

Editorial

Special issue: *Exploring Social and Emotional Learning: Contributions from two European Conferences*

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This special issue of the International Journal of Emotional Education presents some of the highlights of two International Conferences on the Promotion of Social and Emotional Competence, namely the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Centre for Social Competence at Diakonhjemmet University College, Norway in 2012, and the 4th International ENSEC Conference at Zagreb University, Croatia in 2013. The first three papers are from the Social Competence conference in Norway, while the last four papers are taken from ENSEC conference in Croatia. This edition then, in the spirit of ENSEC and the Centre for Social Competence conferences, is brought to you by three editors from the Norway, Croatia, and the United Kingdom, and represents a truly international collaboration.

In the first paper Knut Gundersen (Norway) argues that many of the dimensions of ‘social competence’ might best be understood as a number of continua where the optimal level could be in the middle rather than at one end of the continuum. He presents a theoretical model supported by examples from practice. Gundersen argues for a more individualised approach to promoting social and emotional competence, and suggests the need for more flexibility in delivering parts of programmes or combinations of programmes. He also argues that the knowledge and skills of the trainer are essential to making these adaptations.

Roman Koposov and colleagues (Norway) present the results of an evaluation of ART in Russia where ART has been disseminated under the auspices of the *Children and Youth at Risk Project*. The quasi-experimental study sampled 232 children recruited from 10 institutions. Findings revealed that the ART Programme was associated with a significant increase in social skills when assessed through children’s self-reports, and the most significant effects were found in 6-9 and 10-14 years old participants. Interestingly, the

control group also indicated a significant improvement in social skills, which they argue could be attributed to a ‘diffusion effect’.

Helen Cowie (UK) presents an interesting analysis of the role of bystanders in incidents of bullying. She argues that perpetrators seldom act alone, but are usually supported by their immediate group of ‘assistants’ and ‘reinforcers’ and encouraged by the responses of the bystanders as ‘outsiders’ who may react with indifference to the plight of the victim or implicitly condone what is happening. Cowie describes the ambivalence felt by the bystanders, who understand that bullying is wrong and want to stop it, but are aware of their own needs for security and acceptance within the peer group. She argues convincingly that cyberbullying presents a special challenge since it has the potential to reach a large audience and thus could be very harmful for the victim. Cowie suggests some interesting implications for practice, particularly in relation to the potentiality of peer support in this area.

Ebru Ersay (Turkey) explores maternal responsiveness to infant emotions, particularly in relation to socializing of the infant. Ersay sampled 868 mothers of pre-school children in Istanbul and Ankara using the *Responses to Children’s Emotions (RCE) Questionnaire*. The study has a dual purpose, both to document maternal responses in the Turkish sample and to further explore the reliability and validity of the RCE Questionnaire. Ersay’s study demonstrates the usefulness of the questionnaire and provides interesting insights into maternal responses in the sample that she argues could form the basis of interesting international comparisons. In an interesting analysis of the data, Ersay explores the variables that she demonstrates might impact on the maternal responsiveness such as the age of the mother, the level of maternal education, and the birth order of the study child.

William Nicoll (USA) explores what he describes as an ‘emerging resilience paradigm’ which he sees as providing a very timely challenge to a more ‘pathology-focused’ approach to education. Nicoll usefully theorises the difference between innovation and transformation, drawing on a wide range of sources, and argues that genuine transformation involves addressing our very fundamental ways of thinking about education and schools. Nicoll argues convincingly that authentic change and transformation can be maximised by building on the existing knowledge we have of academic and social contexts, and presents for our deliberation a ‘resilience based, systemic-holistic paradigm’ that might have resonance for many readers.

Helen Cowie and Carrie-Anne Myers (UK) present an innovative study of cyber-bullying amongst university students, a phenomenon they argue persuasively that has been insufficiently theorized. The study collected data from university student volunteers who were asked to reflect on their experience of role-playing a restorative conference following an incidence of cyber-bullying. Cowie and Myers report interesting similarities between the outcomes of this study and research into cyber-bullying amongst children, with the demonstrated ‘apathy’ of those in roles as bystanders and the ‘responsibility’ felt by those in role as the victims being particularly interesting. The bystander role has been further theorized by Cowie earlier in this issue, and it is one that the authors suggest is worth further investigation, noting that very interestingly in this study none of the bystander group was willing to publicly denounce the bullying by the ‘popular’ member

of the group. The study highlights the contribution that a ‘narrative method’ can make to understanding the processes of bullying, and concludes that bullying might be a lifelong problem worthy of investigation in different contexts.

In the final paper, Wendy Turner (UK) investigates the impact of an innovative approach to helping students in higher education to bridge the ‘practice –theory gap’ through supporting their application of knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people to real situations. In a mixed methods study Turner explored student and staff experiences of a new way of working, and looked at the impact on student data in relation to achievement and satisfaction. After a detailed analysis of the data, Turner draws together a model of what she calls “Applied and Purposive Learning” which brings together online theoretical information, real life experiences and reflective interactive learning experiences in the classroom to support optimal student learning. Turner usefully highlights the importance of using technology to support students as “as co-producers in their own education”, and concludes that this particular model might be a useful one for other programmes where children’s emotional well-being is a focus of the teaching and learning.