

# An Exploration of the Integration Pathways for Social Emotional Learning into Early Childhood Inclusive Education Curriculum

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**Abstract:** Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has a significant impact on children's social adaptation, emotional management, and academic achievement. Therefore, integrating SEL into preschool curricula holds practical significance. The curriculum structure of kindergartens in Shanghai predominantly features inclusive education. Integrating SEL with the content of the inclusive curriculum can highlight the educational value of "Social Emotional Learning" while ensuring the fundamental development of children. This article takes the example of early childhood education and attempts to integrate SEL into environment creation, learning activities, life activities, and play activities, and outlines appropriate pathways.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Curriculum; Early Childhood Education; Social Emotional Learning

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Social Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process by which children learn to recognize and control their emotions, develop care for others, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain positive relationships<sup>[1]</sup>, and effectively handle various problems. SEL encompasses five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making<sup>[2]</sup>, all of which are crucial for children's development.

The "Shanghai Preschool Education Curriculum Guide" indicates that "preschool curriculum is divided into inclusive curriculum and elective curriculum based on its functional dimensions." Inclusive curriculum is designed for all types of kindergartens and all children, aiming to promote basic development. It is organized in the forms of play, daily life, physical exercise, and learning, and is integrated into all aspects of the daily activities in kindergartens.

Thus, integrating Social Emotional Learning into the inclusive curriculum can effectively enhance children's SEL capabilities while ensuring their basic development. In the context of the author's research project "Practical Research on Supporting Social Emotional Learning for Young Children under the Inclusive Curriculum," four pathways for integrating SEL into the inclusive curriculum for small classes have been identified.

## 1. Multidimensional Environment Creation: Fostering a Positive Atmosphere for Social Emotional Learning

### 1.1 Implicit Environment

Use pictures, songs, and nursery rhymes to create an atmosphere that promotes children's social emotional learning. For instance, playing the song "Fall in Love with Kindergarten" can alleviate separation anxiety; the nursery rhyme "Tidy Up Our Toys" encourages empathy towards toys, motivating children to clean up; displaying pictures of the daily schedule on the wall helps children learn self-management; providing picture books aids in developing children's understanding of emotions; offering props for role-play stimulates children's imagination, interaction, and relationship skills.

### 1.2 Interactive Environment

Based on the core content of social emotional learning, select suitable entry points to create an interactive environment that continuously cultivates children's social emotional abilities. For example, in the "My Feelings" section, provide emotion icons and children's portraits for them to match and express their current feelings, reinforcing self-awareness; in the "Little Garden" area,

offer easily cared for, fast-growing plants and animals along with various tools and care instructions to stimulate responsibility and initiative, enhancing self-management skills; in the "My Many Friends" section, children can place cartoon figures of themselves and their friends together, sharing experiences with their peers, which not only meets emotional needs but also promotes social awareness development.

### **1.3 Psychological Environment**

Create a reassuring and comfortable psychological environment to support children's social emotional learning. The biggest challenge for new kindergarten students is adapting to the new environment. Teachers' genuine acceptance and encouragement can effectively stabilize children's anxiety, helping them quickly adapt to the collective life of kindergarten. Throughout the daily activities, teachers should be adept at identifying opportunities for social emotional learning. By continuously observing children's behaviors and performances, teachers can understand the development of their social emotional abilities and adopt appropriate methods and strategies to effectively support and promote their growth<sup>[3]</sup>.

## **2. Expanding Learning Activities to Highlight the Core Content of Social Emotional Learning**

### **2.1 Integrating Based on Thematic Content and Requirements**

Each theme of the learning activities is designed based on children's cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal understanding of physiological and psychological characteristics of things. Every theme has different focal points and embodies distinct core social emotional learning abilities. For example, the theme "Pleasant Sounds" focuses on liking to discern various sounds around, distinguishing different sounds and their meanings. This can be linked to recognizing others' emotions and expressing individual emotions. In the collective activity "Footsteps," guide children to discern the sounds of three sheep walking and tripping, understanding the impatience of the little sheep wanting to meet Grandma Rabbit. The individualized activity "Books with Sounds" associates sounds with scenes, helping children understand the meaning of different sounds. Another theme, "Learning Skills," directs children to focus on the skills of animals and have an interest in imitating actions. In the collective activity "Good Babies Learn Skills," encourage children to talk about their skills, promoting self-awareness and self-efficacy.

### **2.2 Integrating Based on Goals and Steps**

In practice, we found that learning activities in different fields potentially offer opportunities for "children's social emotional learning." When designing activity steps, teachers should emphasize the content of social emotional learning and adjust goals as needed to integrate SEL. For example, the original goal of the activity "Big Bear Mountain" in the field of art was to perceive the low and slow music melody and match it with the image of a bear; to dance by imitating bear movements to the rhythm of the music. In the segment of waking up the bear, we expanded the design from the perspective of "relationship skills." The assistant teacher played the role of the big bear, and the lead teacher guided the children to try different ways to wake up the bear. Through teacher-child interaction, children perceived the effects of different methods and adjusted appropriately, enhancing the contextual and fun elements of the activity while also subtly introducing the cultivation of responsible decision-making skills.

## **3. Creative Implementation of Daily Activities: Meeting Children's Social Emotional Learning Needs**

### **3.1 Multi-Form Integration of the Same Material Point**

In the "Daily Activities" textbook, each material point's "activity suggestions" provide specific methods to help teachers understand how to conduct the activities. We implement the same material point in various forms to support children's learning more comprehensively. For example, in the "Learning to Plant" activity, it is necessary to first create a planting environment, then observe how children take care of the plants and provide individual guidance, cultivating their behavior management skills. While children are eager to participate in planting, the results vary: some can water the plants appropriately according to the instructions, some need reminders, and others overwater the plants. To address these practical issues, teachers can use relevant articles from the "Kindergarten Parent Meeting" WeChat public account to guide parents in participating in social emotional learning and co-education. Finally, organize a harvest event where children pick the crops and take them home for cooking. Parents can share photos of the prepared dishes, helping children understand the diversity of food processing, thus enriching their social awareness. Through environment creation, labor education, parenting guidance, and home-school cooperation, various forms collectively promote children's development.

### **3.2 Contextual Integration in Group Activities**

The premise of conducting group teaching activities is to meet the current developmental needs of most children, and social emotional learning is no exception. Observations of younger children reveal that they desire to make friends but lack the methods for interaction, often resulting in disputes over toys or unsuccessful attempts to exchange toys.

Therefore, we designed the daily activity material "Playing Together" into a group teaching activity "Good Friends Play Together." Teachers first invite older children to reenact scenarios of how to join peers' games and record it on video. Younger children are then guided to observe the interaction processes of their older peers, learning methods of interaction. They practice these methods by exchanging toys with their peers. After the activity, teachers continue to observe and remind children in their daily interactions to help them consolidate their experiences. The contextual design aligns with younger children's preference for intuitive thinking and imitation. Through experiences and feelings in the context, children internalize interpersonal skills and social awareness.

## **4. Interactive Promotion of Play Activities to Enhance Children's Social Emotional Learning and Application**

### **4.1 Learning Opportunities Arising from Play**

Play materials not only enrich the content and form of children's games but also stimulate their motivation and scenarios for play. Teachers can place various symbolic materials in the material box, observe children's behaviors and performances, and enrich interaction scenarios. For example, if teachers notice that children are engaging in birthday-themed play but lack interaction experience, they can introduce a toy birthday cake set and organize a discussion: "How do you celebrate birthdays at home?" This can lead to new play scenarios such as giving gifts, hugging, saying "Happy Birthday," and singing birthday songs, which in turn encourages more children to join in and enhances their interpersonal skills.

### **4.2 Extending Learning into Play**

Play activities are spontaneous and self-initiated by children, and the experiences gained during learning can provide new inspiration for their play, reinforcing social emotional learning. For instance, a teacher might design a role-playing scenario to teach children the nursery rhyme "I Am the Little Host." Children may then spontaneously play games where the "little host" welcomes "guests," ringing doorbells, inviting, and entertaining them. Through scenario reenactment, dialogue, and behavior imitation, children understand and apply interaction skills, accumulating social emotional learning experiences.

## **5. Conclusion**

The integration of social emotional learning into a unified curriculum relies on the support of teachers. Teachers' understanding and flexible application of social emotional learning concepts ensure the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Their in-depth interpretation of the unified curriculum allows for better integration of social emotional learning, forming an organic whole. Observing and identifying children's social emotional development enables teachers to promptly address issues and provide effective support, thereby promoting the comprehensive development of children.

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