

Social, emotional learning can boost academic performance

A new global survey of more than 2,000 parents and educators found that both groups have a narrow understanding of social and emotional learning (SEL). Those reviewed view it primarily as a means of achieving better classroom discipline, not as a way to ensure better economic, academic and social outcomes over the long term.



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Social and emotional skills, such as collaboration, communication and problem solving, are increasingly necessary, as jobs evolve in the 21st century. SEL confers academic benefits; for example, a recent review of more than 200 SEL programmes showed that social and emotional skills could boost academic performance by as much as 11%.

Education technology holds enormous promise to help foster social and emotional skills. It can personalise learning, engage the disengaged, complement what happens in the classroom, extend education outside the classroom and provide access to learning for students who might otherwise not have sufficient education opportunities.

A new report, *New Vision for Education: Fostering Social and Emotional Learning through Technology*, from the World Economic Forum, written in collaboration with The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), was released late last week.

Despite the promise of technology, most of the learning strategies commonly used to develop social and emotional skills do not use technology or use it in only a limited way. The survey shows that most parents and educators recognise the potential for education technology to build social and emotional skills but also that they do not fully understand which technologies have the most promise or how to use them best.

In addition, parents and educators prefer to use technologies to impart foundational academic skills rather than to foster social and emotional skills. For example, in the US, 67% of teachers surveyed believe technology is best used for foundational subjects, such as literacy and numeracy, whereas only 43% believe it is best used for social and emotional skills, results that are similar to findings in other countries. In addition, the number of SEL-related ed-tech products in the market today is insufficient.

Three opportunities to use ed-tech to advance SEL

Interviews with education and technology experts and research into many promising examples of ed-tech products underscore the fact that technology can indeed play a pivotal role in fostering SEL.

The report unpacks critical opportunities that policy-makers, educators, parents, and others can tap to use ed-tech to foster the social and emotional skills that children need:

1. Capitalise on what works. Help educators, educators and others understand what really boosts social and emotional learning. In the course of the study, the report compiled a list of 55 product features that are correlated with the ten critical social and emotional skills.
2. Embed SEL into foundational ed-tech products. Technology developers can embed SEL features into ed-tech products that support foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy, where 95% of venture-capital investment dollars directed to education technology have flowed since 2011.
3. Expand the realm of the possible. Take advantage of five nascent technology trends—wearable devices, leading-edge apps, virtual reality, advanced analytics and machine learning, and affective computing—that extend ways of fostering SEL and offer potential for exciting new learning strategies.

“To thrive in the 21st century, students must have strong social and emotional skills, which are increasingly vital to the changing labour market and are clearly linked to a range of benefits including higher levels of academic success and employment. However, many stakeholders lack awareness of all of the positive and long-lasting impacts of SEL,” said Allis Bailey, a senior partner and the head of BCG’s US Education practice.

Elizabeth Kaufman, a BCG partner and a project advisor for the report, added, “Education technology offers an opportunity to address some of the barriers by embedding SEL features into foundational academic products. The list of features linked to social and emotional skills that we have compiled in this report can serve as a guide.”

“Tremendous innovation is happening in education as well as across industries that we can learn from to design new learning experience for the future,” said Mengyu Annie Luo, head of Media, Entertainment and Information Industries at the World Economic Forum. “We are excited to continue the work with leading technologists, thinkers, educators, researchers, business partners, and policy makers to identify new ways to advance SEL for all the critical skills students need.”

To download the report, go to www.bcgperspectives.com.

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