



## ADVANCING FUTURES

Education for Sustainable Development and Citizenship



### Empathy makes the world go round... by Anna Hasper

The well-known psychologist and educational reformer Dewey once wrote that education is not only about what one knows, it is as much -if not more- about influencing the kind of person one will become. Not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. Getting along with others, in the classroom and beyond, is an essential life skill. In this blog you will find some practical activities to help grow young learners' social awareness, but first let's explore what social emotional learning is and why it matters.

#### The learning context

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional learning (CASEL) framework highlights 5 areas:

- **Self Awareness** - being able to identify and understand one's emotions
- **Self management** - being able to manage one's emotions and behaviours
- **Social awareness** - being able to understand other people's views
- **Relationship skills** - the ability to have positive relationships with others
- **Responsible decision making** - the ability to make well-informed decisions



macmillan  
education

## Why does SEL matter for learning?

No one is born with the ability to regulate their emotions (Corry, 2009). Most young learners develop these skills in their home environment, but not everyone has the opportunity to grow these essential life skills.

However, social-emotional skills are important not only for enhanced academic performance, but also to enable effective social interactions, in and beyond the classroom. For example, to respect and value diversity and promote a sense of belonging in the classroom learners need to first become aware of their own emotions that drive their behaviour and how this behaviour can affect their friendship.

## SEL and Global Citizenship Education

According to CASEL, SEL is:

*the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.*



As such SEL is one of the pillars supporting Global Citizenship Education in promoting human rights, gender equality, peace and non-violence and valuing cultural diversity. Global citizenship requires us to be prepared to listen to a range of attitudes, which might mean holding back emotions that may impact negatively on others, and pausing before acting to anticipate the consequences of our actions on the world around us. All this relates to being socially aware, one of the key components of SEL.

## Social awareness

To enable young learners to become active citizens in the future in our diverse global world, they need to become aware of their role in communication with others. Social awareness is the ability to recognise, identify and understand the thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours of others as well as the impact of one's own behaviour on others (CASEL). Empathy plays a key role in being socially aware as well as in getting along with others, in and beyond the classroom.

## Empathy

Empathy relates to being able to take on different perspectives and have empathy for others, even those who are different from us (Gueldner et al., 2020). This is vital for creating an inclusive classroom, building friendship and collaborating with learners from diverse cultures or with diverse needs and abilities. Children who have developed empathy often work better together in class and can communicate more effectively beyond the English language classroom than those who only care about themselves. So how can we strengthen empathy in the YL classroom? The following are some activities for you to use in the classroom.



## Activities

These activities are written with young learners in mind, however, no one is better able to decide if these activities are appropriate for your learners in your context, so please adapt them as needed. Also, as with all learning activities a supportive classroom culture has to be established first so learners feel safe enough to participate.

To start you could introduce the concept of empathy in a developmentally-appropriate way by asking learners to hold their hand in line with their nose, thumb touching the tip of their nose. Then ask them to close both eyes and open only one, before switching and opening the other. Do they see things that are exactly the same? No, and that is okay.



## 1 - Walk of Fame - Getting to know you

Getting to know learners is essential for creating a supportive learning environment. However, this activity is also an excellent springboard to notice that everyone is different. Get learners to trace one foot. Tell learners to write in their toes- starting with their big toe: their name, age, birth month & date, how many people they live with at home, and their favourite food. On the board write the other topics you want learners to draw -or write, depending on their level- about in their foot. Select 3 or 4. For example:

- I feel happy/ sad/ scared when....
- My least favourite activity is....
- My most favourite..... is
- I love....
- I don't like....

Allow learners to be creative and colour this in, you can create a model. After cutting out their foot, create a wall where learners can hang and read the feet to find similarities and differences. Focus on how being different is okay and how these differences can make us think and feel about the same thing in a different way.

## 2 - Thinking Bubbles: exploiting story books

Storybooks can help young children to identify feelings and explore how others feel. Key is to select a book that is right for your learners' language and developmental level. Ideally, the illustrations support the story, as this might help learners explore the characters' feelings.

- Before reading, do a book walk-through. Use the images to predict the story, elicit how learners think the character(s) might feel.
- During reading, ask how the character(s) might feel now and why.
- After reading, zoom in on one emotion. Discuss if students feel the same sometimes, when. Ask what we could do to make ourselves and others feel better. Next, invite learners to draw the character. Tell learners to complete a thinking bubble from the character's perspective with e.g. *"I felt (emotions of focus)... because..... . When you feel (emotion of focus) I will (...how they can help).... "*



### 3 - Same-Different-Question: exploring images

Human beings are intensely visual (Zull, 2002). The use of images is thus not only logical to facilitate language learning, but they can also help students think from a different perspective. For this activity, make sure your images include people and are appropriate for your teaching context. [www.photosforclass.com](http://www.photosforclass.com) and [www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/eltpics/) have some excellent free images available.

The questions below can be discussed looking at an image as a whole class or in small groups, depending on students' language level:

**Same** - What is the same in your life and for this person/ these people?

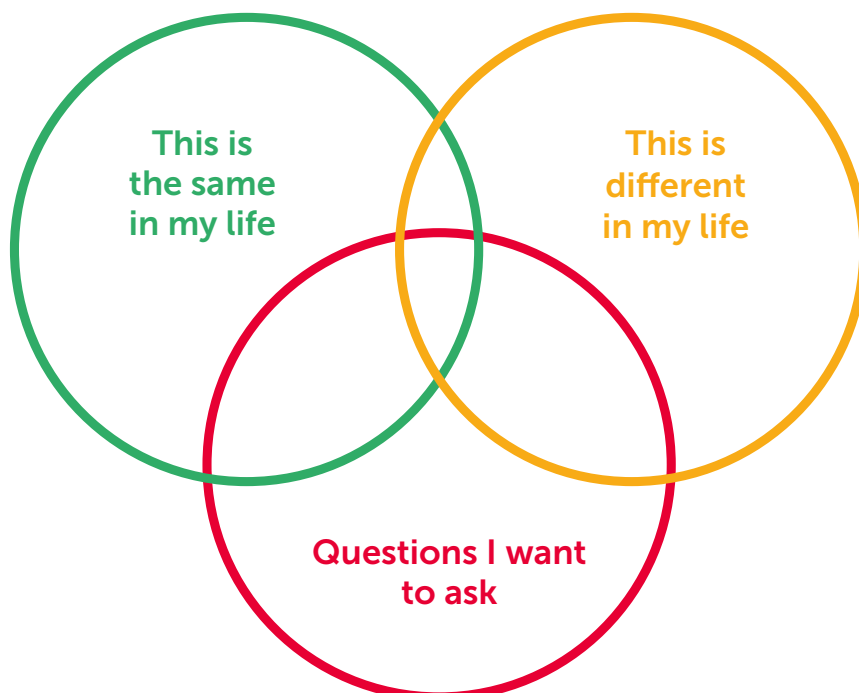
**Different** - What is different between your life and their life?

**Question** - What would you like to ask them about their life?

adapted from [https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Same%20Different%20Connect%20Engage\\_0.pdf](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Same%20Different%20Connect%20Engage_0.pdf)

**If you want to simplify the above, use the graphic organiser below:**

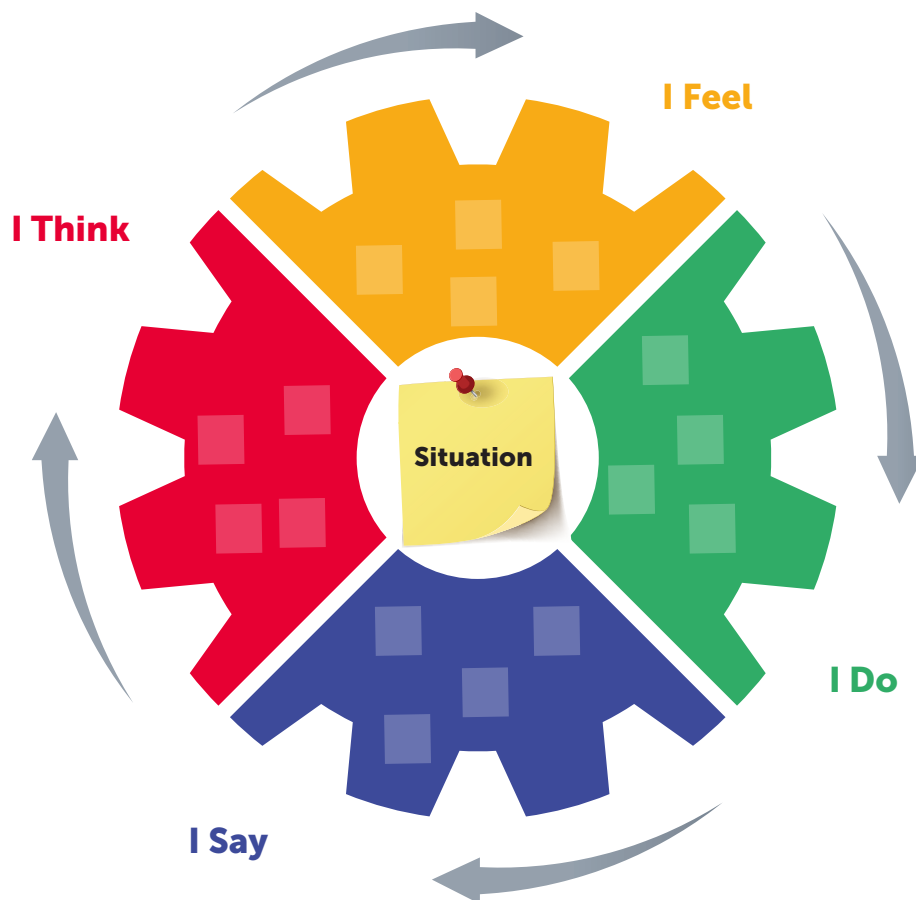
Looking through different glasses



## 4 - Using situations: An Empathy wheel

Many things are going on in children's life outside the classroom. All this can influence learner behaviour in the classroom. This activity can be based on a reading or video or a scenario that a learner might be experiencing. For example, *'a new student is starting class tomorrow,' 'someone's Mum is in hospital,' 'a child sitting alone every break.'*

- You need an A3, sticky notes and markers
- Write or draw a situation in the middle of the wheel.
- As a whole class discuss what they think this person might think; what they might do; how they might feel and what they might say to themselves. This can be done in pairs if learners have the language or if they can draw.
- Write the ideas for each category (think, feel etc.) on different colour sticky and stick them on the wheel. There are no right or wrong answers.
- At the end, ask the class how they might react to the behaviour and/or words now they know more. Elicit how they think they can help the person to feel better.





## Conclusion

Effective teaching should equip learners for life and go beyond simply learning English.

It should develop personal and social abilities which can enable our young learners to participate as active global citizens more effectively in their world. Including some of these activities in the classroom can help learners to develop empathy which is at the core of communicating and working peacefully with others. So, what are you waiting for?

## References

- Corry, C. (2009). *Becoming emotionally intelligent*. Bloomsbury Publishing
- Gueldner, B. A., Feuerborg, L.L. & Merrell, K.W. (2020). *Social and emotional learning in the classroom*. The Guilford Press.
- Zull, J. (2002). *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning*. Stylus Publishing.

## About the author

**Anna Hasper** is a primary-trained ELT teacher and teacher development specialist based in Dubai. She has worked in a range of global training contexts for Ministries, educational institutes and leading educational publishers as a trainer, course and content writer and ELT consultant. She is passionate about teaching IELTS and Young Learners. Her research interests are in the areas of teacher professional learning and educational psychology with an emphasis on motivation, engagement and social-emotional well-being.

