Re-imagining school leadership to foster social and emotional development of students

EDUCATION SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF STUDENTS. MAYA MENON REPORTS HOW INDIAN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK OR ISELF, AN AGE-BANDED FRAMEWORK OF STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING, CAN BE USED BY SCHOOL LEADERS TO BOOST HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS.

Schools today have to contend with several challenges and consequences thereof – increasing prevalence of mental health issues among students such as depression, inability to cope with stress, suicidal tendencies, violence and abuse, and growing incidents of bullying and negative peer pressure. Schools and school leaders are striving to promote and nurture wellbeing and improve the learning experience for all learners.

The issue of wellbeing has merited attention in the recently circulated draft of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 – 'Recent research drawing from a large number of scientifically rigorous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies demonstrates that introduction of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in schools can lead to improved cognitive and emotional resilience and promote constructive social engagement... Explicit training in socio-emotional skills ensures higher levels of attention and emotional and cognitive regulation that are necessary not only for well-being, empathy towards others, and lower stress, but also leads to increased academic success. In the current context though, schools continue to be seen more as a preparation for employment rather than an endeavour to realise full human potential'. This is a call for action to support the implementation of a model that improves the social and emotional wellbeing of all students.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as 'the process of acquiring a set of social and emotional skills – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making – in a safe, supportive environment that encourages social, emotional, and cognitive development and provides authentic opportunities for practising social-emotional skills'. This definition is adapted from *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)* published in 2005. In our country, due to the absence of relevant and well-articulated standards, the affective domain has been largely disregarded or side-lined by our schools and there is no well-defined school curriculum for SEL emanating from such standards.

This clear acknowledgement of the importance of socio-emotional aspects of learning in the draft NEP is a great impetus to the dissemination of The Teacher Foundation's rigorously researched and contextualised Indian Social and Emotional Framework (ISELF). ISELF provides the competencies schools need to develop in Indian children in a methodical age-banded manner. It is accompanied by specific guidelines for school teachers, on how to nurture these skills in an age-appropriate manner.

Research underpinning ISELF

The Teacher Foundation (TTF) conducted a six-year nation-wide research on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) that lead to the development of ISELF. In a span of five years starting in 2012, a research design was formulated, survey tools were piloted, data was gathered from students, teachers, and headmasters in 10 different languages from 15 locations (urban and rural) across India and analysed, to finally develop ISELF. This was done in 90 schools (private and government), covering 850 teachers (grades 1 to 12) and 3300 students (grades 4 to 12), and included 30 group interviews. The data gathered included perceptions of teachers and students of the domain of social and emotional learning. Subsequently, it was piloted across one academic year, in 12 representative schools, six of which were experimental and six control schools. This research was supported by *Wipro Applying Thought in Schools* for four and a half years and more recently from Maitri Trust and another organisation that wishes to remain anonymous. The research sets out to bridge the SEL gap between the stated intent in the NCF (2005) and actual action on the ground, in schools.

The questions that were examined included – what could be an appropriate framework of standards for SEL in a large and diverse country like India? What should be the age-bands in this framework? What should be the relevant guidelines for teachers and educators to use the framework meaningfully and foster social and emotional competencies in children?

The knowledge base thus created by this research is meant for dissemination amongst school practitioners, especially school leaders, who are primarily responsible for infusing a better learning environment in their schools.

Key findings

The following findings (only a sample is given) in A – H reflect what our schools consider important or worrying in the context of SEL. Inferences are made alongside.

A. Teachers' opinion of SEL

- 87 per cent of teachers recognise the need for the combined involvement of the school, home, and community for the development of SEL.
- However, 48 per cent of teachers, felt that SEL cannot be taught in classrooms. According to them, children learn it through their experiences.

B. Teachers top 3 priorities with regard to their students' learning

- Studies (46 per cent of total responses).
- Development of social-emotional skills (29 per cent of total responses).
- Outdoor games and sports (22 per cent of total responses).

C. Top student behaviours liked by teachers

- Taking initiative and persistence in studies.
- Compliance with school rules and norms.
- Having positive relations with teachers and parents.

Inference: Student behaviours that please teachers seem to be linked to aspects of Self Management and Relationship Management.

D. Top factors that make students happy

- Academic success.
- Being with friends and family.
- Helping others.
- Being acknowledged.

Inference: Like teachers, students too seem to give more importance to aspects of Self Management and Relationship Management.

E. Top student behaviours that worry teachers

- Indiscipline in class.
- Disinterest in studies.
- Lack of concentration.
- Poor work and time management.

F. Top worries of teachers about girls

- Shyness or keeping silent.
- Focus on looks, appearance, and inappropriate dressing.
- Relations with boys (being too casual / too shy).

G. Top worries of teachers about boys

- Physical fighting.
- Use of abusive language.
- Irregular school attendance.

H. Students' interactions with others

Percentage of favourable responses

	Teachers	Students 4th to 8th	Students 9th to 12th
Cooperation with others	76%	85%	60%
Interactions with the opposite gender	84%	62%	74%
Relations with parents and other adults	66%	70%	56%

Amongst students (9th to 12th)

	Girls	Boys
When working with others, wanting things done in one's own way	45%	56%
Have physical fights to get what they want	23%	29%

Amongst students (4th to 8th)

	Girls	Boys
Feel shy talking and playing with children of the opposite gender	29%	40%

Amongst students (9th to 12th)

	Girls	Boys
Feel shy talking and playing with children of the opposite gender	15%	25%

Inference from the above table: Boys tend to expect things to go their way while working in groups, more than girls. Also, a marginally higher percentage of boys reported engaging in physical fights for what they want. Moreover, more boys than girls indicate a sense of awkwardness and shyness when interacting with peers from the opposite gender.

Development of ISELF

The above research indicated that while schools see value in social and emotional dimensions of learning, they don't actively encourage abilities in their learners that could fall under the SEL competencies. From the questionnaire and interview surveys with teachers and students, it was found that the two target groups have slightly different expectations with regard to student behaviours. These expectations can be mapped to the five SEL competencies.

SEL competencies teachers consider important in order

1. Self Management
2. Decision Making
3. Relationship Management
4. Social Awareness
5. Self-Awareness

SEL competencies students consider important (in order)

1. Relationship Management
2. Self Management
3. Social Awareness
4. Decision making
5. Self-Awareness

3 WHAT is ISELF?

ISELF's primary objective is to foster social-emotional development of Indian school goers, in the age-group of 6 to 18 years. ISELF will help teachers and counsellors develop five vital social-emotional competencies in children: ***Self Awareness, Self Management, Relationship Management, Social Awareness and Decision Making.*** Each of these competencies are explained below.

SEL competencies and descriptions

Self-awareness

The ability to recognise one's feelings and emotions and how they influence one's decisions and behaviour; accept oneself as a unique person; appreciate one's personal traits; develop positive self-worth; take pride in one's skills, talents, and achievements; assess one's strengths and weaknesses accurately, thereby developing an overall sense of confidence and optimism.

Self-management

The ability to express one's emotions appropriately; deal with personally upsetting situations in healthy and effective ways; identify sources of help and form a self-support system; set goals (personal, academic and career) and work towards them in an organised manner.

Relationship management

The ability to form and sustain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups; have meaningful social interactions with friends, family, peers, colleagues etc.; have clear, timely and assertive communication; express authentic views and opinions; offer constructive feedback; resist inappropriate social pressure and negotiate conflicts in mutually beneficial ways.

Social awareness

The ability to work and form positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds (including religion, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, economic status); understand different cultures; empathise with and accept people and practices that are different from one's own; be sensitive to one's surroundings; have a perspective on various social problems and take the required action to counter them.

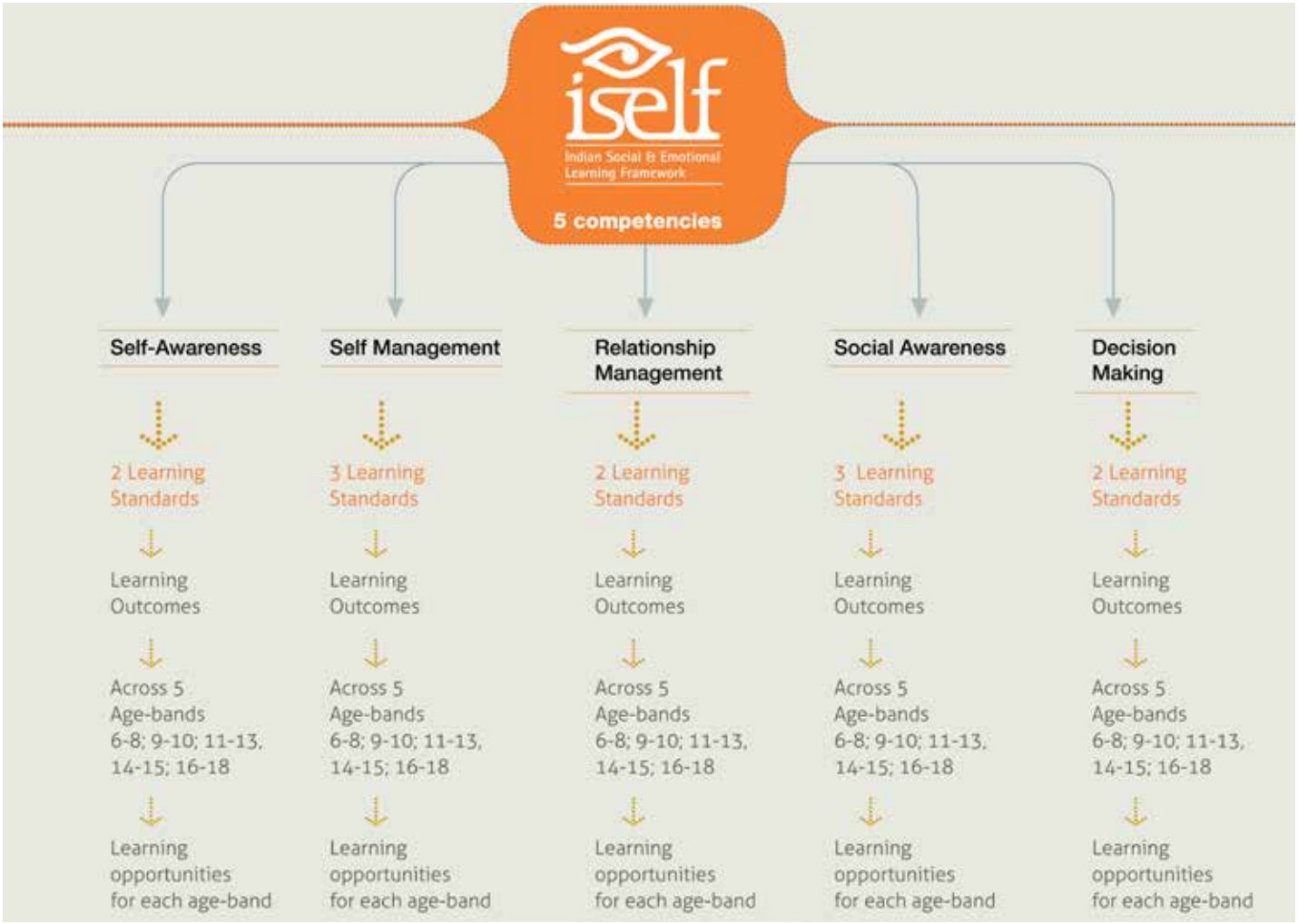
Decision making

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour, health, relationships, and career considering existing social, ethical and safety norms; understand the rationale behind different rules; examine consequences of one's actions; respect one's own and others' rights; demonstrate responsible citizenship in the larger interests of society.*

*[*The descriptions of these competencies have been contextualised based on the nationwide empirical research study.]*

ISELF has been developed with accompanying guidelines for teachers and educators to be used as a handy ready reckoner for developing social and emotional competencies in children and transforming existing school cultures in India.

The ISELF tree



A sample Learning Standard in the self awareness competency

Self Awareness:

The ability to accurately recognise one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behaviour. This includes assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

Learning Standard 1
Identify one's emotions and their influence on one's behaviour, performance and decisions

	Age 6-8 years	Age 9-10 years	Age 11-13 years
	Learning Outcomes		
	Accurately label emotions and recognise how they are linked to behaviour	Describe different emotions and the situations that cause them	Recognise that one's emotional responses can be distinct from others' in the same situation
	Students are given opportunities to...		
1	Identify emotions (eg happy, surprised, sad, angry, proud, afraid) expressed in "feeling faces" or photographs	Describe a variety of emotions and identify the ones they have experienced	Describe situations that trigger various emotions in them(eg listening to music, talking to a friend, taking a test, being scolded)
2	Describe how various situations make them feel	Describe situations that trigger various emotions (eg listening to music, talking to a friend, taking a test, being scolded)	Share their emotional experiences related to different situations with their peers
3	Recognise that feelings change throughout the day	Recognise change in their moods and reasons for the same	Find out how others feel in different situations using the verbal and non – verbal cues (eg: language and choice of words, facial expressions, gestures, etc.)
4	Share feelings (eg through speaking, writing, drawing) in different situations	Distinguish between different intensity levels of emotions they might feel in different situations (eg: irritated vs angry vs furious, pleasant v/s joyful v/s elated, etc	Examine the similarities and differences in their own and others' feelings in the same situation

Age 14-15 years		Age 16-18 years
Determine how emotions contribute to performance	Analyse how emotions affect decisions and responsible behaviour	Examine ways of dealing with conflicting thoughts and emotions
Recognise aspects of themselves that they are proud of	Describe how the way they think affects the way they feel, and the way they feel affects the way they think, and that this affects their behaviour	Recognise that some thoughts and emotions can make them uncomfortable (physically and mentally)
Identify factors that cause stress in positive and negative ways	Recognise how changing their interpretation of an event can alter how they and others feel about it	Identify ways in which social institutions (eg: school, family, marriage, religion etc) and cultural norms influence the way they experience and respond to certain emotions
Recognise the effect of self-talk* on emotions (eg I am good at this, I have a lot to be proud of, This is too hard etc)	Focus on the strengths of their community (religious, social, cultural, neighbourhood etc) rather than its shortcomings, while making choices	Recognise that there are certain emotions that seem difficult to explain and justify
Identify physical or bodily reactions and emotional reactions they display when stressed (eg: increased heart – rate, perspiration, sweaty palms, irritability, anger, anxiety etc)	Recognise the consequences of different ways of communicating one's emotions	Find out ways in which they typically deal with conflicting thoughts and emotions (eg: trying to forget about them, blaming or being angry with somebody less in power, doing exactly opposite of what they feel like doing, etc)

4. How can schools use ISELF?

ISELF will be freely accessible online to all schools and teachers from July 2019 at www.teacherfoundation.org. The tree diagram below provides a bird's eye view of ISELF. There are many ways in which ISELF could be included into a school curriculum.

Integrated with the Academic curriculum

ISELF can inform teachers on what competencies to focus on depending on the subject taught and the age of the students.

Separate time-tabled SEL Periods

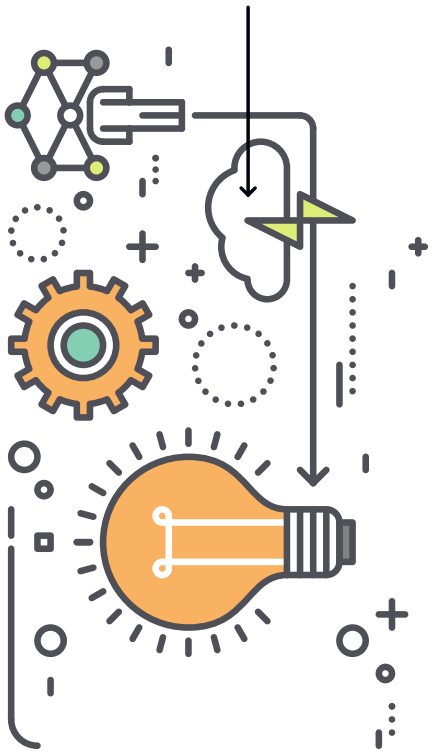
A time-tabled weekly period, across grades 1 to 12, for planned and structured sessions on SEL. The facilitator refers to ISELF on a specific social-emotional skill appropriate to the grade and plans the lesson around it.

Focussed SEL programmes

The school allots specific days at the beginning or towards the end of the academic year, or after school during the academic year, to conduct SEL programmes using a planned and structured approach to developing specific social emotional skills. ISELF can be used to plan activities appropriate to the age group.

Specialised SEL interventions

These interventions are specially planned for children with identified behavioural or emotional problems. Similar to other SEL interventions, they have a design and structure to meet certain key SEL objectives, within a given time-frame. ISELF can be used to plan activities appropriate to the age group. T



AUTHOR

Maya Menon is the Founder Director of The Teacher Foundation. Her areas of professional experience include conceptualising, designing, and implementing a wide range of school and teacher-related projects and services, including the Wipro Applying Thought in Schools Teacher Empowerment Project, initiated in 2001. She is an Accredited Teacher Trainer for Jenny Mosley Consultancies (UK) for training teachers on Whole School Quality Circle Time across schools in India. She also initiated the Safe & Sensitive Schools project initiated in 2009 and research & development of the Indian Social & Emotional Learning Framework between 2012 & 2019. She has presented at a wide range of conferences in India and abroad. Follow her @ttfMaya

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