

FETC Guest Post: How EdTech Can Promote SEL, Equity, and Engagement



The 2019 [Future of Education Technology Conference \(FETC\)](#) will take place in Orlando, Florida, from January 27-30. In this Presenter Q&A Roundtable, a number of conference presenters share their perspectives on some of the compelling education questions of today. Read below to see what they shared, and to find out what sessions each will present at FETC.

What are two ways that technology supports social-emotional learning?

Technology can be a great equalizer for students. Some kids have more difficulty talking through social-emotional issues, or even learning different SEL concepts as a group. Technology can be a great way for kids to express their ideas in a more secure way using voice to text on a tablet or typing on a computer. One great idea, try a video journal. Kids can keep an ongoing journal responding to the same 3 questions each day. What went well today, what could I improve upon, and what is my plan for tomorrow? It can be quick and easy and for many kids, will be so much better received than asking them to write it! Another idea, when kids are ready for a new challenge, have students use their tablets as groups to make commercials or movie shorts applying the SEL concepts they are learning. It's great team building and it's fun!

[Lori Jackson](#), Educational Psychologist, Co-Founder of behavioral technology company [The Connections Model](#)

I encourage teachers all the time to explore and incorporate Skype in the Classroom. This worldwide community offers untold opportunities to deepen SEL through many of the possible collaborations. A few include: 1) Joining with a class of students in another part of the country or world to participate in a project and share progress in a weekly Skype session. 2) Hearing from guest speakers on topics related to SEL. 3) Going on virtual tours of underprivileged areas of the world.

Another great use of technology includes apps that are being implemented in classrooms to help lower stress through music, breathing exercises and guided meditation. Kids as young as 4-5 are being taught amazing skills to be more aware of how they are feeling and what to do about negative emotions as they become more aware of them.

[Tara Brown](#), "[The Connection Coach](#)," President of Learner's Edge Consulting

Edtech supports social-emotional learning by giving hands-on opportunities for development of CASEL's five core competencies. When we use edtech for skill and drill in order to give us a snapshot of a student's current abilities in a particular subject area, we are then able to provide more personalized instruction to meet their needs. This increases their own self-awareness. Additionally, the power of edtech can be harnessed to help students create meaningful and lasting projects, such as websites, blogs, and digital art. In our increasingly tech dependent world, we must teach students how to be responsible digital citizens and use technology for good. This helps improve their social awareness.

Not only can edtech be used to help increase self-awareness and social awareness, it can also be used as a tool for self-management, responsible decision-making, and relationship building, which are critical skills for employment in the workforce. Digital projects, such as coding or movie-making, demand problem-solving and collaboration in order to create a vibrant product and meet deadlines. The key to using edtech

to promote social-emotional learning is to be intentional about the conversation with students about the competencies and skills they are developing for personal and interpersonal growth.

[Tamara Fyke](#), Creator of [Love In A Big World](#)

Interpersonal connection and reflection are two fundamental components to quality SEL initiatives, and both can be greatly enhanced using technology. VR, as an example, allows us to connect and share aspects of our lives in a way previously not possible. Imagine how impactful it can be for students to experience the perspective of others by using VR to immerse themselves in someone else's point of view? New depths of mutual understanding can be achieved after jointly reflecting on such an experience.

Michael Auerbach, Co-Founder of [Kinful](#). Visit Kinful at [Booth 856](#) in the FETC Expo.

What are some of the key questions that educators should ask themselves about creating equitable learning environments?

Equity is perhaps the number one, most persistent objective we are constantly striving toward in K-12 education, and educators are on the front lines of making a difference. By asking themselves the right questions, teachers and administrators can find the right solutions to improving equity and access for all learners. Here are the top three questions I recommend asking:

How should we adapt technology usage for different settings (student backgrounds/characteristics, use cases, levels of technology)?

Does a particular edtech tool improve student outcomes for different sub-groups of students (EL, SPED, low SES ...)?

How can we insure all students are growing sufficiently to close achievement gaps in proficiency?

Ken Tam, Executive Director of Personalized Learning and Assessment, [Curriculum Associates](#). Visit Curriculum Associates at [Booth 731](#) in the FETC Expo.

Have I identified my learners? Do I know what each of them need?

We can't help what we don't know. By screening students, gathering notes and data, we can gather information about our students so we have it as a reference as we lesson plan and develop classroom ideas. By understanding that Zoey's best way of digesting content is to verbalize it and that Joe reads best in a quiet environment, I can constantly check to make sure that the space I'm creating and the lessons I design have elements that touch on their needs.

What small challenge or difference am I executing daily to help my classroom serve every student? What are the bite-sized changes I'm working toward this year? The idea of a major classroom shift in a given amount of time is never a good strategy. We must provide milestones and small changes that eventually can lead to bigger shifts in thinking, action, and reflection.

How about we start by asking ourselves and our leaders to define equity? If a room of educators provided the definitions they had in mind, there would likely be a huge range of thoughts. What does equity mean to the mission and focus of the school? How can teachers take ownership of that and translate that into actionable steps in their classrooms? What is the evidence and what are the outcomes that can be tracked over time to show that these steps are effective?

How will _____ handle this assignment/activity? Play a game with yourself, and at random choose two

students from your roster and play out how your lesson will be received. Will a certain student roll their eyes in boredom? Will someone feel anxiety about having to present content in a certain way? By doing this you may identify weaknesses in your execution or opportunities to create variety or additional support for your learners.

Kelsey Olson, Director of Partnerships and Services, [Shmoop](#). Visit Shmoop at [Booth 1649](#) in the FETC Expo.

“How do we equitably scale personalized learning?” Educators need edtech tools that differentiate for students with unique learning styles and abilities, and when they identify those tools that work, they need the systems, processes and tools to expand their use (and to stop using those that don’t meet their needs any longer). Understanding the organization’s ability to scale what’s working is important. Additionally, educators should be asking “How can we quickly determine which tools are meeting our needs?” Whether through structured pilots or rapid-cycle evaluations, teachers should be provided access to [product efficacy](#) to know if a solution is effective for their demographic of students (regarding age, grade level, ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, etc.). At the very least, this is where verified teacher feedback from a network of educators who share product reviews and personal experiences can go a long way.

[Karl Rectanus](#), CEO of [LearnPlatform](#)

In order to answer this question, we must first define what equitable means. Equitable comes from the word equity. Equity does not mean equal. It is not giving every person the same thing; it is giving each person what s/he needs to succeed. In order to give students what they need, we must be willing to ask questions, not only of ourselves as school leaders, but also of our students and their families. What type of devices do our students use? What access do our students have to these devices? Do they have internet access at home?

I have heard stories of students typing and submitting 10-page papers on smartphones. What a cumbersome task that must be. I have heard of students not being able to complete homework because they do not have internet access at home. In order to increase the relevance and rigor of instruction, we must provide students with the tools they need to succeed, including devices, internet access, typing instruction, and coding classes. These are requirements for the 21st century job market.

[Tamara Fyke](#), Creator of [Love In A Big World](#)

Equity remains a challenging concept, and it should be. It is contextual and messy but goes after the fundamental “why” of education.

To tackle questions of equity, you have to start (and end) with the goals for each learner, preferably in the form of an enlightened “portrait of the graduate.” The “why” here is to equip each student with the best chance of success now and later in life. If those baseline competencies serve as the standard — the non-negotiables — then you have a target for each student.

Now on to equity, which in many ways boils down to opportunity. What factors support or vie against each student’s chances for success? Consider not just their inherent gifts and challenges but also the environmental, societal, and institutional factors that influence success. The answers to those questions become the “how” of achieving equity for each learner.

[Doug Casey](#), Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

How do you define "global engagement" and how does technology help to advance it in the classroom?

Global engagement is a broad term to say the least. I would define global engagement as thinking globally,

acting locally. There is so much we can do in our own communities simply by understanding and reflecting on global current events. Sharing experiences, supporting causes and even connecting with our peers around the world give us a perspective that can change our own communities for the better. From there, the actions are contagious. They spread to impact other regions and individuals, and before you know it one small engagement has become a global phenomenon. Technology in the classroom is the catalyst that makes this all happen. Our generation literally has a world of information in the palm of our hand. Technology provides students an avenue to this information, which then dictates a student's own learning and interest in the classroom. Turning lessons into action and impact is one of the most important things we can focus on in 2019, which can project student voice to a level we have never seen before.

[Evin Schwartz](#), CEO & Founder of [Belouga](#)

Global engagement is the connecting of people regardless of geography, time zone, nationality, or culture. However, true engagement comes when these connections are used by several groups to establish dialogue and discourse around important topics. Of course, technology plays a central role in this by facilitating large scale interactions and bridging the physical divides that separate people. With the advances in artificial intelligence and language translation, technology is stepping up the game by removing some final barriers that keep people disengaged. Global engagement will continue to grow worldwide and technology will actually diminish in its influence. Instead of being a focal point of communication, it will become so prevalent we won't even think about it as we talk with 20 people from 10 time zones speaking 5 different languages.

[Matt Harris](#), International Education Con