

# Socioemotional learning: an integral piece of whole child development

March 2020

Dr. Neil Boothby  
University of Notre Dame  
[nboothby@und.edu](mailto:nboothby@und.edu)

# The Science on Child Development

## Three Critical Concepts

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012



### Life Course Science

Childhood experiences have lifelong consequences.



### Epigenetics

Early childhood ecology becomes biologically embedded through epigenetic mechanisms.

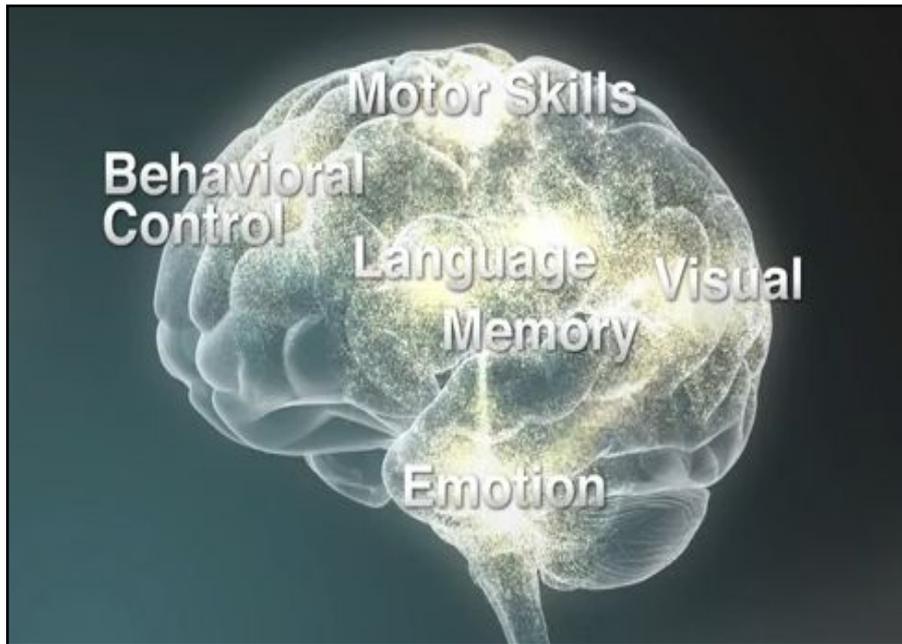


### Developmental Neuroscience

Brain architecture is experience dependent and influenced by ecology (plasticity).

# Brain Architecture Supports Life-long Learning

---



**Brains are built over time**

**Complex skills build on simple skills**

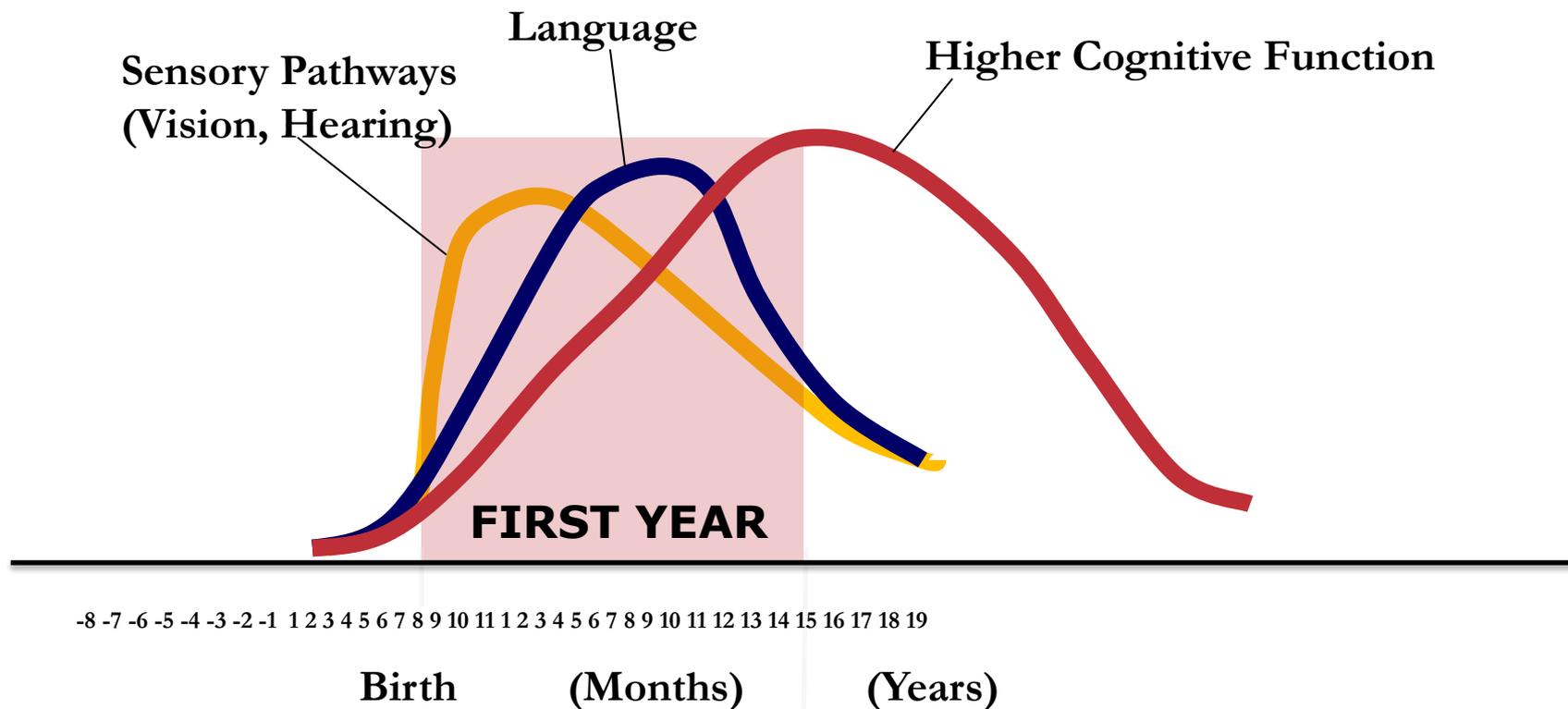
**Cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities intertwined**

**A strong foundation in the early years is invaluable**

# Neural Circuits are Wired in a Bottom-up Sequence

## Three Critical Concepts

Source: C.A. Nelson (2000)



# The Home is the First School

## Parents play a critical role in child development

---

- Pregnancy and the first 1000 days of life sets the stage for fulfilling individual potential
- The road to academic achievement, higher wages and social mobility starts at birth
- The best metric of child poverty may have to do not with income but with how often a child is spoken and read to
- What are the key investments in young children to support lifelong learning and success?



# Adolescent Brain Development

## A second window of opportunity

Source: Alliance for Excellence in Education

DID YOU KNOW?

### ADOLESCENCE IS A CRITICAL WINDOW FOR LEARNING

For students to succeed in college, career, and life, they need to be able to



Master Academic Content



Collaborate



Think Critically



Develop Social & Emotional Skills



Communicate Effectively



Solve Problems

Adolescence is the time to develop these skills.

Why? Adolescents' brains are growing and changing as they prepare for adulthood.

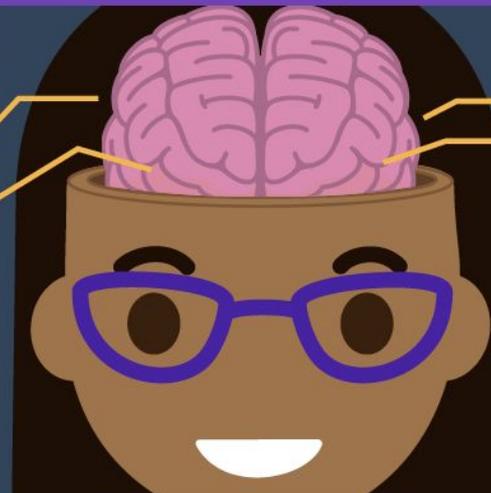
### THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN IS

#### Hardwiring Important Skills

Connections related to important skills become stronger, and connections to skills that are not being used are removed.

#### Becoming More Efficient

The brain increases speed between connections, making them more efficient.



#### Preparing for Change

Experiences during the adolescent years drive the brain to adapt for future needs.

#### Creating Connections

The brain starts creating more complex connections, making it easier to engage in advanced thinking and mental tasks.

It is not enough to invest *only* in early childhood and elementary education.<sup>1</sup> Students are more likely to succeed when they receive continuous support throughout development.

# Socioemotional Learning and Adolescent development In Schools

---

**SEL:** key attitudes and skills to understand-manage emotions and make thoughtful-responsible decisions

Purpose based learning is critical - connecting inner development (SEL) to the real world

## How are practitioners working to:

1. Integrate SEL classes throughout the school?
2. Bring voice of students into the curriculum?
3. Create cultural relevant competencies?
4. Create psychologically safe classrooms?



# Child Development and Learning is Influenced by Ecology

---

60-70% of achievement gaps are evident before a child begins kindergarten

Nutrition and food security is linked to school performance

Parenting is correlated with economic and social realities

How parents value education is also linked to economic and social realities

Social-economic realities is linked to youth opportunities

**How can SEL contribute to Youth and child development?**

# Some Attributes of Effective Communities of Practice



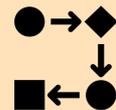
Grounded in Science



Learns through doing



Generates actionable evidence



Scans globally, learns locally, applies regionally/nationally



Partners share a common vision



Partners complement each other

**Question of the Day:** What is the Vision and Commitment for a Peruvian Community of Practice?

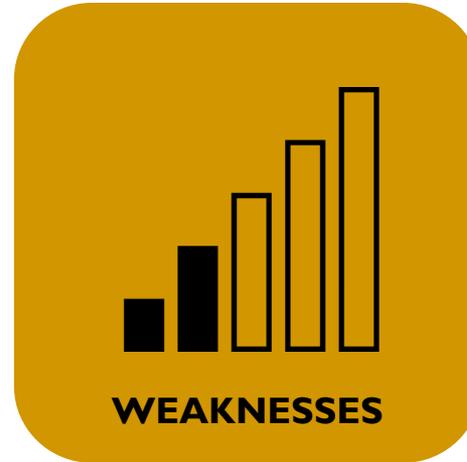
# Measuring “fuzzy” social and emotional skills in children: Opportunities and challenges

March 2020

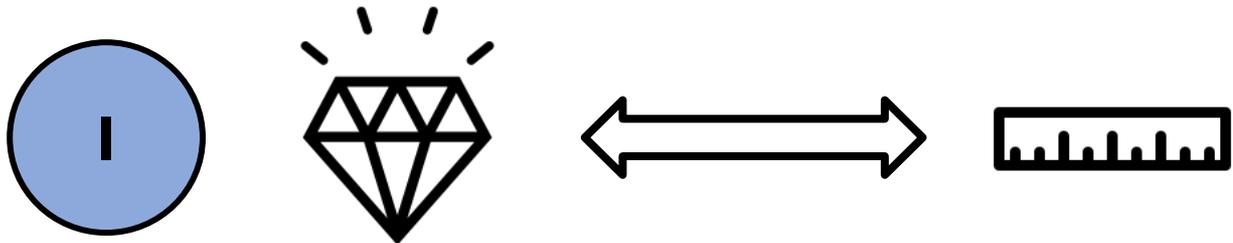
Dr. Nikhit D'Sa  
University of Notre Dame  
[ndsa@und.edu](mailto:ndsa@und.edu)

# Brief overview of SEL measurement

---



# Why should we measure SEL skills?



2

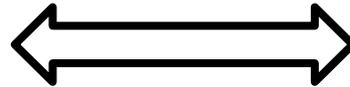
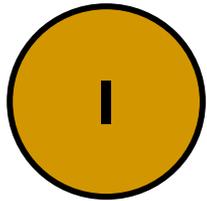
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TARGET 4.7

*By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development*

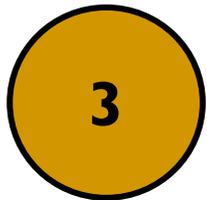
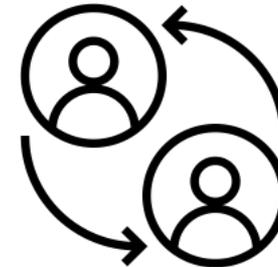
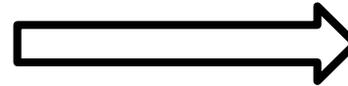
3

WHAT programs? | WHICH children? | WHEN? | HOW?

# What is the status of SEL measurement?

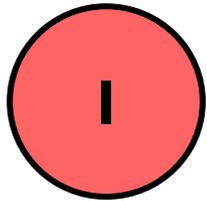


Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

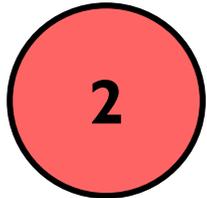
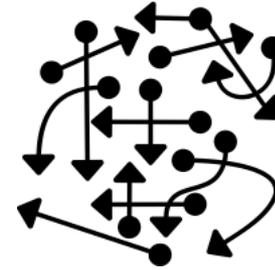


Limited information on data-driven decision making

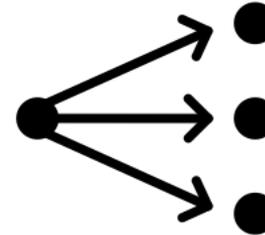
# What are the challenges?



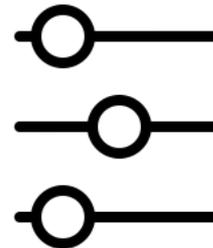
Limited clarity on purpose, data use, and responsibility



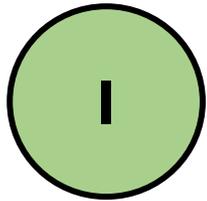
Picking single skill to represent complex social and emotional growth



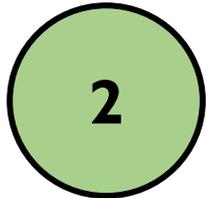
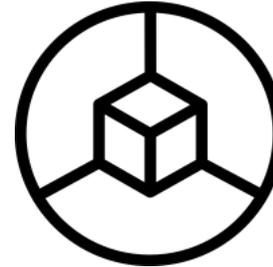
Setting an arbitrary threshold or benchmark



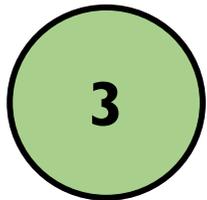
# What are possible next steps?



Agree on framework and definitions



Develop medium- and long-term learning agenda



Foster community of learning

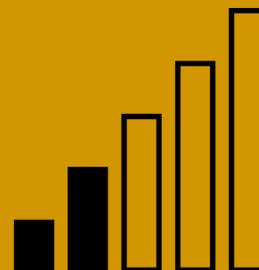


Measuring SEL skills is important if we want to build national and global attention for its importance



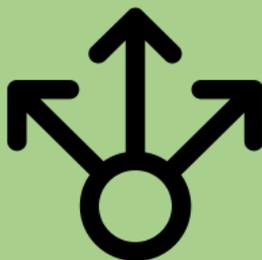
**STRENGTHS**

SEL measurement is hard and complex; it takes time and investment



**WEAKNESSES**

Use measurement to build a SEL community of practice that can advocate for its inclusion

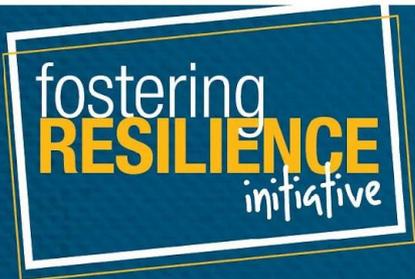


**OPPORTUNITIES**



**THREATS**

Be careful about rushing to create national indicators and benchmarks



*Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child*



**Nikhit D'Sa**  
**Neil Boothby**  
**Fostering Resilience Initiative**



**ndsa@nd.edu**  
**nboothby@nd.edu**  
**FRI@nd.edu**



**@NikhitDsa**  
**@NeilBoothbyI**