



## The Learning Labs

Feature: Aditi Pathak , Associate Project Officer at UNESCO MGIEP



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The world around us is changing rapidly. There has been a debate globally about the kind of knowledge and skills that are important for the increasingly diverse, interconnected, and innovation-oriented societies of the 21st century. Thus, learning in 21st century cannot be limited to literacy and numeracy but should be broadened to enable students to think, deliberate and address contemporary socio-emotional problems they face individually and collectively. This can be achieved only if we bring about a change in teaching and learning processes. Thus, the need of the hour is to foster innovative, dynamic, and interactive pedagogies. It is time that we move beyond the traditional 'banking model' of teaching<sup>1</sup>, in which students are treated as empty vessels to be filled. For learners pose questions, analyse, take action on social, political and cultural issues that influence and shape their lives, emancipatory pedagogies where students are co-creators of knowledge are required.



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It is important that educational institutions especially schools equip students with necessary social and emotional skills for the 21st century. Research suggests that social-emotional skills can be taught. This was highlighted in a large review on social-emotional skills in 270,034 students in kindergarten through the 12th grade<sup>2</sup>. The review found social-emotional learning programmes in schools not only improved social-emotional skills, but also increased positive attitudes towards school, positive social behaviour and academic performance. These programmes also decreased the likelihood of kids getting in trouble or experiencing emotional problems.

**||** *There is a need to arm schools with strategies and skills that can enable them to produce future citizens who are equipped for collaborative living as well as the right attitudes and values necessary for such an existence.*

UNESCO MGIEP's DICE The Learning Labs project is one such initiative; it is designed to connect middle school students from varied social, economic and cultural contexts and help them engage in digital dialogue from across the globe, allowing them to share ideas and drive their own learning on issues related to peace and sustainable development. The programme not only helps in promoting skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, empathy, perspective taking and intercultural communication but also provides innovative tools for assessing these highly complex skills. Thus, the programme provides teachers with tools to teach and promote such critical skills and assess the young learners. The programme is conducted online and allows young learners to connect with peers from digitally remote parts of the world.

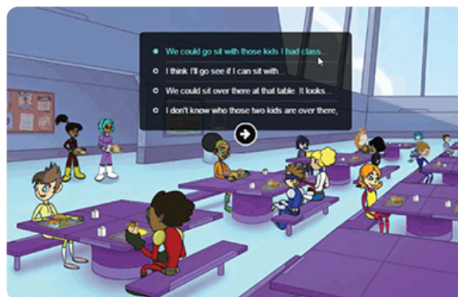
How do we do it?

The pilot phase of the transformative learning labs programme was launched in June 2015. The programme reached out to grade 7 students (12-14 years) across 6 schools from diverse socio economic and cultural contexts in New Delhi, India. Students connected through an online platform and held discussions on issues related to migration. The team conducted pre and post assessments of the programme, collating and analysing large sets of qualitative and quantitative data. The programme was further refined and redesigned and phase II of the programme was launched with select schools from India, USA, Norway, South Africa and Malaysia.



**||** *To enable the teachers to facilitate the programme, a Toolkit was developed on the theme of migration. The toolkit is essentially a collation of lesson plans on the issue of migration embedded in core*

topics such as ratios and percentages, human and animal migration, social movements and gender issues, taught in the regular teaching learning practice in middle schools globally. Online teacher trainings were conducted on the programme to help familiarise the teachers with the programme and introduce them to the assessment tools.



Hall of Heroes, a game developed and designed to assess SE skills for the middle school students.

Research indicates that project based learning and engaging in intercultural dialogue helps in promoting skills such as critical thinking, self awareness, respect for others, perspective taking and appreciating diversity. A set of innovative tools were used to assess student growth on above mentioned skills. According to research, social emotional (SE) skills are key to doing well in school and are not only important for doing well socially but academically as well. There are very few fun and engaging ways to assess these skills. In order to effectively assess the SE skills of participating students, the project team used Hall of Heroes, a game developed and designed to assess SE skills for the middle school students. The game provided an effective alternative to traditional measures. Apart from the games, picture based assessments were also used to measure the change in attitudes and perspectives of the students over a period of 6 weeks. Traditional methods of assessments such as surveys and questionnaires were also used.



**II** *Transformative Learning Labs workshop organised in New Delhi, India saw participants from United States, Malaysia, India, Norway and South Africa.*

Phase II of the Transformative Learning Labs programme concluded in a three day long workshop organised from 12-14 July, 2017 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Students and teachers from United States, Malaysia, India, Norway and South Africa participated in the workshop and came together to share their experiences and learnings from the programme. The workshop started with an inaugural address by Dr. Anantha Kumar Duraippah, Director UNESCO MGIEP, during which he highlighted the importance of 'dialogue' and 'constructive engagement' amongst young people for mutual understanding and collaboration. The address was followed by ice breaking exercises and experience sharing by the students and teachers, in which the participants spoke about how 'sharing different perspective enhanced their understanding of multiple identities and their ability to accommodate differing opinions'.

It was for the first time that students and teachers, who had been interacting with each other online met in person. Excursion trips to the National Crafts Museum and an ethnic dinner were also organised to help participants understand the local cultures and interact with each other informally. As part of the exercise on collaboration and cross cultural communication, a two day workshop on participatory film making was also organised. The workshop was facilitated by the renowned film maker, Krishnendu Bose, during which students

from different countries came together, brainstormed and collaboratively developed the idea of a film entitled, 'Candy Chaos'. The film highlights the oneness of humankind and similarities in spite of differences and is available online: <https://bit.ly/2qfFDFy>



**Aditi Pathak** is currently working as Associate Project Officer at UNESCO MGIEP and has been leading the implementation of DICE The Learning Labs programme since the last 3 years.

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