Editorial

Editorial for the Special Edition on Social and Emotional Education

Colleen McLaughlin (ID)

Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TN, UK;
cm10009@cam.ac.uk

This collection of eight articles in this special edition clearly exemplifies the variety of thoughts and definitions relating to the territory of social and emotional education. It also shows the different approaches within education with regards to engaging with this area of work. The methodologies are varied and typical of work occurring in the field at the present time. Before analysing the different approaches and topics, it is important to note what they have in common: a strong argument, backed by evidence, for the importance of schools' engagement in the development of the personal and social aspects of education and for the use of evidence to substantiate arguments. Many writers in this edition note that social and emotional education or learning have long been central aspects and goals of school education, and they were neglected until recently. The balance between elements has become or remained skewed towards knowledge acquisition and retention, and there is a highly cognitive emphasis in many aspects of school education today.

The importance of redressing the balance is shown in the research reported in these papers. Research studies cited show agreement that the wholistic development of young people must include social and emotional learning, and that the school's role in this development is key. It seems surprising that this requires restatement, but this may be due to the narrowing and increasing adoption of utilitarian goals for education in the last thirty years. Academic progress and attainment rely on good social and emotional development from a young age. Butvilas et al. report in their paper on a survey of the existing research on the personal and social aspects of learning that 'There is strong research evidence that social and emotional development contributes to development across various domains: cognitive, physical, and communication. Promoting such competencies can help a student become a competent and resilient individual capable of overcoming societal crises and hardships.' The link to the development of good mental health and healthy relationships is also emphasised in these papers. Thirty years ago, Michael Rutter [1,2] reported on the links between schooling, cognitive and social skills, the development of self-efficacy, and later relationships and work. In these articles, there are similarly strong rationales for focusing on social and emotional learning based on different types of evidence. It would be hard to read this evidence and think that schools should not seriously engage in this area of learning. However, there is not such consistency in the thinking and approach to how this should be undertaken in school. This is where the real diversity and debate are.

First, there is a range of terms and definitions, with limited agreement on what they mean or which terms to use when discussing these aspects of education and development. This may not be a problem, but it can make it confusing for the reader. The definitions are, of course, related to the theoretical stance and use of key scholarship. A brief precis of the content will help the reader to understand further what I mean and to see the emphases of the papers.

D'Amico's and Geraci's article, MetaEmotions at School: A Program for Promoting Emotional and MetaEmotional Intelligence at School; a Research-Intervention Study, is a study of a social and emotional learning programme intent on 'promoting the culture of emotional and metaemotional intelligence in schools, and at improving emotional

awareness both among teachers and students' through a train-the-trainers programme. The thinking here can be traced back to a key text by Daniel Goleman on Emotional Intelligence and which has been developed into school-based programmes. This work is based on a framework called CASEL, and the theoretical base and research are fully explored and presented in the text. Bono et al.'s paper, Gratitude and Adolescents' Mental Health and Well-Being: Effects and Gender Differences for a Positive Social Media Intervention in High Schools, also designed an intervention built around gratitude interventions and practices and evaluated its impact.

Contreras-Quiroz et al. were interested that the general assessments of the quality of education paid little attention to the emotions of students, although personal and social development indicators were included in the evaluation. They set out to explore the relationship between emotions, school and classroom context using a radical constructivist approach. They concluded with the construction of three indices of favourable and unfavourable emotions: motivation arising from interaction, exclusionary interaction, and interactional context.

Bartroli et al. set out to assess emotional competence in children by constructing a sound psychometric in Chile, aiming to 'build a measurement system to assess the favourable and unfavourable emotions of students' in relation to learning and achievement.' A model, which is built from the research analysis, proposes a new model using a radical constructivist approach. A useful framework is in this paper, which serves as a conclusion to their work.

Two articles by Song et al. on using translanguaging approaches in support of their students' social emotional learning and Rodríguez et al. on how career exploration can be used to support social and emotional learning exemplify the integration of social and emotional aspects in other activities in education. Wikman et al. set out to examine the associations between the child-rated self-concept and wellbeing, teacher-rated prosocial school behaviours, and academic skills (as measured by child performance tasks), as well as to examine if there were group differences by gender for these constructs. They found that these three factors of self-concept, prosocial school behaviours, and wellbeing are interrelated and key elements in understanding and improving academic achievement. Within these papers, a range of foci, methodology, and theoretical positions were proposed. What questions and debates do they raise when one looks at them all?

The first question is, how is the task of educating young people's social and emotional learning regarded? The view of the nature of education will have within it a view of development in this area, as well as learning. When analysing the eight papers within the special edition, it is possible to see the following approaches.

1.   *The specialist programme*

This view is often based on a psychological approach and sees the educational endeavour as the construction of a set of tasks that may involve skills development and other related activities. We know that there is some merit in this approach, and it is an approach that has been used in other areas, such as sex education and career education. We also know that it tends to be time limited, i.e., as time goes by, the learning disappears if it is not practiced or reinforced regularly. It also assumes that learning occurs in the formal curriculum, and we know that young people learn about their self-concept, as well as their view of their success, most powerfully, from the ongoing activities in school, and these activities have long-lasting effects. The informal curriculum is more powerful and often ignored. Everything matters in terms of social and emotional learning. Feedback and its nature, comments from peers, communicated predictions and expectations, role models, visibility in the classroom, and praise and reward all have a strong role in shaping how young people see themselves and then act. Dweck 's research has shown how significant these aspects are for mental health [3].

2.   The integrated model

This model is a demanding one that makes demands on the view of the purpose and nature of education in general. This relates to the issue raised in many of these papers about the fragmentation and reduced emphasis on social and emotional learning in schools in recent times. This may also be related to the growth in young people's mental and emotional difficulties [4]. This approach requires the examination of the place and implications for personal and social development in the whole curriculum and school processes. This involves the sort of consideration that the articles on translanguaging and careers engaged in–seeing the multiple purposes of various activities in the curriculum.

There are also different theoretical educational frameworks underneath these approaches, and often the frameworks come from research in other disciplines, e.g., psychology, sociology, or psychotherapy. These disciplines do not always easily transfer to educational contexts and are often based on individual ways of working (therapy and psychology) rather than group contexts within the powerful institution of a school. The other feature worth focusing upon is the overall view of the educational task and the child. Is this seen as a remediation approach similar to the way that special needs were viewed in the past, i.e., diagnose, categorise, and intervene or as a proactive educational task concerned with the development of the child in the round? I hope we will see, in future work, a focus on the educational task and debates within this area, including one about approaches and viewpoints. This edition raises all these issues, and none of these papers can be neatly placed in any of these categories I have created, but the questions are nonetheless important.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1.   Rutter, M. Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry* **1989**, *30*, 25–51. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2.   Rutter, M. Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life; The Role of Schooling. *Pastor. Care Educ.* **1991**, *9*, 3–10. [CrossRef]
3.   Dweck, C.S. *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*, 1st ed.; Psychology Press: London, UK, 1999. [CrossRef]
4.   Yeager, D.S.; Dweck, C.S. Mindsets and adolescent mental health. *Nat. Ment. Health* **2023**, *1*, 79–81. [CrossRef]