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The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

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Putting Theory into Action: The Evolution and Practice of Structural Dynamics
David Kantor with Deborah Wallace; Sarah Hill and Tony Melville

This article gives a unique glimpse into both the development and the application of a key body of work by one of today’s most important organizational theorists and practitioners. In Part One, David Kantor explains the evolution of his theory of Structural Dynamics, a model of how communication works—or doesn’t work—in human systems. He also details how what he calls “communicative competency” can lead to more effective conversations—a key to creating healthy family and organizational systems. In Part Two, Sarah Hill and Tony Melville describe the application of Structural Dynamics to a client situation. These two complementary perspectives provide a window into the profound possibilities offered by translating Kantor’s theory into practice.

Learning to Learn: Knowledge As a System of Questions
Michael Ballé, Jacques Chaize, and Daniel Jones

What is it about the Toyota Production System (TPS) that has allowed Toyota to achieve high levels of performance over time, despite occasional setbacks? The authors have found that instead of being a system of best practices, the TPS is a system of interconnected questions. As such, in TPS, knowledge does not involve applying a cookie-cutter method to get a desired result but rather posing the right questions to ultimately improve the system as a whole. The authors examine Toyota’s five-step cycle for problem finding, framing, and solving. They show that as employees develop their problem-finding capabilities and problem-solving skills, they individually and then collectively enhance the organization’s judgment in the long run.

Is Your Town in Transition?
Jessica Stites

Over the past decade, more than 1,000 municipalities in 43 countries have chosen to define themselves as “Transition Towns.” Frustrated by the slow pace of change in response to challenges such as peak oil, climate change, and economic instability, people in these places have undertaken grassroots initiatives to build the resilience of their communities to survive sudden shortfalls of necessities such as food, oil, water, or money. These preparations take many forms, some infrastructural—such as establishing solar energy programs—and others interpersonal—like creating groups that encourage people to help each other in times of need. At its core, the Transition Movement seeks to build the “social technologies” required to achieve long-term sustainability.

The Triple Focus: Rethinking Mainstream Education
Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge

In The Triple Focus: A New Approach to Education, Peter Senge and Daniel Goleman examine the cognitive and emotional tools that young children need to navigate and thrive in today’s environment. The authors identify three skill sets essential for navigating this world of increasing distractions and decreasing face-to-face communications: focusing on self, tuning in to other people, and understanding the larger world and how systems interact. This excerpt focuses on the third skill set and makes a strong case for capitalizing on the connections and synergies between Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and systems thinking. The notion of transforming and replacing the traditional pedagogy that anchors our current curriculum with systems-based learning has already taken hold with impressive results that have surprised even the authors.
Reflections on the 2014 SoL Global Forum  
*Gitte Larsen and Vicky Schubert*

On May 21–23, 2014, 450 participants from around the world gathered in Paris, France, to take part in the SoL Global Forum: “Investing in Emerging Futures: New Players, New Games—Welcoming Metamorphosis.” Organized by SoL France, the event invited change leaders and organizational leaders to explore an urgent question together: “How can we facilitate and accelerate the metamorphosis of our organizations, firms, and society?” In this two-part article, Gitte Larsen, a newcomer to the Global SoL community, and Vicky Schubert, a long-time SoL contributor, share highlights from—and personal reflections on—the event. Their insightful commentary paints a picture of a community of people who are making the internal shifts necessary to lead profound changes in all those external systems that connect us.
The Triple Focus
Rethinking Mainstream Education

DANIEL GOLEMAN AND PETER SENGE

In *The Triple Focus: A New Approach to Education*, Peter Senge and Daniel Goleman examine the cognitive and emotional tools that young children need to navigate and thrive in today’s environment. The authors identify three skill sets essential for navigating this world of increasing distractions and decreasing face-to-face communications: focusing on self, tuning in to other people, and understanding the larger world and how systems interact. This excerpt focuses on the third skill set and makes a strong case for capitalizing on the connections and synergies between Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and systems thinking. The notion of transforming and replacing the traditional pedagogy that anchors our current curriculum with systems-based learning has already taken hold with impressive results that have surprised even the authors.

We believe we are at the very beginning of rethinking our views of human development in a more integrative way: cognitive (frontal brain/lobes), emotional (mammalian brain and limbic system), spiritual and energetic (which could be embedded in the whole mind-body system functioning rather than particular circuits). Again and again, we find one of the most powerful experiences of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and systems educators everywhere is seeing that the genuine potential of students far exceeds what the current mainstream education system, with its emphases on cognitive development and analysis over synthesis, is designed to produce (see “Social and Emotional Learning Defined”, p. 32). In that sense, it is a system of “dumbing down” these innate capabilities.

It is useful to remember that the factory model we have inherited through the Industrial Age School was never about tapping and cultivating this innate potential. It was never about growing human beings—it was designed to train factory workers en masse. Though almost everything has changed in the reality for our students since this model was implemented almost 200 years ago, the basic design of school has only been
Social and Emotional Learning Defined

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an approach to learning in which children develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. For children to succeed in developing these life skills, SEL must be taught in the context of safe and supportive school, family, and community learning environments where they feel valued and respected.

For more information, go to The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

adjusted incrementally, not fundamentally. We still have fixed grades (Grade 1, Grade 2, and so on right to Grade 12) that most students move through en masse, with rigid curricula guidelines and expert teachers who are supposed to endorse them. We are now standing at the edge of . . . a fundamental innovation, and through the combined lenses of the SEL and systems work, seeing how this innovation could occur.

[An] important synergy between SEL and systems thinking has to do with transforming pedagogy and the culture of school. For example, a key to making such a spiral view of cognitive-emotional development practical in real educational settings is profound respect. You don’t try to teach kids something that has no meaning to them, something that does not connect in any way with their lives. But unfortunately, that’s still the modus operandi for 80–90% of school curricula.

In contrast, students at every level find SEL compelling because it helps them deal directly with the issues that matter most to them: bullying, friendships, getting along, and the like. . . .

The factory model we have inherited through the Industrial Age School was never about growing human beings—it was designed to train factory workers en masse.

A common discovery is that neither effective SEL nor effective systems education can be accomplished by traditional pedagogy, where teachers stand in front of classes and deliver information. When either is done well, there is a natural emphasis on experience-based lessons and on project-based learning, action learning, and cooperative learning, with students getting deeply engaged in matters that are important in their lives and taking responsibility for their own learning. These are all familiar instructional strategies to most educators, and can be effective across ages and diverse academic content. Yet, they are still the exception rather than the norm, in large part because educators know the concepts but are not adept at their practice, or because the constraints of most school cultures inhibit them in building these capacities.

We believe a wonderful joint project would be for leaders in SEL and systems education innovation to work on a common set of pedagogical principles, like:

• Respect the learner’s reality and processes of understanding.
• Focus on issues that are real to the learner.
• Allow students to build their own models, construct and test their own ways of making sense of problems.
• Work and learn together.
• Keep the focus on action and thinking, how I or we need to act or behave differently, not just think differently.
• Build students’ ability to be responsible for their own learning.
• Encourage peer dynamics where students help one another learn.
• Recognize teachers as designers, facilitators, and decision-makers (more than “curriculum deliverers”). This requires that teachers have strong content knowledge, continually being advanced through robust peer-learning networks.

Focusing on real innovation in pedagogy does not preclude attention to skills, curriculum, or standards. Rather, it builds more effective strategies for accomplishing overarching educational goals. . . .

But these pedagogical principles are only half the story. Though commendable, they won’t be followed widely and effectively until they are paired with implementation principles.

Roger Weissberg, the founding director of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has often said that the most important—but also most neglected—aspect of SEL is its implementation. In the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Education ordered that a program called SEAL (“Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning”) be started in schools there in 2003. This was a top-down mandate, and not every
head of school or teaching staff was necessarily keen on the program, nor was there a standard curriculum. Perhaps no surprise, a study of the program’s effectiveness found that on average, SEAL didn’t really help kids that much. However, there was a great deal of variation in outcomes, with some schools having very positive results, even though others had poor outcomes.

And a major factor in the program’s success seemed to be how it was implemented. It’s not just having an outstanding curriculum that makes SEL succeed, but having all those involved understand, embody, and teach it effectively. It’s changing the culture of the school.

Beyond the programs themselves, bringing SEL into a school requires helping teachers prepare well, so they can embody what it is they’re going to teach. We should also involve parents to the greatest extent we can—the best SEL programs all have a component for parents.

There’s a natural two-way flow between classroom and home. Children who learn a technique for, say, self-management, will often bring the school lesson home to the family, as in, “Mommy, you’re starting to get upset, why you don’t take some deep breaths.” Such reports from home are common because the wall between school and home is somewhat of a fiction. A child lives in her whole world, not in walled-off parts. And what she learns in one place she brings to the other naturally whenever and wherever it applies.

One of the best practices in SEL is involving parents as much as possible. That way what children learn in school gets reinforced and supported by the people who matter to them the most: their families.

A simple rule-of-thumb is the more you’re really innovating, the more you’re stretching the norm, the more you must involve parents. One of the best practices in SEL is involving parents as much as possible. That way what children learn in school gets reinforced and supported by the people who matter to them the most: their families.

Daniel Goleman is the author of the best seller Emotional Intelligence, called one of the 25 most influential books by Time magazine. He is co-director of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations.

Peter M. Senge is a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; founding Chair of SoL, the Society for Organizational Learning; and author of the widely acclaimed book, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.