

Is SEAL being lost in the “Theme Park?”

The SEAL Primary National Strategy is one of the most exciting initiatives to come out from the DfES over recent years...but is it having its desired effect?

Children’s social development and emotional well-being are vitally important if we are to enable children to achieve their maximum potential. SEAL is a programme which aims to develop the underpinning skills that help promote self esteem, positive behaviour and effective learning.

It focuses on **five social and emotional aspects** of learning, from this point referred to as the **five SEALs**:



SEAL supports the excellent work going on in the many schools that give systematic attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning through their whole-school ethos; initiatives such as Healthy Schools, Circle Time, buddy systems or R time; and the taught PSHE and Citizenship curriculum. The materials found in SEAL help children develop skills such as understanding another’s point of view, working in a group or pairs, sticking at things when they get difficult, resolving conflict and managing worries.

The materials are organised into **seven themes**:

- New beginnings.
- Getting on and falling out.
- Say no to bullying.
- Going for goals.
- Good to be me.
- Relationships.
- Changes.

Each theme is designed for a whole school approach and includes assemblies and suggested follow-up activities in all areas of the curriculum. These themes will lead to interesting discussions, debate and revelations, helping the participants to come to terms with some of the important and fundamental aspects of growing up.

However, the impact will be less significant if the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning aren’t explored, valued, discussed and applied to the whole process.

There is a concern that the **seven themes** can become more prominent than the **five SEALs**. It is vital that there is a balanced approach. It can be too easy to teach to the seven themes allowing them to mask the importance of the **five SEALs**, which need to be placed back at the centre of this very important initiative. If we just teach the themes we are ‘short changing’ ourselves as well as the children we are working with.

The **five SEALS** need to be examined a little more closely to understand how they underpin the seven themes. If the programme is not used appropriately then its effectiveness as a means of promoting positive behaviour and effective learning will be diminished.

What do the **five SEALS** encompass?

1) **Managing feelings:**

Children will experience many feelings as they move through their childhood and adolescence into the realms of adulthood. There are eight key feelings: Anger, Sadness, Fear, Enjoyment, Love, Surprise, Disgust and Shame, to which all other feelings are related – e.g. Shame is related to embarrassment; Fear is related to anxiety etc.

It is important that these emotions are explored and recognised as part of the 'growing up' experience. The sooner children can identify these emotions the easier it can become to deal with them.

R time creates opportunities for children to become familiar with these feelings, helping them to come to terms with managing them. It teaches skills, which enable children to *manage their feelings*. These skills include acceptance, respect, valuing differences in others and how to handle conflict situations.

2) **Motivation:**

How can we foster and promote motivation? The following list will help identify some of the factors that will encourage motivation.

- a) **Setting goals.** All the R time activities have goals that the children work towards - ranging from acceptance of their partner to establishing a working relationship that enables the designated activity to be achieved in the most productive of ways.
- b) **Finish what you start.** The R time process itself is neatly contained in a beginning and end format – from the initial greeting to the formal thank you. In addition to this the activities themselves, designed to be brief as well as easily achievable for children of all abilities, have a defined starting and finishing point. The R time activities are fun and easily completed providing an in-built success/ feel good factor with every child having the opportunity to succeed and make their own contribution within each session.
- c) **Socialising with others who have a similar interest.** By its very nature the R time process creates opportunities to socialise with your partner. The activities require the participants to become involved in a shared experience through discussion, doing a practical task together or using their imaginations together.
- d) **Seeing the practical application of something learnt.** When children have 'owned' something that they have been taught and can use this

learning in practice, this is a motivating experience. Many of the R time activities enable this to happen

- e) **Taking risks.** The very fact that the children work in random pairs could constitute a risk element. However, in all the evaluation carried out on the R time programme, the excitement and enjoyment of working with someone you might not choose is something children really enjoy and they certainly rise to that challenge.
- f) **Celebrating and rewarding achievement.** The plenary part of the R time sessions provide opportunities for the outcomes of the children's work to be acknowledged by adults and their peers. When they can see that their contributions are being listened to and valued this will be motivational.
- g) **Having fun.** Enjoying, as well as having a good working knowledge of a given area of work will motivate children. R time is an area of work that almost without exception brings real enjoyment as well as fun.

3. Empathy - or the art of being in someone else's shoes.

There are three important ingredients of an empathic nature:

- i) The ability to want to understand others.
- ii) The willingness to be understood yourself.
- lii) The attitude to allow 1 and 2 to influence your actions, words and thoughts.

A simple example from an R time session. (Year 3):

The children were asked to greet their randomly given partner with an hello used in conjunction with the name of the child. One of the girls raised her hand and said she had a problem that her partner could not speak any English. Her remedy was to offer to shake her partners hand as a way of overcoming the language barrier yet still enabling both children to greet one another.

For children to begin the process of empathy there needs to be opportunities for the children to engage with one another. For only by getting to know others can children begin to explore and come to terms with the ability to communicate and relate and a level beyond the very superficial.

R time creates a safe process that enables the children to feel comfortable and confident with their work partners. As their confidence grows so does the willingness of children to relate with others they would not naturally choose to be with. The children are enabled to understand their own and others feelings, seeing things from the viewpoints of others - *leading to empathy.*

4. Self awareness:

A simplistic view of self awareness can be best explained in four ways:

- a. Getting to know about self.
- b. Getting to know about your strengths.
- c. Getting to know and come to terms with your limitations.
- d. Knowing enough about yourself that you can adapt and make changes.

As you grow in self awareness, you will better understand why you feel what you feel and why you behave as you behave. That understanding then provides the opportunity and freedom to change those things you'd like to change about yourself and create the life you want. Without fully knowing who you are, self acceptance and change becomes more difficult.

5. Social skills:

The whole R time philosophy is about teaching, modelling and appreciating social skills. A socially well adjusted child will almost certainly be a valued member of society. First and foremost R time is predicated on the importance of building accepting, respectful friendships between the children. Via the activities it models ways for the children to support one another, enabling children to succeed in one-to-one relationships – *leading to social skills*.

What is key in promoting good social skills?

- **Effective communication.**

Effective communication involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding in an appropriate way. To know that communication is a two-way process.

Communication is not just about the words used but also the manner in which they are spoken, the body language and above all the effectiveness with which listening takes place. To know how to listen to others making them feel valued and involved.

R time not only expects and demands these skills but teaches them, recognising for many these skills need to be taught and refined as well as caught and developed.

Through the emphasis on random pairing, with appropriately structured activities that rely heavily on the spoken word, the participants quickly appreciate the need for effective communication. This is not forced but often happens as a necessary 'by-product' of the need to get the best from the designed activities whether they are talking, pretend or practical ones.

- **The ability to be comfortable in the company of others:**

Equally important in the developing of social skills is the ability to feel at ease in the company of others. This situation can be brought about in a number of ways and all help to create an atmosphere of trust, respect as well as self worth.

In its most simplistic form there are three ways that can help you to relax with others

- i) Organise yourself so you can feel comfortably physically.
- ii) Organise yourself so you can relax mentally.

iii) Organise yourself so you can make decisions that will help you as well as others.

So how can the process and practise of R time help children to be comfortable with each other?

One of the key factors in creating a relaxed atmosphere is to set clearly identifiable ground rules that all the children need to know and work with. The key rule for R time is: **'To show good manners at all times'**. This rule underpins the whole R time approach. This well established ground rule is taught, modelled, valued and used by all and quickly creates an acceptance that having good manners is not only beneficial but 'cool'.

The whole issue of good manners can be explored and developed, depending on the age of the children, creating an environment that enables the majority of the children to feel comfortable knowing that they and their peers are working together as one.

As part of the 'getting to know' philosophy of R time the children are not only encouraged to share ideas, thoughts, knowledge, resources and activities, there is also the necessary ingredient of sharing about themselves. This can be done through all the 5 different component parts of R time and becomes an essential ingredient of creating that friendly classroom ethos so clearly verbalised in the statement; **'Thanks to R time I've now got friends I don't even like'**. (Karan, aged 9 years)

How does R time help to address the five SEALs?

R time basically is an approach, a process, which enables the SEAL themes to be explored in a way that will teach the SEAL skills at the same time as the themes are being addressed.

R time has 5 component parts and each of them have in-built opportunities to maximise the potential of the **five SEALs**. In fact, as R time is a process, so are the five SEALs.

- 1) **Random Pairing:** By definition this will help children to, first and foremost, develop their social skills. This is not, as some may think, a throwing the children into the deep end, it is a support mechanism enabling children to be effective in their communication. It will help children to share about themselves as well as creating the relaxed atmosphere in which to do so. (Key opportunity to experience **Social Skills**; though others will also be practised).
- 2) **The Greeting Time:** Where the children are asked to demonstrate their 'Sharing, Caring and Staring' (Appropriate eye contact). Once again children are being asked to use and develop their social skills as well as starting to explore the whole issue of managing feelings (After all they could be with someone they don't want to be with, or they are disappointed they weren't

with their best friend etc.) (Key opportunity to experience **Empathy**; and **Managing Feelings**; though others will also be practised).

- 3) **The Activity time:** Whether it be a practical approach, or a talking emphasis, or an imaginary exploration the children will touch on a range of experiences – many being found in the motivating section of SEAL.
The children will be set goals that they will work on together.
They will be encouraged to finish what they start.
As they work together there will be the realisation that the shared activity will almost certainly help in promoting a positive working relationship.
the children will start to take ‘safe’ risks with each other as they begin to explore their own knowledge, talents and interests in working towards the successful completion of the given task. (Key opportunity to experience **Motivation**; though others will also be practised).
- 4) **The Plenary:** Creates a wonderful opportunity for the facilitator of the session to tease out some of the vital contributions made by the children as they work together in a structured as well as non-threatening environment. Where better to highlight the empathetic nature of the way the children worked together. Or how the strengths of individuals enabled the group to tackle the task so successfully. (Key opportunity to experience **Empathy**; though others will also be practised).
- 5) **The Thank You:** The best meals will often leave a pleasant feeling long after they’re finished. What better way can the children feel good about their successful partnership than with a pleasant and positive parting. Once again the social skills are highlighted by the way the children say their farewells, again exploring some of the key emotional aspects of successful citizenship. (Key opportunity to experience **Self awareness**; though others will also be practised)

The R time process has much to commend it and in the hands of aware practitioners the necessary focus on promoting the **five SEALs** will not be left to chance.

The five SEALs matched to the R time process (using an activity from R time to Support SEAL)		
What kind of activity is this?	Talking activity	This activity supports the Say No to Bullying SEAL theme.
Resources	The anti-bullying poster S.T.O.P. (<i>at the back of the R time to Stop Bullying book</i>).	
Random Pairing	Children are paired randomly	Managing Feelings (Surprise) Motivation (Taking risks) Social Skills (Socialising with others)
Introduction	I’m really pleased to be with you today - ----- (<i>insert partner’s name</i>).	Managing feelings (Enjoyment) Motivation (Taking risks) Empathy (Making your partner feel comfortable and able to join in). Self Awareness (coming to terms with self).

		Social Skills: (Ability to feel comfortable with others; effective communication).
Activity	Remind the children that S.T.O.P means two things: a) A definition of bullying: Several Times On Purpose. b) A response: Start Telling Other People. What sort of things does a bully do? Where does a bully do those things? Who should we tell that can help us? Give the children thinking time, as well as discussion time, for each of the three questions.	Managing Feelings (This subject can evoke a range of feelings). Motivation (Setting a goal; finishing what you start; socialising with others with a similar interest; good subject knowledge). Empathy (Listening and understanding another's point of view) Self Awareness (Get to know about your strengths). Social Skills: (Effective communication).
Plenary	Where in the school can we put these S.T.O.P. signs? How big shall we make them? Do you think they will help?	Empathy (Ability to understand others and the circumstances that individuals may experience). Motivation (celebrating and rewarding achievement; application of knowledge)
Conclusion	I think the signs will be really helpful ---- - <i>(insert partner's name)</i> .	Self awareness (by working together one's strengths and limitations are appreciated and confronted) Motivation (Finishing what you have started) Social skills (Effective communication).

R time resources:

- R time Main Manual – price £50. This has 210 R time activities for all ages from Nursery to Year 6. It contains the theoretical background to R time, how to use the R time Questionnaire, and how to use R time to achieve its full potential.
- R time to Support SEAL – price £45, contains 168 R time and extension activities, matched to the seven SEAL themes, for all ages from Nursery to Year 6.
- R time to Stop Bullying – price £25 has a range of activities and assemblies which support the Say No to Bullying SEAL theme.
- T time to support transition from Primary to Secondary School – price £20 contains a range of activities, for Years 6 and 7, exploring the excitements, challenges and concerns involved in this key transition. It supports the Changes and New Beginnings SEAL themes.

Training:

The two R time consultants provide day conferences, workshops, school-based training – all of which include an emphasis on SEAL – especially the **five SEALs**.

For further information, or to order any of the above:

- Contact Greg Sampson – gregsrtime@hotmail.com; Phone/ Fax 024 7665 9393 or 07946 333321; Write to 55, Garth Crescent, Binley, Coventry CV3 2PP
- Pete Harvey – pete@peteharvey1945.wanadoo.co.uk; Phone 0116 277 1458 or 07981 785656; Write to 4, Enderby Road, Blaby, Leicestershire LE8 4GD.

Or visit the R time website : www.rtime.info