Simulation and Gaming. 40th Anniversary Edition

Games as a pedagogy to promote social and emotional learning:

'It's fun and we learn things'

Robyn Hromek

The University of Sydney

Sue Roffey

The University of Western Sydney

Abstract:

This article has two broad objectives: (1) it reviews the theoretical and practical literature on the use of games to facilitate social and emotional learning (SEL), and (2) based on this review, it argues that games are a powerful way of developing social and emotional learning in young people. In addition, we draw on our collective experience as educational psychologists to identify effective practice when using games to teach SEL. The social and emotional skills needed to play successfully with others are those needed to succeed at work and in adult life. Pro-social skills involve regulating negative emotions, taking turns and sharing, support orientations to others that are fair, just and respectful. The natural affiliation between children, play and the desire to have fun with others makes games an ideal vehicle for teaching SEL. Circle Time games are used to support universal programs for teaching SEL to whole classes. Therapeutic board games provide an effective intervention for young people who have been targeted for further guided practice in small group settings. Verbatim quotations from students and teachers demonstrate ways in which SEL has generalised to real life situations. The role of facilitator is crucial to the success of this approach, both in modelling appropriate skills and making the learning connections for students. In this paper, facilitation and debriefing are deconstructed and the value of collaborative, rather than competitive, aspects of games highlighted.

Keywords: emotional literacy; experience-based learning; Circle Time; co-operative games; debriefing; facilitation; fun; games-based learning; pedagogy; resilience; school connectedness; social and emotional learning; therapeutic boardgames; wellbeing.

The Report to UNESCO for the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 1996) entitled "Learning: the Treasure Within", described

the 'four pillars of education'; 'learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be.' A few years before Salovey and Mayer (1990), building on Gardner's model of multiple intelligences (1983) began to develop the concept of emotional intelligence. In 1996 Goleman published his best-selling book on emotional intelligence and the connection between self knowledge, self management, relationship skills and success became established internationally. Although much debate still exists about the definition and parameters of social and emotional intelligence, it has sparked a new education focus on 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' often referred to as 'social and emotional learning' (SEL) or 'emotional literacy'. This has often been incorporated into a more general focus on 'student wellbeing', developed from our increasing knowledge about the protective factors that enhance resilience and good mental health (Benard, 2004; Blum, 2000).

In 1994 Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established at the University of Illinois in Chicago with a brief to provide evidence and resources to promote SEL. Their aims are to 'advance the science of SEL' and to 'expand the practice of SEL'. CASEL now has an impressive research record influencing education and mental health policies across the United States. In the UK the profile of social and emotional learning has risen incrementally over the past decade to the point where all schools, both primary and secondary are expected to follow the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning - known as the SEAL program (DfES 2005). In Australia, the concern to reduce bullying and increase student resilience, together with implementing the Framework of Values for Australian Schools has also initiated an interest in social and emotional wellbeing and learning.

With the growing interest in SEL comes the need to identify programs and practices that effectively engage students. Experience-based learning tools like games provide a forum for the development of the skill-sets, attitudes and values that build resilience and maintain wellbeing. This highly motivating approach provides the opportunity for skilled facilitators to create a safe, fun environment where social connectedness and meaningful participation are likely to occur. This paper focuses on games in two different contexts. Circle Time uses games to engage all children within a preventative model to promote positive relations and caring classroom ethos, whereas therapeutic boardgames target students who need extra guided practice in relationships in a smaller groups setting. We set out the rationale for this approach and the processes for effective implementation.

Social and emotional learning (SEL)

Social and emotional understanding and skills underpin both personal resilience and healthy relationships. Howard Gardner identified the two intelligences as intrapersonal - understanding and managing the self, and interpersonal - establishing and maintaining positive relationships (Gardner 1999). Although the following list is not exhaustive, the authors identify SEL as including the following:

- Recognising and labelling personal feelings, strengths and values;
- Knowing how to regulate and express feelings effectively and safely;
- Having a pro-social orientation to others which is not bound by pre-judgment
- Being able to read and take account of the emotional content of situations;
- Being responsible to oneself and others and making ethical decisions;
- Being able to set goals in both the short and longer term;
- Problem-solving skills, especially in the domains of personal coping and interpersonal relationships;
- Focusing on the positive;
- Respect for others, including valuing diversity;
- Treating others with care and compassion;
- Good communication skills;
- Knowing how to establish, develop and maintain healthy relationships that promote connection between individuals and groups;
- Being able to negotiate fairly;
- Having skills to de-escalate confrontation and manage conflict well;
- Being prepared to admit mistakes and seek help when needed; and
- Having personal and professional integrity demonstrated by consistently using relational values and standards to determine conduct.

Although these competencies are written here as separate, they are dynamic and overlapping and always in interaction with specific contexts (Triliva & Poulou, 2006). This makes the teaching of such skills complex and highlights the importance of pedagogy and teacher skills. Social and emotional learning may focus not only on the acquisition of knowledge and skills as in other subject areas, but also in changing or developing values, beliefs, attitudes and everyday behaviours. As can be seen from the above list, SEL is not just about individual wellbeing but also about the development of healthy relationships and caring communities. SEL takes root when it is embedded within whole-school practices that support school connectedness and student wellbeing. The congruence of the values and ethos of a school are critical to embedding such learning across the whole school community (Roffey, 2008).

So why are educators excited about SEL? What do they think it can offer? What does the research say?

Research and effective programs for SEL

Indications are that higher levels of SEL or emotional literacy can reduce subjective stress and increase feelings of wellbeing (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002), improve coping abilities, (Salovey et al, 1999), limit drug and alcohol addiction (Trinidad & Johnson, 2002), mediate aggression (Jagers et al, 2007), enhance psychosocial functioning (McCraty et al, 1999), increase school connectedness (Whitlock, 2003), reduce bullying (Bear et al 2003), and increase the capacity of students to learn (Zins et al, 2004). These results reinforce earlier research indicating that children's peer relations in school predict school success (Ladd & Price, 1987). The finding that children's social competence develops in the context of interacting with their peers is especially important as children of primary school age have fewer opportunities out of school for interacting freely with peers and thus developing social competence (Burdette, 2005).

A plethora of information exists about the need for evidence-based SEL programs, multi-year and integrated programs, principal and staff support, community involvement, co-ordination and congruence with caring school practices (Zins and Elias, 2007). Triliva and Poulou's (2006) review of studies on competence-based programs, however, reveal a lack of research on teachers' perceptions or understandings regarding the development or implementation of SEL within school settings. As it is well documented (Alvirez and Weinstein, 1999; Donahue et al, 2000) that teachers' implicit theories have a significant impact on their approaches to teaching, teachers' attitudes towards implementing SEL in schools becomes crucial.

The literature focuses on *what* should be taught in some detail but not about the *how* within the classroom. The training of teachers on the PATHS program mentions both principal support and 'implementation quality' (Kam, 2003), but provides little clarity about what 'implementation quality' means. Much of the language in schools remains based in the realm of targets, instruction and program delivery. Less information exists on pedagogy - the way in which this learning might come about and the teaching approaches that facilitate both knowledge and skills. Zins and Elias (2007) mention just one: '… addressing emotional and social dimensions of learning by engaging and interactive methods'.

However research has been conducted on what is involved in 'transformative' learning - where education is seen as the vehicle for both personal and social change. This is sometimes referred to as 'critical pedagogy' and rejects didactic methods of teaching as

technical and instrumental. Fetherston and Kelly (2007) explore a pedagogy for conflict mediation which is itself a feature of SEL in that it requires self and relationship exploration and new ways of thinking and doing. They base their thinking around cooperative learning. When students engage with content at the same time as learning/practicing pro-social skills in collaborative ventures they are employing basic conflict resolution skills to make their learning groups effective. When students are asked to reflect on group processes and skills, they are able to connect them to the course content and then to wider, deeper issues. 'Through changes in understanding and perspective, through the reframing of "problems", personal and social transformations become possible'. Elias and Weissberg (2000) contend that when SEL activities are coordinated with and integrated into the regular curriculum they are more likely to have lasting effects. A student who is discussing what a character in a story feels, or what emotion a piece of music or art conveys, is actively developing emotional understanding (Mayer and Cobb, 2000). Reading and discussing stories where the characters have to confront dilemmas with a wide range of feelings, or having students address emotions through role-plays, can provide them with a repertoire of responses to real-life situations (Norris, 2003).

Fun and games: positive emotions in learning

> "*I am so happy when we do Circle Time, it is so fun. I can't wait until next Tuesday when we will do Circle Time*" (*school student*)

Playing games and having fun are crucial to development and highly motivating to children. The natural setting of a child's game provides opportunities for language development, hypothesis testing, problem solving and the formation of thought constructs and 'scripts' that reflect the shared cognitive themes related to cultural understanding (Fromberg, 1992; Vygotsky (1976). Paramount to a child playing a game is the element of fun. Fun and humour stimulate creativity as the brain moves from a cognitive, rule bound state to a more fluid, relaxed state where the whole body is engaged in problem solving (Prouty, 2000).

> "The joy that many students seemed to experience, expressed as having fun, seemed to be tied into the way in which understanding their immediate physical and social context allowed them to make informed decisions" (Light 2002).

Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) emphasise the role of positive emotions in broadening people's capacity to learn. They say that positive emotions enhance optimistic thinking, which leads to more creative problem-solving capacities. Research also demonstrates that positive emotions have the ability 'to undo' the effects of stress and encourage both emotional and physical resilience (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004). Having fun together is a bonding experience and increases the sense of belonging to the group (Ayers et al, 2005). The psychological safety of all is an important element in having fun. The ways in which facilitators respond in a situation have a significant impact on enjoyment.

> *'There were times when students would laugh at what someone had said and we would remind them that there were no put downs in Circle Time and how would they feel if that happened to them. Eventually the students would stop laughing at each other and instead give positive feedback such as 'that's a great idea'. (University student working in a school*)

Games as a pedagogy for SEL

Until the late 1960's the dominant paradigm for teaching and learning involved information transfer by experts to learners using instruction technologies like books, lectures and articles, with success measured by written examination. While these teaching methods are common in some educational settings today, pedagogy has moved on to broader understandings of teaching and learning processes. Cognitive theorists like Vygotsky (1978), Gardner (1999) and Goleman (1996) discuss social and emotional environment and its impact on learning. Intelligence is now seen as multi-faceted, with emotional intelligence a pivotal factor. This diverse view calls for more complex approaches such as those provided by 'experience-based learning' which Ruben (1999) sees as having the potential to address the limitations of traditional paradigms. Experience-based learning is interactive and relational and uses instruction technologies like simulation, games, role-plays, case studies, scenarios, multi-media presentations, and encounter groups. It is also a pervasive and subtle process, resembling life in many ways.

Table 1 sets out what Ruben sees as the limitations of traditional paradigms and the potential for life-long learning skills offered by experience-based practices.

TRADITIONAL PARADIGM	EXPERIENCE-BASED LEARNING
Teaching and learning = stimulus and response	Learning mediated by socio-emotional and physical environments
Passive, memory-based learning	Active, collaborative, critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, evaluation
Learner watches and listens to 'expert' teacher	Learner interacts and collaborates with adults and peers
Learning viewed predominately in the cognitive domain	Learning linked to cognitive, affective and behaviour domains
Learners learn what teachers teach Standardisation leads to mediocrity	Diverse learners and environments lead to creativity
Knowledge most often assessed by written examination	Knowledge assessed as it is applied – projects, presentations, multi-media
Predictable, static and unchallenging = boring	Fun, challenging, relevant, multi-media presentation = engaging
Books, articles, lectures, examinations	Simulations, games, role-plays, case studies, encounter groups, multi-media

Table 1. Attributes of traditional and experience-based learning

Games-based learning and SEL

Games, as a form of cooperative, experience-based learning, appear to be highly motivating to young people. Games have set rules agreed by players that govern the process. Game designers can create effective tools to teach a myriad of lessons, from

mathematics to money management, from reading texts to reading people. By keeping a balance between chance, skill, strategy, hope, competition and fun, they engage the attention of young people. Every face-to-face game, no matter the objective, provides a 'social experiment' in which players must use self-regulation and social skill in order to play successfully with others. The complexity of games played by young children varies from turn-taking games, like tag, to more complex games where players require a fair degree of social and cognitive sophistication to play (Connolly et al, 1988). It is the interactional nature of games that makes them especially suitable for delivering SEL. Games designed for this purpose use strategies like discussion, role-play, and problem solving to engage players in solving social dilemmas whilst practicing social and emotional skills. Players balance personal goals with those of others while managing emotional reactions to frustration and delaying gratification in order to play collaboratively and cooperatively. After repeated interactions in such games, young people become familiar with each other and can then interact in other, more complex ways. At least one influential educational theorist (Piaget, 1962) suggests that games have important implications for children's, and especially boys', social and cognitive development. Piaget also suggests that one of the functions of childhood games is to practice working with rules and self-discipline, which ultimately underpin social order.

> *''Playground' is a really good game to get people to stop being mean to everyone. It tells you how to deal with problems and is very fun to play'* (*student*)

Games, psychodrama, role-plays and simulations have been used in various contexts to develop insight, empathy, pro-social skills and improved behaviour (Dromi and Krampf, 1986; Hromek, 2004; Porter, 1995; Sheridan et al, 1995; Tingstrom et al, 2006). Despite repeated calls for more research on games over the last 50 years children's games have surprisingly lacked empirical attention from psychologists or educators. However, Malouff and Schutte (1998) field-tested therapeutic games by evaluating the types of therapeutic experiences produced in the games and the extent to which players enjoyed them. The results supported the effectiveness of therapeutic games with children, adolescents and adults. In a meta-analysis of moral education interventions, Schaefli et al (1985) concluded that programs that involved moral dilemma discussion, psychological development, and ran for a course of 3 to 12 weeks with a skilled facilitator produced significant results.

Games-based learning and resilience

> *'This game helps me to work things out by myself and not go and tell the teacher that is on lunch duty' (student)*

Emotional resilience refers to the internal and external adjustments we make when adapting to adversity and change. Benard (2004) highlights three key features of resilience: supportive communities that foster relationships based on caring and respect; opportunities for young people to gain competence in a range of skills; and the opportunity to contribute and participate. Blum (2000) followed a cohort of children over their lifetimes and identified a range of personal, family and peer/adult factors that were common in resilient young people. The research emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for skill development and for involvement in humanitarian activities, adventure and fun. Table 2 sets out the ways in which games based learning activities have the potential to increase resilience.

RESILIENCE	GAMES-BASED LEARNING
self-efficacy	games-based learning provides opportunity to gain skills through modelling, guided practice, role-play
social skills	skill-set developed: turn-taking, listening, sharing, negotiating, resolving conflict, apologising, encouraging
emotional literacy	guided practice in identifying emotions in self and others, perspective and empathy
sense of humour	games inherently provide fun and humour
positive attitudes	solution-focused, positive interactions
average to above intelligence	thinking skills: attention, explaining, perseverance, problem solving
even temperament	emotional regulation
work success	pro-social skill-set: social skills, thinking skills, emotional regulation, perseverance
talents	confidence and skills gained through persistence in a safe environment
school: positive early experience, connectedness, academic success	positive, fun-based, democratic, collaborative
family: qualities valued by family warm relationships, connectedness	skill-set is developed for maintaining positive relationships
social opportunities: leadership, talent, positive relationships, adventure, fun, humanitarian pursuits, success, coaching responsibility	positive relationships, fun, confidence, helping skills, values clarification, moral development

Table 2. Resilience factors in children and opportunities provided by games-based learning

Cooperative and competitive learning

The pedagogy for SEL requires an approach that fosters discussion and reflection on experiences, not just reading a text book or being told what to do or think by someone in authority (Illeris, 2002). Johnson and Johnson (2004) argue that for children

> "…to establish and maintain healthy relationships and manage emotions and internalise the pro-social attitudes and values needed to set positive goals, make responsible decisions and solve problems, they must be members of a cooperative (as opposed to a competitive or individualistic) community, manage conflicts in constructive rather than destructive ways and internalise civic rather than anti-social values" (p. 41).

Small group learning is an essential component of this approach. Over a thousand research studies have documented the many benefits of cooperative learning (Benard, 2004; Marzano, 1998). Researchers have identified that cooperative learning leads to increases in academic outcomes, social skills, empathy, motivation, acceptance of diversity (racial, ethnic, physical) conflict resolution, self-esteem, self-control, positive attitudes towards school and critical thinking (Johnson et al, 2001; Slavin, 1995). Cooperative learning and cooperative group work have also been associated with lower levels of bullying, an increased ability to tolerate different perspectives on the same issue and increased levels of assertive problem-solving skills (Johnson et al, 2001; Ortega & Lera, 2000).

The 'Too good for violence' program (What Works Clearinghouse, 2006) uses role-play, collaborative learning games, small group activities and classroom discussions to effect changes in behaviour and knowledge, values and attitudes. Students are encouraged to apply their learning in different contexts. In a study of 1,000 students, significant improvements were noted in behaviour and substantial, although not significant, changes in knowledge, values and attitudes. Johnson & Johnson (1999) assert that cooperative groups lead to greater efforts to achieve learning. Team games

have a long history of promoting social-moral development although what actually happens, as with other SEL, depends on the focus, skills and attitude of the teacher or facilitator.

There is an argument that competition increases motivation but research indicates that although competing for high grades can increase the academic performance of some students, many young people are less motivated under these conditions (Meese et al, 2006). More relevant to learning is the situation where support and guidance is provided by a teacher or facilitator to someone who has done well or to someone who needs to cope with the emotions in 'losing' (Jones, 2004). These are relevant to both resilience and healthy relationships.

The continuum and context of intervention

Historically, social and emotional learning was seen as appropriate, and therefore only available, to those who had experienced crisis or had been identified as having a significant deficit. This took place in the form of individual counselling, group therapy or social skills training to address the needs of a vulnerable minority. The paradigm is now shifting to include a focus on social and emotional wellbeing at a universal level within education (DfES 2005) although there will always be students who benefit from additional support and teaching. Here we outline interventions at two ends of the spectrum using games as a pedagogical approach. Circle Time is a universal and inclusive intervention; all students within a class group participate and the facilitator is usually the class teacher. Therapeutic games are for smaller groups although these can usefully be a mix of vulnerable young people and their pro-social peers. The facilitator can be a teacher, but is more likely to be effective if they are a special needs support person, school counsellor or psychologist.

Circle Time

Circle Time (also known as Magic Circles, Circle Solutions, and Learning Circles) is a framework for group interaction based in the principles of democracy, inclusion, respect and safety. These are encapsulated in the three simple rules: You will have your turn to

speak, when it is your turn everyone will listen to you; you do not have to say anything if you don't want to, you may 'pass'; there are no put-downs, no naming, blaming or shaming (Roffey, 2006). Circle Time has a focus on the positive and has two symbiotic aims, to create a caring classroom ethos that promotes a sense of belonging and provide structured and facilitated opportunities for social and emotional learning. To be effective Circles need to be a routine part of the school week, not an occasional 'fun time' or used exclusively for problem solving. For younger students Circles take 20 minutes or so, up to 45 minutes for older students. Participants sit in a circle and are mixed up regularly to interact with others outside of their usual social groups. Activities are presented in the form of games and include paired, small group and whole group activities. These have a focus on the positive and encourage communication on important issues, such as the meaning of trust, what are the qualities of friendship and how can we, as a class group, help everyone feel safe and valued. Examples of games are:

> 1.) Class Web - where students make a web using string thrown between them until everyone is holding a section - demonstrating that each person is important to the whole;

> 2.) Pair shares in which students discuss and agree two things they have in common, such as "We feel happy in school when…" This not only focuses on similarities rather than differences between people but feedback from everyone shows that positive feelings are generated by friendship, engagement, safety, inclusion and having fun.

Circle Time enables the teacher to talk about the connection between feelings, rights and responsibilities and can lead to further small group creative activities that give students agency to address issues affecting them as a class group. When Circles are facilitated in line with the basic principles students are very enthusiastic. Teachers say it changes the way students relate to each other and that the benefits generalize outside the Circle (Roffey, 2005).

> *"You think about when you have done bad things and want to make up for it"* *(year 5 student)*

> *"The no put-downs rule has rolled over into every day"* *(teacher)*

"A student admitted to bullying and said he realized it was because he was angry because his parents were splitting up. Other kids went to comfort him and his behaviour since has totally changed." (teacher)

"Having the opportunity for this girl to tell her story of being a refugee has made a huge difference to how others have accepted her in the class." (teacher)

It also benefits teachers in that students learn strategies to resolve conflicts and relational dilemmas themselves without the need for adult intervention.

Therapeutic boardgames

Therapeutic boardgames are psycho-educational tools used to teach skills and strategies for dealing with issues like friendships, teasing, anger management, sportsmanship, anxiety, depression and happiness (Hromek, 2005). They are played with small groups of children targeted for guided practice and usually include a competent peer with pro-social skills to help come up with positive solutions. SEL is embedded on the board-faces or in the cards that are turned over during the games. The social dilemmas and challenges presented provide opportunities for behaviour rehearsal, collaboration and self-reflection. Each game becomes an 'experiment', allowing the child to make comparative observations, try new strategies and watch the 'experiments' of others from within the safety of a game. When played with a skilled facilitator they provide a safe, fun way of coaching young people in pro-social skill development and emotional regulation (Hromek, 2007).

'*The reason I like this game is that when I have a fight with my friends this game makes me feel better and tells me how to say sorry or them to say sorry to me....I think it is a good game because it is so much fun'* (*student*)

Learning appears to takes place at several levels during a therapeutic boardgame. First, the psycho-educational or *skill-element* level where players practice the social and

emotional skills embedded in the game, for example, saying something funny in response to a tease. Second, the *interactional* level where these skills are used with each other during the game, for example, when players become frustrated with each other and use self-calming strategies. Third the *mediated* level, where facilitators enhance learning with strategies like modelling, scripts or hinting at solutions. The role of the facilitator is pivotal to the success of the intervention. While primarily designed for use at the targeted level, these games can be used both to support SEL in the classroom and also as a clinical intervention with individuals who have not responded to small group work. At this clinical level playing games must be part of a broader response to meet the needs of the young person.

Facilitation and debriefing

The role of facilitation in the delivery of games-based learning is crucial to providing a motivating and safe learning environment and is arguably the most important part of the intervention (Crookall, 1995). This is especially so with games designed to enhance SEL. To this end, facilitators must present activities in an engaging manner, with 'flair and panache' and with the safety of players foremost (Jones, 1999). It is the facilitator's role to create emotionally secure environments where aims and objectives are clear, rules are applied fairly and where trust issues are explored. According to Jones, effective facilitators set the scene and 'sit back' in a curious, philosophical manner, waiting for the 'teachable moments' that present in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, explained later) in order to scaffold learning. Mistakes are welcomed as opportunities for growth through problem solving and debriefing. Debriefing provides the opportunity for players to make connections between experiences gained from playing and real-life situations.

While games-based learning has definite benefits, players and facilitators face potential risks. Klabbers (2006) uses the metaphor of the *magic circle* in which players create a real situation and feelings within the game from which they can learn about themselves and the field being explored in the game. Jones (2004) makes the point that emotions in games are often themselves feared and that teachers may not want to 'lose control' by allowing a situation in which emotions come to the surface. This means that some of the most powerful learning, for both individuals and groups, is lost. With the right approach, facilitators use debriefing as a powerful learning tool in the face of emotional crises. Understanding the players and their individual characteristics, developmental stages and their varying capacities to participate, reflect and draw conclusions is crucial for facilitators who wish to enhance the learning experience. It is

also helpful for facilitators to be aware of the types of situations that may cause stress in games, for example when players give personal opinions, disclose feelings, provide anecdotes or are put on the 'spot' (Hill & Lance, 2002). By remaining alert and responding immediately to possible issues of harm, facilitators provide a break or 'out' for participants, avoiding shame or embarrassment.

The experiential learning described here directly addresses rather than sidelines the emotions that are, whether we admit it or not, always present in any learning situation and explores options for both personal and interpersonal responses. By engaging in games for social and emotional learning, teachers as facilitators may learn skills that enable them to more effectively address the emotions in the classroom, thereby both embedding social and emotional learning throughout the school day and harnessing a major factor in student motivation. Facilitators encourage collaboration, cooperation and perseverance amongst the players while modelling expectations.

At first, when the children would not listen the teacher would intervene and shout at them, defeating the whole purpose of Circle Time. When she fully understood the principles she changed her approach and then we saw some real changes in the students' (University student working in a school).

Orientations and approaches

Facilitators come from a wide range of backgrounds including psychologists and educators and will often be working with children who have difficulty regulating emotion and lack empathy for their peers. A particular set of values, skills and attitudes are required as set out in Table 3.

Facilitator issue	Circle Time as a universal activity for all students	Therapeutic boardgames for targetted groups
Belief	Relational values and social and emotional skills important for all	Boardgames support reflection on behaviour and coping skills
Attitude	Respectful, curious, neutral, supportive philosophical stance reduces stress and creates environments in which young people can try new	

	skills and solve problems	
Immediacy	Activities are related to what is needed in the class group with a focus on the positive.	Teachable moments arise within a game and between the players
Language	Inclusive language that is non-judgmental, encourages children to take responsibility for their actions and develop empathy for others.	
Making connections	A major role for the facilitator is commentary on the learning that is taking place, such as pointing out commonalities, shared feelings.	
Scripts	Encouragement to devise ways and words to facilitate a friendly and caring ethos	Scripts are modelled for dealing with anger, frustration and conflict
Modelling	Facilitators model courtesy, rule-keeping, turn-taking, apologizing, resolving conflict, smiling and having fun.	
Participation	The facilitator participates fully and leads games to show what is expected. Full participation maximizes the sense of belonging and equality in the class group.	
Reading and language skills	Circle Time activities are not usually dependent on literacy skills but students with language difficulties may need to be placed with supportive peers and given visual support	Poor readers may need assistance with written material. Some concepts will need to be discussed to enhance understanding
Cheating	Cheating is less likely in collaborative games and within a Circle, behaviours are more observable.	A curious, philosophical attitude allows the group to decide how to respond.

Winning and losing	Competition only takes place between groups to engender a spirit of cooperation. Acknowledgement of the strengths and efforts of others - including opposing teams is part of this. Both celebration and condolence are encouraged	Winning is not the object and is not emphasized. The emphasis is on having fun. Children may, however, be interested in who finishes first or has most tokens. Acknowledge feelings that arise while using 'scripts' that suggest coping.
Managing difficult behaviour	The philosophy of Circle Time is summed up in the three rules that provide for democracy, safety and respect. When these are broken by individuals they are first repeated to the whole group. If disruption continues students are given choices to stay or leave. The focus is on inclusive practices so they may return when they wish to abide by the rules.	Rules such as turn taking, listening to others and respect are negotiated at the beginning. If the game becomes unruly, the facilitator stops play and asks what needs to happen in order to play. Players are invited back to try again. Reduce the size of the group, invite players with pro-social skills. Most players are keen to play and will cooperate.
Minimizing harm	A focus on the positive and use of the third person reduces capacity for harm. Peer pressure and repeating the rules usually stops hurtful behaviour. If this continues it may be actively addressed in the Circle with a focus on feelings. Students are discouraged from inappropriate disclosure but issues followed up.	The design of the game should not disadvantage any player. Discuss issues of trust at the beginning of the game. Address teasing or put downs immediately.
Debriefing	Circles finish with a calming activity that may summarise the learning that has taken place. Role-play games need to ensure that students return to their own identity when the game is over.	Discuss issues that arise immediately and if necessary at the end of the game. Use a life space interview if the situation warrants.
Incentives	Circle Time is a different way of being in the class and interacting with both peers and the teacher.	Young children enjoy receiving something as simple as a sticker at the end of the game. This adds to

	When the facilitator ensures that this is positive experience for everyone this in itself is highly motivating. Teachers say that students love Circle Time and are always keen.	fun and motivation and ameliorates the pain of not finishing first. Older children usually find the games intrinsically motivating

Table 3. Facilitator skills across the continuum of social and emotional learning

The Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Studies in the fields of primate cognition and artificial intelligence draw on the theories of Lev Vygotsky about the mind. Vygotsky (1978, 1979, 1986) argued that cognitive development takes place within a dynamic interplay of socio-historic environments and bio-physical factors. He saw the mind as being constructed from the outside, through interactions with this life-space and language developing initially for social contact and control and later as *egocentric speech* which, in turn directs thinking. Language is the primary tool for mediating between the elementary mental functions (perception, attention, memory) and the higher skills (consciousness, meaning, intentionality), that is, between '*stimulus and response*'. Language scripts create helpful 'mind schema' that mediate between thoughts, feelings and behavior, thus regulating human social behaviour (Corsaro 1985, Snow 1989). This process of internalization occurs within the ZPD surrounding child and challenge. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD

> 'exists between the child's actual problem-solving skills and the level of their potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (p.86).

In this zone, facilitators mediate experience by scaffolding words and resources around the child and challenge. Scripts, hints, encouragements, explanations, models, role-plays are examples of strategies that influence the development of thought concepts and behaviours and assist the process of integration into a framework of internal

meaning. A repertoire of sample behaviours and scripts develops from which to choose future responses to challenges. Rather than simply being told what to do to solve the problem, the child develops higher mental functions while endeavoring to do so. For example, the simple question 'Who wants to go first?' creates the opportunity to earn valuable experience resolving this dilemma rather than being told who will go first. Each child is likely to want the first turn. Group members will be tackling issues of fairness and self-interest in an emotional milieu while deciding who goes first. They will be making decisions about whether to cooperate with the majority solution or to 'make a fuss' and protest their rights, prolonging the conflict and delaying the game. This opportunity would have been missed if the facilitator simply chose who would go first.

The Life Space Interview as a debriefing tool

The Life Space Interview (LSI) is a verbal technique for working with students in emotional crisis and is useful when dealing with issues that sometimes arise while playing SEL games. The LSI was initially developed by Fritz Redl (1966) and has been refined by Wood and Long (1991), Morse (1969) and Watson (1992). The LSI provides emotional support while using events surrounding a crisis to expand understanding of behaviour and the responses of others. Emotional first aid (Hromek, 2007) is applied when the young person is experiencing 'floods' of emotion. Once calm, the young person is assisted with the process of decoding the feelings behind actions, identifying central issues and discovering values like respect, fairness and justice. They are then guided through the problem-solving process to choose alternative behaviours and take steps to repair and maintain relationships. LSIs are immediate, meaningful, solution focused interviews that encourage empathy and provide emotional space for restitution. LSIs can be used as brief interventions during a game or as a private, in-depth interview afterwards. The steps of a LSI are as follows:

1. Emotional First Aid – use reflective listening to Identify and empathise with emotion, encourage use of emotional first aid strategies like having a drink of water, taking a walk, breathing evenly.
2. Focus on the incident – once emotional control has been gained, talk, listen, reflect, in order to understand the facts surrounding the incident.
3. Identify the values being defended by the young person. Decide on therapeutic goals, for example, anger management, assertive communication.
4. Problem solving and restitution – brainstorm alternatives, evaluate consequences, explore restitution, make a plan

5. Plan for success – rehearse the plan, anticipate reactions of others and accept consequences.
6. Re-enter the game/event – with a calm responsible, matter of fact attitude.

Conclusion

The power of using games to teach socio-emotional skills lies in the interactional nature of playing a game together. Games are fun to children and young people and therefore highly motivating. They provide the potential for transformative learning through social interaction, social connectedness, co-operation and collaboration and possess many of the features that encourage student wellbeing and resilience. While in the ZPD the skills and language of positive relationships are shaped and guided in meaningful ways. Clearly, a vital role exists for the facilitator to enhance the learning that is taking place within a game both at the skill-based level and at the interactional level and to provide opportunities to extend and embed this in the formal and informal curriculum and the myriad of interactions that occur in every day school life. In this paper we have presented theoretical and practical evidence to support using this highly motivating approach to teaching SEL. Based on our experience as psychologists and educators, we believe the range of experiences provided by Circle Time and therapeutic boardgames provide powerful tools to enhance SEL in children and young people.

References

Alvirez, J. and Weinstein, R.S. (1999). Early Teacher Perceptions and Later Student Academic Achievement. Journal of Educational Psychology. 91(4)

Ayers, L.R., Beyea, S.C., Godfrey, M., Harper, D.C., Nelson, E.C., & Batalden, P.B., (2005). Quality Improvement Learning Collaboratives. Quality Management in Health Care. 14, (4), 234-247.

Bear, G., Manning, M., & Izzard, C.E. (2003). Responsible behaviour: The importance of social cognition and emotion. School Psychology, 18, (2), 140-157.

Benard, B. (2004). Resiliency: What have we learned? San Franscico: WestED.

Blum, R. (2000). Healthy Youth Development: Resiliency Paradigm for Adolescent Health Development, 3rd Pacific Rim Conference of the International Association for Adolescent Health: Lincoln University, Christchurch, June.

Burdette, H. (2005), Resurrecting free play in young children: Looking beyond fitness and fatness to attention, affiliation, and affect. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. 159, 46-50.

Connolly, J.A., Doyle, A.B. & Reznick, E. (1988). 'Social Pretend Play and Social Interactions in Preschoolers'. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology. 9, 301-313.

Corsaro, W. A. (1985). Friendship and culture in the early years. Ablex Publishing Company, Norwood, New Jersey.

Crookall, D. (1995). Debriefing: The key to learning from simulation/games. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Delors, J. (1996). Learning: The Treasure Within. Paris: International Commission on Education for the Twenty First Century, UNESCO.

DfES. (2005). Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning. Nottingham: DCSF Publications Centre.

Donahue, K.M., Weinstein, R.S., Cowan, C.P. (2000). Patterns of Teachers' Whole Class Perceptions and Predictive Relationships between Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Individual Child Competence. Early Childhood Research Quarterly. 15(30), 279-305

Dromi, G.P. & Krampf, Z. (1986). Programming Revisited: The Miftan Experience. Social Work with Groups. 9, 91-105.

Eisenberg (1998). Handbook of Child Psychology. John Wiley & Sons

Elias M.J. & Weissberg J.P. (2000). Primary Prevention: Educational Approaches to Enhance Social and Emotional Learning. Journal of School Health. 70, (5), 186-90.

Fetherston, B. & Kelly, R. (2007). Research Project on Learning in Higher Education Conflict Resolution and Transformative Pedagogy: A Grounded Theory. Journal of Transformative Education. 5, 262-285.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive Emotions Trigger Upward Spirals Toward Emotional Well-being. Psychological Science. 13, 172-175.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Tugade, M. (2004). Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 86, (2), 320-33.

Fromberg, D.P. (1992). A Review of Research on Play. In Seefeldt, C. (Ed), The Early Childhood Curriculum: A Review of Current Research (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of Mind: the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. New York: BasicBooks.

Gardner. H. (1999). Intelligence Reformed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century, New York: Basic Books.

Goleman, D. (1996). Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hetherington (1983). Handbook of Child Psychology. John Wiley & Sons.

Hill, J.L. &Lance, C.G. (2002). Debriefing stress. Simulation & Gaming. 33, (No. 4), 490-503.

Hromek, R.P. (2004). Planting the Peace Virus: Early Intervention to Prevent Violence in Schools. Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishing.

Hromek, R.P. (2005). Game Time: Games to Promote Social and Emotional Resilience for Children Aged 4-14. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Hromek, R.P. (2007). Emotional Coaching: A Practical Programme to Support Young People. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Illeris, K. (2002). The Three Dimensions of Learning: Contemporary theory in the tension field between the cognitive, emotional and social. Roskilde University Press

Jagers, R.J., Morgan-Lopez, A.A., Howard, T., Browne, D.C., Flay, B.R. & Aya, A. (2007). Mediators of the development and prevention of violent behavior. Prevention Science. 8, 171–179

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R.T. (2004) "Cooperative Learning and Social Psychology: The Interrelationship Among Theory, Research, and Practice," Symposium: Efforts to Bridge Social Psychology and Education, Harris Cooper, Chair, Society of Experimental Social Psychology, Annual Conference, Dallas, October 15-16, 2004.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Stanne, M.B. (2001). Cooperative learning methods: a meta-analysis <http://www.clcrc.com/pages/cl-methods.html>

Jones, K. (1999). With Appropriate Panache. Simulation & Gaming: An Interdisciplinary Journal. 30, (3), 327-331.

Jones, K. (2004), Fear of emotions. Simulation & Gaming: An Interdisciplinary Journal. 35, (4), 454-460.

Kam, C., Greenberg, M.T. & Walls, C.T. (2003). Examining the Role of Implementation Quality in School-Based Prevention Using the PATHS Curriculum. Prevention Science. 4, (1), 55-63.

Klabbers, J.H.B. (2006). The magic circle: Principles of gaming and simulation. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Ladd, & Price, (1987) Predicting Children's Social and School Adjustment Following the Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten Child Development: Special Issue on Schools and Development. 58 (5): 1168-1189

Light, R. (2002). First Experiences of Teaching Games for Understanding. The Social Nature of Games: Australian Pre-service Primary Teachers. European Physical Education Review. 8, 286-304.

Malouff, J. & Schutte, N. (1998). <u>Games to Enhance Social and Emotional Skills: Sixty-Six Games That Teach, Adolescents and Adults Skills Crucial to Success in Life</u>. Springfield Illinois: Hares C. Thomas.

Marzano, R.J. (1998). <u>A theory-based meta-analysis of research on instruction</u>. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Mayer, J. & Cobb, C. (2000). Educational Policy on Emotional Intelligence: Does it Make Sense? <u>Educational Psychology Review</u>. <u>12</u>, (2), 163–83.

McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., Tomasino, D., Goelitz, J. & Mayrovitz, H.N. (1999). The impact of an emotional self-management skills course on psychosocial functioning and autonomic recovery to stress in middle school children. <u>Journal of Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science</u>. <u>34</u>, (4), 246-268.

Meese, J.L., Anderman, E.M & Anderman, L.H. (2006). Classroom Goal Structure, Student Motivation, and Academic Achievement. <u>Annual Review of Psychology</u>. <u>57</u>, 487-503.

Morse, W. (1969). Training Teachers in Life Space Interviewing. In Dupont, H. (ed.) <u>Educating Emotionally Disturbed Children</u>. New York: Holt & Rinehart.

Norris, J. (2003). Looking at Classroom Management Through a Social and Emotional Learning Lens. <u>*Theory into Practice*</u> <u>42</u>, (4), 313–18.

Ortega, R. & Lera, M.J. (2000). The Seville anti-bullying in school project. <u>Aggressive Behaviour</u>. <u>26</u>, 113-123.

Piaget, J. (1962). <u>Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood</u>. New York: W.W. Norton.

Porter, D. B. (1995). Computer games: Paradigms of Opportunity. <u>Behavior Research Methods, Instruments and Computers</u>. <u>27</u>, 229-234.

Prouty, D. (2000). Creativity. <u>Zip Lines: The Voice for Adventure Education</u>, <u>40</u>, 9-11.

Redl, F. (1966). <u>When We Deal With Children</u>. New York: The Free Press.

Roffey, S. (2005). <u>Promoting relationships and resilience: Effective processes for the implementation of Circle Time</u>. Unpublished Paper

Roffey, S. (2006). <u>Circle Time for Emotional Literacy</u>. London: Sage.

Roffey, S. (2008). Emotional literacy and the ecology of school wellbeing. <u>Educational and Child Psychology.</u> <u>25</u>, (2), 29-39

Ruben, B.D (1999). Simulation, Games, and Experience-Based Learning: The Quest for a New Paradigm for Teaching and Learning. Simulation & Gaming: An Interdisciplinary Journal. 30, (4), 498-505.

Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional Intelligence: Imagination, Cognition and Personality. New York: Harper.

Salovey, P., Beddell, B.T., Detwieler. J.B. & Mayer, J.G. (1999). Coping Intelligently. Emotional Intelligence and the Coping Process. In Snyder, C.R. (ed) Coping: The Psychology of What Works. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schaefli, A., Rest, J. R., & Thoma, S. J. (1985). Does moral education improve moral judgement? A meta-analysis of intervention studies using the defining issues test. Review of Educational Research, 55, 319-352.

Sheridan, M.K., Foley, G.M. & Radlinski, S.H. (1995). Using Supportive Play Model: Individualised Intervention in Early Childhood Practice. New York, London: Teachers College Press.

Slaski, M. & Cartwright, S. (2002). Health, performance and emotional intelligence: an exploratory study of retail managers. Stress and Health. 18, (2), 63-68.

Slavin, R. (1995). Enhancing intergroup relations in schools: cooperative learning and other strategies. In Hawley, W. and Jackson, A. (eds) Toward a Common Destiny: Improving Race and Ethnic relations. 291-314. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Smilansky, S. & Shefatya, L. (1990). Facilitating Play: A Medium for Promoting Cognitive, Socio-emotional and Academic Development in Young Children. Gaithersburg, MD: Psychosocial and Educational Publications.

Snow, C.E. (1989). Understanding social interaction and language acquisition: Sentences are not enough. In M.H. Bornstein and J.S. Bruner (Ed.), Interaction in Human Development. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 83-103.

Tingstrom, D.H., Sterling-Turner, H.E. & Wilczynski, S.M. (2006). The Good Behaviour Game: 1969 2002. Behavior Modification. 30, (2), 225-253.

Triliva, S. & Poulou, M. (2006). Greek Teachers' Understandings and Constructions of What Constitutes Social and Emotional Learning. School Psychology International. 27, 315

Trinidad, D.R. & Johnson, C. A. (2002). The association between emotional intelligence and early adolescent tobacco and alcohol use. Personality and Individual Differences. 32, (15), 95-105.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1976) 'Play and its Role in the Mental Development of the Child'. In J. S. Bruner, A. Jolly, and K. Sylvia (Eds.), Play – Its role in development and evolution, 537-554. New York: Basic Books.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1934).

Vygotsky, L. S. (1979) 'Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behavior', Soviet Psychology. 16, (4), 3-35. (Original work published 1925).

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). Thought and Language. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1934).

Watson, I. (1992). Techniques for Helping and Controlling Children who Hate: The Craft of Fritz Redl. Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling. 2, (1).

What Works Clearinghouse (2006). Too Good for Violence. What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report. Rockville: Web site: http://www.whatworks.ed.gov

Whitlock, J. (2003). ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence: Research Facts and Findings. A collaboration of Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the New York State Center for School Safety, Fostering School Connectedness.

Wood, M. & Long, N. (1991). Life Space Intervention. Austen, Texas: PRO-ED.

Zins, J. E. & Elias, M. J. (2007). Social and Emotional Learning: Promoting the Development of All Students. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation. 17, (2), 233-255.

Zins, J.E., Weissberg, R.P., Wang, M.C., & Walberg, H.J. (2004). Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What does the research say? New York: Teachers College Press.