

From an Education of Indifference to an Education of Caring

May 8, 2020 por [Autor invitado](#) — [Leave a Comment](#)

[Leslee Udwin](#) is the founder and CEO of Think Equal - a non-profit aim to promote system change in education to end the discriminatory mind set and cycle of violence across the world. [Think Equal](#) is member of the 21st Century Skills [Coalition](#) joined by different public and private organizations to promote the development of 21st century skills in Latin America and the Caribbean. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Think Equal is giving caregivers and children [a series of free](#) narrative picture books and activities, including a new narrative picture book for children called "Rainbows in Windows" about the pandemic.

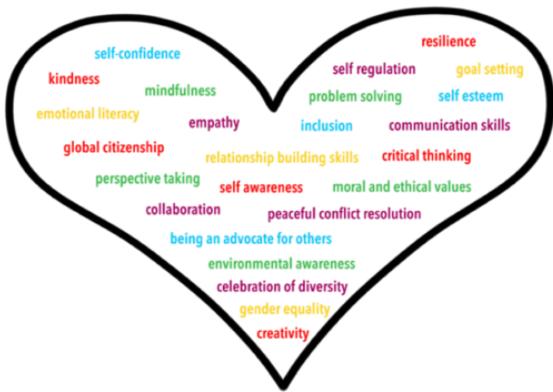
The physical crisis we're engulfed in, is an existential wake up call. The virus struck us at the time of an acute development emergency and existential crisis. We were deeply entrenched in what [Pope Francis](#) so accurately calls "the globalisation of indifference" – an ever increasing habituation to violence and the climate emergency; a growing refugee crisis; depression on course to be the most prevalent global disease; suicide amongst young males, the No 1 killer in many countries; a pandemic of gender-based violence at heart-stopping levels. This was a worsening trajectory that seemed unstoppable. It was then that the COVID-19 pandemic struck us and seemingly stopped the earth from spinning. In one fell swoop, the spotlight has fallen on our relationships and inter-connectedness, how dependent we are on others and how altruistic and even heroic many of us can be. If this enforced period of reflection does not result in our redefining of values, then we are truly lost.

We have the gift of opportunity in this darkness to rethink and recalibrate our priorities. We see ourselves so clearly in a crisis that aims itself at each and every one of us. This crisis shows us that we're all vulnerable, but most of all what this crisis highlights is our extreme inequality, and sadly that lesson is only starting to unfold. Those without the luxury of self-isolation, social distancing or even running water, will likely be destroyed by this pandemic without the lottery ticket that gets them to a hospital bed, which may or may not have a ventilator to save them.

We owe it to ourselves and to human progress to ensure that we do not under any circumstance go back to that 'normal' that caused and collaborated in a careless, unequal world, and we must allow ourselves to open up to and embrace the light that is coming out of this darkness.

The key question is, how do we ensure that the system change that we now know is required will solve these global inequities? I believe one of the most important drivers of a sustainable change is education – always the primary engine of progress. If we are to successfully recalibrate our values as a world, we must begin with the children, and the younger the better. It has been widely accepted that children need to study numeracy, literacy, and core academic content, however the movement to add social and emotional learning (SEL) as a missing 3rd dimension to education is just beginning to gain momentum. Educating children in skills such as empathy, celebration of diversity, gender equality, kindness and mindfulness is crucial to developing the whole child to enact this shift to a new start. If children across the globe are educated in life skills that help them grow into compassionate, empathetic and inclusive adults, who care for and about one another, our future and the future of our planet will be assured.

The heart illustrates the 25 critical values, skills and competencies which the Think Equal Programme mediates to children. [Think Equal](#) is both a movement and a very tangible and concrete programme of narrative picture books, prescriptive lesson plans and accompanying resources which have been designed by experts in psychology, gender equity, neuroscience, human rights and education. It is designed to educate hearts in the very Early Years, between 3 and 6, when the brain is optimally neuroplastic and 'sensitive' and neuropathways of habitual ways of responding with understanding, empathy and kindness can be created in the physical architecture of the developing brain. Alongside learning to read, write, and count, young children must also learn to play, love, accept, understand, include and collaborate. It is

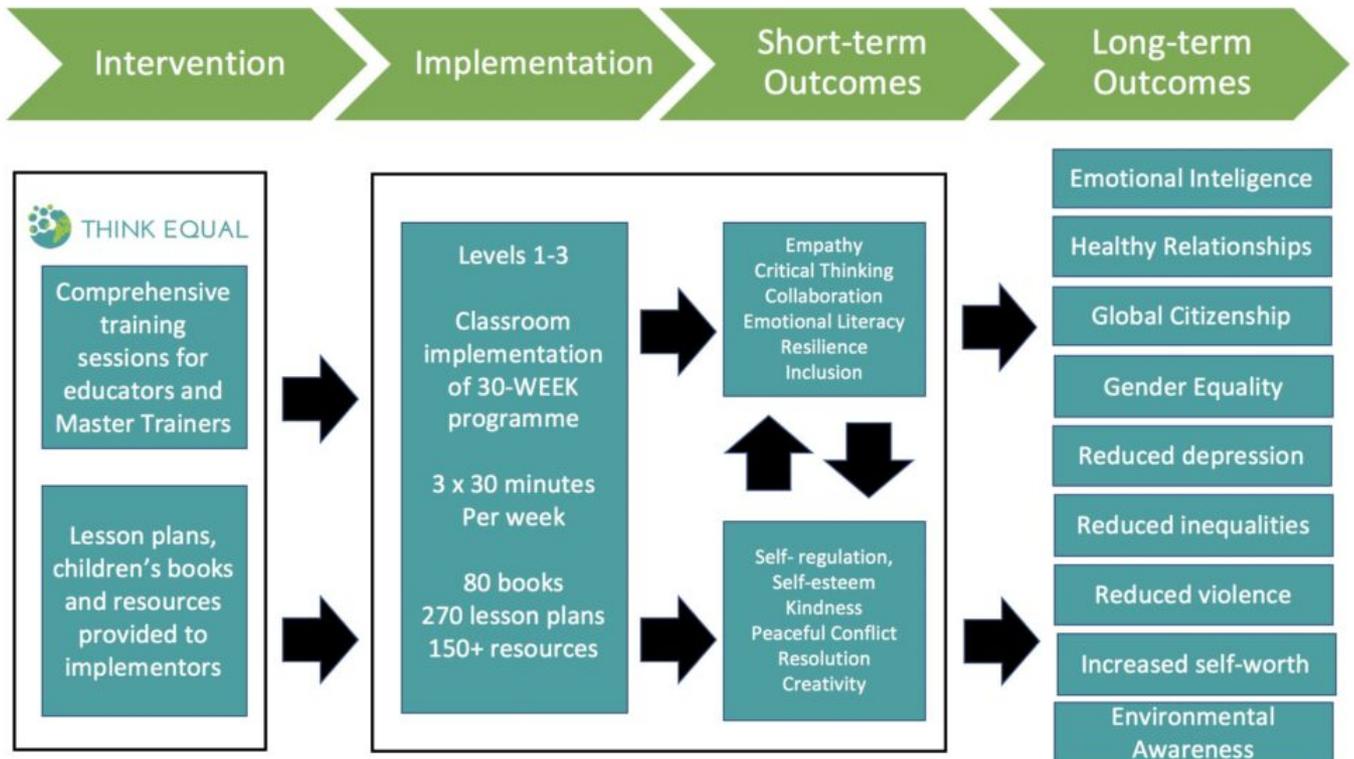


imperative that we give the same attention and priority to these learning areas as we do to 'academic skills. In fact this missing subject of social and emotional learning should be compulsory in national curricula worldwide, particularly in the early years.

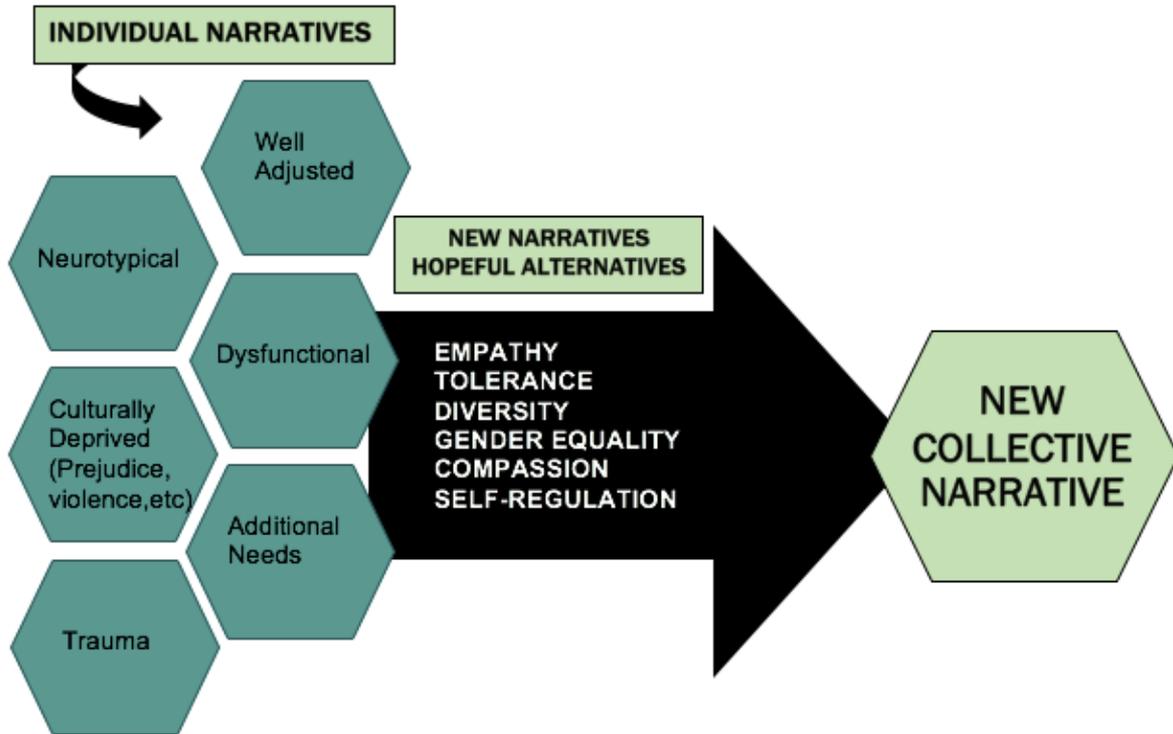
The [Think Equal Programme](#) provides Early Years teachers with tangible SEL materials with which to transform children and ensure they

are equipped to be dignified caring global citizens. This is playing out and proving to be empowering and transformative of children in the most diverse of socio-economic circumstances, in 14 countries, across 5 continents, from rural Kwa Zulu Natal, to London, community pre-schools in India to Los Angeles. Children as diverse as it is possible to imagine them to be are being provided with the tools to of SEL, which help develop empathetic foundations, emotional regulation and love for humanity that these children will carry with them into the world for the rest of their lives, as they grow and make meaningful and positive impact on their communities.

Think Equal's Theory of Change



Narrative is the spine of this learning, for it is only through story that empathy can be experientially learned and practiced. Empathy is the glue that holds humanity together. The image below illustrates Think Equal's approach in creating new, hopeful collective narratives for a new society, starting with our youngest children.



Of course, due to the global crisis, our SEL interventions in school settings have been paused for the moment. Crucial skills such as emotional literacy, self-regulation, empathy, acceptance and understanding are more important than ever at this time. To respond to families' needs while many of us are sheltering at home, Think Equal has quickly developed adapting its lessons and creating activities for caregivers to do with their children at home. [These materials](#) are provided for free on our [website](#) and available in English, French and Spanish, as we are striving to reach as many families as possible. It is our hope not only to help in occupying young children while they are separated from their daily routines and friends, but also to continue the vital mission of disseminating SEL skills to the world's children.

For me personally, the light that this crisis has brought along with its darkness shines on and through our children and the next generation. It is effectively only through them that we can develop the capacities that humanity needs for sustainable development. We must urgently re-imagine, re-purpose and rebuild our education system to serve our society and humanity holistically, in all its component parts. The 'old world' view of 'education' – the industrial revolution's outmoded view of it being the path to a healthy economy and the labour market, is long overdue for rethinking. It must be urgently supplanted by an education which leads us to inclusion, equality, lasting peace and well-being. We must prepare our youngest children with the foundations for compassionate, empathetic, dignified and respectful lives. We now have new methodologies, new tools. We must seize the positive learning that has come from this moment in our history to change education policy and mindset.

From whichever angle each of us come at these lessons learned, at the end of this crisis, the last thing we should do is going back to the way things were. We must start a new beginning, going forward with the insights and the wisdom we have gleaned – with our values rethought,

and our priorities recalibrated. [Anne Frank](#) from her own enforced lockdown said: “Look at how a single candle can define and defy the dark.” I believe this to be the powerful potential narrative of this pandemic – if we join hands and hearts in making it so.

Stay tuned and follow our blog series on education and #skills21 in times of coronavirus. Read the first entry of these series [here](#). Download the [Future is now](#) and keep an eye out for our [news!](#)

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