

IRN ACTIVITIES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND FUTURE PLANS

This report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of a WERA IRN, “Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Professional Development for Educators and Effective Teaching”¹ between September 2018 and December 2019 and outlines plans for 2020. The group has been examining how educators perceive the nature and value of their own Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills as well as what SEL skills they believe students need in order to compete for decent work and succeed in life. From September 2018 to December 2019, we had 11 virtual meetings as a group, dozens of one-on-one meetings, and one in-person meeting in Padova, Italy. Fifteen countries have successfully completed the first phase of the project, collecting survey data from educators and analyzing the data using a modified grounded theory and NVivo. The group will continue to analyze and compare the data across countries in order to create an SEL measure and professional development strategies (Phase 2 and 3).

ACTIVITIES

Led by two conveners, Lea Ferrari (Italy) and V. Scott Solberg (United States), and the project coordinator Chong Park (United States), the IRN had 11 virtual group meetings from September 2018 to December 2019. The kick-off meeting was held on September 21, 2018, and 22 career development researchers from 18 countries participated in the meeting via Zoom. In addition to introducing ourselves, we reviewed the theoretical framework of our research effort, which starts from access to caring and encouraging educators to enabling youth to establish career and life goals that would result in positive youth development outcomes, such as high school graduation, postsecondary completion, developing Social and Emotional Learning skills, personal health and well-being, and ultimately access to decent work. We also clarified our roles and expectations – each team is responsible for its own data collection and has ownership over the data and analysis. We would collectively design the survey questionnaires and learn about a modified grounded theory strategy to analyze the results, with a focus on cultural variations.

In winter 2018, the IRN focused on designing survey questions, discussing data collection methods, and working with each institution’s IRB. Each country translated the survey into their language and made initial contacts with schools and teachers. The convening team introduced Qualtrics as an online tool to collect survey data, although the final collection methods were determined by each country considering the availability and accessibility at each institution and of responding educators. The convening team also provided assistance to those who wish to use Qualtrics but do not have access to it through their institution. The LinkedIn group page was created to share ideas and resources.

In spring 2019, most countries were in the process of collecting data, with a few exceptions who struggled with participant recruitment as educators in some countries expressed lack of awareness on the topic of SEL. The convening team examined various ways to analyze data and introduced NVivo as an additional qualitative analytic tool that would help each country

¹ This work is being conducted as part of a larger cross-cultural research program referred to as *Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Professional Development for Educators and Effective Teaching* and is formally recognized by the World Education Research Association as an International Research Network (2019-2022)

to create a coding system and allow us to compare across countries. In addition, a codebook framework was introduced with examples from the US data that included a list of codes, culturally focused definitions, and examples. We also created a website through the University of Padova that describes our aims, activities, and conference participations.

In summer 2019, the IRN focused on sharing the survey results and finalizing the codebooks. Countries were asked to submit their codebook and summary report before our in-person meeting in July (more details in the next section). Based on our discussions in Padova, the participating countries continued to refine their codes and codebooks. In fall 2019, the convening team ran a cross-cultural cluster analysis on NVivo based on the collected codebooks, resulting in the identification of common and unique themes across countries. In September 2019, some of the IRN members participated in the IAEVG conference in Bratislava, Slovakia, where we had a symposium presentation that focused on our project rationale, methodology, and first year results. Several of us also had an oral session that focused on SEL skills and/or individual country results from the first phase. South Africa and the USA submitted proceedings related to the project which were published in March 2020.

Below is a list of our project-related individual activities between 2018 and 2019:

PAPER

- Marsay, G. (Submitted). A Case for Implementing Social and Emotional Learning Skills in South Africa. Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals.

PRESENTATION

- Andrei, A. & Scoda, A. D. (Accepted). Social Emotional Learning in the Romanian school context. International Congress of Psychology, Prague (postponed for July 2021).
- Marsay, G. (Submitted). South Africa needs social and emotional skills to improve education and to grow the economy. Educational Psychologists Association of South Africa.
- Marsay, G. (Submitted). The impact of Hope and Social Emotional Learning Interventions as a foundation for developing future readiness. PSYSSA Conference.
- Marsay G (Submitted). A case for implementing SEL skills in South Africa PSYSSA Conference.

CONFERENCE ORGANIZING

- Andrei, A. & Scoda, A. D. (November 15th, 2019): The Romanian team organised the National Conference ‘Social and emotional learning - dimensions and impact in the development of students' career. Challenges and solutions for school counselors and teachers’, in Bucharest with the support of the Euroguidance network Romania. Participants include 65 school counselors and directors of the counselling centres from all 41 Romanian counties and Bucharest as well as researchers and decision makers. They discussed the results of research based-evidence on the role of social and emotional learning, identified challenges and solutions to the benefit of students. The keynote speech “Social and Emotional Learning – dimensions and impact on career development” was presented by Dr. Scott V. Solberg from Boston University. Dr. Angela Andrei,

researcher at the Institute of Educational Sciences presented the results of the SEL project in Romania.

BLOG

- Marsay, G. (2020, January 20). Social and emotional skills will improve education and grow our economy. thoughtleader Mail and Guardian.
- Marsay, G. (2020, April 24). Now, more than ever, we need Social and Emotional Learning Skills interventions. thoughtleader Mail and Guardian.

WEBINAR

- Andrei, A. & Scoda, A. D. (Planned): A webinar on the SEL project outcomes addressed to the Euroguidance network of career guidance practitioners from Europe is planned to take place in September 2020 with the participation of Dr. Scott V. Solberg from Boston University, Dr. Angela Andrei and Dr. Andreea Scoda, researchers at the Institute of Educational Sciences Bucharest, Romania.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Our first press release was published on May 16th, 2019 that details the project aims, SEL frameworks, and quotes from the participating researchers on what motivated them to participate in this project and what they value most in their work. On July 9-10, the IRN met at the University of Padova, Italy, to share the initial results of the first phase of the study. Fifteen countries, including China, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, and the United States, completed the first wave of data collection and joined the meeting in person or via Zoom. Thirteen countries submitted their summary report and codebook before the meeting, and the documents were shared as hard copies and also available on Google Drive for those joining the meetings remotely. The sample size of the 15 countries varied from 18 to 95 educators, and the number of codes/themes ranged from 7 to 131. Many countries struggled with their educators having lack of prior knowledge on SEL. However, the group was able to identify some common codes/ themes as well as some themes that are unique to a particular country. “Empathy” and “communication” are just two examples of SEL skills that are commonly found important in most countries. There were also many interesting themes that can be understood better with the social and political contexts of each country. “Verbalization” was a unique theme found from Japanese data. Considering the cultural backgrounds that emphasize more reflection or thinking than acting, it was interesting to see how Japanese educators are encouraging youth to express their feelings with words and considering such skills important to teach in the classroom. In South Africa, it is critical for educators to consider a culture of violence and children at disadvantaged backgrounds. Themes, such as “forgiveness,” “free expression,” “loss,” and “restorative justice,” revealed the unique societal situation that South African educators are facing. The discussions in Padova reflected how educators in 15 countries perceive SEL skills, as well as the different shades of meaning in these SEL skills that indicate the importance of considering cultural, societal, and political differences in discussing SEL skills. Based on our first in-person meeting, our second press release was published on July 17th that details our discussions and activities. Our Padova meeting and collective research effort also influenced emerging scholars at the University of Padova. Two master’s students of Dr. Lea Ferrari, Sara Congiu and Nura Ferraretto

Hassanien Ali, assisted with data collection and conducted a literature review on socio emotional learning in school. Congiu's master's thesis was titled "Socio-emotional learning and career education: educating hearts, inspiring minds and designing paths," and Ali's work was titled "Social and emotional learning at school: the teachers' point of view."

FUTURE PLANS (2020-2022)

As a result of active participation in international conferences, many countries that are not part of the IRN yet reached out to us asking for more information about the group. Two additional countries, Singapore and Togo, joined the network in early 2020, and the IRN will continue to conduct more outreach throughout the year. The IRN also initiated a webinar series on SEL and Career Development in March 2020. The kick-off webinar had 3 IRN members as panelists, was moderated by the two conveners, and led by a senior researcher at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The IRN will continue to invite researchers, students, and education leaders around the globe to the webinar series to raise the awareness on SEL and promote SEL skills among students and educators. Although all in-person meetings and conferences are canceled due to COVID-19, the IRN plans to keep supporting each other virtually and stay active in our collective effort. The group began working on identifying SEL items based on the first phase of the study that would help us create a new SEL measure that is culturally competent and responsive to the changing workplace.

In 2018-19, the IRN was actively engaged in the discussion of innovative solutions that would ultimately enable youth to gain the "deeper human" and "advanced technical skills." We have seen concerns among career development researchers and educators around the globe but also a strong desire to change the existing perceptions and practices. It is promising to see the initial results of the first phase of the project, as well as the collaborative work planned ahead for the IRN in the upcoming year.