

A young girl with blonde hair tied in a ponytail with a large white bow is shown in profile, holding a Mexican flag. She is wearing a red short-sleeved shirt under a blue denim dress and a colorful beaded bracelet on her right wrist. The flag is partially visible, showing the green, white, and red vertical stripes and the national coat of arms. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. A white rectangular box with a drop shadow is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

Mexico



Social and Emotional Education in Mexico

Claudia Madrazo

Abstract

Mexico is the fourth most biodiverse and culturally diverse country on the planet. In the last forty years Mexico's population has grown from 20 to 112 million inhabitants, 76% of whom are under 45 years of age (INEGI, 2010). These demographic pressures along with multiple deeply rooted systemic factors (in the political, economic and societal realms) have all contributed to the erosion of the social tapestry of the country.

As a consequence of its complex social dynamics, Mexico is experiencing an escalation of violence among the younger generations, as evidenced by rising incidences of student disengagement, dropping out of school and suicide (CEAMEG, 2011).

This chapter describes the efforts of the Mexican government to introduce a systemic approach to social and emotional education (SEE). However, despite numerous SEE-related curriculum reforms, an integrated compulsory socio-emotional approach to education is still missing.

The three case studies in the chapter focus on the following:

AMISTAD para Siempre is the culturally adapted Spanish version of the *FRIENDS for Life* programme. It is a social and emotional programme, endorsed by the World Health Organisation, which is designed to enhance resilience by increasing social and emotional competence and decreasing anxiety and depressive symptoms in children and adolescents. Studies have shown that children and adolescents who take part in the programme increase their coping skills, their ability to think positively and their ability to form relationships.

Over half a million children in 28 Mexican states have engaged with *dia*° Programme (Development of Intelligence through Art). *dia*° brings visual and literary art into the education process, creating a safe space for students to contribute and uses dialogue as the main vehicle of the transformation process. The *dia*° methodology is being used in 20,000 classrooms in Mexico at present and over 2,000 principals have adopted it. 95% of teachers questioned in the case study observed positive benefits in terms of their students' emotional skills, and 78% agreed that the methodology also supported the development of their pupils' cognitive abilities. Claudia Madrazo introduces us to how the *dia* programme has been implemented at CAM 10 (a public Multiple Attention Centre in Mexico), highlighting the transformation of students, teachers and parents, and providing us with insights into how the *dia* programme works in practice.

The third case study focuses on the social and emotional education of the Mayan people in the Yucatan. This case study brings us to the most profound level of the educational process, to the core of our basic social values and mental models, to the roots of our ancient cultures. The case provides us with a fascinating insight into the importance of social and emotional education in the traditional Mayan way of life, and reveals the profundity and the fragility of

Mayan socio-affective skills which are nurtured in the communities in order to achieve “metaphysical balance”.

Each of these cases reveals an orientation towards creating desirable futures and addressing fundamental problems that exist at different levels of the sociocultural system in Mexico. What is clear is that structural changes in curricula and continuous capacity-building for teacher trainers, principals, teachers, coaches and parents are urgently needed. The ultimate goal is to develop healthy learning communities, capable of co-creating and sustaining the complex processes of socio-emotional education, so the social tapestry can be reconstructed.

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Claudia Madrazo grew up in a family of educators. Since she was young, she has been interested in learning and exploring the world. Her need for enquiry and discovery led her to art and its potential as a path of transformation. For her, education is a process that goes beyond formal learning.

"As teachers and institutions we need to play a central part in the holistic development of students, promoting sensitivity, reflection, and critical consciousness. We must give them the intellectual and emotional stimulus to help educate complete beings in every sense of the word, capable of knowing themselves and able to change and act in the world with sensitivity and responsibility". – Claudia Madrazo

In 1992 Claudia founded *La Vaca Independiente*® (The Independent Cow), a social enterprise focused on educational transformation and human development. She developed the innovative education methodology *dia*® (Development of Intelligence through Art) which enables the transition of the teacher as unilateral transmitter of information, into a mediator of a deep learning process who invites students to share responsibility for their learning and development.

In 2010 she co-founded the *Academy for Systemic Change*, an initiative to enable leaders, communities and networks to catalyze and facilitate societal, environmental and economic well-being on a scale that matters.

In 2012, she founded *TAE* (Transformation through art and education), a non-profit organization formed by artists, educators and professionals committed to supporting education and art transformation.

Claudia is also engaged with conservation and sustainability issues and sits on the boards of *The Nature Conservancy*, the *Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology*, and the *National Geographical Society*.

Claudia has a degree in Communications and Mass Media from the *Universidad Iberoamericana*, and a Master's in Museology and Semiology of Cultural Objects from *Essex University, U.K.* She is the author of nine books as well as essays and articles.

Case Study 3:

Social Emotional Education in the Yucatec Mayan: From Reciprocity to Metaphysical Balance.

Author: Claudia Madrazo

In search of the cultural roots of the Mayan Social and Emotional Education (SEE)

When people hear or think about the Mayan culture, they picture an ancient civilization that built amazing pyramids in Central America, and rarely visualize a living culture made up of more than a million people who still speak the original Mayan language, and continue to practice many of their ancient cultural traditions, ways of being in and understanding of the world.

Across time, Yucatec Mayan communities have inherited deep cultural values and a particular cosmology, a way of seeing and experiencing the physical world and their social milieu. More than five hundred years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the imposition of Christianity, some of the ancient Mayan social and emotional values, attitudes and beliefs still prevail within the contemporary Mayan com-

Eighteen years ago when my family started to spend more and more time in the Yucatan, my own fascination and interest in understanding this culture was not so much focused on the archaeological dimension of the past, but in the cultural reality of the present.

Those who have come across the Mayan people of Yucatan at some point have noticed the friendliness, kindness and respectful manner that characterize them. My own experiences over the years and in different Mayan communities, with these subtle and yet profound “qualities of being”, is the point of departure for this case study. My experiences led me to wonder: how are these human qualities transmitted? How explicit are the social and emotional education processes in Mayan communities? And, finally where are the social and emotional concepts, skills and values transmitted today?

The main objective of this case study is to identify, make explicit and analyze the most influential aspects of the traditional social and emotional education (SEE) of the Mayan people of Yucatan, in order to understand how and where these teachings are trans-

Some of the ancient Mayan social and emotional values, attitudes and beliefs still prevail within the contemporary Mayan communities

munities, many of which can be objectively observed in their daily cultural practices and social behaviours. Their sense of reciprocity and cooperation, or “reciprocal altruism” (as one of the interviewees expressed it), as well as their feeling of “connection” with nature, depict a balanced relationship between the physical world and the spiritual realm, characteristics that coincide with the Mayan ancient cultural and social cosmology.

mitted today. Also, we aim to identify which social-affective elements have endured over time, in order to identify the socio-cultural variables responsible for preserving or losing these traditional social and emotional (SE) values. This case study also seeks to understand the relationship between traditional Mayan SE values and the Western SEE core competencies, in order to create common language categories that could help co-create

meaningful and efficient local SEE programmes for the Yucatec Mayan communities in the light of current social and cultural changes among these communities.

Retrieving Data

In order to accomplish this case study, several interviews were carried out in communities in the vicinity of Merida, in Yucatan, Mexico, with local Mayan representatives of different genders, ages and occupations. Twelve people were interviewed in total, six women and six men. All of the participants in this research were bilingual speakers of Yucatec Maya and Spanish. Additionally, two linguistic anthropologists, specialized in Mayan studies and who live in the nearby area were also interviewed. All interviews were carried out in Spanish, using an open inquiry process. All questions and answers were digitally recorded for further analysis.

SEE in the Midlands of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico

After analyzing all interviews, the results were organized into two separate but related

3 Core values and attitudes

4 Cosmology: The concept of embodying nature, and the experience of metaphysical balance

These four dimensions provide a framework through which to observe the dynamics and ways of transmission of traditional Mayan social emotional values; and associated skills, concepts, and beliefs. It is through these components that social and emotional education is made manifest and translated into observable behaviours, ways of being and socializing, and represented in language.

The second framework is organized around the core competencies that comprise Western Social and Emotional Education. The objective here was to formulate a common language between the traditional Mayan SE aspects and Western SEE competencies, so that the former could become more explicit in terms of their description, their social and educational value, and the way they are transmitted and taught, allowing local educators and social stakeholders interested and involved in

The young Mayans of the Yucatan have the lowest rate of school-related violence in the country; in contrast, they have one of the highest suicide rates in Mexico

frameworks: The first one comprises the components of what we named the *Mayan Social Emotional Ecosystem*.

These components include:

- 1 The Milpa as the ultimate space of transmission
- 2 The Maya language and the Art of Communication: Sharing tales and conversations

SEE to use these aspects as a framework and tool for creating locally appropriate SEE programmes.

The characteristics and human qualities mentioned in this case study are present in the Mayan people of the Yucatan Peninsula, a territory of one million inhabitants. According to the Centro de Estudios Indígenas, we estimate that 10 to 15% of living Mayans still hold deep values and ways of being, however,

as we will present in the conclusion, the threats to these cultural values are growing with accelerating speed. We don't intend to idealize the Mayan people, and pretend that all of the Mayans have these values and qualities of being; rather, we aim to shed light on some human characteristics (individual and collective) that are visible and present today. We also want to address a larger cosmology that has been a revelation to us and has expanded our understanding of social emotional education. In the most recent statistics (INEGI, 2010) the young Mayans of the Yucatan have the lowest rate of school-related violence in the country; in contrast, they have one of the highest suicide rates in Mexico. We could investigate several hypotheses of the challenges the Maya communities are facing to find the roots of this phenomenon.

The Main Components of The Mayan Traditional Social and Emotional Education

Spaces and forms of transmission: Tending the Milpa, the ultimate hub

The Milpa creates the space for the transmission, modeling, and absorption of social and emotional values and skills. The Milpa, or cornfield, is the place where a significant part of the social-affective education takes place. It could be said that the Milpa is a representation of the Mayan social-affective universe.

at the Milpa as a fundamental space, where they went with their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, to support the labour of farming. From burning the forest, clearing the fields, performing the rituals for the Gods, planting one seed at a time and paying close attention, throughout the seasons, they performed the necessary work and rituals to keep the crops growing healthy and vibrant.

"We grew up with my father going to the Milpa, and then he got a job. My grandfather used to tell us stories of the Milpa, the elderly know how things are and that you should not take or move anything."

"We learn to speak Mayan in the Milpa, we did not go to school we went to the Milpa."

"When harvesting, we all went together, we did not go to the market, everything was produced in the Milpa and on the Patio."

"They would give us tasks, our work and responsibility, and I felt very good. I felt proud of myself because I had a responsibility and contributed to the family."

"Since I was very little he would tell us; if the children don't work and have

The Milpa, or cornfield, is the place where a significant part of the social-affective education takes place ... Cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity and friendship all converge in this space

Cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity and friendship all converge in this space. One of the interviewers referred to their experience

things to do and learn to be responsible, then, when they grow they will go on wrong paths."

"Today there are a lot of young people who get into drugs and trouble, I think that our grandparents taught us how to work, and value the work we did. My grandfather would tell us; if you learn to work, tomorrow when you have your own family you will know how to earn what you need to support your own family and you will not get into bad roads, wrong paths."

"They were very strict with us, he has a strong character. And I think it is because he is this firm that none of them got into bad habits, all my aunts and uncles took good paths."

Somehow, the Milpa is a democratic environment in which everyone's efforts are valuable and necessary to bring about the harvest. Working in the field creates an honored network of mutual obligation. At the

Mayans are not only great storytellers, they can sit and tell stories forever, but they also use stories and conversation as vehicles to solve conflict and share ancient wisdom. The quality of these conversations provides social modeling, and the conversations function as explicit mechanisms through which social emotional wisdom is transmitted.

"We shared all meals together, breakfast, lunch and dinner, and it was a moment to share and talk to each other, about what had happened during the day, with the animals, in the Milpa, with the trees and plants. At the end of the day the father would take the boys out and tell stories. It was a great moment of the day; it was a way to be connected and together, to feel the relationship. The girls went with the mother and did their things."

Mayans are not only great storytellers, they can sit and tell stories forever, but they also use stories and conversation as vehicles to solve conflict and share ancient wisdom

Milpa nobody's work is better than anyone else's; everyone's contribution is important and necessary.

In addition, the Milpa has been the space where they transmit the Mayan language, as the grandparents and parents talk to their children during the processes of tending to the land and also share stories, tales and myths.

The Maya language and the art of communication: Sharing tales and conversations as vehicles for building and generating harmony through dialogue

Trouble, misfortune or misdoings are always addressed through conversations and by sharing stories, real or mythological. Creating a time and a space for sustaining a conversation is a crucial aspect when dealing with social and emotional issues. Conversations usually take place between older adults, children and youngsters, or among more experienced adults and novices. Seeking advice or untangling a difficult matter is usually the reason for creating a conversational space; however, sharing tales and previous experiences is also a way of teaching youngsters and novices how to avoid trouble and misfortune before it happens. In a way, stories,

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fictional or real, foretell and model positive and wise behaviour.

"If you don't agree about something and you get angry about it, instead of getting into a fight you talk about it."

"They have a way of solving problems with communication. They say, we have a problem let's talk about it and see what happens."

"If they fight with each other they create a distance, they stop talking with each other, until they find a mediator. They have that cultural practice, they bring someone in when the conflict escalates and ask him or her, 'can you tell so and

Gods' behaviours, and how to take care of them and of ourselves."

"They like to talk about everything, they always have something to talk about, and it is their way to exist. Communication, they really embody the Art of communication."

"They talk about their relationship with the supernatural beings, their relationship with the elements, the wind, the animals, their friends."

Core values and attitudes

There are a series of consistent attitudes and behaviours observed by the interviewers when speaking with the Maya that trans-

"They have a way of solving problems with communication. They say, we have a problem let's talk about it and see what happens."

so, that I want to apologize, so we can keep our relationship."

"They certainly value relationships and friendship."

"Grandmother would tell us all kinds of stories and tales, her beliefs about The

mit a profound sense of kindness and a particular way of being, with respect and a friendly attitude.

Driving through the small towns and roads of the Yucatan, one stops the car, opens the window and asks for directions, the Maya will come close, and before formulating any answer

will embody attention, look directly at you and say, “Good afternoon,” hold a slight moment of silence, almost undetectable for most people and then, will help you with directions.

Courtesy and kindness: a way of being around sensitivity, love and affection

The Mayan’s kind and courteous attitudes are notable, they have softness in the way they treat each other and how they express respect and sensitivity to the world around them. As Ricardo Aranda (one of the interviewees who grew up in a Mayan family) comments:

“We lived in the country, with the animals and the forest, we woke up early and during the day everyone had things to do, in the field, with the animals, or the crops... but we lived in a very tranquil environment, we shared with the neighbors what we had, and they supported us when we needed things they had, we did not go to the market as we do today... but the most important thing they taught me was the sense of respect, respect to the elders, to our parents and to each other, they were very serious about not listening to others’ conversation, and greeting the elderly was a must... if we did something wrong, grandmother would call us, and asked us gently, “Why did you do that? If we took something that did not belong to us, she would call us, and explain why that was wrong. Eventually she would really get angry and as a punishment we had to do more work in the field... when we visited our grandparents, they received us with love, they embraced us, hugged and kissed us with warmth, they gave us what they had from their Milpa, they were always like this. We spent a lot of time with them.”

The feeling of love and kindness, as a genuine attitude that is expressed at home, is present

in many of the interviewees. In these territories of sensitivity, feeling and caring, it was clear throughout the interviews that some of the Mayans have a wide spectrum of feelings, which is reflected (as Amira shared) in their capacity to feel deep connections of love and affection to their fellow companions.

“My mother loved her roses, her plants, and is capable of feeling sad when her roses die, she has cried many times because someone took and stole her turkey, because she loved it, it was her turkey and she loved it, and she is capable of feeling these deep affections.”

The Mayans have a wide range of feelings and can feel, as Amira states, in different forms:

“We can feel respect, and also for the need of a relationship that we establish, for giving and receiving, or for gratitude.... we can feel for a wide range of things. For us feeling the need to love, to care, is natural, is what we are, we don’t talk about it, we are this way.”

A deep and fundamental Sense of Respect; keeping your place in the place where it belongs

The Mayan sense of respect is deep and subtle, and may be the key value of this culture. Respect means to keep your place where it belongs and let the other be in his or her own space. They express this value by embodying a whole sense of consideration that each person deserves.

“They always greet each other, they transmit friendly attitudes, and they really care about how they are treated and therefore how they treat others. If in a given job, a Mayan feels badly treated, he would rather quit the job than support the disrespectful attitudes of the boss.”

Respect means to keep your place where it belongs and let the other be in his or her own space

The mother guides and teaches her children to be respectful, not only with each other but also with the animals and trees around them, as Esteban reports:

"If we treated the pigs aggressively, our mother would say, 'do not hit the animals like that' and she would take a long wooden stick and delicately push the pig to the right place. Our life growing up was full of those simple but specific gestures."

Reciprocal Altruism: valuing and building relationships

In the context of the Milpa and the Patio (backyard orchard and family farm), during cultivating, harvesting and taking care of the stock, the Mayans were very aware that a single individual could not achieve survival, and that only by working together could they accomplish and guarantee everyone's subsis-

in Ricardo's comments, where help is offered with an expectation or the hope that the favour will be returned in some way in the future. This behaviour can be observed among people, but also towards animals, nature, or between humans and Mayan deities. The help can take many forms, such as offering a hand at work, building a house, taking care of the sick or the elderly, providing goods, counsel, or even money. In general terms, this concept could be associated with the Western concept of Mutual Reciprocity.

"We take care of our dog, we love him, we know he takes care of us and loves us back. Our dog has put his life at risk many times for us; he has for example fought snakes in the garden."

Amira

Most of our interviewees agree that reciprocal altruism is learned in the cornfield and the

Being human meant being part of a community (Jürgen Kramer)

tence. Taken to the extreme for ancient Mayas if an individual left the community, he was no longer considered "a human being". Being human meant being part of a community (Jürgen Kramer).

This way of thinking and other communal behaviours are what we have called *reciprocal altruism and gratitude*, which can be understood as the move towards helping others for mutual benefit and fulfilment. As we read

patio, where everyone contributes for everyone's sake and profit, in order to enhance the general social capital.

Subtle collective capacities: Social synchrony, sensing and social presencing (working as a social body)

Within Mayan social perception, a person is never a sole entity, everyone belongs to a community. As a part of that microcosm, either within a family or at work, we are all

connected by actions, and mutual reciprocity. Such a connection requires being constantly aware of one's own and the others' actions and moods or mind states, and to be tuned in to a state of joint attention. The most elevated form of this social interaction that we found is not led by verbal exchanges, but through *social synchrony*. This means being aware of each other to create a collective mechanism for synchronized action. As one of our interviewees expressed it, "When working with a group of friends, or co-workers, signs and gestures are more often used than verbal language, for we are all participating together in a sort of synchronicity that requires working collectively and paying attention to each other's actions in the present moment."

"I sense what everyone in the kitchen and in the space is doing, and we all enter into a rhythm where we do not need to talk, we are all just in the same field."
Esteban

In that sense, we could draw a parallel between the Mayan concept of synchronicity and the concept of *Social Awareness or Presencing*³.

Participating in everyday activities at home or in the field may account for the development of social synchrony. Yucatec Mayan children

nity's work and activities. As one of our interviewees put it:

"Within a family, both children and adults wake up and end the day at the same time, since we all participate in daily activities, each one of us fulfilling a certain role or task."

Cosmology: The basis of a metaphysical balance sustaining the social and emotional ecosystem— Embodying Nature, Ecological Consciousness

In the Yucatec Mayan social-affective cosmology, the self is conceived not only as intertwined with its social community, but also as bound to nature (to the cosmos). According to this idea, humans possess a vital energy or "*óol*" (Le Guen & Pool Balam, 2008). It is through this vital energy that life manifests itself, and thus allows us to be sentient beings. We feel and sense, and ultimately experience cognitive states thanks to the *óol* that inhabits us. Furthermore, most of the Yucatec Mayan words used for naming emotions include variations of, or are related to, the linguistic root of the word *óol* (Le Guen & Pool Balam, 2008).

The *óol* must be taken care of, nurtured and kept away from negative entities or forces (including negative feelings and emotions);

In the Yucatec Mayan social-affective cosmology, the self is conceived not only as intertwined with its social community, but also as bound to nature (to the cosmos)

learn their duties and responsibilities through experiential learning, and by modeling through action and joint participation with their caregivers and surrounding adults, and by "tuning in" with the rest of the commu-

otherwise, as one of our interviewees explained it:

"The óol may get lost, subside or lead to sickness, misfortune or madness."

Therefore, it must be in harmony with its surroundings, and with the cosmos in general.

In that sense, caring for and respecting nature, and its representative gods, is beneficial for the *óol* and leads to wellbeing and happiness. This relationship can be synthesized in the words of one of our interviewees:

“Nature cannot be separated from God, and God can only be sensed through nature.”

are my brothers and sisters, my orchard is my dear orchard and the mountain and the rain belong to God and thus it is our duty to honor them and take good care of them.”

This physical and emotional caring for nature ensures a sustained balance, or equilibrium, between the physical world and the world of human beings (which includes the *óol*).

According to previous investigations, visualizing unity in diversity is characteristic of the

“Nature cannot be separated from God, and God can only be sensed through nature.”

It could be concluded that the Mayans conceive the *óol* as the point of contact between individuals and the cosmic forces animating the universe (Fischer, 1999).

Conceiving the self as part of a larger system, one that includes others and also nature, provides a wider ground for experiencing interdependence. As one of the participants expressed it:

“The mountain, the trees, plants and animals feed us, the sun and the rain feed the soil, and hence we all embody a single living organism. Plants and animals

Mayan cultural logic (Fischer, 1999). Unity is conceptually associated with balance and harmony, both within and between the material-physical world and the metaphysical realm.

As mentioned before, the continuation of human existence depends on this cyclic cosmic balance, for it affects and reflects everyday life conditions. Therefore, human actions are directed towards maintaining cosmic harmony through reciprocity between humans and with the vital forces of the cosmos (Monaghan, 1995). The former ideas can be repeatedly observed in folk and traditional tales, which portray the need to be responsible to

Visualizing unity in diversity is characteristic of the Mayan cultural logic (Fischer, 1999). Unity is conceptually associated with balance and harmony, both within and between the material-physical world and the metaphysical realm.

and dedicated to one's gods and the nature guardians (aluxes or chaacs) in order to maintain prosperity, good health and fortune, and overall cosmic balance (Terán, Rasmussen & Chuck, 2011). Furthermore, this balance appears to have both spatial and temporal correlates to the solar movements and the agricultural cycle (Fischer, 1999, Watanabe 1983); thus, the relevance of socialization while tending the "Milpa," and the nurture of the self associated with this primordial community work. Balance also requires *centredness* (a balance of quantities, one's possessions vs. reciprocity) and *grounding*, which means being in contact with nature and the immediate context of action (Fischer, 1999).

Therefore, a certain balance must be achieved, and everyone's actions must be connected to this cosmic balance. We subjects are only a part of a larger whole, we are not better than other beings on the planet, we are just a part. That is what I feel, that is what I experience, being part of this whole. As one of our interviewees expresses it:

"When we lose the language we lose everything. There it is, it is not in the books... In the language everything is recorded, it is the word itself that contains what you feel and what you think... How you perceive the other, the words generated in that thinking, create the

The boundaries between the individual self, others' selves and nature appear to be conceived within the Mayan culture as completely permeable

It is likely that to be centred and grounded may also account for what was described before as *social synchrony*. Other authors (Fischer, 1999; Klor de Alva, 1993) also support this vision of Metaphysical Balance as associated with the Mayan social and cultural cosmology.

The boundaries between the individual self, others' selves and nature appear to be conceived within the Mayan culture as completely permeable: human beings, other life forms as well as inanimate objects, all seem to be part of a universal continuum, in which their actions and fate are intertwined and linked directly with a greater cosmic order. This complexity demands a collective compromise and a joint intelligence. If any component of this swarm entity is disrupted the whole system may fail, and chaos could be brought about.

possibilities of the relationships, the ties that we establish with the whole. There are multiple ways and forms with which we can establish relationships. It is in the Spanish language where we create the separation. In Maya, the word itself holds the thinking, the ideas, and the feelings, in the language we find what you feel and how you feel."

Social Emotional Core Competencies (SECC) and their Relationship to Mayan Traditional Social and Emotional Values

In order to create a common language between traditional Mayan SEE key components and Western SECC, a comparative analysis was made between these two categories. The analysis aimed to associate the main aspects of Mayan SEE with the explicit abilities embedded in Western SEE core

| Western Social Emotional Core Competencies | General Definition | Traditional Mayan Social and Emotional Capacities and Values |
|--|--|--|
| 1. <i>Self-Awareness</i> | The ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence over behaviour. | <p>Considering that according to Mayan social cosmology, an individual is always conceived as a member of a larger social and cosmic network, Self Awareness can then be translated as the capacity, or state of being (emotional and cognitive states combined), which allows a person to actively participate while carrying out a task, both individually and collectively.</p> <p>It requires being observant, reflective, prudent in terms of modulating one's feelings and behaviours in order to work synchronically and in harmony with others. In that sense Self Awareness is not completely separate from Social Awareness, and both competencies could be grouped in a single concept, that of: <i>Interdependent Awareness</i>.</p> |
| 2. <i>Self-Management</i> | The ability to regulate one's emotions effectively in different situations | <p>In the context of Mayan SE values, Self Management is tied to a larger network of people, objects and events, all of which contribute to everyone's emotional regulation.</p> <p>As mentioned before, the concept of <i>óol</i> (a vital force similar to the Western concept of soul) is bound to nature and other people's <i>óol</i>; therefore, one's emotional management requires managing others' emotions too, or nature's influence on one's <i>óol</i>, through religious rituals and offerings. That is why emotional crises are usually resolved by spiritual or religious rituals, offerings or traditional medicine interventions (cleansing of the <i>óol</i>, for example).</p> |
| 3. <i>Social Awareness</i> | The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others | <p>There is a direct parallel between Social Awareness and the Mayan concept of Social Synchrony as was described above, specifically with regard to the general abilities that describe this core competency.</p> <p>Interestingly, however, for the Mayan people of Yucatan, social awareness is a given in their social cosmology. As mentioned before, the self is intertwined with other selves, and this may lead to an intrinsic collective consciousness.</p> |
| 4. <i>Social and relational</i> | The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships. This includes learning to cooperate and seeking and offering help when needed | <p>As with the previous competency, the general abilities that define the Relationship Skills competency are strongly aligned to the Mayan concept of Reciprocal Altruism. However, in the case of the Mayan SE value, the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships extends beyond the social-human realm, and encompasses nature in an overarching <i>cosmic interdependence</i>.</p> |
| 5. <i>Responsible decision making</i> | The ability to make constructive and respectful choices, based on consideration of ethical standards and the well-being of self and others and to embody the sense of responsibility | <p>To consider oneself as a constituent part of a larger network of living beings, inanimate objects and spiritual and natural forces, favours considering others when making decisions. Furthermore, sharing past experiences and skills through storytelling or by dialoguing about life experiences may strengthen responsible decision making. However, this same collective social vision may also blur personal responsibility and individual decision-making, and may hinder autonomy and innovation for the sake of helping others feel at ease.</p> |

Table 1. The Relationship between Western Social and Emotional Core Competencies and Mayan Traditional Social Emotional Values

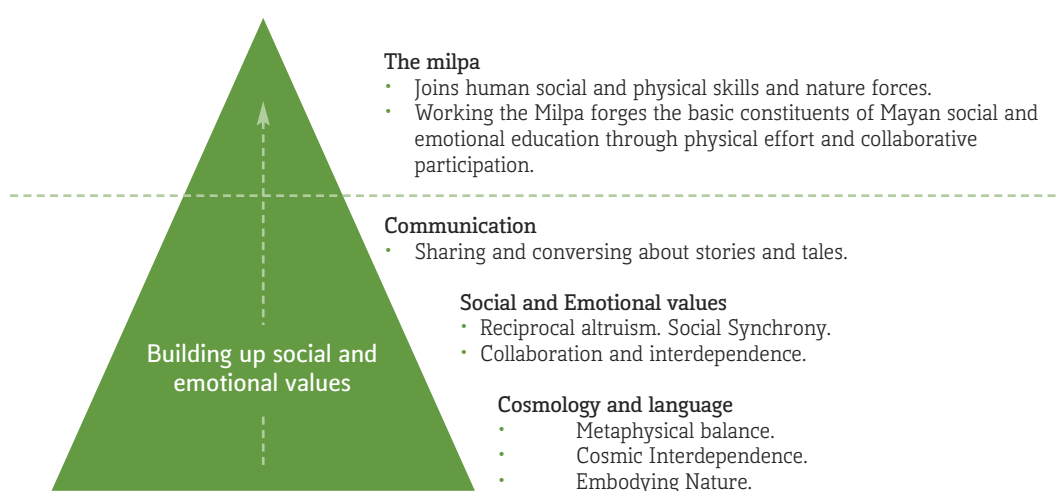


Figure 2. Iceberg diagram of the elements that sustain and help preserve Mayan Social Emotional Education.

competencies. Table 1 shows the SEE core competencies and their associated Mayan SE values.

Mayan Social Emotional Education: Sustaining and Reconstructing the Social-Affective Fabric

As with many other cultures and societies, the Mayan people of Yucatan have endured the rapid social, political and economic changes that characterized the twentieth century and the dawn of our current time. These changes include ecological devastation, climate change, poverty and economic disparity, and social and cultural erosion, among others. These populations have so far remained socially resilient and cohesive. There is an opportunity however, despite this hurricane of factors, given that some of the traditional social and emotional values are still present within the Mayan communities of Yucatan, that we may be able to work with them to keep these values and concepts alive. However, we must not overlook the fact that many people from the younger generations no longer endorse such values as they migrate to urbanized cities, or foreign countries, looking to “improve” their economic and socio-cultural status, in the search of the “Western dream life,” one so often sees advertised

in television shows, movies and in the media in general. As members of the community migrate, the social plane erodes and traditional values are substituted by attitudes and beliefs that, in some cases, contradict the original conceptions and cultural cosmology. Most importantly, these beliefs and behaviours disrupt the social fabric by creating a space for violence, harmful behaviour and social despair, as one of our interviewees expressed it:

“Youngsters who have migrated to the cities to work in the hotels and who no longer tend the Milpa conceive of themselves as being poor and are constantly dissatisfied, they want more. Before they had it all, because they had sustenance in the Milpa, they were self-sufficient and they belonged to a community.”

Thus, we see the urgent need for co-creating a local SEE programme with them, one that accounts for and counterbalances these converse scenarios, in order to preserve and reconstruct the local social-affective environment.

We propose that, by identifying and making explicit the traditional SEE values that have

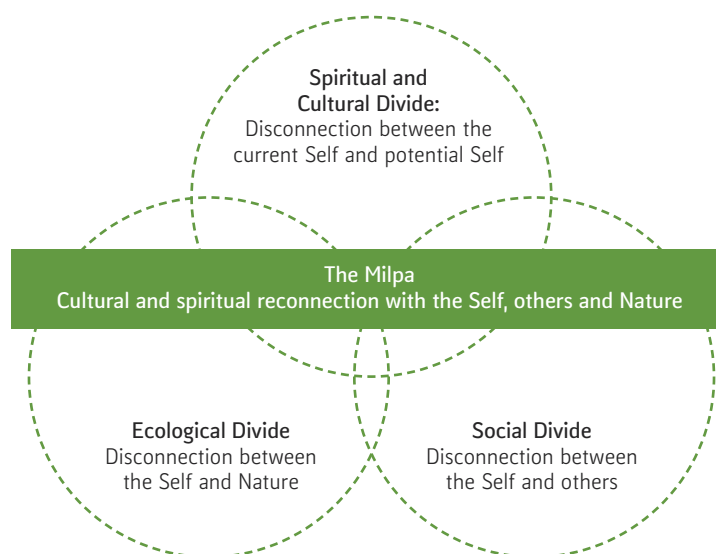


Figure 3. The Mayan social and emotional eco-system: Reconciling the three divides.

been passed on for centuries among these communities and that have kept a cohesive social and emotional environment for so long, we can help assure a wider prevalence of social and emotional wellbeing that may lead to a constructive historical transition despite the rapid (and sometimes adverse) historical and ecological changes. In order to start building a local SEE programme, it became evident that a first step into such endeavor, was the category analysis showed earlier in Table 1, as well as the need to identify the relationship between the tangible and the intangible aspects of Mayan traditional SEE values and practices.

Figure 2 shows an iceberg scheme portraying this relationship, where SE values build up from the most subtle but nonetheless fundamental aspects to the most visible and concrete skills and actions. Although the tangible or observable aspects do not always directly portray the importance of the founding principles (as with an iceberg), it is important to consider their pragmatism, for they may provide a realistic or metaphorical guideline to access the systems on a more profound level.

The next step of this study will be to design the guidelines that will comprise and translate into concrete actions the Mayan SEE values and their corresponding contexts of implementation. We believe that by rescuing and bringing into the future some of the SE abilities and conceptions that forged and helped keep alive an ancient and prominent culture such as that of the Mayan of Yucatan, we are not only helping a local community to safeguard their social and emotional wellbeing, but we are also providing the world with a larger set of tools, understandings and strategies for crossing the three divides mentioned in Scharmer and Kaufer's (2013) work (the social divide, the ecological divide and the spiritual and cultural divides), all of which put the world's social and emotional welfare at risk.

Conclusions

From the information presented above, it is clear that in order to sustain a healthy and productive social and emotional environment, the interrelationship between all the components identified in Table 1 must be kept in some sort of balance. That balance is what prevents a social and emotional ecosystem

from becoming an ego-system where the social and emotional architecture supports the popular Western saying: “Every man for himself”.

Perhaps the Mayans still have something to share with the world, from the same store of wisdom that calculated the solar year and came up with the concept of zero long before any other Western civilization. Maybe they had already visualized a more efficient and long lasting socio and emotional eco-system through the metaphor, or the actual realization, of the *Milpa*, an approach that may provide additional answers to the world’s divides, and thus to SEE, a system that could prove to be more sustainable than the Western socio and emotional ego-system (Figure 3).

IV. Reflections and General Conclusions.

Around one year ago, when I started working on this chapter, I could not find many organizations or initiatives in Mexico that were working directly on SEE with significant positive results. My own understanding was intellectual and distant. The immersion into this territory has not only expanded my awareness of the critical reality that we are facing, but also brought to light the extent of the needs, challenges, and the deep, profound and painful feelings that come with it.

Today, as the symptoms of social decay have grown significantly in Mexico, bullying and different forms of violence have increased in schools (CEAMEG, 2011). It is a wake-up call for both government and civil society. The Minister of Education has sprung into action and introduced emergency reactive measurements, from regulations and anti-bullying laws to teacher and principals’ training programmes aimed at developing social and emotional skills.

I could not conclude this paper without having in mind the scope of the challenges that

we face and the need to visualize what could be possible. Two scenarios emerge as a result of my own reflections:

The first scenario sees the rapid and exponential growth of social disruption, where government structures cannot respond with the efficiency that is needed. The other scenario sees the activation of a social movement that awakens and commits to participate more actively with the different sectors and members of society: families, communities, business, and government. We may be close to a tipping point where the forces at play may fall either way. Today both scenarios are equally possible. Therefore, the need to understand the dynamics of the invisible elements of the education system is crucial, as well as the orientation that both government and civil society assume regarding the issues.

We can think about these changes through the lenses of the three divides that we mentioned in Case Study 3. These are fundamental disconnections that are causing continuous and undesirable consequences at the level of the self and on a global scale; disconnecting self from self, self from others and self from nature. Following an iceberg representation similar to the one illustrated in Figure 2 in Case Study 3, we may conclude that SEE is at present tackling the observable facts, however, deeper in the iceberg invisible underlying forces are at play.

Each of the case studies presented reveals an orientation towards creating desirable futures and addresses fundamental problems that exist in different levels of the educational system, from the symptoms and external indicators of violence in classroom and school behaviour, to deeper and less visible elements of the system (i.e. the lack of innovative pedagogical approaches and teaching methodologies, coherent teachers’ training).

One important challenge is to shift paradigms from focusing on reactive and disconnected interventions towards focusing on the importance of prevention and the promotion of resilience

As noticed in the *AMISTAD para siempre* study, one important challenge is to shift paradigms from focusing on reactive and disconnected interventions towards focusing on the importance of prevention and the promotion of resilience. The promotion of community wellbeing and positive psychology is crucial, as well as the involvement of families to maximize the knowledge and providing skills across the life span. The idea is to envision prevention as a lifelong approach and the *AMISTAD para Siempre* programme has been shown to be an effective tool to promote resilience and social and emotional learning among children and youth (Barrett, 2012a-h).

At a more structural level, in line with the latest education reform and agreements at Ministry level, the need is to move towards holistic methodological approaches like the *dia* Programme that may shed light on how to integrate different teaching practices that cultivate and nurture some of the capacities which lie at the core of human development. Such a practice may lead to the re-integration of the *self* with the *self* and the *self* with *others*, through a holistic approach to education made up of the affective, the social, the cognitive and the communicative realms, one that engages and unites the educational social triad (teachers, students and parents). And one that, in the near future, brings nature and/or art into the education process, as many artists and poets do when attempting to grasp the meaning of existence, transforming the current teacher training models and the way schools operate today.

Lastly, we find ourselves at the most deep and profound level of the iceberg, at the core of our basic human social values, beliefs and mental models. As we discussed in the 3rd case study the challenges are huge, and civilizations like the Mayans who have held profound wisdom for centuries are dissolving through globalization faster than we realize. We could be on the verge of losing important social and emotional teachings before we are even aware of the extent of that which we have lost. We must look inside and try to find ourselves again as we once were: emotional cores embedded in a complex ecosystem that sustained all of us in a graceful but nonetheless proactive interdependent choreography. The field of Social and Emotional Education may now appear to be much more complex, deep and relevant than what we have previously understood and were able to express.

I feel very moved and full of gratitude to The Botín Foundation, and to my fellow companions on this journey, for providing me with the opportunity to dive deeper into my own cultural reality, and for creating the space to share questions, ideas and approaches that have enriched my vision and horizon of both the challenges and possibilities inherent therein.

Endnotes

- ¹ La Vaca Independiente is a social enterprise focused in educational transformation and human development founded in 1992 by Claudia Madrazo.
- ² CAM 10 is one of 79 CAMs Schools in Mexico City.
- ³ Drawing on the arts and contemplative traditions, Social Presencing brings to the surface a clearer sense of the relationships, hidden dynamics, and emerging possibilities inherent in a team, organization or larger system. It allows co-creators in a given system to gain insight into the current situation, seeing potential opportunities for change. It sets the ground for creative collective action.

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