

Carmel Cefai · Valeria Cavioni

Social and Emotional Education in Primary School

Integrating Theory and Research
into Practice

 Springer

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Foreword

This extraordinarily compact and valuable book integrates the best available theory, research, and practice internationally and services as an essential resource for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. It is rare indeed that one book, in relatively few pages, can accomplish all of these goals. However, this book has done so.

The outset of the book establishes the need in children's lives for a new kind of education, Social-Emotional Education (SEE), that leads to academically, socially, emotionally literate young people:

A relevant and meaningful education for the realities of the twenty-first century leads to the formation of academically, socially, and emotionally literate young people who have the skills, abilities, and emotional resilience necessary to navigate the uncertain but fast moving environmental and economic present and future. (p. 5)

Teachers know that the well-being and mental health of their students is an extraordinarily important determinant of their learning and behavior in school. Their reluctance to state this is because they do not want “one more thing” on their plate to have to address is. But this book is about a third way—not mental health experts in the schools, not referrals to the outside, but an complete integration of social, emotional, and character development into the rest of educational and pedagogical concerns. By attending to these matters systematically and systemically, woven into curriculum and instruction at the individual, classroom, and school level, student performance can be enhanced and the role of the teacher can become more fulfilling. Further, Prof. Cefai argues convincingly that the relevance of Heart for learning and performance has been rediscovered, not discovered, by recent cognitive neuroscience research. Indeed, concluding each chapter with ancient legends or fables from around the world that exemplify aspects of SEE is effective and serves to show the timelessness and universality of the SEE message. In *Talking Treasure, Stories to Help Build Emotional Intelligence and Resilience in Young Children* (www.researchpress.com, 2012), my colleagues and I took the same approach, using timeless stories as vehicles for parents and educators of young children to develop their emotional intelligence.

The SEE framework presented in Chap. 2 expresses the integration of a wide range of perspectives that support SEE and guide its full and proper implementation. And then, the remainder of the book is dedicated to operationalizing that

guidance. Prof. Cefai's vision of SEE is multilevel, multicomponent, multiyear, and multipopulation:

Both universal and targeted approaches have their place in a comprehensive whole school approach to SEE, and an integrated universal and targeted approach is more likely to be effective than one focusing on one form of intervention alone. . . . A curriculum, classroom based approach to SEE needs to be accompanied and supported by a whole school approach with the whole school community in collaboration with parents and the local community supporting and reinforcing a climate conducive to SEE for all the school members. (p. 28)

The book provides an action-research/implementation and evaluation cycle to help educators get started with bringing SEE into their schools systematically. It wisely begins with creation of an infrastructure, an SEE leadership team, and an analysis of needs and potential implementation obstacles. This includes devoting more time to understanding the theory and pedagogy of SEE, rather than over-emphasizing the technical aspects of curriculum delivery. Also included is the concept of piloting, which allows opportunity for local learning, experimentation, and tailoring.

The curriculum framework adds to the seminal work of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) elements from other aspects of the author's SEE framework. This leads to four foci, represented as "I am...", "I care...", "I can...", and "I will..." This simplified framework, reminiscent of that used by the Anchorage, Alaska, public schools (<http://www.asdk12.org/depts/SEL/>), but elaborated in important, new ways, provides clear guidance for educators about the dimensions most important to develop in students, though without the detailed developmental sequencing found in the Anchorage framework and other comprehensive, multiyear, empirically-based curricula. A very useful assessment tool matched to the framework, for both staff members and student self-ratings, is provided and can be of instant use to readers. Prof. Cefai also recommends and explains the use of a student SEE journal, a highly innovative technique that allows for assessment but also has clear pedagogical benefit.

Prof. Cefai also shares the methodology he and colleagues have used successfully in Maltese schools to build optimal learning environments and caring classroom communities. Of tremendous value is a self-guided assessment framework that allows teachers and pupils to monitor a wide range of indicators for creating caring classrooms and engage in a program of continuous, incremental improvement. The inclusion of a pupil version highlights the overarching theme in this book of the importance of student voice and their essential role in co-creating a positive learning environment. There is a parallel structure, with equally valuable tools, in Chap. 7 dealing with the entire school environment.

Among the innovative contributions of this book are the chapters devoted to intervention with students who are experiencing more difficulties than can be addressed by universal approaches. Prof. Cefai provides an accessible, staged approach for targeted, multilevel SEE interventions coordinated with the universal level for optimal synergy.

Finally, Prof. Cefai addresses two issues too rarely confronted: the emotional life and well-being of teachers, and engaging parents. For staff, focusing in particular

on mindfulness, self-care, and mentoring-peer support techniques, the book provides another outstanding self-assessment tool for educators to monitor and improve the extent to which their schools are promotive of staff well-being. For parents, there are international examples of ways in which parents and other caregivers have been engaged and supported in greater involvement in their children's education, including a user-friendly self-assessment tool.

To summarize the message of this book, I cannot do better than quote from the concluding chapter:

We now have enough evidence about how educational systems without a Heart can lead to pupils becoming alienated, disaffected and unprepared for life outside school.... Schools now have a very clear choice. Rather than 'educating for the past' (Gidley 2007), they need to be grounded in the current realities and challenges if they are to remain valid and relevant to the lives of children in the 21st century. We need both Head and Heart in education. (p. 181)

I have seen no better recent, international guide to carrying out this mission, which expresses a developmental right of all children worldwide, than this outstanding book.

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Contents

1	Education That Matters in the Twenty-First Century	1
1.1	Heart in Education.....	3
1.2	Outline of the Book.....	6
Part I Heart in Education		
2	Social and Emotional Education: A Framework for Primary Schools	11
2.1	Social and Emotional Education: An Integrated Well-Being and Resilience Perspective.....	11
2.1.1	The Six Perspectives Informing the SEE Framework	13
2.2	Evidence Base: It Is Not Just Magic, Mystery and Imagination.....	19
2.2.1	‘Meta-Abilities’ for Academic Learning.....	21
2.3	A School-Based, Whole School Approach to SEE.....	23
2.4	A Roadmap for SEE in Primary School	26
2.4.1	Multidimensional	27
2.4.2	Multistage.....	28
2.4.3	Multitarget.....	29
2.4.4	Multiintervention	29
2.4.5	Well-Planned, Well-Implemented and Well-Evaluated.....	29
2.5	Conclusion.....	30
3	An Overarching Structure for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Education	33
3.1	An Action Research Framework	33
3.2	Stage 1 Planning.....	34
3.3	Stage 2 Implementation.....	37
3.4	Stage 3: Evaluation	37
3.5	Conclusion.....	38

Part II Heart in the Classroom

4 Taught Social and Emotional Education: SEE in the Curriculum..... 43

4.1 Curriculum Framework..... 43

4.2 Content..... 46

 4.2.1 Self-Awareness..... 46

 4.2.2 Self-Management..... 46

 4.2.3 Social Awareness..... 47

 4.2.4 Social Management..... 48

4.3 Goals..... 48

4.4 Learning Standards..... 49

4.5 Staged Benchmarks..... 51

4.6 Instruction..... 52

4.7 Social and Emotional Education (SEE) Resource Pack..... 59

4.8 Assessment..... 61

 4.8.1 Assessment Tools..... 63

 4.8.2 Pupil Social and Emotional Education (SEE) Journal..... 69

4.9 Embedding Social and Emotional Education (SEE)
in the Other Areas of the Curriculum..... 71

4.10 Evaluation..... 74

4.11 Appendix..... 76

**5 Caught Social and Emotional Education:
A Caring Classroom Community..... 81**

5.1 Caring Classroom Community..... 82

5.2 Indicators for Classroom Community..... 85

6 Targeted Interventions for Pupils Experiencing Difficulties..... 97

6.1 A Framework for Targeted Social and Emotional Education
(SEE) Interventions..... 97

6.2 Stage 1 Classroom-Based Interventions (From Universal to
Selective Interventions)..... 101

6.3 Stage 2: Whole School Interventions (From Selective to
Indicated Interventions)..... 104

6.4 Stage 3: School Plus Interventions (Indicated Interventions)..... 107

6.5 Stage 4: Formal Assessment for Additional Support/
Special Provision (Indicated Interventions)..... 108

6.6 Conclusion..... 109

Part III Heart in the Whole-School Community

**7 A Whole-School Approach to SEE:
The School as a Caring Community..... 113**

7.1 A Schoolwide Approach to SEE..... 113

7.2	Assessing the Whole-School Ecology.....	116
7.2.1	Staff Checklist.....	117
7.2.2	Pupil Checklist.....	120
7.2.3	Parent/Caregivers Checklist.....	121
8	From Neurasthenia to Eudaimonia:	
	Teachers' Well-Being and Resilience	133
8.1	A Vulnerable Profession.....	134
8.2	Promoting Teachers' Well-Being and Resilience: An Interactionist Approach.....	136
8.2.1	Teachers' Social and Emotional Competence as a Protective Factor for Well-Being and Resilience.....	136
8.2.2	A Caring Professional Community Supporting Staff's Well-Being.....	140
8.3	Against the Odds: Promoting Resilience Amongst Teachers.....	143
8.4	Promoting Teachers' Well-Being: Identifying Targets for Improvement.....	145
9	Reaching Out: Parents'/Caregivers'	
	Engagement, Education and Well-Being	149
9.1	Parents as Active and Equal Partners in Education.....	149
9.2	Parental Education and Well-Being.....	151
9.3	Promoting Parents'/Caregivers' Engagement, Education and Well-Being: Identifying Targets for Improvement.....	154
10	Conclusion	159
	References	163
	Index	179

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Chapter 1

Education That Matters in the Twenty-First Century

The rapid global, social, economic and technological changes taking place in the adult world today are exposing children to unprecedented pressures and challenges at a young vulnerable age. Increasing mobility, urbanisation and individualism weaken the social connectedness and support that the children used to enjoy with consequent decline in emotional security and sense of well-being. These trends are demonstrated in the growing number of children who live in a world marked by changing family structures and more fluid relationships, breakdown of neighbourhoods and extended families, weakening of community institutions, fear of violence, rampant competition, excessive consumerism, increasing social inequality and manipulation through the media (Layard and Dunn 2009; Elias 2009; Collishaw et al. 2004; Palmer 2006). This emotional deprivation (Palmer 2006) is aggravated by adults' preoccupation with the pursuit of their own individualism and materialism, what James (2007) calls 'affluenza', which erodes prosocial qualities such as empathy, kindness and care. It also widens the gap between adults and children in terms of the amount of time that children spend with adults as opposed to that spent with their peers (over 50% of the total time spent), and contributes to the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties such as bullying, delinquency, anxiety and depression (Layard and Dunn 2009; Palmer 2006; Rutter and Smith 1995; WHO 2012).

About 20% of school children experience mental health problems during the course of any given year and may need help from mental health services (WHO 2011b; Romano et al. 2001); this may go up to 50% amongst children coming from socially disadvantaged areas such as urban regions (Adelman and Taylor 2010). According to the latest report by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), the prevalence of mental health difficulties in children and young people has been increasing in the last twenty five years, with 13 to 20% of American children and teenagers suffering from mental health difficulties in a given year, the most prevalent being behaviour or conduct problems followed by anxiety and depression. KidsMatter, Australia (www.kidsmatter.edu.au), reports that every one in seven primary-school-age children has mental health difficulties, the most common being depression, anxiety, hyperactivity and aggression, while in a longitudinal study with early primary school children, Cefai and Camilleri (2011) found that 10% of young children were at risk of developing mental health difficulties, either internalised or externalised.

This social and emotional landscape highlights the challenges children and young people are facing today. One must be careful not to take a simplistic and uncritical view of social change, such as embracing the ‘crisis of childhood’ without contextualising it within the wider social change, or attributing the current difficulties that children face simply to adults’ psychological narcissism and excessive materialism (Myers 2012). However, the social systems in children’s lives, such as family, school and community, do need to address the social and emotional challenges that children experience in meaningful and useful ways (Bronfenbrenner 1989). A relevant and meaningful education for the realities of the twenty-first century leads to the formation of academically, socially and emotionally literate young people who have the skills, abilities and emotional resilience necessary to navigate the uncertain but fast-moving environmental and economic present and future (Zins et al. 2004; Fundacion Marcellino Botin, 2008; Cooper and Cefai 2009; Durlak et al. 2011). Children and young people will need to be creative in problem-solving and effective in decision-making, to build and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to be able to work collaboratively with others. They need to mobilise their personal resources in times of difficulty, and sustain their psychological and social well-being. These are the qualities and competencies that must be fostered in children and young people if they are to become active and constructive citizens of the world (Benard 2004; Noddings 2012). As Linda Lantieri (2010) put it, ‘our task as educators who are preparing young people to be citizens of the 21st century, is to make sure that not only is no child “left behind” but that no *part* of the child is left behind—that every aspect of being human is welcomed into our schools. Becoming a citizen ready for the 21st century requires a change in consciousness’. Global interdependence, maximising human growth, development and learning, and a commitment to collaboration, justice and peace need to replace the erstwhile emphasis on competition (Noddings 2012; Lantieri 2009a).

There are so many changes happening at this very moment—particularly in our advances in technology—that we can only guess what the future will be like and what competencies young people will need to be successful. My guess would be that SEL skills will be, without a doubt, the ones that remain on the list. (Lantieri 2009a)

Schools are ideal entry points to address these challenges as they provide access to children from an early age (Brown and Bowen 2008). An ‘industrial era template’ of educational practice (Dator 2000) focused on academic achievement and performance indicators, however, is clearly out of step with the contemporary world. The spirit of twentieth-century competition still pervades many schools and educational systems today (Noddings 2012) with children being bored and depressed by ‘high-stakes bullet-pointed lists’ and ‘terrifying competition with one another’ (Cigman 2012, p. 10). They continue to be punished for their circumstances and social and emotional difficulties (Spratt et al. 2010). As well put by Roffey (2010, p. 156), ‘during the latter part of the 20th century, relational quality in education became

a casualty of tightly defined and delivered curriculum targets, a competitive focus on academic outcomes and time-consuming testing'. Teachers may have to repress their tendency for emotional connectedness with children and bypass their understandings and insights of child development in the face of academic press and 'technical, rational models of practice focused on assessment and targets' (Watson et al. 2012, p. 199). They become driven by the 'science of deliverology' seeking to deliver results and reach set targets and performance indicators within a 'depersonalised education' (Pring 2012).

For instance, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) standards are one of the key indicators used for measuring school effectiveness and student success these days. However, PISA is focused on academic achievement and assessment, and there is a danger that an overreliance on these standards may force educational systems and schools to put more value on academic achievement at the expense of other aspects of education, such as social and emotional education (SEE) (Rowlings 2012). They could turn out to be another league table, underlining the segregation of rich and poor into separate schools resulting from competition (Pring 2012). As Ravich (2010) put it, within such contexts, whatever cannot be measured does not count.

In contrast, we now have a sound evidence base supporting the relationship between SEE and academic learning, underlining the SEE foundation of academic achievement (e.g. Durlack et al. 2011). This needs to be underlined when citing the PISA standards (Rowlings 2012). In his review of over 800 research studies on what makes effective teaching and learning, Hattie (2008) underlined the importance of healthy and supportive classroom relationships as a key factor in teaching and learning challenges.

Will the schools successful in generating conventional academic, and occasionally social, excellence through their predictability, cohesion, consistency and structure, be the schools to generate the new social outcomes of 'coping' and 'psychosocial resilience' that are needed for today's youths? We fear that the answer (is)... no. (Reynolds and Teddlie 2000, p. 342)

1.1 Heart in Education

The foundational role of emotions in learning and behaviour is not something new as some might be led to believe (see Dixon 2012), but the current interest in the area underlines the shift towards a broad-based, holistic conceptualisation of childhood development and education, a proactive approach to the promotion of growth, health and well-being (cf. Seligman 2011). Research and theory in child development and learning have drawn our attention to the need for educational practices informed by a developing understanding of the ways in which social, cognitive and emotional factors interact and contribute to the learning process. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) systemic development model underlines the importance

of the whole child and the need to take the various facets of the child's development in education. Developmental theorists such as Bowlby (1980) and Maslow (1971) indicated that children could only achieve self-reliance, autonomy, self-esteem and other higher needs once their basic physical and emotional needs are adequately addressed. Effective social and cognitive functioning in children is predicated on emotional competencies which involve the understanding and regulation of emotions as well as the ability to read and empathise with the emotional states of others (Cefai and Cooper 2009).

What has happened to the idea that education should help people to find out what they are good at, what they would like to do in life, and how they might live their lives as individuals, friends, parents and citizens? (Noddings 2012, p. 777)

One may argue that education is not and should not be about mental health and well-being and that teachers are educators and not surrogate psychologists or mental health workers (Craig 2009). This is a particularly salient point in contexts where teachers face increasing pressure to ensure ever higher levels of pupil performance and passes in examinations, and where their own, and their school's, effectiveness are most often measured solely on the basis of pupils' academic outcomes. As already mentioned above, however, the current social and economic changes taking place in families and communities, leaving many children without the erstwhile protective networks of social support and connectedness, is making us rethink the objectives of education and the role of schools as primary settings for health promotion. Social and emotional education, however, does not equate with mental health difficulties or with turning schools from learning communities into therapeutic centres (Ecclestone and Hayes 2009). The traditional deficit discourse may have hijacked the idea of what mental health promotion in school is really about, namely promoting well-being and maximising growth and potential for all.

The broad framework suggested in this book and espoused in more detail in the next chapters, proposes a positive health and well-being perspective of child learning and development, depathologising mental health and positioning the classroom teachers as effective and caring educators in both academic and social and emotional learning. This universal perspective is clearly different from interventions simply targeting students experiencing social, emotional and behaviour difficulties and mental health difficulties, though the latter are not excluded (see Vostanis et al. 2013). Targeted interventions for pupils in difficulty, even if they are effective, do not necessarily reduce the incidence of mental health difficulties in children (Greenberg 2011). In contrast, besides promoting health and well-being, universal interventions prevent the development of more serious difficulties later on, reduce the impact of stigma associated with targeted interventions, and often lead to a reduction in multiple problem areas in children, since many of the social, emotional and behaviour problems experienced by children have overlapping risk factors and

comorbidity (Essex et al. 2006; Diekstra 2008a; Greenberg 2010; Bowers et al. 2012; Sklad et al. 2012).

The schooling of children, has, for more than a century, been about accomplishment, the boulevard into the world of adult work...imagine if schools could, without compromising either, teach the skills of well-being and the skills of achievement. (Seligman et al. 2009, p. 293–294)

One of the concerns amongst some parents and educators is that SEE takes precious time from academic learning which may lead to lower academic achievement (Benninga et al. 2006). The evidence shows, however, that a focus on social and emotional processes in education does not weaken or detract from achievement. On the contrary, affective education is at the heart of teaching and learning, providing a foundation upon which effective learning and success can be built and socio-emotional competence developed. In classrooms where teachers keep all the goals of schooling in mind, students achieve more than in classrooms where exclusive focus is on achievement (Caprara et al. 2000; Willms 2003; Roffey 2010). A dual focus on academic and socio-emotional learning promotes academic achievement, engagement, positive behaviour and healthy relationships (Payton et al. 2008; Dix et al. 2012; Durlak et al. 2011) and acts as an antidote against both internalised and externalised problems (Waddell et al. 2007; Blank et al. 2009; Battistich et al. 2004). It enables pupils to regulate their emotions, cope better with classroom demands and frustration, solve problems more effectively, relate better and work more collaboratively with others. Competencies like agency and initiative, self-efficacy, problem-solving, decision-making and collaboration also help to build a sense of entrepreneurship from an early age—one of the objectives of the European Union's educational vision for the twenty-first century.

Children can learn and use SEE competencies effectively, given the right context and tools, particularly at a time when their personality is still developing and serious behaviour problems have not yet been manifested (Domitrovich et al. 2007; Weare and Nind 2011; Lanes and Menzies 2004). In contrast, children with poor social and emotional literacy skills are more at risk of experiencing learning difficulties and engaging in such behaviours as anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, violence and criminality, and to leave school without any certification or vocational skills, with consequently poor employability opportunities (Adi et al. 2007; Maes and Lievens 2003; Fergusson et al. 2005; Colman et al. 2009; Bradley et al. 2008; Miles and Stipek 2006; Mooij and Smeets 2009). Seen this way, such children and young people may end up as an economic burden on the country's resources, including health and social services. For instance the USA spends about US\$ 247 billion a year on such services (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). A comprehensive, whole-school approach to SEE, combining prevention with early, targeted interventions, thus, would also be cost effective in the long term (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2008; WHO 2013). As Dodge (2010)

put it, social and emotional competence is an ‘important causal factor in life outcomes, from graduation to incarceration to employment’.

1.2 Outline of the Book

This book is about the social and emotional processes in education, the formation of socially, emotionally and academically competent and resilient pupils prepared for the tests put up by life in the twenty-first century. It suggests an integrated psycho-educational framework of social and emotional well-being, one which is based on health, growth and resilience. It proposes a multilevel, multitarget, multidimensional taught-and-caught approach to the promotion of well-being, health and resilience in school. It is intended as a practical guide for classroom practitioners, support staff, administration and other educationalists engaged in the promotion of social and emotional education in primary schools. It may also serve as a resource for educationalists engaged in policy-making, planning and curriculum development as well as a teacher education guide for both initial teacher education and professional learning programmes.

The book is divided into three major parts. The next chapter proposes a SEE framework for primary schools, suggesting how SEE may be developed as a whole-school approach with interventions at classroom, school and community levels, at universal and targeted intervention levels and with interventions for pupils, school staff and parents. Universal interventions refer to programmes and initiatives aimed at the whole classroom, school or community, while targeted interventions are focused specifically on pupils who may be either at risk of or manifesting difficulties in their social and emotional development. Chapter 3 describes an overarching whole-school framework to facilitate the implementation of the SEE framework in various elements at the school. Part 2 describes how social and emotional education may be organised at the classroom level at both taught-and-caught level and at universal and targeted interventions. Chapter 4 presents a universal curriculum integrating social and emotional learning, positive education, resilience, mindfulness, inclusive education and a caring school community’s perspectives. It describes the curriculum content, goals and learning outcomes and how it may be delivered, assessed and integrated in the other areas of the curriculum. Chapter 5 describes how the classroom may be organised as a caring community in the promotion of SEE. A school-based, staged and developmental framework to address the social and emotional needs of pupils in difficulty is discussed in Chap. 6. Part 3 outlines the implementation of the SEE framework at the whole-school level. Chapter 7 discusses how the whole school may mobilise its resources in implementing SEE at the whole-school level, recruiting the active engagement of all staff and the collaboration of parents and the community in reinforcing and complementing the classroom practices. Chapter 8 underlines the need to address the health, well-being and resilience of the school staff, while Chap. 9 focuses on how the school needs not only to engage the parents’

collaboration but also to enhance their parenting and own well-being. Chapter 10 concludes with a brief overview of the way forward for practitioners engaged in social and emotional education in schools.

Each chapter ends with a story, legend or folk tale from various regions of the world, illustrating one of the competencies presented in the SEE curriculum. The stories have been developed and modified by the main author to fit the scope and style of the book. They are also intended as illustrations of how classroom practitioners may use story telling as a medium for the promotion of SEE.

The book includes various excerpts from interviews with school staff carried out by the author in a number of schools in South Australia engaged in social and emotional learning and mental health initiatives.

The book also includes a set of SEE activities by Valeria Cavioni at two age levels (early years and primary school) in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management, respectively, with various classroom and home activities in each area. *Timmy's Trip to Planet Earth: A Self and Social Adventure* is available at www.springer.com.