

Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning: A Curriculum that Educates the Heart and Mind

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Abstract

Given the growing interest in providing social and emotional learning opportunities within after-school and youth programs, identifying high-quality and innovative learning materials is critical. This review of the newly launched Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning framework and curriculum, developed at Emory University, provides an overview of this curriculum and its potential use in after-school and youth programs. This comprehensive learning system includes curriculum for young people from kindergarten through 12th grade and an online professional development site for those who deliver the curriculum.

Key words: after-school, youth programs, social–emotional learning, curriculum, mindfulness

Introduction

There is growing evidence that offering young people the opportunity to learn social and emotional skills can improve academic performance and their mental health (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2019; Panayiotou, Humphrey, & Wigelsworth, 2019). The Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE) at Emory University developed the *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning Curriculum* in partnership with the Dalai Lama. This is a free, comprehensive curriculum designed for young people in kindergarten through 12th grade. The Dalai Lama noted, “From the beginning the SEE Learning curriculum has been intended for international implementation and has evolved from the cooperation of people belonging to different cultures and nations, often speaking different languages” (CCSCBE, 2019a, p. 2).

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Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning

In April of 2019, *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning: Educating the Heart and Mind* (CCSCBE, 2019b) was launched to an international audience of more than 1,000 people representing more than 36 countries. This curriculum is grounded in the most recent research related to social and emotional learning and ethics and offers young people an innovative learning experience, with contributions from leading scientists including Dr. Daniel Goleman, Dr. Mark Greenberg, Dr. Thupten Jinpa, Dr. Robert Roser, and Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl. These experts, along with the staff from Emory University, and in partnership with the Dalai Lama, created this curriculum designed to enhance social, emotional, and ethical skills and knowledge. Although this curriculum was developed in partnership with the Dalai Lama, it does not promote any particular religion or set of beliefs. It was designed to fit into school programs throughout the world.

The Curriculum

SEE Learning curriculum expands on traditional social emotional learning (SEL) frameworks (Dusenbury et al., 2015) by drawing on the latest research pertaining to attention training, the cultivation of compassion for self and others, resilience skills based on trauma-informed care, systems thinking, and ethical discernment. The curriculum has nine components that are consistent across all age levels of the curriculum:

1. Attention and Self-Awareness
2. Self-Compassion
3. Self-Regulation
4. Interpersonal Awareness
5. Compassion for Other
6. Relationship Skills
7. Appreciating Interdependence
8. Recognizing Common Humanity
9. Community and Global Engagement

Although the curriculum is aimed at traditional classroom settings, its flexible structure lends itself well to after-school and youth programs, and it is already being used in after-school and summer camp settings. Practitioners will recognize the curriculum's pedagogical model as one of experiential learning, emphasizing "exploration by students on their own, not direct instruction" (*The SEE Learning Companion*, 2019, p. 22).

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According to the curriculum, adults act as facilitators who encourage young people to think critically, engage in reflective practices, and develop an understanding of the science that informs the curriculum through active, engaged learning. Through this process, young people have the opportunity to engage in activities designed to address learning at three levels: (a) Received Knowledge, (b) Critical Insight, and (c) Embodied Understanding. Understanding each of these three levels further expands the experiential nature of the curriculum beginning with Received Knowledge. Received Knowledge is the ability to use the information gained through either instruction or experiential learning. Critical Insight is learning that one might call the “aha” moment arising from personal experience and investigation into one’s own learning. In addition, Embodied Understanding is learning that is internalized and serves to be transformative and spontaneous. This approach is designed to enhance and support the education of young people by fostering social, emotional, and ethical learning around three goals:

- Awareness – Young people will have a greater awareness of their thoughts and feelings, of the thoughts and feelings of others, and of interdependence as it relates to them and to broader systems.
- Compassion – Young people will cultivate skills of emotional well-being and self-care, empathy and courageous compassion for others, and the values of others.
- Engagement – Young people will develop greater self-regulation skills and the ability to determine when their behavior is beneficial to others, ability to relate to others in a caring manner, and ability to engage in activities that benefit the larger society.

Finally, different from other SEL curricula, the inclusion of the ethical learning component brings an increased awareness of how individuals are interrelated within part of a larger system and prepares young people for their roles as global citizens. Thus, young people have the opportunity to learn how best to take care of their own and others’ emotional and social health.

Learning Platform

Unique to this free curriculum is the availability of the SEE Learning system platform that offers educators and practitioners a comprehensive online learning system with the tools and supports needed to successfully implement this curriculum including:

- Free curriculum for young people in grades kindergarten through 12.
- Ongoing professional development in the best practices for delivering the curriculum at all levels.

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- Learning communities of practice for educators and practitioners.
- Facilitator training and certification for those who would like to become trainers.

The curriculum also offers a different perspective as it focuses on the social and emotional learning, and the ethical learning grounded in a systems and global view. Another distinctive feature is the fact that the program was created from the outset for international and multicultural use, and its development and implementation has been informed by a standing international program committee of about 40 education experts from around the world. This curriculum offers after-school and youth programs a free, high-quality curriculum using experiential learning pedagogy and support of the staff who deliver the program. Therefore, this comprehensive approach fits the structure of after-school and youth program settings well.

How to Obtain

The SEE learning platform at <http://compassion.emory.edu/see-learning/index.html> provides access to all the learning materials. A free overview of the curriculum is available in the manual entitled *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning: The Companion*. The kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum, *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning: Educating the Heart and Mind* is also free, however to access the curriculum you will need to complete the SEE 101: Orientation training. This training takes approximately three to four hours and can be completed at the learner's own pace.

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