

# Zeng Li and Rouza Pan Share Insights on SEL Practice in China at the Harvard China Education Forum

BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, April 18, 2025

/EINPresswire.com/ -- At the 16th CES at Harvard University Postgraduate Scholars Conference, held at Harvard University, educational experts from China, the U.S., and other countries gathered to explore innovations in education in a globalized world. In the education psychology panel, Principal Zeng Li from Chongqing's New Silk Road Kindergarten, and Ms. Rouza Pan, an internationally renowned educator and one of the founding advocates of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the U.S., were invited to speak. Together, they shared their presentation titled "Rooting and Integration: The Practical Exploration of SEL in Chinese Kindergartens."

At the forum, Principal Zeng introduced the SEL curriculum system she recently developed, along with a regional promotion model based on her school's experience. With Ms. Pan's recommendation and ongoing guidance, Zeng explained how SEL was implemented through site-based research projects, systematic teacher training, and family engagement mechanisms. These efforts gradually helped SEL "take root and flourish" in Chinese kindergartens.

Ms. Pan, drawing from her own educational theory and global perspectives, also shared her experience founding a research-based early-education institution in the U.S. over two decades ago. She illustrated how SEL has grown from a concept into an actionable framework, and how it has become a shared "language of education" across cultures.

The pair's insights—such as "authentic life brings authentic education" and "social emotional competencies are foundational to lifelong well-being"—sparked strong resonance among forum participants.



Social Emotional Learning: Returning Education to Its Human Core  
Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational philosophy that focuses on cultivating an individual's social-emotional competencies. It emphasizes that education is not only about cognitive development, but also about nurturing the whole person. SEL's core consists of five key competencies: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, Responsible decision-making

These abilities form the foundation for children to understand themselves, relate to others, manage emotions, and make healthy choices. In the long term, SEL enhances individual well-being, resilience, and adaptability—key pillars of holistic development. As global awareness of mental health grows, SEL has become a focal point in international education reform. In China, especially at the preschool level, SEL is gaining increased recognition.

At the forum, Principal Zeng emphasized: "SEL is not just a theory—it is life itself. It's about how children observe and respond to nature, animals, and others' emotions in real-world situations."

She shared several initiatives her team has led in Chongqing, including:

- Promoting SEL curriculum and classroom environments tailored to 3–6-year-old children, encouraging emotional awareness and empathy through interaction with nature and peers
- Organizing workshops on SEL for educators to enhance self-awareness and child psychology skills
- Establishing "family classrooms" for parents and grandparents, which help transform traditional beliefs and foster cooperative home-school-community education systems through co-reading and storytelling projects

Ms. Pan highlighted that: "Empowering a person to grow as a whole is the most powerful form of



education.”

She emphasized that SEL is not exclusive to Western culture, but a universal, human-centered educational framework. Advocating a philosophy of “from life, to life,” she suggested integrating SEL into children’s lives through storytelling, games, nature observation, and collaborative activities. “A child who can notice the emotions of a small animal,” she said, “is more likely to become a compassionate and empathetic adult.”

#### About the Speakers

Zeng Li is the Director of the New Silk Road Preschool Education Group in Shapingba District, Chongqing. She also serves as Part-time Vice Chairperson of the Shapingba District Women’s Federation and is a Senior Teacher (equivalent to full professor level) and Special-grade Teacher, and Director of the 5th Chongqing Municipal Master Teacher Studio. She has led several major education reform initiatives, advocating for a “Root-Nurturing Education” philosophy and advancing SEL in kindergartens, teacher development, and family-school partnerships. She is considered one of China’s leading figures in frontline SEL implementation in early childhood education.



Rouza Pan is a global advocate and pioneer of the SEL concept. With academic training at the University of Houston and Harvard University, she founded an innovative research-based kindergarten in 1999 in the U.S., centered on whole-person education. Her core belief—“education is growth, and growth is relationship”—has inspired tens of thousands of teachers and millions of families. As an educator, mother, and psychological researcher, and for her passion for education and sense of mission for SEL and humanity, Rouza Pan continues to promote SEL and whole-person education in China, advancing it through teacher training,

curriculum development, and public advocacy.

## Conclusion

Through the long-term practice and collaborative efforts of Principal Zeng and Ms. Pan, SEL presents a new possibility for education—one that moves beyond knowledge accumulation and returns to the human essence. It nurtures complete individuals with empathy, judgment, and social adaptability. SEL responds to global calls for holistic education and offers educators a new path forward.

Education, through the lens of SEL, extends far beyond classrooms and grades—into every aspect of life: from emotional expression to nature walks, from kindergarten reform to family engagement, from individual growth to social connectedness.

Recognizing the impactful outcomes of SEL in Chongqing, Ms. Pan encouraged and guided Principal Zeng to compile her work and submit it to the Harvard China Education Forum, where it was selected for formal presentation.

Today, SEL is gently but powerfully redefining what it means to “nurture a child.” The true value of education lies not merely in academic performance, but in cultivating responsible, emotionally rich, and fulfilled citizens for a new era.

This is a vision worth our collective attention—for the future of the next generation, and for the true revival of education.

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