

Think Piece: Individual and Community - The hand metaphor

The SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) curriculum is based on a number of individual skills, many based on 'I can' statements. However, we all operate in a variety of community contexts. Much of the original SEAL material is set within a school context and although it encourages schools, classes and groups to establish their own community this is not fully developed, nor does it look to the wider national or international context. It takes a western perspective and does not encourage exploration through the perspective of other cultures. The SEAL and the Global Dimension project has reframed the SEAL Learning Outcomes to recognize that the individual operates within a wider community (local to global) and planetary context, incorporating the eight key concepts of the global dimension*.

The SEAL-GD project has been working with Vanessa Andreotti** to explore issues relating to social and emotional learning from a variety of cultural perspectives. We were very struck by her use of the hand metaphor to describe the difference between the western focus on the individual and the greater focus on being part of a wider community in many non-western cultures.

"In an interview with an Guarani elder in Brazil, I asked the question: what is development for your community and is it different from the way development is understood in the city? He replied:

The word development in Portuguese (desenvolvimento) can literally be interpreted as de-evolution, which is about going backwards. What people in the city do not understand is that the land is alive and it becomes ill when we live on the same spot for too long. That is why we keep moving to different places, so that it can heal itself, replenish what we take from it. And we are not separate from it either: we are part of it and we are part of each other. When people come here to tell us how to live, they forget that. Now you imagine if the stomach turned to the liver and said: you are worthless, you should be a stomach! If the liver decides to be a stomach you can see what will happen and that is what you would call cancer.

If you look at your hand, there are five different fingers – five DIFFERENT fingers. You would not want a hand with only thumbs. You would not want to get rid of any of your fingers either. Each finger is essential for different tasks and each finger is insufficient in itself – it is co-dependent on the other fingers through the hand – even if they do not know the hand that connects them, they work together. They are not trying to cut each other off. For us development is about the possibility to be a finger in a hand: to give and to receive, to contribute and to learn from others. The hand does not have to construct big things for a life of its fingers to be worthwhile. The hand, the body, is the Earth. If instead of the Earth you have the economy as the hand, you start to chop off the fingers who can't or won't cooperate."



Questions to consider:

- What does well-being look like if we see the hand as the economy or the hand as the Earth?
- What difference would it make for education?
- How could education be imagined from both perspectives?
- "For us development is about the possibility to be a finger in a hand: to give and to receive, to contribute and to learn from others." How does this compare with how you implement SEAL in your school? Is the focus on the individual or the whole-school community? Where are the boundaries of your school community?

*Conflict resolution, diversity, global citizenship, human rights, interdependence, social justice, sustainable development, values and perceptions – see the presentation on SEAL and the Global Dimension in the CPD section of the website www.sealgd.org.uk

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