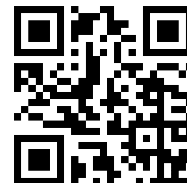


## **How Social Emotional Learning Can Be the Catalyst to Successful Global Engagement**



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**ABSTRACT:** Intercultural understanding is vital to solving the pressing challenges of the 21st century (Brookfield, 2019; Egan, 2008; Mori & Williams, 2021). Tolerance and understanding of diverse groups of people are achievable only through true conceptual change (Bereiter, 2002). Having a confident sense of self and commitment to the pursuit of improvement can provide the stability required in these rapidly changing times (Beyn et al., 2006). Identity is formed through interaction and interpretation and increasingly this is done in an international, global setting. Understanding the society around us, experiencing life, and competently interacting with ourselves, our neighbours, and others, can lead humanity to better global engagement (Six Seconds, n.d.). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an umbrella term for teaching practices and ways of life that can provide the visionary reform education requires to afford the citizens of the world more fluidity between countries and success in global engagement (Birkhoff et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2015; Humphrey et al., 2010; Six Seconds, n.d.).

**KEYWORDS:** global engagement, socio-emotional learning, Japanese education, educational reform

### **HOW SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING CAN BE THE CATALYST TO SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT**

Educators and students alike crave a sense of self-discovery; there are countless memes and books targeting how to find your true self. Identities are often sought with historical research and forward-thinking imagination. It is this imagination that great philosophers, social theorists, and educators deliberate over as neuroscience and technology continue to progress in this globalised, pluralistic, 21<sup>st</sup> century world (Bleazby, 2017; Claxton, 2021; Egan & Judson, 2009; Fry, 2022; Matthews & Egan, 1998; McGee et al., 2021). Sense of identity has become a research field in its own right and the theory, along with social reconstruction (tolerance and peaceful co-existence), feminist (acknowledgement of disruption to power and oppression becoming a vehicle to support change) and progressive post-structuralist theories (challenging what is truth and knowledge) will be drawn upon to ponder the future of education (Bleazby, 2017; Claxton, 2021; Norton, 2013; Weedon, 2008).

Social emotional competencies under the framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) have gained recognition in both the US and the UK over recent years (Humphrey et al., 2010; Lawlor, 2016; Six Seconds, n.d.). SEL can accommodate the active pursuit of global experiences as it encompasses understanding others' perspectives and sustaining positive relationships. SEL is a process through which individuals attain and apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to manage their emotions, understand others' perspectives, to set and achieve positive goals, and develop and make responsible decisions (Durlak et al., 2015; Humphrey et al., 2010; Lawlor, 2016). This paper intends to show how integrating social learning (environmental influence) and emotional learning (emotional intelligence, EI or emotional quotient, EQ) into education worldwide, can become the catalyst towards the betterment of society through global engagement.

As research continues, educators should become comfortable with the interdisciplinarity of a multitude of fields including, but not limited to anthropology, sociology, post-colonialism, cultural studies, media studies, feminism, and education. The questions of Who am I? and Where do I fit into this world? are increasingly asked post COVID-19 by all of humanity (Banerjee, 2020). Overcoming power differentials created by social, cultural, and political boundaries pushes the pursuit of new theories to end oppressions through education (Brookfield, 2017). Progress in any form requires support. Conversations encompassing SEL and lifelong learning need to be in continual practice to enhance self-growth that can build from the inside-out, bottom-up and aim towards positive global engagement (Bleazby, 2017; Egan & Judson, 2009; Greene, 1988; Mori & Williams, 2021).

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

The elements of looking from the outside-in (the social) and the inside-out (the emotional), are combined into an epistemological perspective of SEL. Transdisciplinary research formed the umbrella framework in an attempt to support the connection between

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research, policy, and practice (United States Department of Education, n.d.). SEL is a relatively new term coined for concepts taken from progressive educationalists such as John Dewey (1859-1952). Fresh research is establishing the social depiction of SEL. Hitherto, “Anything to do with ‘emotion’ is demonised and becomes the very antithesis of reason” (Claxton, 2021 p.6). Despite that, this framework and term is well-equipped to cover the intersectionality and messiness that is existence. It has become steadily more difficult to discern issues into specific labels as they merge, separate, reform, and develop into new and ever more challenging issues. However, delving into the social inquiry before shaping the emotional component will support the argument that SEL will aid in the notion of neutrality to provide a new baseline and lead the world into a higher realm of communication and mobility (Brookfield, 2017).

### THE SOCIAL LEARNING

Society, language, and culture will forever be intertwined; when interacting with another language, there is also access to the culture and society it encompasses. Societal behaviours and values are often reflected in language and vice versa. Cultural recapitulation can assert accumulation of knowledge and assist in the development of understanding (Egan, 2010; Mori & Williams, 2021). It must be remembered that people are fallible. Diversified situations make it extremely more difficult to predict outcomes or reactions to discreet significant changes. SEL competencies can provide the language, skills, and tools to question prior knowledge with no absolution of the historical shame and guilt of previous ideologies (Brookfield, 2019). Awareness and acknowledgement of past injustices can open conversations and become a steppingstone to inclusiveness and change.

Remembering to take an equity pause; reflecting, sharing learning and goals, and suggesting improvements to support inclusion, can add a slice of truthful commentary to any symposium. Calibration is exhausting, and scattered pieces of perspective are unpredictable and volatile. Yet, it is of utmost importance to try to understand the position one stands in and the circumjacent environment. The seething forces of modernity continue to host foundations of neoliberalism and conservative values over the ongoing transformation of our times: process over product (Bellanca & Boss, 2015; Craft, 2013; Mori & Williams, 2021). The capitalistic conservative economic-determinist perspective, in which social status and money determine ideas and thoughts, regards education (and training) simply as an instrument to economic growth: education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth (Freire, 2018; Robinson, 2010). The attitudes of edupreneurship, a term devised for the commercialisation and for-profit activity within education, needs to be overcome (Kashani, 2021). Noddings’ (2013b, 2013a, 1989) theories of care argue that relationships with others are the ontological base of humanity and that our relationships with others can help define ourselves. Relationships should be equal, accepted from the giver and receiver of care, and SEL competencies can lead to better understanding and tolerance (Durlak et al., 2015;

Noddings, 2013b; Six Seconds, n.d.). A re-established trust can propel a sense of ease and Noddings’ (2013) theories of nurturing can assist SEL to check current balances within the pertinent environment.

Society and learning about society should progress from the self, the home, the institution, and out into the broader scope of national and global positioning. Intellectual inquiry into the identity of self, liberated from imposed identities can progress into imagining the ever-more heterogeneous and multi-cultural sense of community that can grant us global mobility and *laissez faire* in its full true meaning (Posner et al., 2019). Neoliberalism and globalization were critical in spreading growth to poor countries over the past three decades and the recent backlashes of this in terms of financial contagion, migration crisis, trade disputes and terrorism, beg the question of how individuals can continue to gain and manage themselves through the inherent cross-border, cross-cultural conflicts. Bereiter’s (2002) theory of the knowledge age is a good starting point to consider qualitatively higher standards of society. The problem identified is “society does not know where it is trying to steer itself” (p. 462).

Learning about current affairs and international politics, or the lack thereof, offers some hope of overcoming the “checked past of international governance” (Posner et al., 2019 p.266). The current design has allowed the often impartial elites and selfish individuals who are indifferent to the public good, diminished responsibility (Posner et al., 2019). Providing an environment that is both safe and empowering is one of the key

SEL competencies found across the plethora of policies, practitioners, and researchers (Durlak et al., 2015; Rand Corporation, n.d.; Six Seconds, n.d.). Uncertainty can lead to hidden stresses and according to Foreman (as cited in Sprenger, 2020), the antidote to stress is trust. Knowing and understanding what the key human values are, the current affairs of the community, can help instil trust.

Dewey (1954; as cited in Greene, 1988) claimed that the articulate public lacked a sense of shared values and norms. Having a framework such as SEL or a school motto to return to in times of doubt will guide any school or struggling learner back on the journey of development. If the core value of the school environment is not set, it will be difficult for any school to flourish (Biesta, 2010; Egan & Judson, 2009). If the school’s motto is out of date, it is up to the school to establish a slogan, or set of competencies, that the whole school can get on board with. Whether this motto, slogan or competence establishing values motivates or hinders is worth exploring. Perhaps it is reinforcing the neoliberalist vision of education, and timely discussion of this worldwide impact continues to grow (Biesta, 2010; Bleazby, 2017; Egan & Judson, 2009; Humphrey et al., 2010).

Research is directing belief that SEL competencies can offer a helping hand towards surpassing stale assumptions and convey a shift in society beyond self-defeating conflicts towards positive global engagement (Blakemore, 2020; Collaborative for the

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Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning. & Illinois Univ., 2005; Craft, 2013). It is notoriously difficult to predict when cultural adaptation to new social institutions will undermine or support those institutions or turn utopian designs into dystopias (Posner et al., 2019). Humanity's greatest risk is stasis, and SEL can not only provide coping mechanisms but also permit the indulgence of reimagined states of a global fluidity.

### THE EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Basic acknowledgement of emotions being present in decisions, empathy for others in their struggles and acceptance of sociocultural differences can enhance the ability to express one's own personality in any language (Leaver et al., 2005). This emotional awareness can be a starting block to keep society progressing with the momentum of globalization, not to overshadow academic practice, but to provide the balance it needs for sustainable survival (Blankstein et al., 2008; Mori & Williams, 2021; Noffke & Somekh, 2013).

There are three main models of emotional intelligence researched by Peter Salovey (2011), John Mayer (1990), David Goleman (1995), and Konstantin Vasily Petrides (2007). The ability model proposes a four-branch model of emotional ability: 1) perception/expression of emotion, 2) use of emotion to facilitate thinking, 3) understanding of emotion, and 4) management of emotion in oneself and others (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). The mixed model represents aspects of an individual's personality, as well as the ability to motivate oneself in social and emotional situations (Goleman, 1995), and the trait model describes perceptions and dispositions in terms of perceiving, understanding, managing, and utilizing emotions (Petrides et al., 2007). These assorted models have been embraced by policy makers around the globe and taken on as national and humanistic values under the umbrella terms of SEL, which includes Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) in the United Kingdom and collaborative for academic, social, emotional learning (CASEL) in the United States. This paper uses the term SEL to bring together environmental awareness and the practical ability of EI to improve EQ. This encourages continued questioning, observation, exploring and applying creativity to wield a path to improve international communication.

In recent years along with the wellness trend, emotional awareness has become mainstream. Emotions are often attributed with feminism, "connectedness, personal relationships, emotionality, corporeality and concreteness ... is thought to characterise the feminine self" (Bleazby, 2017 p.25). It will be interesting to see as with current gender neutrality issues, if humans will be able to think and feel, to exist independently and in relation to, the individual within the collective. There are constant reminders to check mindsets, and from even before the ramifications of COVID-19, emotions were being labelled with an anticipation of controlling them (Dweck, 2015). The five interrelated areas of SEL are an amalgamation of EI, EQ, societal behaviours, and knowledge of environment influence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These abilities can foster more emotionally stable and competent human beings. The traditional systematic approaches to educational ideas that have dominated schooling, where teachers assume complete relativism-that their knowledge is being received-are progressing (Bleazby, 2017). With improved emotional competence and social awareness in the general public, an unimagined future can be comfortably entered.

### SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Neuroscience is supporting the EQ in SEL and now a critical race theory lens is being utilised to address issues of equity and with it demise the support of social awareness (McGee et al., 2021). SEL is not only about teaching and EQ skills, but it is also about learning conditions and the society and environments encompassing that. Education can be a tool for many things, including but not limited to empowerment and social justice. Our assumptions of all people being able to read symbolic forms, such as numbers, is not effortless and is in fact, cognitively demanding. Within SEL there is an array of deep, compelling, and effective resources and techniques, such as storytelling, music and art that can foster knowledge in an emotional and intellectually curious form (Durlak et al., 2015; Egan, 1997, 2005, 2008, 2010; Six Seconds, n.d.). Developing human resources by fostering thinking, judgement, and creative expression in all young learners is an epistemological goal worthy of pursuing (Egan, 2008; Robinson, 2010). Developing a society where being different is not a disadvantage, where curiosity and intrigue should be an excitement and not a bore is crucial in the current climate (Claxton, 2021; McWilliam & Haukka, 2008).

The acceptance of the necessity of SEL competencies within education can pave the way to successful global engagement. A flux of migration and an increase of crosscultural marriages are encouraging the ideas that mutual respect can be achieved. If people know how to listen, can recognise commonalities, and can begin to get comfortable with the uncomfortable, then positive new relationships can be gleaned. Life is uncomfortable; there is truth in universal rejection and building relationships (Cohen, 2014). Patience and resilience can help us to not only cope, but also to act within this transitional period post-COVID-19 and into a new age.

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### CONCLUSION

“Teaching practices must evolve with the times so that students can fully participate in our rapidly changing global society” (Mori & Williams, 2021 p.23). Solidifying ideas of giving young people a powerful array of cultural and cognitive tools to empower creativity within the classroom is a positive thing (Egan, 2010). Especially since COVID-19, teachers, students, and the public have felt the strains of work-life balance. Practices of EQ are seemingly trying to help people understand the turbulence within their environment and a global awareness of responses and reactions has risen. Discussions and research of SEL competencies need to continue before radical action is taken to understand what has been successful and why (Claxton, 2021). With adequate monitoring and careful stewardship, a balance can be built to provide preventative and accountable systems for a more personable and meaningful education. In this way, SEL can be the catalyst the world has been searching for to enable positive global engagement.

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