



# Successful Lives – The Evidence that Informs Our Lessons and Curriculum

## Introduction

The Successful Lives curriculum was informed by

- Research into Social and Emotional Learning programmes delivered in schools.
- The research of Carol Dweck into Growth Mindset.
- Research on effective practice on developing resilience and wellbeing within schools.
- Our own research and experiences as senior business leaders and working with other leaders and elite performers, such as Olympic athletes.

This document provides a brief overview of the curriculum development (which in itself is one part of our whole school approach).

## Social and Emotional Learning

The social and emotional learning for the curriculum was informed by ‘The Impact of Enhancing Students’ Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions’ by Joseph A. Durlak, Roger P. Weissberg, Allison B. Dymnicki, Rebecca D. Taylor and Kriston B. Schellinger.

This research investigated 213 SEL programme interventions that were delivered to entire student bodies (universal) so they could be incorporated into routine educational practice; that is they can be successfully delivered by existing school staff during the regular school day.

They used the following definitions of SEL and other factors to underpin their research.

- The SEL approach integrates competence promotion and youth development frameworks for reducing risk factors and fostering protective mechanisms for positive adjustment (Benson, 2006; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Guerra & Bradshaw 2008; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Selig-man, 2003).
- SEL researchers and program designers build from Waters and Sroufe's (1983) description of competent people as those who have the abilities "to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalise on opportunities in the environment'."
- Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognise and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively.
- The proximal goals of SEL programs are to foster the **development of five inter-related sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making** (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). These competencies, in turn, should provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviours, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003). These competencies sit within the curriculum lessons as core themes.
- Over time, mastering SEL competencies results in a developmental progression that leads to a shift from being predominantly controlled by external factors to acting increasingly in accord with internalised beliefs and values, caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one's choices and behaviours (Bear & Watkins, 2006).
- That there is broad agreement that programs are likely to be effective if they use a sequenced step-by-step training approach, use active forms of learning (discussion and practise, etc.), focus sufficient time on skill development, and have explicit learning goals (Bond & Hauf, 2004; Durlak, 1997; Dusenbury & Falco, 1995; Gresham, 1995).

When meeting these requirements, the research from Durlak et al. highlighted the following benefits from their study:

- **Better academic performance:** achievement scores increased by an average of 11% in tests.
- **Improved attitudes and behaviours:** greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behaviour.
- **Fewer negative behaviours:** decreased disruptive class behaviour, non-compliance, aggression and disciplinary referrals.
- **Reduced emotional distress:** fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal.

## Resilience and Emotional Well-being in Schools

Gilligan, 1997, identified three fundamental building blocks of resilience, being:

1. A secure base, whereby a child feels a sense of belonging and security
2. Good self esteem, that is, an internal sense of worth and competence
3. A sense of self-efficacy, that is, a sense of mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations.

The curriculum looks to support the last two of these, while our whole school approach helps to address the first.

The lessons also fit well with the six domains of resilience that Gilligan also identified, namely: Secure Base, Education, Friendships, Talents and Interests, Positive Values and Sociable behaviour.

They are focused on the individual (but in working with others) and in building skills to act as protective factors (or assets), as well as identifying some risk factors relating to health and emotions. This is designed to sit alongside what many schools already do to manage risk factors, for example through lessons within PSHE (e.g. alcohol, drugs, sex and relationship education, and e-safety) and the wider school safeguarding agenda. It helps to build assets for young people, as well as helping them use the assets they already have in the most effective way.



The work of Emeritus Professor Katherine Weare and of the National Child Bureau has informed our overall whole school approach. She has recently put together much of her work into a report written for the National Child bureau - “What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?”

We have used her work to develop our five levels covering: Leadership; Planning; Staff; Students; and the wider community, with a specific focus on parents. This has enabled us to put together a manageable and practical approach for schools.

This report is available at

[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1197143/ncb\\_framework\\_for\\_promoting\\_well-being\\_and\\_responding\\_to\\_mental\\_health\\_in\\_schools.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1197143/ncb_framework_for_promoting_well-being_and_responding_to_mental_health_in_schools.pdf)

### Professor Carol Dweck and Growth Mindset

The research of Professor Dweck has directly driven the creation of the growth mindset lessons within the curriculum, as well as linking to our work on resilience and wellbeing.

It is important to ensure her research is understood, including ensuring schools do not fall into the traps or have the misunderstandings that she articulates. These include not simplifying to say it is OK to make mistakes, (it isn't if the mistakes continue) and that

success doesn't come because young people are praised for effort and not achievement. There is much more to her research and the lessons have carefully followed her approach.

## Our Own Experiences

Les Duggan (a co-author of the full successful Lives Curriculum together with Mark Solomons) and Dr David Hemery CBE, wrote the first version of the curriculum (12 modules covering 27 lessons).

This was based on three areas

- The research from David's doctorate in education (subsequently published as a book 'Sporting Excellence – What Makes A Champion'), where he interviewed over 50 world-class performers. This examined the common factors that separate the highest performers from the rest of the competition, covering subjects such as childhood, upbringing, parental guidance, coaching, personal relationships, destiny, stress and the influences of the mind and the performers' physical, social, mental and moral development.
- The work David, Les and Mark have delivered in business, education and sport. This is largely development work with adults, to build greater self-awareness, self-management, emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, leadership, relationships, self-esteem, confidence and skills such as coaching, planning and implementing.

David also worked alongside Sir John Whitmore, the author of Coaching for Performance and creator of the GROW coaching model, whose influence can also be found within the curriculum.

- The experiences of Les Duggan and Mark Solomons as senior business leaders.

The pilot for our first curriculum, called 'Be the Best You Can Be', was delivered into 10 schools in the South West and evaluated by Bath University. This showed significant improvements in a range of measures across all schools.

Les and Mark moved away in 2011 to continue to run Developing Potential Ltd, and subsequently founded Successful Lives to further develop the curriculum using the research highlighted in this paper.

## The Successful Lives Curriculum

The curriculum has been developed to sit in seven areas that support the development of the skills needed, covering:

- **Creating Success** – Understanding the skills needed for success and how these can be best developed.
- **Coaching Success** – Raising self-awareness, enabling self-management, asking the right questions, developing listening skills and empathy, giving and receiving feedback, setting goals and planning to achieve them.
- **Resources for Success** – Understanding their place in the world and community, the importance of finding meaning, finding things they enjoy doing and using their talents,

building relationships, effectively managing and regulating emotions, understanding values and choosing those that are positive for them, exploring mindset and how to develop positive habits and managing physical health (food, exercise, rest).

- **Leading Success** – Self-management, leading others and effective teamwork.
- **Presenting Success** – Building confidence and self-esteem through speaking in public and more effective communication (also very important for employability). This covers creating content, influencing an audience, delivery, feedback and managing anxiety.
- **Resilience for Success** – Focusing on developing specific skills they can use in the face of adversity. This is our own model, which fits with the evidence highlighted in this paper, and is based on over 20 years of research and experience as senior leaders and working with successful people.

This covers Stepping out of comfort zones, positive values, finding new interests and talents, what might be your meaning and purpose, finding and building a support team, setting goals and planning to achieve them, improving self-esteem through a positive mindset, managing physical health and taking action.

We have systemised this into step-by-step approach to aid implementation and learning.

- **Growth Mindset** – Setting out the importance of believing intelligence and skills can be developed and providing a logical approach to help students develop a growth mindset. This includes a look at the neuroscience behind it and how the human brain aids learning.

For more information about the curriculum or the evidence that informs it, please get in touch.

*Developing Potential is a not for profit company supporting schools to raise attainment and improve wellbeing through a whole school approach (students, staff, leadership, parents and the wider community. The Successful Lives curriculum was developed with the support of teachers, for teachers and students.*



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