

Circle Solutions

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING
AND THE ASPIRE PRINCIPLES

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Knowledge or wisdom

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What is social emotional learning?

- Learning to Be
- Learning to Live Together
- Learning to Transform Oneself and Society

- Delors Report 1996
- OECD Learning Framework 2030

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Learning to Be

- Understanding and regulating emotions
- Identifying a wide range of strengths
- Liking yourself without being narcissistic
- Knowing how to respond to and withstand challenging situations
- Developing a positive identity
- Being able to problem-solve effectively
- Striving to be the best you can be
- Having meaning and purpose

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Learning to Live Together

- Understanding the Golden Rule – treating others as you would have them treat you
- Appreciating our shared humanity
- Having the skills to establish a threshold for friendship
- Having the skills to maintain healthy relationships
- Knowing how to deal with difference and conflict
- Being able to repair broken relationships
- Being yourself and not influenced by peer pressure
- Focusing on collaboration rather than competition

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THE PROMISE of SEL

- It connects us to others in positive ways
- It fosters resilience in the face of adversity
- It facilitates emotional regulation - not letting negative emotions dominate action
- It promotes critical thinking & ethical decision-making
- It encourages sustainable pro-social behaviour.
- It gives us a sense of 'shared humanity' thereby addressing social issues such as racism and misogyny
- It strengthens family and community relationships
- It promotes good citizenship and civil societies
- It supports progress in learning

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But...

- There is a risk that:
 - social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are about individual skills and do not promote connection
 - the content is not congruent with the context – going through a curriculum
 - There is little cultural sensitivity
 - There is no clear pedagogy that enables everyone to feel safe
 - SEL becomes a version of 'group therapy' where teachers do not have the training nor time to respond to potential disclosures.
 - Students are told what to think and do rather than coming to their own conclusions about what matters and why

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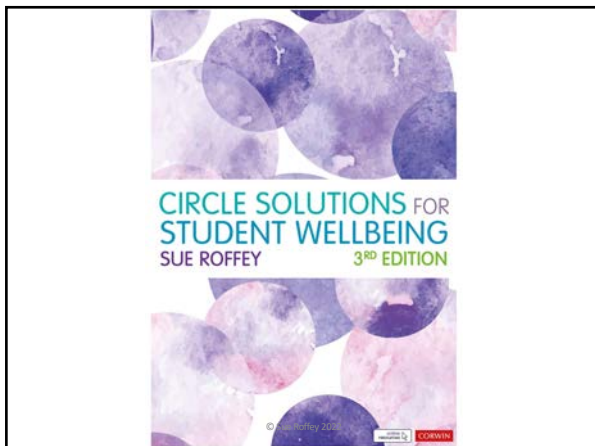
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For effectiveness, implementation (the how) matters as much as content (the what)

- Social and Emotional Learning needs to:
 - Be safe – for both students and teachers
 - Be solution focused – not taking problems to pieces
 - Identify strengths for ourselves and each other
 - Help children learn behaviour 'from the inside out' – not 'the outside in'
- SEL must be reflective (encouraging thinking), discursive (students talk with each other) and experiential – (to give a deeper understanding of what the learning means in practice).

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The ASPIRE principles

- AGENCY
- SAFETY
- POSITIVITY
- INCLUSION
- RESPECT
- EQUITY

Although given separately these are all interactive

You aspire to great things?
Begin with little ones.

- Augustine Saint

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Three simple guidelines for Circles

- We listen to the person speaking
- You may pass – you do not have to say anything
- There are no put-downs – only personal positives

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A is for Agency

- Ryan and Deci talk about the importance of self-determination to wellbeing
- This means having a say in what happens to you
- Not feeling that you are a victim of fate
- You do not blame others but feel empowered to act
- Not feeling controlled but making your own decisions
- When you have agency you take responsibility for your own behaviour and its outcomes
- This means not controlling others

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AGENCY In SEL

- Everyone has a voice and choice
- Everything is voluntary
- Socratic not didactic education - asking questions, not giving answers
- Activities give students opportunities to discuss and reflect on important issues that impact on their lives (trust, friendship, fairness, etc) – not being told what to think or do
- Maximising student responsibility for the class climate
- Teachers being in charge of situations but not controlling pupils.
- Circles are about changing behaviour from the inside out – not the outside in

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S is for Safety

- Physical, Psychological, Emotional
- Being accepted for who you are
- Being able to take risks and make mistakes
- Being able to trust others
- Not being singled out
- Feeling someone has your back



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SAFETY in SEL

- The right to pass
- No put downs, only personal positives
- Everything happens in pairs, small groups or the whole Circle
- Activities focus on issues, never incidents
- The use of the third person (“Someone”, not ‘I’ or ‘my’)
- Students are not given activities where they are expected to talk about their own lives and feelings

Many books have great ideas for activities but most need changing to a paired or group focus and away from ‘I’.

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P is for Positivity

- Built on positive psychology research about the
- value of positive emotions
- positive communication for healthy relationships
- strengths identification
- the importance of play and shared laughter.



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POSITIVITY in SEL

- Promotes positive feelings, being valued, included, respected, acknowledged
- Activities that encourage playfulness and laughter – these raise oxytocin levels which foster resilience, warmth and cooperation
- Address issues from a solution focused approach, not a problem-based one. What do we want rather than what we want to get rid of. Friendship, kindness, inclusion and upstanding than bullying.
- Identification of strengths for self and others.

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I is for Inclusion



- Feeling you belong, you are accepted and you matter is one of the strongest factors for wellbeing
- Resilience research
- Behaviour research
- Prevention of violence research

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INCLUSION in SEL

- The expectation is that everyone will work with everyone else
- Students are regularly mixed up so over time interact with all their peers
- There is a clear directive about what happens when students break the three simple guidelines to give them maximum choice and inclusion whilst maintaining high expectations for behaviour
- Many games / activities promote a sense of belonging
- Circles promote the responsibility of everyone to include others.

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R is for **Respect**

- Respecting voices, choices and culture
- Not imposing your own view and ignoring others
- Being accepting and non-judgmental
- Listening
- Being reliable
- Taking account of someone's situation
- Self-respect does not lie in compliance – it lies in integrity, acting in accordance with your values

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RESPECT in SEL

- When one person is speaking others listen
- We share the space fairly
- There are no put downs, verbal nor non-verbal
- We avoid pre-judging anyone on the basis of their colour, race, ability, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- We acknowledge that different cultures have different values and ways of being

• See: Dobia, B. & Roffey, S. (2017) *Respect for culture: Social and emotional learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth* in R. Collie, E. Freydenberg, and A. Martin, (eds) *Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific*. Springer

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Equality

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E is for **Equity**

- The literature indicates that **equality** is a factor underpinning societal wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).
- However, treating everyone the same does not respect diversity nor lead to what is essentially fair. This requires flexibility and adaptation. The construct of equity reflects this.

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Equity

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EQUITY in SEL

- Everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.
- These means being flexible for those who need something extra or a bit different
- Being aware of the context of a class and ensuring that participants
- The teacher (facilitator) does everything the students do to both model what is expected and to show they too are learning/

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For maximum effectiveness...

- SEL needs to be part of and underpin whole student / school wellbeing, positive relationships and high social capital.
- The learning in SEL needs to be put into practice on a daily basis.
- This is why SEL needs to be universal - all students, not targeted groups - and the facilitators are teachers who spend time with young people - not external experts.

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