

BUILDING

KINDER

BRAINS



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Mahatma Gandhi Institute of
Education for Peace and
Sustainable Development

**A TEN
BILLION
NEURON NETWORK**



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BUILDING KINDER BRAINS

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Building Kinder Brains

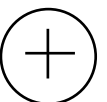
The traditional notion of a compartmentalised emotional and rational / cognitive brain is obsolete. The brain is now understood as a complex yet dynamic and malleable organ, which uses an interplay of emotional and rational neural networks to make decisions.

Education if designed and implemented with this understanding of the brain can have huge implications for learning and human behaviour that offer great promise and potential to address wicked problems such as violence, poverty, inequality, climate change and to facilitate change for the common good.

The messages presented in this brochure are a result of a two-year initiative by the UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP). The initiative began with a workshop at the Sorbonne in Paris, France in 2018 with over 20 experts of global eminence from a range of disciplines and countries, followed by a second workshop at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada in 2019, and culminating in a 250 page report entitled 'Rethinking Learning' published and released in 2020. This booklet is a playful presentation of some of the key messages from the Rethinking Learning report and is intended to be an introduction to Social and Emotional Learning and its incorporation in the classroom.



Kindness releases dopamine, which is the brain chemical for reward and pleasure. Dopamine enables people to seek rewards and to take action to move towards them. Therefore, once you experience the joy' of kindness, you want to keep experiencing



Humans are social emotional beings

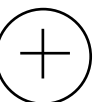
Neuroscience research shows that all learning occurs in a context, and involves cognitive social-emotional interactions.

Human well-being depends on humans learning to communicate individual needs to each other and managing emotions in healthy ways. Emotional and social development of an individual is therefore as important as cognitive and biological development. Education systems must be transformed to be able to address and contribute to this aspect of human learning and experience.

Neuroscience research shows that all learning occurs in a context, and involves cognitive-social-emotional interactions. This cognitive-social-emotional brain involves interactions throughout the whole-brain. This whole-brain activation happens when children and adolescents learn to read, count, reason, make decisions and perform acts of kindness.

The introduction of social and emotional learning provides a double dividend to learners and society by improving academic achievements and nurturing empathetic and compassionate individuals dedicated to building a kinder world.

The key messages presented in this toolkit provide teachers, educators, parents, and policy makers with the incredible opportunity and responsibility to build kinder brains for a resilient, peaceful and sustainable planet by training and nurturing the social and emotional development of children.



GENERAL MESSAGES

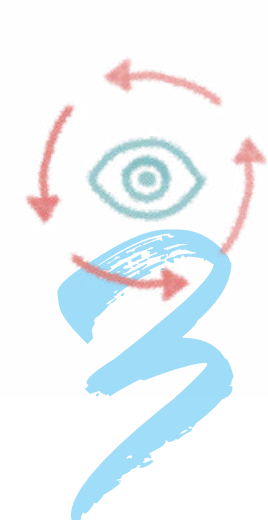
Social and Emotional Learning is a necessary condition for all Learners



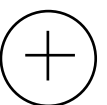
Social and emotional skills build social and emotional intelligence and these are fundamental for success in school and life. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) enables children and adolescents to make friends, calm themselves when angry, resolve conflicts, be kind and make safe and ethical choices



SEL is the process of acquiring competencies to recognise and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations effectively.



SEL addresses real-life skills such as reading faces and voices for emotions (emotional awareness), self-awareness (consciously listening to our body and thoughts,) active listening (listening without judgement), empathy (understanding and feeling for others) and compassion (taking positive action to reduce pain and suffering).



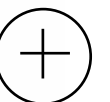
The brain never stops learning and the superpower of brain plasticity

The development of the human brain is dynamic and the brain is influenced by the social and emotional environments to which it is exposed.

The human brain is endowed with a superpower called 'neuroplasticity', which allows it to change both in structure and function, based on training. By regularly performing a series of practices, the brain can form new circuits and learn new skills because of neuroplasticity.

Given the plasticity of the brain and the positive impact of SEL intervention on cognitive, social and emotional development, it is recommended that SEL begin from early childhood and continue into adulthood, so that it can respond to the changing needs of people across ages.

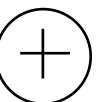
It has an extended period of maturation and is strongly influenced by social connections, context, moral norms, emotional support, and language.



Relational Competencies form the core of SEL

Competency is not just knowledge but also attitude and behaviour. Social and emotional competencies can be trained just like literacy and numeracy. A competency-based approach for cultivating SEL is necessary because it allows continuous tracking and growth of the individual self and ensures that continuously changing needs are met. Competencies that promote the cultivation of healthy relationships with self, with others and with nature are necessary conditions for a peaceful and sustainable societies.

Kindness increases endorphins in the body; these are natural pain relievers which reduce pain and increase energy.

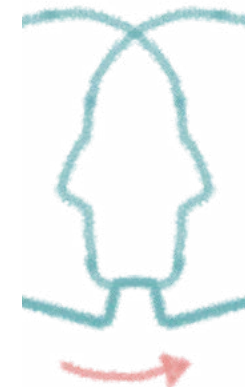




1

SELF

SEL competencies for a healthy relationship with self include - self awareness, emotional literacy, emotional regulation, mindfulness, impulse control, self-compassion, critical inquiry, resilience.



2

OTHERS

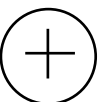
SEL competencies to build healthy relationships with others include empathy, perspective taking, compassion, kindness, communication, and collaboration



3

NATURE

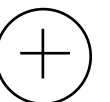
SEL competencies to build healthy relationships with nature include empathy, environmental literacy, sustainability, and purpose.



SPECIFIC MESSAGES

Building the SEL Ecosystem

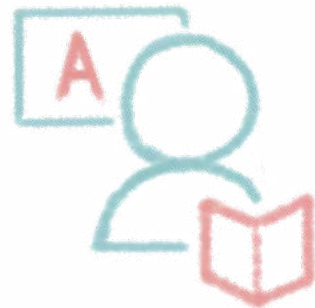
A whole-school approach is a necessary condition for SEL to be successful – an approach which includes the student, educator, caregiver, parent and policy maker





01 CHILDREN

Babies are naturally empathetic and kind. For example, toddlers have been shown to help adults, without being asked, whether their parents are in the room or not, and even without being thanked. Studies suggest that empathy and altruism have an evolutionary basis and that these skills are not just guided by social advantage or obligation. Classrooms and living spaces offer great opportunities to encourage and support these inherent traits.



02 TEACHERS

Teachers must embody SEL. Children tend to emulate the behaviour of those around them so teachers should ideally practice SEL in their classrooms and in other learning spaces. Research shows that classrooms with an even distribution of popularity (i.e., no favourite children and no marginalized children) have better average mental health than stratified classrooms, suggesting that entire classrooms practising prosocial behaviour may reap benefits.



03 LEADERSHIP

School leaders, principals and administrators, must embody SEL since their actions and behaviours impact school climate. Regular check-ins with students, visibility in school corridors, and positive relationships with teachers and parents motivate school environments to practice SEL. Research suggests that kind leaders are willing listeners, take responsibility and lead with compassion, not aggression. School leadership must mainstream SEL into teacher professional development so that teachers may model appropriate social behaviour by their words and their actions inside and outside the classroom.

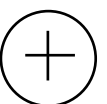


04 PARENTS

The ethical system that parents build at home creates foundational social and emotional skills. A research study that asked sixth-graders to rank the emphasis their parents placed on six values - three related to achievement (attend a good college, excel academically and have a successful career in the future) and three related to kindness (be respectful to others, try to help others in need and be kind to others) - found that children who perceived that their parents valued kindness over achievement did better than other children both in academic and psychological skills.

SEL in the Classroom

SEL is experiential and is best learnt when it is embodied in pedagogy and curriculum.

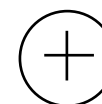
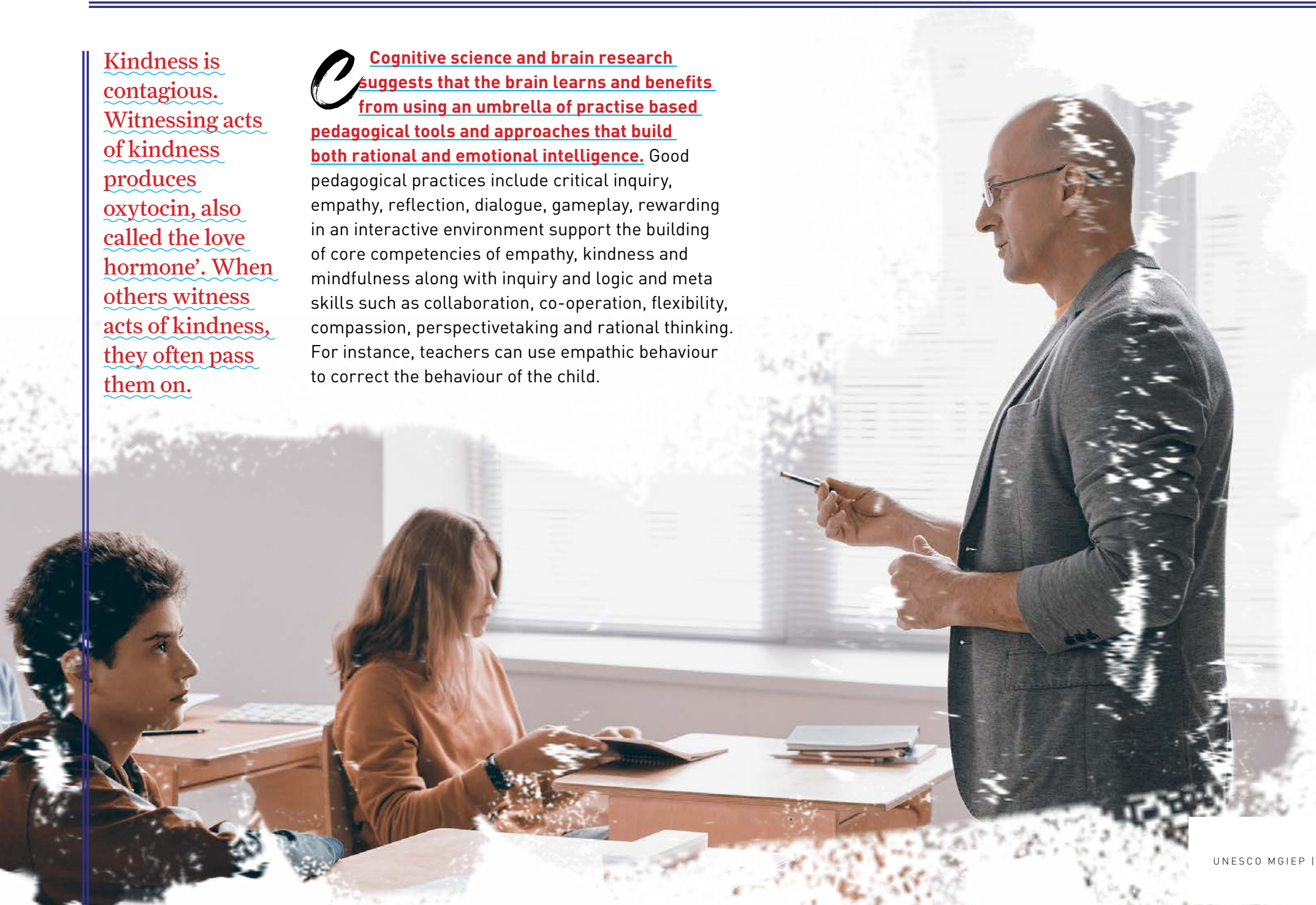


Pedagogy

Kindness is contagious. Witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin, also called the love hormone'. When others witness acts of kindness, they often pass them on.

Cognitive science and brain research suggests that the brain learns and benefits from using an umbrella of practise based pedagogical tools and approaches that build both rational and emotional intelligence. Good pedagogical practices include critical inquiry, empathy, reflection, dialogue, gameplay, rewarding in an interactive environment support the building of core competencies of empathy, kindness and mindfulness along with inquiry and logic and meta skills such as collaboration, co-operation, flexibility, compassion, perspectivetaking and rational thinking. For instance, teachers can use empathic behaviour to correct the behaviour of the child.

Empathetic discipline requires the teacher to be calm, and actively listen to a child to understand why an act of indiscipline was committed. Adopting this perspective has been shown to yield better emotional management, improved confidence and kinder children.



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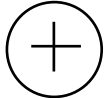
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ENDORSED BY



Leonie Arthur, Early Childhood Teacher and Academic.
Former Director of the Early Childhood program at
Western Sydney University, Australia



Gregoire Borst, Professor of Developmental Psychology
and Cognitive Neuroscience of Education, University of
Paris



Richard Davidson, William James and Vilas Research
Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry and Founder &
Director of the Center for Healthy Minds, University of
Wisconsin-Madison, USA



Brenda Dobia, Adjunct Fellow in the School of Education
at Western Sydney University, Australia



Anantha K. Duraiappah, Director, UNESCO MGIEP, New
Delhi, India



Joseph A. Durlak, Emeritus Professor of Psychology,
Loyola University Chicago



Matthew Farber, Assistant Professor of Technology,
Innovation and Pedagogy (TIP) program, University of
Northern Colorado, USA



Jennifer Frank, Associate Professor of Education in the
Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and
Special Education, and faculty affiliate of the Bennett-
Pierce Prevention Research Center and Child Study
Center at the Pennsylvania State University, USA



Patricia A Jennings, Professor of Education at University
of Virginia School of Education and Human Development



Dion Khlentzos, Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in
Counselling at Excelsia College, Sydney, Australia



M. Jennifer Kitil, Doctor in Human Development,
Learning, and Culture at the University of British
Columbia, Canada



Julien Mercier, Professor at Université du Québec à
Montréal, Canada



ENDORSED BY



Michelle Montgomery, Teacher, school counsellor and specialist in trauma-informed education, Australia



Roberto Parada, a child and adolescent psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Adolescent Development Behaviour and Wellbeing in the School of Education, Western Sydney University, Australia



Keerthi Ramanujan, a cognitive scientist specializing in bilingualism and biliteracy



Matthieu Ricard, a writer, photographer, translator and Buddhist monk, France



Susan E. Rivers, a social psychologist and an expert in emotional intelligence and social and emotional learning, USA



Sue Roffey, a psychologist, an academic and a speaker, UK



Clifford Saron, a research scientist at the Center for Mind and Brain and the MIND Institute at the University of California at Davis, US



Julie Sauve, a PhD student at the University of British Columbia, Canada



Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, an applied developmental psychologist and a Professor in Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, Canada



Sanchit Sethi, a gold medal in Master's in Economics (with specialization in Resource and Environmental Economics) and a Bachelor's degree in Economics (Hons) from the University of Delhi, India



Nimrod Sheinman, the founder and the director of Israel Centre for Mindfulness in Education, a co-founder of the Israel Centre for Mind-Body Medicine, and the initiator and director of the International Soul of Education Initiative



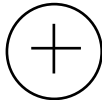
Nandini Chatterjee Singh, a cognitive neuroscientist and Senior Project Officer, UNESCO MGIEP



Narayanan Srinivasan, Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur



Jessica Trach, a senior researcher with the INVEST Research Flagship at the University of Turku





UNESCO MGIEP focuses on achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 towards education for building peaceful and sustainable societies across the world by developing programmes that promote social and emotional learning, innovate digital pedagogies and empower the youth.

UNESCO MGIEP, ICSSR Building,
First Floor, 35 Ferozshah Road,
New Delhi-110001

Phone: +91 11 23072356-60

