducing the theories of social competence and the varying definitions that make operationalizing this concept problematic. She moves on to provide the reader with the developmental framework for understanding social competence at various ages, from infancy through adolescence and young adulthood. This section of the books helps the reader to understand what development typically looks like at each age, and helps ground ones expectations of child behavior. In the following chapter, Semrud-Clikeman moves into a discussion of assessing social competence for the purposes of screening, problem identification, and early intervention. The use of observations, interviews, self-reports, behavioral rating scales, and direct measures of social understanding are all discussed as sources of information that may be used to identify a child's strengths as well as areas in need of further development and support. She also discusses the limitations to assessment practices and how some that may be feasible in a clinic setting may not be an option in the school setting.

4. Social competence in exceptional children (chapters 4 through 12)

The next sections of the book provide a discussion of the challenges for children with learning, attention, and social deficits in developing social competence (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). She covers a range of disorders, from the more common childhood difficulties such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and learning disabilities to more rare disorders such as childhood cancer and genetic disorders, and describes how social competence is addressed depending on each child's individual needs (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). As noted by Semrud-Clikeman, a few of these disorders have a large empirical base of research to support both their identification and their treatment, while many other low-incidence disorders do not. Throughout each chapter, Semrud-Clikeman describes in detail what the disorder of focus is and provides case examples of how deficits in social competence skills present themselves with children who have that particular disorder. She goes on to differentiate social competence developmental at each age, and presents information on interventions and treatments for particular concerns related to each disorder. Each chapter covers its own disorder, making for a very clear and organized transition through different areas of social competence. Additionally, each chapter provides examples of goals related to different skill development, and a summary and conclusion section, which highlights the key features of the chapter.

5. Conclusion

Margaret Semrud-Clikemans's book provides a nice introduction into social competence in children, how social competence is defined, assessed, and how it relates to the development of children with varying disabilities or deficits. She pays close attention to the important role families play in the development of social competence in children. She also makes clear that social skills and appropriate behaviors can develop in all children through a variety of different teaching and modeling strategies, as well as individual and group interventions. This book provides a great starting point for gathering information related to social competence in children with specific needs and the resources necessary for supporting their growth and socialization. Semrud-Clikeman also provides the reader with information that is empirically validated while also providing clinical insight into the development of social competence that may not be as well studied in the field. In closing, *Social Competence in Children* is a user-friendly book, geared towards practitioners and families, which clearly articulates the need for social competence skills for healthy child development as well as the need for further research in this area.

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