

Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action

SEL and IRL Identity

Developing a sense of identity is an important part of growing up – and continues long beyond childhood.

As the world becomes increasingly connected and globalized, with mass movements of people across countries and continents, how the next generation develop their sense of personal, societal and national identity, empathy, respect for others, resilience in adverse situations, and willingness and ability to communicate and collaborate with others, will greatly impact the shape and cohesion of future workplaces and indeed societies-at-large.

As one panelist urged: “Follow the SEL breadcrumbs.” The jobs of the future will require good collaborators. Collaboration needs self-regulation. Self-regulation needs self-awareness. Self-awareness needs emotional understanding and vocabulary. Thus, “emotional intelligence is key to success.”

Our societies are becoming more diverse. Academic subjects such as history and literature can be exclusionary for those who do not belong to the majority population. SEL can help foster the critical thinking of those who belong to the social majority in order to question the narratives they are being presented with. It can also help those outside of that majority to process and address the emotions of being excluded. SEL can help all students to better process, understand and empathize when learning about traumatic historical events in both shared and other communities' histories.

The digital space is formative in shaping youth identity. “Generation Z is leaving our classrooms and entering our staffrooms,” while Generation Alpha are now starting school. They are the first “phygital” generation – drawing no distinction between the physical and digital world.

Online spaces give people the chance to find and “try on” new identities, seeking out communities of like-minded other people not present IRL (in real life). Many young people thus now have multiple identities. Ensuring our young people have the emotional intelligence and positive values to successfully and safely navigate both these IRL and online spaces is key.



Smashing the Patriarchy with SEL

Education is a powerful tool in achieving social justice – but that education needs to be about more than just academic achievement. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is also vital.

For children in non-crisis settings, research shows that those who struggle the most with their behavior benefit the most from SEL teaching, as reflected in their academic outcomes. Thus SEL is a pathway to academic equity.

For children in conflict and crisis settings, SEL can be even more important. “It doesn't matter if you have these skills and competencies if you are not safe enough to use them.”

In April 2014, 276 school girls were kidnapped by the terrorist group, Boko Haram, from their school in Chibok, northern Nigeria. Some were fortunate enough to escape or be released in the following months – but unsurprisingly, they were traumatized. Getting these girls back into school was a priority for local educators. First 24, now 122 girls have been enrolled into a new program called the New Foundation School. The program is a college-preparation course to ready the girls for study at the American University of Nigeria. But, as a panelist in Salzburg pointed out: “This wasn't just an academic matter... we had to address their trauma,” and this is where SEL comes in.

The New Foundation School supports not only the girls' academic growth, but also addresses their social and emotional wellbeing and physical health, post trauma.

Through various academic and artistic pursuits, the Chibok girls are learning to deal with their traumatic experience, regulate their emotions, and express their hopes for their future. The school's program does not disregard their traditional culture, but through education many of the girls have come to question traditional societal expectations of them. Many now want to return to their communities to address inequalities and issues there.

In India, SEL is being used to help girls – and boys – develop a greater sense of gender equality through the development of empathy, respect and resilience. Girls are empowered to understand their self-worth and create a strong sense of self – not just as someone's daughter, wife or mother. Boys learn that girls are their equals.

Class and caste issues are also being addressed. As one participant remarked: “It's not only important for the dalit girl to learn about her value but also for the brahmin girl to know it too.”

Thus SEL is being used to help deconstruct oppressive power dynamics, such as patriarchy. When deconstructing patriarchy, one panelist pointed out, it is important to engage young men. “We tell them patriarchy isn't your fault but it hurts the women you love.”

While it is important to expand SEL beyond the classroom and into the home and communities, “schools are powerful sites of social transformation... If schools are unjust, injustice will persist outside of schools.” The reverse can also be true.

Mapping Out SEL and Facilitating Conversations at Salzburg Global Seminar

Monika Kochowicz discusses her work and the conversations she has had in Salzburg

Lucy Browett

After three days of productive talks at the Salzburg Global Seminar program, *Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action*, participants have had the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise and learn about different countries' approaches to social and emotional learning (SEL). Now is the time to discuss next steps.

During their first three days at Schloss Leopoldskron, participants have engaged in panel discussions, knowledge exchanges, and even a film screening to explore SEL in both research and practice contexts, as well as from global and local perspectives.

Participants range from academics and researchers to policymakers and educators, providing a breadth of knowledge and experience in varying forms and contexts of SEL.

One of the participants embracing the varying formats of the program and the multitude of conversation opportunities is Monika Kochowicz, who collaborates with the Norwegian Red Cross and No Hate Speech campaign as a facilitator and educator, specializing in conflict resolution and non-violent communication.

This affinity towards non-formal learning methodology began through her own studies. She said, "For my thesis, I was looking into Polish migrant youth experiences of intercultural learning and different learning settings.

"Then since, I [have] felt so very passionate about non-formal education, and I thought this is a great way of creating safe spaces for people to learn and reflect."

Kochowicz took this passion and began her work with the Norwegian Red Cross, where she became a workshop facilitator. For her, the role has strong SEL roots. She said, "I would say that the components that would align with SEL would be to give them [the students with whom she works] tools, learning how to communicate and how to voice their needs and emotions."

Through this work, her experience with the No Hate Speech campaign, as well as through the Norwegian Red Cross, Kochowicz often works with young refugees.

Kochowicz said, "I also work with human rights education and mainly concentrating on online hate speech. This is



again facilitating conversations and group processes with youth between 15 and 25 years old.

"It's migrant youth... and I feel it's immensely important for them to just create those safe spaces for them to get to talk about their experience to just give them the feeling that they can be heard and seen."

On Monday afternoon, participants attended a Knowledge Café, where they spent around 25 minutes at each table discussion, exploring SEL concepts led by a facilitator at each station. "I really like that format because you get to travel," said Kochowicz. "It was mapping what different people work with."

"There's been a few different approaches to applying SEL, different perspectives. Some of which is in conflict areas. People [are] going into those places of trauma and working with people whose needs really have to be taken into consideration before doing any work... And it sounded like their needs are being taken into account."

On Wednesday, participants will gather into working groups to further explore the concepts and ideas discussed throughout

the week and make action plans.

Kochowicz stated, "I feel like I've been learning so much already."

Looking ahead to these working groups, she added, "I would want to gain more input on how can we work with both the youth practitioners and teachers and youth workers."

Reflecting on her own experiences that she would be able to bring to the table, Kochowicz said, "I would like to concentrate on all the simplicity of action, which is teaching people how to communicate how to talk about their needs and emotions."

The conversation continues.

The program Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action is part of Salzburg Global's long-running multi-year series Education for Tomorrow's World. The program is held in partnership with ETS, Microsoft, Porticus, Qatar Foundation International and USAID's Education in Crisis and Conflict Network, with additional support from the British Council.

Being Human in Digital World

“How are you feeling?” asked the moderator. As a large digital clock projected onto the wall counted down on the panelists’ opening remarks, the answer was probably “stressed.”

Technology thus loomed large in a panel exploring the role it plays in helping to develop SEL and the general role it plays in our everyday lives. Tech is a powerful tool, but unlike pre-digital tools like a hammer, which were completely in the control of humans, today’s tools seem to be in control of us. How do we retake our sense of control and retain our sense of humanity?

Digitalization is just one of several “mega trends” facing the next generation. From globalization and environmental insecurity to the fourth industrial revolution and the ensuing need for lifelong learning and collaboration and co-operation, the world of work and at-large will look very different for today’s students. As a UK study showed, many students have career aspirations that do not align with future workforce projections, greater links need to be forged between the world of study and the world of work.

As the first “phygital” (physical-digital) generation, tech is already playing a huge role in young people’s lives. Fears abound, mostly focused on the quantity rather than quality of young people’s interaction with tech.

Excessive screentime has been connected to childhood isolation and obesity. Excessive use of social media can impact self-esteem. Excessive use of tools such as Google Maps can lead to the loss of offline map-reading skills or even spacial awareness. Some even worry that excessive photo-taking is impairing memory retention.

But tech also has the power to enhance our SEL and lives in general. Smartphones can create a closer connection to the wider world, opening up space for dialogue, exchanges and community building never before possible. Virtual reality can help develop students’ empathy, e.g. using it to render familiar environments into war-torn places to help them understand what has caused migrants to flee their homes.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is also increasingly omnipresent, opening up new ethical questions such as “can I be rude to Alexa?” One might be inclined to say no, but as one panelist admitted “I’m happy to shout at Alexa” – alleviating burdens onto virtual assistants can be cathartic.

“Before we ask what is artificial intelligence, we need to ask what is human intelligence,” remarked a panelist. We belittle ourselves when we think that artificial intelligence will replace us. As humans in a digital world, we can still retain control of both our emotions and technological tools.

Context Matters: Assessing SEL

“What’s measured matters” is an oft-used phrase in measurement and assessment, but on a panel on the measurement and assessment of SEL the mantra “context matters” was also frequently stated.

When it comes to assessing SEL, regardless of the context, the biggest challenge is the lack of agreement on what constitutes “social and emotional learning” and the naming of the key competencies.

But beyond terminology, assessment of SEL in crisis and conflict contexts is further hindered by the fact that many of the assessment methods have yet to be validated in those contexts. How do we know that existing methods will work in this context? How can they be adequately adapted?

While much is done to translate programs into local contexts and languages, this is less common for the assessments of those programs. If a child is learning in a language different to that which they use at home, they may not have the vocabulary necessary to express themselves in a self-reporting assessment. One solution is to empower and

train local teachers to formulate their own assessments.

Measurement is important for more than just individual assessment; data gathering also helps measure, evaluate and improve SEL programs. This data should then be widely shared to improve other programs.

In countries where testing and assessment is seen as burdensome and stressful for both students and teachers, measurement of SEL can prove controversial. As one panelist remarked, “We don’t teach SEL for the sake of teaching it, to meet assessment goals... We teach SEL to provide the foundation for students’ education” but as another also rightly pointed out, “Without effective assessments, we cannot know if students are succeeding in our programs.” Ensuring that assessment does not become burdensome is key to ensuring widespread data collection.

Individual assessment and program M&E can help gather the data to make the case for SEL education for the unconvinced. Measuring SEL can thus make SEL matter more – whatever the context.

Closing the Gaps in Global SEL Research

“The moment of SEL is here” – so how do we take advantage of that to curate the research needed to advance SEL?

Many donors fund programs for offering SEL in crisis and conflict settings, but more need to fund the research needed to make sure these programs are effective in the specific context in which they are being implemented. Zero research means poor impact. As researchers, we should ask ourselves five key questions: What works? For whom does it work? How does it work? Under what conditions does it work? And “for how damn long?”

Understanding the context and resources available will create more effective programs. However, much research takes place outside of the context of practice, thus stronger links need to be forged between the two.

“There are more gaps than there is research,” lamented one panelist. Policymakers are often “pushed to back up what they need to do,” so much so that they tend to sometimes “grab anything.”

Those who suffer most from this poorly informed approach are those who would benefit most greatly were it to be improved: the students. “Kids don’t deserve us guessing – kids deserve us knowing.”

To produce the best possible research and evidence, research should be inclusive. “We need to co-create research with communities so that research is done *with* them not *on* them.” Research also needs to expand beyond US/Western scholarship. Funding initiatives to pair researchers from the North and South, can go a long way in establishing a *global* understanding of SEL.

Screening at the Schloss: Back to the Fatherland

Building on discussions on SEL and identity, Fellows were treated to a screening of the moving documentary *Back to the Fatherland*. Directors Kat Rohrer and Gil Levanon took questions from the floor, exploring their own journey in making the deeply personal movie and how their own SEL and national narratives had helped or hindered them.

You can find out more about the movie and watch extra footage online:

www.backtothefatherland.com

Upcoming screenings include six dates in London next week. If you would like to bring the film to your city, contact Kat: kat@greenkatproductions.com.

HOT TOPIC: How Can SEL Help Foster Identity?

Lucy Browett

“Identity is such an immense topic and I feel the word itself is loaded... For [migrant youth], it’s a very important tool when they’re migrating from another country and they have to learn the language and values of another country and live by them. It’s important that they see multiple layers of identity that can allow them to relate to others and have sense of belonging. It’s not only their national identity but also other things they hold dear such as different roles in life, personality facets, etc. Mapping and self-awareness can contribute to putting things into perspective and their wellbeing.”

Monika Kochowicz

Facilitator and Educator, Norwegian Red Cross, Norway

“We all hold many identities simultaneously. Especially for children in crisis and conflict settings, social and emotional learning may offer some of the best opportunities for children to

internalize and apply skills, values and behaviors that may be critical to promoting positive identities, which may link to psychosocial wellbeing, resilience and to peace building efforts.”

Lindsay Stark

Associate Professor of Public Health and Social Work, Washington University, USA

“In our context, after failing the public examination, some students commit suicide. So how do we address these emotional feelings?... [Identity] is basically the issue. When children appear in the public examination, they have hope and inspiration that they will pass. So when they fail they feel humiliation.”

Mahmudul Hoque

Additional Secretary for Development, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh

“With SEL...you have a strong sense of identity, so you feel like you’re more able to do a lot of things. You also feel that you have the ability to succeed because then you know who you are and so that brings out

that whole issue of success and being able to manage your life much more effectively.”

Lucy Maina

Program Manager, Zizi Afrique Foundation, Kenya

“SEL skills include self and social awareness. In crisis and conflict contexts, these skills are particularly important for children and young people who need the skills to understand who they are and how to situate themselves in the world, especially as they experience multiple displacements and often are caught up in vulnerable and complex identity politics.”

Margi Bhatt

Coordinator, Education Policy, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), USA

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