



Book Review

S. E. T. Social Emotional Tools for Life: An early childhood teacher's guide to supporting strong emotional foundations and successful social relationships by Michelle M. Forrester and Kay M. Albrecht

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The *S. E. T. Social Emotional Tools for Life* book, written by Michelle M. Forrester and Kay M. Albrecht aims to give early childhood teachers tools to support children's social and emotional development. The *S. E. T. Social Emotional Tools for Life* book is packaged as an approach; however, it makes use of people, places and things that already exist in the early childhood setting. There is no need for fancy teaching materials, special classroom supplies or a specific education background. The strategies are not all new, some have been around for a while, and some are derived from play therapy. The same goes with the underlying theories behind the strategies. Understanding theoretical foundations and applying them to teaching is the basis of sound practice. Where some books were unsuccessful in bridging the theory and practice divide, Forrester and Albrecht have been able to marry theory and practice well. Theorising practice or practising theory, are explained in clear terms, in interesting and engaging ways, with a particular focus on social and emotional development.

The book's publication is timely. Social and emotional competence, the ability to function positively in the social world and to deal with emotions is an essential skill, regarded to be on par with literacy and numeracy skills. Children need to build strong emotional foundations and successful social relationships; they are vital life skills that are best learned while young. Some skills are not learned by osmosis, so they must be taught, and the early childhood setting is the ideal environment where children can observe, learn, practice and master these skills. Thus, the teacher's role "to introduce, model and support the development of these skills" (Forrester & Albrecht, 2014, p. xx) is crucial.

The book is all-inclusive in its intended audience, value and reach. For the student, this is a good book to study, learn, test knowledge and build a repertoire of effective practices. For the teacher, this is a valuable book to re-think practice or to engage in practice in a different way. For the teacher educator, it is a useful textbook and a reliable reference material. The book's value is not limited to social and emotional development, the principles and ideas are rather applicable to other domains as well: language, cognition and physical. The principles and ideas are also argued to traverse all nationalities and cultures.

The book is organised and the topic sequence is well thought-out. The first chapter sets the tone by introducing S. E. T. for life and its five principles. The book then goes into detail as to why the five principles matter. Each principle is also discussed in-depth in succeeding chapters. Chapter two delves into the importance of building positive relationships and foregrounds the discussion with interactional theory and psychosocial theory. In this chapter, the teacher's own



emotional health is scrutinised as it impacts greatly on building relationships. Chapter three highlights the need to be a good observer and includes a range of observation techniques. Temperament is also covered, including types. Teaching strategies in becoming a good observer to address children's individual temperaments conclude the chapter. Chapter four looks at the necessity of making healthy emotional connections with a focus on attachment. This concept is carefully explained and strategies are provided to support attachment. Chapter five explains emotional development, its connection to intelligence, emotional expression and emotional self-regulation. Social development is also explored in the next chapter, premised on socio-cultural theory. Chapter seven explores the importance of play, with several theorists explained in relation to play. Several challenging behaviours are explored here. Chapter eight reviews how children develop and learn (cognitive development), with chapter nine continuing with language development and communication. Chapter 10 looks at the classroom and at creating a supportive environment. The different play areas are described and related to what children learn: art, sensory, dramatic play, science/discovery, blocks/construction and maths/manipulative. Chapter 11 delves into managing challenging behaviour. The book ends with a chapter on partnering with families.

The structure of the chapters is well thought-out and there are a number of features that make the book visually appealing. Each chapter explores a topic and then links this to a theoretical concept. It continues with a range of strategies to apply in the classroom and ends with a summary of the strategies. The chapters are peppered with real-life scenarios, anecdotes and vignettes that enable the reader to visually capture theories, concepts or strategies, acquiring an even deeper understanding. With the specificity in its approach, each chapter is able to explore in-depth the concepts and strategies discussed. Coloured boxes within the pages explain further or summarise concepts. There are plenty of images and these capture the essence of the topics. The text is colour coordinated, making it easy to sift through information. The book's use of colour and images as markers to categorise different information makes it user-friendly.

The book is an important resource for students, teachers and teacher educators in early childhood education.

Reference

Forrester, M.M. & Albrecht, K.M. (2014). *S. E. T. Social Emotional Tools for Life: An early childhood teacher's guide to supporting strong emotional foundations and successful social relationships*. Houston, TX: Innovations in ECE Press.

S. E. T. Social Emotional Tools for Life: An early childhood teacher's guide to supporting strong emotional foundations and successful social relationships by Michelle M. Forrester and Kay M. Albrecht is available through NZTC books <http://www.nztertiarycollege.ac.nz/about-us/nztc-books>