



# Making Wellbeing in the Classroom: Social and Emotional Learning in Adult Education

Giselle Sim

Victorian Skills Authority Fellowship, 2023

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# 01

## Acknowledgements

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### The Awarding Bodies

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# 02

## Executive summary

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Education systems can be a traumatising place for many children, leading to traumatised adults. The Fellow, who started researching adult education out of Cloverdale Community Centre, Geelong in 2019 found this to be more common for certain demographics and applied for a fellowship to address wellbeing in adult classrooms. The Fellow became a Learn Local trainer in 2020, who also has a background in Anthropology.

The priority area of focus for this fellowship is developing educational approaches that address the gaps between disadvantaged learners and high-quality education and training outcomes. At Cloverdale there had already been systems put in place, such as the Wellbeing Team, where trainers were never alone in classrooms and had support from mental health and wellbeing students on placement to assist learners in need. However, the problem persisted community wide and adults with trauma and complexity in their lives needed help immediately.

The Wellbeing Team and a focus on wellbeing in classrooms was a successful system, but not a formalised nor recognised system. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a newer theory for education best practice that begins to formalise wellbeing in the classroom. New and accessible practice is being developed out of Europe researching the theory out of the U.S. including exploring the importance of cultural context for classrooms to local environments and demographics.

Desk top research was conducted over 2022 and early 2023, while the travel component was completed in September and October 2023. Countries visited were Italy and Malaysia to investigate SEL in practice and multiculturalism in adult education. The Fellow visited schools and researchers for observation and discussion for turning theory into best practice for teachers, and success stories for learners.

The key learnings from this fellowship are education as enterprise, education as care, and education as community. These were the three main points consistent for a SEL education. It was critical learners see their worth through enterprise and making money. When an education system cares for learners they learn to care for themselves and the community, which in turn fosters purpose and vision for learners.

The fellowship aims to put SEL at the forefront of education best practice in Australia. Both adults and children need to be taught how their emotions can dictate their lives, instead of rational thought. Classrooms need to be safe and trauma informed for adults to thrive and have meaningful education and employment outcomes. Emotional learning is for beyond the classroom and to support learners for life.

Money is not the issue for SEL success when it is possible for education to generate its own revenue and invest in its learners. Education centres can meet the needs of the community and innovate through raising their own funds, while also partnering with local organisations and business to help projects grow. However it is important for organisations to set and mean their organisations' values and not set them as a 'tick and flick' exercise. Because, though soft, an organisations' values result in shaping the culture.

This fellowship has had an impact within Cloverdale and incorporating SEL practice into the centre. The main learning has been to see the possibilities of enterprise and begin making them larger. The Fellow plans to continue raising awareness of improving the wellbeing in adult classrooms with practical SEL steps into 2024 and beyond.



# 03

## Fellowship Background

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### Context

The priority area of focus for this fellowship is developing educational approaches that address the gaps between disadvantaged learners and high-quality education and training outcomes. The Fellow's focus is on learner wellbeing in the classroom. Low retention rates continue in many low socioeconomic areas and reflecting on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a learner cannot study when they have limited or no money, food and shelter. Adding unaddressed traumas many learners have and learning becomes near impossible. This equation has been strongly evident in the community at Cloverdale.

The Cloverdale way has been one of inclusion and to instil a culture of lifelong learning. Staff and volunteers strive for a safe space teaching learners that learning is not constricted to the typical sit down and listen model. Learn Local is the pre accredited training carried out at the centre. It was becoming unsustainable to have only one trainer conduct classes as wellbeing and trauma issues were flagged as a barrier to participation. The Wellbeing Team was formed and classes were to involve at least two staff all the time to help learners. The Wellbeing Team has been hugely successful for participation and overall wellbeing of the community. The team consists of student placements led by one professional. These student placements can consist of social workers, community workers, mental health workers, allied health and so on. But this is not a formalised or researched concept. The Wellbeing Team is

equipped to address the end result of a problem, not the root cause.

Solving these problems require non-traditional ways of thinking. The Fellow sees a need for deep change in education culture for the benefit of the sector by having higher rates of completion and engagement from learners. Not only would the learners get career advancement, but they would experience positive changes in their family lives. This change of culture would have flow on effects for generations to come.

The Fellow has conducted research in Cloverdale with the data collected on learners through the Pre-accredited Quality Framework forms that are required for Learn Local delivery. Both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data comes from all the informal conversations carried out by the Wellbeing Team, staff, and volunteers. The Fellow uses anthropological methods to process these stories that have become the story of Cloverdale. It has been found that the Cloverdale community lack confidence and hold a fear of failure from their previous experiences with schooling.

The missing data in Learn Local forms can say a lot. There are learners that enrol and drop away and so learner reviews do not get completed. With statistical data analysed from these Learn Local form collections towards the end of 2019 the Fellow found that 51% of learners were seeking work and ranged from unemployed to under employed. Only 27% had finished high school and 35% had no further education in VET. 66% of people were in a

Learn Local course for the purpose of getting work or upskilling for work. Half of participants identified a disability, with mental illness being the most common at 28%.

What this shows is a need of understanding the role of life barriers, education to find work and understanding the individual learner.

Many participants did not connect education to employment prospects and did not upskill when needed. Also, those that disclosed a disability had higher rates of unemployment and low education. Learners have their own lives and stories, and this is where an anthropological model to adult education is needed.

There are constant mistakes being made in the adult education sector that disadvantages learners. One key issue that needs addressing in the Australian setting is finding new and creative ways of community engagement for the purposes of learning. It is very hard for many Learn Local providers to find ways in which to attract people in need of further education and support in their lives. Deep community connections are not evident in Australia as many do not know of Learn Local or what local options in education are available.

Education is not only important to the individual but also for their families. As seen with Cloverdale, views on education trickle down through a family. So, if an older generation does not see the value this culture is passed down. Issues such as trauma, disability, refugee backgrounds, none to limited English speaking and long term unemployed add further complications. Addressing these barriers would benefit the industry because these issues are widespread in the pre-accredited learning sector. Many have voiced their problems and do not yet have evidence-based practice that consistently works. This requires a community centred care model and one that offers a continuity of care.

## Methodology

The Fellow conducted their research through desk top review of theory and literature. The travel component consisted of observation, meetings, and presentations. The report component reflects observations and discussion of themes and issues.

## Fellowship Period

The Fellow was awarded the fellowship in November 2021 and spent 2022 and early 2023 conducting desk top research, interviews, and meetings with contacts. The Fellow travelled across northern Italy over September 2023, including Como, Brescia and Verona. The Fellow then travelled to Penang, Malaysia in late September to early October 2023. The Fellow completed the report at the end of 2023.

## Fellow Biography

The Fellow has a background in Anthropology who joined Cloverdale Community Centre mid 2019 to support community need and education outcomes through research. They commenced being a Learn Local trainer in 2020 and applied for a fellowship a year later after seeing a need for research into managing trauma and wellbeing in the classroom.

# 04

## Fellowship Journey

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### Social and Emotional Learning

During the desktop research phase of the fellowship the Fellow was introduced to the theory of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) from international contacts. SEL and its tool RULER is an evidence-based approach developed by Prof. Marc Brackett, who founded the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI), that continues this work today (Ruler 2023). Research is now being trialled by UNESCO and partners in Europe to see how SEL can work in their cultural context.

The theory urges that emotions are in control of us where they dictate judgement and not rational thought (Brackett 2019, pp. 32, 84-5). However despite emotions being deemed inconvenient in the modern western world, they can be used as a guide to navigating modern daily life and so must be expressed and understood to regulate individual systems before they take over (p. 13 Brackett 2019). We must change to see 'feelings as a form of information' where they can inform each of us to make better decisions (p. 17 Brackett 2019). However, emotion skills and emotional intelligence need to be taught and learnt as they are not naturally formed knowledge. In regard to education and training 'the three most important aspects of learning—attention, focus, and memory—are all controlled by our emotions, not by cognition' (Brackett 2019, p. 195). If in the class staff and learners can understand this then disruptive outbursts and vicarious trauma that can dominate situations could be better prevented.

The theory breaks emotional intelligence down to two sorts of people. The Emotion Scientist and the Emotion Judge. The scientist personality stops, thinks and questions emotions and what they mean while the judge personality assumes, denies and blames others for a situation, without personal accountability. This mirrors Cloverdale's above the line and below the line behaviour policy and is a simple to understand concept for community.

The RULER method is the steps to regulate emotions in the classroom (p. 19 Brackett 2019).

**R = Recognise:** emotions in ourselves and others, including body language.

**U = Understand:** source of emotion, why is it here?

**L = Label:** emotion with more words.

**E = Express:** with the words labelled and share empathy.

**R = Regulate:** with practical strategies instead of emotions controlling.

The final step to regulation is the Meta Moment (Brackett 2019, pp. 157-61). This is stopping before the moment of meltdown in intense situations. It asks the individual to not react and calculate how actions led to the tense situation before them. Ask the questions an emotion scientist would. Try to see the solution, for the goal is not to fight, it is just a disagreement.

## Cometa – Como, Italy

Cometa was founded in the early 1990s by two brothers with the goal of starting foster care for community, which would lead to education. In 30 years it has since become a network of fostering, childcare support, schools, VET centre and enterprises. Cometa has multiple sites over Como to facilitate the organisations activities. Cometa hosts a substantial variety of public facing enterprise businesses across Como. They consist of cafes selling their own made foods and shops selling fashion and accessories from partnered brands. For Cometa to work it needs to be local, run by locals for locals, answering the needs of locals.



Figure 1. Driveway and buildings with arrow sign post



Figure 2. Cafe



Figure 3. Cakes on display

Cometa strives to make community connections in everything possible. Including on the job training and enterprise. This all leads to inclusion, which is core to the culture and involves the whole community of Como. All services are open to the community to build a hub for the region of Como. In the words of one learner 'Cometa has formed a little city'. Cometa runs three programs: VET, high school, and job experience. The VET experience consists of three industries: textile, woodwork and restaurants including commercial cooking and serving. They have established a purpose-built high school which started 18 years ago that local students asked for because of issues attending "normal" school, in their words as other schools were posing a barrier to participation.



Figure 4. watercolour of child with star



Figure 6. woodwork supply cupboard



Figure 5. restoration of red theatre chairs



Figure 7. wine barrel deconstruction



Figure 8. wood work bench

The VET courses on offer train learners in industries relevant to the local area need. Textiles and woodwork are required for the refurbishing of antiques, while hospitality can be widely used in tourism around Como. As part of the woodwork component in their VET course furniture is made and restored for high end clients in Como and Milan. Cometa services Villa d'Este in restoring irreplaceable antiques. Members of the community can place orders for products to be made or fixed. Colleagues at the International Academy of Tourism and Hospitality (IATH) echo the social and emotional learning, and the hands-on practical elements to support learners, done through allowing creativity for problem-based learning to design solutions. During Covid the centre needed a seating solution for safe distancing of learners. Learners designed individual all in one desks that included locker space beneath and portability. IATH has partnerships throughout the tourism industry of Como as high-end local hotels invest in high end hospitality experience. This experience being learnt through new ways of best practice.



Figure 9. IATH partnerships



Figure 10. List next to door frame



Figure 11. Round orange wall deco



Figure 12. Painted bathrooms



Figure 13. Orange swivel chairs and desks

The enterprises of Cometa started through the need of on the job experience for drop out students, migrant workers and persons with disabilities. All learning content is to start with experience to make the outcome more real for learners. With their enterprises Cometa has slowly over the years made partnerships with larger businesses to help facilitate on the job training for persons with disabilities in front facing community roles. Stores such as Zara and Louis Vuitton have partnered with Cometa wanting to host staff with disabilities to sell stock and run cafes in their stores. The Fellow was informed this is a one of a kind in Italy, with no knowledge of this model being elsewhere. The shop 'For and From' in Como started just before the pandemic and despite this set back has been successful in employing persons with mild to high intellectual and cognitive disability. Other enterprise included producing and selling long shelf-life baked products. In September when the Fellow visited, the kitchen was already preparing their Christmas stock to sell. All stock and enterprise sports the Cometa logo. During Covid all community facing enterprise was forced to shut down. A bread machine was donated and learners began to make bread, pastries and longer shelf-life goods that are still sold online, through their magazine and with the help of campaigns through the large companies they partner with.



Figure 14. for and from shop



Figure 15. lingerie shop with mannequins

There is extra care put into the value of inclusion through the support given to persons with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities to participate in the workforce, for fair pay. Laws in Italy require some industries to employ a certain number of persons with disabilities (Cometa, 2021 pp. 12-7), (PWC TLS, 2022). Intellectual, cognitive, and psychosocial disabilities were the more common at Cometa. Cometa hosts a Disability Learning Designer to coordinate addressing workplace barriers. The Fellow had a chance to speak with them where they emphasised you must get to know each individual characteristics of each learner to set up for success. Many of their cohort have trouble with speaking, memory and comprehension of information. But they still have the capacity for employment, with support. It is a must to make information accessible through the use of pictures

showing step by step procedure and have the person with disability write the steps again in their own words. With enough support these learners can go on to teach new students in time, thereby solidifying their own learning and helping others. The soft skills are also important, where self-presentation, in association with the beauty value of Cometa, is a must. Students learn to present themselves in public and this carries on for life, not just for immediate employment.

They support families struggling to find work for their children with disability. This has come from the needs of the community because families feel very alone without the support. Tutors are involved with each student and they meet as a group every 1 to 2 weeks to workshop tailored learning plans. The key skill needed for tutors is patience and a knowledge on disability. They hold files on each student so all staff know what is and is not within the capability of students, including medical risk or co-morbidities associated with their condition. Tutors and other support learning workers across the organisation hold at least a masters in learning and pedagogy. Cometa also hosts childcare facilities open to all that is a free service for the public and is funded through enterprise. For every five children there is one worker with at least a masters for the purpose of quality care. All work sites have a support worker, again with a minimum of a masters in pedagogy and in the respective need of support, to help facilitate the persons with disabilities to complete their employment shifts to their best ability. These support workers are funded through the profits of enterprise to offer quality support. Cometa is in the process of wanting to hire more teachers, with PhDs relevant to creating new ways to educate. At present the team host 12 tutors on site to offer extra assistance in classrooms, for teachers cannot do it all.

There is zero government funding for the running of all enterprise, tutoring and disability job experience. Cometa tries and succeeds in its ability to be a circular economy. With most of the sites sporting hand crafted accessories and rooms to buildings crafted by learners as part of their learning and assessment from recycled material over the years.



The tables, chairs, decorations, lockers, and bathroom are all hand crafted by the VET learners. Using reclaimed wine barrels, wood, and the metal from soft drink cans to make solid and long-lasting furnishings.



Figure 16. Wooden tables



Figure 17. dining hall with painting

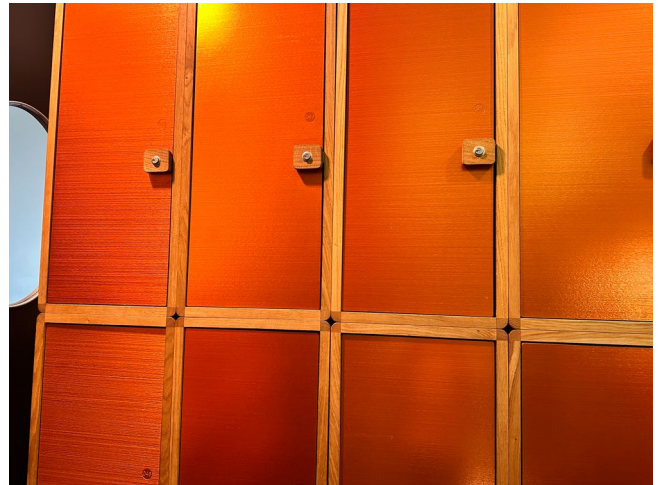


Figure 18. Orange soda can lockers



Figure 19. Orange desks and chairs

The idea of the education at Cometa is to unify the thought and the reality. It was explained to the Fellow that this has been separated through different ideologies and philosophies from the Enlightenment period in education systems for Europe. The gorilla and hand of God are further symbols to this and a reminder to learners on their social and emotional learning. The statue of a gorilla is a reminder to not act out of rage or impulse, but rather look to the hand of God.



Figure 20. Gorilla

Beauty is Cometa's first value and so it is everyone's responsibility to take care of things. While their second value is Sharing, so you are not alone. You are invited to share the good and the bad in your life because by sharing the bad it lessens the load while learning solutions from others. This is also how social and emotional learning takes place. The founders wanted to instil a sense of awe when a person first enters the grounds. This is because awe and beauty removes depression in their philosophy. All rooms hold paintings to feel like a home and have an inspirational quote on the wall. The gardens are kept by volunteers, where many are former foster children and learners giving back to the site. At the time of visiting the Fellow was informed Cometa held 260 volunteers and 217 staff. The gardens and outdoor dining hall are also open to public hire for events and weddings as another source of revenue and on the job experience. The chapel is open for learners to use if they choose as there are a range of faiths at Cometa. However it is asked learners believe in something so they know where they want to go in life. The chapel frames the landscape of Como with the intention to capture the meeting of heaven and earth. Where the beauty is and where learners are to stay in.



Figure 21. Hand of God

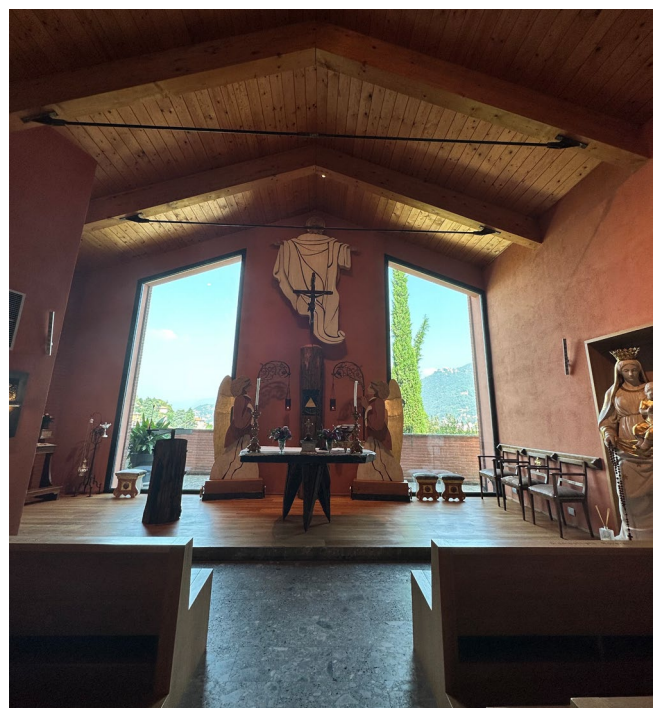


Figure 22. Inside church



Figure 23. Water feature in garden



Figure 24. View of gardens

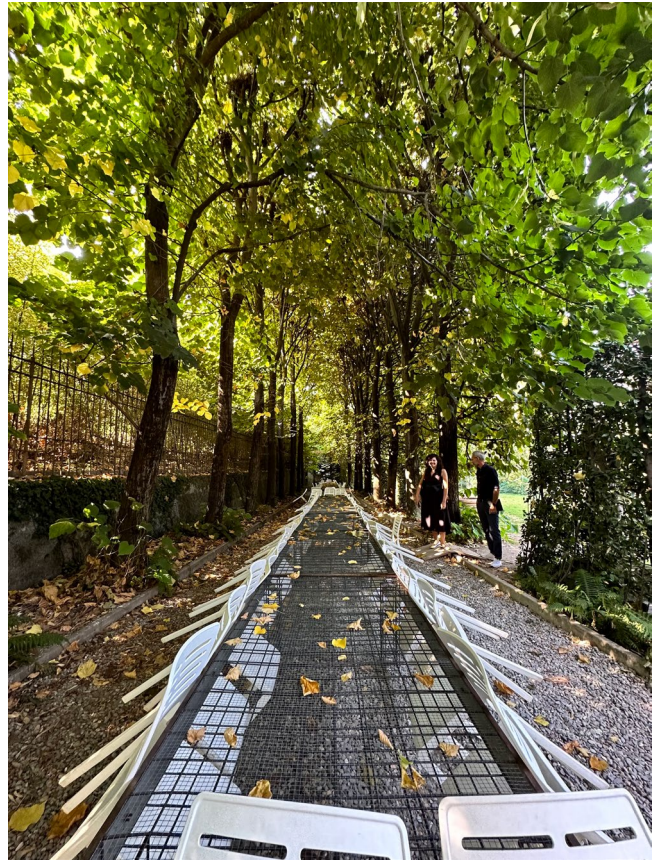


Figure 25. Tree hall with tables and chairs



Figure 26. Tree hall dressed for function

## National Canossian Association (ENAC) – Verona, Italy

ENAC is a private not for profit association of schools and VET centres across Italy and other countries in the world. Their mission is to promote personal and professional development across all life stages in education. Across ten Italian regions they hold 16 VET centres with over 5,000 students annually. It is common for ENAC schools to be run and taught by local nuns, including their 32 other partnered countries. This is generally common in Italy today.

All ENAC teachers and related education staff are provided with training and professional development each year to support their job. Each school can choose their professional development they wish to do depending on their local needs, because each school has its own autonomy. ENAC offers free in-house psychology for students. SEL is a current focus for research and implementation in the ENAC network. Though SEL theory offers benefits from the U.S, it may not fully align with other cultural contexts around the world, and so requires testing and research. Another issue with SEL is that it is a lot of theory and limited in the practice for educators to start implementing now. Which is what the projects with ENAC are looking into.



Figure 27. ENAC countries and dates of joining



Figure 29. Outside monastery with construction



Figure 28. window in monastery wall



Figure 30. Classroom

Their recent Skillati Project was a pilot for SEL in VET and is now part of the curriculum after success. 'Skillati' meaning a person who has developed the soft skills, it comes with a focus of gradual learning over the years in communication and thinking. It has been found to be critically important to start the year off in classes with SEL for the purpose of early cohesion and teamwork. Activities such as role playing, structured mindfulness, and brain storming self-awareness traits were found beneficial in VET classrooms.

### **Catholic University of the Sacred Heart – Brescia, Italy**

The Fellow met with ENAC partnered researchers at the university to discuss the 3-H Project that looks into practical implementation of SEL in classrooms (ENAC 2023). The idea is to reduce rates of unmotivated students, which has been identified by the research to be a leading cause of high school drop out rates in Italy. By having more practical steps, rather than theory, it makes it easier for teachers to implement steps in the classroom now to see results. As part of the project a compendium and guidelines were developed to help teachers start using lesson activities (ENAC 2023). The 3-H stands for Head: cognitive intelligence, Heart: social-emotional intelligence, and Hand: manual intelligence, because VET is to provide holistic education of the three. The project still has another year to develop its final recommendations.

It was discussed that all subjects need to be attentive to SEL if it is to be implemented and successful, including maths and science subjects. SEL can be specific and measurable where learners can be evaluated. It has been raised by teachers and other critics that they have concern over the usefulness of SEL, as it may look more like a waste of time when measurables are required. This idea that it is not possible to evaluate students has been a raising concern for the implementation of SEL. But when practices are formalised so too can evaluating progress.

Teachers must be taken care of for any SEL class to work and so the theory has been made practical by an index of SEL activities found in the collection of good practices compendium (ENAC 2023). Problem and project based learning was found to be a great development for SEL. This helps learners become members of a community through teamwork meeting the needs of the community. The Fellow was informed that some practices that led to the most success were usually the more fun and adventurous class activities. Even using escape rooms and disarming fake bombs as a form of SEL was very well received by learners. Learners found rich learning in developing puzzles for others to solve. Aside from fun they have included knowledge on health and exercise as part of SEL lessons. So to improve overall health and wellbeing of learners because it will not be learnt elsewhere. Education equals care. So far it seems there is no one right model for SEL, rather it is a matter of always needing to find the right fit for the class at the time.

## Penang Institute – Penang, Malaysia

The Fellow visited the Penang Institute for better insight into Malaysian VET and education systems for learnings in multiculturalism. Staff there had been involved in research surveying the VET system in Malaysia in recent years, which demonstrates there are shared problems both with Australia in VET and internationally (The Asia Foundation 2022, p. 2). There is a battle with stigma for learners studying VET, with a perception it is the route for academic drop outs and where universities are the preferred option (The Asia Foundation 2022, p. 30). A problem that even when funding is fuelled to help the problem, there is still hesitancy in enrolment because of the stigma of not going to university. When learners do enrol into VET they are more inclined to get into a private VET provider. The private sector is what holds a lot of students in the VET system. The Fellow was informed this is the same for other levels of schooling, so learners receive more rounded learning applicable for overseas work. Before federation Malaysia held a lot of English and French based schools that offered learners pathways to international movement, but by the 1970s this started to reverse.



Figure 31. Penang Institute building

A key theme raised in discussion was the reversing of colonialism over the history of Malaysian education systems. Since the 1970s the education system saw a rapid and ever-changing state to what curriculum was agreed upon nationally, leading to difficulty in keeping education practice consistent and current. Language barriers have presented problems by not having an agreed

language in which education would be taught, therefore also leading to confusion in texts. It was discussed that education has become a means to get a job and not for its own sake, where education has become narrow in its goal of putting the learning in one spot. A problem seen internationally and one that makes education systems socioeconomically deprived. Malaysia has lived multiculturalism for over 200 years and it does have something to show the world it can be done.



Figure 32. People seated for presentation



Figure 33. Giselle in front of presentation

The Fellow presented for one night at the Penang Institute to locals, teachers and online viewers on the fellowship learnings and SEL. At question time of the event it was remarked by one previous teacher that SEL is to be the pedagogy of the heart. Where they elaborated the pedagogy of the heart is what has always remained missing in education

and that learners are deprived of learning emotional intelligence. The Fellow received much more deep cultural learnings within Penang, however outside the scope of this fellowship.





# 05

## Fellowship Learnings

The Fellow will focus this discussion on the priority area:

*Developing educational approaches that address the gaps between disadvantaged learners and high-quality education and training outcomes.*

### Education as Enterprise

It was clear that many SEL based curriculums circled back to the notion of education as enterprise, one that makes a positive social, emotional and environmental impact for the community. Seeking mutually beneficial collaboration and listening to local needs is a strong SEL activity. The Fellow saw great success, however these projects do take time and effort to set up. Earning money offered a sense of worth and purpose to learners. They saw they were not useless, like old narratives inflicted on them had told. They saw they could be contributing members of a community regardless of their ability.

Enterprises as education is possible in an Australian context with the enterprise being tailored to what an Australian audience would support. The catering services would be the better places to start and making long shelf-life products for sale. Learn Local could be a place for this, as Cloverdale has demonstrated through the small enterprises already in operation. Learn Local enterprise needs to be community needs focussed, however is greatly under resourced. Small steps are the way to start slowly generating revenue and reinvest it into building up educational resources. Instead

of relying on grant money that may never come, enterprise gives organisations power to invest how they see fit and are not restricted by any other party over decision making.

A problem many Australian education centres face is a staffing issue and the Fellow did ask how these projects have managed this. With recruiting the right staff both Cometa and the 3-H project found that recruiters should look at other experiences the applicant has, especially in any volunteer work. Look for things that would foster a healthy social and emotional learning environment, for degrees are not enough to meet this. They specified demonstration through volunteer work and extracurricular activities that foster a positive community, though this also takes time and a team cannot be formed straight away.

### Education as Care

The 3-H project and researchers said schools must overcome education as teaching, and instead be caring. Having education as just teaching is a convenient means to ignore complex challenges that get brought into the classroom from life. So education must become about care. This is a SEL theory approach but the practice is needing to be clear for immediate care in classrooms. The 3-H project already offers and is still working on measurable and targeted learning for SEL based activities in their publicly available resources (ENAC 2023).

However for best practice it is crucial for teaching staff to listen to the incidental conversations. At question time during the presentation the Fellow gave in Penang, Malaysia a teacher in dentistry expressed they could have adult learners often express “I’m stupid” for any possible mistake occurring. The little mistakes are where learning happens however for these learners their biggest barrier is their internal dialogue, which is negative and has been reinforced through trauma in education. This is seen throughout Cloverdale where great effort is taken in Learn Local classes just trying to unlearn negative self-views. The Fellow would argue that the wider Learn Local cohort would struggle with this and so SEL is needed in classes.

An aspect that the Fellow has struggled with in teaching in the past has been intergenerational respect, or lack thereof, between different aged learners. This is something the 3-H project addresses in its guidelines, because adult education can include a large range of ages. SEL classroom activities need to reflect this age difference and target all ages in a room without conflict. All ages having sensitivity to each other and so schools must ‘stay away from easy (negative) intergenerational judgements, and take care of its young students by striving to understand their self-image, and their visions of the world and the future’ which is usually grim for young learners in Australia (ENAC 2023, p. 12). In order for young to thrive, they must be taught properly by the older. Or else we fail them. However there are much older learners who were already long since failed and who equally deserve support. Adult education needs to be mindful of this balance as the Fellow has seen first-hand this can fuel tensions between learners.

Lack of funding is not the issue that causes traumatic education experiences. Malaysian contacts to the Fellow urged funding does not equal results if a culture is strong enough to resist an idea. To be kind and listen is free, though a harder skill to learn for some. SEL must become best practice in order to foster an emotionally intelligent community.

## Education as Community

Most SEL based learnings centre around building teamwork and a community. This community includes all people in and out of the classroom. A criticism for SEL is teachers cannot do more. All teachers must be supported by everyone to do this intensive job and cannot be expected to take on anymore. They must have a network of other teachers and staff to be collaborative and supportive with inclusive management that listens to the need in the classrooms. The 3-H project states in their guidelines an education centre must hold a collaborative culture where its safe for teachers to air problems in the classroom in a group (ENAC 2023, pp 25-6). However having or creating a safe space is not the reality for many teachers.

For SEL to work it must start from the top down. Education centres and management need to seriously reflect on education and workplace culture. It is hard to name what is unspoken, but by doing so is the first attempt at SEL. Organisations can decide on the culture they want to make. One common thing the Fellow saw was a community needed to agree on one vision that all would follow. Because without a vision you do not go anywhere.

The Australian cultural context is tricky in this balance. Because Australian culture is a balance of convenient truths and lies through the bottling up of feelings, not disclosing distress, nor asking for help, as evident throughout the community at Cloverdale. What the Fellow noticed where these SEL communities were happening was that these areas already had in their culture a sense of community. Australia as a nation is still young and is yet to form what it will be. It is a place without a unified culture like other places in the world that have had their identities for centuries. The Australian context is one of isolation and disconnection and so for SEL to work the question needs to be asked how do we connect again? This will be a barrier to developing emotional intelligence and SEL.

Finally, the Fellow would like to note the cultural impression of Australia from the outside. Though not obviously directed to the fellowship scope, the Fellow would argue this issue is a possible root cause to disengagement from international learners. During travels not related to the fellowship the Fellow was overwhelmed by the strange, yet very common, assumptions people outside Australia thought the country was. These were narratives of a Utopia where people didn't work but were rich, where one was lazy but lucky. The dream versus the reality of living and working in Australia seem to be far apart. This is a concern as prospective learners coming here from overseas will be set up to fail. Something seen firsthand in the Fellow's experience through educating. A barrier the Fellow faced when trying to gain further international connections in other countries was this belief that Australians could not possibly be looking for better practices overseas when there is no better place than Australia. However Australia is missing long traditions of learning and handing down of knowledge which is the whole reason why these fellowships were made in the first place. International community is further needed to build up best practice.



# 06

## Impacts of the Fellowship

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### Personal to Fellow

The Fellow had never travelled overseas before and the opportunity alone offered a once in a lifetime experience. SEL theory has had an impact on the Fellow by slowly recognising and developing their own emotional intelligence in both personal and professional life, leading to better communication in the workplace and better team cohesion. Much of the cultural learning on the history of Malaysia made through contacts, though not directly related to the scope of this fellowship, has had a profound impact on the Fellow because of the Fellow's personal Malaysian ties. This knowledge is not possible to find online or in libraries and was only possible by meeting living memory. Further to deep cultural learning overseas it also offered the Fellow more understanding of the cultural contexts playing out back in Australia, which has led to better SEL design and discussion back at Cloverdale.

### Professional to Fellow

The professional capacity development offered by the fellowship has directly led to improved employment and education opportunities. The fellowship facilitated broader research opportunities which further honed the Fellow's skills in research. The Fellow found it very fulfilling to conduct further research into this issue they had been working on since 2019 and hopes it will better support Cloverdale. It has made the Fellow a more rounded trainer who has been challenged to be more innovative. The future plans at Cloverdale

are to continue to expand building positive family culture towards education, while also fostering the importance of community participation. There are trials lined up for education programmes into 2024 to slowly test SEL within the Cloverdale community.

Cloverdale has received greater knowledge sharing through growing international connections. The network on best practice is stronger and Cloverdale is a quick adopter of practice that works. There is now a more formalised tactic and resources for trainers to direct pre accredited training to learners. Cloverdale is the perfect testing field for new learning modalities. With SEL practice in place there is now extra resources for immediate conflict management in the workplace and classroom. SEL education is leading to improved organisational awareness of the complex needs of adult learners and widespread disadvantage in the local area.

Cloverdale intends to grow enterprises from what is already established. The Lotus Kitchen, that offers Thai food to community weekly, is the main enterprise and made \$45,000 overall income in 2022. There is intention to grow this enterprise and produce long shelf-life products for sale from the Thai kitchen. Other enterprise for future thought is The Shed, selling local artisanal works. Though small, showing people they can earn another \$20 extra means a lot. Then The Big Band, which is a work to keep working model, that removes the cost of participation and equipment will be considered for enterprise growth.

The recent Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability flagged there is minimal opportunity for students of health and allied health to get trained in disability while on placement (Royal Commission, 2023 pp. 79-80, 228, 232-3). It further recommends there is a need for 'disability health navigators' to help persons with disabilities navigate the complex health system. The Fellow and Cloverdale urge the model of the Wellbeing team can be an answer to this problem. There are ample opportunities for health students to be placed into community settings and learn, while being mutually beneficial to organisations without the funding to hire staff, to the persons with disabilities getting support, and alleviating funding stress from the government. As for navigating health systems, the Wellbeing team offers this and also to other social services. Currently the Cloverdale Wellbeing Team holds placement students from; Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, Mental health Workers, AOD and Counsellors.

## **Sectoral Impact**

The Fellow is in the process of organising dissemination activities for the sector and plans to continue dissemination activities into 2024 and beyond. This will be conducted through presenting at conferences and talks within the sector. The Fellow will present learnings to the Victorian Skills Authority policy makers and other government representatives. The concept of SEL and focusing on wellbeing in education is already on the radar for Australia, so the Fellow sees there is interest already established in the sector (Victorian Government 2022). Innovation is required across the sector, starting from how data is collected on disadvantage learners. Quantitative data is not fit for purpose in the realms of complex low socioeconomic needs and disadvantage. The sector needs to innovate with qualitative data and having conversations with community and listen to their stories. This in itself would be the first step in SEL for an Australian context. The Fellow intends to push this model and the successes already seen within Cloverdale, because it is possible for Learn Local learners to achieve great success.

# 07

## Recommendations

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### Education and Enterprise

Make your own money. Education can make its own revenue and invest back into learning. The sector would benefit from investigating local need and opportunity into enterprise. Grant money alone does not need to be the only means of funding for new opportunities.

### Education as Care

Use health and allied health student placements to support classrooms. Teachers and learners need extra help in the classroom for success. There are students in need of placement to learn community complexity. Putting placement health students in community settings will benefit both. It was evident that investing in speciality workers was a success in Cometa, and also a success in Cloverdale. Partner with local universities to offer placements for students.

Make organisational values work. An early step for SEL is to decide on a vision for the organisation. Taking on values that instil wellbeing and care guide success into education outcomes for the most disadvantaged learners. Though it may appear soft and irrelevant, SEL requires naming the unnamed, and so name the centre values.

Be the Emotion Scientist, not the Emotion Judge. SEL is not useless nor unmeasurable with success in the U.S and Europe. Steps should be taken to trialling classroom activities with SEL in mind by tweaking to relevant Australian contexts. Being kind is free, though takes time. Emotional intelligence

is a sharing experience and is learnt in groups. However groups may pose problems in differing social status. Learners having perceived social advantage does not equal more happiness or success and may be irrelevant to that person's needs. Theoretical discussions on demographics and who appears more in social issues than others does not fix issues. When an individual is suffering, they must be cared for as an individual, not a demographic. Be the emotion scientist and ask questions in discovery, not the emotion judge who sentences people.

### Education as Community

Respond to community need. To solve local issues the community have stories to share. The main stakeholder should be locals and they know what they need. But they may not know how to get it. Enterprise and other ventures have a higher chance of success if there is an audience for it.

Connect with community and business. Connect with business. Get them on board to support and normalise persons with disabilities working, especially in front facing roles. Respect all people you interact with and build community, for they will give back to you. If you continue to be there for the community, over the years it will be learnt that the facility is a safe space. Help a child now, they will become an adult and may come back to help.





# 08

## Conclusion

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The Fellow urges that many problems faced in improving enrolment retention and wellbeing are not necessarily money issues. Rather there are fixes that can be used that are free, though will cost in time and efforts of collaboration instead. SEL has proved to be a successful formal model for learning in other countries and would only require a few cultural changes to start in Australia. It is only a matter of trying. Models for enterprise have followed and also been successful in the world, which are mutually beneficial to learners, centres, and the community. The culture of education, workplaces and community need tweaking in order to foster places of inclusion. Though these seem like soft and irrelevant matters, it is invisible cultures that have the most sway on a centre and place of work and so they should be taken seriously. The Fellow concludes Australia is culturally distinct from anywhere else in the world and SEL may look very different here. Australian social culture is resistant to open feelings and disclosing problems and rather attracts to the positive. Though in recent years this has started to shift with awareness raising in mental health. Efforts to include SEL would help learners better navigate the change and confusion in Australia today.



# 09

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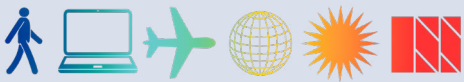
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