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# Mainstreaming social and emotional learning in education systems

Policy guide



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# Why social and emotional learning is key to transform education

Since 2015, there has been significant progress towards reimagining education for wider societal transformation in support of peace, justice, inclusion, equality and sustainability. Yet, the existing challenges have intensified, and new ones have emerged.

The world is witnessing a resurgence of multiple forms of conflict and violence, from racism and discrimination, to hate speech and armed conflict. Our efforts to build sustainable peace through education are falling short. Some 250 million children are still out of school, and those in school are not acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills they need.

This guide makes the case for integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in collective efforts to transform education. It highlights the impact of SEL in improving academic achievement, reducing drop-out rates, and improving overall mental health and well-being, and importantly, in strengthening emotional and relational dynamics of classrooms, schools, communities, and societies.

The guide synthesizes the latest research and practice from the world, including case studies of concrete SEL implementation. It provides policy-makers with preliminary guidance to facilitate their conceptualization and integration of SEL in all facets of their education systems to build long-lasting peace and sustainable development.





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# **Mainstreaming social and emotional learning in education systems**

Policy guide

# Foreword

In our rapidly changing world, the role of social and emotional skills in the educational landscape is becoming increasingly significant. These skills, which enable individuals to manage emotions, forge positive relationships and make responsible decisions, are critical for unlocking the potential and talents of learners but also for successfully coping with contemporary challenges.

This publication seeks to elevate social and emotional learning from its hidden corners within the curriculum, classrooms, and schools, positioning it as an essential building block on an equal footing with cognitive skills, literacy and numeracy. It summarizes the latest research and practice on social and emotional learning and puts forward guidance for how it can be mainstreamed in education.

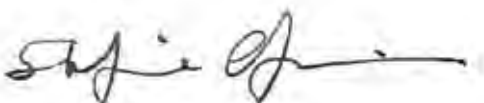
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is integral to UNESCO's humanistic vision of education, which seeks to cultivate not only academic growth but also emotional well-being, social skills, empathy, and social responsibility among all learners.

This holistic approach equips learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to navigate challenges, to build healthy relationships, and to create positive school environments. They prepare them to lead fulfilling lives and spearhead positive social transformations towards long-lasting peace and sustainable development.

SEL is not a panacea. It aims to complement and strengthen existing educational efforts within the transformational education framework, as outlined in the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.

We hope that policy-makers and other education stakeholders will find this guidance to be a valuable addition to their toolkit of resources. Additionally, we invite the broader education system to embrace the call for more research, practice and evaluation of the benefits of SEL to ensure it is grounded in diverse ways of knowing and being, reflecting the rich and complex interconnectedness of our world.

We believe that SEL can serve as a wellspring of renewal towards the reimagination of education for inclusive, just, sustainable and peaceful societies, as called for in UNESCO's flagship report on the Futures of Education.



**Stefania Giannini**

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education

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# **Executive summary**

# I. Introduction

In 2015, Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity and peace. With a pledge of leaving no one behind, the Agenda put forth objectives and corresponding targets to be achieved by 2030, which include addressing extreme poverty, reducing all forms of inequality, enabling lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources, to building peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable societies.

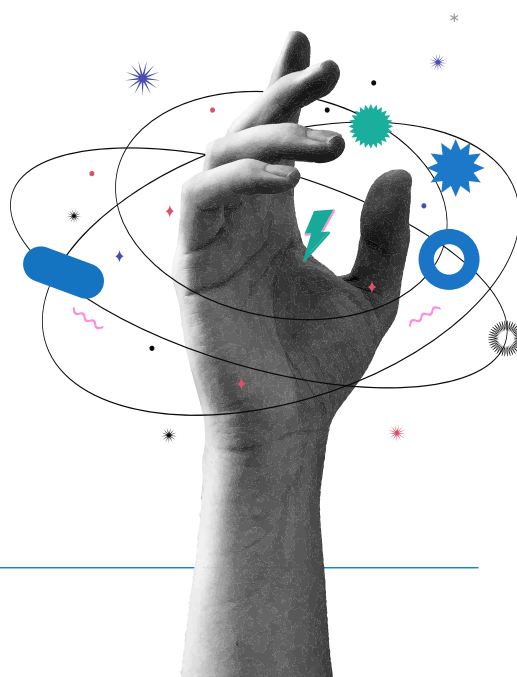
In 2023, even though significant progress has been made on multiple goals in all regions of the world, there is a need to continue expanding efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Our planet and shared humanity face many interconnected challenges, and we are again called upon to act with even more urgency than in 2015. Poverty has increased, and inequalities in many countries are either already high or rising. Climate change and biodiversity loss continue to pose unimaginable existential risks that are felt daily, especially by individuals, groups and communities in vulnerable situations, while mitigation and adaptation efforts are both still falling short of the targets.

Similarly, most forms of violence, from hate speech and racism, to armed conflict, are seeing a resurgence. Every year, more forms of hate speech and other forms of violence and extremism find their way onto social media platforms, presenting new and different challenges, especially for young people. Despite 126 countries improving their positive peace from 2009 to 2020, the 2023 Global Peace Index (GPI)<sup>1</sup> reveals that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated for the 13<sup>th</sup> time in the last 15 years. As with climate change, progress has also been made, but our efforts to build sustainable peace trail those centred on waging war: about USD\$5–6 trillion are needed per year

to achieve the 17 SDGs<sup>2</sup>, but USD\$17.5 trillion was spent in 2022, equivalent to 13% of global GDP<sup>3</sup>, on wars, and with devastating consequences.

At the same time, the digital turn presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the digital transformation has increased the flow of information and expanded social, economic and political opportunities – especially in education – for many people around the world. It has also broadened spaces for different expressions of knowing and being. On the other hand, it has also exacerbated inequalities and accelerated the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech. Another consequence of the digital turn, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the digitalization of education which has exacerbated the deterioration of the relational bonds and social dimensions of education. In response, the social, emotional and affective aspects have seen a surge in education, especially in relation to well-being and learning continuity.

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** aims to address poverty, reduce inequalities, protect natural resources, and build inclusive, sustainable societies



<sup>1</sup> GPI-2023-Web.pdf (visionofhumanity.org)

<sup>2</sup> Annual cost for reaching the SDGs? More than \$5 trillion | UN News

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,1

To face these current and future challenges, education needs to be transformed and redesigned. A genuinely transformative education system can contribute towards addressing these issues both directly and indirectly. This is the vision of education called for by [SDG 4](#)<sup>4</sup>, [Transforming Education Summit](#)<sup>5</sup>, [Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education](#)<sup>6</sup>, the [New Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development adopted unanimously in 2023](#)<sup>7</sup>, and other normative instruments.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has a crucial role to play in the collective efforts to transform education. Social and emotional learning encourages greater attention to the role of social relations and emotional dynamics of learning, in addition to the cognitive and behavioural aspects. If conceptualized and implemented within a broader social, relational and ecological foundation, SEL can not only strengthen the individual, relational and systemic aspects of learning, but revitalize existing efforts within education for positive social transformation towards long-lasting peace and sustainable development.

This publication takes stock of SEL and puts forth initial action ideas to guide its systematic mainstreaming in education. It builds on and extends previous work undertaken by UNESCO on SEL from the perspective of [Global Citizenship Education \(GCED\)](#)<sup>8</sup> and [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#)<sup>9</sup>, [Building Strong Foundations for Health and Well-being Education](#)<sup>10</sup>, and the [Happy Schools Framework](#)<sup>11</sup> among others. It shares insights of earlier

guidance materials and previous research within the sector. For example, a 2019 [UNESCO study](#)<sup>12</sup> examining the dimensions of learning in GCED and ESD in curricular across 10 countries found that though SEL was indeed included in curricular documents, there were important variations between levels of education and subject matter. The same study also found that SEL was present more in content related to GCED (i.e. cultural diversity and human rights) than in others, such as ESD, which focused more on the cognitive and the behavioural or action-oriented dimensions of education.

Based on this foundation, and drawing on contributions from multiple UNESCO Offices and Institutes such as the [Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development \(MGIEP\)](#)<sup>13</sup>, the publication unpacks SEL as a broadening of the educational process, from a focus on cognitive aspects to a balance between cognitive, social and emotional, and behavioural or action-oriented dimensions of learning. The publication recognizes the need for expanding the research foundations of SEL through comparative and longitudinal studies that include more voices from diverse contexts, and from a wider range of educational and social science disciplines. There is also a need for critical review and evaluation of SEL from a wider range of contexts around the world, and for its cultural contextualization. Lastly, it also emphasises that if SEL is to promote social justice within and beyond education, its mainstreaming should be guided by human rights, cultural diversity and the full range of principles set forth in the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.

4 Goal 4: Quality education - The Global Goals

5 Transforming Education Summit | United Nations

6 Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education - UNESCO Digital Library

7 Draft revised 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms - UNESCO Digital Library

8 Global citizenship and peace education | UNESCO

9 Education for sustainable development | UNESCO

10 Health and education | UNESCO

11 Why the world needs happy schools: global report on happiness in and for learning - UNESCO Digital Library

12 Educational content up close: examining the learning dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education - UNESCO Digital Library

13 UNESCO MGIEP | Building Kinder Brains

## II. What is SEL?

Social and emotional learning is a process of acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively. It is a holistic process of

learning grounded in ethics of care that links the cognitive with the social and emotional as well as relational aspects of learning toward supporting learners' well-being, academic attainment, and active global citizenship for positive social change.

Concretely, transformative SEL aims to foster positive relations and behavioural or action-oriented change by enabling learners to:



## III. Social and emotional learning across contexts

Social and emotional learning comes to life differently in diverse contexts. Given its transversality and presence in different conceptions and approaches to learning, social and emotional learning is equated and closely associated, and at times used interchangeably, with and in relation to the following approaches:

Across content and context, the following are some of the general characteristics of SEL:

- Social and emotional learning is multidimensional and requires the integration of cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, relational, and behavioural considerations as well as cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. Thus, education systems that intend to integrate SEL should ground it within a vision of education for the whole human personality, for living together, socialization, humanism and fostering a sense of solidarity.
- Social and emotional learning (whether structured or non-structured) echoes culturally relevant concepts and values, so its expression can vary across developmental stages, individuals, situations and communities through the dynamic interplay of personal, societal and environmental structures and processes.
- Social and emotional learning must be sensitive to cultural variation, must respect different forms of diversity and not favour any one cultural group's forms of SEL over any other – it being understood that, as stated in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the defence of cultural diversity “implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms ... . No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope”.
- Social and emotional learning competencies are malleable; they can be taught and promoted through conscious effort in all settings. To be most effective, a culture of SEL should adopt a lifelong and life-wide approach that ensures continuity of practice between home, school and community.
- Social and emotional learning is not intended to replace social, political, environmental and economic changes that would support the health and well-being of learners, but instead complements and boosts efforts for transformation towards justice, peace and the vitality of learners' environments.
- The full potential of SEL can be hindered or thwarted depending on the availability and provision of equitable environmental opportunities and support for SEL, and structural and social facilitators or barriers to SEL.

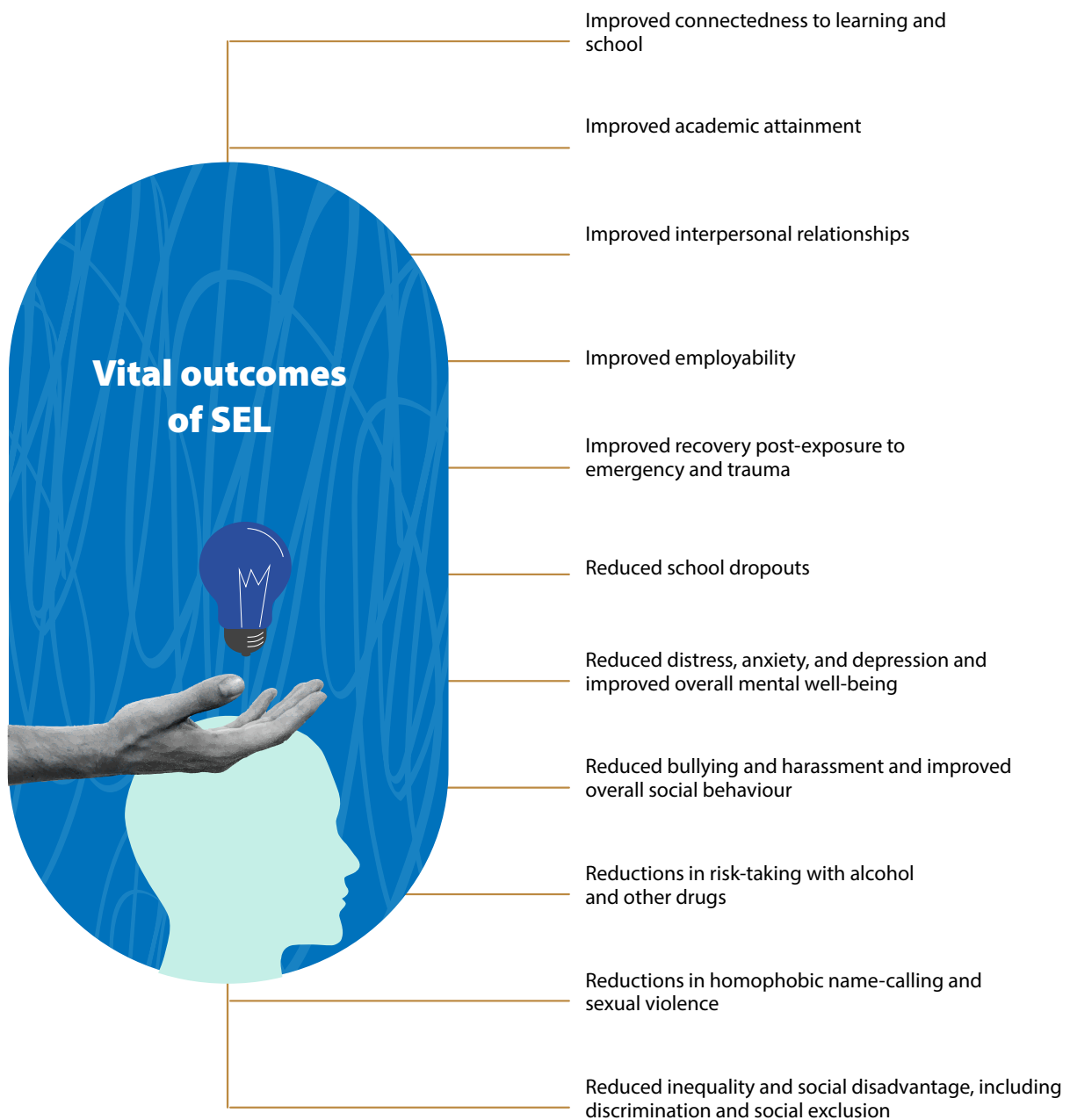




## IV. Why SEL?

Social and emotional learning is an end in itself in that it nourishes the overall physical and mental well-being of individuals and strengthens the connections between members of society. In the short and medium term, SEL can also help address issues such as bullying and inter-personal

violence. In the long-term, evidence shows that SEL, especially when co-created within a social, relational and ecosystemic framework, can strengthen the knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals and communities to lead social transformation.





## V. Key recommendations

### Defining, framing and prioritizing SEL

- Recognize that SEL is part and parcel of a humanistic vision of education. It allows learners in all societies to benefit from a more holistic form of education that values, on an equal footing, the cognitive, social and emotional as well as behavioural aspects of their development and well-being. In short – not only does it help learners address immediate challenges in their lives – it can allow them to spearhead positive social change.
- Prioritize SEL as foundational, just as literacy and numeracy have been identified as foundational to a good education.
- Ensure that the definition, understanding, and practice of SEL is intrinsically tied to cultural norms, beliefs, values, and behavioural expressions of the place in which it is implemented and the learners who compose the learning space.
- Provide all necessary support for comprehensive SEL mainstreaming in all aspects of education guided by a lifelong and life-wide approach that spans all education levels and extends into work and community contexts. This mainstreaming process should also ensure that SEL does not replace or re-invent the wheel but augments existing relevant approaches to education.

### Curricula and pedagogy (digital and otherwise)

- Social and emotional learning curricular and pedagogy are both oriented towards transformative education and should therefore be carefully supported when introduced into the curriculum, especially as SEL also requires contextualization at all levels to be culturally appropriate and responsive. This might also entail analysing and strengthening

existing areas in the curriculum, including in the hidden curriculum, where SEL is already included, instead of adding new content to an already overloaded curriculum.

- Identify and harness pedagogies that advance SEL, such as problem-based learning, collaborative learning, service learning, and reparative pedagogies.
- Take advantage of digital pedagogies to advance SEL, while taking necessary measures to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and sensitive, as well as developmentally appropriate for all learners. Digital pedagogies will not replace the relational and social work of teachers, educators, schools, and communities in comprehensive SEL education, but they can complement as a creative and flexible contribution to SEL programmes. Additionally, ensure they apply the highest standards of privacy and data protection to facilitate the sharing of knowledge for the public common good.
- Ensure that SEL pedagogies are inclusive and support learners' agency and confidence. They should ideally also be active and relational.
- For transformative impact, ensure that SEL is not only integrated as an add-on but comprehensively woven into all aspects of the curriculum.

### Assessment

- In line with the New Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, adopted unanimously in 2023 (paragraphs 31–34), rethink assessment to ensure equal balance between the cognitive, social and emotional, affective and behavioural areas of knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes and other domains of learning that are usually not prioritized. This should also include ensuring that assessment and evaluation are free from cultural and any other bias and are solely

designed to the benefit of learners and their learning process.

- Include learners in the assessment process, who should contribute to learning by giving constructive feedback.
- Special attention should be paid to a differentiated approach to assessment and evaluation which is context-specific and adaptive to all learners, including persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, and those in vulnerable situations.
- Ensure that a SEL assessment, monitoring, and evaluation system collects information to continuously improve SEL delivery systems. It should be formative, comprehensive, balanced, aligned, evidence-based, and ethical.
- Co-create all the elements of SEL assessment with all the stakeholders: from defining process and learning outcomes, the capacities and skills required, the resources available, the adaptations and tools needed, the information to be collected and how to share and use it, to combination of specified/flexible and prefabricated/unfabricated approaches to best accomplish the goals.

**Rethink assessment to balance cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural knowledge, ensuring it is free from bias and beneficial to learners**

## Teacher education and professional development

- Professional development of teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of transformative SEL. To successfully integrate SEL into education systems, inquiry and critical self-reflexivity, social and emotional competence, resilience, adaptability, and self-awareness should be integrated into comprehensive teacher training programmes. Such training programmes should also help teachers understand diversity and cultural variations in SEL mainstreaming, including their own beliefs about the purpose of SEL, which may be grounded in principles of inclusion and culturally embedded social and emotional processes.
- Since SEL does not occur in a vacuum, provide teachers with the tools to decode and critically unpack the impacts of social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental stressors on their lives, and of their students, including how these stressors interact with and influence overall learning and well-being.



- Invest in the well-being of teachers and other educators by ensuring job security, professional support to develop both pedagogically and emotionally competent teachers capable of effective classroom management and empathic interactions while also being cognizant of their well-being. This also requires systemic and structural interventions to ensure teachers have a healthy and safe workplace conducive to good teaching and learning.
- Adopt evidence-based professional development strategies that can assist teachers to become more aware and conscious of biases and other socialized habits, become more reflexive practitioners, and most importantly, to aspire to become positive role models for the social and emotional competencies they are hoping to see in their learners.

### Wider school leadership for SEL

- Support the establishment and smooth functioning of participatory school leadership mechanisms for SEL that realign school processes toward safety and inclusive social support, and consequently, engage the entire school, including the hidden curriculum, to take full ownership of the design and implementation of SEL.
- Provide the resources and necessary support to ensure that school leadership is dynamic and integrates individual capabilities, school and community resources, and relationships among school staff, students, families, and the wider community through the lens of an ethic of care that highlights strengths, caring, inclusion, and equity.
- Harness and support the role of schools as avenues where the wider community can learn and practice SEL. This entails providing the wider school leadership, teachers and other educators, and learners with the necessary support to co-create school activities that bring together and engage diverse members of the community.

### Community and learner inclusion in SEL

- Ensure that policy and planning for SEL allows ample room for community spaces as sites for expanding SEL introduced and practiced in schools. This is because SEL needs to be considered within a socially connected or social-relational or social-ecosystemic context because learning cannot only occur in the school environment. Learning is influenced by micro, meso and macro level factors that are dynamically related.
- Develop a transformative, systemic approach to SEL by considering three inclusive education foundations that underpin SEL: (i) a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective that encompasses education during every stage and dimension of life, and in all places; (ii) a socio-ecological community view to embed the salience of individuals' social relational and physical-material ecologies; and (iii) an asset-based approach as a framework for action, which assume that the people living their everyday lives in a space are best placed to know which available internal and external resources they can access and mobilize to accomplish a goal.
- Recognize and harness the potential of SEL to equip all actors with the tools and competencies to transformatively engage with existing power relations and structures, especially from a social-relational or social-ecosystemic perspective, where relations between different levels of the system are engaged.
- Harness the potential of transformative and social relational SEL to shift power and sustain change through: (i) building a community of carers as a basis for socially connected communities; (ii) building bridges between schools, families and communities, where the larger local and global system is integral to develop learners and communities; and (iii) contributing to local and global transformations towards the common good.

- Leverage the key role of environmental factors in SEL processes by creating a supportive context based on a comprehensive and coherent framework relevant for all community actors. The framework should constitute a shared vision regarding a habitat for SEL which is integral to the development of students.
- Systemic and transformative SEL implementation requires mainstreaming through the whole system a perspective of equity, inclusion and social justice. Each of the dynamics of the social-relational or social-ecological system need to include relevant SEL opportunities – from the micro-system between people in a classroom or family, to the meso-system of local institutions and community organisations, to the wider macro-system of people in societies, countries and the wider world.
- Provide all the necessary support for the local situatedness of SEL as a key starting point for considering the validity of SEL in education. Much inspiration for SEL can be found in the world’s cultures and communities, their languages and cultural expressions. For example, in Latin America we find the concept of Buen Vivir, or “Living well,” which centres on notions of solidarity, generosity, reciprocity and complementarity, related to the goal of social justice and community, which is similar to the African concept of Ubuntu.

## VI. Conclusion

- SEL is a foundational aspect of good education, and informs efforts to transform education so that it contributes towards inclusive, just, sustainable and peaceful societies as called for by TES, the Agenda 2030, the Pact for the Future and other international instruments. SEL is not aimed at replacing, but rather enhancing and improving existing effective approaches to education within a transformational framework, as put forward in the 2023 Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.
- SEL should be carefully contextualized in different cultural and community contexts, as impactful SEL builds on local experiences, cultures and ways of knowing, and can expand on ways that communities conceptualize the good, education, care and other ways of being in and with the world.
- All stakeholders should be involved in conceptualizing SEL, as SEL is more impactful when all relevant actors, from learners to public institutions, are meaningfully engaged throughout the conception, development, implementation and evaluation phases. Important for policy systems and the development of more systemic approaches to SEL as put forward in these guidelines, SEL requires adequate financial resources, institutional support, and advocacy to bring it from the fringes to the centre of education.
- Finally, SEL is not a panacea but an integral part of a wider concerted effort to transform education. It can contribute, but cannot, in itself, address systemic inequalities and injustices, and should therefore be conceptualized in ways that take adequate account of wider efforts to address systemic inequalities and injustices. It is not a replacement for such efforts.

## Chapter 1

# What is Social and Emotional Learning?



This chapter introduces SEL. It explores the conceptualization, expression, educational integration and terminological variations of SEL across diverse contexts and for a range of learners. The chapter examines the role of SEL education in nurturing learner development, involving parents, teachers and communities. Lastly, the chapter explores the significance of SEL in terms of outcomes and its integration in education systems to help achieve just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies.

## 1.1 Introduction

The world confronting most young people today is challenging. Despite amelioration efforts, pressures affecting human and planetary well-being are increasing. There have been setbacks in anticipated gains for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2022). Challenges such as poverty and climate change present uncertainties for societies around the world. Despite policy commitments to the contrary, energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have reached the highest level ever. The number of people living in extreme poverty and income inequality has both increased. There is an escalation in violent conflicts (United Nations, 2022), a sense of isolation (Boursier et al., 2020), and heightened stress levels (Marten and Wilkerson, 2003; Hou et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic produced significant educational setbacks, compounded existing challenges and revealed disjunctures in the structural makeup of society (WHO, 2022; Singh and Singh, 2020).

All of these challenges require significant social, political and economic shifts, such as wealth redistribution, energy transition, renewed efforts at peace-building and the reinvigoration of democracy. Such shifts are not merely technical, nor do they involve the action of individuals only. Rather, they require the coordinated efforts of people across diverse contexts, countries and

positions – of global citizens. For education to contribute towards collective efforts to address these and other future challenges, it needs to be transformed by supporting learners not only with critical and creative cognitive capacities but also with self-reflexivity, empathy, care, ethical decision making, and relationality (i.e. social and emotional competencies) to work together as members of a shared planet. At the centre of this reimagination of education is SEL. This is in line with the kind of education called for by [SDG 4](#)<sup>14</sup>, [Transforming Education Summit](#)<sup>15</sup>, [Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education](#)<sup>16</sup>, the [Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development adopted by consensus in 2023](#)<sup>17</sup>, and other normative instruments.

14 Goal 4 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org)

15 Transforming Education Summit | United Nations

16 Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education; executive summary - UNESCO Digital Library

17 Draft revised 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms - UNESCO Digital Library

## 1.2 What is SEL?

Social and emotional Learning is generally understood as a holistic process of learning that more explicitly links a cognitive emphasis with social and emotional aspects. Social and emotional learning connects learning with individual learners' underlying beliefs, values, attitudes and skills. Its aim is to support student well-being and academic attainment, peacebuilding and healthy relationships, and

active global citizenship. The definition below from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2020) shows the scope of SEL to also include school-family-community relationships. In Chapters 2, 5 and 6 this is re-emphasised as being an important feature of SEL that is culturally inclusive and situationally relevant.



\*

## A definition of SEL

Social and emotional learning is an integral part of education and human development. It is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop inclusive identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Social and emotional learning advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. Social and emotional learning can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy and just communities. (CASEL, 2020)

Building on preceding conceptions, this guide defines SEL as a process of acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively. It is a holistic process of learning grounded in ethics of care and which links the cognitive with the social and emotional and relational aspects of learning toward supporting learners' well-being, academic attainment, and active global citizenship for positive social change.

Concretely, transformative SEL aims to foster positive relations and behavioural or action-oriented change by enabling learners to:





While SEL comes to life in different ways in different contexts, some of its general characteristics are that:

- Social and emotional learning is multidimensional and requires the integration of cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, relational, behavioural considerations as well as cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. Thus, education systems that intend to integrate SEL should ground it within a vision of education for the whole human personality, for living together, for socialization, humanism and fostering a sense of solidarity.
- Social and emotional learning (whether structured or non-structured) echoes culturally relevant concepts and values, so its expression can vary across developmental stages, individuals, situations and communities through the dynamic interplay of personal, societal and environmental structures and processes.
- Social and emotional learning must be sensitive to cultural variations, must respect different forms of diversity and not favour any one cultural group's forms of SEL over others – it being understood that as stated in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the defence of cultural diversity “implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms [...]. No one may invoke

cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope”.

- Social and emotional learning competencies are malleable; they can be taught and promoted through conscious effort in all settings. To be most effective, a culture of SEL should adopt a lifelong and life-wide approach that ensures continuity of practice between home, school and community.
- Social and emotional learning is not intended to replace social, political, environmental and economic changes that would support the health and well-being of learners, but instead complements and boosts efforts for transformation towards justice, peace and the vitality of learners' environments.
- The full potential of SEL can be hindered or thwarted depending on the availability and provision of equitable environmental opportunities and support for SEL, and structural and social facilitators or barriers to SEL.



# 1.3 Social and emotional learning across contexts

Mainstreaming SEL in education requires, first and foremost, the delineation of what it means. This is crucial, especially since the term ‘social and emotional learning’ comes to life under different names in various settings. These differences in terminology are driven, among other things, either by the outcomes the framework intends

to achieve, the research areas that contribute to the framework’s development or the goals and aspirations of the education envisioned by the developing organization. Some popular terminologies that are often equated with or closely associated with SEL are:



The definition, understanding and practice of SEL is intrinsically tied to cultural norms, beliefs, values and behavioural expressions of the place in which it is implemented and the teachers and learners who make up the learning space. While competencies such as empathy, mindfulness, social and self-awareness, kindness, compassion, critical inquiry, collaboration and communication, to list a few, are valued in many contexts, cultural and contextual elements can drive the specific framework and vision for SEL in a specific context. As expressed throughout this guidance document, working directly with diverse learners, educators, parents and communities can help to ensure SEL is contextually relevant and that it reflects the diversity of learners in a given learning space. It is indeed essential to situate SEL in socio-cultural contexts to ensure cultural relevance of SEL, while also linking this to global citizenship realities and challenges.

In this vein, SEL is conceptualized differently in various contexts, reflecting diverse cultures, social conditions and educational systems. In some West African nations, for example, SEL is frequently intertwined with character education, emphasizing values like respect, empathy and responsibility, to foster students' moral

growth. These programmes aim to cultivate favourable character traits for individual and societal welfare. They acknowledge the role of cultural values, community involvement and traditional wisdom in shaping SEL abilities. In some East African contexts, SEL is closely linked to promoting resilience and life skills. The emphasis is on equipping students with practical skills to navigate challenges and adversities. Programmes may include activities that enhance communication, problem-solving, decision-making and conflict-resolution abilities. Social and emotional learning in this region often underscores the importance of building social connections and fostering a sense of belonging, reflecting a strong focus on the African tradition of valuing relationality and community. Indigenous cultures in Australia may incorporate traditional wisdom and community connections as integral components of SEL (Dobia and Roffey, 2017). In summary, SEL is underlined by contextual differences in its definition, purpose, terminology, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Examples of these differences will be highlighted through these policy guidelines based on the content of each chapter, and in the case studies.



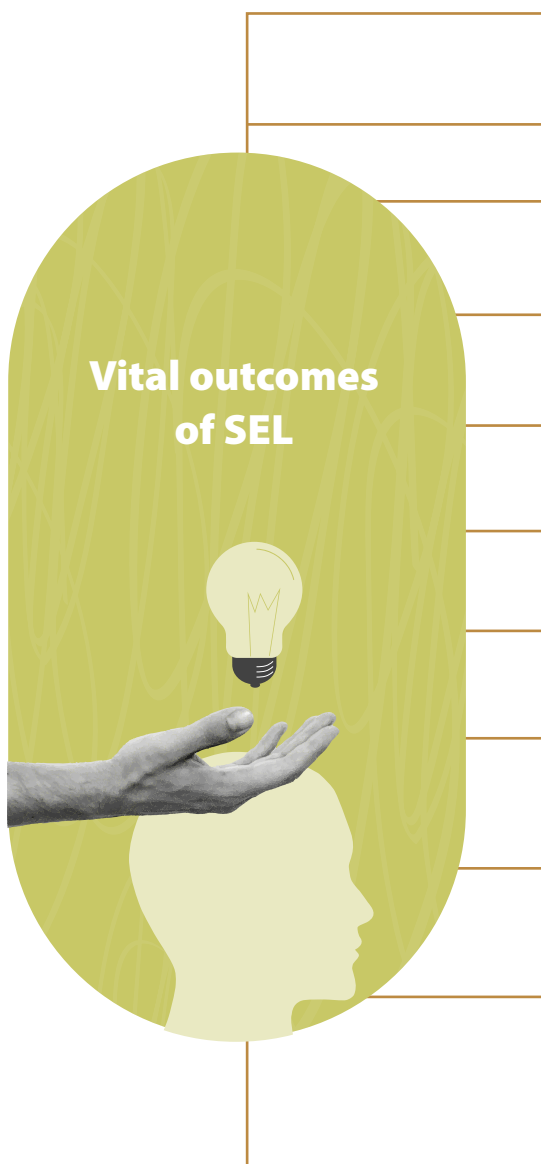
# 1.4 Why does SEL matter?

## Vital outcomes of SEL

Social and emotional learning has potential to nurture the personal and academic growth of individuals to develop capabilities to navigate an increasingly complex world, and to contribute more holistically to resolving multifaceted challenges. Based on the positive outcomes of introducing SEL and associated competencies into education, educators, parents and policymakers have come to recognize

the critical importance of engaging learners in SEL, especially, but not only, the younger generation. The recent COVID-19 pandemic fuelled this urgency further, abruptly reshaping the educational landscape and underscoring the need for fostering relationality and social connections.

A substantial body of research has shown many benefits of SEL programmes and their orientation towards more holistic engagement with learners, including:



- Improved mental well-being and reduced distress, anxiety and depression** (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak and Mahoney, 2019; Wang et al., 2016)
- Reduced school dropouts** (Wang et al., 2016)
- Improved social behaviour and reduced bullying and harassment** (Cipriano et al., 2023; Ttofi and Farrington, 2011)
- Improved connectedness to learning and school** (Catalano et al., 2004; Cipriano et al., 2023)
- Improved interpersonal relationships** (Kats Gold et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015; Frey et al., 2005)
- Improved academic attainment** (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak and Mahoney, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011)
- Reductions in risk-taking with alcohol and other drugs** (Bond et al., 2007; Sklad et al., 2012)
- Reductions in homophobic name-calling and gender-based violence** (Espelage et al., 2015)
- Improved employability and educational achievement** (OECD, 2015; Chernyshenko et al., 2018; Steponavičius et al., 2023)
- Improved recovery post-exposure to emergency and trauma** (Cahill et al. 2020)
- Reduced inequality and social disadvantage** (Cañabate et al., 2021; Olcoñ et al., 2021; Hagelskamp et al. 2013; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008), **including reduced discrimination and social exclusion** (Rutland and Killen, 2015; Killen et al., 2011)

Studies into the benefits of SEL are ongoing, with a recent review undertaken by the OECD (Steponavičius *et al.*, 2023) offering a review of the evidence on the relationship between SEL skills and key life outcomes. The study diverges from historical framings of SEL that were largely based on personality traits research, as personality trait research is limited because it has been conceptualized primarily in western cultural settings with a concern that it may not adequately capture cultural variations and diversity in social and emotional skills development.

The study also argues that SEL skills are dependent on, but also conceptually distinct from foundational cognitive processes such as visual processing, attention, memory and academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. It also tries to point out which SEL skills are ‘teachable’ i.e. they can be pedagogically supported. It argues that there is evidence that SEL skills of empathy, metacognition, co-operation, self-control, assertiveness, stress resistance, emotional control, social problem-solving and self-efficacy appeared can be ‘taught’, but outcomes related to other SEL skills such as social awareness, communication, self-management, often promoted in SEL are not that evident in terms of their pedagogical relation.

The study links SEL skills to life outcomes, arguing that there is evidence that self-control and self-efficacy/locus of control have strong evidence of association with academics, the labour market, quality of life and societal outcomes, while emotional intelligence influencing all types of outcomes. Social problem-solving appears to be important for health and prosocial behaviour, and empathy for civic engagement. The authors of this extensive study, writing for the OECD, show that these SEL skills should not be seen as the sole determinants of individual success and societal well-being, as social conditions and contexts influence SEL skills development, and these should be considered together with pedagogical/teaching processes in SEL interventions (Steponavičius *et al.*, 2023).

From a SEL education perspective, the study reports that “self-control, locus of control and self-efficacy, emotional intelligence (likely a composite of several social emotional skills), social problem-solving, empathy, assertiveness and co-operation were identified as the skills with the highest level of evidence of teachability and predictive value” in terms of life outcomes (Steponavičius *et al.*, 2023, p. 79; UNESCO *et al.*, 2024).

## Social and emotional learning and sustainable development

Processes for SEL that foster competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, acceptance of diversity and conflict resolution can contribute significantly to achieving various aspects of sustainable development as exemplified in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is through their influence on beliefs and behaviours (Cristóvão *et al.*, 2023) and collective actions and cultures of practice (Tozer *et al.*, 2011). Social and emotional learning and associated competencies can promote quality education for all (SDG 4) by creating a positive and inclusive learning environment, enhancing collaboration and engagement, fostering critical thinking, aiding emotional regulation, and stress management, promoting positive forms of resilience and well-being (SDG 3). Competencies such as empathy and communication can break down stereotypes and promote inclusivity, diversity and gender equality (SDG 5).

In the context of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), effective communication and problem-solving abilities can foster leadership potential for sustainable economic advancement. Empathy and care for others can help to avoid exploitation in workplaces. Social and emotional learning and associated competencies can contribute to reducing inequalities (SDG 10) by fostering an understanding of the systemic underpinnings of inequalities and the need for cooperation among diverse groups, thereby reducing discrimination, and promoting inclusiveness. They can also contribute to peace,

justice and strong institutions (SDG 4.7, SDG 16) by enabling conflict resolution, empathy and effective communication – necessary foundations for just societies.

When engaged with the surrounding environment through ecological care approaches, SEL can also contribute to the building of healthy communities and cities (SDG 11), manage eco-anxiety relating to, and act to resolve climate change challenges (SDG 13) and establish healthy relations with the land, other life forms, our oceans and water (SDGs 13, 14, 15 and 6). Social and emotional learning competencies can also aid in relationship and partnership development (SDG 17) by facilitating collaboration, trust-building and effective communication among various stakeholders, which is essential for the sustainable development of society, and therefore also the SDGs. Social and emotional learning therefore also supports the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)<sup>18</sup>:

However, there is a need for more empirical research to understand how different SEL competencies can positively impact one or several SDGs. This impact is likely mediated through complex interactions between micro, meso and macro contextual factors. Furthermore, the pathways from competencies to SDG aligned behaviours might differ in different contexts that can only be revealed through large-scale comparative studies.



## 1.5 Where is SEL most effective?

Social and emotional learning benefits learners and teachers, improves the general school climate, and contributes to broader social aims and sustainable development in all contexts. However, SEL is most impactful when educational practices and the curriculum intersect with learning experiences from the local community and external actions, such as service-learning and community-based initiatives (Greenberg et al., 2003). Thus, having a shared commitment to SEL practices is the most sustainable way to integrate SEL into education systems. A collaborative SEL consortium can foster learning possibilities within and beyond its scope. Importantly, SEL spans formal, informal and non-formal educational settings, with students, families, and communities co-creating the SEL vision, plans and practices. Additionally, internal and external communities of practice can strengthen SEL implementation.

Social and emotional learning is beneficial beyond formal and traditional school setups. For example, SEL education has been shown to have a promising impact on people in displacement or conflict-affected settings through various impact studies across Asia, Europe and Africa (Kim et al., 2023; Aber et al., 2017). Social and emotional learning programmes enhance emotional well-being, coping mechanisms and resiliency, and improve mental health and interpersonal relationships while reducing psychological distress among refugee children, adolescents and learners in these contexts (Betancourt et al., 2013; Jordans et al., 2018; Panter-Brick et al., 2018).

Education systems are responsible for providing for the holistic learning needs of all learners. Hence policy-makers should have an interest in whether SEL programmes address the needs of a diverse range of learners. While SEL is important for all learners, SEL has also shown particular benefits to enhance inclusion in the following contexts:

### Learners in inclusive learning environments

Many studies investigating universal SEL have not included student ability status within the demographic data, hence it has not been possible in all studies to determine if the programme under investigation provides benefits for the full diversity of students in the classroom (Daley and McCarthy, 2020; Rowe and Trickett, 2018). Some studies, however, have shown that SEL programmes are particularly helpful to support enhanced engagement across a range of students with diverse learning needs (Dix et al., 2012; Cook et al., 2008; Pandey et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 2014). For students with social, emotional and behavioural challenges, SEL helps to improve mental health and well-being (Dix et al., 2012; McMillan and Jarvis, 2013), self-regulation (Pandey et al., 2018) and de-escalation of bullying (Trach et al., 2018), and increases academic attainment (Espelage et al., 2016). In inclusive classrooms, all learners who participate in SEL are more likely to relate in positive and inclusive ways to their classmates who experience emotional and behavioural challenges (Trach et al., 2018). There are thus promising signs that providing an inclusive SEL programme can make a positive contribution within broader efforts to ensure that schools are accessible and supportive places for all learners. Chapter 2 discusses some of these benefits further, offering more nuanced insight for policy-makers and educators.

### Learners in settings of displacement

Education in settings of displacement often involve trauma and disruptions, making SEL crucial for addressing displaced populations' unique challenges. Social and emotional learning interventions offer a safe space for learners to process their emotions, manage stress and develop crucial life competencies. Impact studies indicate that SEL programmes lead to

better academic engagement, improved self-esteem and decreased behavioural issues among displaced students (Aber et al., 2017, Bennouna et al., 2021).

Furthermore, SEL equips displaced students with competencies essential for successful integration and participation in host communities. These competencies include effective communication, conflict resolution, confidence building and cultural adaptation. Studies have demonstrated that SEL interventions foster social cohesion, promote positive cross-cultural interactions, and reduce discrimination and stigma (Reiger et al., 2019; McBrien, 2022). Incorporating SEL into education in settings of displacement and emergencies not only improves students' immediate well-being but also can break the cycle of trauma and displacement by equipping them with competencies that contribute to their long-term success and overall well-being (UNESCO, 2020).

### Learners in juvenile justice programmes

Similarly, SEL education has led to positive outcomes in juvenile justice programmes and associated educational settings such as prevention programmes for youth. While such programmes should also address structural supports such as safety, economic stability, and provision of basic needs for students, SEL

interventions can complement such supports through a focus on developing emotional regulation, communication, conflict resolution and responsible decision-making. Social and emotional learning programmes contribute to positive outcomes for learners such as reduced repeat offences, improved behaviour and enhanced social and emotional well-being (Aos et al., 2004; Greenberg et al., 2003; Grossman et al., 2021; Hahn et al., 2007; Ireland and Smith, 2009; Lerner et al., 2011). Young people participating in SEL programmes demonstrate greater empathy, self-awareness and stronger interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for successful reintegration into society (Yang et al., 2018).

### A reminder: social justice is more than SEL

While these are positive benefits for individual learners as outlined above, in the education system care should be taken to avoid conflation of the introduction of SEL as a means of supporting learners to cope with and respond to challenges faced by them, and the wider need for education systems to deal with structural inequalities, human rights, social justice and the causes of the challenges that learners face (Bryan, 2023). Critiques related to SEL should be noted and carefully considered in planning and implementing SEL, including a critique that

**Social and emotional learning is not a replacement for the ongoing human rights and social justice work** that is necessary to build more **equitable, sustainable futures** and more **inclusive education systems**, that also **respect and enable the rights of children**.

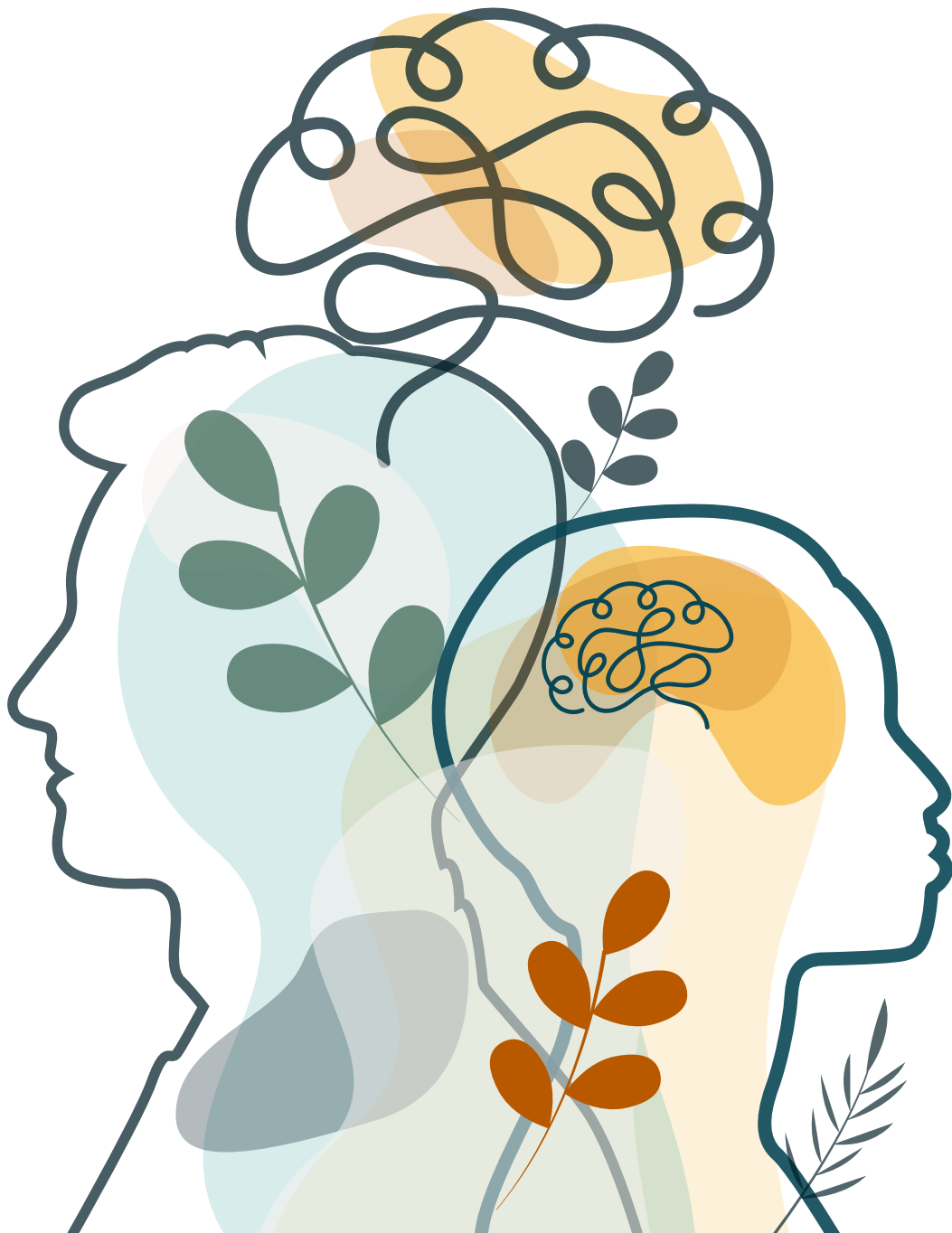




SEL is not an adequate response to the calls for social justice and environmental sustainability especially if narrowly interpreted as a form of ‘neuroindividualism’ (Bryan, 2023). Chapter 2 further discusses more detailed critiques of SEL with specific guidance for planning and implementation.

Social and emotional learning is not a replacement for the ongoing human rights and social justice work that is necessary to build more equitable, sustainable futures and more inclusive education systems, that also respect

and enable the rights of children. It can only be a complementary effort to strengthen learning and should not be reduced to an individualized resolution of societal problems, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2. This is vitally important for policy-makers. To conflate SEL with the need for structural interventions that are needed to deal with wider social justice concerns would leave SEL as an extremely limited response to structural and material factors that produce inequalities, exclusions and social injustices in the education system and in society more broadly.



## 1.6 Integrating SEL into education systems

### The broader policy context of SEL

Integrating SEL in education policy can contribute to some of the pedagogical intentions of SDG 4, Target 4.7, but should not be the only means of interpreting or implementing this target. Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7 requires all education systems to:

*By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (United Nations, 2015).*

Social and emotional learning implementation is most effective when education systems

acknowledge education's broader purpose beyond simply imparting basic knowledge or technical skills. Excellence and equity in education involve nurturing individuals to become independent critical thinkers who actively contribute to a dynamic and diverse society. Achieving this requires a comprehensive approach addressing cognitive, emotional, individual and social dimensions of learning with a clear understanding and mandate that learning must be continuous, occurring throughout life and must include applying acquired knowledge. Consequently, SEL must span all education levels, from early childhood to postgraduate education and can extend into work and community contexts with the above caveats on not conflating the need for wider social and structural reforms in education with the processes of integrating SEL in pedagogical and curriculum development contexts to broaden learning experiences of learners (Bryan, 2023).



## A process model for integrating SEL in education systems

There are different ways of integrating SEL into education systems. One model that may be useful for policy-makers is shown in Figure 1.1. This **4P model** (UNESCO MGIEP, 2022) involves plan, prepare, practice and progress evaluation and operates in a cyclical manner.

- a) Plan** includes convening a team of SEL experts, representatives of relevant stakeholders (learners, teacher representatives, parent groups, community members, school principals and administrators) as well as policy and decision-makers; conducting a needs assessment to map out objectives, resources, outputs and intended outcomes and impacts; and identifying the type of data to be collected, and how it will be securely stored and used. Finally, a monitoring and evaluation plan should be laid out.
- b) Prepare** includes setting up learning systems by preparing guideline documents, programme and curriculum design, training materials, assessment tools and pedagogical tools (elaborated across this policy guideline document in Chapters 2 and 3).
- c) Practice** includes professional development of teachers, integration of SEL across systems and broader communities, collection of quantitative and qualitative data through assessments and measurement of both proximal and distal outcomes (elaborated across this policy guideline document in Chapters 4, 5 and 6).
- d) Progress** includes implementing the monitoring and evaluation programme to inform decisions by policymakers, and update objectives and methodology based on resulting outcomes (elaborated in Chapter 7).

Figure 1.1 Key steps to implement SEL in schools



Source: Adapted from UNESCO MGIEP, 2022, p.22

## 1.7 Conclusion

As discussed across this chapter, SEL introduces a broadening of educational processes, from a focus on cognitive skills to expanding these with social and emotional skills development in the education system. The chapter has shown that these have positive benefits for learners, but that SEL education should not ignore socio-cultural and structural aspects of education. Social and emotional learning should also not be a replacement for ongoing efforts to address human rights and social injustices in education systems worldwide. Social and emotional learning can support the development of psychological capabilities of individuals to integrate emotional responses with rational thinking, and through this, strengthen their individual and social-relational capabilities. This combined cognitive-emotional approach, in turn, can guide beliefs, actions and social relationships, and can contribute to well-being, global citizenship and sustainable development if practised in social settings with solidarity, care and respect for cultural diversity.

As much of the literature on SEL tends to focus on the individual learning advantages, it is important to note that various social structures – for instance those associated with race, ethnicity, economic position, and gender (Jagers et al., 2019) – and surrounding environments interact with individual learners' well-being. Social and emotional learning programmes cannot therefore be solely linked individual psychological development. Rather there is need to consider how psychological development is shaped by the broader socio-cultural and natural worlds where certain ideas, values and emotions are valued and/or are needed.

As argued in this chapter, SEL has important positive benefits for individual learning and psychological development and well-being. It also has important contributions to social and sustainable development more broadly. Locating individual cognitive-emotional learning processes within socio-cultural and ecological contexts in

SEL programmes, can therefore support learners to develop their individual competencies and well-being, and to also collectively contribute to wider social efforts to address complex global problems such as gender inequality, human rights issues, climate change and ecological degradation, violence, and other forms of social injustice.



## Key points for policy-makers

- Learners in all societies are faced with increasing complexities. For this a broader, more holistic form of education is needed that gives attention to cognitive development, but also to cognitive-emotional learning processes, and SEL that leads to well-being, agency for change (behaviours and actions) and social solidarity.
- Social and emotional learning has proven benefits for learners, such as improved mental well-being and reduced distress, anxiety, and depression; improved relationships, practices and confidence; improved educational attainment; and positive contributions to school-community relations; citizenship and sustainable development and general life outcomes. It is particularly important for building more inclusive, compassionate societies.
- The definition, understanding, and practice of SEL is intrinsically tied to cultural norms, beliefs, values, and behavioural expressions of the place in which it is implemented and the learners who compose the learning space, hence SEL programmes are best designed in socio-cultural context (i.e. there is no universal SEL programme) and limitations of the initial research framework for SEL being based on western models of personality traits should be borne in mind. Collaborative approaches to SEL planning involving multiple stakeholders should guide defining what SEL could be in different settings.
- While competencies such as empathy, mindfulness, social and self-awareness, kindness, compassion, critical inquiry, collaboration and communication, to list a few, are valued in many contexts, these should be informed by cultural and contextual elements that drive specific frameworks and visions for SEL in specific contexts, while also linking this to global citizenship realities and challenges.
- Integrating SEL into education can support some of the pedagogical dimensions of SDG Target 4.7. SEL spans all education levels, from early childhood to postgraduate education and can extend into work and community contexts. An inclusive, participatory approach to implementing SEL using a process approach can aid introduction of SEL.
- To ensure coherence with SEL, it would need to be integrated into all aspects of the education process: planning, curriculum design, learning materials, teacher professional development, assessment, and should have a clear monitoring and evaluation framework and approach to guide reflexive implementation of SEL policy.

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## Chapter 2

# Policies and frameworks for action



This chapter aims to inform policy-makers in their work of policy development and programme provision. It provides an overview of the research for those engaged in mainstreaming SEL at system level, including elaboration of the contribution of SEL programmes to well-being and learning, suitability for different cultural contexts and frameworks and strategies to guide holistic approaches to implementation. It also highlights the contribution SEL programmes and initiatives can make towards education system and school efforts to address issues of equity and inclusion, in line with the UN SDG for Quality Education.

## 2.1 A policy case for SEL

Policy-makers can benefit from knowing that a substantial body of research has found that well-designed and implemented SEL programmes lead to improvements in student relationships, behaviour, mental well-being and academic attainment, as well as to longer term economic outcomes relating to employability, as described in Chapter 1. Policy-makers and school and system leaders can highlight these findings when making a research-informed case to garner wider political support for provisioning of SEL programmes.

Data from over 60 countries estimates that social and emotional competencies have been termed 21st century skills because they contribute both to the capabilities and resilience that people need to adapt to change and challenge and because workplaces, families and communities function better when people are able to treat others with respect and collaborate effectively to solve problems and make the best of opportunities (Sanchez Puerta et al., 2016).

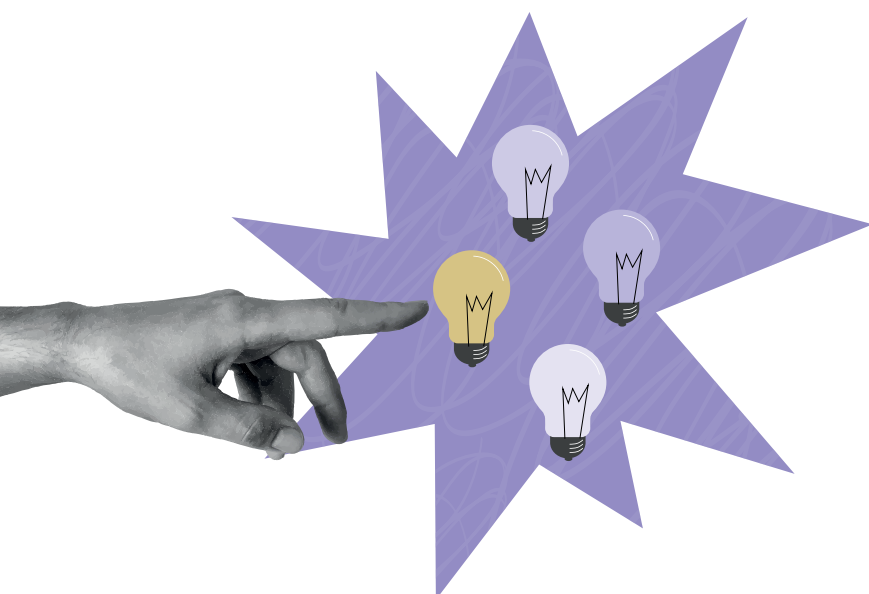


## 2.2 Social and emotional learning programme transferability across national and regional contexts

There is some evidence that SEL programmes developed in western contexts can work in similar ways when used in different countries. A meta-analysis study of eighty-two research trials conducted across diverse geographic contexts (forty-four conducted within and thirty-eight outside of the United States) found long-term positive effects at follow ups between a year to three years post-intervention. This meta-analysis also found consistent positive effects for those from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds within particular national contexts (Taylor et al., 2017). Social and emotional learning programmes have also been found to be beneficial for students returning to school post-disaster or following exposure to armed conflict. Students receiving a substantial SEL programme have shown improved psychological well-being and lower rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD than students in control schools (Cahill et al., 2020).

Despite these promising findings, there is a recognized need for greater attention to cultural recognition and responsiveness, both within and across national contexts, as emotions can be

named, discussed, demonstrated and regulated in different ways in different cultural traditions (Dobia and Roffey, 2017; Hecht and Shin, 2015; Jagers, 2001), as mentioned briefly in Chapter 1. Efforts are necessary to ensure that education programmes are informed by and responsive to cultural strengths, along with historic and political factors that may influence social relations within the learning environment and broader social world, as also mentioned in Chapter 1. One study found that some programmes devised within the contexts in which they are used have shown more positive impacts than those brought in from elsewhere, whereas in other instances programmes have travelled well into different contexts (Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Many factors can influence effectiveness, including cultural and contextual suitability, along with the broader social and political climate. Similarly, a meta-analysis of 86 randomized SEL programmes involving use of culturally informed variations of SEL programmes in China found significant positive results in terms of improving SEL skills, behaviour and reducing emotional distress (Chen and Yu, 2022).



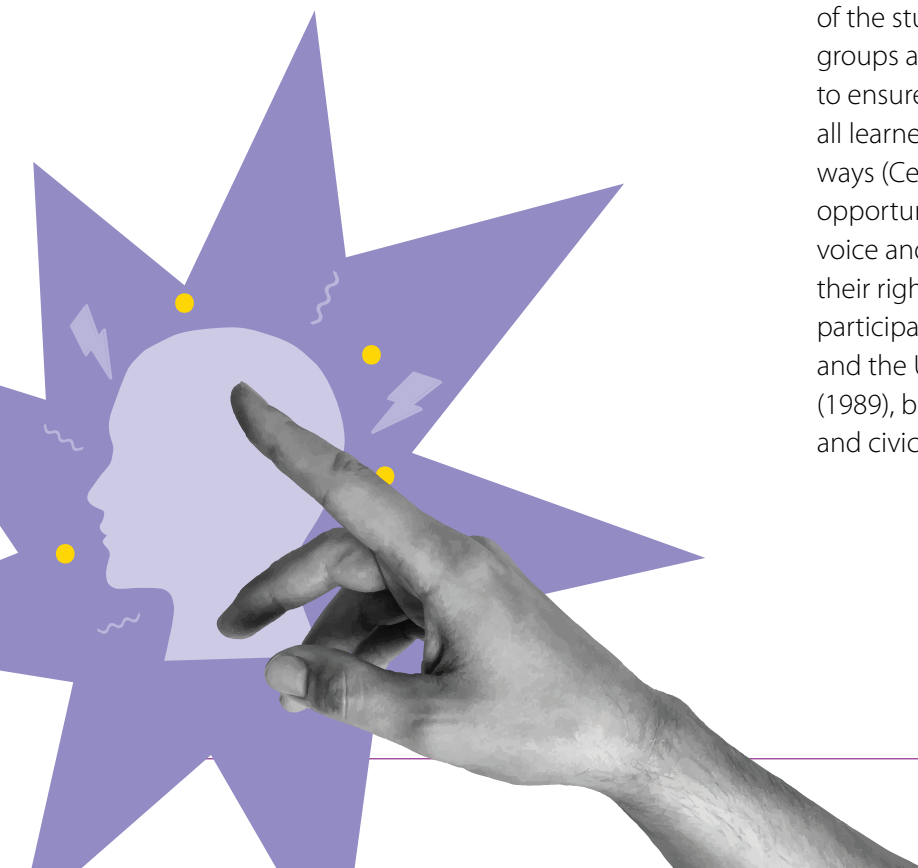
**Use of inclusive participatory approaches to programme development and adaptation can help to ensure** that interventions are responsive to culture and context and are thus **meaningful and relevant** for its diverse members.

It is also important that cultural appropriateness and social analysis is considered in relation to assessment and measurement. Most SEL assessment tools and measures have only been validated in relation to dominant cultures within Anglo-American contexts (Merrell et al., 2008) and this may mean their underlying constructs require investigation or adaptation prior to use in different cultural contexts, or in relation to conclusions made about the diversity of learners (Humphrey, 2013). Overall, an evolving body of research suggests that social well-being initiatives are likely to be more effective when they are attuned to the culture and life contexts of the learners (Wigglesworth et al., 2016; Hecht and Shin, 2015). The use of SEL frameworks developed in WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) contexts do not necessarily address the needs of culturally different countries (UNESCO MGIEP, 2022), or, by extension, diverse students within a single classroom. Similarly, while SEL programmes have been effectively implemented to support children exposed to armed conflict and forced displacement (e.g. LSCE, 2017; McBrien, 2022), these have needed to be adapted according to the immediate needs of such children, with specific SEL competencies and broader efforts towards reconciliation becoming more salient in such contexts (LSCE, 2017).

## Enhancing contextualization through participatory approaches

Use of inclusive participatory approaches to programme development and adaptation can help to ensure that interventions are responsive to culture and context and are thus meaningful and relevant for its diverse members (Cahill and Romei, 2019; Cefai et al., 2021a). A participatory, bottom up approach, with school staff, students and parents actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions as mentioned in Chapter 1, can help to ensure that programmes are culturally and contextually responsive, relevant and owned by the members of the school community (Cahill et al., 2023; Weare and Nind, 2011).

Effective SEL programmes make use of collaborative learning activities, which provide opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction within the tasks. In this, they provide opportunities for student voice and cultural expression within the learning endeavour. When provided with an authentic voice, both in the classroom and across the whole school context, students are more likely to contribute to and benefit from the SEL curriculum (Weare, 2017). It is important that student voice initiatives are inclusive, gender-balanced and fully representative of the diversity of the student population, including marginalized groups and those with diverse abilities. This helps to ensure that programmes address the needs of all learners in meaningful, inclusive and equitable ways (Cefai et al., 2021b). Providing students with opportunities for an authentic and representative voice and cultural expression not only reflects their rights of self-expression, participation and participation as enshrined within the UN SDGs and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), but also develops their personal, social and civic capabilities (Cefai, 2024; Lundy, 2018).



## 2.3 Social and emotional learning programmes within a whole school approach

While important, it may not be sufficient to provide isolated SEL instructional programmes. There is a need to situate these and locate them within school-wide approaches (see also Chapter 5). Therefore SEL programmes should include classroom SEL curricular and instructional programmes, strategies addressing the school ethos and environment, a parent component, and where possible, a community component, that work in sync to develop a whole school approach to SEL, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Whilst understood to be best practice, studies of whole system or whole school approaches are more difficult to conduct, and hence currently the majority of the evidence-base around the use of SEL programmes comes from studies of classroom intervention programmes which explicitly teach SEL skills (Gartland et al., 2019). However, a recent review of studies of whole school approaches to SEL found a positive impact on learners' social and emotional adjustment, behavioural adjustment and their internalizing of difficulties (Goldberg et al., 2019). Importantly, those interventions which contained a community component showed a significantly higher impact in social and emotional adjustment than interventions without such a component. Similarly, two major longitudinal studies tracking students from Grade five to age twenty-one found positive outcomes in learning attainment, school retention and reduction of risk behaviours when schools had provided a combination of SEL, parent training and training for teachers in the use of collaborative learning strategies and positive approaches to classroom management and feedback (Catalano et al., 2004). Further, another broad-scale review of SEL research recommended a whole school approach to SEL, incorporating provision of focused instructional

programmes; cross curricular integration; a safe, inclusive and supportive classroom and school climate; and active engagement of parents and the local community (Cefai et al., 2018).

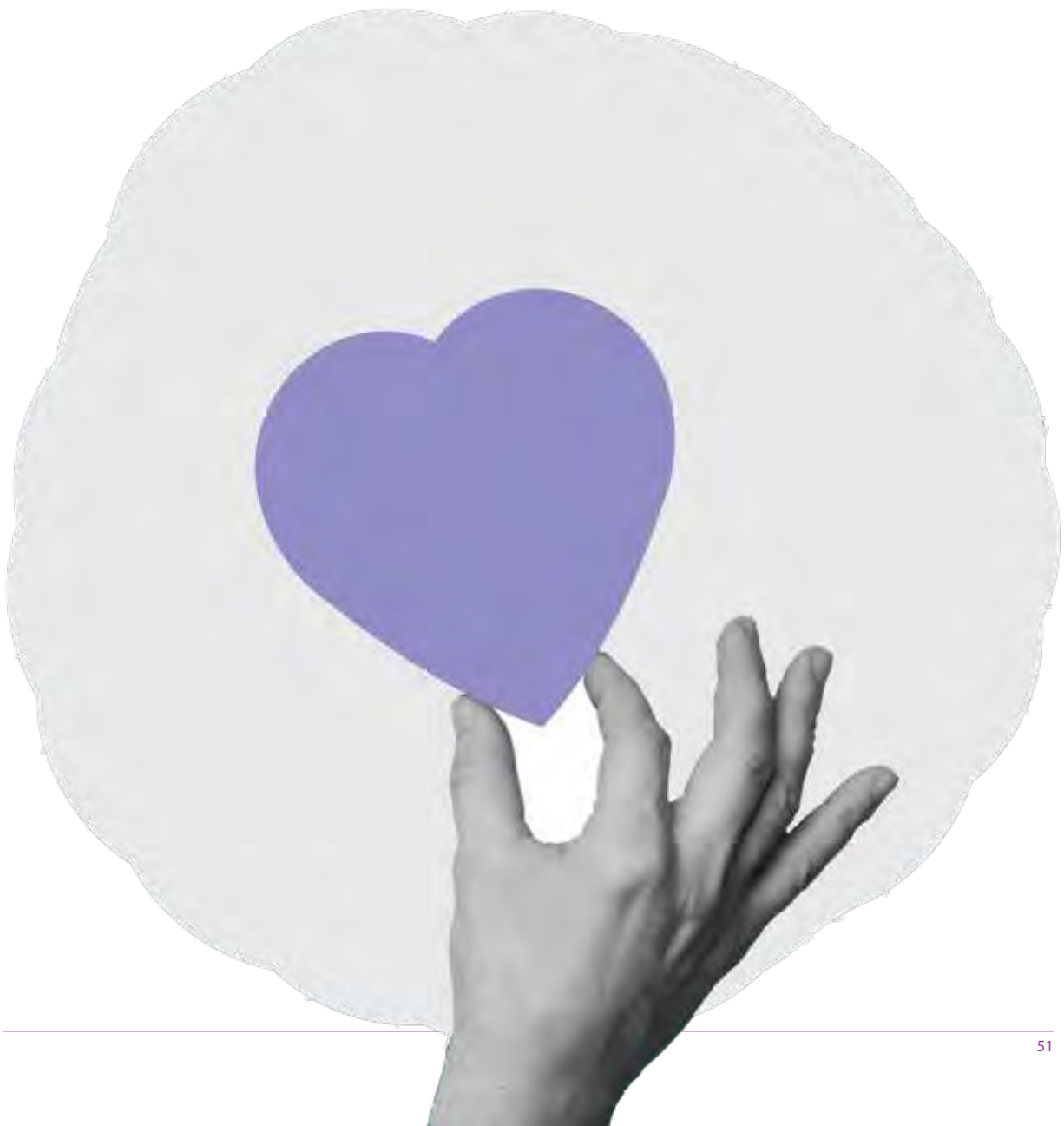
Also lending strength to the argument that whole school approaches enhance impact, is research in the fields of bullying prevention (Olweus and Limber, 2010; Ttofi and Farrington, 2011), mental health promotion and well-being (Askill-Williams et al., 2013; Cefai et al., 2021b), and prevention of gender-based violence (Keddie and Ollis, 2021). Research in these allied fields shows that best results in improving relationships are achieved when classroom interventions are provided in combination with whole school strategies encompassing proactive policy and attention to teacher practices and relationships. The most effective bullying prevention programmes have typically also included multiple components at a whole school level, including improved student supervision, teacher training, parent briefings, and provision of lessons which specifically address bullying prevention (Espelage et al., 2016).

Policy-makers and school leaders with a broad interest in advancing positive behaviour and preventing discrimination and gender-based violence can benefit from knowing that within a broader school approach, SEL programmes can have multiple positive benefits. Whole school SEL approaches improve student behaviour, foster more harmonious peer relationships, and lead to reduced rates of bullying against vulnerable and marginalized students, including those with diverse abilities, LGBTIQ+ students and students from minority or marginalized ethnic and migrant backgrounds (Durlak et al., 2022; Goldberg et al., 2019; Cahill et al., 2023; Espelage et al., 2014; Espelage et al., 2015).

## 2.4 Social and emotional learning programmes and health education

SEL also has an important role in advancing health education and well-being promotion. There is, however, also a need to provide directed education programmes addressing citizenship, drug education, sexuality education, bullying prevention and education for the prevention of gender-based violence. For optimal outcomes, it is necessary to include both explicit teaching of social and emotional skills and a broad health and citizenship education which addresses specific health-related issues (WHO, 2020). Social and emotional learning programmes alone are not

sufficient to provide for drug education, sexuality education and education for the prevention of gender-based violence, but rather SEL should be optimally integrated into these programmes. Research into effective programming on these health-related issues shows that along with a focus on developing relationship skills, it is also important to provide an explicit focus on the knowledge, skills, attitudes and influences that inform health-related decisions (Sell et al., 2021; Dusenbury et al., 2003; Kirby et al., 2007; Levy et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2017).





## 2.5 Social and emotional learning and social equity issues such as racism, colonialism and gender-based violence

Given the importance of addressing issues of equity, inclusion and respect for diversity within school systems, policy-makers and school leaders may need to know whether SEL programmes are sufficient to rectify the ways in which social disadvantage affects learning, participation and well-being. Despite the term 'social', many SEL programmes have not focused overtly on addressing problematic forms of social interaction which have structural and cultural drivers, such as racism, colonialism, gender inequality and gender-based violence. Criticisms have been mounted against narrow assumptions indicating that SEL programmes can be a panacea for rectifying social and economic disadvantage, particularly if providers presume that marginalized and vulnerable children should be able to overcome inequity simply through exercise of their intra- and interpersonal capabilities (Cefai et al., 2018).

It has been strongly argued that greater attention is needed in SEL programmes towards the root causes of inequity, in an effort to enable transformative responses to the provision of SEL (Jagers et al., 2019). The research of scholars

addressing racism and social justice (Zembylas, 2013) and approaches to the prevention of gender-based violence (Crooks et al., 2019; Levy et al., 2020) have variously investigated and theorized effective approaches, and their findings and insights could be harnessed to contribute to the evolution of SEL programmes. These scholars note the importance of critical engagement with the ways in which historical and cultural forms of discrimination and oppression continue to affect lives in the present day. They advocate use of methods which develop a sense of shared compassion and collective responsibility for advancing social justice (Zembylas, 2019). They have also demonstrated that educators can find it emotionally, politically and pedagogically challenging to raise culturally sensitive issues in the classroom (Cahill and Dadvand, 2020; Zembylas, 2013) and that when dealing with these issues educators benefit from pro-active system level policy, leadership support, guiding resources and professional development (Dadvand and Cahill, 2020).

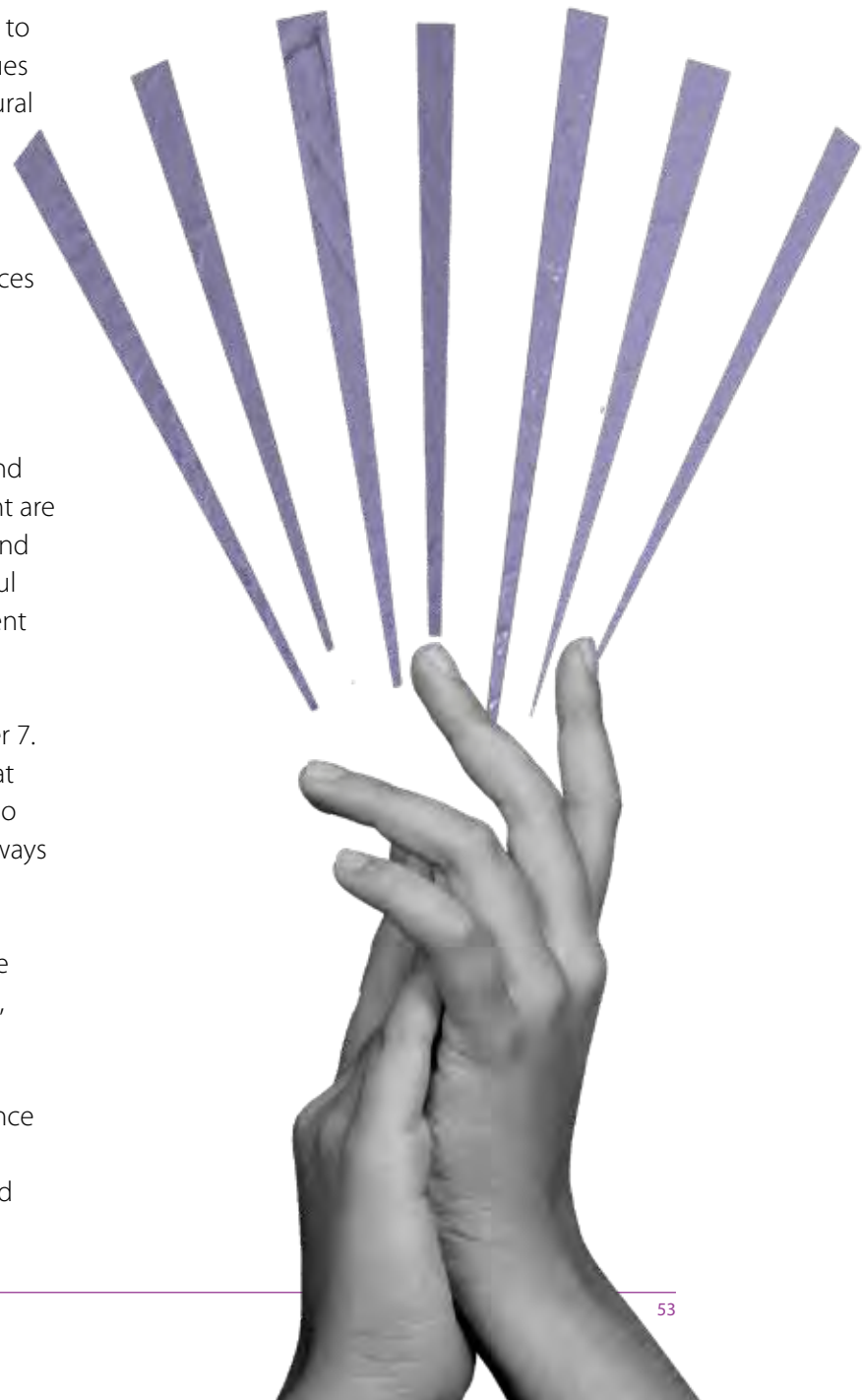
System and school programmatic attention is needed to address the ways in which structural inequities and injustices influence well-being and opportunity, as was also introduced in Chapter 1. Provision of SEL programmes alone does not relinquish society from its responsibility to break down barriers of inequity, inaccessibility and injustice, and education systems share a responsibility for advancing the civic as well as the personal and social capabilities of their students, so they in turn can contribute in positive ways to this endeavour. Importantly, SEL should not substitute structural reforms that facilitate meaningful inclusion of all learners. Rather, SEL should complement, enrich and extend such structural reforms.

## 2.6 Approaches to assessment of SEL

The increasing integration of SEL in curricular across the world has been accompanied by efforts to develop assessment tools to evaluate students' learning and development of social and emotional competencies. Measures used to assess SEL variously include standardized tests, surveys, attitude questionnaires, performance-based assessment, portfolios, rubrics, interviews and checklists (Assessment Working Group, 2019). The use of summative measurement may be inadequate, due to the complexity and contextual and cultural nature of social and emotional capabilities, as is discussed further in Chapter 7. Summative methods may also be contra-indicative when instruments are used to rank and label students in an area where values and human behaviour may differ across cultural contexts.

By contrast, formative assessment practices can assist teachers and students to work collaboratively to improve learning via practices of self-reflection, peer feedback and teacher feedback (Assessment Working Group, 2019) in a way that is not reflected in traditional assessment practices such as tests or written assignments (Siarova et al., 2017). Inclusive and enabling approaches to formative assessment are dialogic, strengths-based, developmentally and culturally appropriate, collaborative, respectful of rights to privacy, and use a range of different assessment tools to make use of multiple sources of information provided by teacher, student and peers, as is elaborated in Chapter 7. They require multiple forms of expression that are resonant with the SEL intentions. They also include consideration of the context, or the ways in which the class and school climate affects the participation, learning and well-being of students (Cefai et al., 2021a). Additionally, due to the contextual nature of social capabilities, it may also be important to assess the varied ways in which classroom and school climate, along with the broader social context, influence students. This may require consideration of indicators such as cultural responsiveness and

inclusion; sense of safety and prevention of bullying; caring teacher-student relationships; positive classroom management; supportive peer relationships; collaboration between the various partners concerned; active student voice, cultural expression and engagement; transparent expectations for all students; parental and community involvement; collegial staff relationships; and staff well-being (Cefai et al., 2021a). Chapter 7 provides a comprehensive discussion of assessment.



## 2.7 Addressing common challenges when moving to scale in the provision of SEL programmes

Implementation studies show that moving to scale requires policy and leadership support, curriculum reform, investment in teacher development, and provision of education resources to guide effective approaches.

Teachers are more likely to be able to effectively provide SEL programmes when they feel supported by their school administration, when they are confident in the capacity to deliver it well, when they have received training to help them to do so, and when the programme itself is aligned with the curriculum (Ransford et al., 2009). While this section provides a high-level overview of teacher preparation, a more comprehensive discussion is provided in Chapter 4.



### Curriculum crowding

Policy-makers could be faced with competing pressures about what to include in the official curriculum. Although there is an increasing recognition that SEL contributes actively towards the health and well-being of children and young people, some educators could presume that SEL programmes will detract from the focus on academic achievement (Askill-Williams et al., 2013; Reyes et al., 2012). Pressures around academic performance could lead to the relegation of the social and emotional dimensions of education to the periphery (Ercikan et al., 2015). Consequently, SEL may not be recognized as a key priority area in many educational systems and schools, despite the reality that academic and SEL are inextricably linked, and evidence exists that SEL enhances academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2022; OECD, 2022) as was also mentioned in Chapter 1.

Teachers commonly cite lack of time, and competing curriculum needs as the key factor constraining their capacity to provide such learning. This has particularly been shown in secondary schools where such initiatives are rarely allocated sufficient time for delivery, especially as students enter their senior years (Lendrum and Wigelsworth, 2013). This can mean that as adolescents reach a more challenging time in their social development and experience higher rates of mental health distress, they are unlikely to be provided with programmes addressing their social and mental well-being. Teachers report that a combination of structural and interpersonal supports can assist them to address this issue of curriculum crowding, including proactive policies on the part of their education system, provision of curriculum

guidance about how, when and where to provide for SEL, and supportive school leadership to assist with the work of refining the school programme (Dadvand and Cahill, 2020; Ransford et al., 2009).

## Teacher capacity

A key challenge in high quality implementation relates to teacher capacity. Use of evidence-informed programmes is not enough to produce positive results. As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, SEL teacher education programmes must be provided in a manner consistent with their design, in particular via the use of collaborative learning and applied skills-based learning activities within a positive class climate (Durlak et al., 2011; Herbert and Lohrmann, 2011). Failure to use these methods has been shown to be a key area of implementation breakdown in SEL and well-being education initiatives, with teachers preserving the knowledge-based components and omitting the critical thinking, relational and skills-based activities that equip learners to translate this learning into action in their everyday lives (Cahill, 2007; Dusenbury et al., 2003). A key reason for this is that many teachers are more accustomed to teacher-centred or didactic approaches to instruction. However, advancing teacher capacity in this area is likely to have other benefits for students, as collaborative learning strategies have been shown to improve learning attainment across disciplinary areas (Kyndt et al., 2013; Tolmie et al., 2010) and to advance comfort in providing peer support and in seeking help from teachers (Eliot et al., 2010).

Broader implementation research in the field of well-being education shows that it is important for teachers to be provided with professional learning that models the use of programme methods and assists teachers to understand the rationale underpinning the learning design (Cahill et al. 2013; Dusenbury et al., 2003). When teachers understand the learning rationale and design, they are more likely to make effective modifications to attune the programme to respond well to the capabilities, context and

cultures of their students and use effective collaborative instructional methods (Larsen and Samdal, 2012). Along with support for positive approaches to classroom management, provision of SEL programmes for teachers first can assist in building a prosocial environment and provide opportunities to model social and emotional competencies which teachers are aiming to foster in their students (Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

## Cultural and contextual constraints

Contextual challenges that may undermine effective implementation of SEL include situations in which there is widespread exposure to or acceptability of violence, maltreatment, abuse and gender-based discrimination, or lack of recognition of children's rights. In such contexts, teachers can find it difficult to teach about sensitive social issues such as those pertaining to prevention of racism or gender-based violence without access to training, strong policy support and wider endorsement via broader community campaigns (Cahill and Dadvand, 2020). In response, those advocating for provision of SEL may choose to highlight the strength of the evidence base about the contribution that this form of learning can make to healthy child development, and point to the consultative approach used in its development, along with the efforts made to ensure that the SEL programme is responsive to the context (UNICEF, 2012; UNESCO MGIEP, 2022). See Chapter 3 for a more extensive focus on curriculum and pedagogy, Chapter 4 for a more extensive focus on teachers' professional development and Chapter 6 for a more extensive focus on community and learner inclusion.

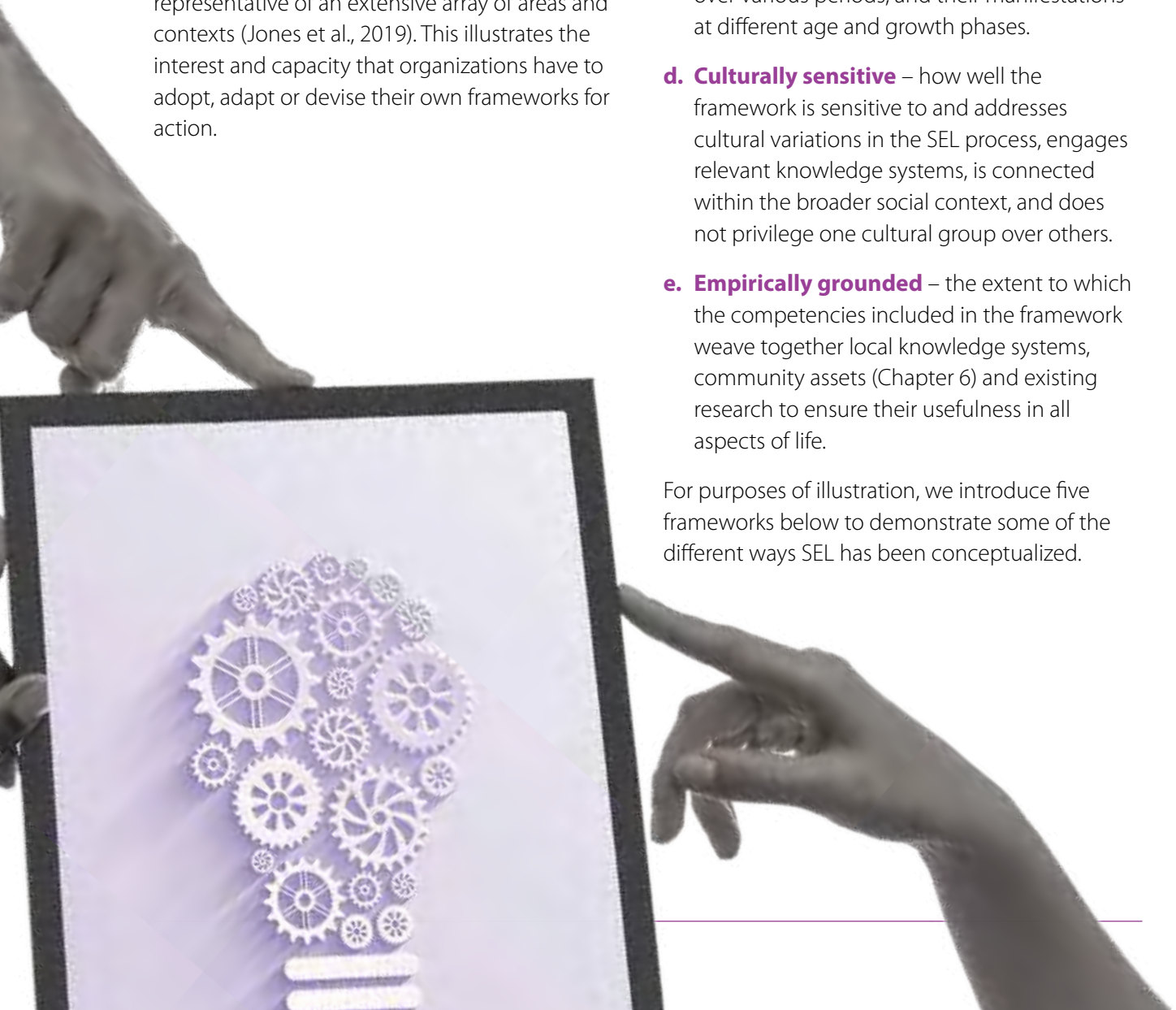
## 2.8 Using frameworks to inform policy and programming approaches

Policy-makers can advance and enable uptake of SEL programmes by providing research-informed frameworks which illustrate their conceptual approach. Frameworks are useful when moving to scale, as they provide a clear structure within which to plan for action. Systems and schools typically devise a framework which captures their vision, mission and their understanding of the overarching objectives. They may review other frameworks as part of developing their own framework and use findings from well-being and education research to inform their design. There are many research-informed frameworks available in the public domain (Berg et al., 2017). For example, one study identified more than 550 interrelated skills within 40 frameworks, representative of an extensive array of areas and contexts (Jones et al., 2019). This illustrates the interest and capacity that organizations have to adopt, adapt or devise their own frameworks for action.

When designing or selecting a framework, policymakers may look for the following five characteristics (Schonert-Reichl, 2020:64):

- a. Specificity** – the extent to which the framework includes well-defined and specific competencies.
- b. Balance** – how well the framework balances the competencies across the cognitive, social and emotional domains in knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- c. Developmental** – The degree to which a framework incorporates and employs a developmental perspective that portrays how competencies are shaped, how they evolve over various periods, and their manifestations at different age and growth phases.
- d. Culturally sensitive** – how well the framework is sensitive to and addresses cultural variations in the SEL process, engages relevant knowledge systems, is connected within the broader social context, and does not privilege one cultural group over others.
- e. Empirically grounded** – the extent to which the competencies included in the framework weave together local knowledge systems, community assets (Chapter 6) and existing research to ensure their usefulness in all aspects of life.

For purposes of illustration, we introduce five frameworks below to demonstrate some of the different ways SEL has been conceptualized.



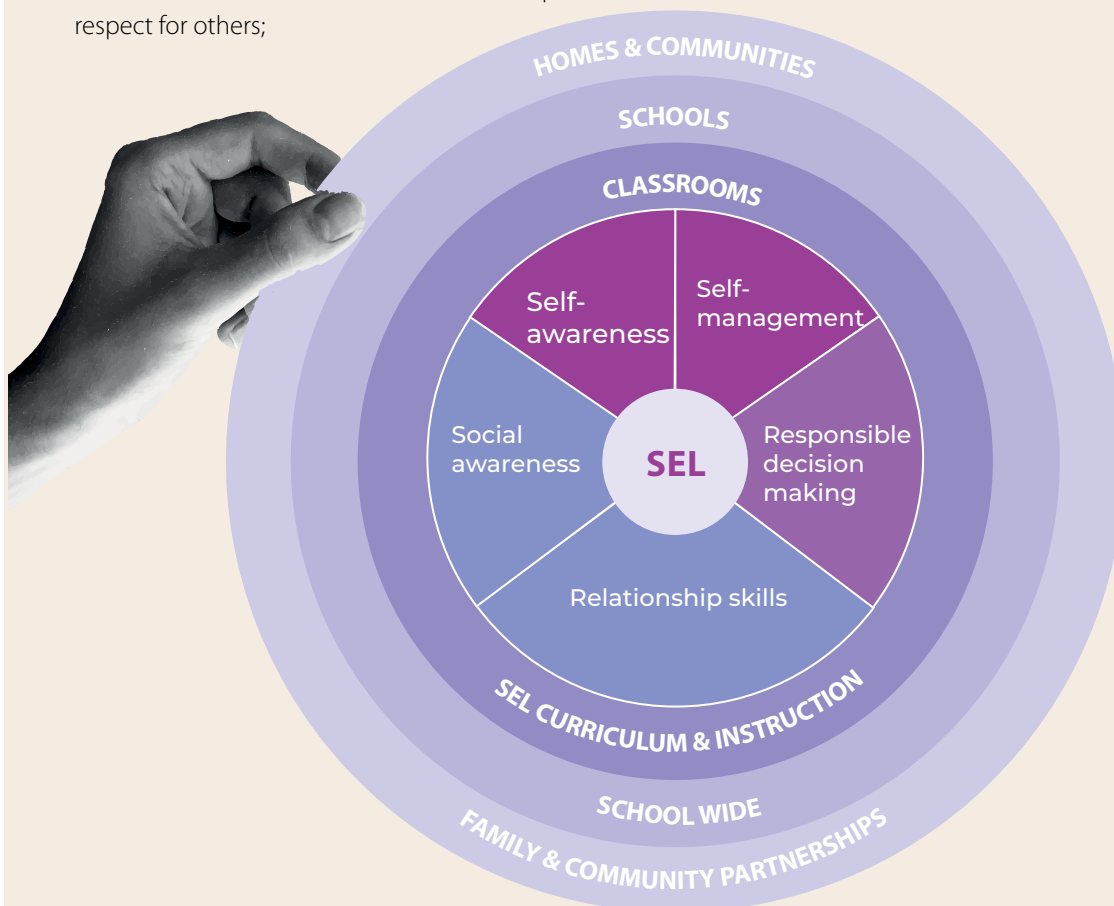
### Example 1: The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model for SEL

A widely recognized framework for understanding and advancing provision of SEL is that offered by CASEL, an organization that aims to ensure that evidence-based SEL becomes an integral part of education from preschool

through to high school. This model focuses on use of classroom and school-wide approaches to advance the intra- and interpersonal skills of self-awareness, self-management and social awareness, along with relationship and decision-making skills. It also identifies the role of classrooms, schools, families and communities as co-providers of this form of education.

#### Figure 2.1 The CASEL model for SEL

- **Self-awareness:** to recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, behaviours, values, strengths and weaknesses;
- **Self-management:** to utilize a growth mindset to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different settings;
- **Social awareness:** to empathize with others, especially those from diverse backgrounds, understand social/ethical norms and develop respect for others;
- **Relationship-skills:** to establish and maintain healthy and positive relationships, negotiate conflicts and seek help when needed; and
- **Responsible decision-making:** to make constructive choices on the basis of ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms, with due consideration for well-being of oneself and others. (CASEL, 2020)



Source: Adapted from CASEL, 2020, p.1. © 2020 CASEL. All Rights Reserved. [<https://casel.org/casel-sel-framework-11-2020/>]

## Example 2: A framework for developing key competencies in SEL programmes by UNESCO MGIEP

The Rethinking Learning report (2020) released by UNESCO MGIEP was a comprehensive review of different SEL frameworks in education. This review offers a framework that provides a focus on advancing the critical and cognitive as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies (Kyndt et al., 2013). This framework utilizes

a three-tiered model (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020) to direct attention to:

- i) skills for managing the self;
  - ii) skills for relating well with others and society; and
  - iii) skills for agency, behaviour change and action
- Though similar to the CASEL model, it differs in its inclusion of skills for critical inquiry and its focus on cooperation and agency as key skills for social contribution.

## Figure 2.2 A framework for developing key competencies in SEL programmes

### TIER 1 – The Self, involving:

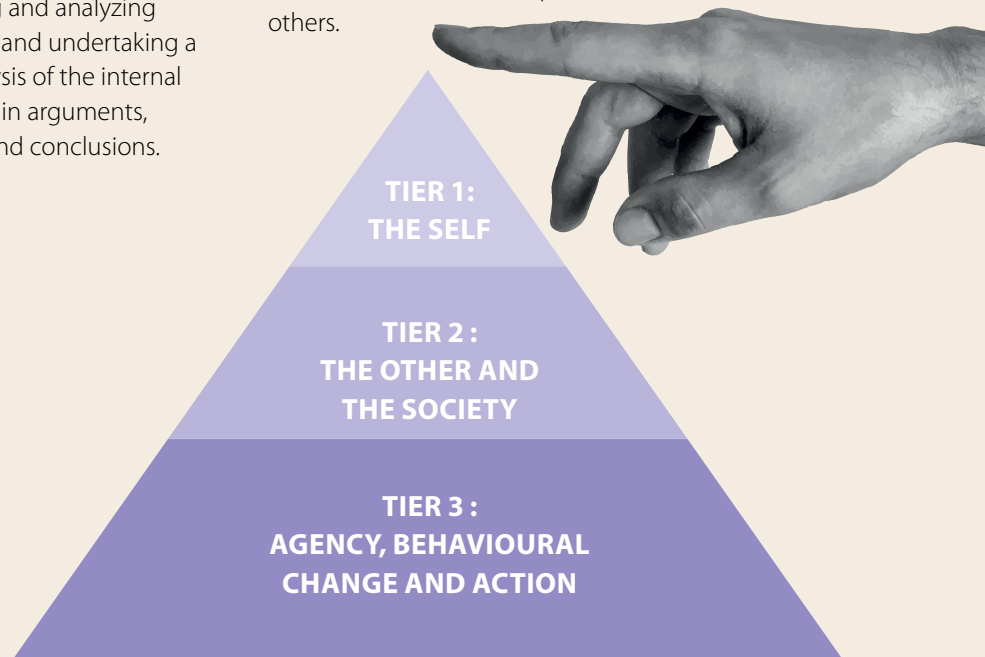
- **Attention Regulation:** The ability to concentrate and focus in the present.
- **Self-Regulation:** The ability to identify and recognize one's own emotions, thoughts and influences on behaviour.
- **Emotional Regulation:** The ability to effectively regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours.
- **Critical Inquiry:** The process of collecting and analyzing information and undertaking a critical analysis of the internal consistency in arguments, facts, data and conclusions.

### TIER 2 – The Other and Society, involving:

- **Empathy:** A combination of feeling and sensing from emotions of others as well as the ability to identify and understand other people's emotions.
- **Social Awareness:** The ability to appreciate diversity and respect others.
- **Relationship Skills:** The ability to communicate, collaborate, listen and help others.

### TIER 3 – Agency, Behavioural Change and Action, involving:

- **Compassion:** The propensity to take action to help others for the better.
- **Cooperation:** Working together with others without ulterior motives.
- **Responsible Decision Making:** Understanding the consequences of one's behaviour with respect to another's well-being.



Source: Adapted from UNESCO MGIEP, 2022, pp.32-33.

### Example 3: Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa

The UNICEF framework for advancing Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa (UNICEF MENA 2017) was developed

in consultation with a range of education ministries and NGOs in the region. It provides a conceptual and definitional understanding of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills based on the four interconnected domains of Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Be, and Learning to Live Together.

## Figure 2.3 Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa: a four-dimensional and systems approach to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

This framework draws on education and well-being research to inform the focus on advancing learning, active citizenship, employability and personal empowerment. It identifies 12 key life skills as contributing to these outcomes.

The 12 key life skills are located as advancing:

- **Learning:**  
creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving.
- **Employability:**  
cooperation, negotiation, decision-making.
- **Personal empowerment:**  
self-management, resilience and communication.
- **Active citizenship:**  
respect for diversity, empathy and participation.

A cross-curricular approach is recommended as the way to advance these interconnected skills.



Source: Adapted from UNICEF, 2017, p. 7.



### Example 4: A framework to guide whole school approaches to social and emotional education provided by the European Union

The European Union (EU) provides a framework to guide a whole of school approach to SEL. It identifies the importance of a focus on curriculum, climate, student voice, teacher competence and well-being, collaboration with parents and community, and use of both universal and targeted interventions. The European Commission identifies 'Personal,

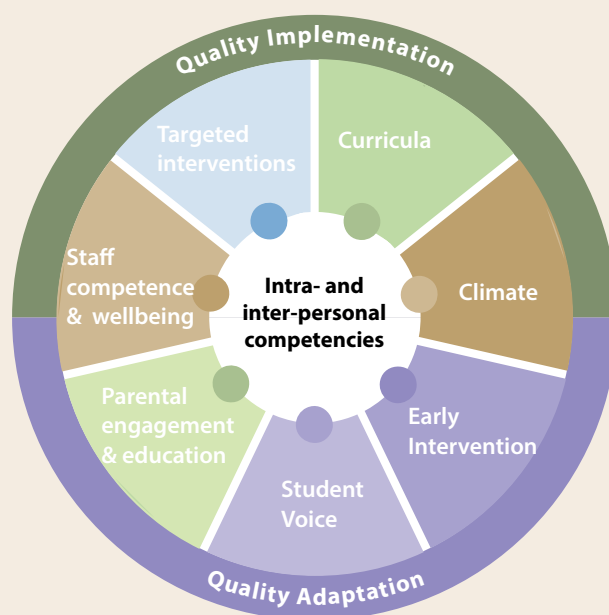
Social and Learning to Learn' (PSLL) as one of the key competencies for lifelong learning, with competence based on three pillars of personal competence, social competence and the competence of learning to learn (EU COUNCIL, 2018). It identifies the importance of quality adaptation to ensure the programme is responsive to and informed by the context of delivery and the importance of support for high quality implementation provision (Cefai et al., 2018).

### Figure 2.4 EU network of experts framework for a whole school approach to SEL

- **Curriculum:** Social and emotional competencies are developed through explicit competence-based instruction of SEL as a key content area in the curriculum, and integrated into other content areas of the curriculum.
- **Climate:** SEL instruction is conducted within a positive classroom and whole-school climate.
- **Student voice:** Students participate actively in the planning, co-design, delivery, assessment and evaluation of SEL curricular.
- **Teacher competence and well-being:** Teachers are adequately trained and mentored in developing their SEL programme, in creating a positive classroom climate and in working effectively with colleagues and parents. They are mentored in developing their own social and emotional competence and maintaining their own health and well-being.
- **Collaboration with parents and community:** collaborative, empowering, and bottom-up approaches are used to engage parents and community members. Schools operate as lifelong learning community centres, providing opportunities for parental education and self-development.
- **Early intervention:** SEL is provided throughout schooling from the early years, through high school and into post-secondary and tertiary education.
- **Targeted interventions:** Universal interventions are accompanied by selected and indicated interventions for students with chronic and

complex social and emotional needs.

- **Quality implementation:** SEL is supported by adequate and continuous teacher education and support, good planning, provision of financial and human and resources, active participation of the whole school community and ongoing review and evaluation.
- **Adaptation to local context:** SEL programmes are responsive to the schools' culture and students' needs and interests, including linguistic, gender, cultural, social and other areas of diversity. Quality adaptation of existing programmes finds a balance between preserving the integrity of the intervention whilst ensuring it is responsive to the needs of the fresh context.



Source: Adapted from Cefai, C. et al., 2018

### Example 5: An ecocultural framework for advancing SEL

As pointed to in Chapter 1, some criticisms have been levelled at those SEL frameworks and programmes which take an overly individualized and psychologized approach to advancing well-being and fail to include a focus on inequities associated with race and ethnicity (Jagers, 2019). Other critics have noted that SEL programmes have rarely encompassed a focus on the relationships between humans and the non-human world. They observe that a focus on individualized and psychologized strategies should not be posited as a sufficient means through which to assist people to collectively address complex global problems such as gender inequality, planetary well-being, violence and social injustice (Bryan, 2023). These criticisms point to the need to evolve frameworks for action which adequately address the vision within United Nations SDG 4, Target 4.7 as discussed briefly in Chapter 1.

Ecological models have been used in well-being research as a means through which to recognize the structural and social determinants of well-being as well as the inter-generational, interpersonal, familial and school-based influences (Hong and Espelage, 2012). Ecological models identify the dynamic interconnectedness between individual, family, school, community and the institutional and ideological influences on well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They also recognize the ways in which historical, structural, technological and institutional factors influence well-being and life outcomes. Ecocultural perspectives have been more recently proposed as a way to evolve ecological models, such that they actively encompass consideration of both the cultural influences and the non-human influences and conditions that interact, to affect well-being and learning. More recently, ecocultural models expand on human-centric models of understanding well-being by also considering the dynamic interaction between the human and the more-than-human (other life forms) and emphasizing the importance of culture as a mobilizing force for change (Milstein

and Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). UNESCO MGIEP (2022) underlines the role of SEL in promoting sustainable development, including dealing with issues like environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, pandemics and climate change, but as noted by Bryan (2023), SEL should not be over-individualized in such attempts.

Policy-makers and system and school leaders may increasingly seek holistic frameworks of this nature, given that climate change has already intensified the scale and frequency of natural disasters, in some instances leading to forced migration, instability and armed conflict. Additionally, disasters have disproportionate effects on those already most disadvantaged, thus presenting further equity challenges for nations, school systems, teachers and learners. Education systems may position ecological or ecocultural frameworks at the heart of school reform, using them as a way to integrate their responses to the intersecting challenges of academic attainment, social and mental well-being, equity, social justice, citizenship and climate change (Cahill et al., 2021; Greenberg et al., 2003).

The framework below has been devised to illustrate one way in which an education system might sketch an ecocultural framework for advancing well-being via an integrated and cross-curricular focus. It responds to criticisms that individualistic approaches to SEL are too narrow to sufficiently address the capabilities needed to engage with problems related to equity and climate disaster. It does this by clearly locating the interconnections between individual, collective, societal and planetary well-being, and by calling for a cross-curricular approach to developing collective response-ability and transversal skills. Transversal skills are those interconnected skills that can be used across a wide variety of situations and disciplines, and across life and work settings. They have been defined by UNESCO as including intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and skills for critical and creative thinking, global citizenship and media and information literacy (Care et al., 2019). This definition could be broadened to include a focus on gender equality,

cultural capability, anti-racism and decoloniality, and climate response-ability. This would ensure there is explicit focus on how to advance both the individual and collective capabilities needed

for social justice and climate care, whilst also responding to the challenges and strengths within particular contexts and times.

## Figure 2.5 R.E.S.P.E.C.T (Real-ising Education for Sustainability, Peace, Equity and Climate care Together): a cross-curricular approach to advancing transversal response-abilities for collective well-being

Schools will provide opportunities for learners to develop:

- **Interpersonal skills:** including communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, empathy, inclusion, and respect for diversity and difference.
- **Intrapersonal skills:** including self-awareness, self-discipline, resourcefulness, resilience, adaptability, perseverance, integrity and self-respect.
- **Gender equality:** including a focus on human rights, and the capacity to challenge those gender norms which lead to harmful or limiting outcomes
- **Cultural capabilities:** including respect, and recognition of the rights and contributions of diverse peoples and knowledge traditions.
- **Global citizenship:** including responsibility, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, democratic participation, respect for the environment, national identity and sense of belonging.
- **Critical, creative and ethical thinking:** including creativity, critical thinking, ethical thinking and reasoned decision-making.
- **Media and information literacy:** including the ability to obtain, critically evaluate and make ethical use of information (Care et al., 2019).
- **Climate response-ability:** including an understanding of the ways in which people impact on and are impacted by their environments, and development of individual and collective response-ability for engaging in climate care.



## 2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some key questions that may be posed by policy-makers as they consider the challenges and benefits of providing SEL programmes in their area of jurisdiction. It has included a focus on the evidence-base demonstrating SEL's positive contribution, as this can help leaders to advocate for and convince others of the merits of provision, despite

competing curriculum demands. It has discussed common implementation challenges, presented illustrations of enabling frameworks, and outlined a number of recommendations that can assist policy-makers and system leaders to guide a sustained and strategic response to ensuring that all schools are able to provide SEL.

### Key points for policy-makers

- Position social well-being as a key priority area in education.
- Provide system and school policy which includes specific focus on advancing SEL and citizenship skills.
- Raise awareness and advocate for SEL as a key educational goal to promote cognitive, social and emotional development at national, district, community and school levels
- Provide frameworks to guide strategic and inclusive approaches to provision at classroom and whole school levels.
- Ensure the curriculum includes a specific requirement to provide for SEL.
- Provide professional learning which addresses rationale, content and methods and which provides opportunity for growth in teacher social and emotional competencies and pedagogical skills.
- Provide evidence-informed, age-appropriate, and culturally adapted programmes, along with guidance about how to activate whole-of-school approaches to advancing social and emotional capabilities.
- Provide equity-based funding and resourcing to ensure that students and schools with higher indicated needs are provided with access to this form of learning.
- Provide sustained school-wide support to staff, (and students, parents and local community) in the implementation of interventions at various levels and phases.

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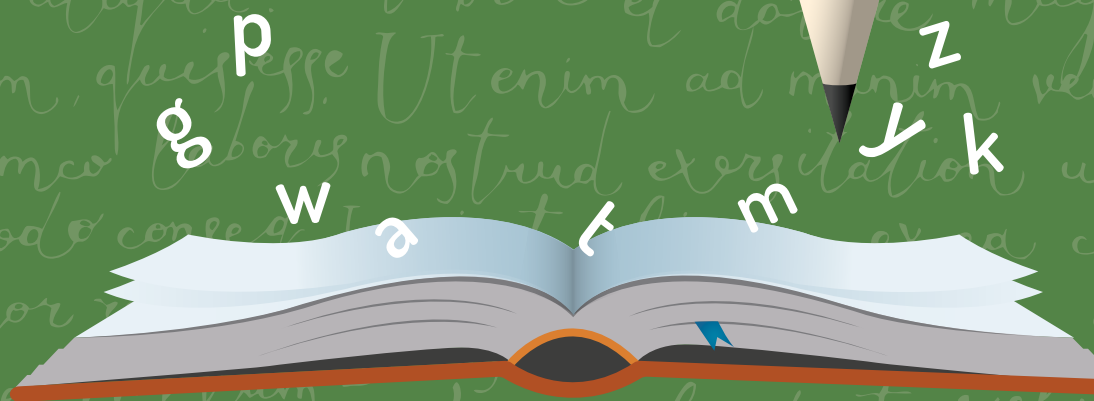


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## Chapter 3

# Curriculum and pedagogy, including digital pedagogy



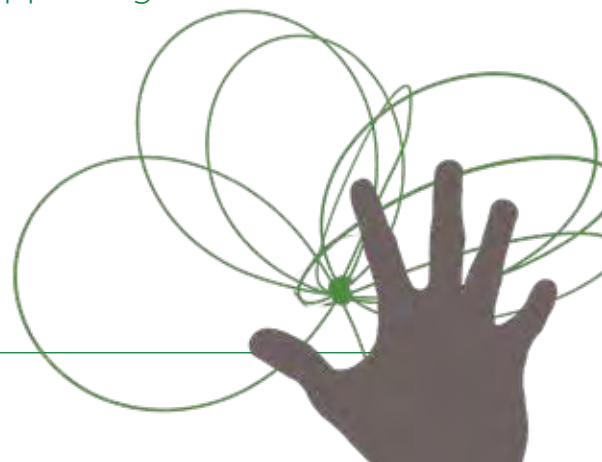
This chapter considers the ways in SEL enters the classroom through curriculum development and pedagogical orientation, and how this entry can support more inclusive and equitable classrooms, school and school systems. It offers practical guidance that supports the implementation of SEL programmes developed from macro and microsystems perspectives. Implementation can occur either through standalone SEL courses or through subject matter-SEL integration. Critical to the long-term success of both options is attention to the nexus between curriculum, pedagogy, and SEL. This chapter should be read in the context of the next chapter which indicates that whole school approaches to SEL help to support SEL in curriculum and instructional programmes. Social and emotional learning curricular and pedagogies, if developed within a whole school approach, can support teachers' confidence in teaching SEL, and enhance the overall school ethos supporting SEL. The chapter also includes a feature on digital pedagogy for SEL.

## 3.1 Social and emotional learning and the need for change

As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, the introduction of SEL is associated with change and transformation in teaching and learning towards a more holistic education that is also socially and environmentally engaged. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, curriculum in many settings has largely organized content according to disciplinary knowledge. This tradition evolved specific pedagogies for the teaching of separate subjects, with clearly defined learning objectives based in cognitive achievements. Meanwhile, the deeper aspects of students' learning, especially in the emotional sphere, were relegated to institutions outside the school or dealt with through the 'hidden curriculum', the set of unspoken rules and roles that shape the understanding of what is 'right'. Now, the call for mainstreaming SEL raises questions about the traditional subject-based organization of learning, to move towards a curriculum organization around learning experiences that include social and emotional elements in addition to cognitive elements. As indicated in Chapter 1, SEL is related to cognitive

academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, but also extends these as focus for education and learning. As such, SEL raises questions about the content of formal curriculum and how it comes to life in learning spaces and through the experiences of learners as they interact with each other and the world around them.

**Social and emotional learning curricula and pedagogies, if developed within a whole school approach, can support teachers' confidence in teaching SEL, and enhance the overall school ethos supporting SEL.**



## 3.2 Defining curriculum and pedagogy

There is no singular definition of either curriculum or pedagogy and the definitions of SEL also differ (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). With this in mind, the following definitions ground the discussion on curriculum and pedagogy in this chapter, as these relate to the inclusion of SEL in education.

**Curriculum** describes an entangled web of processes and norms that are either explicit (clearly written or said) implicit (assumed and not said but practised), or absent (not included due to bias or ideological blindness) (Eisner, 1992). For the purposes of this chapter, curriculum can be understood as “a description of what, why, how and how well students should learn in a systematic and intentional way” (UNESCO, 2013). However, the written curriculum is not an end in itself, but rather a means to foster quality learning, and involves the whole process of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2013). Curriculum is the nexus that links social visions and aspirations with theories about learning into a coherent process of planning, evaluation and creating actionable classroom practices (see e.g. Grundy, 1987). Thus, curriculum as medium to foster quality learning is not an end, but a means through which learning happens. This means, or learning path, is dependent on the framework through which a curriculum is constructed and is ultimately realized as a social-cultural process of interaction between teachers, texts, learners and environments.

For SEL, this entails making concrete those learning outcomes in accordance with the selected or developed framework, either within or across disciplines. For example, learning outcomes might entail identifying others’ emotions, mapping others’ perspectives, or problem solving through consensus processes. In developing curriculum, it is key to have balance between structure and flexibility, especially when considering SEL learning processes

and outcomes. This is particularly so if SEL is to accommodate diversity and be culturally grounded in local contexts, languages, traditions and cultures. At one end of the spectrum, the structure can be too rigid to support culturally responsive and diverse educational needs (Farrell et al., 2015; Rowe and Trickett, 2018). At the other end of the spectrum, the curriculum can be too opaque and criticized for ‘hidden’ agendas. At both ends of the spectrum the curriculum can be ideologically biased (e.g. as is the case with colonial forms of education and their assumptions about what should be valued by the colonized) or local ideological biases (e.g. patriarchy which assumes what SEL is relevant for women and girls but not for men and boys etc.). At both ends of the spectrum, approaches to SEL can even be ‘blind’ to their own biases and logics (not being able to see their own bias). Thus, it is useful to have frameworks as discussed in Chapter 2, but to ensure that they are carefully and critically deliberated and adapted into local contexts with all stakeholders (see also Chapter 6). This is particularly important for SEL because what may be relevant SEL in one context may not be relevant SEL in another. As already discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, most of the research on SEL has been conducted in western countries, with some studies that have tested western models in other contexts. But there is as yet not enough research evidence of what SEL means in diverse contexts to universalize SEL models, assumptions, approaches and evidences, as was also pointed out in Chapters 1 and 2.

**Pedagogy** is the method by which teaching occurs. From a theoretical perspective, teaching methods are coherent repertoires of pedagogical strategies informing teaching, learning and assessment processes. They can be classified in a continuum that goes from *instructivist*, which emphasizes the role of teachers as instructors, to *constructivist*, which changes the role of the teacher and places a

focus on the teacher as supporting learners to construct their understandings through experiential and participatory learning. This can allow learners to expand their experience and co-construct meanings and new experiences with support from peers, texts, teachers or more knowledgeable others. For SEL, pedagogy supports learners' development by creating classroom experiences oriented towards promoting the student's intrinsic, strength-based development in relation to whole-child well-

being in social contexts. Pedagogy operates within the context of the curriculum as the teacher actualizes the curriculum framework and guidelines into learning activities, and considers the context and specific expectations and needs of the learners. Through this, teachers support learners to construct meaning from the learning experiences and be part of co-constructing understanding and experiences of their own strengths, and their relational being in the world with others.



## 3.3 Social and emotional learning-oriented pedagogies

Pedagogies that best support SEL are grounded in constructivism (Schreiber and Valle, 2013) in that they place the learner at the centre. They aim to promote whole-child well-being by creating a classroom experience that supports a student's intrinsic, strength-based development, that is culturally sensitive and appropriate within learners' socio-cultural contexts. Constructivism emphasizes the existing knowledge and experience of learners as the foundation for expanding learning and agency of learners who co-create meaning and construct knowledge through social interactions (Bada, 2015). Constructivist strategies 'decenter' the teachers from simply giving information and reposition them as facilitators who provide carefully structured meaning-making opportunities for and with learners, through active classroom experiences (Brooks and Brooks, 1999).

Some examples of pedagogies that support SEL include:

- **Project-based learning:** An approach to teaching that allows students to investigate and respond to complex questions or challenges. Projects can be designed to integrate SEL skills, such as collaboration, communication and problem-solving. For example, students could work together to create a community service project that addresses a social or environmental issue.
- **Cooperative learning:** A teaching approach that involves students working together in small groups to achieve a common goal. Cooperative learning can promote SEL skills such as empathy, communication and teamwork. For example, students could participate in a jigsaw activity where they work together to learn about a topic and then teach it to their peers.

- **Restorative practices:** A set of strategies used to build relationships and resolve conflicts in a positive way. Restorative practices can promote SEL skills such as empathy, communication and problem-solving, and foster peace-building and care for the environment. For example, a teacher could use a restorative circle to facilitate a conversation about an issue that has arisen in the classroom, or she can use restorative pedagogies to encourage learners to care for elderly community members, or a local wetland, or a community's food security needs. Box 3.1 shows that this type of pedagogical practice is also important in contexts of extreme stress or trauma.
- **Service learning:** A teaching approach that combines academic learning with community service. Service learning can promote SEL skills such as empathy, collaboration, and civic and environmental participation. For example, students could work with a local organization to research, consult, and take actions to improve waste management and environmental health in the community as a climate change response action.

Overall, these pedagogical approaches can help create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that brings SEL curricula to life.

They aim to **promote whole-child well-being** by creating a classroom experience that supports students' **intrinsic, strength-based development**, that is culturally sensitive and appropriate within learners' socio-cultural contexts.

**Box 3.1 Trauma-informed pedagogy**

An extension of the restorative pedagogical processes listed above can be found in specific SEL instances of trauma-informed pedagogy. The critical constructivist theoretical framework (Schreiber and Valle, 2013; Taylor et al., 1997) is particularly important within SEL for trauma- and resilience-informed education, where sensitive topics are explored with students (Waajid et al., 2013; Parker and Hodgson, 2020). Pedagogical approaches in this context invite a shift from the traditional trauma-informed approach that focuses on ‘what is wrong with a child’ towards the resilience and strengths-based question ‘What is right with you, and how can we build on that to help one another?’ One example is the combination of body and sensory-based resilience practices (Miller Karas, 2015). These methods have been used with children in some extremely high trauma settings with significant and positive impacts on the child’s intrapersonal skills development (Grabbe and Miller Karas, 2018). Such skills are most successfully developed in the context of a constructivist pedagogical orientation (Schreiber and Valle, 2013).

## 3.4 Translating theory into practice

Learning spaces are places where learning happens through formal, nonformal or informal frameworks of instruction. While the context of these spaces can vary widely, the content (curriculum) and framing of the context (pedagogy) can situate SEL in context, making learning more accessible, relevant and impactful.

Key issues of context include:

- **Rhythm and timing of delivery:**

Considering the structural diversity of the space, including the interaction of SEL with various disciplines. This means that there may be better places, times and spaces that would suit SEL curriculum activities better than others (e.g. in life skills or social studies classes, or carefully constructed collaborative activities in mathematics when there is enough time given to this). Outdoor education can be good for environmental care and citizenship activities, and there could also be specific spaces for SEL interactions and/or times set

aside each day for SEL activities, but ideally SEL should be a normal part of all lessons as SEL influences *the way teaching happens*, as much as what is taught.

- **Boundaries of the learning spaces:**

Reflecting on the concentration of SEL within a single learning space or across a diversity of settings, including school, community and home spaces. Chapters 5 and 6 address whole school and community-based approaches to SEL integration respectively. At school, all classroom activities should carry some aspects of SEL, but SEL should not be confined to the school or classroom only.

- **Cultural and linguistic relevance of the materials:**

Creating a student-centred and responsive approach that acknowledges and embraces the diversity of the students’ life experiences, language diversity, and the strengths of students’ cultural backgrounds is vitally important for successful SEL.



## Cultural relevance of SEL-oriented curriculum and pedagogy

Cultural relevance and linguistic inclusion are crucial elements of successful SEL implementation and warrant additional discussion. Achieving cultural relevance in the implementation of SEL programmes requires a critical nexus between the curriculum, pedagogy and the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the learning space. It is crucial to recognize and celebrate this diversity to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Cultural relevance requires alignment of the curriculum and pedagogical orientation of the programme within the context of cultural norms and values (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Cramer and Castro-Olivo, 2016), along with attentiveness to learner diversity.

Some pedagogical strategies to support culturally relevant SEL are:

- **Build strong relationships with students:**

Establishing positive relationships with linguistically and culturally diverse students and their families is crucial for creating the supportive and inclusive learning environment necessary for SEL.

- **Use culturally responsive pedagogy:**

Incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies that acknowledge and embrace students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as using materials and examples that reflect, for example, learners' various means of expressing emotion, their ranging social processes (e.g. for collective decision-making, resolving conflict), and their shared cultural attitudes towards the environment.

- **Provide differentiated instruction:**

Differentiate instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students, such as using visual aids and graphic organizers; integrating

oral, written, visual and active elements; providing extended time for assignments; and using peer tutoring or cooperative learning.

- **Engage in ongoing professional development:**

Attend professional development opportunities to develop knowledge and skills for teaching diverse students and stay up-to-date on research-based practices.

- **Foster a culture of respect and inclusivity:**

By celebrating diversity, promoting gender equality and encouraging mutual understanding and appreciation among students of different backgrounds in the classroom and school. This includes recognizing that SEL expression is not homogenous across cultures and individual students.

Overall, these strategies can help educators create supportive and inclusive learning environments that value and embrace diversity and help a range of learners engage in SEL. Any group of learners is always a microcosm of diversity, even in the most culturally monolithic spaces, where a student-centred and responsive approach enhances the climate within the space.

## Digital tools supporting SEL pedagogy

Given the expansion of the digital learning environment, educators should also consider how to most appropriately use digital tools for SEL. This is because there are many programmes and games that are now being developed that can both impede SEL and develop SEL. Thus educators and parents need to critically review digital tools for their potential value for teaching SEL. In particular, digital pedagogies allow learning to be self-paced so that learners can learn at their own pace, in languages they are most familiar with, while using multiple modalities, thus creating potentially rich learning

experiences. Digitally-enabled learning can offer exciting, innovative, interactive, and immersive ways for augmenting deep, engaging, and active learning experiences, but care should be taken to also enable learners to engage in real social interactions that are not always digitally mediated. While this is the case, there is also a growing body of literature that warns against overuse of digital tools and digital media, especially, but not limited to social media tools, as this can cause anxiety and depression amongst young people (see for example, Hoge et al., 2017;

Peper et al. 2018). Hence the importance of careful and critical review of digital tools used in support of SEL.

In general, and when well designed, digital pedagogies combine pedagogical approaches with technological infrastructure and tools to facilitate teaching and learning in places where digital tools are available. Some examples of digital pedagogies are learning platforms, immersive interfaces, digital games and ebooks.

### **Box 3.2 Some examples of digital SEL pedagogies**

#### ***Example 1 – Tools to express emotional awareness***

Digital pedagogies to teach children emotional awareness: Emotional awareness, which includes emotion check-ins, recognition, labelling and management, is considered one possible starting point for SEL skill acquisition (Brackett, 2019). Emotion check-ins can be taught through the RULER approach and implemented using the Mood Meter. RULER stands for:

- R**ecognize emotions in oneself and others.
- U**nderstand the causes and consequences of emotions.
- L**abel emotions with a nuanced vocabulary.
- E**xpress emotions in accordance with cultural norms and social context.
- R**egulate emotions with helpful strategies (Brackett, 2019; Cipriano et al., 2017).

Using digital or nondigital emotion check-in tools, students can self-report how they feel on any given day. The Mood Meter<sup>19</sup>, which was developed to be used with the RULER Approach, is a visual taxonomy like the Feelings Wheel and the Wheel of Emotions, with four color-coded quadrants that include dozens of moods connected to energy levels (Brackett, 2019). Red describes high energy unpleasant moods; yellow is pleasant but high energy emotional states. Blue represents unpleasant low energy moods, while green represents pleasant low energy moods. Teachers can create color-coded 'choice boards' – menus of options where students can demonstrate learning through multiple means of engagement, representation and action and representation (Centre for Applied Special Technology, 2022). Choice boards can involve digital pedagogies that afford students opportunities to connect and share with others online.

<sup>19</sup> <https://marcbrackett.com/how-we-feel-app-3/>

### Example 2: Simulations to explore dilemmas

Another example is the use of social impact digital games, which provide context for understanding complex real-world issues experientially. With proper guidance, some digital games can be used as a rehearsal or practice space safe for building and refining SEL skills. An example here is the game *Quandary*<sup>20</sup>, a single-player digital card game from Learning Games Network, a nonprofit that was spunoff from the MIT Education Arcade. This game was designed to teach ethics and perspective-taking as players make decisions based on the needs of fictional characters – a process that mirrors offline simulations that can be carried out in learning spaces without access to digital technologies. In the game, players are presented with a series of dilemmas that do not have concrete solutions. As the leader of an interplanetary colony, players resolve conflicts by considering the points of view of non-playable characters. Free on any device, there are also lesson plans across content areas (e.g. earth science, history, literacy). There are also SEL-specific lessons for children, focusing on in-groups and out-groups in digital spaces. When adolescent students were observed playing together in pairs or small groups, the game's dilemmas became “a catalyst for discussions with complex moral themes” (Ilten-Gee and Hilliard, 2017 as cited in Osterweil et al., 2019, p. 328).



There are many other examples of such online tools that could be used for SEL purposes. Importantly, teachers and educators need to critically evaluate the narratives, potential value and the quality of such tools for the overall objectives of SEL in their contexts, as some of the games tend towards homogenizing cultures, or overly hyperreal settings which could leave learners without situated experience of the online engagements.

<sup>20</sup> [www.quandarygame.org](http://www.quandarygame.org)

## Principles and guidelines for using digital tools for SEL

As in other educational settings using digital tools, educators need to be alert to principles that mediate use of digital media, programmes and tools when using these for SEL. These include ensuring educator and learner privacy and confidentiality, content appropriateness (for age and cultural contexts) and flexibility to meet the needs of diverse learners. They should also be non-discriminatory in direct or indirect ways through their stories, artworks, representations, user interface (UI), user experience (UX), or any other dimension. SEL-related digital tools should avoid non-gratuitous violence and teachers should also evaluate the assumptions hierarchies and subliminal messages in games, simulations and other immersive environments, as these can promote stereotypes and hierarchies through styles of characters and narratives that are uncritical. For example, it is unacceptable to encourage role play of historically marginalized peoples as it contributes to these very hierarchies, and care should be taken to carefully evaluate how they are represented in online games.

More specifically, using digital pedagogical applications and tools for SEL will benefit from being:

- **Learner-centric and active:** The digital pedagogical application must adopt an active learning approach and make effective/optimal use of the vast interactive possibilities in order to create rich, immersive and efficient learning experiences. Learners should not simply be passive consumers of content but be actively engaged and central to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. To accomplish this, all students must have the requisite digital literacy in order to fully participate, so time must be dedicated to digital skills, familiarity with platforms and game behaviours, and how student data is used.
- **Age-appropriate:** Early childhood SEL lessons may be more about labelling and

identifying feelings and ways of managing emotions, while in adolescence, one would expect the SEL activities to be aligned with developmental shifts, particularly in ethical and moral development, and with shifts in neuroplasticity and expanded socio-cultural experience (Delalande et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). As such, SEL digital pedagogies for younger children would need to differ from those designed for secondary school students.

- **Oriented toward social equity and social good:** The need for SEL to cultivate social and emotional competencies for self and societal equity and purpose needs to be an underlying feature across all pedagogies. This requires the acquisition and training of virtues (qualities) and values (beliefs and ideals) and the capacity to make wise choices for a peaceful and sustainable society. In this sense, digital technologies that are overly individualizing are less helpful than collaborative tools. Social learning helps build a foundation for lifelong learning, and supports successful relationships at home, in the community and the workplace, and develops the personal values and virtues for sustainable participation in a globalized world.
- **In support of learner agency development:** In the context of education, fostering learners' agency can be understood as students directing their learning, based on their interests and goals, taking an active role in seeking and internalizing new knowledge, and learning to express their agency in relation to the agency of others. Research has demonstrated that students taking self-responsibility for their own learning has positive effects on motivation and performance (e.g. Sasson and Yahuda, 2023). Other studies indicate that the locus of agency is not only situated within the self, but that it is also motivated and influenced by external conditions. For example, experiences of economic precarity and social exclusion can shape the way that youth come to understand their agentic power (Spencer et al., 2020). Some of the more individuated components

of learners' agency are future orientation, self-regulated learning, metacognitive self-regulation, mastery of orientation, locus of control, perseverance of effort, perseverance of interest, self-efficacy, collaboration, deliberation and mutual support, while some of the more socially shaped components of learners' agency are cultural expressions, civic actions, altruistic motivation, shared concerns and others.

- **Inclusive:** Not all learners encounter and internalize knowledge in the same way. There is a need to move towards educational practices that give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed. Education systems need to accommodate learners with hearing and visual impairments and special learning needs, and to focus on those with learning disabilities. Digital technologies have a great potential to provide personalized learning experiences and digital learning applications

should be accessible, especially for girls, and should optimize content design and delivery, teaching-learning strategy and interaction suitable for individuals with different needs and capabilities (Belda-Medina, 2022), and also be culturally responsive (Guberina, 2023).

- **Supported through teacher professional development:** Teachers need to be supported to continuously explore new methods of teaching, including the use of digital pedagogies for SEL and the inclusivity and gendered dimensions of such pedagogies. This requires teachers not only to learn new skills, but also to 'unlearn' some of their more traditional teaching practices (Abbott et al., 2017; Hill Jackson et al., 2022). Hodges et al. (2020), for example, show some of the benefits of digitally capable teachers for SEL when they share insight into how digitalization helped to bridge home-school divides during the COVID-19 pandemic.

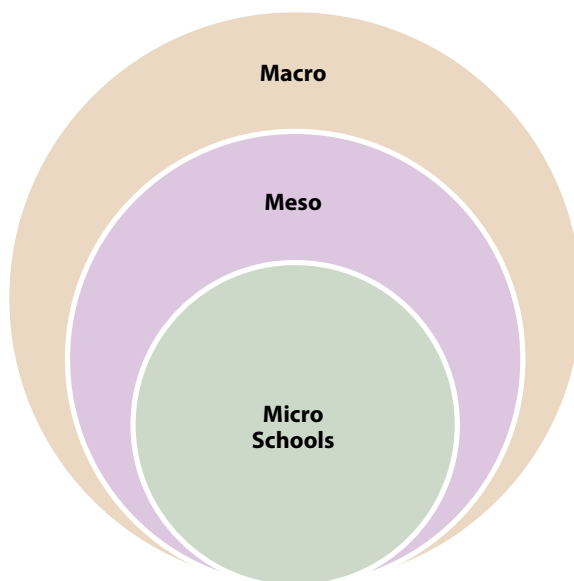


## 3.5 Supporting SEL curricula and pedagogy across education systems

When developing SEL curricula and pedagogy, action happens at three distinct but interconnected levels:

- **the macro-level**, at which large scale policy decisions are made, and broad guidelines for curriculum development are issued;

Figure 3.1 SEL curricula and pedagogy at different levels



- **the meso-level**, where district/municipal programmes and planning decisions have to consider local needs but also macro guidelines; and
- **the micro-level**, where schools and practitioners devise and implement specific programmes adapted to their particular contexts, while procuring an alignment with district and macro policy guidelines.

In the following section, several ideas are presented to orient discussion at each of the levels.

### Macro – the level of policy

At the policy level, state and federal education entities support SEL integration into the curriculum through policies intended to influence local planning (meso) and school decisions (micro) to achieve coherence at the macro level. Curriculum, at the system level, is the nexus to build coherence in planning, evaluation and teaching practices, and can influence education systems to allow for SEL integration. There are three critical entry points to consider in the context of using policy to mainstream SEL.

#### 1. Policy supports the vision of student learning and development at the national level.

**How:** A definition of what students must learn regarding SEL, with the view to achieving a district/state/national vision of the purpose of education.

**Questions to ask:** What are the ideals regarding the kind of person and society we aspire to? How can SEL contribute to achieving that goal? How does the leadership team in your schools support a climate that nurtures equity and diversity and well-being? (See Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6)

#### 2. Policy supports the broad vision of scope and sequence for the SEL learning path and trajectory:

**How:** Decisions on how to organize what students must learn at specific moments in the learning pathway, either in a common way for all schools or with different degrees of flexibility to be used at the local (school) and (classroom) level, either linked to a subject or promoting interdisciplinary linkages.

**Questions to ask:** What aspects/dimensions of SEL should be emphasized at what grades and/or what subjects? How can progress in SEL be described in terms of learning progression? What spaces exist in the curriculum for mainstreaming SEL? Is the curriculum overcrowded and where can it be streamlined? Is it reasonable to tie SEL content to a specific subject (e.g. physical education or social studies), or is it more feasible to propose a cross-cutting, parallel distribution in several subjects? Can SEL become ‘infused’ or ‘embedded’ in the more traditional parts of the curriculum? Or should it have its specific ‘learning time’?

### 3. Policy supports the integration of SEL training into pre-service teacher education as detailed in Chapter 4.

**How:** Suggestions and training of teachers on how to plan their interactions with students (pedagogical orientation) to promote SEL, eventually leading to changes in the teacher education curriculum.

**Questions to ask:** What strategies for pre-service and in-service training should be made available, and which teachers should be the focus of those strategies? What orientations should be given to initial teacher education to build an SEL curriculum?

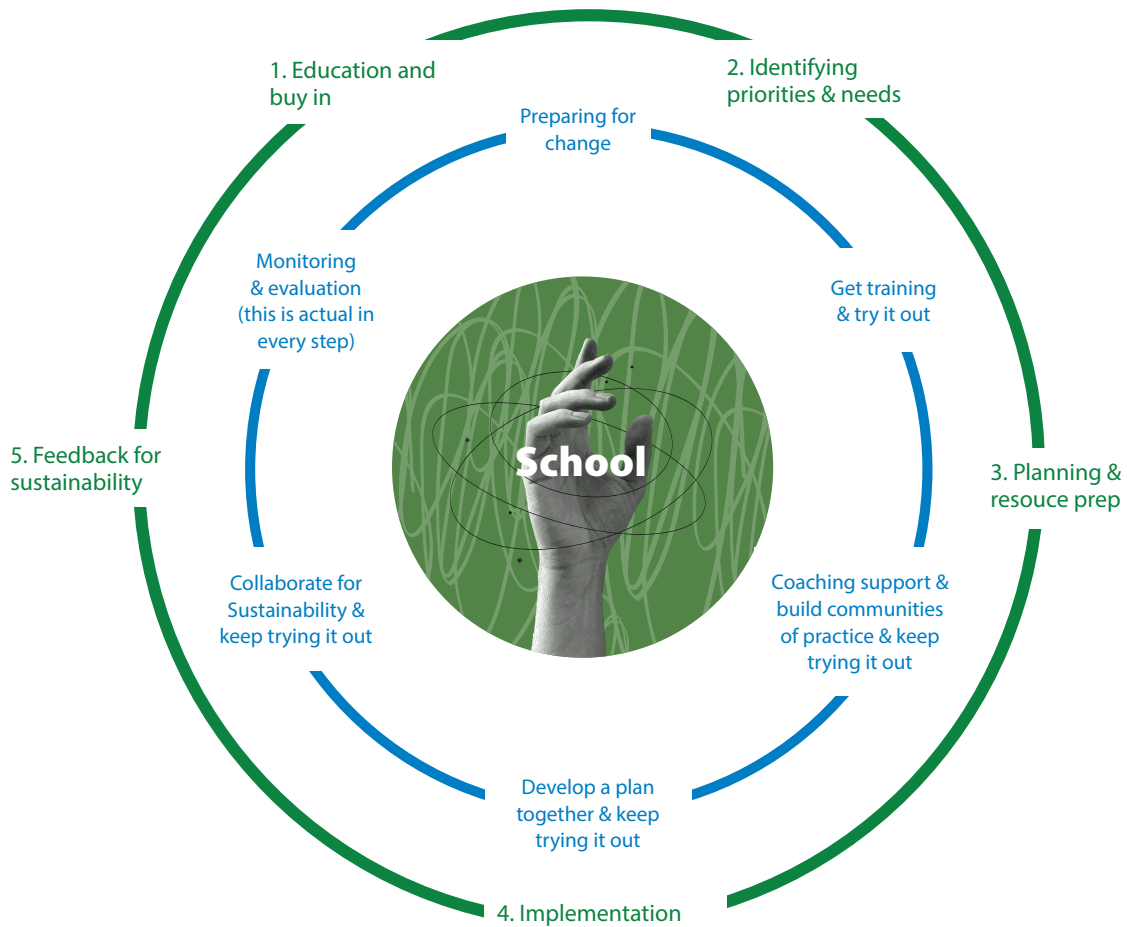
## Meso – from policy to district planning

At this level, guidelines and policies are translated into district/municipal programmes and planning decisions. In each district, municipality or supervision zone (education governance model and the level of decentralisation varies across countries), the general SEL curriculum and pedagogy guidelines influence the already-existing actions and promote the development of new ones. This process requires building confidence and support across the schools’ leadership and planning how to resource the new curriculum (see also Chapter 5). To achieve the sustained use of SEL programmes, it is critical to think about SEL not as an add-on to curriculum goals within a district, but to integrate core SEL through alignment between existing district goals and SEL objectives. The model in Figure 3.1 shows a process that can be followed which involves getting education system ‘buy in’ or support, collaboratively identifying priorities and needs, planning and resource preparation, implementation and review, and feedback for sustainability. This supports the school-level implementation shown in Figure 3.2.

### Box 3.3 A SEL curriculum policy example

Pruebas Saber are standardized tests applied by the ICFES (Colombia Institute for Education Assessment), and they assess the level of achievement of students as defined by the National Ministry of Education, at Grades 3, 5, 9 and 11. For the last three, citizenship competency is assessed, as it is included in a national initiative (*Programa de Competencias Ciudadanas – Citizenship Competency Programme*) where all schools have to plan and implement actions to promote the balanced and harmonious development of students’ skills, specially their capabilities to make decisions based on criteria, working in teams, using their time efficiently, taking responsibilities, solving conflicts and problems, and practising skills for communication, negotiation and participation. These developments have been enriched by a series of alliances with NGOs such as Fundación Escuela Nueva, which has worked with the Ministry of Education to develop resources for promoting social and emotional competencies in students and teachers. This is an example of how several dimensions, including curriculum, learning materials, assessment, teaching styles, can be aligned to promote the development of SEL.

Figure 3.2 Process model for integrating SEL at meso-level



- STAGE 1** **Education & buy in:** Educating district-level administration on SEL
- STAGE 2** **Identifying priorities & needs:** Integrating SEL into district-level priorities
- STAGE 3** **Planning & resources:** Identifying programmes, trainings, and support processes that align with these priorities, providing resources and access to programmes (training, materials, etc) to schools – this includes supporting the integration of SEL training into in-service teaching and professional development resources available to teachers in your region.
- STAGE 4** **Implementation:** Allocating time and space for schools to conduct training and implementation
- STAGE 5** **Collaborate for sustainability:** Creating systems of feedback and information sharing schools in the district



## Micro-school creativity, adaptation and development of SEL curricular

At this level, schools adapt the district/municipal guidelines to create their own context-specific SEL programmes. Devising and implementing an SEL programme is challenging because schools are dynamic environments with ever-changing and interrelated features (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Wandersman et al., 2008). Schools also have their own cultures, ethos or norms, that shape what people can do and are willing to do.

Based on a school's ethos, school leaders have multiple options for bringing SEL curriculum to life in learning spaces:

- **Classroom implementation:** Incorporate SEL skills and competencies into teaching strategies, peer interactions and classroom management practices. This approach is designed to enhance students' emotional intelligence, social skills and academic performance, by creating a supportive and caring classroom environment. Examples of classroom-based SEL programmes include [Responsive Classrooms](#)<sup>21</sup>, [SEE Learning](#)<sup>22</sup>, [Second Step](#)<sup>23</sup>, and the [MindUP programme](#)<sup>24</sup>. Another example is the [KiVa Anti-Bullying Programme](#)<sup>25</sup>, a research-based programme developed in Finland that aims to prevent and reduce bullying in schools. It is integrated into the regular curriculum and involves classroom lessons, online games and discussions. The programme focuses on improving students' social skills, empathy, and problem-solving abilities.
- **Advisers, counsellor and guest contributors:** SEL curricular can be enriched with the contributions of advisers, counsellors or guest tutors who can help to provide SEL

programme delivery during non-academic meeting times or in specially identified sessions. The adviser, counsellor or guest presenter is a trained or experienced adult in some area of SEL and could also be a specialist teacher or counsellor (e.g. school psychologist), who supports and guides students in their academic and personal lives. These advisers or specialists may facilitate individual or group discussions, offer academic and career guidance, and promote positive relationships among students. This approach is intended to create a safe and supportive environment for students, where they feel heard, valued and supported. Standalone curricular are often adapted to allow for integration of specialist inputs from advisers, counsellors or guest presenters.

- **Subject integration:** SEL competencies and skills can be integrated into specific academic subjects or courses, such as English, history or science. Teachers can use subject-specific content to teach SEL skills, such as empathy, perspective-taking and collaboration. This approach is designed to help students see the relevance of SEL skills to their academic and personal lives and in the world around them. Examples of subject-based SEL programmes include the [Social Justice Standards](#)<sup>26</sup> developed by Teaching Tolerance, and the [SEL-infused English language arts curriculum](#)<sup>27</sup> developed by CASEL. Another example is found in Australia, where the Emotional Literacy Curriculum integrates emotional literacy into the [English curriculum for students in grades K-6](#)<sup>28</sup>. The programme uses literature and language to teach students emotional intelligence skills, such as empathy, emotional regulation and self-awareness. Social, Emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning (International), already mentioned above, is

21 Responsive Classroom

22 SEE Learning - Home (emory.edu)

23 Social-Emotional Learning Programmes | Second Step

24 MindUP - CASEL Programme Guide

25 KiVa is an anti-bullying programme | KiVa Antibullying Program | Just another KiVa Koulu site (kivaprogram.net)

26 LFJ-Facilitator-Guide-Social-Justice-Standards-Oct-2021-10052021.pdf (learningforjustice.org)

27 SEL-in-High-School-ELA-8-20-17.pdf (case.org)

28 Learning 3-6 | The Australian Curriculum (Version 8.4)

another example of a programme designed to be integrated into regular classroom instruction, across different academic subjects. For example, in science classes, students learn about interconnectedness and interdependence between living things, while in English classes, they may explore character development and ethical decision-making through literature.

- **Standalone materials:** This approach involves using specific curricular or materials that are designed to teach SEL competencies and skills directly. These programmes typically include structured lessons, activities and assessments that focus on specific SEL skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation or conflict resolution. This approach is intended to provide explicit and targeted instruction in SEL skills. Examples of standalone SEL programmes include the [RULER approach](#)<sup>29</sup> developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence, the [PATHS programme](#)<sup>30</sup> developed by the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies Centre at the University of Pennsylvania, and SEE Learning at Emory University.

All of these approaches can be integrated into the school curriculum through the process model shown in Figure 3.2. It suggests that schools should prepare for change, access professional development opportunities, try out what is being proposed for SEL curriculum development, get support from others by establishing a SEL community of practice in the school, develop plans together, collaborate and keep trying out new ideas and approaches, and monitor and evaluate along the way.

To bring SEL to life within a school context, buy-in, training, resourcing, support and flexibility are necessary to account for contextual factors and promote sustained implementation (Harn and Stoolmiller, 2013). Some further guidance to enhance the process outlined in Figure 3.2 includes:

- **Preparing for change – building a leadership team:** Here it is important to give attention to the construction of the team who will work on introducing SEL into the curriculum. Core team members should consist of affiliates or staff dedicated to bringing in the SEL programme. It may make sense to use an existing team aligned with addressing the objectives targeted by the SEL programme. If an existing team is used, decide if additional members should be added for a more comprehensive representation of stakeholders, as can be found in the [PRIMED model](#).
- **Recognize your assets:** The introduction of the SEL programme is likely to be more successful if the school starts with focusing on the positive attributes of the school, and identifies and builds on that which already exists within the school environment that could support the integration of the SEL curriculum and classroom practices.

### Key questions to guide the identification of assets

- What are strengths in your school that support a positive social climate?
- What is working effectively to support your students in their social and emotional development?
- Are there programmes or initiatives which support your students and which overlap in their objectives?
- Are there programmes or initiatives that could work together to increase overall impact?
- Are there individuals in your community willing to provide time, talents or skills to support your students' social and emotional growth and development?
- How can you approach the implementation process with enough flexibility for the inclusion of all learners and cultures within your community?

29 RULER Approach

30 PATHS Program LLC - Social Emotional Learning for Pre-K, Elementary, and Middle School

Figure 3.3 Process model for integrating SEL at micro-level



**STAGE 1** **Preparing for change:** The purpose of this stage is to support schools in the readiness process to begin bringing SEE Learning to their students. This begins with stakeholder engagement and school-level team development.

**Get Training & Try it Out:** The purpose of this stage is to help schools determine their model of training, their initial training cohort, and the process of capturing training feedback.

**STAGE 2**

**STAGE 3** **Coaching Support & Build Communities of Practice:** The purpose of this stage is to inform schools in how to conduct communities of practice and to connect educators with coaching support as they are using the curriculum in the classroom.

**Develop a Plan Together:** The purpose of this stage is to bring the initial school team together to develop a plan for bringing SEE Learning to a broader group of educators in the school. This includes a plan to train more educators and to continue the communities of practice and coaching started in the previous stage.

**STAGE 4**

**STAGE 5** **Collaborate for Sustainability:** The purpose of this stage is to work with the school team to develop a plan to integrate SEE Learning into the school sustainably. This includes sustained communities of practice, the integration of SEE Learning into subjects, and processes of training incoming educators and administrators.

**Monitoring & Evaluation:** The purpose of this stage is to work with school to mobilize a tracking process to monitor the educators experiences of the trainings, supports, and curriculum.

**STAGE 6**

■ **Strengthen your assets through professional learning and collaboration:**

It is important to give attention to professional development of educators who are to introduce and teach SEL. This could either be for specialist teachers or for all teachers (see Chapter 4). It should also be relevant to the scope and sequence of delivery of SEL and align with the roll-out plans for the school (see Chapter 4). Coaching, peer-to-peer and shared learning opportunities should also be considered, as should the gradual scaling and deepening of the professional development programme for teachers in the school. Collaboration should be emphasized, both for strengthening the programme and its implementation, and for sustainability.



## 3.6 Conclusion

Curriculum and pedagogy are intricately connected and critical for the sustained implementation of SEL programmes. This chapter has provided orientation on how to approach SEL pedagogy, including from a culturally responsive perspective. It has also included some guidance on using digital pedagogy for SEL. The chapter has also provided some approaches to integrating SEL into the curriculum and has considered how to go about SEL implementation at macro, meso and micro levels. Overall, it is important to note that when implementing a sustainable SEL curriculum in schools across different cultural contexts and educational systems, school principals and leading teams should consider several factors. Around the world, resources, training, languages and structures vary widely. However, there are a few critical considerations across all of the varying conditions that are related to bringing in SEL curriculum and pedagogies. Critical to this process is collaboration, with a focus on developing a plan to support the integration of SEL into the school curriculum in a sustainable way. By considering these factors, schools can implement SEL in a way that is tailored to their unique cultural context while promoting positive social, emotional and ethical learning outcomes for students.

## Key points for policy-makers

- Social and emotional learning curriculum and pedagogy are closely related and when introducing SEL, equal attention should be given to curriculum and pedagogy, including digital pedagogy.
- Social and emotional learning curriculum and pedagogy are both oriented towards transformative education and should therefore be carefully supported when introduced into the curriculum, especially as SEL also requires contextualization at the level of curriculum and pedagogy in schools to be culturally appropriate and responsive.
- It is important to identify pedagogies that advance SEL, such as problem-based learning, collaborative learning, service learning and reparative pedagogies.
- Digital pedagogies can also be used for SEL and there are many examples emerging, but care should be taken to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and sensitive, and developmentally appropriate for the learners.
- Digital pedagogies will not replace the careful work of educators, schools and communities in comprehensive SEL education, but they can complement as a creative and flexible element to a SEL programme.
- Social and emotional learning pedagogies should also be inclusive, should support learners' agency and confidence and should ideally also be active and relational.
- Social and emotional learning curricular can be introduced in a number of different ways, such as integration into existing subjects, developing standalone courses, and through contributions from advisers, counsellors and/or guest contributors.
- Design and development of learning materials that support the principles and contents of the SEL curricular are an integral part of SEL curriculum integration.
- SEL curricular should be integrated at macro-, meso- and micro levels, with the macro level supporting the meso and micro levels, and with strong support for the micro- or school level being built into the implementation systems for SEL.
- At the local micro level of the school, attention should be given to cultural responsiveness, and to careful planning, identification of a good team to lead SEL curriculum implementation and a process that builds on existing assets for SEL in the school and surrounding community.
- Professional development of teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of a SEL curriculum (see also Chapter 4).

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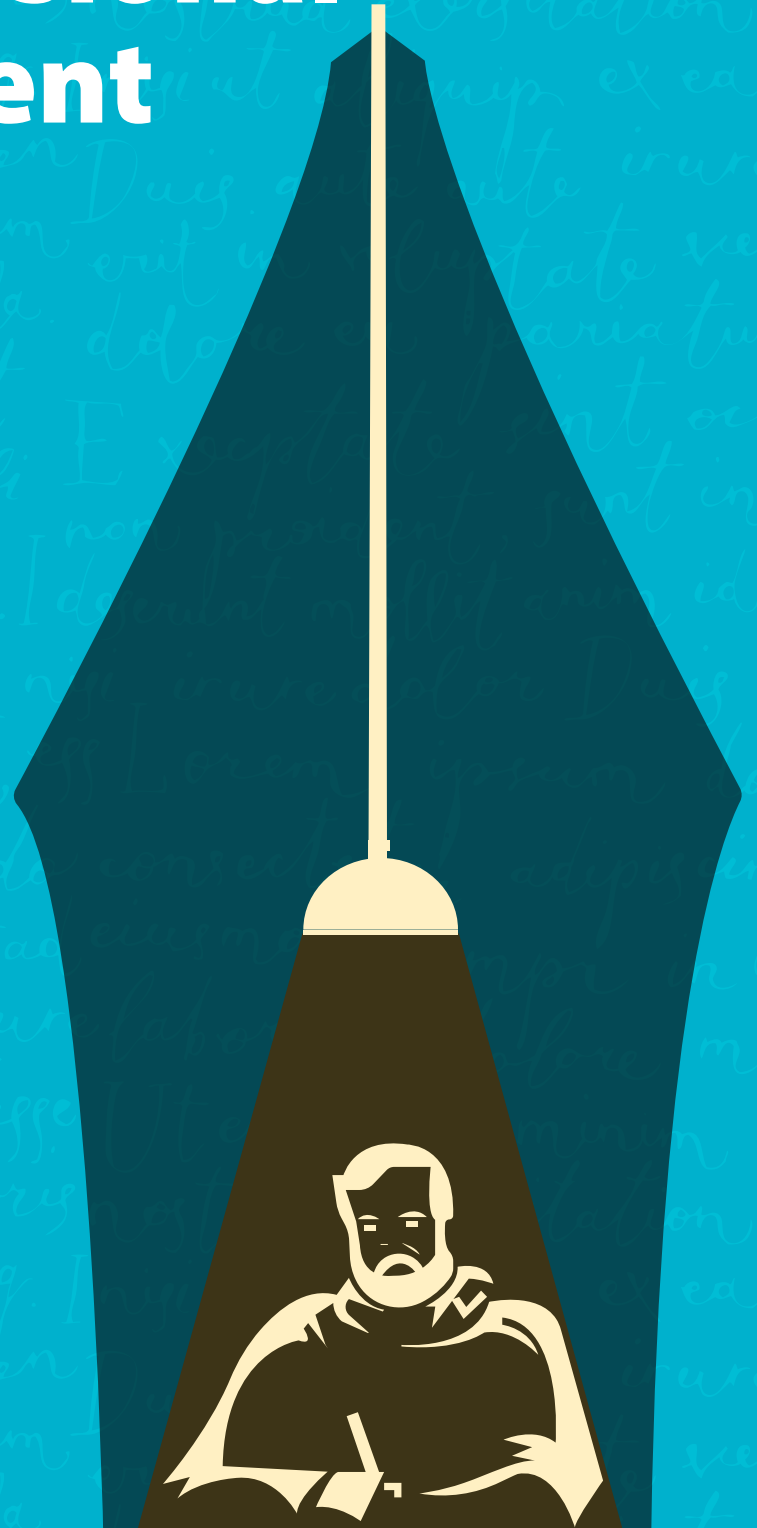
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## Chapter 4

# Teacher education and professional development

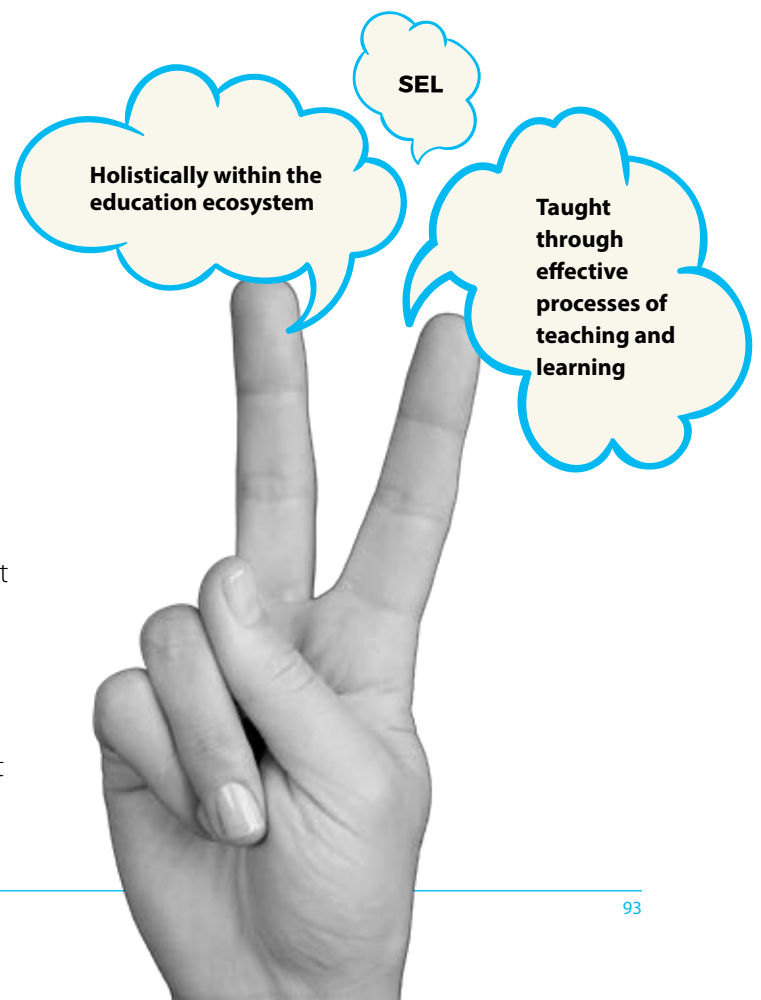


This chapter focuses on a key element of the SEL ecosystem, namely the teacher who facilitates the promotion of the students' social and emotional competencies within the context of the classroom. Social and emotional learning is not only learned through explicit lessons, but through ongoing interactions during the day. To teach SEL successfully, teachers themselves need to develop a range of social and emotional competencies that are unique to the classroom context, and teachers need specific training to build these competencies. While teachers need training to understand how to integrate SEL content and activities into subject areas, and how to support SEL within a whole-school approach and ethos, the education system also needs to give attention to the well-being of teachers as this affects their abilities to successfully integrate SEL into the curriculum. The chapter outlines key issues and challenges relevant to teacher preparedness for teaching SEL. It provides research evidence to inform recommendations for best practices and makes recommendations for priorities and actions for policy-makers, teacher educators and school leaders to address these issues.

## 4.1 Social and emotional learning and teacher education

Two driving principles for effective SEL are that it should be considered holistically within the education ecosystem, as argued in Chapter 2, and be taught through effective processes of teaching and learning. Research shows that students learn social and emotional skills best when they are embedded in a context that is emotionally warm and socially supportive. In conflict-affected environments (Brown et al., 2022), the effectiveness of SEL can be undermined by intense stressors (Reed et al., 2012). Nonetheless, research suggests that fostering positive relationships with adults (like teachers) and establishing safe, predictable environments can serve as protective factors, strengthening students' capabilities and resilience and supporting academic engagement (Cowen et al., 1996; Starkey et al., 2019). A critical element of this ecosystem is the teacher who is responsible for promoting the students' social and emotional competencies within the context of the classroom. While teachers' content knowledge is important, SEL is primarily learned and developed within the context of social

Figure 4.1 Driving principles for effective SEL



interactions that occur throughout the day – not exclusively through explicit lessons – as was also noted in Chapters 1 and 2. A key aspect of this supportive environment is inclusivity, where everyone is welcome, valued and respected and has equal opportunities to access resources and make contributions. In this way, SEL becomes a resource for social change, building the foundation for social justice in communities.

Teachers' understanding of social and emotional development, cultural sensitivity to learners' life worlds and experiences, and their ability to engage in explicit modelling of SEL skills in relevant, culturally sensitive ways is critical to the success of SEL. Teachers themselves therefore need to develop a range of social and emotional competencies that are unique to the classroom context, and teachers need specific

training to build these competencies. Further, education systems should support teachers to maintain their well-being, given the high levels of stress many teachers experience (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers also need training to understand how to integrate SEL content and activities into subject areas, be aware of its gendered dimensions, and how to support SEL within a whole school approach and ethos (see also Chapter 6). For some teachers, this may come naturally, while others may need support to understand the best ways to do this in their particular context. Finally, teachers need to understand the importance of honouring diversity and promoting equity and inclusion for all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized by society.



## 4.2 Key issues and challenges influencing SEL teaching

### Foregrounding cultural and regional nuances in SEL training

Preparing teachers for SEL requires an understanding of lifespan social and emotional development, a recognition that there is cultural variation in social and emotional processes (Mesquita, 2022) and expertise in delivering social and emotional learning curricular content. Also, SEL preparation requires understanding diversity and cultural variations in SEL provision and educators' beliefs about the purpose of SEL, which may be grounded in culturally embedded social and emotional processes. For example, a study in Greece, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom has found significant cross-cultural differences in SEL provision and teachers' beliefs about the purpose of SEL. Furthermore, teacher education in SEL was available to only a minority of teachers in these four countries (Scott, 2019). In South Africa (Marsay, 2022),

there is a growing consensus that contextually relevant SEL interventions can enhance both the learning environment and workforce readiness (e.g. Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Theron, 2020; Ungar & Theron, 2020). Localized SEL programmes could address specific challenges faced by educators and learners, underscoring the need for interventions tailored to the specific context (Solberg et al., 2020).

Currently, few opportunities exist for teachers to acquire expertise in SEL. A scan of teacher preparation programmes in the United States found that the promotion of students' SEL is given little attention in required courses (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). However, research has shown that pre-service training can support teacher efficacy. For example, a study in Spain analysed the effectiveness of ten-weeks groundbreaking pre-service teacher training based on the model SAFE, that includes four core elements: SEQUENCED activities for incremental skill development; ACTIVE learning experiences;

Figure 4.2 Key issues and challenges influencing SEL teaching



FOCUSED time on specific skills; and EXPLICIT targeting of these skills. These components work in tandem to offer a comprehensive approach to building social and emotional competencies effectively (Durlak et al., 2011). The findings point to significant effects in self-esteem, empathy, and confidence when speaking in public, while fear of public speaking and negative affect was seen to decrease significantly (Palomera et al., 2017). In a Portuguese study involving fifty-six student teachers across seven master's degree programmes, a six-session programme enhanced participants' emotional literacy, including understanding and expressing emotions and fostering empathy and connectedness. The study underscores the importance of ongoing investment in teachers' social and emotional competence throughout their educational and professional careers (Caires et al., 2023).

## **Understanding contextual and individual aspects of stress, and impacts on teaching and learning**

Social and emotional learning does not occur in a vacuum, and teachers will need the tools to decode the impacts of social, cultural, political, economic and environmental stressors on their students, including how these stressors interact with and influence students' learning and well-being.

Besides being sensitive to stressors and their influences on learners, teachers need to understand stress responses and how they may interfere with teaching and learning. At a general physiological level, we now know that when a stress response is activated, hormones and neurotransmitters flood the body to prepare for fighting the threat, fleeing or freezing, for protection. Higher order cognitive functions are not prioritized. In this state, it is difficult to focus on activities that require executive cognitive functions so critical to teaching and learning in school. The stress response evolved to ensure human survival under conditions of physical threat, such as being hunted as prey.

However, the threat system in humans is easily triggered under conditions of psychological threat experienced within the context of social interactions. In such conditions, this biological reaction does not help the individual cope with the situation because fighting, fleeing or freezing does not solve the situation and may actually compound social conflicts and emotional reactivity (Sapolsky, 2004). Feelings of psychological threat can be easily triggered in classrooms where there are demands and time constraints that place pressure on learners or teachers. Learners may also come to school or class with psychological threats triggered elsewhere (e.g. through gender-based violence or racist incidents). These can easily interfere with learners' motivation, ability to concentrate or participate, and teachers' goals and objectives, and can be misunderstood, leading to further stress. Also, teacher well-being is crucial in its own right, and also because it indirectly influences student outcomes. Stress in the teaching profession is closely related to burnout, anxiety and depression, impacting teacher health, well-being, and productivity (Agyapong et al., 2022). It is also exacerbated by poor structural conditions for teaching such as large classes, gang violence in the neighbourhood, or inadequate resources and support in educational settings.

## **Addressing structural barriers to teacher well-being**

Teaching is increasingly being described as a highly stressful occupation, worsened by increased work demands that are often met without commensurate institutional and societal support. Teachers situated in contexts of conflict, war, emergency, or environmental toxicity and degradation may be suffering from their own mental health challenges while facing the stressors of their students. In some contexts, teachers teach large classes with inadequate resources for learners and inadequate educational infrastructure. Some teachers are also subjected to patriarchy, for example, the double burden of household chores and care activities for female teachers or other discriminatory

attitudes at work. Coping strategies alone may not suffice to alleviate these stressors.

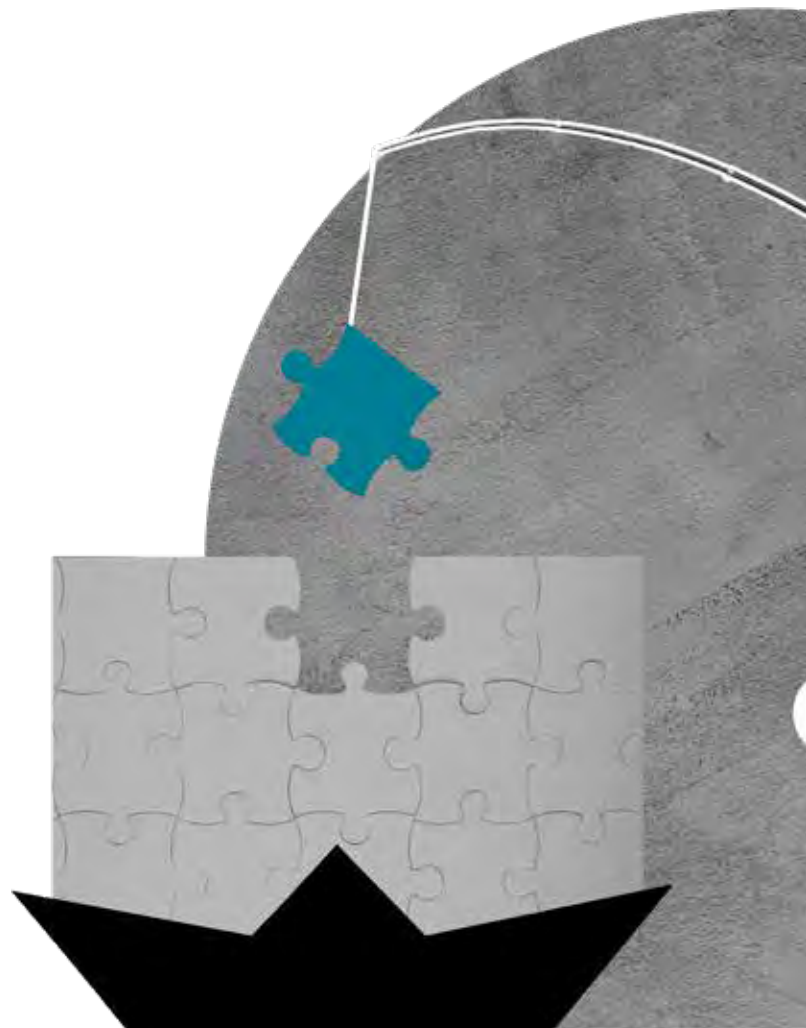
It is imperative for educational leaders to actively work on ensuring that teachers have a healthy and safe place to work that is conducive to good teaching and learning; reduce unnecessary workloads and provide adequate resources for teaching; improve educational democracy in schools; and consider offering additional paid time for teachers to manage additional challenges, as such measures could mitigate stress and enhance teacher well-being.

### **Unpacking teacher assumptions and biases through reflexive praxis**

Teachers need to cope with occupational demands, model the SEL skills and behaviours that the SEL curricula teach and learn to constantly recognize, refine and unlearn social and emotional behaviours that may have become obsolete and/or inappropriate for the current context. Teachers themselves are socialized into social and emotional practices, some of which may be inappropriate or inadequate in current contexts. During the socialization process, individuals learn to adopt emotionally conditioned reactions to social situations. Part of adult social and emotional competence (SEC) includes recognizing their own social conditioning, reflecting on it, and learning how to unlearn it if it is inappropriate or no longer relevant. This is so that the adult can thoughtfully and reflexively respond to situations, rather than automatically reacting unconsciously (Jennings, 2015). When adults have mastered this self-reflexive SEL skill, they have a wider range of responses to situations and they are likely to be more flexible, capable, responsive and resilient. Because many socialized habits are learned during childhood, there is a tendency for adults (parents and teachers) to automatically project them on child behaviour without considering the whole context of the situation. For example, a teacher who, as a child, was punished for being late may automatically tend to judge and punish

tardy students, rather than inquiring into causes of tardiness and support for the student.

Current efforts in education should emphasize action-oriented approaches over mere hypotheses about teacher behaviour. For instance, teachers with ingrained beliefs, such as viewing tardiness as punishable, may benefit from specialized training encouraging self-awareness and promoting empathy over punitive measures (Jennings et al., 2021). Acknowledging such prejudices is crucial, particularly in patriarchal or racialized colonial contexts where these biases may be deeply rooted. Effective strategies can include evidence-based professional development that can assist teachers to become more aware and conscious of biases and other socialized habits. These educational interventions can equip teachers with the tools to foster inclusivity and practise equitable treatment of all students and develop a wider range of SEL insights (Jennings and Alamos, 2024).



## 4.3 What do we already know about teacher preparation and development for SEL?

Research findings support the need to promote SEL for teachers (Greenberg et al., 2003; Mansfield et al., 2016). For example, the UK Department of Education and Skills in the *Every Teacher Matters Report* (Bassett et al., 2010) concludes firstly, that specific SEL competence which has not been acquired cannot be taught, and secondly, that quality teaching is not possible without teacher well-being. Teachers who understand and demonstrate social and emotional competencies tend to teach better, as they are able to respond to the fullness of learners' being. Also, a stronger emphasis on social and emotional development in pre-service training may provide graduating teachers with capabilities to recognize the signs of social, emotional or behavioural challenges. They may then implement evidence-informed teaching practices to address specific challenges based on person-centred SEL perspectives, embedding them into daily practice, routines, activities and play (Blewitt et al., 2019). It may also equip them to better support and expand the social and emotional capabilities and attributes that learners bring into the classroom (i.e. children's innate capacity for care and relationality). It may also better prepare them to work with parents, communities and colleagues in the school, to advance a more holistic educational experience that recognizes learners' cognitive contributions in addition to their social and emotional ones and understand how these can strengthen meaningful learning and life experiences in diverse social contexts.

Effective emotional engagement and management is critical for teachers, as research has shown that educators' stress and emotional dispositions can adversely affect students, including disruptions in students' stress response systems, as measured by morning cortisol levels (Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Similarly, it is well known that teachers' positive emotional

dispositions can positively affect learners' enthusiasm and responsiveness to educational challenges. Beyond stress management, procedural learning and positive emotional engagement with learners offers a strategy for enhancing SEL in educational settings. Introducing targeted practices and positive and encouraging emotional engagements, processes and activities can foster self-awareness, helping teachers and students strengthen positive social and emotional engagements such as care, collaboration and empathy, and keep negative or more destructive social and emotional practices in check (such as negative feedback, discrimination or exclusionary practices). Giving more attention to the positive social and emotional strategies and reducing negative or damaging social and emotional interactions with learners can promote a more conducive learning environment (Jennings, 2015).

Research has demonstrated that teachers can acquire SEC as a multidimensional skill set that includes self-awareness, emotional management, social awareness and responsible decision-making (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Teachers need to aspire to become positive role models for the social and emotional competencies they are hoping to teach to their students. Jennings and Greenberg (2009, see Figure 4.1) offer a Prosocial Classroom Model which articulates the role teachers' SEC plays in desired student prosocial outcomes. Teachers' SEC supports effective classroom management, teachers' ability to build supportive relationships with their students, and their ability to deliver SEL programmes effectively. These elements contribute to a socially and emotionally supportive classroom climate which has been shown to support student SEL. These factors are all influenced by the school and community context, which can be supportive or unsupportive to all these factors, including

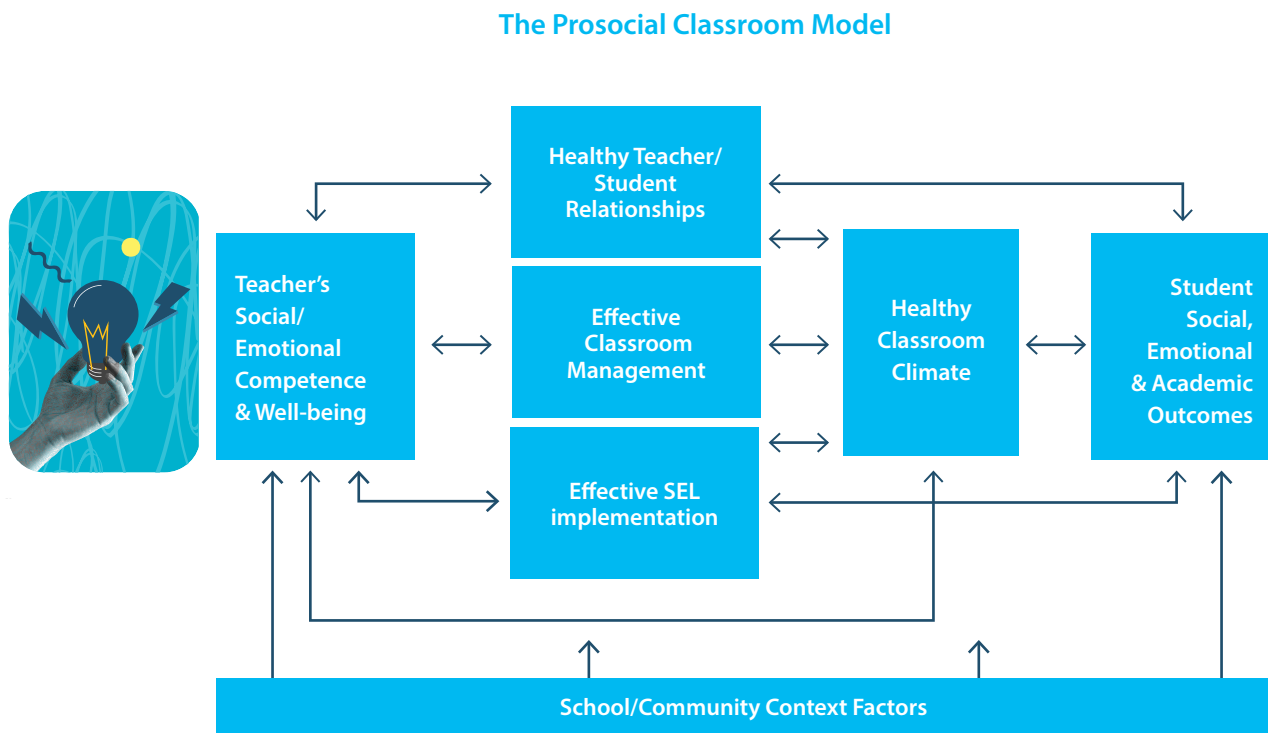
students from marginalized communities, students with special needs, and students exposed to trauma and adversity. In these contexts, teachers more than ever need strong and positive SEC.

In the context of teacher SEC, specialized and context-specific training is essential for managing the complexities of inclusive classrooms (Loreman and Deppeler, 2002). Continuous self-assessment and peer dialogue are also crucial for maintaining teacher effectiveness (Nieto, 2001). Comprehensive planning and community support systems significantly influence teacher attitudes toward inclusive education (Van Reusen et al., 2001). Aligning these considerations with the Prosocial Classroom Model emphasizes the role of multi-layered support systems in enhancing teachers' SEC and student outcomes (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

The largest and most comprehensive study of a programme specifically designed to support

teachers' SEC and the hypothesized downstream impacts was produced in a well-resourced educational environment. It examined the efficacy of Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), an intervention that combines mindful awareness and compassion practices with information and skill building around emotional mastery within the context of the classroom (Jennings, 2016). Jennings et al. (2017; 2019) randomly assigned 224 teachers from 32 public elementary schools located in high poverty regions of New York City to receive the CARE programme, or a waitlist control condition. Teachers who received CARE improved on a variety of measures, compared to control teachers. Their mindfulness and emotion regulation improved significantly, and their psychological distress and time urgency significantly decreased. Most of these positive impacts continued into the following school year (Jennings et al., 2019). Classrooms were observed and coded using the CLASS measure, which examines the quality of classroom interactions.

Figure 4.3 A Model of Teacher Well-Being and Social and Emotional Competence, Support, and Classroom and Student Outcomes

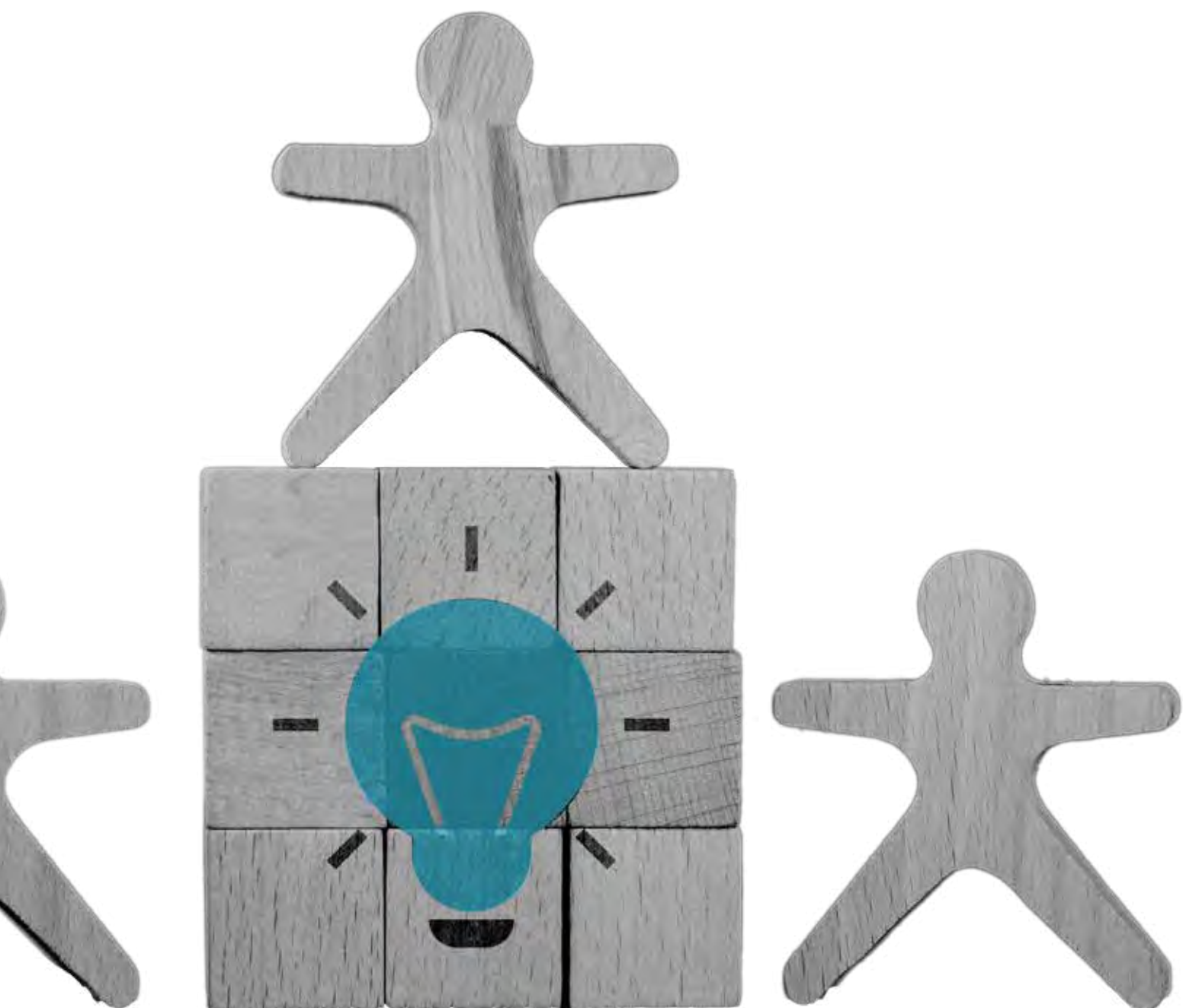


Source: Adapted from Jennings, P. A., and Greenberg, M. T. 2009, pp.491–525



Classrooms with teachers trained in CARE were significantly more emotionally supportive, teachers were more sensitive to the needs of their students, and the classrooms were more emotionally positive. Furthermore, classroom interactions were rated as more productive. Confirming the prosocial model, students in CARE classrooms were rated as significantly more motivated and engaged than those in the control classrooms and also rated higher in reading competence (Brown et al., 2023). Although these findings are promising, more research is required to gain a deeper understanding of the

mechanisms underlying the impact of teacher stress and well-being on their capacity to deliver SEL programmes effectively and to create socially and emotionally supportive environments. Further research is also necessary to understand how such programmes may impact teachers in various settings internationally and how they may support inclusive and equitable education. However, these findings suggest that supporting teachers' well-being within the context of the classroom demands may support their ability to teach SEL effectively. A diversity of research approaches may also be needed.



## 4.4 Priorities to embed SEL in teacher education and professional development

Social and emotional learning should be included in pre-service teacher training curricular, and sufficient time should be allocated for training and professional development of in-service teachers in embodying the SEL competencies they aim to develop. In order to broaden the applicability of SEL strategies, educators require multi-faceted professional development that addresses both technological and interpersonal competencies. Mentors should focus on nurturing teachers' social and emotional skills, as these competencies are integral to effective classroom management and student engagement and are therefore also central to advancing meaningful learning. Training and mentorship programmes should be available across all educational settings, including high, low- and middle-income educational contexts, to ensure equitable access to quality education for all in ways that recognize the full potential of all teachers and learners to contribute to and realize meaningful learning interactions and quality education outcomes.

With schools struggling to find time and space to accommodate the many competing areas of teachers' professional development, there is a clear need for SEL to be prioritized at the local and national levels while identifying creative ways to organize such professional development. Professional networks, collaboration platforms and teacher learning communities provide collaborative learning environments where teachers can share, discuss and improve their SEL teaching and assessment practices. Support needs to be available at school, regional and national levels to assist teachers in implementing the pedagogies and formative assessment practices of SEL. Teachers have to design pedagogical and formative assessment instruments through a bottom-up approach at school, with regional and national level guidelines in mind, as discussed in the previous chapter. Ultimately, there is a need for structures and resources that actively promote the health and well-being of teachers, and which affirm their innate SEL capabilities, which has a direct impact

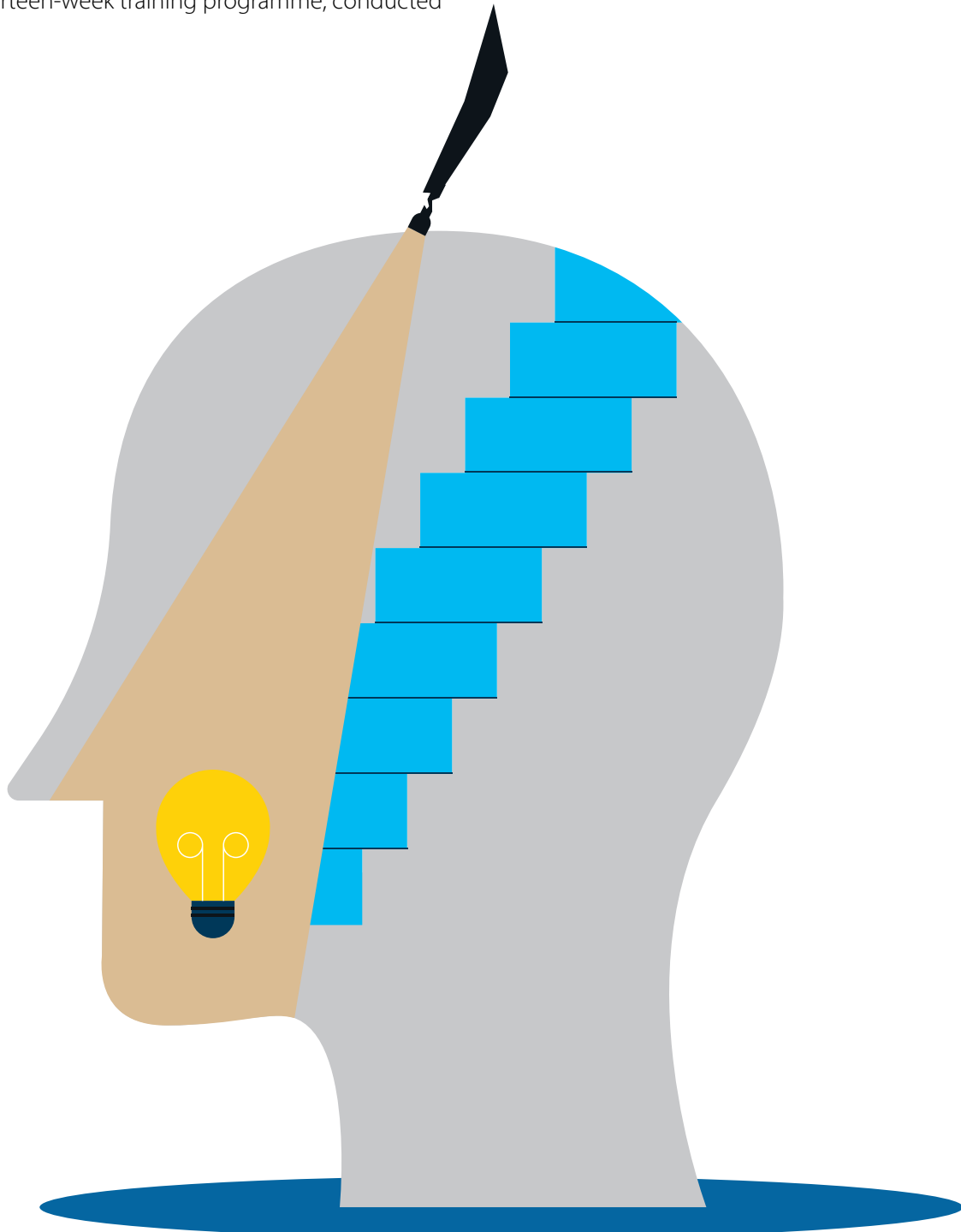
### Box 4.1 Means for fostering teacher capacities to model SEL in various contexts may take multiple forms

- Mindfulness skills which can be effective for teachers in promoting well-being, reducing distress, and improving classroom interactions and desirable student outcomes (Brown et al., 2023; Jennings et al., 2017; 2019; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). There is preliminary evidence in some contexts that mindful awareness practices may help individuals overcome implicit biases (Lueke and Gibson, 2015) and promote intergroup prosociality (Berry and Brown, 2017). Training that incorporates mindful awareness, compassion practices and instruction on diversity, equity and inclusion is a promising approach to building teachers' necessary SEL competencies. In other contexts, approaches such as relational solidarity (e.g. by advancing the African philosophy of Ubuntu) may offer the same results.
- Forging connections between teachers and the wider community and society will support teachers to provide contextual SEL education that is embedded in the immediate context. As has been shown for Inuit students, for instance, spending time with elders and with the land is a key element of well-being that can be supported when teachers understand these connections (Sawatzky et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2021).

on the quality of SEL delivered in the classrooms (Cefai et al., 2021).

The urgency for this focus is further underscored by studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed that targeted interventions like stress management skills, mindfulness practices and cognitive reframing can significantly enhance teachers' psychological well-being and resilience (Lizhi et al., 2021; Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021), in conjunction with structural supports to ensure teachers have what they need to do their best work. Furthermore, a fourteen-week training programme, conducted

partially during the pandemic, positively impacted on teachers' stress-coping abilities, emotional intelligence and competence in using information and communication technology in the classroom (Pozo-Rico et al., 2020). While further research is needed regarding how to support teachers in contexts of violence, conflict, emergencies or environmental stress, this early research shows that strategically designed interventions combined with concrete systems that support teachers' abilities to do their jobs can improve teachers' mental health and contribute to the effective delivery of SEL curricular.



## 4.5 Professional development across teachers' professional life cycle

Teachers require training and mentoring – both during initial teacher training and as part of continuing education – to integrate the formative assessment of social and emotional education within their classroom practice and in a way that is culturally relevant (see also Chapter 2). This includes making sense of social and emotional competencies, learning standards and progression levels; developing, adapting and using a range of formative assessment tools; and training, guiding and supporting students in self and peer assessment (Cefai et al., 2021).

**Pre-service teachers:** We must recognize and promote SEL as a necessary part of teacher training and professional development. Indeed, given the importance of teachers' social and emotional well-being for implementing SEL programmes and practices, pre-service teacher education should not only provide teacher candidates with knowledge about students' SEL; it should also proffer strategies and tools to build their own social and emotional competence (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

**Early career teachers:** Professional learning opportunities are essential for beginning teachers, who are especially vulnerable to emotionally challenging aspects that impact their ability to be effective. They often cite poor classroom management skills, feelings of pedagogical inexperience, and the lack of mentorship and feedback as major professional stressors (Goodwin, 2012). Research has found that teachers who feel supported and well-prepared, including in solid classroom management and mentoring, were less likely to drop the profession than teachers with lower quality preparation or mentorship (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Ongoing development:** While research on whether social and emotional competence can be increased in professional development is still scarce, early research in the related fields of health sciences and medicine indicates a need for ongoing professional development. According

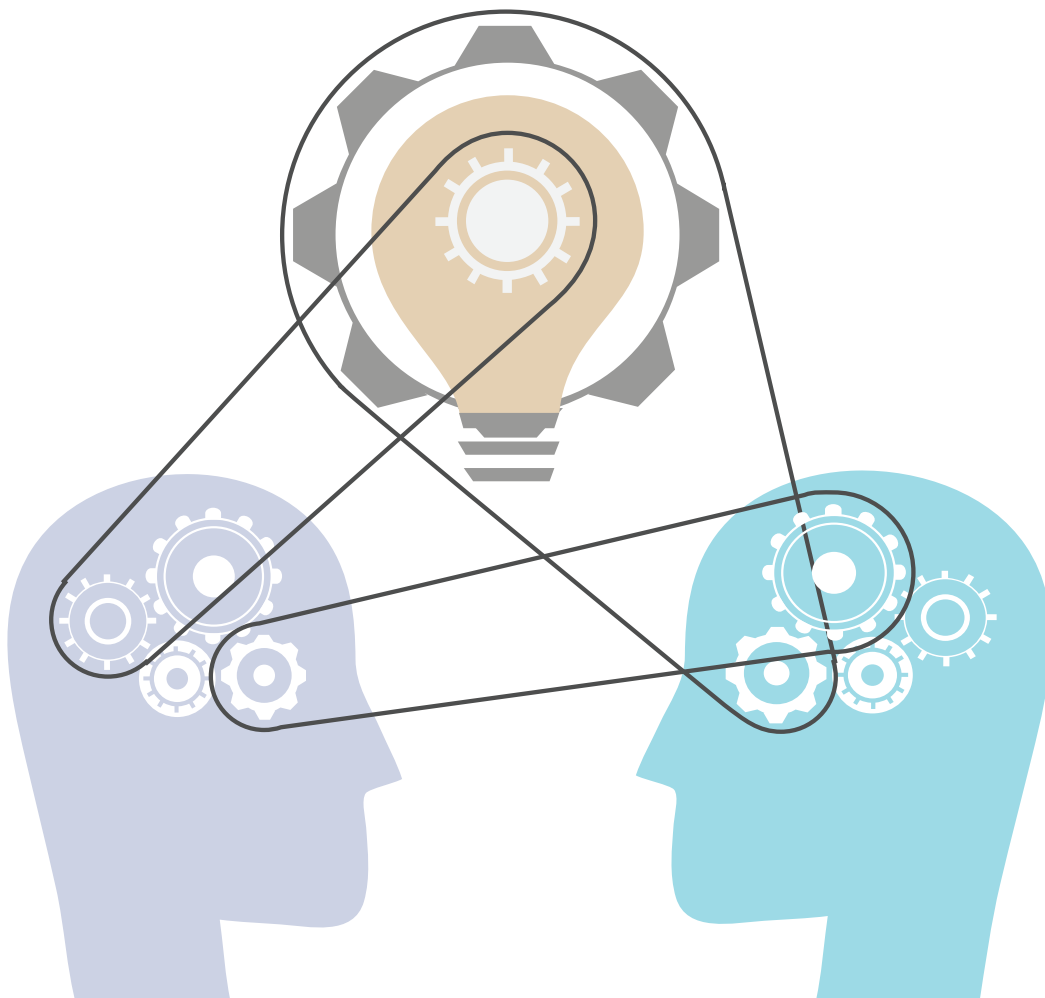
to reviews in these fields (e.g. Brown and Bylund, 2008), communication skills (such as listening skills) can be taught but are quickly forgotten if not maintained in everyday practice. Some basic skills can be learned in a short period of training. The teaching method should be experiential as it has been shown conclusively that instructional trainer-centred methods do not give the desired results. Those with the lowest pre-course scores gain the most from such courses (Brown and Bylund, 2008). It is essential to acknowledge the importance of teachers' SEL and study the development of these skills to counter the notion that well-being, including SEL, is an automatic by-product of general pedagogical practices (Pyhältö et al., 2010).

There is mounting evidence suggesting that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are beneficial for improving the psychological well-being and educators' SEC. A recent meta-analysis that explored the influence of mindfulness programmes on educators' well-being examined 18 studies, encompassing 1,001 participants (Zarate et al., 2019). The study showed that methods of these programmes varied extensively, ranging from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) specifically designed for educators (Flook et al., 2013; Frank et al., 2015; Roeser et al., 2013), to programmes that integrated both yoga and mindfulness (Ancona and Mendelson, 2014). The duration of these programmes also varied significantly, ranging from 4.5 hours to 42 hours. Across all evaluated domains in the contexts where the research was conducted, the programmes exhibited significant positive impacts, including substantial improvements in mindfulness, moderate reductions in stress and anxiety, and slight alleviation of depressive symptoms and burnout. However, the meta-review indicates that the quality of the research reviewed varied and only a limited number of studies investigated the dosage and intervention fidelity. As indicated above, research into a wider range of contexts is vital for making broader claims about such approaches.

## 4.6 Teachers' roles in transformative SEL

Despite the growing acknowledgment of SEL's importance, current implementation approaches often perpetuate a colour-blind, gender-indifferent and heteronormative paradigm, failing to account for students' diverse identities and experiences. The standardization of SEL can perpetuate existing systemic inequities especially when SEL is not adapted to local contexts. Transformative SEL addresses this gap by incorporating a caring, equity-oriented lens that critically examines the root causes of racial, gender and economic disparities (Jost, 2015; Seider, 2008), and also emphasizes contextual co-defining of the meanings of SEL in particular contexts, as discussed in Chapter 2. By focusing on identity development and incorporating race, class, gender and culture discussions into academic content, transformative SEL aims to foster critical self-awareness and responsible

actions among students and adults. It gives due attention to historically marginalized groups and encourages those with relative privilege to engage in self-examination and take an active role in alleviating inequities. Therefore, policy-makers, education administrators, teacher educators and wider school leadership, should embrace transformative SEL as a holistic approach, recognizing its potential to bring about meaningful and sustainable change in educational settings, with cultural responsiveness at the core. Integration of SEL into the structure of K–12 education through ongoing teacher professional development can create a generation of students and educators who have acquired the social and emotional competencies they need to be active and inclusive global citizens, well-being catalysts, and promoters of social justice for all members of society.



## 4.7 The road ahead: priorities and actionable steps to embed SEL into the foundations of teacher education and professional development

Successful SEL programme implementation and enhancement of students' social and emotional competencies depends upon high levels of the teachers' social and emotional competencies (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, SEL should embrace common principles embodied by culturally sustaining, social justice-oriented, transformative and trauma-sensitive approaches (Ramírez et al., 2021). There is sufficient research, policy, professional and public support for the proposition that social and emotional well-being and learning are central to the work of teachers. There remains no question of whether teacher well-being should be a vital element of the role of the teaching profession (Hazel, 2017).

To achieve SEL embodied in educational teacher education and professional development, the following suggestions can assist with SEL implementation:

**Teacher well-being:** Teacher well-being is a strategic investment in educators' job security, professional support and emotional capabilities, resilience and self-awareness. Integrated seamlessly into comprehensive teacher training programmes, teacher well-being focuses on developing emotionally competent teachers capable of effective classroom management and empathic interactions, while also being cognizant of their well-being and biases. Within an overarching system that provides ongoing protection and support for teachers, this dual focus aims to enhance the quality of education and the holistic experience of teachers and students in the learning environment as follows:

- *Holistic social and emotional care for educators* adopts a comprehensive approach to social and emotional well-being in teacher training programmes, ensuring it is not isolated from other essential teaching skills.
- *Nurturing self-awareness* prioritizes training modules that encourage teachers to build self-awareness, examine biases, and consider their well-being, alongside their professional roles.

**Teacher capacity development:** Teacher capacity development is a comprehensive strategy to enhance educators' skills in SEL. For SEL, teacher capacity development should include at least the following three pillars:

- fostering meaningful relationships and culturally responsive teaching,
- specialized training for diverse student needs, and
- ongoing professional development to improve adaptability and confidence in SEL.

These three pillars and the elements below create a well-rounded approach for teachers, enabling them to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms effectively. Social and emotional learning teacher capacity development programmes should:

- *Cultivate compassion and connection:* Implement training to promote meaningful relationships and culturally responsive teaching practices, thereby aiding the effective delivery of SEL.

- *Equip teachers for diverse classrooms:* Offer specialized training to help teachers adapt their SEL teaching strategies according to different student needs, including those with emotional and learning disorders.
- *Master adaptive learning:* Invest in ongoing professional development that enhances teachers' flexibility in teaching SEL and builds their confidence through hands-on classroom experiences.
- *Provide administrative support:* Ensure the education system is not compounding stress for teachers but instead provides them with the appropriate pay, job security, and administrative and infrastructural support to do their best work. Healthy teachers are grounded in a healthy working environment.
- *Social justice in SEL:* Train teachers to adopt a social justice lens, focusing on equitable and inclusive practices that challenge societal biases and systemic issues and that are culturally sensitive and relevant (see Chapters 1 and 2).
- *Care for the environment and SEL:* Support teachers to encourage caring attitudes to the environment and promote healthy environments and sustainable development (see Chapters 1 and 2).

### **Pedagogical approaches and associated dynamics of SEL:**

As underscored in the previous chapters (Chapters 2 and 3), pedagogical approaches in SEL are guided by a comprehensive strategy integrating curriculum, community engagement, policy and social justice. These ensure a holistic, inclusive and equitable educational environment, aiming to equip teachers and influence policy to deliver SEL effectively. Teachers should also be oriented to the pedagogical dynamics of SEL and to the following associated dynamics:

- *Integrated SEL curriculum design:* Encourage the development of SEL curricular that align with the larger educational goals, paying attention to the diversity of student backgrounds (see Chapter 3).
- *Community-based SEL:* Connect teacher training with community service to build contextual and culturally grounded SEL approaches (see Chapter 6).
- *Policy inclusivity:* Guide policymakers in embedding SEL principles into educational policy, ensuring a well-rounded approach to teacher education and professional development (see Chapter 2).

## 4.8 Conclusion

The efficacy of SEL programmes is contingent upon a comprehensive framework that encompasses curricular needs (Chapter 3) and includes specialized teacher training as discussed in this chapter. Addressing fundamental questions – whether specialized training for SEL is needed, how it looks for in-service and pre-service teachers, and how it can be incorporated into existing programmes emphasizes the need for a multi-layered approach. Given the proven benefits of well-designed interventions on teacher well-being, social and emotional competence, resilience, adaptability and self-awareness must be integrated into comprehensive teacher training programmes. Additionally, the transformation of educational systems to include SEL must be inclusive and equity-oriented, adopting a critical lens that challenges systemic issues. Such an inclusive approach can enhance educators' effectiveness in fostering SEL competencies in their students, contributing to an empathetic, equitable and socially aware society.

## Key points for policy-makers

- To successfully integrate SEL into education systems, social and emotional competence, resilience, adaptability, and self-awareness must be integrated into comprehensive teacher training programmes.
- Preparation for SEL requires understanding diversity and cultural variations in SEL provision and educators' beliefs about the purpose of SEL, which may be grounded in inclusivity principles and culturally embedded social and emotional processes.
- There is a growing consensus that contextually relevant SEL interventions can enhance both the learning environment and workforce readiness.
- Social and emotional learning does not occur in a vacuum, and teachers will need the tools to decode the impacts of social, cultural, political, economic and environmental stressors on their students, including how these stressors interact with, and influence students' learning and well-being.
- Teacher well-being is a strategic investment in educators' job security, professional support, and emotional capabilities, resilience and self-awareness. Teacher well-being focuses on developing emotionally competent teachers capable of effective classroom management and empathic interactions while also being cognizant of their well-being and biases. Teacher well-being also requires systemic and structural interventions to ensure that teachers have a healthy and safe place to work that is conducive to good teaching and learning.
- Effective strategies can include evidence-based professional development that can assist teachers to become more aware and conscious of biases and other socialized habits, and to become reflexive practitioners.
- Teachers need to aspire to become positive role models for the social and emotional competencies they are hoping to teach to their students.
- Social and emotional learning should be included in pre-service teacher training curricular, and sufficient time should be allocated for training and professional development of in-service teachers in embodying the SEL competencies they aim to develop. In order to broaden the applicability of SEL strategies, educators require multi-faceted professional development that addresses both technological and interpersonal competencies.
- For SEL, teacher capacity development should include at least the following three pillars:
  - fostering meaningful relationships and culturally responsive teaching;
  - specialized training for diverse student needs; and
  - ongoing professional development to improve adaptability and confidence in SEL.



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## Chapter 5

# School

# Leadership for Social and Emotional Learning



This chapter discusses school leadership for SEL. It argues that collaborative forms of leadership are necessary to launch and maintain the transformation of the school's collective capabilities, resources and relationships, to ensure that SEL integrates into the school culture. It points to the important role of leadership in making sure that the incorporation of SEL is more than simply introducing programmes into curriculum, pedagogy, or the physical spaces of learning. Leadership must understand the way in which actions, interactions, relationships, behaviours and practices interlock and affect each other. The chapter introduces three leadership lenses that can help to advance SEL: **1) schools and spaces of learning, in general, are systems; 2) leadership should be viewed as collective; and 3) leadership should be based on the ethics of care.** The chapter emphasises that leadership for SEL is not a single role but a shared process that everyone is responsible for. It emphasises the co-construction of a shared vision as being a vital starting point for collective leadership, and then the cultivation and distribution of roles and contributions to the formation and sustaining of SEL in a school. It offers some specific guidance for school leaders, and also for policy-makers.

## 5.1 Social and emotional learning aims to transform school culture and climate

Social and emotional learning should become a way of life, an energizing feature of the school culture, focused on perpetual development. Diverse individuals and roles within a school increasingly collaborate with each other in ways that benefit everyone. Their combined capacities become a systemic property of the school that can transform the school culture and climate. Thus, collaborative forms of leadership are necessary to launch and maintain the transformation of the school's collective capabilities, resources and relationships, to ensure SEL integrates into the school culture. (Randolph et al., 2019). Changing the **school culture** involves changes to its values and norms, to consistently give everyone the feeling of emotional well-being, social support, psychological safety and positive interpersonal interactions. These should extend to positive

social relations with parents and communities (see Chapter 6). This feeling – or **school climate** – is foundational for strengthening academic performance, mental health and prosocial behaviours that are important in today's societies (see Chapters 1 and 2). **School climate and SEL mutually support each other.** When individuals gain a general sense that everyone cares about and contributes to the well-being of each other, so that empathy, positive relationship building and an ethic of care is what everyone expects of each other, behaviour and activities in the school align with these expectations. In turn, developing adult and student SEL competencies sustains a positive school climate (Berg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013).

Collective forms of leadership are necessary to consistently keep alive the promise of SEL by

maximizing the interplay of SE competencies throughout school activities and venues. The more ways, times and locations that SEL is practised and made visible to students, staff and visitors in the school, the faster and stronger the school culture and climate can improve.

Thus, SEL transformation goes beyond incorporating SEL programmes into curriculum, pedagogy, or the physical spaces of learning. Effective school leadership understands the way that actions, interactions, relationships, behaviours and practices interlock and affect each other. Informal conversations, formal meetings, teaching and learning, sports and arts, extracurricular opportunities, in other words all activities in a school come to align with, and model SEL competencies like mutual understanding, equity and justice (Elias et al., 2006; Goldberg et al., 2019; Hamedani and Darling-Hammond, 2015).

**School culture** comprises the values and norms that staff, students, parents and school managers, consciously or unconsciously, consider ‘our way’ of fulfilling their tasks and duties and of interacting with each other (Kane et al., 2016).

**School climate** describes how individuals ‘feel’ in the school and classroom, based on their experiences and perceptions of the learning environment, such as social and instructional interactions, safety, inclusion, and infrastructure (Schweig et al., 2019).



## 5.2 Three leadership lenses to help advance SEL

Three leadership lenses can help to advance SEL: firstly, there is need to recognize that *schools and spaces of learning in general, are systems*. Secondly, it is important to recognize the organization of *leadership as collective*, and thirdly, the importance of launching from an *ethic of care*.

### Social and emotional learning leadership requires a systems view

SEL transformation requires **a systems view** of learning space culture and processes. For leading a transformation process, it helps to focus not only on outcomes but also – and primarily – on the *processes* that bring about desired outcomes. Intervening in processes provides quicker and clearer feedback on what is working and what needs further adjustment. Timely feedback is critical because transformation takes time. If an unhelpful process is not corrected early, the school could generate counterproductive behaviours. But well-aligned processes can create ripples of positive effects throughout the school. Viewing the school as a system makes visible specific levers that leadership can adjust to better develop the capabilities, resources and relationships available in the school.

Schools are social organizations whose members learn and adapt their beliefs, behaviors, and relationships through day-to-day interactions with each other and their environment (Miller & Page, 2007; Jacobson et al., 2019). Enhancing opportunities for school community members to learn from each other is critical to SEL transformation.

From an everyday perspective of an individual in a role *within* the system, leadership's persistent, reflective, proactive adjustments in the school allow for more effective and timely influence on the interactions among other individuals and roles. Schools change continuously as individuals

**Social system** comprises interacting individuals or roles through which one's behaviour influences others' behaviours (Parsons, 1951).

**Dynamic system** means the structure and function of the system can change over time, usually through the system's own processes (Koopmans, 2020).

**Complex adaptive systems** thinking focuses on the interactions among many roles within context, from multiple perspectives of the individuals involved, to highlight patterns of interdependence and influence (Miller & Page, 2007).

alter their behaviour to adapt to opportunities and pressures. Social and emotional competencies are strengthened through sharing, observation and modelling. As individuals try new approaches, they also demonstrate and teach others new ways of behaving. In addition, encounters with external schools and professionals can provide further approaches that individuals in the school can model and adapt (Elias, 2014).

Increasingly positive interpersonal and pedagogical interactions set up *empirical expectations* and *social expectations* for SE competencies (Bicchieri, 2016). When individuals observe others modelling SE-competent behaviours, they start to expect those behaviours from more individuals. When leadership recognizes SE-competent behaviours, individuals feel important to the SEL transformation process. Expectations are based less on empirical observation of individuals and more on community social norms. Social norms consolidate individuals' commitments to the agreed-upon way *everyone* is expected to behave.



Figure 5.1 Gear metaphor for SEL's potential to transform school culture

An overview of leadership practices (arrows) that can set in motion and increase momentum of structural opportunities (gears) for SEL to transform the culture / learning environment of a school. Collective leadership practices focus on the interactions among opportunities so that all “gears” turn together, eventually in a harmonious rhythm that makes SEL a self-reinforcing contribution to everyone’s well-being, sense of belonging, and educational equity and justice.



Individuals realize that others expect ‘me’ to model and promote SEL and that others expect ‘me’ to actively participate in the transformation process. Individuals start to reward each other’s SE-competent behaviours. New norms form cultural change.

Social and emotional learning transformation is easier when leadership takes not only an everyday ‘insider’ perspective but also an ‘overview’ perspective of the whole system. A systems view helps leadership concurrently watch over all parts of the school that influence the development and sustainability of SEL. Figure 5.1 presents a systems view using a metaphor of gears. The gears make visible how leadership *practices* (arrows in the figure) increase the potential of *assets or opportunities* (gears in the figure) to transform a school’s culture around SEL. Leadership inspires collective direction through a shared vision. Leadership cultivates individual contributions by strengthening capabilities and resources. Leadership catalyses positive interactions by improving relational dynamics. Leadership fosters a caring community through building, then maintaining, a positive school

culture. When a school introduces SEL, it already has a certain type of school culture, in addition to capabilities, resources and relational dynamics among staff and students. What is needed is a vision of how the school *will operate* when SEL is central to the school culture, hence it is important to develop this vision collaboratively as indicated in Chapters 1, 2 and 6. Transforming a school culture to align with a new vision is rarely a direct or immediate outcome. Verbal conveyance of the vision is usually not strong enough to ‘turn the gears’ of the system.

Instead, capabilities, resources and relational dynamics must be influenced by the vision, which over time starts to move the school culture in a new direction. A shared vision for SEL transformation simultaneously influences the development and mutual reinforcement of what adults and students can do, how availability and utility of resources can support these new capabilities, and how interactions and relationships turn capabilities into actions. With increasing practice, these gears gain momentum in both efficiency and proficiency of SEL (Meyers et al., 2018).

## Social and emotional learning transformation requires collective leadership

Transformation, changing how school processes operate, often requires integration – combining school processes to make a new whole. When processes integrate, they affect each other's function, which changes how the overall system works. For example, when flour, water and yeast integrate, they become a dough, which functions differently from the separate ingredients. Similarly, when individuals' SE competencies cohere into social norms, the emotional 'feel' of the school itself becomes more respectful, helpful and uplifting.

The first integration that must occur for SEL transformation is to integrate school leadership.

### **Leadership for SEL is not a single role but a shared process that everyone is responsible for.**

The nominal leader of a school, based on their position of principal or administrator, becomes an equal learner and contributor to the ongoing transformation efforts of SEL. This position starts, enables, and is an ongoing voice in the *collective* leadership of SEL. In addition, since nominal leaders connect to broader education systems or school leadership networks, this role is vital for bringing in technical, managerial and other supports for SEL, and is a major contribution to collective leadership. Social and emotional learning transformation is

most effective when led *collectively* through the integration of leadership skills that are distributed across individuals in various roles in the school and surrounding community (Louis et al., 2010). Participation and involvement of parents and the community is vital to ensure that the direction of SEL is relevant to the community and learners' needs (see Chapters 2 and 6), and is not only reflective of particular ideologies or views of teachers or school leaders. The SEL direction must therefore be negotiated and agreed upon in the collective leadership building process. This may be a complex and difficult process at first as not everyone is likely to agree, but it is important to find 'grounds to converge' and starting points for expanding collective leadership for SEL.

Diversity of individuals in collective leadership ensures that the priorities, values, and needs of all school members are represented and considered. Collective leadership organizes collaboration among educators, students, parents and community members. Collective leadership is needed to incorporate multiple perspectives on SEL in setting priorities and the direction for integrating SEL into school life, and to inspire working together to identify and address barriers to SEL. Collective leadership is also necessary to make decisions about roles, resources and approaches through discussion and deliberation, and to co-define agreed-upon collective actions (Berger et al., 2020; Louis et al., 2010), putting the learners' well-being and meaningful learning at the centre.

*Everyone* – including students – has a voice and a role throughout SEL transformation. In fact, it is vitally important to involve students in the co-defining of SEL directionality in the school or learning space. Examples include contributing to a school vision for SEL, reviewing SEL materials and existing programmes, building a social classroom, designing psychologically safe spaces, organising SEL communities of practice, conducting SEL-related action research, advocating and supporting positive parenting and community action and establishing networks to share SEL knowledge and experiences. These roles may change as SEL integration progresses.

**Transformation** involves changing how the school works and how school processes operate.

**Integration** involves combining school processes so that these processes affect each other's functioning and re-create how the whole school works.

**Collective leadership** is a process, not a single position, through which everyone in the school has a voice and role in the SEL transformation of the whole school.

Collective leadership is also necessary to set in motion and sustain commitment and progress in transforming the school around SEL. Transformation occurs through an iterative process of reflecting on insights and proactively implementing insights from individual and institutional changes resulting from SEL. This iterative process is why the gear metaphor and dynamic systems overview is so valuable to SEL transformation.

Depending on their specific skill sets, different individuals in the collective leadership structure can contribute to leading policy reforms such as zero tolerance for bullying, identifying community resources to support SEL, such as thematic clubs or volunteer opportunities, and organising events to share with other communities. Deliberately creating opportunities for student voices and active participation in collective leadership is important for smooth SEL transformation. Key moments for student inclusion can occur in the visioning process, programmatic decision-making, coordinating student SEL with adult SEL, and collaborating on school projects (Berger et al., 2020; Elias, 2014).

Collective leadership also drives individuals' mutual reinforcement of SE-competent behaviours in each other. Mutual reinforcement occurs through positive and meaningful pedagogical activities, social interactions, peaceful resolution of differences, respect and understanding. Mutual reinforcement strengthens SE-competent behaviours within everyday situations in classrooms, meetings, assemblies, and other encounters among teachers, parents, students and community members. Mutual reinforcement becomes a habit for individuals to continually adapt their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour through observing and interacting with others who are doing their part to create and sustain a positive climate amplifying belonging, inclusion and equity (Auspos and Cabaj, 2014; Cheatham et al., 2020; Miller and Page, 2007). As individuals strengthen SE competencies, exclusion, inequity and their root causes become more visible by contrast.

Mutually reinforcing expectations towards prosocial behaviour, cooperative relationships, cultural inclusivity and a positive climate can motivate and support individuals to overcome injustices, because shared social-emotional well-being has the potential to produce better outcomes, as argued in Chapters 1 and 2. Care should be taken at all times to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, and the work involved in this process should not be taken for granted. As argued by Gutiérrez et al. (2020) there are many groups of people who have been, and continue to be oppressed as a result of systemic injustice, and addressing these in schools and school communities requires the building of relationships of trust and mutual relations of exchange in imagining and co-constructing a better future. It is possible that new forms of mutual reinforcement can paradoxically exclude or produce new dominant hegemonies, hence it is necessary to enable regular feedback and to create relationships of trust and mutual exchange and shared processes that can regularly and critically monitor progress towards development of a truly shared, fully inclusive school culture and climate.

At the start of SEL transformation, integrating diverse perspectives into inclusive collective leadership may require persistence of effort in the face of challenges. Language barriers may limit some parents' participation, especially in displaced settings. In settings where families do not have large amounts of leisure time due to economic demands or family responsibilities, or who live far from the school, it may be difficult to involve parents or guardians. Divisive and conflictive situations may limit open-mindedness, which could introduce bias and exclusion in setting direction and deter sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of all adults and students in the school community. Social and emotional learning and collective leadership are worth the effort to turn these barriers into opportunities by providing translation, compensating parents for participation, connecting with families online, or working with and through community organizations, building important school-home relations. Reframing

the 'sides' of difference or conflict as valuable multiple perspectives on how to improve social and emotional competencies and interactions can turn antagonism into curiosity. Improved SE-competent behaviours, in turn, are much more likely than conflict to bring peace and prosperity to all. If needed, nominal leaders and other SEL champions – including at levels above the school or district – may help garner interest and participation from all school and community members.

## Social and emotional learning transformation requires an ethic of care

A systems view and collective leadership leads to the third required leadership lens: an ethic of care that instils habits of kindness, consideration, empathy, and well-meaning among school members. An ethic of care involves individuals valuing and agreeing to care for each other and engaging in qualitatively different ways that foster psychologically safe environments for expressing a variety of viewpoints (Ramirez et al., 2021). Care involves recognizing others as individuals in their own right, with unique strengths and hopes, not as simply a role or a

means to reach a goal. Care bridges differences and is not extended only to those similar to oneself. Care makes possible the reciprocal interaction of collective leadership and SEL transformation. When combined with a systems view, care involves investigating the aspects of school systems that may restrict some students from feeling safe – for instance due to racism, gender discrimination, etc. – and by addressing these issues at their root source in conjunction with a SEL programme. In such cases care should extend to social solidarity and can involve participation in programmes that actively counter structural concerns such as racism, gender discrimination and environmental health issues.

An ethic of care in collective leadership offers learning not only *from* others but vicariously *through* others (Ramirez et al., 2021; Stephens, 2021). Vicarious learning can be particularly powerful when engaged across ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other differences because it broadens the outlook of individuals beyond their own identities and provides a more comprehensive understanding of what needs to be done. Everyone at a school brings experiences, hopes, dreams, strengths, interests, curiosities and insights that are valuable to the overall well-being and functioning of the school. When viewed through an ethic of care, these attributes become powerful drivers of collective leadership and SEL transformation towards equity, and include solidarity, empathy and care for the community and environment. By using an ethic of care lens, collective leadership can review what members of the school community already do to make the school culture caring, welcoming, inclusive, equitable, just, open-minded, and otherwise socially and emotionally competent (Jones et al., 2013). What does the current school culture promote? Who is already aware of or knowledgeable about SEL? How well do school actors understand the interdependence of social, emotional and cognitive learning? How are current homes, schools and classrooms aligned to promote SEL? This inventory starts the dialogue because everyone has a perspective and insights on what is already occurring in the school.

An **ethic of care** emphasizes shared, agreed-upon benevolence towards one another, recognizing the needs and hopes of other individuals in collaborative decisions and plans, which changes the quality of interpersonal and group engagement to foster connection (Kennedy, 2019).

**Benevolence** means a preference and habit of being kind, considerate and well-meaning towards others.

**Caring** involves seeing others as individuals in their own right, respects their dignity, shows general concern for their welfare, and considers their perspective (Senge, 2014).

### The heart of education is caring:

“...the best teachers listen not only for expressed needs but for expressed wants and interests ... To address expressed needs, teachers work to establish relations of care and trust with their students. Within such relations, intellectual dialogue can become meaningful ... [Schools] must concentrate on establishing conditions under which caring-for can take place, under which relations of care and trust are established and maintained ... In caring-about all children, we can work intelligently to support the conditions under which good people can supply the direct caring-for needed by every child.”

*Nel Noddings, 2015*

People do not always think consciously about the values and norms that constitute their culture. Instead, people often act habitually on cultural norms without self-awareness (Kane et al., 2016). But others with different perspectives notice such habitual practices and can verbalize them. Through this process of surfacing behaviours and taken-for-granted norms, the entire school community can become more enlightened about current habits and norms that support SEL and habits that counter or impede meaningful and relevant forms of SEL. The process of ongoing shared review can enable mutual understanding of, and a values-based responsiveness, to the variety of priorities, hopes and foresights school members have regarding SEL. As pointed to above, this requires building relationships of trust, and care-full mutual exchange spaces where all have freedom to express their views and concerns honestly and with empathy for each other's viewpoints.

Assessment for *assets* differs from assessment for *needs*, which is more often the focus in education, so collective leadership may need to alter their past assessment practices to be fair. For example, values of collaboration, respect for diversity or community service, could be strong assets for the development of SE competencies such as

peaceful resolution of conflict, perspective taking and participatory citizenship. Conversely, valuing academic performance to the detriment of student and teacher well-being may undermine SEL by imposing pressure on teachers, that may ripple through to students. School norms to use collaborative decision-making could promote SEL, whereas condoning corporal punishment or gender discrimination tends to impede students developing a sense of control and responsibility, and equitable self-worth and agency.

An ethic of care is important particularly for schools who may be in contexts that are not strongly conducive to SEL. These schools may need an extra step or two before collectively creating a shared vision. Schools that are apathetic or stuck in counterproductive traditions may need to first invite school actors from different backgrounds simply to directly interact and create a shared language around SEL. Sometimes formal SEL curriculum mandated by the state or school district can provide a common language upon which to build, within the school community.

Schools that are in violent or other harmful or insecure contexts need to first address safety, protection, well-being and a sense of belonging. Past harmful behaviours may be so ingrained in the culture that current school actors do not know how or why they began, and at times influences are not always within the school, but impinge upon the school. School actors need to see the possibility of other ways to interact and need to be able to involve community members in addressing more complex contexts that are potentially harmful to learners. SEL champions in the school and school community could create ripples of inclusion by linking SEL with education for reconciliation and peacebuilding, along with practices that work against all forms of discrimination. Social and emotional learning is a powerful companion to education that counters violence, racism, and gender and sexual discrimination, unpacking the root causes of violence while practising healthy ways of being together.

## 5.3 Start with a collectively crafted shared vision

With the trifold requirements of using a systems view, having collective leadership, and establishing the ethics of care, it is time for collective leadership to start moving the gears towards SEL transformation. Once an inventory of the current school culture's SEL-relevant assets has been done, collective leadership turns to the driving force of SEL transformation: an inclusive process to create a shared vision of how the school will operate once the school culture has become more infused with social and emotional competence (Kools and Stoll, 2016; Senge, 2012). Envisioning involves weaving together the varied notions of SEL that are valued and meaningful across diverse school roles, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, genders and backgrounds (Jukes et al., 2021). The vision starts with imagination and hope. Imagination and hope are powerful mental faculties focused on 'what could be'. A shared vision for SEL is a mental image of a learning environment in which SEL infuses all aspects of school life. The envisioning process invites everyone to picture how SEL becomes part of students travelling to school, entering the school grounds, interacting with teachers in and beyond the classroom and sharing challenges with trusted adults. How do different school members see SEL infusing staff meetings, school assemblies, peer support

### Collective Direction in Action

*"In building a shared vision, you will lead (or take part in) a group effort to develop images of the future we want to create together, along with the values that will be important in getting there, the goals we hope to achieve along the way, and the principles and guiding practices we expect to employ. This generally involves a formal process, in which people committed to the future of the school meet regularly to chart a path together."*

*Peter Senge, 2012*

groups, extracurricular activities, teacher professional development and community volunteering?

The shared vision maintains motivational power throughout the transformation process. It responds to the safety and psychosocial needs of *all* school members and it promotes a wide-reaching sense of belonging. Integration of diverse perspectives involves repeatedly taking a systems view to make sure that *both* the 'envisioned SEL school culture' *and* the steps towards realizing this vision are equitable, just and balanced, in benefits for all school members.

### Ensure an inclusive, collective envisioning process

Suggestions for an inclusive, collective envisioning process may include small teams gathering ideas and possibilities for everyone to consider, and then deliberating among them, such as:

- Revisit the inventory of already existing SEL strengths. Already established strengths are foundations for launching further SEL. (See Ethics of Care section above.)
- Engage staff and students in an internal 'learning journey' to learn what they already know, think and feel about SEL (Randolph et al., 2019). What talents, skills and interests do they already have that they believe could support or promote SEL? What materials or resources do they already have that relate to SEL concepts or practices? What relationships have they already established that embody SEL? Where do they see room for improvement in themselves, others, relationships and interactions in the school? Are interpersonal interactions positive and inclusive? Are disagreements resolved peacefully? Do pedagogical interactions support students' sense of belonging and self-worth?

- Investigate available curricula, standards and professional development for SEL in the school, district, country, or through the internet. Even if these resources do not explicitly say ‘SEL’, they may be applicable. For example, the Philippines Department of Education has a values education curriculum and teaching standards for a positive learning environment that could be adapted to SEL.
- Investigate teacher professional development events in the region or country. Teacher training colleges, other higher education institutions, or nearby schools or school networks may offer ways for educators to learn together or learn from each other.

Suggestions for collective leadership to keep the shared vision alive in everyone’s minds include:

- Offer plenty of occasions for school actors to see themselves in and participate in realising the vision. Recognize one another for SEL competence and contributions. Praise one another for encouraging even more school actors to practise SEL. Notice where and when curriculum, pedagogy, materials and venue foreground SEL.
- Inspire everyone to maintain momentum in the same direction, even as school priorities, needs and culture may change, or as different parts of the vision come to the fore.
- Remind each other, in uplifting ways, of the shared vision and their commitment, shared responsibility, and self-directed and collective behaviour and actions, to realize the vision over time (Menon, 2019).
- Involve each other in strategizing incremental steps to align additional aspects of school life with the SEL vision.
- Create opportunities for everyone to point out progress in small, as well as large ways, signalling benchmarks or milestones for SEL transformation (Stillman et al., 2018).

- Invite all school actors to share their examples of working together, helping each other progress, and overcoming impediments in SEL transformation.
- Tell stories of interdependence among capabilities, resources and relational dynamics that support SEL transformation.

Democratically and collectively working together to set, review, contribute to, and reinforce a shared vision is the most important contribution of collective leadership. It embeds SEL as a systemic property of the school. As argued in previous chapters, systemic SEL affects multiple outcomes of education, including stronger academic achievement, prosocial behaviour and mental health of students (Durlak et al., 2011). If the envisioning process is done well, then the shared vision itself becomes a driver of the school’s development of capabilities, resources and relational dynamics that transform the school culture.



## 5.4 Collectively review, contribute to, reinforce and implement a shared vision

Below are specific ideas for collective leadership to implement a shared vision.

### Cultivate capabilities, resources and contributions for SEL

Behaviours, actions and practices are capabilities engaged in activities. Individuals apply their SEL skills by working with material or social resources (Gimbert et al., 2021). As noted above in the ethics of care and shared vision sections, an early collective leadership task is to take stock of the already existing capabilities that school actors have. But capabilities development and resource acquisition are ongoing processes in SEL transformation. Once a shared vision has been established, capabilities and resources decisions are made *through the lens of the vision*.

With the original assets inventory as a baseline, collective leadership regularly maps changes in understanding, application and reflection of SEL. Over time, new and strengthened capabilities can be expanded to venues beyond the school, such as the use of SEL capabilities in the community, district, nationwide, or even internationally through the internet. Regularly scheduled gatherings of the school community provide

**Capabilities** comprise the abilities a person holds to complete specific tasks in real-life situations, which usually encompass knowledge, skills and intuition.

**Resources** comprise materials, community institutions and venues, and existing programmes in other schools and higher levels of the education system that a school can adapt to enhance individuals' capabilities.

mutual support to examine challenges, identify gaps and collectively decide how to move forward (Elias, 2014; Stephens, 2021). Iterative dialogues involving reflection and peer learning in small groups helps schools efficiently work on several issues concurrently. Engaging in regular reflection is crucial. The ability to develop and use SE competencies in various contexts is important. Perhaps more important for the *sustainability* of an SEL-based culture is the practice of becoming increasingly self-aware of the effect on others of one's modelling and mirroring SE-competent behaviours. Taking a few moments to perceive and remember instances when oneself and others in the school reach milestones can have a tremendous influence on maintaining SEL culture.

Collective leadership **cultivates contributions** as a practice. Cultivation nourishes the expression, adaptation and thriving of capabilities. Contribution is what individual's efforts intentionally bring to a collective endeavour (Moran, 2020).

Some examples of contributions to **tap resources** for co-creating capacity-building experiences include:

- Teachers within grades may take stock of supplementary readings, group-work pedagogy, or extracurricular activities to incorporate SEL in the classroom.
- Student collaborators may strengthen student clubs to provide more open discussion about social issues and emotionally sensitive topics.
- Community members may map the availability of assets such as counselling services, library resources, youth groups, wilderness groups and others, and invite them to become involved.



- A diverse team of students, parents, and educators might review codes of conduct, legislation, and other policy documents to identify opportunities to expand SEL.

Some examples for cultivating each other's further contributions to SEL include:

- Celebrate students' positive peer interactions and prosocial actions.
- Adopt other educators' pedagogical adaptations that create a social classroom environment.
- Recognize parents' advocacy for safe schools.
- Invite experts (school counsellors, local psychosocial service providers) to speak to staff about positive discipline and collaborative problem-solving.
- Appreciate outreach and networking efforts beyond the school to expand SEL resources and opportunities.
- Bring SEL to life through posters and slogans in school hallways, student-directed theatre during assemblies, or community events to raise awareness for zero-tolerance of bullying.

## Catalyse positive interactions and relational dynamics

Through shared vision, growth in SEL capabilities and resources, and caring relational dynamics, collective leadership maintains a healthy school climate that catalyses ongoing positive interpersonal interactions. A catalyst can be a person, social group, object, or situation that induces cooperation, collaboration, inclusion, conflict de-escalation, and other practices that bring people closer together. Quality interactions strengthen a climate and culture in which everyone—regardless of role, gender, status, ability, need or background—feels welcome, comfortable, and involved in responsible contributions to perpetuate well-being.

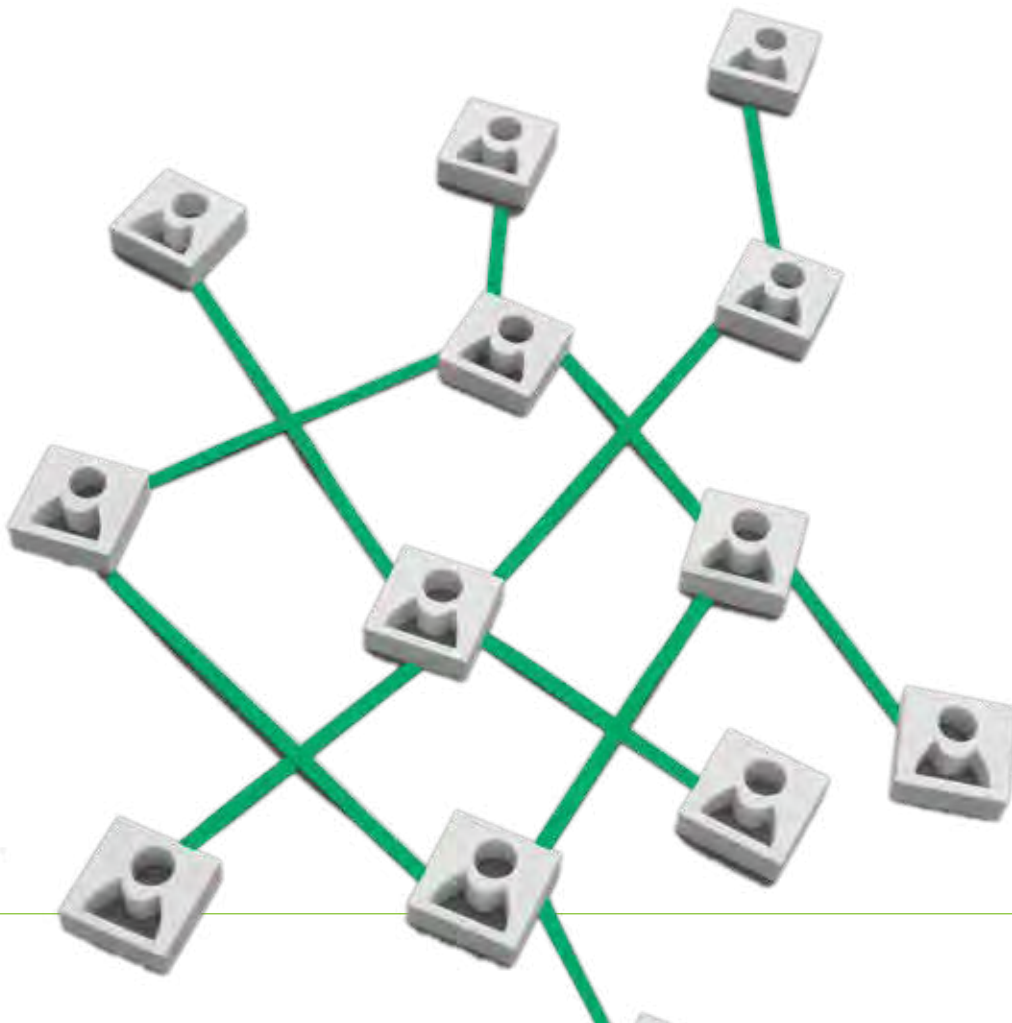
Anyone in the school community can function as a catalyst. For example:

- **School leaders** can convene regular gatherings of the collective leadership to cross-fertilize ideas and address challenges. For example, teachers may have concerns that a friendly classroom environment might diminish student respect for their authority, or that positive teacher-student relationships might be misconstrued as inappropriate, or that corporal punishment helps academic performance. Respectful understanding, perspective taking and peer support are important dimensions of relational dynamics that use SEL to counteract these beliefs.
- **Teachers** can collaborate on pedagogical interactions that relate to students' personal lives, encourage a growth mindset, build relationships through strategic group work, or read and discuss stories about social issues. As parents and community members find the school more welcoming, they engage with school staff more freely and collaboratively. Staff attitudes towards parents and community members improve. A sense of connection with the school ripples far beyond the school buildings.
- **Students** are important co-leaders in strengthening relational dynamics within and beyond the school. They can mobilize action research, group projects and community volunteering. They can establish safe spaces for students to talk about sensitive issues. Through theatre, murals, music or other art forms, they can raise students' voices in a positive school climate. In their everyday experience, students can recognize each other's trustworthiness, share interests, invite students they do not know to groups or events, welcome new students to the school, and help students from different backgrounds join in games or sports. These examples of student initiatives perpetuate relational dynamics that celebrate diversity as a school value (Theoharis and Ranieri, 2011).

## 5.5 Recommendations for school leadership

To bring the gear metaphor to life, the following steps provide a concrete guide for school leaders:

1. Elicit buy-in, support and possible funding from higher levels of the education system.
2. Establish a diverse collective leadership for SEL in the school.
3. Set a regular schedule of meetings for collective leadership to plan and implement SEL transformation.
4. Start with an inclusive process to develop a school-wide shared vision for SEL.
5. Establish small task forces to map existing SEL-related assets and opportunities in the school.
6. Regularly reflect on progress and identify areas of the school that are not yet aligned with the vision or are disconnected from the areas of school who are aligned.
7. Engage in learning journeys or formal action research to better understand these unaligned, misaligned or disconnected areas of the school, so that proactive adjustments can fill the gaps.
8. Establish in-school, school-to-school and external professional networks to extend communities of learning, communities of practice and peer support for SEL transformation.
9. Engage an iterative cycle of reflection, learning, collective decision-making and proactive adjustments to school actors' capabilities, resources and relational dynamics, to sustain a systemwide, SEL-competent culture over the long term.



## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter offers an approach using the ‘gear metaphor’ for guiding a systems approach to the development and cultivation of a collective leadership for SEL. The chapter clearly shows that leadership for SEL must necessarily be shared and involve all role players in the school in creating a change in culture and climate that reflects SEL which is based on an ethic of care and respect for all. An important starting point for collective leadership is to develop a shared vision for SEL in the school, and then to carefully support its implementation through cultivating shared contributions and through leveraging shared resources for SEL. Establishing relationships

of trust and processes that allow for mutual exchange are vital in this process, especially to facilitate inclusivity, but also for ongoing reflection of the unfolding of the collective leadership process and the co-construction of the SEL culture and climate in the school. While school leaders play a vitally important role in developing a SEL culture, they are not the only group who can play a leadership role, and explicit attention should be given to distributed forms of leadership involving students, parents, teachers and other role players, all of whom may have unique contributions to make.

### Key points for policy-makers

Policy processes should support inclusive, collective leadership for social and emotional learning (SEL). Collective leadership creates sustainable feedback loops for capabilities, resources and relational dynamics to interact, align with, and promote social and emotional competencies. This approach helps to establish and affirm values and norms to sustain a more caring, safe, inclusive, just and equitable school culture. Social and emotional learning leadership is necessary to establish whole school approaches to SEL and to affirm and support teachers.

1. Leadership for SEL realigns school processes towards safety and inclusive social support, then engages the entire school community to take ownership of everyone’s SEL.
2. As the school transforms, the school culture and climate become steeped in social and emotional competencies.
3. Social and emotional learning transformation requires three leadership lenses:
  - a. A dynamic systems view towards integrating individual capabilities, school and community resources, and relationships among school staff, students, families and the wider community.
  - b. Collective leadership with everyone involved in design and implementation of new practices.
  - c. An ethic of care that highlights strengths, caring, inclusion and equity.
4. As an inclusive group, collective leadership for social and emotional learning imagines a shared vision of the desired school culture that exemplifies social and emotional competencies among all individuals.
5. This vision, reinforced throughout the school by the collective leadership, drives changes in adult and student capabilities, the number and types of resources brought into the SEL effort, and sustainable, positive, mutually respectful and encouraging relationships and social interactions among individuals and groups.

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## Chapter 6

# Community and learner inclusion in Social and Emotional Learning



This chapter focuses on the need to consider community spaces as sites for expanding SEL as practised in schools. The key argument is that SEL needs to be considered within a socially connected or social-relational or social-ecosystemic context because learning does not only occur in the school environment. Learning is influenced by micro-, meso- and macro- level factors that are dynamically related. With a transformative, systemic approach to SEL in mind, this chapter proposes three inclusive education foundations that underpin SEL: (i) a lifelong and lifewide learning perspective to encompass education during every stage of life and in all places; (ii) a socio-ecological community view to embed the salience of individuals' social-relational and physical-material ecologies; and (iii) an asset-based approach as a framework for action, which assumes that the people living their everyday lives in a space are best placed to know which available internal and external resources they can access and mobilize to accomplish a goal. The chapter shows how these three SEL drivers can shift power and sustain change through: (i) building a community of carers as a basis for socially connected communities; (ii) building bridges between schools, families and communities, where the larger local and global system is integral to develop learners and communities; and (iii) contributing to local and global transformations towards a good life. Overall, the chapter argues for a strong local situatedness for SEL, but with a strong transformative, relational systemic orientation that engages SEL dynamics and relations across the social-relational system at different levels, from local to global.

## 6.1 Social and emotional learning in a social-relational, eco-systemic context

As indicated in previous chapters SEL is not only a policy-level curriculum, courses and training matter (Yeager, 2017). Rather, SEL needs to be viewed in an social-ecosystem context, and be conceptualized in a socially connected context. Consequently, SEL policymakers and educators must consider community spaces as sites for affective experiences, where individuals can learn among peers and intergenerationally with families. Social and emotional learning needs to be conceptualized and co-constructed within a social-relational context – whether it is based in

cities, neighbourhoods, rural villages or societies (Durlak, 2016 based on Domitrovich et al., 2008; Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Fixsen et al. 2005).

For learners of all ages to develop in ways that are relevant to their local context and contribute meaningfully to the local and global citizenship sphere, learning needs to be a collaborative action. Social-relational interaction is needed to support children to learn (Rossetti, 2014). Social-relational interaction is nested within social, cultural, economic and political systems that



can either enable or constrain lifelong learning of social and emotional competences (SEC). These interconnected social-relational dynamics are found at micro-, meso- and macro- system levels. They shape the conditions and climate that impact on the success of delivering SEL actions.

As also discussed in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, the context in which SEL takes place may either promote or constrain learning actions (CASEL, 2016). Therefore, for SEL interventions to be transformative, inclusive and sustain lifelong learning it is imperative that socio-cultural system members are included. Socio-cultural system members (for example, people from the community, families, municipal councillors, leisure and sports groups, district officials, faith-based organisations, health-care providers and environmental organisations) are all important to co-construct the content of sociocultural values, beliefs and practices that are relevant for SEL programmes, and they should also help to advise on how to holistically facilitate the learning of social and emotional competencies.

## Different dynamics of the social-relational system

Meaningful SEL that is relevant to peace and sustainable development is possible when the content and the format for delivery includes influences and understanding of the dynamics of various inter-related dimensions of the social-relational system at different levels – micro, meso and macro. This can be conceptualized as follows:

- For the *person system* (the teacher, child or young person), effective SEL recognizes the personality, culture, worldview, beliefs on well-being and aspirations of SEL roleplayers.
- For the *classroom system*, effective SEL incorporates evidence-based pedagogical and formative practices in a particular learning space that are also culturally responsive and attentive to individual SEL needs (Chapters 2, 3 and 4).
- For the *school system*, SEL includes familiar organisational beliefs, values, practices and structures regarding a supportive climate

and culture, in addition to a collective SEL leadership (Chapter 5).

- For the *community system* SEL acknowledges salient socio-cultural values, practices and networks that support well-being (other educational spaces).
- For the *country system* (society), effective SEL is cognizant of opportunity structures that support a sustainable quality of life, including SEL education policy and wider commitments to sustainable development, local and global citizenship and wider societal values (Chapter 2).

Considering SEL from a social-relational systemic perspective involves much more than setting aside an activity to talk about sociocultural values around emotions, gender, race or ethnicity (Lubit and Lubit, 2019). It requires changes to the terms of conversation in ways that take the scope of social-relational dynamics into account. Incorporating SEL is not a single-action initiative, but a long-term process of cultural, educational and pedagogical metamorphosis within educational communities and countries.

The benefits of SEL interventions that follow a social-relational systems framework (often also referred to as a social-ecological framework following the social psychological work of Uri Bronfenbrenner, 1986) is that it is socially constituted, transformative (Mitchell, 2017), inclusive (Sokal and Katz, 2017), enables lifelong learning and supports the sustainability of SEL interventions in communities (Jones and Kahn, 2017). Social and emotional learning interventions that are grounded in social-relational systems or socio-ecological frameworks are inclusive, as the focus shifts from merely the individual learner to the social-relational and structural changes that are needed for SEL to be supported. For example a focus on the social relational can foreground a need to support persons with disabilities, address social systemic challenges such as discrimination, racism, or gender-based violence, or address experiences of learners that are defined by war, conflict, profound ecological degradation or climate breakdown.

## A systemic transformative approach to SEL

This chapter aims to highlight the importance of **a systemic transformative approach** to social relational or socio-ecological SEL interventions. For CASEL transformative SEL is a term that refers to applying the SEL framework toward the goals of creating equitable settings and systems and promoting justice-oriented school and civic engagement. This form of SEL is aimed at redistributing power to more fully engage young people and adults in working toward just and equitable schools and communities. It emphasizes the development of identity, agency, belonging, curiosity, and collaborative problem-solving within the CASEL framework (CASEL, 2021).

As is also argued in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, it is important to include a social-relational or more systemic approach to SEL, as most of the CASEL's core features of Transformative SEL unfolds at an individual level (e.g. collaboration between students and adults; academic content that integrates issues of race, class and culture; instruction that values and links with students' lived experiences and sociocultural identities; prioritizing students' individual and collective agency to take action for more just schools and communities). As elaborated in Chapter 5, to achieve such a transformative SEL approach, there is need to emphasise that school leadership intentionally collaborate with educators, young people and community-members (parents, caregivers, child-relevant organisations) to plan and implement structural changes to school conditions, climate, practices and governance that enable a democratic environment promoting SEL deployment.



## 6.2 Three foundations for community-based SEL

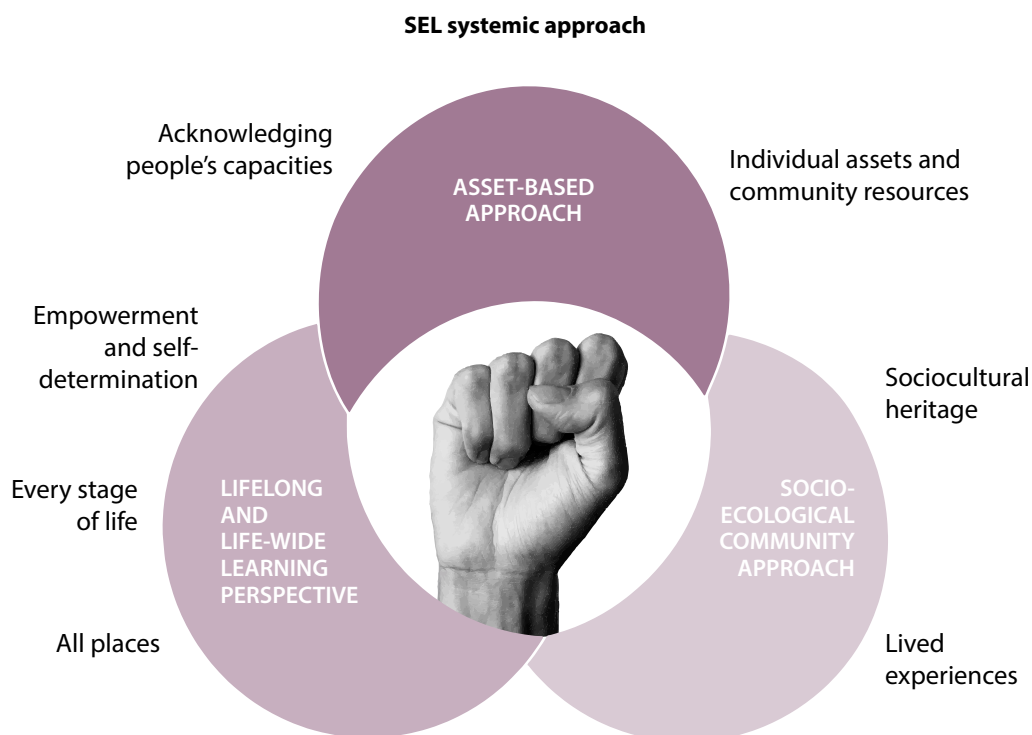
With a transformative, systemic approach to SEL in mind, this section discusses three inclusive education foundations that underpin community-based SEL: (i) a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective to encompass education during every stage of life and in all places; (ii) a socio-ecological community view to embed the salience of individuals' social relational and physical material ecologies; and (iii) an asset-based approach as a framework for action. These are illustrated in Figure 6.1 and discussed further below.

As elaborated in Chapters 1–5, there is an emerging consensus that SEL is important to develop affective, sociocultural and behavioural domains in all students – be it in the formal, informal, community or other extended areas of any scholar experience (CASEL, 2015; see Chapter 2). However, globally a spectrum of inequalities means that quality opportunities to

learn social and emotional competences are not equally available to all (Evans, 2017; Gilles, 2011). It is especially at the classroom level (as is the case with inclusion) that opportunities for SEL fall short (Bresciani, Ludvik and Eberhart, 2018a, 2018b) preventing holistic approaches to achieve broad SEL transformations (Coggshall et al., 2013).

Learning pathways research draws attention to the fact that environmental factors can strengthen positive well-being outcomes in teachers and students (Weisbberg et al., 2015). It thus makes sense to plan SEL interventions in ways that will make the most of dynamic factors in household, community and life-world spaces (Taylor et al., 2017). One approach with such a systemic stance is a whole-school approach where a school is an important space for SEL, but is also recognized as being part of an existing, integrated space – the school community, and as part of lifelong learning.

Figure 6.1 A SEL systemic approach



## Lifelong and life-wide learning as an inclusive perspective for SEL

SEL has long lasting effects (Durlak et al., 2015) but does not occur only at a certain time of life or have a designated place. It is not temporally or spatially limited to the schooling process (Field, 2011). SEL thus need to be addressed at all times and places given the affective dimension in every teaching and learning practice. Hence SEL should include both a lifelong, as well as life-wide learning perspective (Bélanger, 2016). A *lifelong perspective* recognizes the educational process as occurring from 'cradle to grave', during every stage of life. A *life-wide perspective* considers the diversity of socio-cultural experiences in every location in social life, from the school to the city as a continuum through social coexistence. Therefore, SEL activities should develop across every location (whole-territory approach) (Dusenbury, Dermody and Weissberg, 2018), and should also encompass a focus on the quality of the learning environment. Research shows a positive effect on the performance of students who study in schools whose construction quality is better and which have the necessary furniture and basic services, in contrast to those who attend precarious schools (BID-OREALC and UNESCO, 2017), which also affects socio-emotional learning. The pleasant and comfortable spaces represent a motivating factor to attend school (Bosch, 2018), and the physical elements of the classrooms in the facilities affect the socio-emotional development of the students (Castro and Morales, 2015).

Additionally, SEL should be present in all spaces of scholar, educational and social life, across schools, libraries, museums and cultural spaces, athletic and sports venues, environmental and community organizations. To create a common language and vision, SEL leaders can work with teachers, principals and families (Busso et al., 2017; Fredericks et al., 2016) around the integral well-being of learners and their territories (Blanco and Umayahra, 2004), generating the conditions in the educational habitat (Coelho and Sousa,

2017) and in collaboration with local networks and knowledge holders for its full development (Aspen Institute, 2018c). For example, schools may work with Elders to understand local knowledge surrounding well-being, including local medicines, traditional learning spaces and important cultural stories, or schools can work with local environmental organisations to care for their rivers. A variety of policies and institutional supports may facilitate the implementation of programmes and experiences of high quality social and emotional learning (Weissberg and Utne-O'Brien, 2004), which include the support of school and district/municipality leadership, active participation of knowledge holders and stakeholders in the programme planning and assessment, the time and proper resources, and the alignment with the school, district, municipality and state policies (see Chapter 5).

The argument for a lifelong and life-wide approach to SEL is shown by studies that indicate the limited longer term value of specific SEL programmes that are not widely integrated into the social-relational system. Recent research on the longitudinal and curvilinear impacts of social-emotional programmes focused on the classroom showed that although the impacts at the end of the year are important, after the holidays many of them are reduced to almost zero and the others are exhausted at the end of the second year. Isolated classroom-focused programmes have more value as an effective intervention than as a prevention and lasting recovery tool (Cook et al. 2018). Similarly, evaluations of psychosocial support programmes for young people at risk of dropping out manage to increase their attendance levels in the first year and, in some cases, contribute to graduation. In the second year, they return to pre-intervention levels (Vega, 2017). Other studies have also shown that, although there may be changes with SEL programmes in certain behaviors in the short term, they are only maintained while the action takes place, but not during the holiday periods when learners change environments (Elkington et al., 2014).

## Socio-ecological community approach as an inclusive view for SEL

A life-wide perspective on learning leads into a natural discussion of why a social-relational or socio-ecological approach to SEL has value for inclusive education that is both locally relevant and globally meaningful. From a *socio-ecological community approach*, as is the case with a life-wide learning perspective, SEL draws on the environment in which the individual functions as the space that provides resources to use in learning and development. The context supports the learning of socio-emotional competences. The environment also shapes SEL content - what matters as values, beliefs and practices - as well as accepted formats for teaching and learning.

Consequently, SEL must reflect the complex interaction between a person's lifespan, life roles, context, culture and personal beliefs – an awareness that SEL depends on both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. SEL also provides knowledge on how individual agency can be used to find and mobilise health-enhancing resources which may *inter alia* include community resources, health practitioners, active spaces, and outdoor locations for mental and social nourishment. From this stance SEL takes life itself (familiar ways of being, living, aspiring) into account. SEL actions are thus not isolated and fragmented. Rather, SEL actions mirror comprehensive strategies of systemic transformative vocation.

Importantly, and as mentioned in previous Chapters, SEL actions should acknowledge the sociocultural heritage and lived experiences of learners and educational actors. For example, a community approach to lifelong learning helps people to re-identify, re-evaluate and further develop local and indigenous knowledge, based on still-relevant but frequently neglected traditional wisdom, which community-based learning can help reclaim (UIL/UNESCO, 2017). It is important to nest SEL within knowledge and practices of well-being and development that are familiar to the learners and education

actors engaged in SEL. Furthermore, SEL must be built on knowledge of what people take pride in individually and collectively (esteem), ways in which they relate to one another, and how they make use of support that is available to them.

A socio-ecological conceptualization of SEL considers issues of equity and diversity as it includes issues of cultural meaning making (Ungar et al., 2013), which is useful in accounting for varied SEL manifestations (e.g. Ebersöhn, 2019). An inclusive system would intentionally use SEL as 'glue' to establish or strengthen and maintain networks across disciplines (educational, medical, rehabilitative, social, community) that are protective and supportive to children and young people who are subject to discrimination and violence, or who experience social or educational exclusion. With its focus on social-cultural learning, SEL can play a pivotal role in re-shaping community perceptions (and misconceptions) regarding diversity, complementing local efforts for reconciliation, anti-discrimination and countering violence. Drawing on these efforts, SEL may contribute to developing a shared understanding of inclusion to drive social change.

Through such approaches, SEL can support the transformation of education towards greater inclusion of historically marginalized learners. For example, Individualized Educational Plans can be used as deliberate dialogue spaces to engage with relevant community members to reflect, consult, and ultimately refine and co-construct consensus-goals for the education of a child or young person, while informing educational change towards greater inclusion. As another example, existing community WhatsApp-groups in conflict zones and other places subject to humanitarian crises (be it amongst families, friendship circles, faith-based organisations) may be utilized to map relationships that can mobilise available resources to address the needs of vulnerable individuals (Ebersöhn, et.al., 2022) and indicate where children may be housed, who could provide homework support, where children may play in safe spaces, who could contribute in providing meals, clothing, and a sense of belonging when need is high.

## Asset-based approach as a framework for SEL action

Many effective instructional SEL initiatives have been described in the literature (see also Chapter 2 and 3). However, SEL should not just be viewed as a pedagogical intervention, but should be understood as an authentic effort of dialogue, mediation, and cultural negotiation. Where inequality is rife, there may be resistance to actions that implement SEL by decree or as new items on a long list of responsibilities for schools, teachers, families and students. Given potential power imbalances, social and emotional learning that is imposed could be difficult to accept, integrate and deploy if it were an external imposition or instruction. It must necessarily be cultivated bottom-up, building the social tissue and institutional support to sustain it over time (e.g. DBE, 2022) as also argued in Chapter 5. Therefore, to be intentional about equality and respecting diversity is essential to establish relationships of respect and strengthening the participation of everyone. Dialogic relationships in which the various voices have the same opportunity to make themselves heard, receive a response, intervene, approve, disapprove, and disagree, discuss and reflect on what has been done are core (Montero, 2004).

In other words, a systemic and transformative SEL must be cultivated bottom-up and aligned with the culture of the students to integrate into all settings, including school, home and community (Aspen Institute, 2017; Jones and Kahn, 2018). The change cannot be limited to a top-down dictation but needs to be a process experienced by the educational communities in order to resignify it (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). Such a grounded engaged approach is especially where there is need to acknowledge marginalised, excluded or historically neglected cultures of students and where issues of injustice such as racism or discrimination are present. This is particularly relevant in countries where the continuities of colonial education produce alienation, and where school is exogenous and unsuited to its own socio-cultural environment.

The *asset-based approach* has relevance as a framework for action (Kretzmann and McKnight's, 1993; see also capability approach, Sen, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011) coherent with this dialogical view. The asset-based approach is an alternative to the needs-based approach. The needs-based approach focuses on shortages and problems, preventing communities from recognising their strengths and assets (Cordes, 2002). Interventions that follow a needs-based approach often culminate in stakeholders becoming dependent on services instead of producers of solutions (Ebersöhn, 2019). In contrast, the asset-based approach is based on three fundamental principles (Cordes, 2002; Mathie and Cunningham, 2002):

- a focus on the positive by acknowledging that people possess the inner strength to take charge of their own lives and build relationships and networks;
- identifies individual assets and community resources (asset identification), and connects these assets to one another in ways that improves their effectiveness (asset mobilisation) by emphasising the establishment of networks and the building of relationships; and
- aims at creating a sense of empowerment and self-determination.

An asset-based approach to development means that constraints as well as enablers in each space of intervention are recognized (Ebersöhn, 2019). The asset-based assumption is that those in the know, the people living their everyday lives in a space, are best placed to know which available internal and external resources they can access and mobilize (how they have the freedom to mobilise available resources) to accomplish a goal – here culture and context salient SEL. For example, some researchers have indicated that SEL programmes must build on the knowledge and experience that young people already possess (i.e. their assets) and must facilitate the incorporation of their culture into the school to create environments that are more respectful of youth identities and existing SEL experiences (Yeager, 2017).

## 6.3 Transformative SEL and power relations

Within a transformative systemic approach to SEL, SEL interventions may be viewed as a mechanism to reconfigure power (whether in schools, communities or society) when they aim to promote solidarity and common belonging, diversity, gender equality, equity and inclusion. However, structurally this means that decision-makers need to create and maintain a climate and conditions that enable education actors (teachers and students) freedom, in their different contexts, to promote and sustain educational transformation based on SEL. To recognize, value, and put into practice SEL could be a deeply transformative perspective as long as it recognizes power structures relevant to a given context. For example, SEL decision-making processes need to recognize the importance of cultural relations with elders in contexts where elders are revered (Ebersöhn, 2019) and should

ideally include general democratic practices. In addition, in societies where exclusion and inter-group mistrust or hostility are major problems, SEL education that includes broader education efforts for reconciliation and peace-building may be needed, or in contexts where racism is rife, then explicit anti-racist SEL strategies can be deployed. In contexts where patriarchal or hetero-normative relations are dominant, gender sensitive SEL pedagogies and approaches can be deployed.

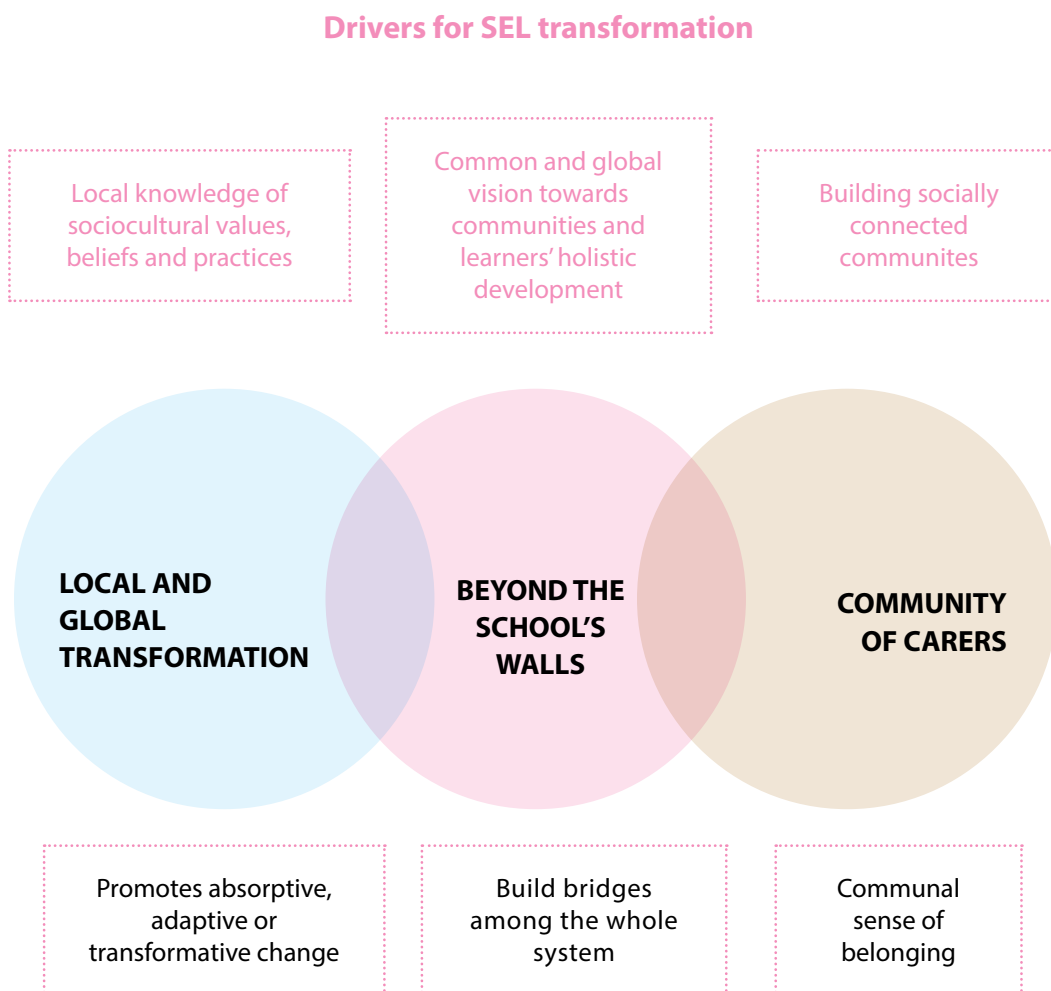


## 6.4 Drivers to enhance transformative SEL

As argued above, education transformation through SEL requires transcending individual activities and effecting changes in the topic and dialogue structures of SEL conversations. We identify three key drivers to enhance this

transformative process: (i) Building a community of carers; (ii) looking beyond the school's walls; and (iii) local and global transformation. These are shown in Figure 6.2, and elaborated further.

Figure 6.2 Drivers for SEL transformation





## Building a community of carers

Social and emotional learning requires caring and supportive conditions as also highlighted in Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. This naturally calls for socially connected, caring and protective relationships (Arón and Milicic, 2004) that are integral to human development (Bagwell and Smith, 2011) and with multiple benefits for children and young people. Protective relationships promote student well-being, positive school experience, positive attitudes towards challenges (Frenzel et al., 2009), school retention (Fundación Súmate, 2019), and scholar attendance (Allidière, 2004).

Social and emotional learning is relevant when building *socially connected* communities and can help to transform communities characterised by exclusion, isolation, loneliness, inequality and discrimination. Strengthening social connectedness in SEL can promote quality of life and resilience to adapt to challenges. Social connectedness signifies meaningful relationships with a variety of community stakeholders (e.g. family and friends, community leadership, municipal and district officials) and implies effective levels of socio-emotional competence (Versfeld, et al., 2022; Ebersöhn, et al., 2020). The opposite of social connection is social isolation and loneliness – when people feel alone and disconnected from others. The challenge is not only at the individual-system level (loneliness). Rather, the challenge deeply social and structural as inequality and discrimination can cause isolation and loneliness.

Social and emotional learning leads to strengthened social and emotional competences that are relevant to values, beliefs and practices in a community, and these competences lead to culturally acceptable prosocial behaviour that supports people to establish and maintain healthy relationships. Social connectedness denotes with the place and the history a sense of belonging, diversity, interconnectedness, a shared sense of humanity and solidarity, which contributes to health and well-being. For

example, many countries and societies have national/local/traditional concepts that promote ideas linked to “respect for diversity”, “solidarity”, and a “shared sense of humanity”. For example, the related concepts of *buen vivir* (Spanish), *sumak kawsay* (Kichwa) and *suma qamaña* (Aymara), taken up in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions, open up space for new ways of living together and provide solid grounds for SEL. Similar concepts found in diverse contexts globally are rooted in local cosmologies, founding stories, and national histories, and they can often be found in constitutions, national anthems, and government policy documents, as well as in the writings of historical figures. Unfortunately, these concepts are sometimes insufficiently known and celebrated beyond their regions of origin (UNESCO, 2018).

## Looking beyond the school’s walls: school-community collaboration

Studies have shown that initiatives that manage to create environments of care, well-being and that are conducive to learning can have a significant impact (Zins et al., 2004). A caring and supportive environment connects SEL with the context where learning takes place. Care and support are possible when SEL is integrated into the curriculum, pedagogical practices, the school climate and evident in school-community relationship (family, neighbourhood and local networks) (Abright and Weisbergh, 2010; Mart et al., 2015). In especially the Global South, there is evidence that social connectedness promotes care and support: people who know each other are able to turn to each other for help by sharing what they have with each other. They can give and receive social support in times of adversity by collectively mobilising social resources for social support: distributing health, economic, educational or environmental resources in ways that enable positive outcomes despite the extreme difficulties being experienced. In the same way intragroup resources may be mobilised to promote social justice and equity. To support the well-being of a circle of friends, family or community, people with strong relationships are

able to draw on social resources such as existing networks to share knowledge; financial practices like borrowing, lending and sharing to distribute wares; and cultural values and beliefs of care, compassion, humour and inclusion (Ebersöhn, 2019).

However, in many places access to school and quality, inclusive education are characterised by division and/or exclusion, marginalization and cultural alienation. Hence relations of care and trust may be absent or inadequately established. As mentioned in Chapter 5, for meaningful SEL, there is need to give time to build trust between schools, families and community institutions. The invitation is for schools to reach out and include community members in processes to build bridges for SEL between schools, families and communities and among the whole system (Garbacz et al., 2015). The implication is that schools act in a participatory manner (UNESCO, 2019a) especially also to build a vision and programme for SEL as indicated in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. Participatory schools operate outside the boundary of their institutional 'walls' with, among others, non-formal education actors, local leaders, families, community-based organizations, civil society, local communicators, artists.

The guidelines provided in Chapter 5 on establishing a shared vision for SEL, combined with insights from the asset-based approach discussed above provide good practice examples of how a school could take the initiative and responsibility to lead participatory collaboration for school-community SEL (Ferreira and Ebersöhn, 2012). Active family and community involvement can expand and amplify the impact of programmes, as well as their effects in the context (Gullota, 2015). An asset based approach to surfacing SEL contributions from school and community partners, can intentionally include salient sociocultural knowledge to support well-being that mirrors the way in which a community envisions and enacts well-being (Ebersöhn, 2020). As indicated in Chapter 5 this is a key role for collaborative SEL leadership.

## Contributing to local and global transformation

For global transformation towards inclusivity, justice, and peace, it is important that *SEL starts with local knowledge* of sociocultural values, beliefs and practices. A locally situated approach to considering global challenges such as sustainability, peace-building and well-being for all, when based in thinking, feeling and actions constructed at a local level, enables people to take direct, practical action to tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing, increasingly global world. It also helps people gain new knowledge and skills to improve their daily lives in sustainable global ways, and by developing greater shared ownership of their community's future, they are able, through learning, to participate in the development of their own communities while also responding to global issues (UIL/UNESCO, 2017). Key in this process is to connect the local to the wider concerns, and to introduce new knowledge of global or wider concerns that connects with local experiences.

When people learn *familiar* social and emotional values and beliefs, their resulting actions mirror what is acceptable as prosocial behaviour amongst those they know. Whereas SEL starts with what is familiar, the transformation agenda is that the SEL space needs to be safe enough for children and young people to also question what is familiar when it results in discrimination, inequality and exclusion and to develop broader views of what it is to be both a local and a global citizen, at the same time. Thus while the starting points for such learning are best when locally grounded, this does not mean that they should be locally encapsulated or constrained. Local perspectives and experiences should connect with and relate to wider social and environmental experiences and questions in places other than the local, as much as they should be locally grounded.

Social and emotional learning matters for sustainable global change. Social and emotional

learning can promote change that is *absorptive*, *adaptive* or *transformative*. An everyday scenario of absorptive, adaptive and transformative change could be as follows: when people are in conversation (or interact during a SEL session), one student may think: ‘hmmm, this perspective on emotions and human interaction makes sense to me. It fits into my framework of understanding emotion and behaviour. I can easily absorb these learnings into what I am familiar with.’ Another student may think, ‘what I am hearing is somewhat different to the beliefs I have about emotions. I will have to adapt what I value about, say anger, in order to integrate this new knowledge with my existing repertoire in order to make myself heard in future conversations.’ A third student may think: ‘What I am hearing about emotions is so intriguing. I am excited to think of how I can be creative and innovate a different way to express my emotions in order to live a fulfilled life.’ Importantly, all of these students should be encouraged to think not only about their own emotions, but how these relate to others and the wider context of the world and environment.

Absorptive change would indicate a system responding to the effects of acute challenge by *recovering and restoring functional* pathways that *enable normative* behaviour and performance (Amadi-Echendu et al., 2020). SEL for absorptive change means using social and emotional competence to recover and restore what has come to be revered as normative intergenerationally. In colonial settings, such restorative approaches to SEL may be important for recovering indigenous knowledge and cultural experiences that have been marginalised and which may be important for cultural resonance and well-being, but in other settings (e.g. extractive or patriarchal settings), the same return to familiar normativity may consolidate conservatism and discrimination. So care should be taken when considering this aspect of SEL. In this instance, using SEL for sustainable development may mean doing whatever is needed to return to what is known, or it may also mean a need to break away from normative regularity.

Adaptive change to complex challenge signifies *restructured* pathways that *enable stable and sustained* positive behaviour and performance (Amadi-Echendu et al, 2020). Here using SEL for sustainable change means rearranging familiar ways of knowing and doing. SEL for adaptive change means rethinking and reorganizing social and emotional competence to promote quality of life. Adaptive change can lead to an adjustment of existing ways of being and doing, or it could also mean a more radical change that slowly emerges from the restructuring of existing ways of being and doing.

*Transformative change* implies evolutionary or even revolutionary change with pathways restructured to create and sustain new forms of desired behaviour and performance in new or different directions (Amadi-Echendu et al, 2020). In this scenario SEL implies constant innovation; using social and emotional competence creatively to *constantly reimagine, redefine and reform* power relations, existing situations, quality of life and life conditions, and/or ways of being and doing that are more sustainable and socially just. An example of SEL in this situation could be to cultivate transformative SE relations with the environment away from destructive actions to constructive relations with the environment that do not contribute to ongoing environmental degradation. This would require relational as well as lifestyle and behavioral changes, based on SEL that takes the environment into relational account. It could also similarly characterise SEL that adopts anti-racism practices and cultures, or gender sensitive approaches to ways of being and doing things in the world.

## 6.5 Conclusion

As argued in this chapter, systemic and transformative SEL implementation requires mainstreaming through the whole system with a perspective of equity, inclusion and social justice. Each of the dynamics of the social-relational or social-ecological system needs to include relevant SEL opportunities – from the micro-system between people in a classroom or family, to the meso-system of local institutions and community organisations, to the wider macro-system of people in societies, countries and the wider world. To recover harmony between people and the planet requires a shift of power and acknowledging that there is no single way of change. In the same way there is no single, exclusive SEL idea, there is not only one view on what peace or sustainable development is. Globally people live in vibrantly different countries, communities and social groups. They have equally valid and contextually relevant ideologies and experiences. It is especially during extreme disruptions given humanitarian crises, violence and political instability, that it is important to take notice of and make use of diverse understandings of what a good life is to support local views of community well-being. In order to hook SEL to such collective meanings, SEL dare not be an external or foreign imposition of a certain way of expressing and managing emotions. Such a power-position (of one with 'more' power imposing views and practices on another with 'less' power) carries the risk of cognitive colonization, rather than cognitive justice. One universal size does not fit to all countries or communities. SEL needs to avoid a global discourse dissociated from local needs and realities and especially steer clear from a western-based, superior view of SEL. To start *SEL's interculturalization*, it is necessary to ensure community engagement and learners' involvement. As said by a Latin American educator to a researcher, "How can I be a citizen of the global village and you are denying my right to be the son of my village?" Addressing this question, according to Mejia (2000, pg. 9)

"means asking ourselves about the way the differences between regions are not totally outmatched in globalization, generating identity processes where the local many times does not dissolve, but rather strengthens. It is a school open to universal, but [which is at the same time] ethically and socially committed to its local world".

Overall, this chapter has emphasised the importance of locally situating SEL as a key starting point for considering what SEL would be valid and worth including in education. Here, of course much inspiration for SEL can be found in the world's cultures and communities, their languages and cultural expressions. For example, in Latin America we find the concept of *Buen Vivir*, or "Living well," which centres on notions of solidarity, generosity, reciprocity and complementarity, related to the goal of social justice and community, and referring to a set of rights related to health, education, freedom, participation, and the Rights of Nature or "*Pachamama*". This offers a holistic approach for thinking about transformative SEL, as the concept speaks to the diversity of elements that condition human thought and action, contributing to the search for 'good living,' such as knowledge, and codes of ethical and spiritual conduct in relation to our surroundings. The concept refers also to caring for the environment, thus broadening the notion of social justice and well-being from the individual to include the community. In Southern Africa, the concept of *Ubuntu* is a similar culturally constituted humanist concept that means "I am because we are, we are because I am", speaking to how a person is a person through his/her relation to and respect for others. This refers to an ethos for living together on the basis of care and respect, which is developed through the conviction that a person's actions have impact on others and vice versa, and points to the notion of mutual responsibility (UNESCO, 2018) and the systemic relational view that this Chapter has adopted for SEL mainstreaming.

## Key points for policy-makers

- SEL planning and policy should allow ample room for community spaces as sites for expanding SEL as practised in schools. This is because SEL needs to be considered within a socially connected or social-relational or social-ecosystemic context because learning cannot only occur in the school environment. Learning is influenced by micro, meso and macro level factors that are dynamically related.
- A transformative, systemic approach to SEL can be developed by considering three inclusive education foundations that underpin SEL: (i) a lifelong and lifewide learning perspective to encompass education during every stage of life and in all places; (ii) a socio-ecological community view to embed the salience of individuals' social-relational and physical material ecologies; and (iii) an asset-based approach as a framework for action, which assume that the people living their everyday lives in a space are best placed to know which available internal and external resources they can access and mobilize to accomplish a goal.
- SEL also has the potential to transformatively engage with existing power relations and structures, if considered from a social-relational or social-ecosystemic perspective, where relations between different levels of the system are engaged.
- SEL, if conceptualized within a transformative, social-relational perspective, can shift power and sustain change through: (i) building a community of carers as a basis for socially connected communities; (ii) building bridges between schools, families and communities, where the larger local and global system is integral to develop learners and communities; and (iii) contributing to local and global transformations towards a good life.
- Evidence strongly supports leveraging key role of environmental factors in SEL process. Central to this proposition is to create a supportive context based on a comprehensive and coherent framework relevant for all community actors. The framework constitutes a shared vision regarding a habitat for SEL which is integral to the development of students. A SEL habitat (i) spans systems (among others, from the school infrastructure to the city, open schools to the community, nation and beyond), (ii) strengthens active family and community involvement and including strategies to intentionally foster the family-school relationship, and (iii) values all education spaces as relevant for SEL (SEL programmes outside and/or after school, as well as informal learning).
- Systemic and transformative SEL implementation requires mainstreaming through the whole system with a perspective of equity, inclusion and social justice. Each of the dynamics of the social-relational or social-ecological system needs to include relevant SEL opportunities – from the micro-system between people in a classroom or family, to the meso-system of local institutions and community organisations, to the wider macro-system of people in societies, countries and the wider world.

- Overall, it is important to support the local situatedness of SEL as a key starting point for considering what SEL would be valid and worth including in education. Much inspiration for SEL can be found in the world's cultures and communities, their languages and cultural expressions. For example, in Latin America we find the concept of *Buen Vivir*, or "Living well," which centres on notions of solidarity, generosity, reciprocity and complementarity, related to the goal of social justice and community, which is similar to the African concept of *Ubuntu*.
- All SEL actions are complementary to what communities are already doing. Therefore, those who implement SEL programmes cannot think in the void; they must plan as Paulo Freire said, "with the head where the feet tread". There is no specific way to undertake change. Rather, sustainable transformation is dependent on the conditions and climate of each context in which SEL takes place. Any change (whether adaptive, absorptive or transformative) is scripted on the lived experience and reality of SEL actors in a particular culture and context. To engage the community and achieve learners' involvement we need SEL's localization, we need to think with a global head, and tread with our feet in a local milieu.
- An important focus for SEL policy making, is how to accommodate the interdependent social-relational and social-ecological nature of SEL. Strategies need to consider not only how to align SEL across micro, meso and macro systems at different scales and levels, but also how to maintain SEL coherence, coordination and consistency across the dynamics of these interrelated social ecological relational systems. Intentional processes are required to mainstream relevant SEL across system levels. It necessitates participation by public institutions and community organizations, schools and neighborhoods, teachers, public officers, families, local leaders and students. It also requires deliberate dialogue structures where stakeholders can agree on well-defined roles and responsibilities for all systemic players to accomplish a common SEL task. Broadly there is a need to deploy SEL's social-relational and transformative systemic ecologization.

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## Chapter 7

# Designing assessment, monitoring, and evaluation for systemic SEL implementation



This chapter offers guidance on how to establish assessment, monitoring, and evaluation for systemic SEL implementation. As SEL is not only an outcome to be achieved, but a process of institutional and social transformation as well as human development, an assessment, monitoring, evaluation system designed to support SEL delivery should do more than measure a student's social and emotional profile at a given time. It should provide information that can guide and facilitate understanding of the entire process for SEL and development. The chapter offers starting points for designing assessment, monitoring, and evaluation for systemic implementation of SEL by providing guidance on how to select a framework and approach, the types of information that may be needed, as well as considerations for choosing tools and processes for data collection within a systemic approach. It further provides guidance on how to plan for sharing and using information to continue improvements.

## 7.1 Assessment systems to support SEL delivery

As explained in earlier chapters of these policy guidelines, SEL is not only an *outcome* to be achieved, but a *process* in which to engage. Therefore, an assessment, monitoring evaluation and learning system designed to support SEL delivery should do more than measure a student's social and emotional profile at a given time, but also provide information that can guide and facilitate understanding of the entire SEL process and the SEL system development, as recommended in Chapters 1 to 6.

To illustrate this important point, we offer a metaphor comparing the assessment of a SEL delivery system to the assessment of a meal:

A SEL assessment, monitoring, or evaluation strategy that exclusively measures a student's social and emotional profile – for the sake of characterizing individual students or groups of students – may be akin to judging the quality of an entire meal solely based on the number of calories or the particular nutrients consumed. This approach does have some merit for a certain type of decision making. For example, it may allow us to understand the state of an individual's or a population's caloric

intake relative to prevailing dietary standards. Yet, many other important considerations would be overlooked. Throughout the world, calories and nutrients are not the only consideration for how people judge a meal, or how they plan for the next one. As with SEL, a meal reflects culture and context rooted in histories and traditions, geopolitical and economic structures and struggles, local resources and temporal constraints, the preferences of participants, and the collective and individual purposes for which we are eating. Fundamentally, a meal is experienced. As with SEL, the inherent value of a meal cannot be universalized based on how it is encountered in a single environment, through a single perspective, or at a single point in time, because meals (like SEL processes) are subjective, situational, often relational, and more holistic than the sum of its component parts. Furthermore, a meal does not typically simply appear, but it is actively prepared through love and labour, using an array of knowledge and tools, with inputs from near and far, a way to think about what is also necessary for SEL.

Students' social and emotional profiles are shaped by not only their innate capacity as social and emotional beings, and the micro to macro contexts of their socialization, but also by their understanding of what SEL is (Chapter 1), SEL policies (Chapter 2), plans and leadership practices (Chapter 5), preparation of teachers (Chapter 4), curriculum and pedagogical practices (Chapters 3), and community based, inclusive transformative approaches to SEL (Chapter 6) embedded in and transmitted through respective education systems.

Systemic SEL assessment, monitoring, and evaluation involves a process of collecting information for the purpose of continuously improving SEL delivery systems and learning more about SEL over time involving all of the above elements in an integrated, systemic view of SEL assessment.

## What is an assessment system?

An *assessment system* is a series of interconnected processes assembled for the purpose of having sound and actionable information with which users can make decisions (Sigman and Mancuso, 2017) An assessment system should be:

- *Aligned* – synergistic with curriculum and instruction; integrated into existing or self-sustaining routines.
- *Balanced* – does not overemphasize one purpose or type of decision-maker.
- *Comprehensive* – uses a variety of procedures to collect information for distinct purposes at every level.
- *Defensible* – provides necessary feedback; generates high-quality information worthy of important decisions.
- *Ethical* – inclusive, fair, and transparent; the greatest consideration for the least powerful members of society.



## 7.2 Starting points for designing a SEL assessment system

### **Choose and adapt a SEL framework:**

Begin designing a SEL assessment system by reflecting upon what you hope to achieve. In order to actualize sustainable development goals (UN General Assembly, 2015) within a national context, choose a SEL *framework* that is conceptually clear, ecologically-grounded in context and supported by empirical evidence, as discussed and recommended in Chapter 2. The selected SEL framework will become a reference guide for all subsequent decisions when designing a SEL assessment system. Chapter 2 offers a few SEL frameworks from different countries that can be adapted to local cultures and contexts. The site Explore SEL<sup>31</sup> also has further information on potential SEL frameworks that can be adapted.

**Assemble a SEL assessment design team:** The next step is to assemble a SEL assessment design team. This could be related to or drawn from the wider SEL community that was discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The design team should be composed of representatives of all stakeholder and rights-holder groups that are prospective users of the information to improve a SEL delivery system. The design team should be inclusive, particularly of those most marginalized, but it also needs to be small enough for meaningful dialogue and consensus-building. It may be that participants act as liaisons to their constituency groups, to represent a broad range of ideas, without compromising capacity to advance the design team's goals. In many societies this includes a spectrum of people from policymakers to parents, educators and administrators, teacher trainers, community partners, resource developers and young people themselves (Casas et al., 2013).

The goals of the assessment design team are to:

- build support for a SEL assessment system by developing and sharing the 'why' of your assessment system,
- clarify what information is needed to inform and improve the SEL delivery system,
- create a plan, based on your SEL framework, for generating specific information, and
- resolve tensions thoughtfully before they become embedded in your assessment system.

A key task of this task team is to not only make decisions on the information needed, but also on the whole design of the assessment, monitoring and evaluation framework. For example, questions are likely to arise as to whether student data should be collected anonymously (i.e. devoid of human identifiers). This pivotal decision should be informed by design team deliberations about what information is needed, by whom, and for what specific purpose. If the design team expects teachers to know and respond to the SEL profiles of particular students, student data should be confidential, yet identifiable and available to educators. If the design team only requires understanding of student social and emotional profiles on a population level, anonymous data may be sufficient; a decision which may be better aligned with family preferences and avoid the logistical challenges of transferring, storing and accessing confidential information. These choices are deeply contextual and highly dependent on the opportunities and constraints in diverse Member States.

31 <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu>

## 7.3 Information relevant to different stages of the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of SEL

As indicated in Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, SEL is implemented through a series of related systems that span from macro (policy decisions are made, guidelines are issued) to meso (policies are translated into plans) to micro (plans are translated into highly contextualized practices); see specific detail in Chapter 3. Considering each of these pieces, the design team should ask what information decision-makers need to know about the current status of any problems, policies, preparations, plans, practices or principles regarding SEL – and what is desired or prioritized by various stakeholders. Just as SEL is a developmental process, so is the development of a SEL delivery system. Information can be useful to inform decisions at various stages of building or improving SEL delivery systems, broadly characterized as *assessing needs*, *monitoring processes* and *evaluating outcomes* (Chatterjee Singh and Duraiappah, 2020).

### Assessing needs

A needs assessment helps illuminate the current status of a problem, the availability of resources or assets, and the acceptability of potential solutions for the sake of SEL planning. Improvement happens over time; needs can be prioritized and addressed in accordance with capacity and thoughtfully paired with uncovered assets. An approach that obtains information from multiple perspectives and sources is best for helping to avoid, explain and address implementation problems or equity issues in other phases.

For example, a needs assessment could include surveying individuals at a particular site to determine how many children aged ten to thirteen report feeling unsafe at school, or how many secondary school teachers have been trained in the fundamentals of SEL. Alternatively, a team could plan for focus groups of young

people to explore their vision for a culture of peace, ask families about their hopes and concerns for their children's SEL at school, or conduct interviews of key informants (e.g. teacher trainers, student teachers, seasoned educators, supervisors) to understand what supports are needed and which assets are available to effectively deliver SEL.

As explained in the previous chapter, SEL is best developed through understanding assets. Thus the needs assessment should be underpinned by **an assets review** (see Chapter 6) in order to see what existing SEL resources exist and can be drawn on in responding to needs identified.

### Process evaluation

A process evaluation anticipates the need to know if the SEL delivery system is being enacted as intended. This may involve sending third party assessors or recording technology into spaces (e.g. classrooms, meetings) to enable judgements as to whether there is commitment to the shared vision (e.g. if an SEL programme is implemented as prescribed or agreed upon) or asking learners to reflect on their participant experiences.

It is helpful to distinguish between *formative* evaluation purposes (i.e. which provides actionable feedback to inform real-time, forward-looking adjustments) and *summative* evaluation purposes (i.e. which informs a judgement as to whether a performance criterion was met) (Cefai et al., 2019). Ultimately, formative and summative purposes should be balanced for the dual purposes of facilitating and monitoring progress towards SEL delivery system goals.

Formative assessment may be particularly helpful for aligning assessment with instruction or system improvements. This function, however, requires teachers and educational leaders to

### Useful suggestions for process evaluation

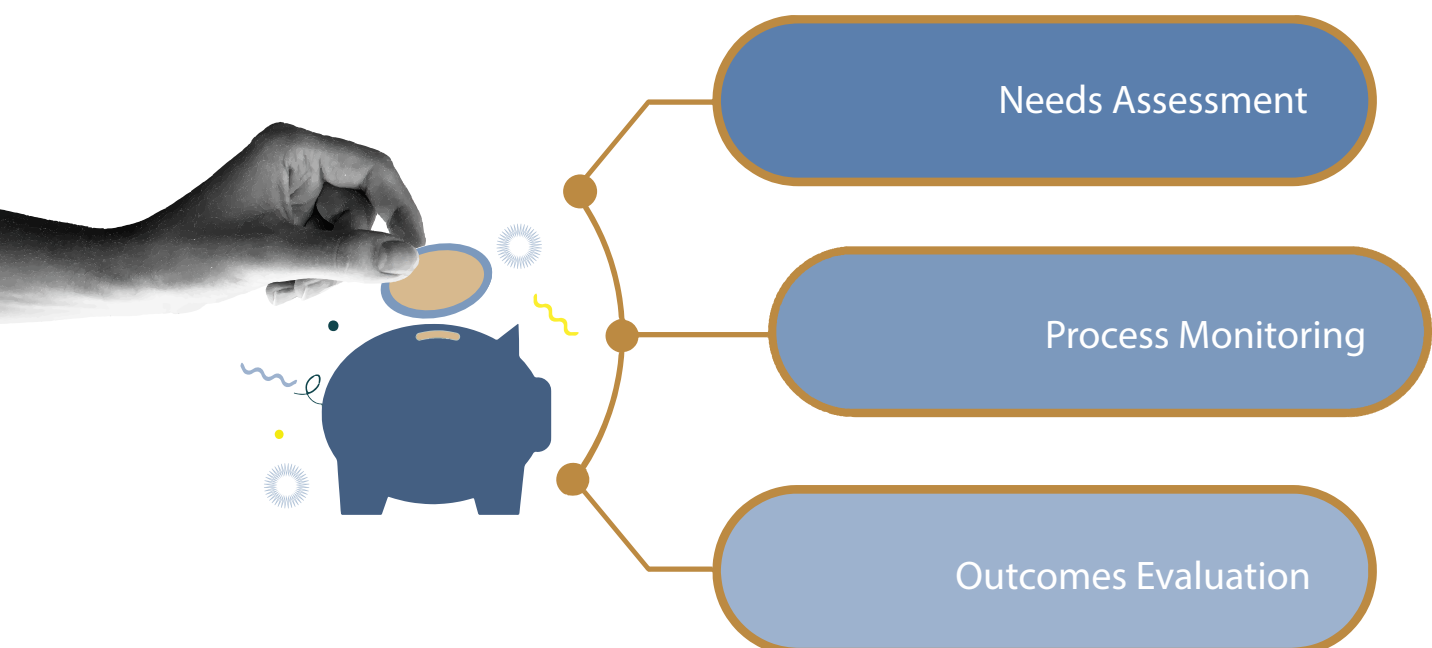
- 1:** Clearly communicate the intended use of information to avoid process evaluations being misunderstood or misused as authoritative compliance checks that incentivize scoring well over doing well (Nielsen et al., 2019; McCallops et al., 2019)
- 2:** Assessment systems should identify, analyse, and remedy barriers to effective and equitable SEL instruction, and also identify talent, appreciate adaptations, spotlight innovations, and learn from successes in various contexts. To identify variations as desirable or undesirable, seek to understand how those variations are related to SEL outcomes in their local context

be appropriately trained in the activity of data utilization, so that they can transform assessment information into growth strategies (Ferreira et al., 2020; Shepard, 2019).

### Outcome evaluation

An outcome evaluation anticipates the need to know whether and how the SEL delivery system is achieving its intended impacts, as required by grant, contract or public accountability requirements. An outcome evaluation may focus on the consequences of the entire SEL delivery system, enabling judgements as to whether an entire cohort is progressing towards the proximal (e.g. social and emotional competence) and distal (e.g. social change) goals of the SEL framework, and to understand the magnitude of the change, the pace of the change, and any disparities in the change experienced between groups. Outcome evaluation can also be helpful for studying components of an SEL delivery system (e.g. a particular professional development experience or an SEL curriculum with a specific group of intended beneficiaries) to determine what works, for whom and under what conditions. Understanding *why* a particular outcome was achieved or not achieved, a change was large or small, fast or slow or differentially successful between groups, derives insights from the needs assessment and process evaluation. *Let these component parts of the assessment system complement and inform each other, rather than rigidly sequencing them, as shown in Figure 7.1*

Figure 7.1 Complementary components of the assessment system





Depending on the assessment system design, information may serve large scale (e.g. national educational policies) or small scale (e.g. classroom practices) decisions. When possible, it is wise for the same information to serve multiple purposes.

For example, the Ministry of Education of Colombia, together with the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education, launched *Evaluar para Avanzar* ('evaluate to advance') at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a way to evaluate

students' progress and needs. This voluntary assessment strategy invites teachers to assess, among other things, their students' social and emotional skills. Teachers are provided with online tools that help them to process and interpret classroom and individual students' results to support instruction. The system also aggregates information for the identification of performance gaps and opportunities for improving education quality on a national scale (ICFES, 2021).



## 7.4 Considerations informing collection of information

Now the question turns to *how* to obtain the information necessary for needs assessment, process monitoring and outcome evaluation. This begins with selecting techniques, articulated as information gathering protocols.

### Considerations related to information gathering protocols

When considering information gathering protocols, four high-level considerations need to be considered, namely reusing, standardizing, effort allocating and administering.

- **Reusing:** There are advantages to selecting techniques that have been used in other assessment systems and have a track record of working well. However, when reusing existing protocols, they should be assessed and adjusted for initial and continued fit in their current context for their current purposes. Even in emergency situations, techniques can be customized for fit (Diazgrandados et al., 2019).
- **Standardizing:** If the design team wants to observe differences between people or places, or observe changes across time, their techniques need to be highly specified and used consistently. This helps to avoid a situation in which changes in the approach become alternative explanations for differences observed in the data. Planned and purposeful variations to accommodate dimensions of difference, such as dialects, developmental stages and idiosyncratic barriers to participation among specific groups, can be part of a standardized process, so long as they are highly specified and consistently applied.
- **Effort allocating:** Different protocols require effort to be allocated at different stages of the process. Some techniques, which we

call ‘prefabricated’, can be used to collect and summarize information efficiently (e.g. computerized questionnaires with limited response options), but require a substantial upfront investment to pilot test the technique in a variety of local contexts to identify inappropriate questions and barriers to responding *before* wide scale data collection begins. Alternatively, ‘unfabricated’ techniques can be used to derive insights that are *not* anticipated in advance by the design team. Deploy unfabricated approaches strategically and selectively for very specific information needs, with particular testimonials or case studies used to provide insights into

#### Useful suggestions for effort allocating

It is important to consider the difference between summarizing the data and interpreting the data for decision-making. Data summaries can inadvertently aggregate assumptions in ways that lead to misguided interpretations. To reduce the likelihood of this outcome, design teams should insist that diverse informants are meaningfully engaged in the design process (Jagers et al., 2018;

An unfabricated approach may also be used to inform the development of higher-quality and interpretation-ready prefabricated approaches, with the methods iteratively informing each other. Although using multiple approaches is often more resource and time intensive than a single approach, it makes community engagement more explicit, and can yield insights that ultimately better serve the SEL delivery system and its beneficiaries (El Mallah, 2020; Schiepe-Tiska, 2020).

perspectives, experiences and contexts, that may not otherwise be well understood. These techniques will require the most effort *during* and *after* data collection to build or adjust protocols in real-time, come to understand insights, and convey the meaning of what was discovered. Without substantial effort, it is nearly impossible to summarize information in ways that retain its local nuance, cultural relevance, and contextual richness.

- **Administering:** Some techniques require (a) specialized training in educational and psychological measurement, (b) a well-developed social and emotional repertoire (e.g. social awareness, relationship skills), and/or (c) and socio-cultural insight and sensibility.

Although SEL assessment systems should be embedded in the routines and realities of all formal educational systems, it should not be presumed that all information must be collected within the footprint of formal educational systems, or that all teachers and learners are affiliated with formal education systems (see Chapter 6 on community involvement and SEL as a lifelong and life wide learning process). Assessment, monitoring and evaluation partners may be needed or desired to include information from other educational settings, sectors, and/or informal settings for teaching and learning, as well as to expand capacity for data collection, analysis, and reporting within and across these settings.

## Data collection techniques and data collection tools

**Distinguishing between data collection techniques and data collection tools:** In designing the data collection process, be careful to distinguish general data collection **techniques** from specific data collection **tools**.

Examples of data collection **techniques** include surveys, interviews and document analysis. Specific techniques are commonly, although by no means exclusively, used for particular purposes within the assessment system.

Techniques are accomplished using a variety of data collection tools. Examples of data collection tools used in SEL include, but are not limited, to:

- The Aristas' Social and Emotional Skills evaluation questionnaire (Panizza et al., 2020);
- The International Survey of Children's Well-Being (Dinisman et al., 2015);
- The Ground Up Interview for Cultural Conditioning of SEL Development (Jukes et al., 2021);
- The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Hwang et al., 2023); see case studies on assessment);
- The Berkeley Assessment of Social and Emotional Learning (Shapiro et al., 2022).

**Selecting data collection tools:** Different **types of tools** have advantages and disadvantages for particular purposes (McKown, 2019; Cefai, 2018; Malti and Noam, 2016). For example,

- **Self-report surveys** are commonly used for gathering the perceptions of students, families and educators, or for understanding the purported frequency or nature of something that is difficult for a third party to know (e.g. attitudes, experiences).
- **Third party observations**, such as checklists, rubrics and rating scales, are common for making comparisons against consensus criteria, expectations or norms (e.g. frequency of implementation behaviours).
- **Performance and situational judgement tests** are an emerging category of SEL assessment tools used for measuring competence relative to learning standards (for students and teachers-in-training alike) in intervention research, and for diagnostic purposes.

Importantly, it is widely believed that adopting **strengths-based tools**, rather than tools that focus on problems or pathology, helps to best align measurement with the ideals of SEL in schools (Chatterjee Singh and Duraipappah, 2020).

There has been some effort, largely in the United States, to create **interactive registries of tools**, to help guide their selection for use in SEL assessment systems (e.g. [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\) SEL Assessment Guide](#)<sup>32</sup>; [The Rand Education Assessment Finder](#)<sup>33</sup>; [The American Institutes for Research \(AIR\) Ready to Assess Tools Index](#)<sup>34</sup>). Other regions have contributed systematic literature reviews (Müller et al., 2022) and spreadsheets (e.g. [Regional Network for the Measurement of Child Development](#)<sup>35</sup>) to similarly help guide the selection of tools.

These registries and reviews provide a useful service. They provide information, such as:

- the coverage of the tools (e.g. what is measured);
- the developmental stage for which the tools are appropriate (e.g. early childhood, adolescence);
- the languages into which it has been translated and requisite literacy skills;
- the estimated administration time (e.g. 10 minutes);
- the administration format (e.g. paper, digital);
- the user credentials required for administration (e.g. professional licence or certification);
- the availability of training or other forms of administration assistance; and
- how to obtain the tool.

These guides may also strive to help prospective users understand whether the tool will lead to a defensible decision. This is an essential consideration, yet a formidable task. The question as to whether assessment information gathered with a particular assessment tool leads to a defensible decision has as much to do with *how the information is used*, as it does with the attributes of the tool itself. It is essential

that design teams provide resources and build capacity to guide the appropriate use of tools. In particular, it is important to not simply ‘adopt’ a tool without careful contextualization considerations.

There are many limitations of existing registries. They tend to:

1. reflect SEL frameworks derived from prevalent western ideologies and the culture and contexts of individuals and educational systems in these regions;
2. feature prefabricated assessment approaches, which if used in isolation, could inadvertently limit possibilities for learning unanticipated information; or
3. emphasize tools intended to collect information about the status of children and adolescents, and to some extent, school climate and other enabling conditions.

Thus, it is important to also assess the breadth of focus and the scope of coverage in existing SEL assessments. As indicated in Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, SEL is not only about individual competence of learners, but is a whole system process and should include considerations such as community involvement, cultural responsiveness and more.

It is therefore also important to support the development of a centralized, open-source repository that can aggregate available techniques and tools, and also allow for critical commentary on their design, contents and scope of inclusion. UNESCO Member States can contribute their tools (e.g. [Escala de Bienestar Escolar MESACTS](#)<sup>36</sup>) to strengthen cross country learning associated with the mainstreaming of SEL assessment systems worldwide. There is a need for the development and inclusion of tools: firstly, attend to the need for educational system accountability for student-level SEL achievement, conceptualized within a relational systemic approach; and secondly, that can enable the

32 Assessment Tools - CASEL

33 RAND Education Assessment Finder | RAND

34 Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Learning and Development? (Second Edition) | American Institutes for Research (air.org)

35 Regional Network to Measure Childhood Development - The Dialogue

36 Escala de Bienestar Escolar BE-MESACTS – mesacts

assessment, monitoring and evaluation of SEL as a formative process that requires upstream information to drive improvement.

One international example of efforts to link and develop shared assessment tools for SEL can be found in the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES). This survey views student skills as associated with student-teacher relations, peer relations, school climate and other factors (OECD, 2021). Beyond statuses, there are also efforts underway to validate tools to assess 'levers' for SEL delivery system transformation. These levers include trusting partnerships, adequate support for adults (e.g. training), requisite adult capacities (e.g. knowledge, skills), and structures and routines of systemic SEL in schools (e.g. SEL leadership teams).

When considering which tools to develop, use or adapt, it is advisable that design teams centre *their purpose* for collecting information as a guide for tool selection, and to review tools from around the world, in consultation with regional learning networks (e.g. Network on Education Quality Monitoring in Asia-Pacific, Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of Quality Education, Africa's Teaching and Learning Educators' Network for Transformation), to fulfil the ideals of a comprehensive, balanced, aligned, defensible, and ethical assessment system.

## Deciding on the scope of information needed

The use of tools creates a discrete record documenting what was seen, heard, shared, felt, thought, reflected or experienced. The record is a unit of information. Examples of records are:

- the transcript of an interview with a single person
- notes from a meeting with a group of people
- an individual survey response
- the score or an artefact from a performance task
- a rubric or rating reflecting the impression of ability

- a photograph or recording of an event
- a legislative transcript
- a plan or policy document.

These records are generated through different techniques, with different tools, by different informant types, fulfilling different assessment purposes (McKown, 2015). To determine *how many* records are needed, design teams must consider both their sampling strategy and the periodicity of their record gathering.

For high-stakes decisions, such as the ones that impact the lives of children, it is important that samples are sufficiently large and diverse to respond to information needs, typically to the point of confidence that additional data collection would not fundamentally alter the current understanding of the problems, processes or solutions (i.e. the information need is satiated).

Specific purposes may require records to be:

- a census of all records
- representative of all potential records
- evenly drawn from two or more groups of records for the sake of record comparison
- sensitive to minority records that have the potential to be divergent from the majority of records
- selective of records, chosen strategically for gaining particular insights.

In addition to using a tool to sample multiple sources at a given time, a tool can be used repeatedly over time. This can help to monitor maintenance or a change in SEL delivery systems. Repeated administrations can suggest returning to specific individuals over time (e.g. individual student growth), or returning to specific roles over time (e.g. 16-year-olds; design team members; heads of schools), even if the people serving in those roles change or record institutional, programmatic, and contextual changes.

If the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of specific SEL intervention strategies or policies, it can be helpful to begin using the tools before any change occurs (i.e. a *baseline* measurement), as well as across situations where a particular change is induced/expected (i.e. an intervention group) and where change is not induced/expected (i.e. a comparison group). This can inform conclusions about the nature, scope and cause of the change that occurred and reveal any unintended or undesirable effects.



## 7.5 Sharing information for use

All the preparation can lead to very little if the information is not used to catalyse action. Each design team should have a communication plan for each of these important functions:

**1. Communicating the rationale and process of the assessment, monitoring and evaluation:** This involves broadly communicating the ‘why’ (i.e. rationale for the assessment system and each of its component parts) and the ‘how’ (i.e. the ways in which information will be gathered, interpreted and used). This should be described transparently, accessibly and persuasively.

**2. Clarifying roles and purposes of knowledge sharing:** Describing who is asked to help interpret, learn from and use the information generated through the assessment process, specifying who is given access to which pieces of information, and articulate a process for getting that information to them reliably, expeditiously, and in a format that facilitates their decisions and subsequent actions.

Importantly, the design team must carefully consider the benefits and hazards of sharing specific information in particular ways and go to considerable lengths to prevent information from being used to rank, stigmatize, humiliate, alienate, or perpetuate constructed advantages among students and communities. Plans to share widely may involve withholding some information to avoid circumstances where the identity of a specific person, community, or institution could be deduced, and avoiding the presentation of information in a format that

may be easily misinterpreted, or that overly simplifies complex situations.

**3. Reporting to stakeholders and accountability:** If SEL is fully mainstreamed, parents and guardians should understand how their individual children are progressing at school in the social and emotional domain. In this case, information shared could be integrated into systems in place to share information with parents about a child’s progress in other domains, such as report cards (Elias et al., 2015). In addition to sharing information on children’s SEL, system wide change related to SEL implemented should also be monitored and reported on. Care should be taken to ensure high levels of transparency as the introduction of SEL involves complex competencies that require an ethics of care and accountability when being introduced into the education system.

It is important for the design team to create this communication plan concurrently with plans to gather information, and not as an afterthought. This will help to identify planned collections that may be excessive or not have a truly actionable purpose. Communication plans should consider media that facilitate the understanding and use of information by intended audiences (e.g. brief videos and infographics posted to social media; testimonials in legislative hearings) and build capacity for the responsible use of information to catalyse action.

### Useful suggestion for the communication plan

The communication plan should also articulate an approach to seeking permission to collect information from individuals (e.g. parents, community elders) who are advised of the risks, benefits and any potential alternatives.

## 7.6 Conclusion

Many sources of guidance about assessment, monitoring and evaluation start with the question of what tools should be used to evaluate the status of students. This chapter has argued that evaluation of student statuses should not be the exclusive goal; formative and summative assessments with students, adults and of systems should be balanced for the dual purposes of facilitating and monitoring progress towards SEL delivery system goals. In line with the New Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2023, paragraphs 31-34), SEL assessment should adopt a context-specific, gendered, participatory and differentiated approach that is adaptive to all learners, including persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, and those in vulnerable situations.

Simply starting with a discussion of SEL assessment tools precludes thoughtful discussions and decisions about the very purpose (and varied purposes) of assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and how to best achieve those intentions. It is therefore vitally important to unpack inherent or inherited assumptions and to adequately contextualize assessment, monitoring and evaluation approaches and tools. Failure to do this may lead to perpetuating commodification of students and reinforcing the (mal)functions of many contemporary

education systems that perpetuate exclusions, discrimination and other challenges. Care should be given to the assessment, monitoring and evaluation design to avoid data collection as a practice of extraction and exploitation rather than engagement in a shared vision, collective effort, and a process of continuous improvement towards the common good. Careful consideration of complex issues throughout the entire design and implementation process can result in an SEL assessment, monitoring and evaluation system that serves as the basis for decision making to continuously improve SEL delivery systems worldwide, and their integration into education systems in meaningful, and adequately contextualized ways.

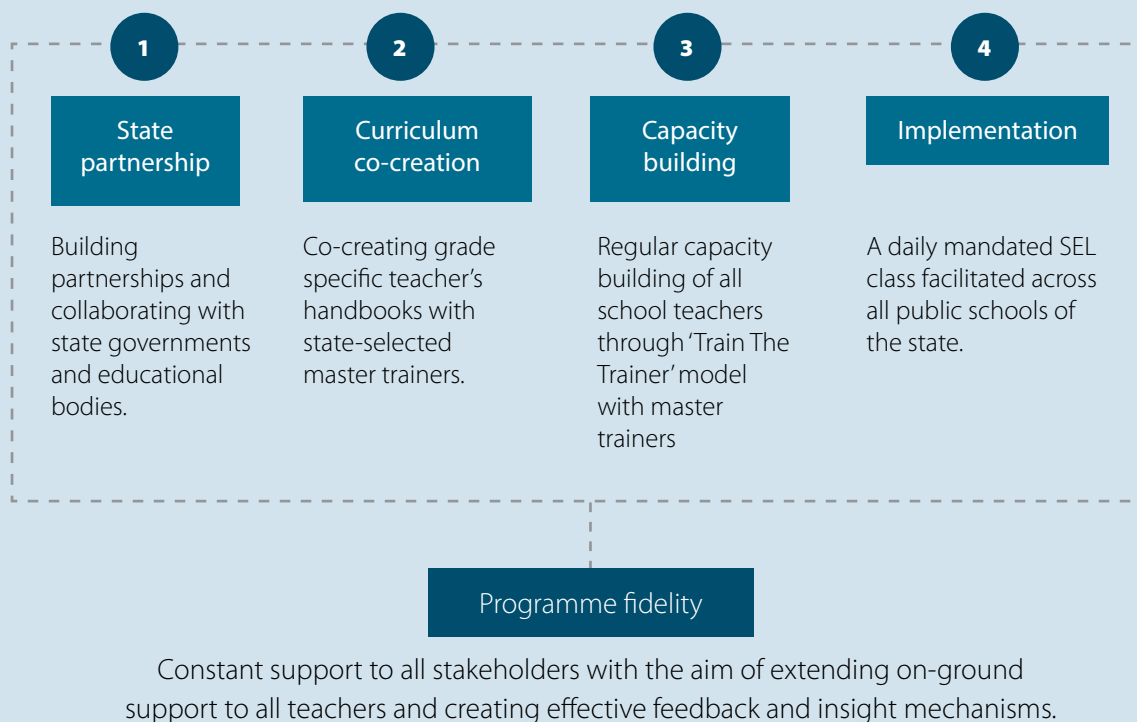
And lastly, refining SEL goals, strategies, techniques and tools for data collection is an ongoing process. Changes must be made through lessons learned, and as the seasons and climatic conditions change, preferences evolve, resources recede, opportunities emerge, needs shift, and the very idea of what is considered healthy and sustainable development is recast. Implementation is often completed in phases, and should itself be a learning process, so that the assessment, monitoring and evaluation system evolves over time, becoming ever more optimized for utilization through co-engaged reflection and learning processes.



## Key points for policy-makers

1. Social and emotional learning is not an only *outcome* to be achieved, but a *process* in which to engage. Therefore, an SEL assessment, monitoring, and evaluation system is a process for collecting information for the purpose of continuously improving SEL delivery systems.
2. An *assessment system* is a series of interconnected processes assembled for the purpose of having sound and actionable information upon which users can base their decisions; an assessment system should be *comprehensive, balanced, aligned, defensible* and *ethical*.
3. Begin designing an SEL assessment system by reflecting upon what you hope to achieve. An inclusive design team can translate a locally selected SEL framework into a process for generating specific information that can inform and improve the SEL delivery system.
4. When considering how to collect information, consider the skills required, the resources available, the adaptations needed, and what combination of specified/flexible and prefabricated/unfabricated approaches will best accomplish your goals.
5. After assumptions have been unpacked, select or develop tools for data collection that are consistent with your intended uses. Decide how much information is needed, collected through what means, and how often.
6. Make and share a plan for how information be shared and used. Build capacity for data utilization that will catalyse action to improve SEL delivery systems.

### Programme process



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# Case studies

These case studies are not intended to be representative of the diverse regions and contexts in which SEL is implemented. However, they help to illustrate the various ways in which SEL can be conceptualized, contextualized and integrated tangentially or holistically. Together, the cases demonstrate the key themes of this publication, especially the importance of co-creating and grounding SEL within a broader social, relational and ecological framing. Most of the case studies were originally published by 'HundredED Spotlight: Social & Emotional Learning' (Green et al., 2021), and even though the versions herein are a little different, the aim was not to duplicate, but to have the theoretical and practical guidance on SEL in one place for policy-makers and educators.

## 1 Enabling children's well-being at scale, through systems change

### LABHYA<sup>37</sup>, INDIA

Labhya integrates SEL programmes into the public education systems in India. To ensure the scale and sustainability of its programmes, Labhya partners with local state governments to co-create and ensure the effective implementation of a state-wide daily SEL class. Just as children attend regular maths and science classes, they now also have a dedicated SEL and wellbeing class integrated into their school day.

Labhya's programmes are currently enabling **2.4 million vulnerable children** across **22 thousand schools** in **3 states** of India to cope with poverty and become healthy, effective learners. It is the world's largest and India's first at-scale SEL and well-being programme.

In its partnership with local governments, Labhya commits to supporting the design, monitoring and implementation of the programmes end-to-end. Labhya's government partners commit to allocating resources, people, and dedicated school time towards the daily wellbeing classes. Governments also incorporate SEL and wellbeing into their annual state public education budgets, a first in many ways in India and globally.

Highly experienced professionals and Social Emotional Learning experts from Labhya's team are placed at all levels of the state government education system to enable consistent prioritisation, high-quality implementation, and ongoing capacity building of stakeholders towards the programme.

#### Co-creating localised curricular:

Each Indian state comes with its unique geographical, cultural and social context and hence it becomes essential to localise the SEL programme to the needs of its children. Labhya's work in any new state begins with a comprehensive need analysis. Labhya identifies the SEL issues and challenges experienced by the children in the state and co-creates the programme with educators from the state.

Labhya supports the selection and rigorous capacity building of a group of 'SEL Master Trainers' from the government, who become co-authors of the state SEL curriculum with Labhya. The SEL Master Trainers are selected from the larger group of public school teachers and government officials from various levels of the government. This enables deep localisation of the curriculum in the context of children who their teachers know best.

This curriculum is then crafted from scratch using a standard framework and draws inspiration from the local practices and day-to-day experiences of the children from the region. It is framed in the local language and is rooted in the socio-cultural context of the state while being gender-responsive, trauma-informed and aligned with the emotional needs of children.

Further, the curriculum is designed to be extremely low-resource and low-burden for all stakeholders. The SEL curriculum is handed over to the teachers in the form of a teachers' handbook that is simple to understand and follow, requiring no more than a 5-minute prep before the class. The activities are simple to execute and can be implemented in the classrooms without any additional materials/resources. Additionally, there are no textbooks for the children, which enables children of all literacy levels to participate equitably in the daily wellbeing class.

#### Systems change approach to capacity building:

With the support of existing teacher capacity-building systems of the state government, all public school teachers of the state are capacitated to effectively facilitate this programme. Labhya supports the SEL Master Trainers in collaboratively designing and facilitating capacity-building sessions for all teachers of the state. The co-creation of the curriculum fosters a deep sense of ownership among the SEL Master Trainers, which is further transferred to the teachers during training.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.labhya.org/>

Teachers are regularly supported and capacitated in the “Train The Trainer” model, first supporting the Master Trainers from within the education system, who then further train the public school teachers.

The teachers gain a deep insight into the relevance of SEL for their own well-being. This enables them to better comprehend its significance for the children. Once the initial understanding is established, they go on to learn the skills needed to implement the programme effectively.

### Seeing the impact through:

Labhya ensures consistent monitoring of implementation, classroom adoption and teacher training impact to understand the effectiveness of the implementation process. On-ground and last-mile delivery challenges are tracked and resolved using feedback from Master Trainers, Labhya team members operating on the ground and other low-tech mechanisms.

The programme’s last-mile impact is communicated state-wide through powerful

audio-visual storytelling with the support of government communication mechanisms.

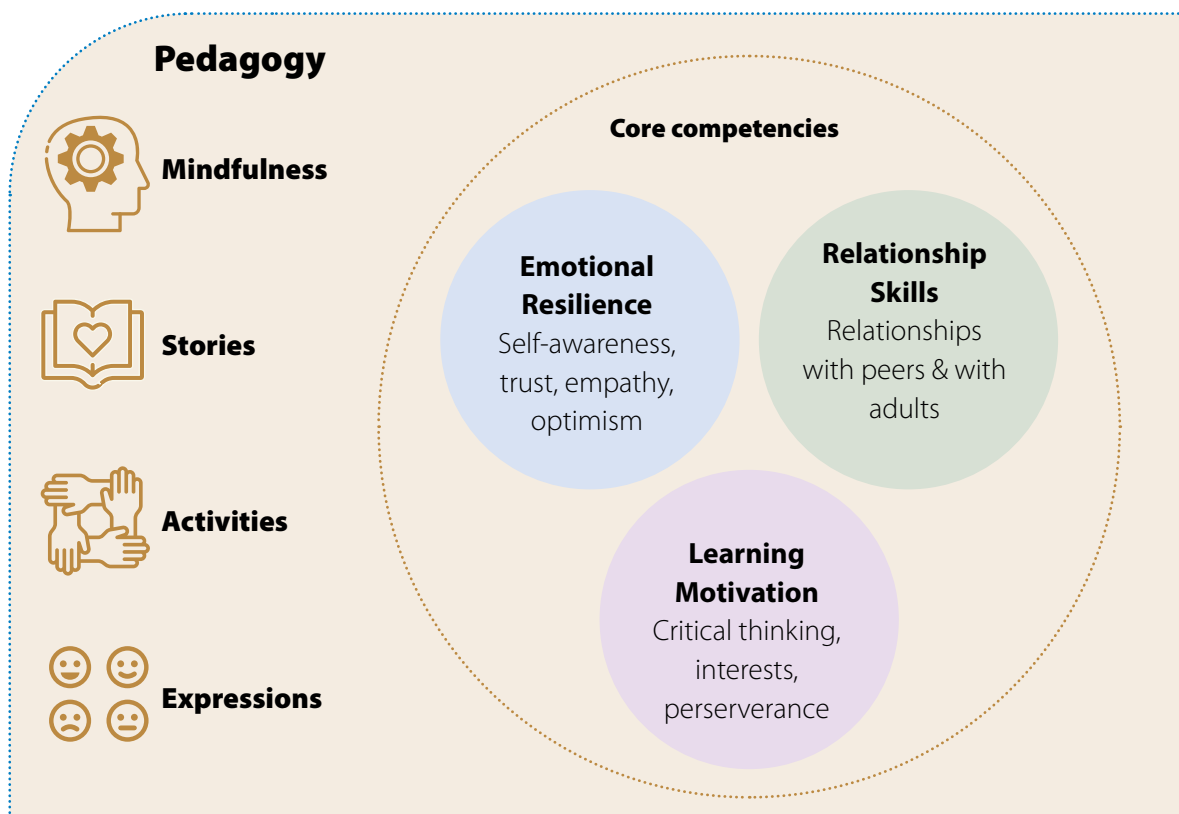
### Labhya’s SEL developmental framework:

The curriculum is crafted to build resilience, learning motivation, and relationship skills through a synthesis of diverse frameworks. The pedagogy draws on empirical frameworks around SEL like PEAR’s Clover model and incorporates relevant aspects of India’s National Curriculum Framework to ensure contextualisation for India. The outcomes are then mapped to developmental frameworks to create age-appropriate and grade-specific curriculum structures.

Designed with a deep understanding of India’s context and children, the curriculum framework structurally incorporates the relevance of interconnectedness over individualism. It displays cultural sensitivity and addresses the unique challenges the children encounter in their daily lives.

The pedagogy incorporates diverse elements to ensure holistic development:

Figure 1 Pedagogy and core competencies



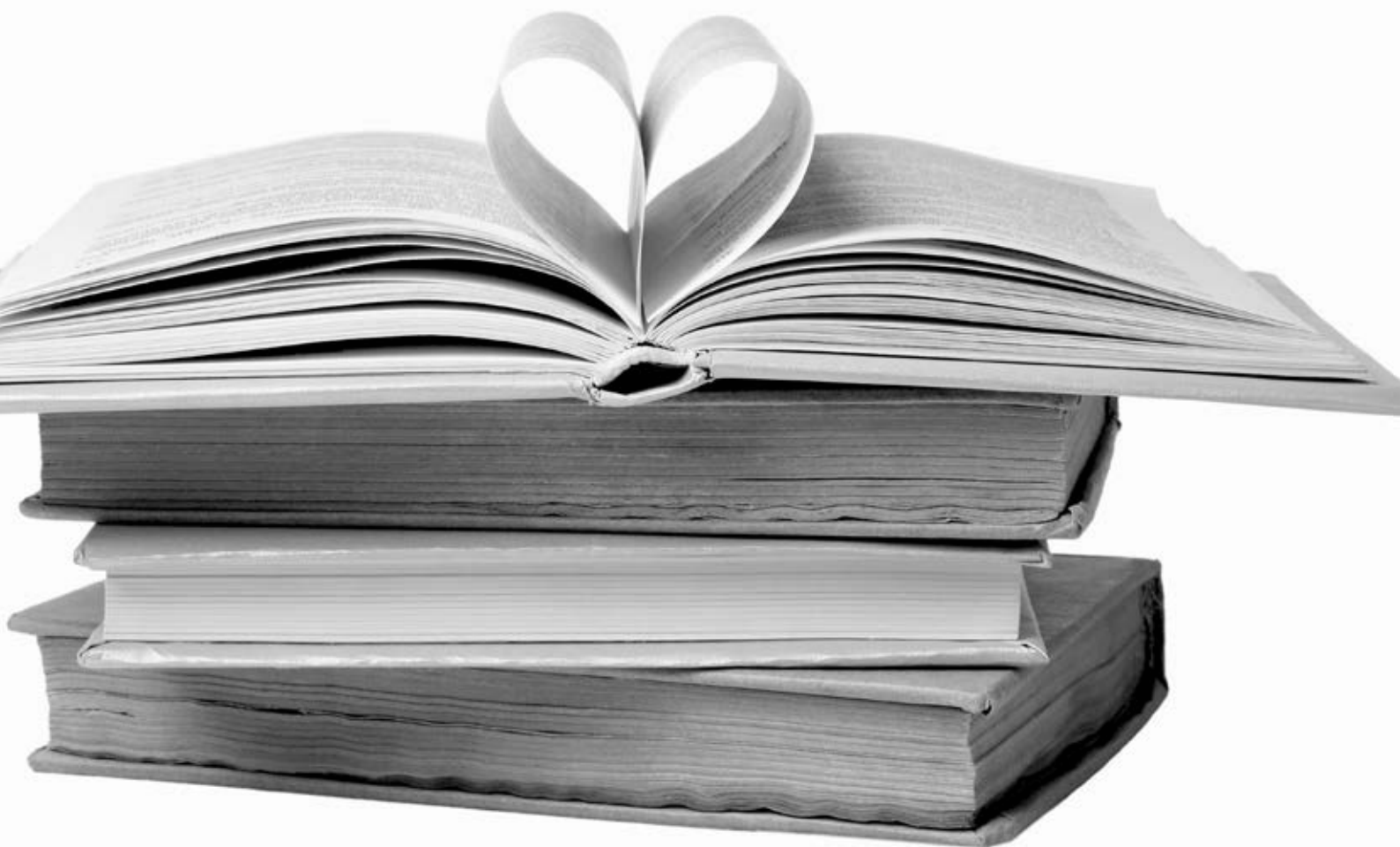
**Mindfulness:** Grounded in a secular and scientific approach, it cultivates present-moment awareness without judgement. This helps enhance focus and neuroplasticity in students.

**Stories:** Crafted to resonate with everyday experiences, using characters inspired by students' lives. The open-ended narratives encourage interpretation, fostering empathy, self-awareness, and critical thinking.

**Activities:** Interactive and participative, these movement and speech-based exercises foster communication skills, emotional regulation, and a sense of ownership in learning.

**Expressions:** Encouraging metacognition, this component prompts children to reflect on weekly experiences and articulate actionable insights, reinforcing their capacity for self-awareness and decision-making.

Labhya's mission is to positively influence the lives of 30 million children by the year 2030, with a broader, enduring goal of integrating the well-being of children into the fabric of the entire educational system in the long run.



## 2 Cultivating Children with Warmth, through improving the overall management of the school

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION<sup>38</sup>, BEIJING NORMAL UNIVERSITY, CHINA**

### Background

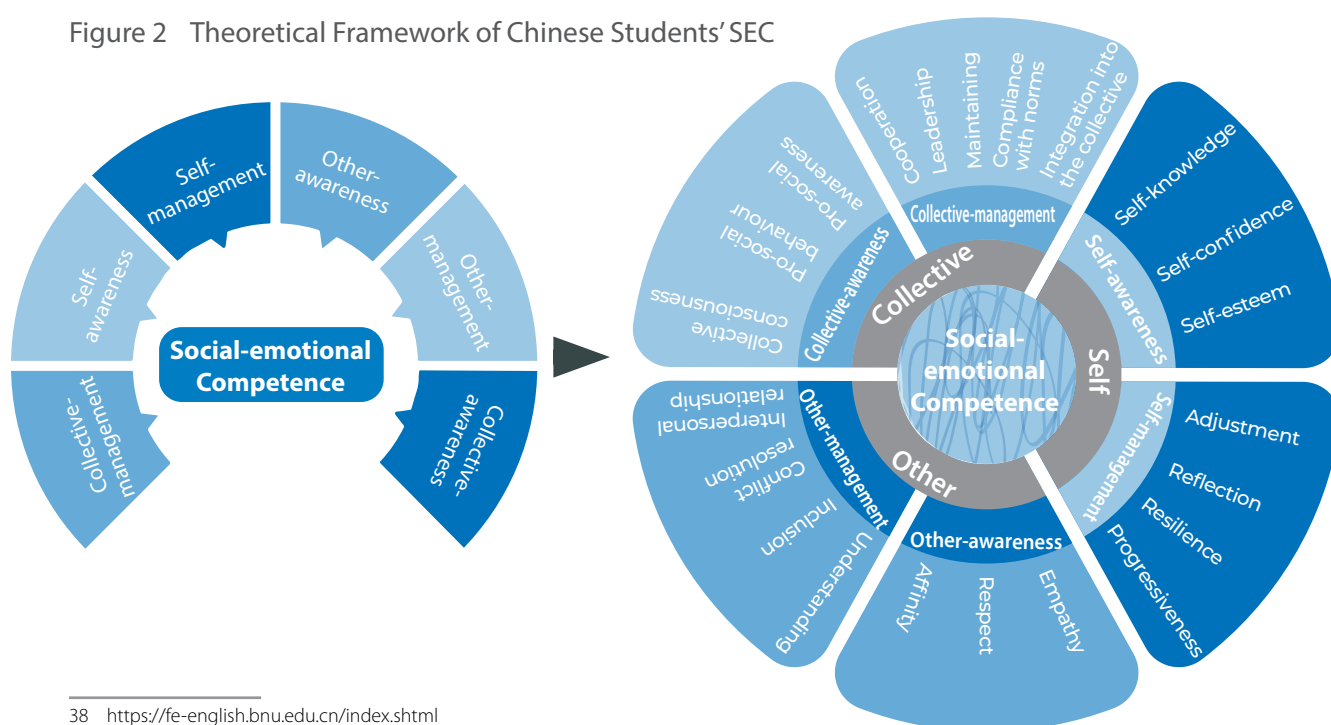
Cultivating students' SEL competence (SEC) is a global educational priority and a fundamental aspect of high-quality primary education in China. To change the status quo that "some students care about themselves while ignoring others, some teachers pay attention to teaching while overlooking education, some schools emphasise cognition while neglecting emotion, and some families take achievement seriously while ignoring cultivation", in 2011, Professor MAO Yaqing led the "Beijing Normal University Chinese Students' Social and Emotional Learning Program" (SEL Programme), which aimed to develop students' SEC through improved school management, collaboration with educational departments, research institutions, teacher training centres, and schools. Following over ten years of theoretical research and practical exploration, this programme has effectively proposed a path to cultivate students' SEC in China.

### Theoretical framework

Based on foreign experience and Chinese cultural background, the SEL Programme defines SEC as "Facing the complex context of growth and development, a set of core competencies related to individual adaptation and social development which are based on personal feelings and interactive experiences in social relationships in the process of socialisation." (Mao, 2019), emphasise that "SEC are grounded in the process of dealing the relationship between students and themselves, others, and the community, and the essence of SEC is social construction of relationships"(Du & Mao, 2018).

Firstly, the SEL Programme divided SEC into two categories: awareness and management. Awareness refers to 'knowing how to do', while Management pertains to 'actual performance'. Secondly, the SEL Programme divided SEC into three aspects: self, others, and the collective. The existing dichotomy between "self" and "others" fails to fully explain the current situation within the cultural context of China. Due to the collectivist culture in China, people highly value the collective and sometimes even willingly sacrifice personal interests for the sake of the joint. Accordingly, following the scientific procedures, a questionnaire was developed, and the SEC model was constructed and validated (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Theoretical Framework of Chinese Students' SEC



38 <https://fe-english.bnu.edu.cn/index.shtml>



### Intervention measures: through improving the overall management of the school

To foster students' SEC, from 2011 to 2024, the SEL Programme has led to development of the comprehensive school management improvement model which involves all members, all processes and all aspects. This has resulted in establishing a systematic and holistic practice model embraced by school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It includes elements such as social-emotional school planning, capacity building for educators and principals, integration of SEL into disciplinary

teaching, creation of a positive and inclusive school atmosphere, and fostering accepting and respectful home-school partnerships (Figure 3). In terms of implementation, the SEL Programme follows a problem-solving approach known as the 3A cycle (Assessment, Analysis, Action), which consists of four stages: conducting an all-encompassing assessment of students and schools based on reality, determining the vision and plan for comprehensive school transformation, implementing sweeping reforms within the school, establishing a mechanism for regional reform coordination (Figure 4).

Figure 3 SEL Experimental Interventions

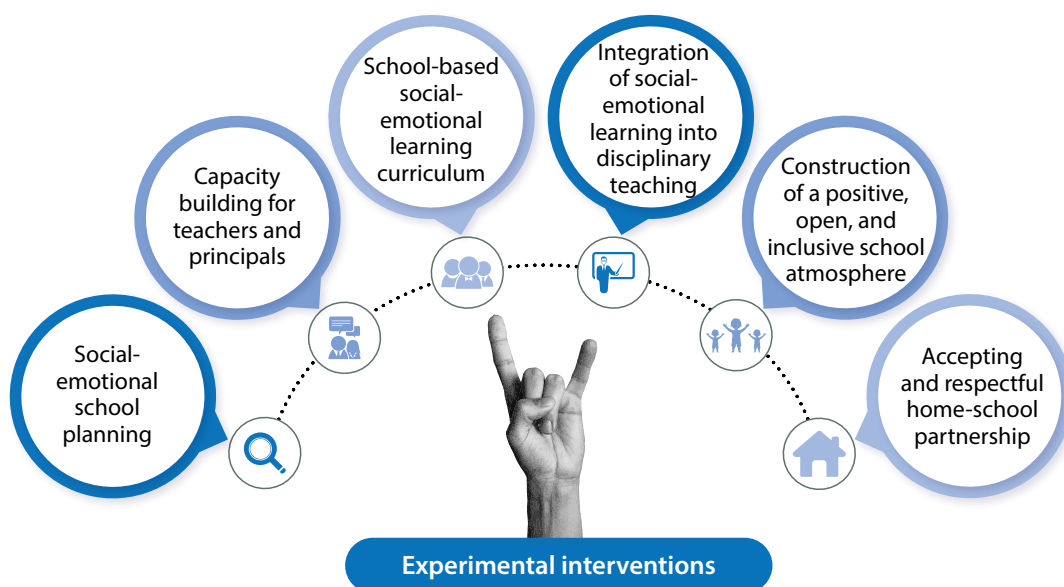


Figure 4 SEL Implementation Proceedings

#### Assessment

- Comprehensive diagnosis of student development and school supportive environment status
- Identify issues and establish baseline

#### Analysis

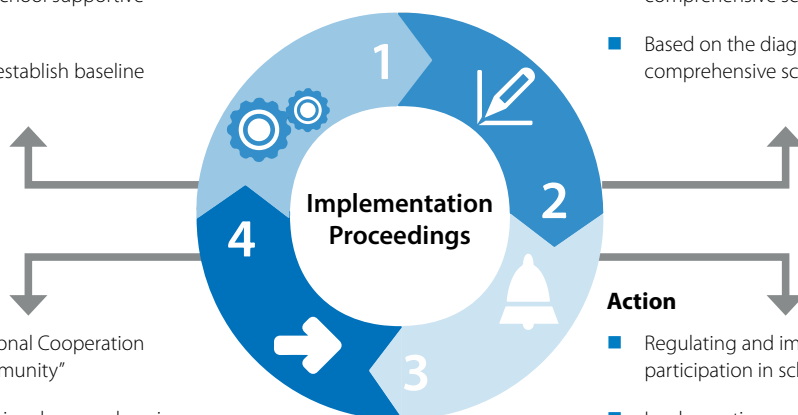
- Determine the shared vision for comprehensive school transformation
- Based on the diagnosis results, develop a comprehensive school transformation plan

#### Action

- Establishing a "Regional Cooperation Development Community"
- Implementing a regional comprehensive reform linkage mechanism.

#### Action

- Regulating and improving the student participation in school management system
- Implementing a comprehensive improvement strategy for the school.

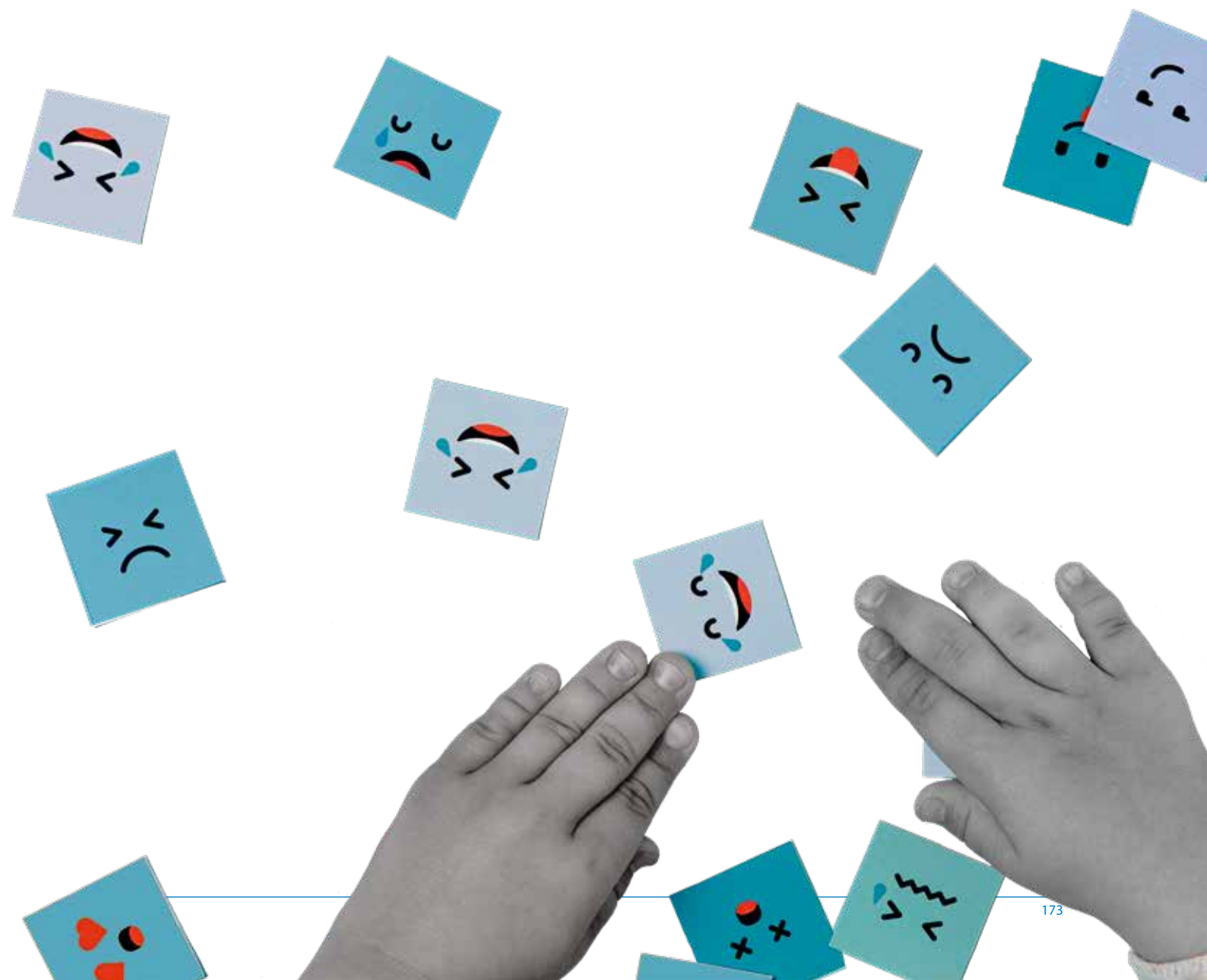


## Effects

Over the past decade, the SEL Programme has been implemented in 579 primary and secondary schools across 15 provinces in China. It has helped over 10,000 principals and teachers' capacity to enhance their educational concepts and management abilities. Additionally, it has benefited more than 300,000 students by enhancing their SEC and school performance. The program's success has garnered widespread praise from society. In a pilot school study, 468 students were tracked for two consecutive years, revealing consistent improvements in their SEC and perception of the school's supportive atmosphere.

## Conclusion and expectations

The SEL Programme discovered during implementation that research on theoretical frameworks, assessment tools, and implementation strategies for 12–14 year old middle school students' SEC are insufficient. Additionally, there is a lack of SEC resources for children aged 6–14. These are currently being addressed by the SEL Programme. Moving forward, it is essential to consider how to expand the impact of the SEL programme while prioritising teacher training and developing management mechanisms that support social emotional education to promote all-round development for every child.



### 3 Grassroot Soccer MindSKILLZ: A Sport-based Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Program for Adolescents

#### GRASSROOT SOCCER<sup>39</sup>, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

##### Introduction

Young people in sub-Saharan Africa face a number of critical health challenges ranging from HIV to unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence. Poor mental health, which is one of the most critical health concerns facing young people globally, disproportionately impacts young people in sub-Saharan Africa, with one in four young people experiencing a mental health condition. These challenges undermine the overall well-being of a population that is projected to double by 2050.

Grassroot Soccer (GRS) was established to address these and other critical adolescent health challenges through proven soccer-based curricular, near-peer mentor “Coaches”, and a culture that encourages safe spaces for vital conversations, relationship building, emotional regulation, and coping skills. Building off of a base of established HIV- and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)-focused programming, GRS has undertaken mental health as a priority programme area to integrate SEL approaches in supporting young people.

##### Developing a SEL-Informed Mental Health Programme:

GRS’s existing soccer-based approach engages adolescents through its “Three C’s” model: adolescent-friendly, evidence-based **Curriculum**, trained near-peer **Coaches** that facilitate programmes, and a fun, inclusive, positive **Culture**. In developing SEL-informed mental health programming, GRS integrated competencies around building strong relationships, promoting SEL skills, managing stress, and regulating emotions. The programme has actively engaged adolescent participants and young adult Coaches in participatory design

workshops and conducted a literature review to inform programme development. Field testing and pilot projects were conducted in Kenya, Scotland, South Africa, and Zambia, including qualitative and quantitative data collection.

##### MindSKILLZ: Programme Overview

In 2022, GRS launched MindSKILLZ, its signature mental health promotion and prevention programme, developed in partnership with young people and guided by global standards. MindSKILLZ is an interactive, evidence-based and trauma-informed programme for adolescents aged 10-19 that creates simple and powerful connections between soccer and life. MindSKILLZ uses a positive approach to mental health, focused on reinforcing and enhancing adolescents’ strengths and skills to cope with life’s stresses. MindSKILLZ is universally delivered to support all adolescents, and it reduces mental health stigma by reinforcing that we all have mental health challenges and encouraging adolescents to talk about it.

*Activity Spotlight:* Players form a circle to keep a “Healthy Mind” ball in the air. Players toss the ball to their peers in a set pattern until they feel confident. The Coach then introduces “Stressors”, which are other balls representing common youth stressors (e.g. school, money, social media). As more “stressors” are added, the tossing pattern is disrupted more. Players then discuss healthy coping strategies, removing “stressors” from the game, making it easier to keep up the Healthy Mind ball.

**Key message:** Stress is normal, but too much stress harms us. MindSKILLZ equips adolescents with healthy coping skills to manage stress.

The MindSKILLZ programme includes the following products:

- **MindSKILLZ Curriculum:** 12-session evidence-based programme, designed to be delivered by trained non-specialists in schools and communities.

39 <https://grassrootsoccer.org/>

- **MindSKILLZ Training Manual:** 4-module youth mental health promotion training for frontline workers (coaches, community health workers, teachers) who facilitate the MindSKILLZ curriculum with young people.
- **MindSKILLZ Magazine:** Hard-copy, fun, and visually appealing resource that engages adolescents beyond in-person SKILLZ interventions. The magazine incorporates critical health and well-being information and interactive activities to flexibly engage adolescents on their own time and in their preferred spaces, such as at home, in the evenings, etc.
- **Digital MindSKILLZ (in development):** a 30-minute game that covers mental health information, coping skills including SEL, and soccer trivia using simple interactive voice response technology. Adolescents can use any phone to call in and navigate through, as voice actors and sound effects make the game fun.

## Results

GRS has reached 30,000+ adolescents with mental health programming, with promising results. Evaluations and routine monitoring data in Kenya, South Africa, Scotland, and Zambia have shown:

- **Improved resilience and SEL skills:** MindSKILLZ participants reported improved coping skills, changes which have been observed and reported by Coaches and adults. Participants reported increased confidence in handling challenges they face when pursuing their goals (23% increase). They particularly highlighted anger management, stress management, and communication with others as particularly beneficial coping strategies.

“I used to be short-tempered, but since I came to MindSKILLZ whenever I come across people fighting, I would look for ways of separating them so that they don’t hurt each other. Also, I rarely get

mad over small things like before.” - MindSKILLZ Participant

- **Improved mental health knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking behaviours:** Participants’ mental health pre/post knowledge increased from 74% to 86%, awareness of local support services for mental health challenges increased by 24%, and stigmatising beliefs around mental health decreased by 29%.

“We learned about mental illnesses and we are told mental illnesses are common. It’s not just going crazy. Some of them is being anxious, being stressed, all those, depression. It’s not just going mad.” – MindSKILLZ Participant

- **Young people enjoyed the programme:** 91% of participants reported that they enjoyed MindSKILLZ sessions ‘a lot’, and 93% reported that the MindSKILLZ Magazine was a good tool for promoting positive mental health.

“The moment classes began, if a participant has forgotten, some adolescent would remind them to join the MindSKILLZ session because it was fun.” – MindSKILLZ Coach

Ultimately, these positive effects have contributed to the following results amongst participants:

- **Reduced depressive symptoms and poor-wellbeing:** the proportion of MindSKILLZ participants reporting moderate to severe symptoms of depression pre: 16.9%, post: 9.3%) and poor well-being (pre: 15.5, post: 8.0%) on the PHQ-9 and WHO-5 respectively was nearly cut in half from pre- to post-intervention.
- **Improved mental well-being:** 41% of participants had clinically significant improvement in well-being, with overall improvements continuing to increase four weeks after the programme.

## Lessons and recommendations

GRS continues to learn from MindSKILLZ implementation and data, gathering insights that will allow us to improve MindSKILLZ, position it for scale, and further build our evidence. The programme highlights the following lessons and priorities based on MindSKILLZ design and implementation thus far:

- **Prioritize Coach well-being and caring for the carers:** Many Coaches come from the same communities as participants and experience the same challenges. Supporting their own mental health is essential for effective mentoring and implementation of mental health programmes.
- **Continue to explore measurement methods:** the tendency towards quantitative scales for mental health measurement can crowd out harder-to-measure but essential soft skills or youth voices/qualitative forms. We will continue to test methods of measurement that help capture the range of experiences in GRS mental health programming.

- **Invest in youth-led and local solutions:** building on existing SEL evidence was instructive, but developing interventions with young people and where we work was critical rather than adapting interventions from other settings.
- **Investigate positive ripple effects of SEL programmes beyond mental health:** Qualitative data revealed that MindSKILLZ extended its positive effects beyond intended mental health outcomes, with stakeholders observed improved school/academic performance. Participants also reported that they shared mental health resources such as the MindSKILLZ magazine with friends and family members facing challenges.

## Conclusion

Integrating SEL into adolescent mental health approaches offers a holistic, proactive, and promising way to support young people's mental well-being. This integration not only helps young people with existing mental health struggles but also equips them with the skills and resilience to face future challenges.



#### 4 In Their Shoes: A Space for Active Empathy: A SEL programme using the Theatre of Awareness to improve school coexistence, prevent violence and build a culture of peace

##### ASOCIACIÓN TEATRO DE CONCIENCIA<sup>40</sup>, SPAIN

###### The need

In Spain, problems of school coexistence continue to increase exponentially, as well as cases of violence among children and adolescents. On the one hand, disruptive behaviour in the classroom has increased, as have fights; in fact, 7 out of 10 children are bullied in their schools and aggressions between minors in public spaces are increasing. On the other hand, situations of “self-violence” have skyrocketed after the COVID-19 pandemic, with 134% more suicides and 180% more self-harm among children and adolescents. Schools, especially public schools, face a problem of coexistence and mental health, which in many cases leads to a drop in the quality of learning and an increase in school dropout rates. This situation, in turn, leads to potential problems of labour market insertion, poverty and social exclusion.

However, at present, this problem is not addressed from a perspective of emotional literacy, compassion or empathy. Nor is it approached from a perspective of prevention, involving the entire educational community. In fact, only 5% of schools include emotional education in their educational project, although 94% of teachers believe that training in emotional education would improve their professional skills; empathy is the competence that teachers most lack in their students. “In Their Shoes” aimed to tackle the problem from the point of view of SEL education involving the whole educational community, and it has been therefore greatly demanded by schools and teachers.

#### The proposal of “In Their Shoes”: emotional literacy and Theatre of Awareness

The Theatre of Awareness is a theatrical methodology that embodies emotions “making visible the invisible”, showing the basic concepts of Emotional Intelligence for emotional literacy and the development of SEL skills of adults, youth and children. This methodology was created by the anthropologist Pax Dettoni in 2010 with a pedagogical vocation, mainly, but also with an artistic one. It is a methodology that allows learners to easily recognize emotions and then learn to manage them and thus move towards empathy, assertiveness, positive conflict resolution, compassion, forgiveness and kindness; ultimately, towards the construction of a culture of Peace.

In 2017, based on this methodology, Dettoni created “In Their Shoes: A Space for Active Empathy”, a pedagogical model in schools (early childhood and primary, secondary and special education) to make the entire school community emotionally literate in order to improve coexistence. The programme seeks to prevent violence, bullying, and build a culture of peace and coexistence through whole of school Emotional Education training through play and theatre.

The programme is supported by the following three theoretical axes:

- **Identification, recognition and emotional management:** learning to recognize emotions, calm down and avoid using behaviours that may provoke frustration, anger, fear or sadness in situations that may cause aggression to others or to themselves.
- **Active empathy:** learning not only to put oneself “in other people’s shoes”, but also to act accordingly and try to help them. This opens the door to non-violence, compassion and forgiveness.
- **Positive conflict resolution:** learning to use assertiveness, negotiation and “win-win” agreements to solve everyday challenges to coexistence. Learning to activate non-violent

40 <https://teatrodeconciencia.org/>

communication and creative and restorative conflict resolution.

It is an easily scalable model because it is based on **peer-to-peer and cascade learning** with the involvement of the entire school community:

1. Teachers are trained as facilitators of the “In Their Shoes” method;
2. Accredited facilitators train teachers, families and non-teaching staff from schools that want to implement the programme - whether in their own school or not;
3. The teachers trained by the facilitators take the method to their classrooms, for which they have a classroom manual in which all the sessions are structured;
4. The students, as a final result, create a Theatre of Awareness play based on their concerns, which is performed in front of classmates from lower grades with the objective of teaching them about social-emotional skills.

In this way, the programme reaches the entire school community and the formative experiences are transmitted and shared from one to another, thus making learning more effective and more extensive, which facilitates the transformation of the centre’s culture.

“En Sus Zapatos” **has been offered institutionally to educational centres of the Community of Madrid (Spain) from the General Sub directorate of Innovation Programs and Teacher Training (General Directorate of Bilingualism and Teaching Quality) since 2017**, and for a number of years in other Spanish regions. During these years, the intervention model has been improved, thanks to the constant evaluation and adaptation to the reality and needs of schools, while new teaching resources have been created for the different educational stages. The resources can be [downloaded free of charge](https://programaensuzapatos.org/recursos-aula/)<sup>41</sup> and are already being used by teachers in more than 15 countries.

## Impact

Since 2017, “En Sus Zapatos” has reached more than **130 schools in Spain, representing 120,000 people** including students, teachers, family and non-teaching staff. During the pandemic, the programme served about 4,000 teachers. It currently has more than 200 press appearances.

“In Their Shoes” is a method of Emotional Literacy with which the individual (adult or child) learns the “abc” to “read and write” their emotions (identification and emotional management) and the emotions of others (empathy and positive conflict resolution). This leads to an improvement in coexistence that is reflected in the classroom climate and in the culture of the school, as well as in the improvement of the well-being of all those involved. This impact on the child, the teacher, the family and the school community has cascading effects on overall efforts towards learning spaces and societies that are peaceful.

This certainty is evidenced in the evaluation of all implementations in schools, and also in the external evaluation of the programme carried out by the Carlos III University of Madrid, in collaboration with the University of Utrecht and INEE<sup>42</sup> of the Spanish Ministry of Education. The evaluation concluded that:

- **Students:** 92% have learned to recognize and identify their emotions and 90% of teachers consider that students are kinder, more willing to forgive, to listen and to be empathetic;
- **Teachers:** 91% calm down more quickly when angry and 88% consider that there has been an improvement in coexistence and school climate;
- **Families:** 45% use less punishment and 24% use less yelling, a large majority say they understand their children better and spend more quality time with them;
- Nearly 100% of all participants recommend the programme.

In 2017, echoing these findings of the evaluation, “En Sus Zapatos” received the “Innovative Project”

41 <https://programaensuzapatos.org/recursos-aula/>

42 INEE: National Institute for Educational Evaluation (Government of Spain).

award from the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (also awarded by the Commitment and Transparency Foundation) and has been recognized by the Finnish organisation **HundrED** as one of the 100 most innovative educational initiatives with the greatest social impact and scalability worldwide in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The programme has also been nominated for the “Science Summit” in 2022 by the Board of Trustees of the German **Falling Walls** Foundation. In 2023, its creator, Pax Dettoni, was selected as a Fellow by the **Ashoka** Foundation.

### Conclusions

The innovation of the “In Their Shoes” programme lies in the approach to school coexistence and the prevention of violence/bullying through Emotional Literacy with Theatre of Awareness, which encompasses the entire educational community.

The Theatre of Awareness methodology is innovative, effective and of great pedagogical strength in strengthening emotional literacy to prevent violence and promote harmonious coexistence; since, in an experiential way, through the use of theatre and play, empathy and compassion are experienced and worked on with the entire educational community. See the video<sup>43</sup>.

Another innovative and successful aspect of the project is the creation of didactic posters, stories and manuals to reinforce learning.

The figure of the facilitator is key, as they are responsible for implementing the programme in the schools. Therefore, it is of great importance that they are all active teachers, since it is based on peer-to-peer and cascade training.

Finally, it is fundamental to recognize that the work carried out in close collaboration with the Public Administration (in our case, mainly with the Community of Madrid) is key not only to reach the greatest number of schools, but also to consolidate a de facto social commitment to the construction of a Culture of Peace.



43 <https://youtu.be/9-bcigrx4QU>



## 5 Alianza Educativa<sup>44</sup>: A social and emotional education model for social transformation

### COLOMBIA

Alianza Educativa is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000, whose main mission is to transform public education in Colombia. Since its inception, it has embraced the conviction that access to quality education is essential to ensure equal opportunities and the integral development of all citizens.

Alianza Educativa currently manages 12 schools in Colombia, most of them located in Bogotá and one in Barú, on the island of Cartagena, benefiting more than 12,400 students. Colombia has experienced decades of armed and other social conflicts, which particularly impacted the highly vulnerable areas where the schools are located. In addition to violence, these communities are exposed to psychosocial risks such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, bullying, emotional and behavioural difficulties, among others.

Considering the above, Alianza Educativa recognizes the urgency of educating citizens capable of living together peacefully, valuing diversity and contributing to the development of their communities. Therefore, Alianza Educativa aims to ensure that students develop the competencies that will allow them to fulfil three fundamental objectives: plan and fulfil their life project, manage the risks of their environment and contribute to the construction of a more just and equitable society from their civic action.

In this sense, Alianza Educativa has integrated SEL competencies into its model as a fundamental part of the teaching and learning process and the integral formation of students. To this end, the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework of socio emotional competencies was selected and adapted, with three dimensions: “with myself”, “with others” and “with our challenges”, covering a total of 18 specific competencies.

To develop these competencies, Alianza Educativa has developed the Navegar Seguro programme as the main action for the implementation of SEL. Adapted from the World Bank’s Step by Step programme and recognized by HundrED and the Lego Foundation as one of the most impactful and scalable social emotional development initiatives worldwide in 2021, Navegar Seguro has 24 sessions for each grade from kindergarten to 11, which are based on pedagogical principles such as meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation and experiential learning.

In addition to the Navegar Seguro programme, the schools implement complementary activities aimed at the prevention of psychosocial risks and the construction of the students’ life project. Likewise, socio emotional competencies are put into practice through classroom management to guarantee a school climate that promotes learning. To achieve this, training is provided to teachers and families, understanding that they are key actors in their development.

In the midst of these advances, Alianza Educativa recognizes the challenge of integrating socio emotional competencies into the curriculum in a deeper and broader manner. In response to this, the network has started a process of curricular renovation that includes the design of instructional guides to allow the intentional integration of these competencies in all academic areas, through activities to put them into practice and promotes academic learning.

The evaluation of the development of socio emotional competencies is carried out through a self-report instrument at the end of each year, as well as through the socio emotional bulletin, in which teachers assess the students socio emotional competencies. These tools allow Alianza Educativa to monitor student progress and make institutional decisions to strengthen the development of socio emotional competencies.

<sup>44</sup> <https://alianzaeducativa.edu.co/>

## Impact

The results of the anonymous self-report assessment range on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 is low performance and 4 is high performance. The results are analysed by school and grade level to design and implement targeted strategies for students with low performance levels. The 2023 report broadly resulted in medium-high and high performance in all grades.

Similarly, positive results are evidenced as the reduction of situations that affect school coexistence, specifically in 2023 there was a reduction of 21% in type I situations<sup>45</sup> and 36% in type II situations<sup>46</sup>, suggesting a positive impact on the prevention and management of conflicts, promoting a safer school environment that contributes to healthy coexistence.

In addition, there has been a notable decrease in cases of specific psychosocial risks. For example, between 2022 and 2023, there was a 44.5% reduction in teenage pregnancies, exceeding the Colombian national average of 15%. This result indicates the positive impact of the development of competencies such as responsible decision making. Likewise, there was a 16.8% reduction in cases of emotional difficulties in the same period, which reflects that students put into practice competencies such as self-regulation contributing to their well-being and mental health.

## Conclusion

The success of Alianza Educativa's socioemotional development actions shows that these competencies contribute to the construction of a safe school environment conducive to learning, as well as to the prevention of psychosocial risks.

Among the lessons learned, the importance of involving families in the socioemotional development of students is well recognized. The support and active participation of parents, caregivers and community members are critical to the long-term success of these programmes. Likewise, it is necessary to promote the socio emotional well-being of teachers to connect them with the purpose and relevance of students' socio emotional development.

Although there are challenges to overcome, Alianza Educativa has a solid SEL education model that focuses on the integral formation of students for academic and personal success. Its commitment and dedication in this area position it as a benchmark that inspires other educational institutions to promote the well-being of students through the development of socioemotional competencies.

45 Type I situations: according to law 1620 on school coexistence, this type includes conflicts that are handled inappropriately and those sporadic situations that have a negative impact on the school climate, and in no case generate damage to the body or health.

46 Type II situations: according to law 1620 of school coexistence, correspond to this type the situations of school aggression, bullying and cyberbullying, which do not have the characteristics of the commission of a crime and comply with any of the following characteristics: That they occur repeatedly or systematically. They cause damage to the body or health without generating any disability for any of the parties involved.

## 6 Illustrative examples of SEL assessment worldwide

### SOUTH KOREA

Since 2012, researchers at Seoul National University have conducted the Study on Korean Children's Quality of Life, with aims of (a) developing a comprehensive measurement framework for child well-being, (b) monitoring the overall trends of child well-being indicators, (c) understanding disparities in child well-being with a particular focus on marginalised groups of children (e.g. children with disabilities, children in out-of-home care placement, children in rural areas), and (d) understanding Korean children's well-being status in the global context (Lee, B.J., et. al., 2013; Lee, B.J., et. al., 2015; Lee, B.J. et. al., 2019; Lee, B.J., et. al., 2021). The study has administered five biennial surveys with nationally representative samples of children, conducted numerous focus group interviews with diverse groups of children and adolescents, collected administrative data indicative of developmental contexts, and participated in the International Survey of Children's Well-Being project, a cross-national comparative study of children's subjective well-being involving 35 countries all over the world.

This is the very first study in South Korea that has established a measurement framework for multidimensional child well-being outcomes and developmental contexts using both objective and subjective indicators as well as problem-focused and strength-based indicators. In this study, children's SEL outcomes have been measured using various self-report indicators. For example, *emotional well-being* indicators include overall happiness, life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions, satisfaction with the self, and depression. *Social well-being* indicators include relationships with parents, peers, and teachers as well as behavioural problems such as alcohol and cigarette use, victimisation, violence, and other delinquent behaviours. *Flourishing* is also conceptualized as an important domain of child well-being, including indicators for empathy, altruism, generosity, and social competence.

The research team has successfully led data-based advocacy in partnership with Save the Children Korea, raising public awareness of children's SEL well-being in general. The study laid the foundation for the Ministry of Health and Welfare's inauguration of the Basic Plans for Child Policy in 2015, which explicitly made children's happiness the top policy priority for the first time in the country. This study has also directly influenced governmental efforts to establish a national database for child well-being, as declared in the state party report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In Korean education systems, however, student SEL outcomes have not yet been systematically assessed as one of the key learning outcomes. Although this work has planted seeds for measuring children's SEL well-being outcomes, much more work needs to be done to bring SEL assessment into the mainstream education system.

### TANGA REGION OF TANZANIA

In 2017 the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) collaborated with the XPRIZE Foundation to distribute tablets containing educational software to 2,700 out of school children aged 9 – 11 from 170 villages in the Tanga region, Tanzania. In order to test the effectiveness of the software, data were collected during a 15-month field test from December 2017 to March 2019, assessing children's literacy, maths, and social-emotional skills (Gross-Manos, D., Kosher, H., & Ben-Arieh, A. 2021).

A mixed-methods approach was used to evaluate the SEL impact of the project on participating children and their communities. The design team opted for an evaluation in three phases (i.e. baseline, midline, and endline), conducting focus group discussions with community members and quantitative assessments which included both parents and children as informants for SEL outcomes. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, read out loud to participants by a trained evaluator to attend to the high level of illiteracy in the population.

Local women (or “mamas”) were trained to collect data in their village under the supervision of researchers from the University of Dar es Salam and UNESCO.

The initial design of the quantitative questionnaire was determined based on a review of the literature and expert consultation. A pilot study was performed in a village in a region comparable to Tanga, involving 30 children and 22 parents. Its purpose was to test two different questionnaire formats: a classic Likert-scale questionnaire, asking respondents to indicate their level of identification with certain conducts (e.g. *“I get irritated easily by a mistake made by the other child”* with four response options: *“very like me”, “quite like me”, “only a bit like me”* and *“not like me”*), and a situational testing questionnaire that asked respondents how they were likely to respond in a certain scenario (e.g. *“In a situation where you are performing a particular task and then you experience difficulties, what do you do?”*). The interviewer would then indicate which category the participants’ open-ended answers fell into (e.g. *a) I will keep trying something until I succeed; b) I hardly give up on a difficult task; c) I carry on trying even if I find it difficult; d) I ask my friend/parents to help; and e) I work together with my fellow children to solve it*). Parents were also asked to answer similar questions as to how their child would respond. Building on pilot study findings and participants’ preferences, a situational testing questionnaire was chosen for child-reported outcomes, while a Likert-scale questionnaire was chosen for parent-reported outcomes.

## URUGUAY

In 2016, the National Institute of Educational Evaluation launched a system for the nationwide evaluation of educational performance, including several dimensions such as mathematics and language performance, opportunities to learn, school co-existence, participation, and social-emotional skills (Enuma Inc. 2019). With no educational standards available for SEL learning, the assessment of social-emotional skills required the design of a locally valid framework. The design team first reviewed frameworks used

internationally to identify existing definitions of SEL and the specific competencies included. Then, the team reviewed local research on a broad range of social-emotional skills, conducting interviews with national and international researchers. Next, the design team drafted an assessment framework for the nationwide evaluation of social-emotional skills in primary and secondary schools, including operational definitions of its components. Finally, the team decided on a final assessment framework based on focus group discussions with several educational actors: educational authorities, labour unions, inspectors, principals, teachers, and experts.

Consequently, instrument design was initiated. First, a systematic review of the instruments used nationally and internationally for the evaluation of the SEL components included in the framework. At this point, a decision was made in favour of a self-report format for assessment, in two different developmentally appropriate versions: one for students in the sixth grade of elementary school, another for students in the third grade of secondary school. For each component to be evaluated, a list of items was constituted selecting items that represented the operational definition of the component from the reviewed literature. All non-Spanish items were translated and back-translated. In some cases, additional items were constructed to fully capture the component definition. The preliminary version of the instrument was presented to local experts for review. They were asked to evaluate the clarity of each item and its adequacy for the national context; the relation of each item with the component it was supposed to measure; the sufficiency of each component’s operationalization. A revised version of the instrument was drafted based on the reviewers’ suggestions. Teachers from different areas of the country were invited to participate in focus groups, evaluating how items might be understood by their students. Their suggestions led to a final draft of the instrument. A qualitative pilot study was performed with small groups of students from different educational institutions and contexts across the country, ensuring

the balanced inclusion of rural children, girls, children with a second language and socio-economic context. During cognitive interviews the linguistic and contextual adequacy of the instrument was evaluated, eventually leading to minor adjustments in the items. With this final draft version of the newly designed instrument, a quantitative pilot study took place (reported in Panizza et al., 2020). Using its psychometric data, the instrument was improved for its actual application. With each wave of new data collection, the instrument's psychometric properties are being monitored.

### **NEW YORK CITY OF UNITED STATES**

The Urban Assembly, in New York City, has pioneered a guided implementation model to support schools and districts to organise around the principles of SEL development. This guided implementation approach emphasises assessment as a key lever for coherence of their Resilient Scholars Program. Using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) (LeBuffe, P. A., Shapiro, V. B., & Robitaille, J. L. 2018), the schools in the Urban Assembly network, in consultation with Fordham University's School of Social Service, use measurement to create

conversation around the social emotional strengths and opportunities of staff and students. The process unfolds in five steps. First, teachers communicate the purpose of the DESSA to students. Second, students in groups have an opportunity to rate their teachers' social emotional skills in order to familiarise themselves with the items and communicate that both students and adults can strengthen their social emotional competencies. Third, teachers debrief the ratings they received from students and publicly set goals around opportunities for growth. Next, students receive their ratings from teachers and compare their self-ratings to the teacher's scores and set goals around opportunities for growth. This can be done in conversation with the teacher, a peer, or through self-reflection. Lastly student's monitor their progress over time with this strengths-based tool. The goals of this process are to build students' self-awareness and social awareness, help normalise and communicate about social emotional development for staff and students and encourage students to set goals for their growth. An initiative from the mayor's office is scaling this process to all public schools in New York City for the 2021-2022 instructional year.

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Sustainable Development

## Mainstreaming social and emotional

# learning in education systems

### Policy guide

Since 2015, there has been significant progress towards reimagining education for wider societal transformation in support of peace, justice, inclusion, equality, and sustainability. Yet, the existing challenges have intensified, and new ones have emerged.

The world is witnessing a resurgence of multiple forms of conflict and violence, from racism and discrimination, to hate speech and armed conflict. Our efforts to build sustainable peace through education are falling short. Some 250 million children are still out of school, and those in school are not acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills they need.

This guide makes the case for integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in collective efforts to transform education. It highlights the impact of SEL in improving academic achievement, reducing drop-out rates, and improving overall mental health and well-being, and importantly, in strengthening emotional and relational dynamics of classrooms, schools, communities, and societies.

The guide synthesizes the latest research and practice from the world, including case studies of concrete SEL implementation. It provides policy-makers with preliminary guidance to facilitate their conceptualization and integration of SEL in all facets of their education systems to build long-lasting peace and sustainable development.

