

*Facilitating the social engagement of students
with Autistic Spectrum Conditions in inclusive
environments*

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Aims of the presentation

1. To build a deeper understanding of the psychological processes underpinning the social-emotional difficulties of students with ASC
2. To increase the knowledge of evidence-based strategies for developing social competence in students with ASC
3. To offer an overview of teaching Personal and Social Competence as part of the Australian Curriculum

Autism: what is it?

- A **condition** rather than a disorder (Baron-Cohen, 2009a)
- Disabilities **and** **cognitive strengths**
- **Autistic traits** in the **general population**
- ASC: an **extreme of the normal variation** of autistic traits
- A **spectrum condition**: planning for individual needs
- A “**transactional disorder**” (Jordan, 2007)

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The autistic view: in the classroom

- *“Teachers thought I was easily distracted. They were right, but it was not the type of attention problem most children have, which is that they can’t focus and have a short attention-span.”*
- *People like me are distracted from within. **We have a very interesting inner thoughtscape and can daydream for ages.** My associative thought processes lead me to ideas and possibilities much more interesting than the subjects taught in school.” (Darius)*

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The autistic view: in the playground

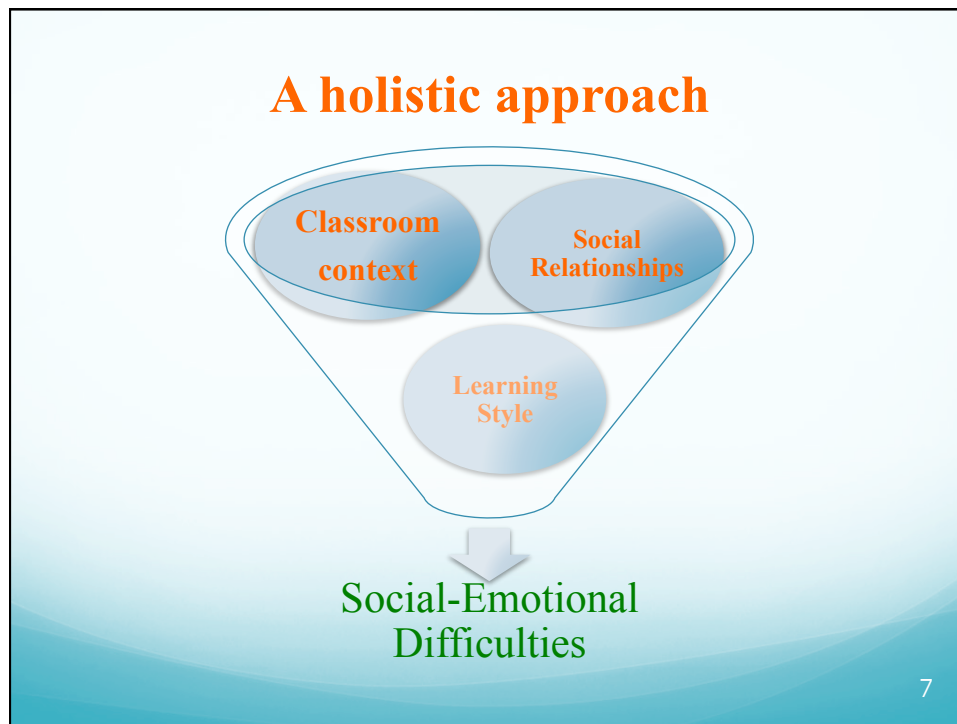
- “School was a torture ground in itself for me because of my lack of social skills and **my absolute terror of people** (in part because I didn’t just **automatically know the social rules**, and, when I did learn them, I had to think about them all the time- and who can keep up that sort of coping skill ALL THE TIME) (Karen).
- «I spent my recesses alone. I recall standing by myself on the edges of the blacktop, watching other kids inside play jump rope and basketball while I tasted from the honeysuckle bushes on the sidelines. I did not yet have a friend, though **I did not particularly desire one either.** » (Sarah)
- «The thing that was the best thing during school hours was when I went away out in a field with my miniature people and cars and **played in the sand or in a log by myself.**» (Jack).

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The Teaching Philosophy

- View autism as another **culture**
- Work **with** rather than **against** autism
- Respond with “**No**” to remediation -“**yes**” to **compensation**
- Capitalize on **cognitive strengths**
- Consider **conceptual** and **sensory** needs
- Create **autism-friendly** environments
- Set **concrete** and **clear** expectations

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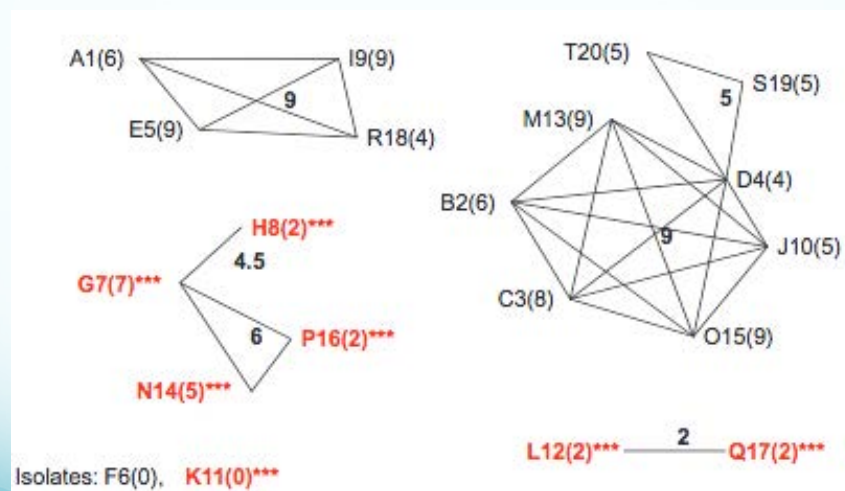
- ### Social Networks
- Dyadic interactions
 - Peer groups to which a student feels s/he belongs
 - **Frequency of nominations** children receive by classmates as members of informal peer groups
 - A **moderate** correlation has been found between the number of friendships and social network status (Locke et al, 2010).
 - Mutual friendships are not always embedded within larger, informal groups.
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Social Networks & Friendships Survey

- Are there kids in your class who like to hang out together?
Who are they?
- Write down the names of the children you do not like to hang out with in your classroom
- **Buddies:** “Who do you like to hang out with in your classroom?”
- **Top 3:** Write down your top 3 friends
- **Best Friend:** Place a ★ next to your best friend
- **Caveat for its use: confidentiality**

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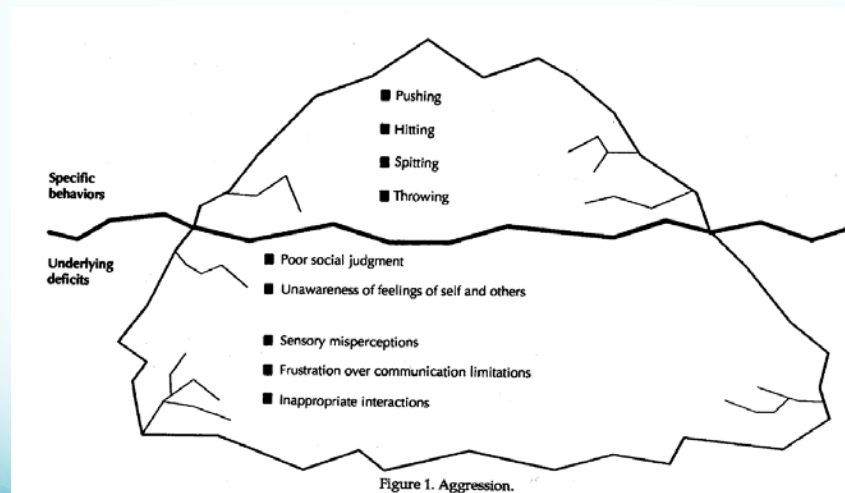
Social Networks: Research evidence



Locke, Ishijima, Kasari, & London (2010)

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The “iceberg” metaphor



Schopler, 1995; 17.

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Learning Style

Students with ASD have ...

- Theory of mind as a failed “gatekeeper” (Happé, 2015)
- Cognitive Empathy
- Strong systemizing skills: highly purposeful
- Strong local processing bias (weak central coherence)
- Weak executive functioning

(Baron-Cohen, 2009a)

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Cognitive Difficulties

- Receptive language
- Expressive communication
- Attention to irrelevant information
- Distractibility
- Working memory
- Organization
- Sensory over-stimulation
- Confusion in identifying personal space and sharing space

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Evidence-Based Strategies

- Teach in **natural settings/contexts**
- Teach the “**hidden social curriculum**” – **social rules**
- Co-create and use **Social Stories**
- Set and follow **work routines** (activity schedules, work systems)
- Develop **choice-making skills**
- Build **verbal communication skills** for requesting “break” and “help”
- Teach **emotion recognition and regulation** (the “emotions thermometer”)
- Engage **peers as assistants**
- Use **flexible grouping strategies**

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Physical Structure: Why?

- Physical boundaries for greater meaning and context ...
- Defines the purpose of space
- Reduces distractions within the learning environment
- Increases attention and concentration
- Clarifies expectations and activities
- Enhances flexibility and adaptive behavior
- Promotes safety and security
- Develops self-control

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Physical Structure: What for?

- Transition area
- Group activities
- Whole-class activities
- Independent work
- 1:1 teaching area
- Play/leisure/relaxation area
- Materials' area
- Finished work

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Circle time



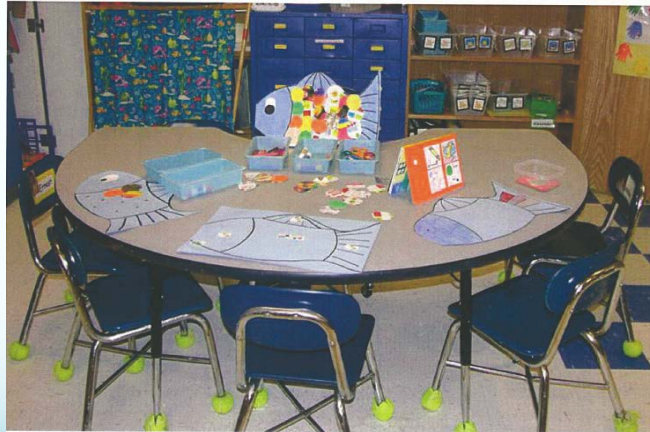
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Circle time: with boundaries



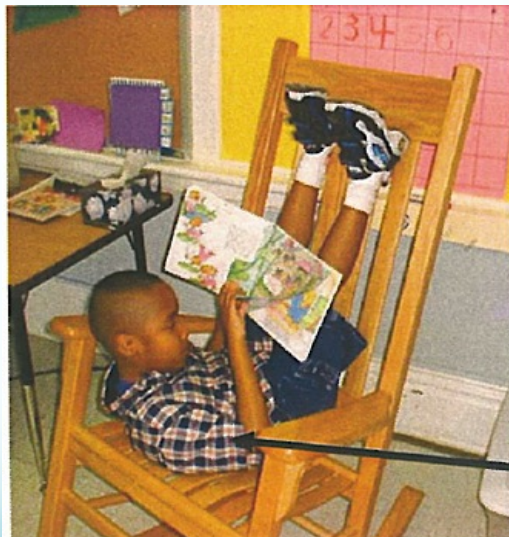
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Set up: group activity



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Break time: Individual



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Activity Schedules: Why?

Help students to ...

- focus their attention on their daily responsibilities
- predict what will happen next
- understand routines
- follow a timetable
- make transitions
- prepare for changes
- control their anxiety
- communicate with their teacher
- make choices and decisions

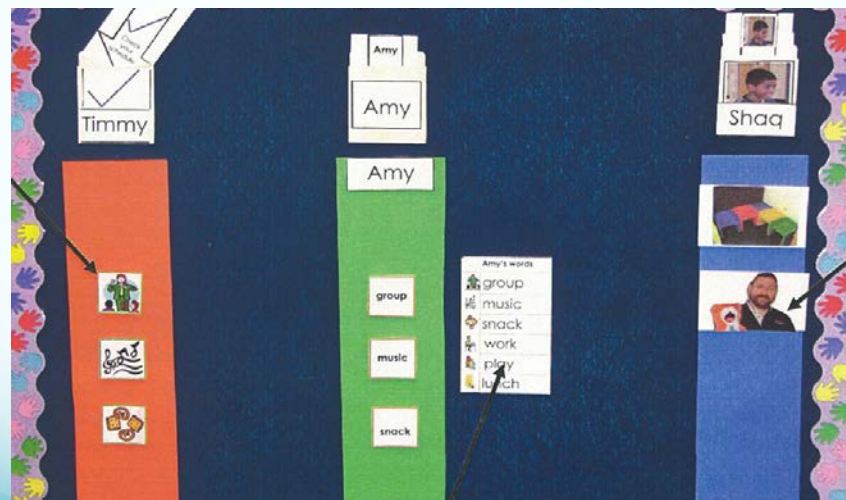
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Activity Schedules

- Level of visual representation
- Sequence of activities
- Use of schedule
- Location
- Transition objects

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Schedules



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Schedule: transition



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Schedule: transition



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Work system: What is it?

- Independent, pair, and group work
- *What is the work I have to do?*
- *How many tasks do I have to do?*
- *How do I know I am finished?*
- *What happens next?*

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Work systems: Why?

Help students to ...

- Become **independent** in using materials
- **Concentrate** and sit quietly
- **Work with others**
- **Take responsibility** for their work
- Become **independent in carrying out activities**
- Feel **positive** about **themselves**

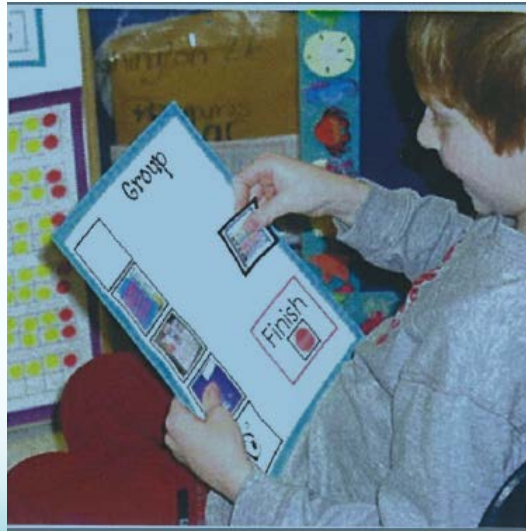
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Work system: Whole class

	Who is here today?	
	Songs	
	Lunch Choice	
Sentence I see you	Time to read	
	Calendar	
	What is next?	

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Work system: individual



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Visual instructions: Why?

Help students to ...

- Understand important concepts
- Follow directions for completing tasks
- Understand the meaning of activities

Help teachers apply differentiated instruction

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Visual instructions: What?

- **Visual Organization**: contains the bits and pieces of the task
- **Clarity**: highlights information significant to the task
- **Instructions**: give the sequence of the task
- Forms: jig, visual or written instructions

Why?

- Clarify the **meaning** of the activity
- Foster **flexibility** in task completion


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Visual instructions: sign-in board



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Visual instructions

Let's Make A Fish


~~Cut the fish on the black line~~

Color the head, fin and tail.....
 choose any color

Glue on the eye


Glue on the scales

Finished

Pick a fun activity in your notebook until everyone is finished

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Visual instructions: Having a conversation









Ask your friend :

What do you like to eat for snack?

Let your friend put his choice in the box.

I like cartoons. Do you like cartoons? What is your favorite cartoon? Put it in the box.

My favorite cartoon is not here

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Visual instructions: making comments








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Visual instructions: Scavenger Hunt

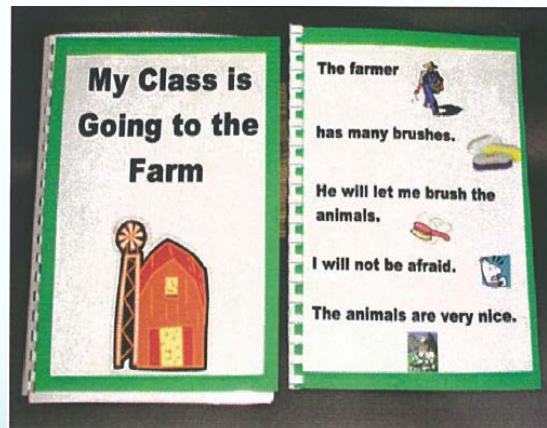
Scavenger Hunt

Look at the people in your group and answer these questions?

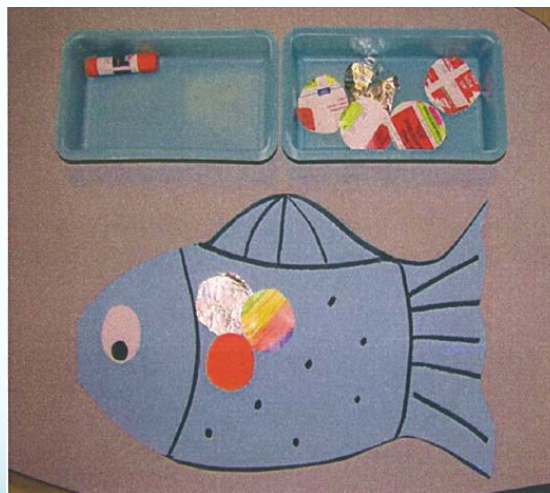
1. Who is wearing shorts?  _____
2. Who has blond hair?  _____
3. How many people are ladies?  _____
4. Who is wearing glasses?  _____
5. Who is wearing sandals?  _____

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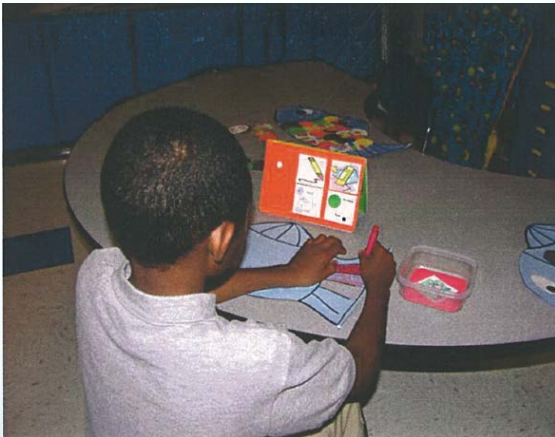
Visual Support: Preparation Story



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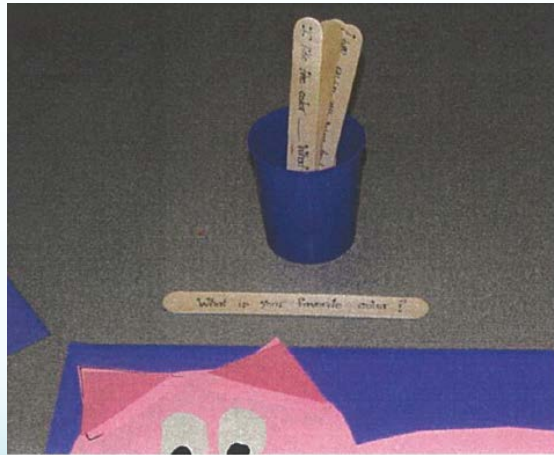
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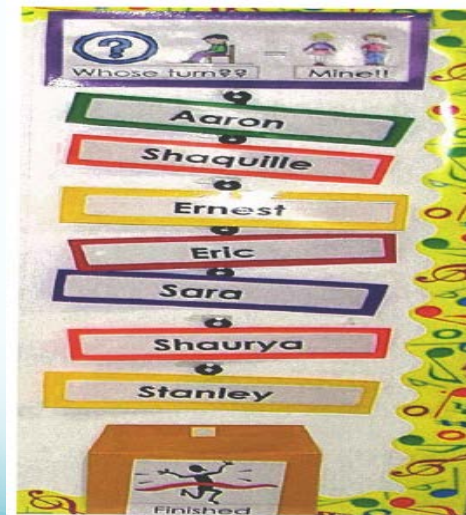
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Behavior routines



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Turn-taking



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Turn-taking



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Putting away toys



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Visual instructions: Standing



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Visual instructions: making a request




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Visual instructions: Book reading



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Social Scripts

 What I can do when partner reading:	What I can say when partner reading:
Get your friend's attention.	"Hey ____"
____ Ask your friend a question.	"What do you think this is going to be about?"
____ Wait for your friend to answer.	Nod to show you are listening.
____ Tell your friend what you think.	"I think this is going to be about ____"
____ Ask your friend who should read first.	"Do you want to read first?"
____ After you read ask your friend a question.	"What did you like best about the book?"

Hart & Whalon (2011)

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Student Scenario

- John is a Year 6 student with an Autism Spectrum Condition. He is very interested in airplanes and likes to talk to his peers about his favorite subject in class and during recess. Because of his inappropriate and disruptive behaviors, his peers have started feeling frustrated and are avoiding him.
- He is achieving high grades in Maths and just recently won the 2nd prize in a national math competition.
- However, he has great difficulty with composing a story about his own experiences or a summary of a story that he has read. His teacher has observed that he is feeling very anxious and also blames himself, because he is a perfectionist while at the same time being very conscious of his writing problems. He has started scratching himself every time he is given a writing task to complete and also talks about airplanes while others are quietly writing their stories.
- He ends up not being able to finish the writing task in class but taking it as homework, which he can complete with his mum's support.

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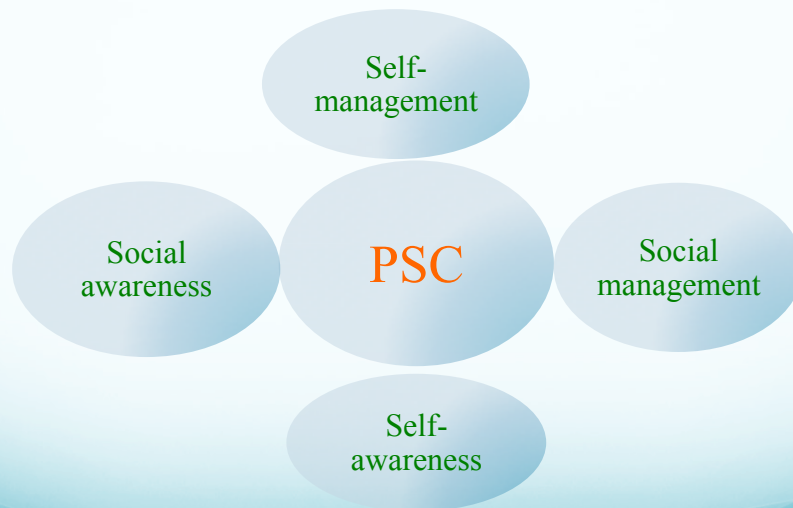
The Australian Curriculum (AC)

- the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)*
- Purpose of education:
“to enable students to act with “moral and ethical integrity” and to be in a position to best “manage their **emotional**, mental, spiritual and physical well-being”.
- Dimension of the AC: General capabilities (ACARA 2010, 2012)
- Personal and Social Capability (PSC)
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- *The general capabilities are **incorporated** into learning area content in ways that are appropriate to each learning area*



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PSC: Organizing Elements



ACARA, v.8.1, F-10 Curriculum, 2015

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Personal and Social Capability

1. Understanding themselves and others
2. Managing their relationships, learning, lives and work more effectively
3. Recognizing and regulating emotions
4. Developing empathy for others and for relationships
5. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships
6. Building effective team work skills
7. Making responsible decisions
8. Solving problems constructively
9. Developing leadership skills

Foundation to Year 10

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Thank you very much for your attention