

Dec 3, 2014

Opening Remarks by Mr. Tim Sutton, Deputy Representative for UNICEF China at the “International Seminar on Social Emotional Learning and Improvement of Basic Education Quality”

Respected guests, distinguished education officials, professionals and practitioners from across China, and around the globe, good morning and it is my pleasure to be able to join you for the opening of this critically important event to exchange ideas and actions concerning children’s social and emotional learning and development.

For some years, UNICEF has been working with the Ministry of Education to develop Child-Friendly Schools in support of the Government’s efforts to achieve equity and quality in education. The Government’s vision is to build schools that foster child-centred teaching and learning, that promote child participation; and where children enjoy a protective, safe and nurturing school in which they are actively engaged in their learning and development.

Social and emotional learning is an important aspect of China’s vision for the education of its children. It promotes improved learning outcomes, as well as fostering children’s well-rounded development. Globally – as many of our speakers will illustrate over these next two days – research shows that effective SEL implementation in education can improve children’s attitudes towards their selves and others, while also increasing their academic performance. It helps reduce problematic behaviours and negative attitudes.

As we know despite the enormous economic progress, many children in China have been affected by migration and many are growing up with grandparents or extended family in rural areas. 14.4 million primary school students were left-behind children in 2013, accounting for 22 percent of all students in rural primary schools. Supportive school environments are especially critical for these children, who might not have adult care and supervision at home and rely on the guidance and emotional support they receive at school. Social and emotional learning helps make these children and their schools, happier and more effective places to learn and grow.

Creating such child friendly and supportive environments, as all the educators in this room know, is not a simple task. But, it is achievable and already many schools in China and around the world that are using Social and Emotional Learning to create child friendly and supportive schools.

With the right investments in teachers, especially those working in poorer and remote areas, we can equip schools with the social and emotional learning tools that can help these children face the challenges of childhood and also grow up to be competent capable adults.

UNICEF really looks forward to your discussions, to your sharing of experiences, and to your enriching the dialogue by posing questions and engaging in discussions throughout the sessions. We know we will discover new ideas, approaches and

insights during this seminar, but we also hope to develop further our shared visions for our children, particularly the most vulnerable.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child we understand better than ever that fulfilling a child's right to learn and develop is not just an investment in building the strong foundations of adulthood but also critical to a strong, stable and prosperous community. It is the cornerstone to improving human development and realising China's dream

Thank you for your contributions thus far, and congratulations for all the achievements that are to come for supporting the social and emotional learning of children in China and abroad.