



## JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

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Book Review: *NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the Social, the Emotional and the Sustainable* edited by Andy Smart, Margaret Sinclair, Aaron Benavot, Jean Bernard, Colette Chabbott, S. Garnett Russell, and James Williams

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# BOOK REVIEW

*NISSEM GLOBAL BRIEFS: EDUCATING FOR THE SOCIAL,  
THE EMOTIONAL AND THE SUSTAINABLE*  
EDITED BY ANDY SMART, MARGARET SINCLAIR, AARON BENAVIDES,  
JEAN BERNARD, COLETTE CHABBOTT, S. GARNETT RUSSELL,  
AND JAMES WILLIAMS  
NISSEM, 2019. 453 PAGES  
FREE ONLINE ACCESS: [HTTPS://WWW.NISSEM.ORG/NGB1](https://www.nissem.org/NGB1)

*NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the Social, the Emotional and the Sustainable* addresses how to educate children to have important skills: skills for life, skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, skills needed in a modern, unequal, globalized, and polluted world; skills needed to reach the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In its 10 sections and 42 chapters, this edited volume offers the diverse perspectives of more than 60 contributors.

Education in emergencies audiences will be interested in this inspirational book because it provides knowledge on how to use education to achieve sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, and gender equality; to promote a culture of peace, nonviolence, global citizenship, and appreciation for cultural diversity; and to encourage understanding of the contributions diverse cultures make to sustainable development all around the world, as stated in SDG Target 4.7. A central message of this book is that the SDG 4.7 themes are most effectively integrated into textbooks and other educational materials when the social and emotional learning (SEL) components of these topics are emphasized. The chapters are well written and interesting, most ideas are clearly presented, and readers will appreciate the practical advice. It is especially important for practitioners in all areas of development, and for those seeking to promote a sustainable future.

The book's contributors represent a wide range of educational backgrounds and fields, which makes this book relevant in diverse contexts. The 10 sections cover relevant areas of SDG 4.7, which calls on leaders from government, academia, civil society, and business to, by 2030, accelerate the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development around the world, and ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

The first three sections address how to embed SDG 4.7 themes in textbooks, how to contextualize SEL in textbooks, and how to promote inclusion and social cohesion in textbooks. These sections suggest that, if the SDGs are to be reached by 2030, children

need different skills than previous generations. The general recommendations for changing curricula are neither provocative nor surprising, and they provide practical examples of how to develop and advance next-generation skills. Importantly, these sections provide researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with valuable materials for writing proposals, policy notes, and research papers.

Section four focuses on how interdisciplinary and holistic science can inform SEL, and on the mechanisms of cognitive development that underlie this relationship. Creating new textbooks and other SEL tools requires content, shape, and form, as sections five through nine demonstrate. While reading these sections, I imagined textbook authors around the world going from good intentions and principles to actually creating and implementing effective learning material for children.

This comprehensive volume offers examples from many countries, including Botswana and Somalia, India and Bangladesh, South Sudan and Rwanda, Afghanistan and New Zealand. These examples are both enjoyable and useful, and practitioners will find similarities with the kinds of challenges they face when developing materials across contexts, including how to create material that is engaging for all readers and relevant across gender, religion, reading skills, and various barriers. I was pleased that the contributors to this book have collaborated with both the biggest players in international development and a range of smaller NGOs. We Love Reading, one of the smaller NGOs represented, advocates that relevant learning material is crucial to empowering children and that it needs to tell stories that all children across the globe can identify with.

The last section raises the question of what actions NISSEM proposes to advance SDG 4.7 themes that are supported by SEL, and makes the following recommendations:

- Integrate SDG 4.7 themes into all education strategies.
- Measure and monitor SEL to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development of the relevant SDG 4.7 goals in terms of attitudes, behavior, skills, and content knowledge.
- Invest in teaching and learning materials and secure the donor commitments needed to achieve SDG 4.7.

This broad perspective gives an overview of the SEL field, which I deeply appreciate. However, for textbook authors working on SEL materials, there are some practical things I wish this book had provided, such as a list of where recommended

questionnaires and measurements can be found and how to access them. For example, the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment is mentioned in several chapters and it would be useful to know how to find it. I also would have liked to see a list of existing SEL materials and how to access them in different languages.

From a more philosophical point of view, I found myself wondering if I am the only one running challenging SEL projects with data that are often messy and difficult to use to create a clear picture; the examples in the book make it seem that there are only neat, well-structured SEL experiences and evaluations going on. I searched the text for the words “failure” and “success,” and while the word “success” was used 89 times, “failure” was used only eight times, and never in reference to a project’s implementation or data collection. As a practitioner, I have seen a lot of data that are missing gender, age, and dates, where pre- and post-measures have been mixed up, or the work is not systematically evaluated, but this volume does not offer any examples of learning from failure. When compared with the startup and innovative environments I have been involved in, this book makes it appear that education’s SEL practitioners are not sharing their mistakes generously. Paradoxically, some of the stories and tools discussed in this volume are about students struggling to accept making mistakes. Learning from mistakes could be liberating for practitioners, and also more fun, empowering, and realistic.

I am working on a digitalized psychosocial tool to be used with Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and although this book may not make my everyday choices easier, it has definitely helped me base some of my decisions more solidly on research-based evidence and shared experiences from the field. For textbook authors, publishers, and SEL developers, *NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the Social, the Emotional and the Sustainable* is a must read.

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