**RESPONSE TO REVIEWER COMMENTS**

**Reviewer 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewer comments</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide a definition on p. 5 of the concept of ‘wellbeing’.</td>
<td>We have now expanded our introduction section to include a clear definition on the holistic understanding of wellbeing that we take on (p.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the start of p. 15, to provide a statement on our understanding of identity.</td>
<td>A sentence has been inserted on (p.15) which explains what is meant by the term ‘identity’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the moral and ethics based approaches section, to change the title of the</td>
<td>We have now amended the sub-title and preceding introductory paragraph as suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first subsection to ‘Character and Moral education’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add a sub-heading to distinguish the points of criticism made within the section</td>
<td>A sub-heading demarcating this section has now been added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on moral-based perspectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few lines critiquing the ethics and identity perspective (for example,</td>
<td>A new paragraph has now been inserted at the end of the ethic-based perspective discussing some of the problems posed here; following Bernstein (1970) we argue that the more invisible forms of pedagogy the perspective is suggestive of may privilege middle class families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highlighting the relativist leanings of ethics-based approaches?) would be useful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a reason the word learning is italicised in the subheading: ‘Social and</td>
<td>Yes, we italicised this word to emphasise the point that this perspective is about acquiring skills in a didactic fashion, this point is elaborated in the section and we refer with emphasis to the point about learning of skills – the inclusion of this in the sub-heading serves to ameliorate this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Learning: a skills and competencies perspective’ (page 5)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would break the paragraph that runs from page 6 to page 7 somewhere (perhaps</td>
<td>We agree and have now broken this paragraph to make it shorter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after: ‘on a set of theories and methods with a defined evidence base’?) as it is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite long.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add a page number to the direct quotation from Huit on page 8</td>
<td>This is an online source, with the correct convention now followed in recording this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On page 10, line 46, I am not sure about the word ‘curious’ in the sentence: ‘A key</td>
<td>We agree and have replaced this word with ‘enquiring’ which we hope is less ambiguous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>component of the ethics-based approach to SEW is a curious appreciation for culture’. The word made me pause as I was not sure which sense of curious that was being used: ‘eager to learn’ or ‘strange’?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theorising social and emotional wellbeing in schools: a framework for analysing educational policy

Ceri Brown¹ and Michael Donnelly

University of Bath

Word count: 8998

Young people are increasingly lamented as unable to cope with ‘everyday realities of life’ with educational institutions and parenting styles accelerating what some refer to as the ‘snowflake generation’. This paper addresses confusion that exists in the framing of social and emotional wellbeing, delineating three competing perspectives: (1) ‘skills and competencies’, (2) ‘morals and ethics’ and (3) ‘capital and identity’. Embedded within each perspective are distinct notions of the ‘self’ and processes of socialisation and identity formation. The competency-based perspective shifts attention towards the individual and is reliant upon universal skills. This contrasts with a morals and ethics-based perspective on social and emotional wellbeing which is seen to be contingent upon the values that guide our moral and ethical frameworks, and informs how we relate with others. A capital and identity perspective does not speak of ‘wellbeing’ per se, but rather places emphasis on the different sets of resources available to children. These perspectives offer fundamentally distinct framings of the ‘crisis of youth’ and we draw out the implications for current and future policy development they imply.

Introduction

Cultural commentators have described today’s youth as more isolated, and atomised than their predecessors, using the term ‘[phone]Gen[eration]’ (Twenge 2017) to refer to the dominance of virtual relationships and technological interaction over real-world socialising, and sedentary leisure pursuits over collective ones (Putnam 2000) resulting in anxiety, communication problems and difficulties in navigating relationships. The phrase ‘snowflake generation’ (Fox 2016) has been used by some to describe what is perceived as a young population who are emotionally unable to cope with what are regarded as the ‘everyday realities of life’. While such labels are value laden there is evidence to suggest that young people are becoming more anxious, for example psychologist Jean Twenge analysed 269 studies, with a total of 52,000 US adolescents, and found a continuous upward trend in anxiety levels across the second half of the 20th century (see Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Embedded within this debate is a perception that young people are not being prepared to cope with everyday challenges, and are emotionally ‘weaker’ than past generations. In terms of the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, one of the key lessons to come from the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of their relationships and connectedness to others.

The policy response to such challenges has been to shift attention towards the social and emotional dimensions of learning as fundamental to schools’ role in children’s development. This narrative is highly problematic on a number of levels, not least because it fails to acknowledge the pressures

¹ Corresponding author: Ceri Brown, Department of Education, University of Bath, BA2 7AY, C.L.Brown@bath.ac.uk
faced by contemporary youth brought about by social and economic change. It fails to acknowledge the onus now placed on the individual to navigate their own choices and trajectories as ‘consumers’ in an increasingly fragile economy where there is no longer a straight forward relationship between education credentials and labour market outcomes. More generally, it does not account for the increasingly performative and market-based logic that has come to dominate the ends and increasingly the means by which educational outcomes are measured and pursued, and the consequential impact on young people.

Key stakeholders in children’s education; parents, employers, public health officials, have aligned with these arguments over shared social issues such as the rise in mental health problems and lamented lack of communication and teamwork skills in the labour market. There is considerable variance however, in the ways that the social and emotional dimensions of children’s lives have been theorised, which reflect distinct disciplinary as well as theoretical positions. Furthermore, the very terms used by which to discuss the social and the emotional vary significantly and include; ‘Character [and Moral] education’, ‘personality’, ‘21st century skills’, ‘soft skills’, ‘non-cognitive skills’ (Jones and Doolittle 2017, p3); ‘social and emotional skills’, ‘emotional intelligence’ (Goleman 1995) ‘social and emotional learning’ and ‘ethics education’ (Cohen 2006). We favour the term social and emotional wellbeing (SEW) selected for its broad focus upon the individual, subjective, as well as environmental, structural and collective factors that bear upon the social and emotional dimensions of children’s development and identity. Not without critique (see Wright and McLeod 2015) the term ‘wellbeing’ being both popularist and theoretical enjoys significant purchase on varying educational policy areas and as such is both conceptual and applied. We take a holistic definition of wellbeing to refer to both individual wellness in being, doing, and a ‘sense of control over one’s fate, a feeling of purpose and belongingess and a basic satisfaction with oneself and one’s existence’ (Cowen 1991, p404) as well having as a relational component as; ‘the outcome of accommodation and interaction that happens in and over time through the dynamic interplay of personal, societal and environmental structures and processes’ (White 2017).

These societal pressures and concerns have no doubt led to an exponential growth in the development of education policies (for example, in England, see policies around relationships, ‘character education’, mental health and careers – Department for Education (2018, 2018a 2019, 2019a)); in recent years, schools, like other institutions of civil society, have witnessed a major growth in the development of activity in this area to address increased expectations incumbent upon them. Yet, we know little about the fundamental distinctions in how this dimension of schooling are conceptualised, including any conflict or consensus in such conceptualisations. A major contribution of this paper is to delineate competing approaches to understanding and addressing social and emotional wellbeing. In this paper, we identify three discrete conceptualisations, which have been used to approach schools’ role in the area of children’s social and emotional wellbeing; ‘skills and competencies’, ‘morals and ethics’ and ‘capital and identity’. While there are clear lines of overlap, they are distinctive in two key ways, firstly, to what extent social and emotional wellbeing is conceptualised as a universal objective for the whole student population, versus the extent it is pursued for target population groups, and secondly, the extent to which the emphasis is upon the individual child as the agent for generating SEW, versus to what extent it is the consequence of societal conditions (social, environmental or structural), therefore responsible to the actions of other social actors including the school, family, community and state. We will now go on to discuss each of these perspectives in turn.

**Social and Emotional Learning: a skills and competencies perspective**
By far the most dominant of the three lenses to SEW is what we call the ‘skills and competencies’ approach, which draws from the psychological literature and is the perspective that has achieved the greatest success by way of translation into school-based interventions. From this perspective, social and emotional skills are conceived of as ‘capabilities’ or ‘competencies’ to be developed and nurtured in the child; ‘Social and emotional competence is generally understood as a set of abilities’ (Burroughs and Barkauskas, 2017, p228) and according to one of its chief founders, ‘measures the ability to understand, process, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of our lives’ (Cohen, 2001, p4). Competencies are understood to be an achieved state of being which can be discerned and measured – in other words, mastery of an ability to do something (physical, emotional, or mental) that individuals may have varying levels of. Consequently, there are educational activities which are effective at increasing or decreasing this objectifiable state held within individuals.

This perspective places emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as the key mechanism by which schools are to be implicated in the development of social and emotional skills;

SEL is the process of providing all children and adolescents with the opportunities to learn, acquire and practise the social-emotional competences needed to succeed in life (Oberle et al. 2016).

Frameworks that cohere with a competency perspective have organised social and emotional ‘skills’ in varying ways, including typographies of three (Jones and Doolittle 2017) five (CASEL 2005) and even seven categories (McNeil 2012). There is generally broad consensus, however, insofar as the organisation of discrete skills into one of three dimensions; thinking, feeling or behaving, which are believed to play a significant part in children’s competency to master key tasks in school and in life (Zins et al. 2004). Concurrently, we may understand them as either: 1) cognitive skills, such as self-and social awareness (CASEL, 2005) problem-solving (Mc Neil et al, 2012) and decision-making (Elias et al 1997); 2) affective skills, such as emotional awareness (Elias et al 1997) and managing feelings (Mc Neil et al, 2012), and 3) behavioural competencies such as inter-personal skills (Elias 1997), social intelligence (Elias 2001) relationship skills (CASEL 2005) and leadership skills (Mc Neil et al, 2012). The atomisation of these competencies into discrete outcomes amenable to quantitative measurement has enabled the gold standard science methodology, - the Randomised Control Trial (RCT), - to determine a causal relationship between the mastery of social emotional skills and reduced common mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression (e.g. Waddle et al, 2007) as well as academic achievement (e.g. Qualter et al, 2012) in turn consolidating schools’ role in developing them in the child.

Taken from this perspective, policy solutions task schools to instil and develop certain capacities that are deemed to be required in young people. This principle operates under three related assumptions; firstly, schools are conceived of as an ideal intervention point for longer-term public health and social goals; Secondly, school based intervention programmes can improve children’s SEL, thus reducing the risk of longer-term social outcomes; thirdly, in following the ‘prevention paradox’: the belief that intervention is best administered universally (as opposed to targeted towards particular student or population groups) because ‘a large number of people exposed to a small risk may generate many more cases [of an undesirable outcome] than a small number exposed to a high risk’ (Greenberg et al. 2017, p13). This points to a universal skill promotion strategy appropriate for all population groups, for example ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Second Step, Creating Confident Kids, and the UK Resilience Program’ (Emery, 2016, p3). These programmes have come about in the past 10 years and are largely all-age school-based interventions designed to develop specific skills through a variety of methods and approaches (SEAL, for example, aims to develop 5 specific skill-sets). These
programmes are often specifically designed as a ‘package’ of activities (often with pre-prepared materials and defined number of hours per programme etc.).

For example, the UK Resilience Programme is derived from the Penn Resilience Programme, developed by a team of psychologists from University of Pennsylvania to ‘building resilience and promoting realistic thinking, adaptive coping skills and social problem-solving in children’ (Challen et al. 2011). This programme has been trialled across a number of contexts to produce a substantial body of empirical evidence demonstrating impact, and is based on Ellis’s ‘Activating-Belief-Consequences’ theoretical model which relies on the notion that beliefs about events are central to mediating emotions and behaviour. A major evaluation of the UK resilience programme concluded it to be effective in reducing the prevalence of depression and anxiety at least in the short-term, as well as improving school attendance and academic attainment in English (Challen et al. 2010). The evaluation found that pupils were positive about the programme, and had applied the skills they learnt in real-life situations. Looking at the effectiveness of a much broader range of programmes that have been running in the UK, Clarke et al. (2015) have found strong evidence of various programmes effectiveness in building competencies (such as coping skills, self esteem, resilience, problem solving and empathy) as well reducing problem behaviours (including aggression and violence, bullying, and substance misuse). SEAL has arguably been most prevalent in the UK, and there is evidence that teachers in the UK believe the SEAL programme is effective and promotes children’s social and emotional wellbeing as well as their ability to control emotions such as anger (Hallam 2009). These sorts of programmes has proliferated in recent times as Governments, schools and education bodies have sought out ‘off the shelf’ packages to deliver social and emotional wellbeing. Notwithstanding the sound intentions of these programmes, and what has been found to be their positive impact, it must also be recognised that the perspective is underlied by particular assumptions which are open to more critical interpretations.

**Critics of the skills and competency approach: a sociological backlash**

When the social and emotional dimensions of children’s wellbeing are conceptualised in educational policy as a competency, or a skill to be learned, the implication is an individual focus upon the agential power of the child in their learned capacity to identify, react and manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviours in interaction with others. This bypasses a philosophical or democratic consideration of the values or the knowledge underpinning SEW; which may be unpacked in the therapists consulting room, but for which there is not the time or capacity to develop in the classroom, with its emphasis upon the child’s competency to administrate the social and emotional dimensions of their experiences. In other words, the emphasis is upon controlling and curtailing emotions that interrupt the business of schooling, and the behaviours and social interacts they provoke. Even by concession of its proponents, the SEL perspective can be seen to ‘put a great deal of emphasis on the individual rather than the environment—and, consequently, put the burden of SEL on students’ (Jones and Doolittle, 2017, p10). This follows the assumption that ‘SEL skills are malleable, meaning they can be taught and learned’ (Jones and Doolittle, 2017, 7). While schools are seen to have the responsibility to facilitate the development of such skills, ultimately they are viewed to be owned or lacking in the individual: the onus is on the child as the agent of change. The child must therefore take ownership of the development of these skills, however they are viewed as amenable to being learned and therefore of being taught in schools. This is not to deny the evident positive impact these programmes do have on children, but rather to question the extent to which they capture the underlying mechanisms which drive behaviour and conduct in the classroom.

Despite its ubiquity in school-based educational programmes, the skills and competency perspective of SEW has been subject to fierce criticism both within the discipline of psychology e.g. (Burman 2018) but particularly in the sociology of education. Critics have taken issue with what has been
termed therapeutic education (e.g. Furedi, 2004; Ecclestone and Hayes 2008). Questions have been levied at the salutogenic (Weare 2010) health promotion goal of universal programmes, which are accused of positioning a diminished subjecthood (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008) thus normalising a default ‘vulnerability’ state in the child, which is both disempowering to the individual and legitimating of a growing market of ‘pseudo experts as an omnipresent source of authority for managing the everyday vulnerability of a human subject’ (Ecclestone and Rawdin, 2016, p389). The ‘prevention paradox’ underpinning universal programmes has also been critiqued for situating the socially and emotionally (in)competent child as a docile and compliant citizen (Batholdsson et al. 2014). Such arguments have taken a Foucauldian frame to consider how SEL programmes reflect ‘governmentality’ techniques (Author) that emphasise self-regulation and psychological realignment as a policy mechanism to achieve social order (Rose 1989). This argument takes issue with the dominant education policy skills and competency emphasis upon positive and anodyne emotions and behaviours. The emphasis upon emotional regulation (McNeil et al, 2012; Goleman date, Elias et al 1997) effectively negate powerful ‘negative’ emotions such as anger, frustration and responses ‘conflict and aggression’, and pathologises particular children, such as those labelled with social and emotional ‘difficulties’ (Gillies 2010). The implication is that studies in the SEL tradition have deduced that; ‘the lack of appropriate social or emotional skills is...a strong predictor of a child’s behaviour’ (Polou 2015, p86) leading to a pejorative labelling of non-compliant emotions. An example of this is offered in a recent paper offering empirical support for the relationship between SEL competency and behavioural problems;

‘Students demonstrate emotional and behavioural difficulties when...they lack appropriate social skills or in other words exhibit inappropriate assertiveness’ (Polou 2015 p101).

This is not to deny the positive change that therapeutic techniques can have on young people (learning to manage emotions and feelings, for example), which can lead to profound and life-changing outcomes. However, there is a danger that schools and teachers can apply these programmes uncritically – missing some of the underlying reasons behind so-called ‘problematic’ behaviours, for example. If individuals are only reduced to certain pre-defined competencies, there is a real risk that the context within which they are situated is lost, which may well have more long-term and lasting impacts. Indeed, it is telling that there are few, if any, evaluations of the long-term impact of school-based interventions, with evaluations often limiting claims to only short-term positive change.

**Character/morals and ethical-based perspectives on social and emotional wellbeing**

A ‘values’ approach to SEW can be divided into two discrete emphases reflecting disciplinary and philosophical differences. We have defined these as a ‘character and morals’ versus an ‘ethics’ based values perspective on SEW. From a character/morals and ethics-based perspective social and emotional wellbeing is seen to be contingent upon the values that guide our moral and ethical frameworks, and informs how we relate with others.

**A character and morals perspective on SEW**

The moral dimension to SEW has a long history as an educational ambition for schooling, for example the 19th century educationalist John Stuart Mill (Miller and Kim 1988) and 20th century educator John Dewey (Dewey 1916) and has been termed Character and Moral Education (CME). This body of work captures what we would call the ‘moral’ dimension to a values-based approach to SEW. By ‘character’ there are two key dimensions;

1. “Engaging in morally relevant conduct or words, or refraining from certain conduct or words”
2. “A complex set of relatively persistent qualities of the individual person, and generally has a positive connotation when used in discussions of moral education” (Huitt 2004, online)

‘Character’ is therefore more than just the possession of key desirable values, but also involves the child acting upon those values and knowledge; ‘In the opinion of most researchers in the area of character and moral development (e.g., Lickona, 1991; Nucci, 1989), additional emphasis must be placed on the philosophical “why” of education in addition to the technical “how.”’ (Huitt 2004). There are, however, differences between ‘Character’ and ‘Moral’ education. Moral education tends to be theoretically driven, is narrower in its focus upon moral reasoning structures, and due to its firmer social science roots tends to have stronger empirical grounding. It is of course also contingent upon context, which matters in terms of what nations, regions, localities, schools, families and other societal units consider to be their shared values and qualities. Character education in contrast tends to be less theoretical, has an extensive and diverse set of outcomes, and hails from a classical and sometimes conservative religious tradition (Alhoff and Berkhoviz 2006, p499-500). Notwithstanding these differences, the perspectives align following a shared concern for the role of schooling (among other social actors) in shaping the individual child's moral framework. This concerns the identification and instilling of key values that underpin social and emotional wellbeing e.g. tolerance, respect, ‘good behaviour’. Like the SEL approach the ‘moral’ strand of this values approach to SEW conforms to a perspective that sees morality in terms of a set of universal human traits or value positions shared by a particular society that transcend social, cultural differences. This position reflects a didactic and somewhat rigid blueprint of what constitutes the specific desired qualities schools are to nurture in the child. Few would argue with the sorts of conduct and behaviour many societies seek to develop in children, such as tolerance and respect for others, but it is also the case that some societies will seek to inculcate potentially harmful ideas, such as homophobic or transphobic worldviews and ideas around the ‘right’ kind of family structure.

The key distinction between a skills and competencies and a moral and ethics approach is captured by one of the founding SEL theorists Maurice Elias;

‘Character and moral education (CME) and social-emotional learning (SEL) have emerged as two prominent formal approaches used in schools to provide guidance for students’ behavior. CME emphasizes values, and SEL emphasizes the skills and attitudes needed to function in relevant social environments... Character and moral education has focused more on the power of “right thinking” and “knowing the good,” and social-emotional learning has focused more on the power of problem solving’ (Elias et al 2007, p167).

This is not to say that CME is incompatible with a skills and competency SEL perspective. On the contrary, CME proponents have argued that the two are closely aligned; ‘many of the skills of character education are basic social-emotional skills of self-management and social competencies required for social living’ (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006, p513). Leading SEL figures such as Maurice Elias and Jonathon Cohen have argued in favour of integrating the perspectives using the respective terms; Social, Emotional and Character Development (SECD) and Social Emotional and Ethics education (SEEE). However, efforts to merge an SEL skills perspective on SEW with a moral and ethics dimensions have been critiqued for their conflation of social-emotional with ethical competence;

‘Indeed, research and literature on SEL tends to either (1) assume SEL includes ethical learning (thereby conflating SEL with ethics education) or (2) claims ethical benefits of SEL training without sufficient discussion or research to support this claim’. (Burroughs and Barkausklas 2017, p221)
At the heart of this critique is the claim that the social and emotional ‘understanding’ that is facilitated through a competency perspective does not de facto lead the child to use such skills for benevolent or ethical purposes (Burroughs and Barkausklas 2017, p223).

Critiquing ‘character and morals’: Universalising and pathologising discourses of ‘appropriate’ behaviour

Given the somewhat prescriptive account of what constitutes ‘appropriate’ social and emotional understanding and the consequential motivations that drive behaviour, it is perhaps unsurprising that the SEL and the CME account are restrictive in terms of accommodating deviance or differences in worldviews. Furthermore, key SEL policies such as the New Labour\(^2\) SEAL programme, have been critiqued for targeting key groups of children such as those in poverty (Emery 2016). This argument claims that conditions of structural disadvantage are reframed as failings in the individual’s social or emotional development. Such a deficit model understanding of the SEL competency of families from low-socio-economic backgrounds has been termed a Moral Underclass Discourse (Levitas 2005; Author) of policymaking that positions children in poverty, and their families, as a morally distinct section of society. In wider social policy, the construction of ‘problem families’ is a further example of the pathologizing discourses which separate social groups into essentialising categories which places an emphasis on individual or group behaviours. However, that said, it must also be acknowledged that at least the SEAL programme accommodates some levels of diversity in response by recognising that differences exist across societal groups. The same kind of recognition is not the case for all policies and programmes, such as the English Character Education programme (DfE 2019) which gives little regard for individual differences in favour of a universalising approach to values and behaviour.

An ethics-based perspective on SEW

In contrast to what we term the ‘moral-based’ approach, an ‘ethics based’ values approach rejects a universal understanding of morality. Accordingly, an ethics-based SEW perspective is culturally sensitive in its emphasis upon the relative dimension of ethical values, with a broader focus upon the whole-child. Advocates of an ethics based SEW approach see an ethical orientation (as opposed to a moral one) as fundamentally autonomous as opposed to learned;

‘We argue that schools would benefit from devoting greater attention to the related, yet distinct, end of ethics education – including a focus on educating children to develop and adopt an autonomous ethical orientation with a personal investment in ethical values, motivations, and actions – with current social and emotional education efforts’ (Burroughs and Barkausklas 2017, 219).

Following this assumption an ethics-based values approach is explicitly political in focus due to the social justice underpinnings orientated towards ‘public morality’ in place of individual morality (Sehr 1997; Bull 2006). While a morality approach emphasises universal moral principles to be inculcated in the child through schooling, an ethics-based approach positions a more active and free-thinking individual, and a pedagogy that favours empowerment, open discourse (Althof and Berkowitz 2006) and critical thinking (Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005). A key component of the ethics-based approach to SEW is an enquiring appreciation for culture, also known as a culturally relevant and

\(^2\) New Labour refers to the Labour government administrations in the UK, under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (1997-2010)
‘sustaining’ pedagogy that aims to ‘ensure that those who have been disadvantaged by schooling receive quality education [as well as for]..those in the mainstream to develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage’ (Ladson Billings 2014 p83).

This approach to SEW is focused upon the role of social and emotional skills in facilitating students’ recognition for the dynamic and heterogenic nature of society (Paris and Alim 2014), including recognition for the multiple axes that guide identification and form communities. This involves recognising and celebrating what binds us with others at the same time as respecting human differences and striving for equality. Accordingly, two central components of what has been termed a ‘culturally sustaining pedagogy’ by one of the key architects for this perspective; Ladson Billings (2014) are ‘cultural competence’ and ‘socio-political consciousness’, which are argued to be of critical importance in evaluating the policies and practices that may have direct impact on young people’s lives and communities;

*Cultural competence* refers to the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture. *Sociopolitical consciousness* is the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems (p75)

Ethics-based approaches to SEW invariably stem from broader social science lens such as sociology and anthropology, and have a specific focus upon SEW as socio-political context and cultural construct, argued to be overlooked by psychological SEL approaches (Simmons, 2017). Recent approaches to social and emotional skills education have attempted to correct the colour-blind privileging of white middle class Anglo-American values (Hoffman 2009) by asserting the value of the full range of emotions, including those that trouble authority and social structure (Ladson Billings 2014; Swanson et al. 2019).

In summary, an ‘ethical’ values approach to SEW, rejects a universal understanding of morality – in seeking out different views and perspectives of the way society and people should operate, which may change according to social and cultural context. While a morals-based approach emphasises universal moral principles to be instilled in the child through schooling, an ethics-based approach values a more free-thinking individual, enabled to understand and arbitrate between diversity and difference of opinion.

The relativism which underlies an ethics-based approach might be regarded as problematic by some. It would be fair to say that ethics-based approaches are likely to require more sophisticated forms of pedagogy (beyond didactic teaching of ‘skills’ or ‘morals’) to create independently minded autonomous learners. Some could argue that this kind of time and resource investment is out of the bounds of teachers and schools with the most disadvantaged catchments. Given its relativist leanings, the perspective could also be suggestive of what Bernstein (1970) refers to as ‘invisible pedagogy’; forms of pedagogic practice which give greater autonomy to the learner in determining the content, pace and ordering of their learning. Bernstein (1970) suggested that this more implicit pedagogy could put the working classes at a disadvantage, because they are less familiar and confident with the ‘ends’ and ‘means’ of schooling. Approaches from an ethics-based perspective may well privilege middle class children who were socialised from an early age into the forms of behaviour, conduct and manner valued by schools. In this sense, the ethics-based perspective leads us on to thinking about capital-based approaches to understanding social and emotional wellbeing.

*A capitals and identity perspective on social and emotional wellbeing*
The third and final lens to look upon schools’ role in children’s social and emotional wellbeing is what we term a ‘capitals’ and identity approach. This perspective does not speak of ‘wellbeing’ per se, and would not use such lexicon, but rather places emphasis on the different sets of resources available to children. It is a way of conceptualising social and emotional wellbeing that accounts for power structures that lead to dominant and dominated positions in terms of the available resources. In the field of international development, the dominant econometric perspective that takes an objective account of wellbeing, stands in stark contrast to perspectives which emphasise the relational nature of wellbeing, that is to say the ways in which it is dependent upon relationships with others (White 2015). Similarly, in education we can consider how competency-based approaches to wellbeing stand in relation to a capital-based perspective. From this predominantly sociological perspective, what might be often referred to as ‘social and emotional wellbeing’ is understood as a consequence of the externally-derived resources that young people have available to them. Furthermore, children are differentially positioned in terms of the social and emotional resources that schooling view as conducive to wellbeing. For privileged groups social and emotional wellbeing is harmonious with educational success, while for disadvantaged groups their available social and emotional resources are discordant with academic wellbeing, and children are forced to choose. The theorisation of capital in its various forms has therefore been used to explain the link between social and emotional resources and educational success. While a number of capital theories have been applied in understanding the educational gains and losses of different groups (e.g. Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986) is perhaps the most comprehensive in theorising the ways in which capital (in its different forms) operates as a tool of cultural reproduction leading to unequal educational outcomes.

The key types of capital that Bourdieu defined as central to education include; economic capital which is ‘immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights’ (Bourdieu 1986; 242); cultural capital, which can be either ‘embodied’, ‘i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’; objectified, ‘i.e. in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) (247) or ‘institutionalized’, a specific form of objectification (such as educational qualifications) which ‘confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value’ (248); lastly he defines social capital, as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.’ (248).

While critiqued for reducing capital to a personal resource to be exploited for positional advantage (Van Rossem et al., 2015) central to Bourdieu’s conceptualisation (1993) is the ‘convertibility’ of capital; its transmutability into other forms of capital. It is this feature of capital that mobilises the social or emotional resource from being an essential or assumed quality or characteristic of the individual child. In developing Bourdieu’s third concept of capital a number of Bourdieusien sociologists have used the term ‘emotional capital’ as central in the operation of social capital. First defined by Nowotny (1981) ‘emotional capital’ denotes the, ‘knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterized at least partly by affective ties’ (148). In this way, we may understand it as the emotional resources implicated in the constitution and maintenance of significant social relationships. While the former perspectives have been concerned to translate the social and emotional dimensions of children’s wellbeing into educational programmes, a capital-based approach is more cautious that this is advisable. This is due to their focus upon identifying the social and emotional resources that are valorised by education as well as those that are not, with the consequential framing of winners and losers. Zembylas (2007) for example has argued that emotional capital can be used as a conceptual tool for analysing the processes and normative standards by which educational institutions maintain what he refers to as ‘affective economies’;
‘Emotion norms, just like other norms, delineate a zone within which certain emotions are permitted and others are not permitted, and can be obeyed or broken, at varying costs; they reflect power relations and thus are techniques for the discipline of habitus in the emotional expression and communication between teachers and students’ (447).

This highlights the unequal value that different emotional and social resources assume within schools, and the resultant hierarchy in social and emotional skills and values that have currency in the classroom. In breaking with the universalising perspective evident in the competencies and morality perspective, a capitals and identity perspective understands Social and Emotional Wellbeing as a far from neutral resource. Researchers interested in the impact of ‘affective economies’ upon child wellbeing are effective in highlighting incidences where children’s emotions can be problematic in the classroom. A poignant example is offered in a vignette by Silfer et al. (2016) in illustrating a child’s emotional response to the performative demands of testing:

‘He [John] starts to cry, first silent and then louder and louder. The other children still in the room stop and stare at John who now cries despairingly... He goes on crying and explains that the test is ‘really hard and really tough’ and that ‘you cannot even get help’ (fieldnotes Silfer et al. 2016, 246).

In this example, the pupil is made painfully aware of their inadequacy as a learner through his inability to perform in the test, and the teacher, also trapped in the restrictive prism of a stringent testing environment is unable to do anything to help him. This example is not about neglectful teaching, but is illustrative of education policy environment with narrow and constraining views about ‘valued learners’ – when pupils do not conform, it results in a painful experience as depicted here. Pupils and teachers alike are both trapped in this discourse of the ‘valued learner’ which privileges those who bring the greatest resources to the classroom. Fundamental to a capital-based analysis of social and emotional wellbeing is a focus upon the ways that the social and emotional resources of social actors (such as teachers and school children) are co-opted within power dynamics that govern educational institutions;

[E]motional capital – expressed through the circulation of emotional resources among teachers and students – is systematically transformed into social and cultural capital – such as stronger relations in the classroom and empowered feelings in the school community (Zembylas 2007: 453).

While the emotional resources John uses fail to co-opt the teacher’s attention, Hempel-Jorgensen’s (2009) study of the learner identities that are generated in schools of different social class compositions highlights how high achieving pupils (in a school serving a predominantly high socio-economic community) are afforded license to display social behaviours not tolerated by students in the low socio-economic schools. When asked what his teacher’s ideal pupil would be like one high achieving pupil responds:

[The ideal pupil] would be like a combination of someone like maybe me, because I’m good at maths, English and someone who’s good at all subjects ... But like, we’re good at work, but we sometimes get told off. (Boy, Rowan)

These sociological and frequently ethnographic studies into children’s daily schooling highlight the differential social and emotional resources that young people have at their disposal, crucially in terms of to what extent they can be mobilised for educational gain. A ‘capital-based’ perspective on SEW is therefore more concerned with the varying value that different emotional and social resources assume within an institutional field such as education. Like the ethics-based approach
capital-based scholars focus upon power and inequality shines a light upon the social, political, historical, and cultural conditions that shape how emotions are both legitimised and thwarted, and social hierarchies established (Gendron 2004).

There is also a broader and more general point to be made here about the ‘tolerance’ of emotions within schools, and our argument needs to be caveated in terms of the situations where emotional responses are tolerated. Of course, it is likely that not all emotional responses are intolerable within the classroom, and schools will most likely be striking a balance between creating an environment where pupils learn to regulate emotions in creating a conducive environment for learning, as well as ensuring that there is space for the natural expression of emotions. However, this open expression of emotions is likely to be constrained – according to the particular kinds of situations where an emotional kind of response is considered appropriate and will be tolerated. Family bereavement is one such such situation where an emotional response will be tolerated and considered appropriate. A teacher who offers a bereaved pupil ‘time out’ because they are crying is not intolerant of their emotions, but is accommodating their emotional response to a ‘valid’ emotional trigger. There will likely be other situations were the appropriate and regulated display of emotions is considered ‘legitimate’. It would therefore be naïve to say that teachers do not ‘tolerate’ any kind of emotions within the classroom, but such tolerance will be constrained to triggers deemed legitimate and responses which are deemed appropriate. Again, it will be the pupils with the greatest resources who are most adept to displaying the right kinds of emotional responses in these appropriate circumstances.

Key foci have therefore been the gender, ethnic and particularly socio-economic disparities between socio-cultural groups and the differential value of the specific forms of capital that they wield in schools. Comparative studies in particular, have illuminated the processes of capital transmutation through which children’s experiences and opportunities to develop socially and emotionally put them at an educational advantage or disadvantage in school. Annette Laureau (2000) for example, demonstrated the conversion of economic to cultural capital through the leisure activities engaged in by middle class and working class children. Through their regular attendance at out-of-school clubs (such as sport music or arts) middle-class children were able to generate high-value social and emotional resources such as ‘learning to look people in the eye and shake their hands…. ‘performing’ in situations similar to school; as for example, at soccer practice, they lined up, followed directions’ and demonstrated their skill in a public setting’ (p168). Consequentially, they were more confident in the classroom and familiar with the mode and mechanism of schooling. The working class children in lacking the economic capital of their more privileged peers, were more likely to engage in solitary unstructured activities that did not lead to these social emotional resources and included; ‘television watching, eating snacks, riding bikes’ (165) carrying domestic chores or caring for family members. As such, the routines and demands of schooling are less familiar, leading them to feel alien or disconnected (Author).

For its focus on relationship building and network operation as a resource for individuals, ‘social capital’ is the most clearly aligned capital form with schools’ role in social and emotional education. While the skills and competencies approach conceptualise social and emotional skills as individually held, social capital is the product of the network. In effect, it only exists as a potential form to be mobilised into other capital resources. There are three major components which determine the process by social capital can be activated; ‘norms, networks and trust’ (Putnam, 1995). Networks refer to social relationships of ‘mutual acquaintance or recognition’ (Bourdieu 1986) bound together through shared commonalities or interests. Norms refer to the rules, values and expectations that govern the networks behaviour and include ‘reciprocity, cooperation and tolerance’ (Putnam, 1995); and trust which is itself a form of reciprocity – the shared understanding that groups
members will share their resources with networks members following the assumption that they will also receive resources (though not necessarily the same ones) when needed in the future.

Studies that have explored the role of social capital in generating social and emotional resources that have led to a schooling advantage have tended to consider young people as recipients of social capital as bestowed by adults such as teachers and parents; for example, the impact of social capital as collaborative practice in meeting the needs of children with language speech and communication needs (McKean et al, 2017) or the role of teachers in building aspirations and motivations for young peoples’ educational ambitions and trajectories (Schuchart, 2013). This has reflected the adult-centric view of social capital propagated by leading scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. Recently, however, social capital theorists have developed the concept in positioning the child as an independent wielder of social capital. This has been applied to the study of friendship and its role educational transition (Author; Van Roseem at el. 2015). This approach deviates from the former two perspectives in seeing the social and emotional derivatives of friendship not as instrumental in the achievement of private or public goods but for the inherent qualitative values of the relationships themselves; ‘Pupils enjoy the benefits of their social capital simply because they have those relationships, not because they deliberately use them to obtain certain resources’ (Van Roseem et al. 2015, p671). This emphasis on the social and emotional value of relational bonds and constitutive of children’s wellbeing differs from that of the social capital pioneers who tended to view social capital as merely a channel to material and economic resources (Bourdieu 1986) or other tangible educational advantages (Coleman 1981).

While the skills and competencies and moral and ethics perspectives are characterised by an interest in education programmes that target the whole student population, a capitals-based approach is more targeted in its focus. Sharing the ethics-based aspiration of social justice and equality, the implications of a capital-based approach is in differentiating resources according to need. This involves increasing the resources required by dominated actors within social space (e.g. children in poverty, girls, ethnic minorities) but also the valorising of the social and emotional norms characteristic of marginalised socio-cultural groups. Ridge (2002) for example discusses the unique value of friendship for children in care in acting as emotional confidants, and protection from bullying and advocacy through the social capital networks of friends’ parents and older siblings. A capitals-based view of SEW also recognises the need for valorising the social and emotional registers of subordinated groups. To this end educational researchers from a capital perspective have argued that a valued ‘learner’ identity is key to schools’ role in supporting children’s wellbeing. In other words, social and emotional (not to mention educational) wellbeing is the produce of children’s belief that they are a valued part of the school community and that they belong.

**Social identity and the production of negative learner identities**

The operation of identity is understood to be a key process through which children are motivated to act and mobilise capital in their navigation of school life. The construction of children’s learner identities has been a key focus for sociologists of education interested in explaining inclusion and sense of social and emotional belonging in school. One line of enquiry has been upon the classed basis of teachers’ judgements of children’s role as learners informing pedagogical constructions of the ‘ideal student’ by which children both judge and are judged themselves to be valued students (Becker, 1952; Keddie, 1971; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009). The second line of enquiry has centred on the role of peer cultures and friendship (Youldell, 2003; Renold, 2009; Author) in constructing intersectional identities of class, race and gender. Wellbeing in this sense is constitutive of the degree to which children feel that they are recognised as valued learners and their social and emotional connection with peers aligns with the pro-educational values of schooling. Deborah Youdell (2003) for example acknowledges the ways in which Black children’s social identity practices
are misread by teachers as ‘deviant’. Through an ethnographic study, Youdell’s work challenged teacher’s misconceptions of what they saw to be resistant schooling behaviours in highlighting how arm-linking in Black girls and a stylised walk in Black boys are, in contrast, bids to affirm their social identity as Black working class students, where bodily comportment serves as a protective and collective shield and the projection of confidence in a context where they are disempowered. This example illustrates how some ‘legitimate’ modes of behaviour can themselves be interpreted as socially constructed within dominant power structures of race and class. Some would argue that in advocating for the development of certain behaviours, there is a sanitising of their association with classed and racialised identities.

While the failure to recognise young people’s social identities is one way in which children’s learner identities can be thwarted, another is where the norms, values and performances of the peer group clash with schooling. Putnam (2000) recognised this as ‘bonding social capital’ which he described as ‘inward looking, and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups’ (p22). More recently, this tension between social and learner identity has been conceptualised as the ‘friendship bind’ (Author), affecting particularly children in poverty who are least able to access friendship groups that promote pro-schooling values. The bind theory points to the paradox where children’s attempts to build their social capital may require them to display resistant identity performances that impact negatively on their learning. The pressure to cohere with peer group pressure is particularly pressing for children in care, as highlighted in Renold’s (2009) narrative of the quandary faced by children in being forced to choose between their social and learner identity. Nevaeh for example laments that, ‘I had friends... who wouldn’t speak to me because I was higher than them in school’ (81), while Keely was told off by her teachers and foster carer for ‘mixing with the wrong person’ (82) leading to an unsuccessful attempt to break with the friendship ‘inside school’ (81), which was ultimately unsuccessful, with the outcome that she fell from the top ability set in school to one day a week in alternative provision during the two year ethnographic study. From the capital-based perspective, in the same way that young people are positioned by dominant power structures, their social relations within their peer groups act as important mediators to schooling experiences. If actions and behaviours of children are at least in part determined by such peer relations, there is a need to at least acknowledge them in the way social and emotional wellbeing policy is determined, for example in recognising that peer group values built upon anti-schooling identities may well be because children are unable to construct positive learner identities in school. Schools could address this through employing identity building activities that celebrate children’s social and emotional development (not just academic achievement), in generating a schooling narrative that children who are emotionally sensitive, creative, and social pillars that strive to include their peers, are valued learners and worthy ambassadors for the school community.

The school’s role in children’s social and emotional wellbeing from a capital based perspective therefore depends upon individuals having access to resources and capitals be they economic and material, cultural (opportunities, experiences) or social (networks and friendships). It also recognises the importance of a positive learner identity in children’s sense of fit and belonging in school and hence their motivation and confidence to engage in learning. Policy solutions need to address these structural and social barriers that youth face. For example, in England, the Gatsby framework is exemplary in emphasising the importance of building resources, in this case social capital, through relationships with employers and other role models in the community3. Policy-makers also need to recognise the challenge for children where their social (peer ) identities are not in alignment with the learner identities that schools promote. Schools’ role in SEW from this perspective is in mobilising the resources, opportunities and recognition external to the child that

---

3 See: https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/gatsby-benchmarks
they need in order to generate SEW. The agent for change therefore requires the social actors around the child; teachers, parents, social workers, community leaders, local authority, government.

**Conclusion: prospects for education policy**

Embedded within each of the perspectives delineated here are distinct notions of the ‘self’ and processes of socialisation and identity formation. Identity is understood in terms of how the individual sees him/herself, both as an individual (personal identity) as well as a part of a group or community (social identity). Crucially, there are ontologically discernible notions of what social and emotional wellbeing is based upon – with skills/competencies, moral perspectives reliant on the view that social and emotional dimensions are objectifiable ‘things’ or ‘states’ in themselves, the ethical perspective seems them as driven by values that serve the collective (above the individual), whilst the capital-based perspectives are based on the assumption that these are merely manifestations of social structure. The skills/competencies and moral lenses are concerned with defining aspects of the person which can be reduced to these objectified states, which are malleable and open to change depending on the end goals of schooling, in terms of the ‘ideal pupil’. An ethical lens is in contrast, socially and politically orientated, where social and emotional wellbeing is achieved through developing learners’ awareness and understanding of the ways in which inequalities are created and empowering them with the tools (and political will) to address them. Looking upon this question with a capital-based lens, ‘social and emotional skills’ are artificial and man-made constructs; it is a further lens to observe social structure and the reproduction of social inequalities.

But the significance of these different perspectives is more than philosophical, it implies radically different approaches for policy and practice. While a skills/competency and morals-based perspective point to interventions focused on individual, the ethics-based and capitals and identity perspective points more to the role of children’s environment as the agent for change. Accordingly, the skills and competency and morals and perspectives target internal psychic, cognitive and moral factors, while the ethics and capital perspectives points to external factors and significant for social and emotional education such as economic resources, cultural and social resources such as friendship. Furthermore, the competency and morals/ethics perspectives see social and emotional education as best targeted to the whole student population, while the capital perspectives targets groups who are deemed to be disadvantaged by dominant power structures.

At the heart of these different perspectives lies a tension between individualising and collectivising notions of social and emotional wellbeing. On the one hand, individualised notions of wellbeing valorise ‘competencies’ that are universally held, whilst on the other hand, collectivising notions of wellbeing place emphasis on what binds individuals and groups together. This has the potential to cause conflict when activities seek to develop competencies and behaviours that do not reflect the culture and identities of all groups within schools. For example, the ‘confidence’ of a middle class white child playing her flute in a school performance is admired, while the ‘confidence’ of a working class black boy ‘swaggering’ into assembly is constructed as ‘problematic’ by teachers. We discussed above some of the profoundly positive impacts which competency-based programmes and interventions can yield in young people. Their value is widely acknowledged in making a positive difference to many young people’s lives. However, whilst they can be effective in reducing undesirable states (such as anger, anxiety, depression), there is a danger that a singular focus on them can miss the underlying structural conditions which these undesirable states are likely manifestations of (e.g. performativity and constructions of the ‘ideal pupil’). If this approach is adopted in an uncritical and normative way, activities that schools employ to develop competencies such as ‘confidence’, the sorts of communicative style, comportment, and manner will likely marginalise non-dominant forms of expression (which could reinforce inequalities). In doing so, this
will likely have a direct negative impact on attempts to build a sense of identity and connection to others – the collectivising notions of wellbeing evident from the capital-based perspective discussed here. Likewise, any work to build identity and connection with others could work against the inculcating of competencies, especially if those competencies do not correspond with communities and cultural groups a school serves. This fundamental tension at the heart of these different perspectives is likely to cause conflict within schools that are simultaneously enacting activities which stem from them.

The long history of research on the lives of children in poverty suggests that any approach which fails to account for the social conditions youth find themselves will undoubtedly have little sustained and lasting impact in addressing their wellbeing. There are parallels here with the mechanisms by which educational and labour market inequalities are (re)produced through processes of (mis)recognition. The sociology of education has shown again and again how dispositions that are crucial to securing top jobs and the favourable attention of teachers are those all too often held by the middle classes – a long standing body of work is illustrative of how employers and teachers consistently mistake middle class attributes for ‘talent’, and misrecognise dispositions of working classes as ‘deviant’ and lacking. Some of this work has drawn on Bourdieu’s idea of symbolic violence to explain how educational processes routinely discriminate against non-dominant social actors within school settings. For example, Nairz-Wirth et al.’s (2017) research into university drop-out of non-traditional students, they describe the ostracism their participants felt throughout their educational journeys, feeling that their own identities were ‘alien’ to the educational settings which they encountered.

It is clear from the analysis presented here that the source of any confusion around social and emotional wellbeing, as well as differences in the ‘tools’ and policy levers created, can stem from the different starting points we speak from. In thinking through policy development, and the enactment of policy within schools, it is important to recognise these embedded assumptions and policy approaches these distinctive starting points imply.

References


Department for Education (2019). Character education framework
Non-statutory guidance to schools on character education and development for pupils. London: Department for Education

Department for Education (2019a). Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education. London: Department for Education


Elias et al. (2007) SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND CHARACTER AND MORAL EDUCATION IN CHILDREN, Synergy or Fundamental Divergence in Our Schools?


