

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

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Abstract

This short paper provides an orientation to the development and introduction of a programme of *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)* by the English government and its intended practices in schools. The paper indicates briefly the conceptual origins of the initiative and the ways in which the programme sought to emphasise the importance of relationships in both social and academic learning. Finally, some comment is provided regarding the impact of the SEAL initiative on pupil performance in English schools

Introduction

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials (DfES 2007a) were introduced through the Secondary National Strategy in 2007 by the ten English government. These materials were intended to provide a way of promoting the personal and social development as well as the emotional competence of all pupils. With the demise of the National Strategies and a Coalition government that is emphasising the importance of a National Curriculum that outlines 'a core of knowledge in the traditional subject disciplines' (DFE 2010: 42) the future of SEAL as a curriculum resource is unclear. However it should be recognised that there were social and emotional aspects involved in learning prior to central government producing materials (DfES 2005, 2007a) that bore this name. These materials emerged against a background of rapid development of resources in this area, much of it based on empirical research (Weare & Gray, 2003), and on the ideas of thinkers such as Gardner (1983) and Goleman (1995). Gardner developed the long-standing idea that there are many ways to be 'intelligent' and included within his analysis idea of being intelligent about our own emotions and those of other people. Goleman proposed and popularised the term 'emotional intelligence' and suggested that emotional and social abilities are far more influential than traditional interpretations of intelligence both in personal life and in school success. Subsequently, developments in psychology, neuroscience, education and other disciplines have demonstrated that social and emotional skills are essential components of positive personal and social development.

There is a generic relevance in promoting these aspects of pupil development in all schools of course. They are apparent in virtually every part of the school experience of pupils, and enable them to be more effective and confident learners as individuals, whilst supporting the development of group-learning skills so that collaborative work can routinely take place. Moreover, developing social and emotional skills also has a discernible impact on the whole school and everyone within it, whether they be pupils, teaching staff of others working alongside them. Finally, because of the benefits of SEAL to all pupils it can be promoted as an inclusive way of supporting those pupils who might be disaffected or at-risk of engaging in challenging behaviour.

The New Labour government's role in promoting the SEAL Curriculum

An awareness of the 'social and emotional aspects of learning' became apparent during the New Labour administration from about 2003. There has long been a recognition of the emotional needs of learners, characterised classically in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (see Neher, 1991 for a critique). However, the policy shift towards a holistic view of children, encapsulated in *Every Child Matters* policies (DfES, 2004), resulted in a concentrated holistic emphasis on pupils in schools, who were affected by social and emotional conditions as well as cognitive or pedagogical dimensions. A study by Weare & Gray (2003) highlighted a set of affective elements that influenced learning and which could also be applicable beyond formal education. The latter is important, as it connected the challenge of addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils in school with the wider social inclusion agenda. As such it introduced a more positive dimension to an area of work which had often

been regarded as marginal to the 'real task' of schooling. Weare and Gray (2003) examined a range of initiatives which sought to place emphasis upon those affective aspects of pupil experience, which for many years had been addressed principally by the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum in secondary schools. In reviewing their findings they found that:

'There is clear evidence on the principles that underlie these programmes, for example teaching behaviours and skills explicitly and in participative and empowering ways, using a step by step approach, generalising to real life and making use of using cooperative group work and peer education as well as whole class approaches' (Weare and Gray 2003: 7)

Subsequently there was official backing for an approach which sought to directly teach a range of 'social and emotional' skills; the national emphasis was originally placed on KS1 & 2 (DfES, 2005), but in the same year a pilot programme was instigated, involving 54 secondary schools. Subsequently, a set of resources were launched in 2007 through the Secondary National Strategy. As with other aspects of behaviour management, there is considerable overlap between the materials produced for the two age ranges, although the underpinning principles are shared. There were, however, some important differences in approach. The SEAL materials at Primary level provide a systematic set of resources built around seven recurring themes, whilst the secondary materials are somewhat less structured, with an invitation to schools to explore ways in which SEAL-related themes can be further developed during KS3. Thus, as Humphrey et al (2010) have noted in this respect,

'Schools are actively encouraged to explore different approaches to implementation that support identified school improvement priorities rather than following a single model, meaning that they can tailor it to their own circumstances and needs. In a sense, this means that SEAL is essentially what individual schools make of it rather than being a single, consistently definable entity. It was conceptualised in this manner to avoid the lack of ownership and sustainability that might be associated with the more 'top-down', prescribed approach' (p.7)

Recent history and background to SEAL

An emphasis on affective aspects of learning is not new (Best, 1995; Collins & McNiff, 1999). Whilst recent initiatives from the English government draw extensively on the previously quoted work of Goleman (1996) and Weare & Gray (2003), an acknowledgement of the historical roots of 'SEAL' assists in understanding its importance in secondary education in general but, principally, its role in supporting pupils whose behaviour is a cause for concern.

In the period prior to the emergence and widespread use of the term 'SEAL' one of the ways in which the affective component of schooling was summarised was in the so-called 'personal and social' education (PSE) of pupils – later to be extended to incorporate aspects of health (H), to become PSHE. Research by, for example, Mortimore et al (1988) and by Rutter and Smith (1995) had confirmed an even earlier recognition that the psycho-social development of pupils was integral to their curriculum progress and achievement in school (Marland, 1974; Rutter et al, 1979). Its role was seen to be particularly important in enabling schools to put in place supportive measures which enabled pupils to be more resilient to the effects of rapid and complex social changes including shifts in the ways that schools and teachers were perceived. Thus, Murray (1998) summarised a position in which '...concerns about youth alienation in the aftermath of the public disturbances in inner city areas in 1981 and high youth unemployment have continued to grow amongst parents, educators, politicians and others. In consequence, the secondary school has become a focus for numerous attempts at 'education for citizenship', 'personal development', 'values clarification' and other strategies aimed at improving the social efficiency of young people, especially those 'at risk' in the employment and behavioural sense. These initiatives are varied in character, often indeterminate in the perspective of more formal curriculum subjects, and are indeed comprehensible only in so far as a loose concept of PSE has emerged to define them!' (p.29).

The period from 1990-2000 saw considerable changes to the way in which secondary schools functioned, in major part as a result of the impact of the 1988 Education Act and the consequent

introduction of a 'national curriculum' to schools in England and Wales. The latter brought with it a far greater emphasis on accountability, key stage assessment and the subsequent publication of (academic) performance tables of schools. In such a climate the 'personal and social' in education was diminished (Best, 1999). The ensuing conditions prompted a view that the emotional needs of those pupils who were most at risk of disaffection and exclusion were becoming marginalised in favour of national curriculum subjects and their measurement (Davies and Brember, 1998). Indeed, Best's study, reporting on the changing nature of 'pastoral care', highlighted the great increases in time and resources that were now being required to address behaviour management issues (Best, *op.cit.*). As Best notes, '...the fact that behaviour management appears to have been given greater importance than casework – so often the 'caring' face of discipline – seems in harmony with the dominant social ideology of the period' (p.8).

But the 'social and emotional' was never far from the surface of discussion concerning effectiveness and inclusion. Close to the end of the decade, for example, the *Advisory Group on Citizenship* (1998) recommended that pupils in schools should be empowered to feel individually confident so that they could become active citizens, able to make a personal contribution to the world around them. Partly as a result of such quasi-official pressure, but also informed by a residual understanding that emotional well-being impacts on achievement and a policy-orientation which was heavily disposed to the concept of social inclusion, the affective dimensions of pupil-experience once again became a central component of government action in England.

The affective component in schooling and the mental-health needs of pupils who are identified as having 'behaviour problems' subsequently converged in attempts to address a long-standing issue in secondary schools: that of disaffection and disengagement from formal learning by some pupils, even from the point of transition from primary school. In their evaluation study of the Primary version of SEAL, Hallam et al (2006) had reported that it had brought '...a major impact on children's well-being, confidence, social and communication skills, relationships, including bullying, playtime behaviour, pro-social behaviour and attitudes towards schools' (p.1). It therefore seemed appropriate to extend the SEAL initiative more widely to KS3 and beyond. A secondary social, emotional and behavioural skills (SEBS) pilot project, as part of the DfES National Strategies, was set up in 2005 to encourage schools to take a whole-school approach to developing social, emotional and behavioural skills amongst pupils. The SEBS were divided into the five aspects:

- understanding ourselves;
- managing our feelings;
- motivating ourselves;
- empathising with others; and
- forming positive relationships.

Each of these five aspects came with sets of key learning objectives and accompanying learning outcomes. Subsequently, the experiences gained from the secondary SEBS pilot initiative informed the development of secondary SEAL programme which in its first year was introduced to almost 20% secondary schools in England.

Why is SEAL important in managing pupil behaviour?

Social and emotional aspects of learning have a natural focus on the development of a set of personal, self-management skills which are frequently raised as potential issues when individual cases of problem behaviour are identified. Briefly summarised, they relate to the development of skills in five principal areas which were popularised by Goleman (1996) and his work on 'emotional intelligence' and subsequently referred to more accessibly as 'emotional literacy':

- self-awareness
- managing feelings
- empathy
- motivation
- social interactions

Given that the underlying causes of difficult behaviour are often related to emotional or social needs of the pupil, attention needs to be directed towards understanding the nature of the difficulty and then dealing with them using a range of strategies. Developing social and emotional skills enables a pupil to make better informed choices about their behaviour. They enhance pupil self-awareness and self-understanding and develop their own understanding of the impact that their behaviour has on themselves and others around them. As a result, SEAL can assist in overall behaviour management strategies by enabling individual pupils to:

- learn the skills they need in order to behave well, rather than simply correcting poor behaviour
- participate in setting rules and consequences that are based upon rights and responsibilities
- make a choice about their behaviour
- recognise and manage their strong emotions
- reflect about the consequences of particular behaviour.

It is also important to recognise that using aspects of a SEAL 'curriculum' can bring significant benefits to the whole school, all of the pupils within it, and particularly to those pupils whose behaviour is a cause for concern. An understanding of the core principles of SEAL contributes to extending the repertoire that teachers use in establishing positive relationships with their pupils. These approaches, applied systematically, consistently and over time can assist in:

- promoting positive learning behaviour by progressively developing positive social skills and attitudes.
- Helping all pupils to recognise that bullying is wrong.
- promoting better school attendance through improving motivation and the enjoyment of school.
- helping overcome social and emotional barriers to learning and helps all pupils to be more effective learners.
- contributing to other aspects of pupil welfare and support.
- helping all pupils to become responsible citizens.

A more recent validation of SEAL indicates that they are central to the quest for school improvement. Thus, the National Strategies (DCSF, 2011) indicated that 'Effective learning, high academic standards, an inclusive culture, positive behaviour, good attendance and good professional practice by school staff are challenging to develop unless both pupils and staff have social and emotional skills, and the ability to manage their own behaviour' (p.1). The same document refers to 'overwhelming evidence' (although not indicating its sources) that 'programmes to promote social and emotional skills can result in gains that are absolutely central to the goals of all schools' and indicates that these are to be found in:

- better academic results for all pupils and schools;
- more effective learning – some well-known programmes have been shown to have demonstrable and measurable effects on attainments of all pupils in reading, non-verbal reasoning, problem solving and

- planning, learning-to-learn skills and maths;
- higher motivation;
- better behaviour;
- higher school attendance;
- more responsible pupils, who are better citizens and more able to contribute to society;
- lower levels of stress and anxiety;
- higher morale, performance and retention of staff;
- a more positive school ethos.

Evidence to support these extensive claims has not been fully collated. However, some support can be inferred from a range of research that has been undertaken over many years. At a very general level, for example, it has been illustrated that programmes which actually teach social and emotional competences have been shown to produce a wide range of educational benefits, including improved school attendance and higher motivation (Durlak and Wells, 1997). These outcomes are recognised as being relevant to all pupils.

But it is in the area of behaviour that the SEAL emphasis, on social competence and self-management, can be most dramatically validated by research. A large-scale review of interventions designed to prevent childhood behaviour problems in schools in the United States by Marshall and Watt (1999) suggested that the programmes it reviewed that were intended to teach social competences contributed towards decreasing early behaviour problems. Also in the United States, Wells (2001) examined mental health promotion programmes in schools which included those with a concentration of pupils with behaviour problems. He indicated that several of the schools which introduced such initiatives were able to demonstrate a clear and positive impact on behaviour. All of these programmes taught emotional and social competences. Epstein and Elias (1996) indicated that similar programmes could be very effective in helping the difficult pupils stay in the classroom, and without detriment to the learning of other pupils.

Pilot versions of the SEAL programme were introduced into English primary schools in 2003, with an adapted version for secondary schools following in 2005. It was estimated that as many as 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools had introduced at least some elements of the programme by 2007 (Humphrey et al 2010). Systematic evaluation of these initiatives was undertaken and has revealed mixed results. At secondary level, the Secondary National Strategy's pilot programme, introduced in the summer of 2005, was subject to official scrutiny (OfSTED, 2007).

Later, in a review of the programme at secondary level the national picture was that SEAL had hardly any impact on the mental well-being of pupils (DCSF, 2010). In primary schools, however, a far more positive set of findings continued to emerge. The national evaluation of group work in SEAL found that 'there is statistically significant evidence that primary SEAL small group work has a positive impact' (p.6). The latter finding is of significance, given that a common cause of problem behaviour amongst some pupils is their inability to be able to form or maintain positive social relationships. Whilst these mixed results may appear to be disappointing, there remains a case for optimism. This is based not only on the increased awareness of the affective curriculum in the school experience of pupils, but also in providing early, systematic attention to areas of emotional support that some young children require. The latter is of significance to the well-being of pupils during transition from primary to secondary school, which has been identified as a period of risk for pupils experiencing social and emotional difficulties.

In summary, the importance of addressing the social and emotional aspects of all learning must be emphasised for *all* pupils. As Steiner (2002) has remarked, "To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power, and improves the quality of life for you, and equally important, the quality of life for the people around you". For those pupils whose behaviour in schools causes concern, Goleman offers a powerful justification for a concentrated emphasis on SEAL:

Students who are anxious, angry or depressed don't learn; people who are in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well... when emotions overwhelm concentration, what is being swamped is the mental capacity cognitive scientists call 'working memory', the ability to hold in mind all information relevant to the task at hand.(p.8)
(Goleman,1995)

SEAL: definitions and content overview

This chapter has already highlighted some of the historical precursors of SEAL and has indicated that there have been many terms previously utilised to prescribe 'social and emotional learning' (SEL). As Humphrey et al (2010) have pointed out,

'the actual application of the term in the literature is somewhat nebulous and amorphous, with programmes described under the SEL umbrella being extremely heterogeneous in their nature, content, audience, settings, and expected outcomes...The parameters of SEL are therefore not entirely clear cut, leading some to suggest that the term is "bereft of any conceptual meaning" (p.9).

Whilst it is therefore important to recognise that SEAL is not in itself an original concept, the pack of materials produced by the English government in 2007 provide a contemporary working definition as well as a useful way of drawing together some of its practical applications. Accordingly, SEAL is described as 'a comprehensive approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools.'" (DCSF, 2007a: 4). These can be synthesised into the five skill areas previously mentioned, for which DfES (2007a) provides a helpful set of definitions.

SKILL	DEFINITION
Self-awareness	Knowing and valuing myself and understanding how I think and feel. When we can identify and describe our beliefs, values, and feelings, and feel good about ourselves, our strengths and our limitations, we can learn more effectively and engage in positive interactions with others.
Self-regulation (managing feelings)	Managing how we express emotions, coping with and changing difficult and uncomfortable feelings, and increasing and enhancing positive and pleasant feelings. When we have strategies for expressing our feelings in a positive way and for helping us to cope with difficult feelings and feel more positive and comfortable, we can concentrate better, behave more appropriately, make better relationships, and work more cooperatively and productively with those around us.
Motivation	Working towards goals, and being more persistent, resilient and optimistic. When we can set ourselves goals, work out effective strategies for reaching those goals, and respond effectively to setbacks and difficulties, we can approach learning situations in a positive way and maximize our ability to achieve our potential.
Empathy	Understanding others' thoughts and feelings and valuing and supporting others. When we can

	understand, respect, and value other people's beliefs, values, and feelings, we can be more effective in making relationships, working with, and learning from, people from diverse backgrounds.
Social skills	Building and maintaining relationships and solving problems, including interpersonal ones. When we have strategies for forming and maintaining relationships, and for solving problems and conflicts with other people, we have the skills that can help us achieve all of these learning outcomes, for example by reducing negative feelings and distraction while in learning situations, and using our interactions with others as an important way of improving our learning experience.

Table 1. Definitions of the five social and emotional skills promoted through SEAL (from DfES, 2007a, p.5-6).

Alongside these articulations of what SEAL comprises, it should also be remembered that Weare (2010) has remarked that schools implementing SEAL are, "encouraged to take from it what they wish" (p.10), indicating the role of individual schools in mediating the resources that they have been centrally produced. At the same time she advocates against "too much tailoring to local needs and circumstances can lead to dilution and confusion" (p.11).

A notable feature of the skills identified is that they are as applicable to teachers and other adults working in schools as they are to pupils. A useful reflective task at this point is to consider each of the skills identified and to attempt to identify a series of operational characteristics which provide practical evidence of them being demonstrated in your own day-to-day teaching and interactions with others. Table 1 offers a template for this exercise, as well as some starting points.

The table can also be completed based on a given pupil, allowing you an insight into the pupil's perspective, so that you are in a better emotional frame to connect with the young person's perspective. Creating this level of engagement is a vital component of relationship-building.

The Secondary SEAL resources contain a useful way of examining the current position regarding the overall 'climate' in a school for an emphasis on social and emotional aspects of pupil experience. For many teachers this will mark a starting point for thinking about the affective dimension of the work they do. (INSERT Figure 1 SEAL Audit – taken from Secondary SEAL Staff Development booklet DfES 2007b, p.10-11).

The resources contained in the Secondary SEAL pack are by no means as extensive as those produced for KS1 & 2. They provide more in the way of an outline of ways of working, rather than the more articulated 'curriculum' produced for primary schools. The Secondary resources provide information regarding:

- 1 Secondary SEAL: Implementation
- 2 What is the link between school culture, environment and SEAL?
- 3 What is the role of leadership and management in SEAL?
- 4 How do we implement SEAL?
- 5 How can we involve all pupils in SEAL?
- 6 How can we involve parents and carers in SEAL?
- 7 What role can the wider community play in implementing SEAL?
- 8 What is already being done and first steps in promoting SEAL

9 Monitoring and evaluating progress in SEAL
10 Video clips for staff development in SEAL
11 School self-review: primary and secondary

The government-produced Secondary 'SEAL' materials (DfES, 2007a, 2007b) have done much to increase the awareness of practitioners of the importance of the affective dimensions of learning, whilst offering a set of resources to support teachers and others in promoting them. They provided a range of resources which were structured so as to be accessible for work at all key-stages and by both pupils and adults alike. The advice which accompanied these materials highlights the complex nature of the issues they encompass, effectively summarised in the Primary SEAL guidance:

"Teachers/practitioners will need to use their professional judgement, however, to decide which activities are developmentally appropriate for their children, and how to 'mix and match' when working in mixed-age classes" (DfES, 2007; p.14). They comprise a set of suggested learning opportunities and lesson plans for developing children's social, emotional and behavioural skills through a given theme, at different levels. They offer a series of differentiated learning opportunities intended for small-group work with children who need additional help in developing their social, emotional and behavioural skills. They provide, in addition, staff development activities relevant and school assembly topics. Recognising that the 'social and emotional aspects of learning' need also to involve parents and other family members in 'behaviour problem solving', the SEAL resources also incorporate activities for families to do together at home.

It is important, however, to recognise that although there has been much recent governmental focus of attention on the 'affective' component of managing behaviour, it has long been recognised as a vital component of any social interaction. Thorndike (1920), for instance, used the term 'social intelligence', describing it as an ability to 'act wisely' and to demonstrate an ability to understand others. And whilst writers such as Goleman and Gardner have offered popular ways of mapping these attributes, many other scholars and practitioners have utilised other groupings and categorisations which have been applied in schools (for example, Steiner, 1981; Sharp, 2001).

Differences in terminology and interpretation need to be recognised of course. But ultimately these can all be subsumed within a generic grouping which covers the affective domain in learning and teaching, best summarised by their 'social and emotional' dimensions.

At the operational level in schools, the National Strategies implementation viewed SEAL initiatives as being characterised by the following principles:

SEAL implementation is underpinned by clear planning focused on improving standards, behaviour and attendance.

- Building a school ethos that provides a climate and conditions to promote social and emotional skills.
- All children are provided with planned opportunities to develop and enhance social and emotional skills.
- Adults are provided with opportunities to enhance their own social and emotional skills.
- Staff recognise the significance of social and emotional skills to effective learning and to the well-being of pupils.
- Pupils who would benefit from additional support have access to small group work.
- There is a strong commitment to involving pupils in all aspects of school life.
- There is a strong commitment to working positively with parents and carers.
- The school engages well with other schools, the local community, wider services and local agencies

(National Strategies SEAL Priorities, 2009-2011)

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning: commentary and critical perspectives

The importance given during the last 5-7 years to a centrally driven, formal programme concerning the emotional aspects of learning represents a recognition that, even at a time when there is a raised consciousness about pupil achievement in English schools (and its international comparison with other countries in performance tables). The tradition of emphasising the emotional well-being of learners is well established in secondary schools of course, usually via their provision in 'pastoral care', and this chapter has clearly not offered a summary of this (see Hamblin, 1993, for a brief overview). Nor does it comprise coverage of the long-established theories that inform emotional development amongst young people in social contexts, including within educational settings (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). What has been apparent in recent times, however, is that an emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of learning has become an increasingly important aspect of intervention in the field of pupil behaviour. This has brought with it a range of implications, opportunities and challenges for secondary schools.

The SEAL approach is notable in that it gives structured, formal attention to the so-called 'hidden 'E' in EBD' (Bowers, 2005), in which a greater understanding of the meaning and purpose of behaviour; this in turn allows the teacher to recognise that some pupils behave inappropriately in order to communicate their feelings, not just about their classroom experiences but about circumstances outside of formal schooling which impact on their sense of well-being. The focus on SEAL emerged at a time when another important theory regarding pupils' social engagement in schools - behaviour for learning (Ellis & Tod, 2009) - was being highlighted. Again, this was not 'new', in as much as theories connecting behaviour and learning have been a characteristic of the study and practice of education for centuries, 'behaviour for learning' draws together a triumvirate of 'relationships' which inform pupil responses to schooling. *Relationship with Self* and *Relationship with Others* within the Behaviour for Learning conceptual framework can be viewed respectively as representing the intra- and inter- personal elements that are reflected in the five skill areas identified as being central to the SEAL approach.

However, the two are connected in as much as the understanding of 'self' in behaviour for learning is largely informed by a recognition that social behaviours and academic behaviours by children in schools cannot be separated.

One feature of the SEAL approach at KS3 & 4 is the extent to which Weare's remarks suggesting that it is best used in a flexible way have been apparent in secondary schools. Moreover, it is clear that many schools have used SEAL-related resources to supplement already well established interventions and ways of working (OfSTED, 2008). This fact was noted by OfSTED (2007) in their evaluation of SEAL through the observation that 'Separating what the pilot had achieved from the range of other initiatives in which the schools were involved was difficult' (p.5).

A subsequent national evaluation of SEAL (Humphrey et al, 2010) obtained mixed results. These authors reported that

'in terms of impact, our analysis of pupil-level outcome data indicated that SEAL (as implemented by schools in our sample) failed to impact significantly upon pupils' social and emotional skills, general mental health difficulties, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems, emotional skills and general mental health difficulties (indicating the possibility of a 'SEAL effect')'.(p.2).

This finding was, however, qualified by the variations that these researchers had uncovered in the ways that SEAL was being implemented across the schools sampled in their study. And in sharp contrast to these negative summations, the same research team was able to comment that

'school climate data also showed a significant increase in pupils' feelings of autonomy and influence, and this was supplemented by anecdotal examples of positive changes in general outcomes (e.g. reductions in exclusion), as well as more specific improvements in behaviour, interpersonal skills and relationships'. (p3)

These positive observations echoed earlier inspection findings of the SEBS initiative (OfSTED, 2007) which remarked that 'in a short period of time, the pilot has demonstrated that schools can make a positive difference in developing pupils' social, emotional and behavioural skills' (p.5). The same report provides a useful synopsis of the benefits to whole schools and individual teachers in adopting a

coherent, but flexible and well-supported SEAL-related programme. Briefly adapted, the key points are that SEAL-related programmes:

- work most successfully when senior leaders understand their core underlying philosophy. ‘Bolt-on’ approaches to personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons are largely ineffective.
- impact most effectively in schools with a strong and clearly articulated ethos.
- develop teachers’ understanding of pupils’ emotional and social development which improves interaction between them and pupils
- assist in developing pupil ‘resilience’, teamwork skills and a willingness to take risks in their learning.
- develop most best in schools where pupil behaviour is the initial focus - understanding how to develop SEAL skills, comes later.
- adopt reliable monitoring and evaluation processes to enable teachers to select an appropriate starting points and adapt the focus as necessary
- systematically address staff concerns that SEAL-type would increase their workloads and possibly undermine pupil attainment
- recognise that a focus on ‘social and emotional aspects of learning’ is linked with, and substantially overlaps, all other aspects of whole-school provision

One feature of SEAL that has raised professional debate is its application to whole-school environments, as compared to its relevance for individual pupils. The literature regarding this highlights the differences between those programmes that regard to be universally applicable (to all pupils) and those that are targeted at identified pupils – who are often ‘at risk’ of, or already presenting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Wells, Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2003). The National Strategies adopted this kind of approach, enshrined within its ‘waves of intervention’ model.

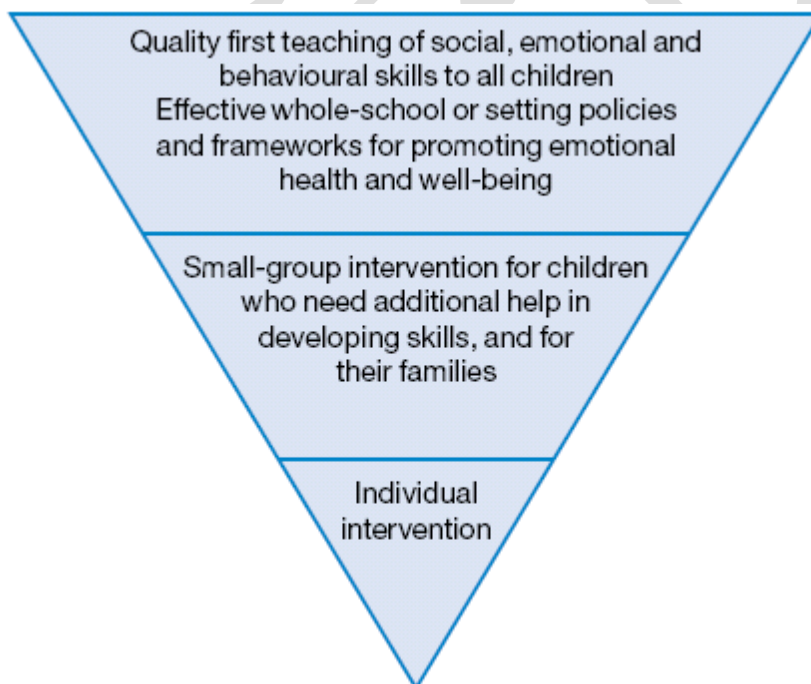


Figure 1. National Strategies’ waves of intervention model (taken from DfES, 2005).

In the above diagram, the whole-school application of SEAL equates to the Wave 1 interventions. A number of issues are raised by this. In the first place, there is a heavy reliance on whole-staff connecting with the philosophy of SEAL and its meaning and usefulness for individual teachers in classrooms. This can have the positive effect of helping to make pupil behaviour ‘everybody’s business’, rather than it being the responsibility of a designated member of a leadership team, or

middle-manager. Collective staff 'buy-in' to a way of working which is informed by the core beliefs of SEAL can thus be a powerful determinant of a school's ethos and culture. But such a sense of ownership is difficult to engender if there is a sense (amongst some teachers in the school at least) that SEAL is an approach which fails to target those pupils who appear to be frequently implicated in incidents of unacceptable behaviour.

This, in turn, gives rise to some important strategic implications which need to be at the forefront of a collective SEAL approach. The first of these is that a SEAL approach does not function in isolation from other strategies designed to promote positive behaviour and manage that which is unacceptable. In particular, it does not operate separately from the school's established whole-school policy, particularly its emphasis on responsibilities and consequences and the rewards and sanctions that follow. Secondly, SEAL at whole-school level should be closely aligned with those Wave 3 interventions which are directed at specific pupils who are raising significant cause for concern. These comprise a diverse range and are usually selected by key decision-makers within schools according to their own experiences, training and professional contacts.

Finally, the application of SEAL across a whole school places an absolute premium on whole-staff professional development, which can sometimes be problematic to facilitate, given many other competing demands. However, a strategic approach to training is very necessary, as it promotes ownership and encourages the development of a solution-finding philosophy. Furthermore, the successful maintenance of SEAL initiatives requires that any training and development is accessible to all of the school work-force, so that its vital messages are reinforced throughout the school with consistency and equanimity.

But the increased recent focus on the affective aspects of learning, as emphasised in SEAL, is not without its more strident critics, however. Some observers have felt that education has been negatively influenced by what some have viewed as a 'therapeutic turn' (Hyland, 2008). The focus on such affective aspects of learning as 'self esteem' and 'emotional intelligence' in recent years has resulted, according to authors like Ecclestone & Hayes (2008), in a proliferation of interchangeable and ill-defined terms (including emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, emotional well-being, self esteem and mental health) alongside an ever-expanding list of disorders and 'syndromes'. In their terms, the 'emotional' in SEBD has become professionalised, at the expense of more traditional learning.

One of the key arguments given in support of this view is that initiatives such as SEAL have contributed to a decline in self-determination amongst young people. Examining such affective qualities as 'motivation', 'awareness' and 'empathy' promote the idea that learners are invariably viewed as being at-risk, disaffected, hard to reach or having low self-esteem. A preoccupation with SEAL-related activities, according to Ecclestone & Hayes, results in a situation which 'erodes the idea of humans as conscious agents who realise their potential for individual and social change through projects to transform themselves and their world' (p.136).

A further source of criticism comes from the high costs attributed to supporting SEAL-related programmes for schools. Thus, Ecclestone & Hayes note that large amounts of public funds are deflected towards these initiatives: "SEAL (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning) cost £10 million in 2007-8, with a further £31.2 million earmarked over the next three years. Anti-bullying schemes cost £1.7 million a year, while peer mentoring currently receives £1.75 million. Another £60 million was added in July 2007 to educational expenditure for schools to improve emotional well-being, phased over the next three years to be £30 million in 2010-2011. In October 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced £60 million for 25 pilot projects to introduce therapeutic interventions in schools for children at risk of mental ill health" (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2008, p.xii).

Summary

In spite of the critical viewpoints expressed by some, there remains a substantial body of research-based evidence to indicate the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils whose

behaviour gives cause for concern (see, for example, Rutter, et al 2001). This is supported by widespread anecdotal evidence of the positive impact of school-based interventions which enable teachers to develop ways of working which enable pupils who are 'at-risk' to become more resilient and, ultimately, more proficient learners.

An attractive feature of SEAL and its related initiatives is that it enables progress to be made in a number of important areas linked closely to managing pupil behaviour. First, the strong intimation that behaviour, learning and the emotions are all closely linked can assist in arriving at a far better understanding of the nature of the behaviour itself. As has been widely acknowledged, this allows a more purposeful and targeted intervention strategy to be identified (Garner & Gains, 1996). Secondly, because SEAL programmes are applicable to all pupils, they constitute a more inclusive approach, and are consequently less likely to reinforce negative stereotypes about 'disruptive' pupils. Noting this point, Ofsted (2007) observed that 'The programme was equally successful in the challenging contexts of lower attaining schools and in higher attaining schools located in more affluent areas' (p.19).

Whilst there is as yet insufficient evidence to support the view, a third observation is that SEAL programmes in secondary schools have a good potential to support pupils at the transition phase from primary schools. The continuities that can be developed between the two settings as a result of attention to a set of common SEAL-related themes can assist in developing pupil resilience to stressors resulting from school transition. Finally, the whole-school application of SEAL programmes also enables teachers to make connections between their classroom practices and the prevailing school culture. Again, as Ofsted points out, SEAL can 'help teachers to emphasise their school's values in practical ways in classroom organisation and teaching' (p.19).

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