

Conceptual Article

Woke in the dark: Embracing diversity and trust through social and emotional learning in education in the age of artificial intelligence

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Woke in the Dark refers to a state of heightened social and political awareness that drives individuals to face the unknown future with courage and collective solidarity despite the prevailing uncertainties and challenges. While woke has become a well-known term in contemporary discourse, the phrase woke in the dark has been crafted to capture the experiences of grappling with political and social uncertainties, and to emphasize the challenges and opportunities of an uncertain future with collective courage and solidarity. As the world continues to rapidly change and evolve, educators must adapt their pedagogies to meet the needs of their students. In Japan, the challenges of globalization and artificial intelligence present unique obstacles for educators, and particularly those in the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) sector, to overcome. However, with these challenges, come opportunities for growth and transformation.

Keywords: Translingualism, Artificial intelligence, Social emotional learning, Design thinking, Co-construct, Educational reform

Article History: Submitted 5 May 2023; Revised 31 July 2023; Published online 8 October 2023

1. Challenges in Japan

Globalization and artificial intelligence (AI) have created a complex educational landscape in Japan. In this complexity, it is important to understand the different types of AI to address the challenges and opportunities appropriately. Artificial super intelligence (ASI) is when technology will transcend human intelligence and it remains speculative due to its undefined limitations and potentials. General, strong, or deep, AI (GAI), is the ability to simulate neural activity, or giving consciousness to machines, this is still considered a difficult endeavour. AI in this text will refer to weak or Narrow AI (NAI), meaning intelligence within a narrow parameter for example providing automated services for a specific task. It is this NAI that will be referred to as AI from hereon in. These great irreversible changes in AI change human thinking and perspectives and these “Mindsteps to the cosmos” as Hawkins (1983) explained them, are adding intensity to all of humanity. For example, the *mindstep* towards environmental consciousness that occurred in the late 20th century led to a greater awareness of the impact of human activity on the planet and a shift towards more sustainable practices. Similarly, the *mindstep* towards greater gender and racial equality has led to significant progress in these areas, although there is still much work to be done. Overall, *mindsteps to the cosmos* can have a profound impact on humanity, as they represent a leap forward in our collective understanding of ourselves and the world around us (Hawkins, 1983).

The Japanese AI industry is not the most competitive on a global scale but it does remain at the forefront of hardware development, such as robots and automobiles (Guillermo, 2020). Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the liberal democrat leader for Japan from 2006-2007 and again 2012-2020 was well known as a supporter of the robotics revolution. To expand the Japanese *craftsmanship spirit* of their manufacturing, or *monozukuri* (

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How to cite: Mori, L. H. (2023). Woke in the dark: Embracing diversity and trust through social and emotional learning in education in the age of artificial intelligence. *International Journal of Didactical Studies*, 4(2), 21482. <https://doi.org/10.33902/ijods.202321482>

ものづくり), in 2018 AI officially became part of Abe's innovation strategy. Continued evaluation is required, but Japan's aging population means there will be a shortfall of workforce and there is an extensive view that AI will fill it. Continual reviews and assessment of AI's trustworthiness continue and what is deemed legal, ethical, and fair will remain of utmost importance, not only in Japan but on a global scale (Zuboff, 2019).

Citizens and residents of Japan are also facing other new challenges along with technological advancements, such as cultural diversity and language barriers, as the borders become more fluid and there is an influx of non-Japanese residents. This influx requires educators to adopt innovative and inclusive teaching strategies. Debates upon the role of teachers and the future of English education have been ignited. Historically, the Japanese government has looked to Western models for inspiration in developing its educational system, however, there are currently no perfect models to follow, and this creates an opportunity to co-construct and nourish meaningful global relationships. A vision of shared values, interests and beliefs in mutual respect, trust and cooperation could prevail (Freedman, 2015; Hogg et al., 2021). This contrasts to the current and previous situation of classroom communities being artificial and forced, lacking in depth of relationships and having no genuine sense of connection or mutual support (Jenson & Gibbons, 2013; Yamagishi, 2011). The excessive emphasis placed on rote memorization and mastery of standardised tests in Japan, and the cultural value placed on harmony and consensus building instead of individualistic and confrontational approaches has limited some of the opportunities for students to engage in debate and discussion (Anderson, 1993, 2019). This is perhaps in complete contrast to its Western friends who have students that struggle to sit still and need constant stimulation (Brooks & Lasser, 2018; Smith, 2012). There is no happy medium and yet Japan does need to continue to adapt to the changing demands of the global market (Mori, 2023).

While considering the epistemological shift of language learning and acquisition from *proficiency* to *criticality* (Bouchard, 2017) this paper acknowledges the challenges and opportunities presented by the identity and ideological changes brought about through rapid change. In typical global classrooms in Japan, language is often forced and accumulated much the same as in Freire's (2018) banking of education, rather than cultivated, and it is therefore a systematic change to education that is needed (Bereiter, 2002; Claxton & Lucas, 2015; Egan, 2008; Mori, 2022). One that supports diversity and mutual growth. Japan faces a plethora of challenges in the coming years, including technological advancements, an increasing influx of immigrants, and a rapidly changing societal landscape. However, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) presents an opportunity for the educational system to improve, not only within the scope of the English language education but for the entire system as a whole.

2. The Importance of Social Emotional Learning

SEL is crucial in a diverse society, as it encourages empathy, communication, and collaboration. There are an increasing amount of organizations, such as Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the Emotional Intelligence (EI) network Six Seconds, the Character Lab founded by Angela Duckworth, the author of *Grit* (2016), and what is occasionally referred to as the SEL 2.0 due to the addition of ethics, Social, Emotional and Ethical Development (SEED). They are all working hard to provide the evidence and data for declaring the value and importance of SEL both occupationally and educationally (Brackett et al., 2011; Bradberry et al., 2009). SEL is a very large umbrella term used to cover a wide variety of skills and competencies that are essential for personal and social development (Arao, 2019; M. Brackett, 2019; Goleman, 1995; Salovey, 2011; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). For further elaboration on the skills and competencies related to SEL, please refer to the dedicated section on SEL definition and its importance, or consult appendix 1, which provides a comprehensive list of competencies along with their own definitions.

SEL is the fundamental component that should be integrated into all aspects of education and life, in order to promote holistic development and enhance well-being of individuals and communities. It can provide structure to build habits and routines that value all aspects of what it means to be healthy, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Differentiation in SEL, refers to the process of identifying and recognizing the unique strengths, needs, and interests of each individual learner. This involves creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel valued and respected for who they are, and where their diverse backgrounds and experiences are acknowledged and celebrated. By developing humanistic skills, individuals are better equipped to navigate the complexities of modern life, build resilience, and contribute positively to society.

3. The Role of Pedagogies of Trust and With-ness

Pedagogies of trust and with-ness are approaches to teaching and learning that emphasize building positive and supportive relationships between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves. These pedagogies can help create a safe and inclusive learning environment, where students feel valued, respected, and supported in their academic and personal growth. Trust has been written about by many Emotional Quotient (EQ) practitioners as it fosters a sense of mutual respect (Freedman, 2015; Jenson & Gibbons, 2013; Yamagishi, 2011). Owing to the surge of what has come to be identified as *fake news* and the rapid escalation of digital activity in image manipulation, discerning the veracity of information has become increasingly arduous. This phenomenon of manipulation is detrimental to trust, as credibility is questioned, and confusion ensues. Distrust has become widespread and in the era of abundant information, it is crucial to verify sources and fact check. In becoming aware of biases and agendas, this knowledge can help individuals to seek diverse sources and perspectives. Verification and fact-checking play a crucial role in building trust by providing an objective assessment of the accuracy and reliability of information. Although these practices may initially appear to demonstrate scepticism, they actually serve to reinforce trust in the information being presented. When individuals encounter information that has been verified and fact-checked, they can be confident that it has undergone a rigorous and impartial evaluation process. This confidence can lead to greater trust in the sources. In contrast, when information is not verified or fact-checked, doubts about its accuracy and reliability can erode trust in both the information and the sources that provided it. By exposing falsehoods and inaccuracies, verification and fact-checking can help to prevent the spread of misinformation and increase trust in the accuracy and reliability of information. A pedagogy of trust can help learners become critical thinkers and can help promote trust in their interactions and ultimately, make better decisions and engage in society in an informed manner.

Pedagogies that emphasize a collaborative *with-ness* necessitate a deep understanding of contextual knowledge. To promote a deeper, more engaging, and relevant learning experience, considering the political and social context can shape communication and interactive styles. To establish a mutually inclusive learning environment where teachers and students work *with* one another, it is imperative to strive for parity in all interactions. Teachers have long been held as the hierarchical knowledge owners (Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test, 2021; Dewey, 2010; Freire, 2018; Kvanvig, 2003; Robinson, 2010). Yet, increasingly, empowering students' voices has dismantled the hierarchy of dialogical space between. Teachers and students collaborating to produce content can destabilize the hegemonic power and be a tool for liberation (Giroux, 1997, 2004). "Transforming schools, and, more broadly, society, cannot occur if youth are not viewed as equal stakeholders capable of imagining a world they will soon lead" (Hogg et al., 2021 p. 1). Co-constructing the experience allows moments of class time to pause and reflect and change the narrative when appropriate.

Baskerville (2021) notes negative school factors can contribute to student truancy and a weakened voice diminishes self-worth. Inclusion in action can provide confidence and trust. A recognition of transformational change is generally reported at times when adults have demonstrated their willingness to involve students as stakeholders in the process (Baskerville, 2021; Cook-Sather, 2010; Ferguson et al., 2011). Pedagogies of *with-ness* then, allows pedagogy to become relational, and interpersonal, who we teach is just as important as what we teach.

4. The Importance of SEL in Diverse Settings

SEL has typically pertained to those early years development, yet that same cultivation throughout all levels, including the graduate and post-grad years can be immediately beneficial when presented as mindfulness, cognitive behavioural techniques, relaxation interventions, and social skills training (Conley, 2017).

4.1. Defining SEL and Its Importance

Basically, SEL is about learning to live a healthier life. There is broad agreement today that life conditions for students have dramatically changed during the past decade, in terms of media exposure and unmediated access to information, and there is less support for, and involvement in, caring for social-emotional development (Weissberg et al., 2017). Although there are various organizations and they all differ in the distinct terminology of the exact competencies, the skills, knowledge, abilities and behaviours, that can be articulated under the SEL heading, there is a fundamental core set that remains within all.

These core competencies typically include: 1) Self-awareness (recognizing and understanding emotions, limitations, and strengths), 2) Self-regulation (managing emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in a constructive manner), 3) Social awareness (perceiving and understanding emotions, needs and concerns of

others), and 4) Relationship management (establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, communicating effectively, and collaborating with others).

We, humans, can change the way we think, and core beliefs can empower a move forward or create limitations and lead to unfavourable outcomes. Taking SEL beyond the talking of ideas and concepts and instead, embodying values of peace, justice, and cooperation, SEL in action (Flippo, 2016) synthesizes these values to make SEL accessible to educators, by providing guidelines based on research and practice. Six Seconds provides resources and training in Emotional Intelligence (EI). EI is typically measured as an Emotional Quotient (EQ) and is the measure of a person’s ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others. While IQ (Intelligence Quotient) measures cognitive abilities such as problem solving and reasoning, EQ measures emotional intelligence and usually assess skills such as the four competencies listed above. Appendix 1 is the model of EQ the Emotional Network Six Seconds follows (see Figure 1). Their Know, Choose, Give curriculum (KCG) adopts EQ in Action to provide practical and simple methods for learning and practicing EQ (Six Seconds, n.d.). Six seconds adopted its three-part model in 1997 and these three important pursuits help people become more aware (know), more intentional (choose) and more purposeful (give) (Johnson, 2021). The program expands with learning outcomes and there are eight learnable, specific measurable competencies, these are all listed along with their definitions in the model at the end of this paragraph. The curriculum aligns with other popular models and is just one example of how the competencies can support awareness, management, and direction.

Figure 1
The six seconds EQ model (adopted from www.6seconds.org)



Pursuit	Competency	Definition
Know Yourself	Enhance Emotional Literacy	Accurately identifying and interpreting both simple and compound feelings.
	Recognize Patterns	Acknowledging frequently recurring reactions and behaviors.
Choose Yourself	Apply Consequential Thinking	Evaluating the costs and benefits of your choices
	Navigate Emotions	Assessing, harnessing, and transforming emotions as a strategic resource.
	Engage Intrinsic Motivation	Gaining energy from personal values & commitments vs. being driven by external forces.
	Exercise Optimism	Taking a proactive perspective of hope and possibility.
Give Yourself	Increase Empathy	Recognizing and appropriately responding to others' emotions.
	Pursue Noble Goals	Connecting your daily choices with your overarching sense of purpose.

The approach to marketing SEL has been criticised for its perceived reliance on gimmicky tactics and has the potential to be misused without proper understanding, leading to the misapplication of its underlying principles. This can, in turn, lead to negative reflections. SEL has also been perceived as a cult due to its emphasis on group cohesion, shared values, and commitment to personal growth, which may share some superficial similarities to cults. Some of the language and rituals within SEL programs could also be perceived as cult-like even though they are intended to promote individuals’ decision-making abilities by

overcoming certain ways of thinking. Scholars such as Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) emphasize the importance of taking a critical stance towards SEL's implementation, ensuring transparency, and avoiding any attempts to manipulate others. Furthermore, with the increasing availability of digital platforms and the use of NAI, there is a risk of inappropriate marketing which may not align with evidence-based practices or principles. The use of technology and AI in SEL interventions is becoming increasingly popular, but it is essential to approach their use with caution and ensure ethical principles are upheld.

4.2. Utilizing Diversity of Communication

Utilizing diversity of communication can enhance SEL in diverse settings, such as teaching English in Japan. Promoting translanguaging, the ability to navigate and communicate effectively in multiple languages and dialects, can facilitate the development of SEL skills and encourage cross-cultural understanding. For instance, teachers can encourage students to use their native languages alongside English, recognizing that language is deeply intertwined with identity and culture. This approach can help students build stronger connections with their cultural heritage, feel more valued in the classroom, and promote a positive classroom environment. Translanguaging and embracing diversity of communication, can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment by allowing students to express themselves more freely and effectively (Canagarajah, 2013; Pacheco et al., 2019). This promotes positive social and emotional outcomes such as enhancing students' confidence and communication skills (Brackett et al., 2011).

4.3. Accepting Non-Japanese Perspectives

Accepting non-Japanese perspectives is crucial for SEL in diverse settings, such as teaching English in Japan. Non-native speakers of Japanese face various challenges, including language barriers and cultural differences, which can affect their sense of belonging and self-esteem (García & Li, 2014). Japan has traditionally been viewed as a monolithic society with strong emphasis on homogeneity, making it challenging for non-Japanese individuals to express their opinions and perspectives. However, with globalization and the increasing importance of alter-globalization, using the alternative to accept all of the positives of globalization, then Japan can be viewed as gradually shifting towards a more inclusive and diverse society (Robertson, 1992). Alter-globalization is a social movement that emerged in response to the perceived negative consequences of globalization, particularly neoliberal globalization. Unlike the anti-globalization movement, which seeks to resist or oppose globalization altogether, alter-globalization advocates for a different form of globalization that prioritizes social and environmental justice, democratic participation, cultural diversity. The alter-globalization movement seeks to create a more equitable and sustainable world by offering alternative economic models, such as fair trade and localism, and advocating for policies that prioritize the needs of people and the planet over corporate profits. As the population ages and the birth rate declines, Japan must rely on non-Japanese and AI to sustain its economy. This shift presents an opportunity for Japan to embrace diversity and to listen to the views and opinions of all individuals. It may affect the role and purpose of TEFL in Japan, but by incorporating SEL practices, educators can support the transition towards a more diverse and inclusive society, promoting empathy, understanding, and respect for different perspectives (Durlak et al., 2011). By accepting non-Japanese perspectives and embracing diversity, Japan can foster a more positive and inclusive environment for all.

5. Embracing AI and Globalization While Addressing their Challenges

As Japan continues to embrace the forces of AI and globalization, it is important to address the challenges these technological advancements bring. In particular, educators must consider how to prepare students for these rapidly changing times. This section will address the challenges of embracing AI and globalization while also recognizing the potential benefits. Additionally, it will highlight the importance of incorporating inquiry-based and cooperative learning to effectively address these challenges.

One of the most pressing concerns about the integration of AI is the potential for it to replace human workers. As automation and robotics become more advanced, there is a risk of job displacement and economic inequality. However, it is important to note that historically, technological advancements have led to increased productivity and job creation in the long term (Furman & Seamans, 2019). As such, it is important for educators to encourage students to critically evaluate the impact of AI on the workforce, and to develop skills that are complementary to technological advancements (Colombo et al., 2019).

While integration of AI and globalization poses challenges, it also presents numerous opportunities. By integrating SEL into AI research, promoting alternative globalization that celebrates cultural diversity, and

prioritizing human relationships, the implementation of AI and globalization can remain beneficial for all involved. AI has the potential to revolutionize the field of education by providing personalized learning experiences and automating administrative tasks. Similarly, globalization has led to increased cultural exchange and economic growth. However, it is important to recognize the potential drawbacks of unchecked economic growth, such as environmental degradation and income inequality. AI can pose a threat to job security for many individuals and the impact of AI on employment remains complex and multifaceted. As such, educators should emphasize the importance of responsible and sustainable globalization, while also highlighting the benefits derived from AI. According to Durlak and Weissberg (2011), SEL programs can promote positive attitudes towards learning and can help individuals manage emotions, set and achieve goals, and establish positive relationships. By integrating SEL into AI research, it is possible for researchers and developers to understand and address the emotional impact of AI-driven changes on individuals. Employers, policymakers and educators may also play a role in promoting SEL skills among employees and job seekers to help them cope better with the emotional challenges of job displacement. Ultimately, understanding and addressing the emotional impact of any kind of change, not just by the introduction of AI but also to other shifts in society, a collaborative effort is required from various stakeholders, including researchers, employers, policymakers, and individuals to how we can mitigate negative emotional responses.

As people become more connected across borders, globalization can promote a sense of unity and collaboration. It can also lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. This paradoxical phenomenon can work in different ways depending on how it is experienced by different individuals and communities. While globalization can create opportunities for greater connection and collaboration, it can also exacerbate feelings of disconnection and alienation, particularly for those who feel left behind or marginalized by its effects. As educational reformers, we must strive for an alternative form of globalization that promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity (Freire et al., 2014; Gallagher et al., 2020; Giroux, 1997; Kumashiro, 2020). Human relationships can promote resilience and provide a sense of support that cannot be replicated by machines-yet. At present, the unique benefits of human relationships are still unmatched by machines and technology, however all that could change as technologies evolve. Positive relationships are essential to well-being, and SEL can help prioritize the development of skills to assist in the integration of AI and globalization. AEL can integrate skills to cope and supersede the possible negative impacts of AI such as fear, isolation, and disconnection. While AI has the potential to become a positive tool, we need to address the ethical implications with urgent attention – will humans allow robots to rule the world?

To effectively address the challenges of embracing AI and globalization, educators should incorporate inquiry based (IBL) and cooperative learning into their teaching practices. IBL encourages students to explore complex problems and develop critical thinking skills, while cooperative learning fosters collaboration and communication. By leveraging these pedagogies, students are encouraged to work together on complex problems, to engage in meaningful conversations that foster the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and digital literacy skills can be developed to help learners succeed in a technologically advanced global society (MacKenzie & Batburst-Hunt, 2019). By cultivating students to think independently, work collaboratively, and apply their skills to real-world scenarios, these approaches can prepare learners for the challenges and opportunities of the modern, alter-globalised world.

6. Pedagogies of With-ness and Trust

Pedagogies of with-ness (Hogg et al., 2021) and trust are crucial components of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes SEL and global citizenship. In the context of TEFL in Japan, these pedagogies are especially relevant, given the need to promote translanguaging, cultural competency, and levelling the hierarchical structure of the classroom.

Trust is an essential aspect of the learning environment, as it fosters a sense of safety and security that allows students to take risks and engage fully in the learning process. Teachers who establish trust with their students create a space where students feel respected, valued, and supported. This is especially important in the context of TEFL in Japan, where students may be hesitant to participate due to cultural differences such as the silence in the classroom as explored by Anderson (1993, 2019) where silence is valued and a lack of confidence may contribute to a hesitancy to speak up. Eye contact is also a changing cultural norm, where direct eye contact is typically seen as impolite, politeness and group harmony and a fear of making mistakes all contribute to cultural differences and the lack of exposure to English outside of the classroom can instil language barriers for learners to overcome.

In TEFL, teachers need to be aware of cultural differences and be able to adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. By promoting cultural competency, teachers can help students develop an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, fostering empathy and respect for others.

With-ness involves being present, attentive, and respectful, building connections with students, and establishing trust and positive relationships. By adopting with-ness, teachers can create a safe and supportive environment where students feel valued and respected. Adopting translanguaging can also contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Translanguaging emphasizes the importance of language as a tool for communication and recognizes the diversity of languages in the world. Pedagogies of with-ness (Hogg et al., 2021) and trust are essential components of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment in TEFL in Japan.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges of AI and globalization require a shift in pedagogy towards SEL and pedagogies of trust and with-ness. Embracing diversity to prepare students with the skills they need to navigate a changing world, will lead to a more inclusive, empathetic, and connected society. In the context of Japan, these pedagogies have significant implications for the future of education, where there is a growing need to develop a workforce that is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to navigate an ever-changing landscape. This is a call for action, where teachers and educators must adapt and innovate to ensure that their students are prepared for the future.

By promoting trust, with-ness, and diversity, teachers can create a safe and supportive learning environment that fosters empathy, respect and responsibility towards each other and the world around them. Ultimately, the pedagogies of with-ness and trust offer a path towards greater awareness and unity in the face of a rapidly changing world. The increasing pace of globalization and AI integration in the workforce of Japan necessitates the adoption of not only coping mechanisms but also in gaining skills and techniques to effectively navigate the resulting disruptions and challenges. By fostering relationships, promoting diversity, and building social-emotional skills, we can be better prepared for the future ahead.

Remaining “woke in the dark” speaks to the importance of the need for working together and walking with awareness to create a brighter future. Woke in the dark is the light we need to guide us towards a more equitable and just society, where the power of education is harnessed to create positive change. It is up to us to embrace these pedagogies, work together with trust and with-ness, and pave the way for a better future.

Funding: No funding source is reported for this study.

Declaration of interest: No conflict of interest is declared by author.

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