

# How to increase empathy by building relational competence

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# Introduction

- Katinka Gøtzsche
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- MA in Dramaturgy and Psychology
- MBSR- teacher (Mindfulness Based Stress reduction).

# Børns Livskundskab

- The Society for Promoting Life Wisdom in Children
- [www.trainingempathy.com](http://www.trainingempathy.com)
- [www.bornslivskundskab.dk](http://www.bornslivskundskab.dk)

# What is the problem?

- Mental health among young people is decreasing
- Societies all over the world are today facing numerous major challenges.
- A need for reorientation and change in the coming decades.
- We must work together toward a future in which respect for life and its processes becomes the key principle and goal

Because *the “global scene”* with pollution, wars, hostilities - like terror or aggression against refugees, and poverty, demands that people **dare** to take contact with their friendliness and compassion.

A similar vein of argumentation by Noddings, 2012  
or Jensen et al., 2016

# Our Vision

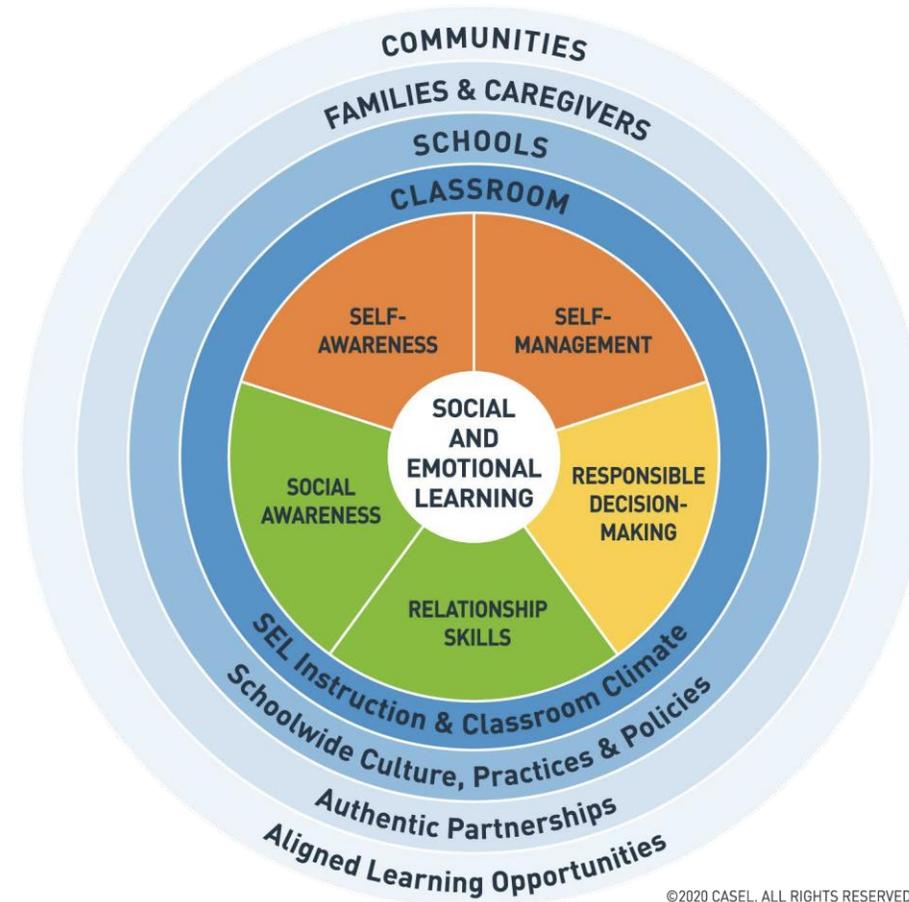
- Our vision is to create a learning environment where the capacity for self-reliance and empathy can be practiced and developed.

# What is our goals

- Enhance and develop empathy and compassion
- Enhance the contact to the inner strength and core
- Enhance the ability to be aware and present

What is done?

# SEL – social and emotional learning programmes



# What is SEL?

## **Social-emotional competencies:**

The ability to:

1. Understand one's emotions, personal goals and values,
2. Regulate ones affect – calming oneself down.
3. Understand others – the ability to take their perspective, empathy and compassion.
4. Communicate clearly, negotiating and seeking help when it is needed and
5. Take responsible decisions.

# Our method

- Building relational competence in the person working with children
- Activities with children

# Why?

- Former SEL-projects have primarily focused on children's competencies, but the scientific work regarding implementation of SEL, points to the great importance of **the teachers' social-emotional-competencies** (Durlak et al. 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)
- **Teachers'** competencies is the stepping stone for the work with SEL.

Why relations are important

# We know that children:

- Are social beings from birth
- Can express the content and limits of their integrity
- Cooperate competently with every kind of adult behaviour, irrespective of whether it is healthy or destructive to them
- Competently express, both verbally and nonverbally, the nature of the emotional and existential dilemmas that their parents are experiencing

- If we want to create a good learning environment it's important to teach teachers to create good relations: To show tolerance, respect, interest, empathy and compassion to each child and appeal to the children's understanding of a conflict instead of bullying them
- (From a review of 220 studies of different factors of importance for the learning environment, Danish Pedagogical University, 2008)

# Empirical support to the importance of the relational quality at schools

- The importance of the quality of the teacher-student-relation on **academic performance** (Nordenbo et al., 2008)
- The importance of the quality of the teacher-student-relation on academic performance and on emotional and behavioral aspects as for instance **satisfaction, participation and self-efficacy** (Cornelius-White; 2007)
- ... and the work of Durlak et al. (2011; 2015)

# Relationale Competence

definition

# Relational Competencies

*“The professional’s ability to “see” the individual child on its own terms and attune her behavior accordingly without giving up leadership, as well as the ability to be authentic in her contact with the child.*

*And as the professional’s ability and will to take full responsibility for the quality of the relation”*

Jensen & Juul, 2004

# What does it mean?

- See each child as it is
- Attune you behaviour to the situation
- Maintain leadership and responsibility for the relationship
- Be authentic

# Personal and Professional Development

- In all professional work the **charisma, manner of behaving** and **personal strength** of the professional play an important role
- Personal and professional development is an ongoing process in which we **examine, acknowledge** and **engage** the **patterns of thought and behaviour** that promote or impede and obstruct our way of fulfilling our professional commitment and potential in relation to others

To be in touch with yourself

...or to loose touch with yourself

# ”Loose touch with yourself”

- You can not vouch for yourself
- You do not live up to your own moral standards and values
- You lose leadership, and overview

# Why do you get out of yourself?

- You feel insufficient
- You do not experience your own value
- You get hit at a sore point

# The Basic Conflict

Integrity



Conflict → Pain → Signal/Symptom



Cooperation

# Action - Reaction



Add awareness

# What to do?

- Be aware of what is going on
- Ground yourself – make a pause

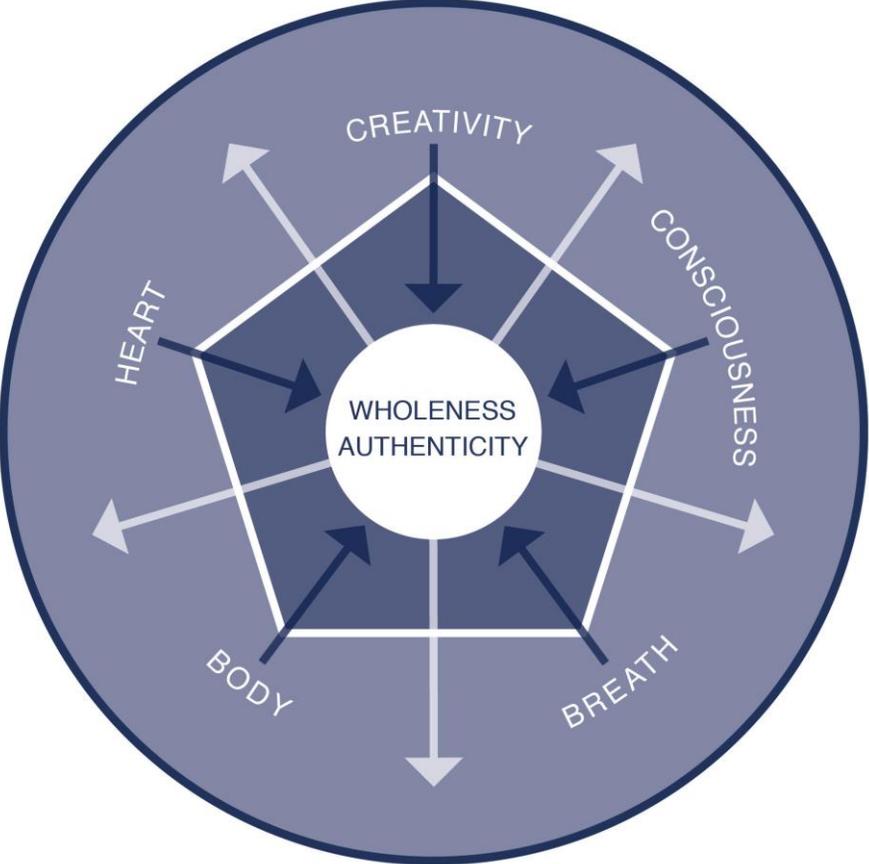
# The Pentagon

- Developed by The Society for Promoting Life wisdom in Children
- Focus has been on liberate the exercises that has been attached to a specific religion from the religious part.

# 5 Innate competences

- Body
- Breath
- Heart
- Consciousness
- Creativity

# The Pentagon



# Inner exercises

- Turn the awareness inwards
- Feel one self
- Feel one self in contact with others
- 60:40

# 60:40

- A movement in and out
- To be in contact with the other and at the same time be in contact with yourself

# Three Participants

- The adult
- The relation
- The child

# The teacher

- The individual teacher's opportunity to increase contact with Her/himself when under pressure and at the same time developing the relationship with the individual child in a way that is constructive and helpful for the child

# The child

- Make small exercises with the child:
- Awareness on the natural competences
- Gearshift
- Awareness on relations- and the group

# Building relational competence

- Know one own reaction patterns
- Turn your attention inward
- Anchor yourself in yourself
- Self-regulation
- Feel your own signals and at the same time understand the other / child
- React authentically while helping the child in a developing direction

# Strengthening relations

- To oneself and the other
- Inward and outward attention
- To learn to understand the connection between being aware on oneself and being aware on others.
- This applies to children and it applies to a great extent to the adults who are important in the children's lives - parents and the professionals.