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Editorial

Special issue: Social and Emotional Learning and Diversity

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This special edition is composed mainly of papers presented at the sixth European Network for Social and Emotional Competence (ENSEC) Conference hosted by Örebro University in collaboration with the city of Gothenburg and held in Stockholm in June, 2017. The theme of the conference and this special issue is “Diversity”, which we find both important and challenging for all countries in the world. Many regions, including Europe and the Middle East, are facing situations where more and more people come for shelter and protection. We need all the knowledge we can get to cope effectively with the situation, and make sure that children of all backgrounds are given the opportunity for positive development. We need knowledge about whether findings from majority groups can be replicated in diverse populations. We also need knowledge about what can be done at a practical level in diverse contexts. The papers in this issue address diversity in various ways, from different perspectives and with different populations.

The well-established finding in Western cultures that authoritative parenting has beneficial outcomes for child development but that authoritarian parenting is linked to negative outcomes (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007; Simons & Conger, 2007) has not always been replicated in Eastern countries. Also, parenting and parenting strategies differ across different parts of the world. Against this backdrop, the first paper, by Ching-Yu Huang and six colleagues from universities in Taiwan, the U.K., and the U.S., investigates the predictive roles of authoritarian, authoritative, and Chinese parenting practices (e.g., encouragement of modest behavior and shaming) in children’s psychological symptoms. It investigates children’s emotional intelligence in a sample of 675 10-year-old Taiwanese students.

The purpose of the study in the second paper was to analyze adjustment problems in a group of adolescents with specific learning disorders in Italy, examining to what extent symptoms depend on the severity level of the learning disorder and/or level of emotional intelligence. Based on the findings in this empirical paper, Antonella D'Amico and Teresa Guastafarro (Italy) argue that emotional beliefs, emotional self-concept and emotional intelligence are important factors for the psychological adjustment of adolescents with specific learning disorder. The authors highlight the importance of considering meta-emotional intelligence among students with specific learning disorder in order to address diversity among students, and to prevent and mitigate possible symptoms of adjustment problems.

In a mixed-method study, Renata Miljević-Riđički, Krešimir Plantak and Dejana Bouillet (Croatia) investigate resilience in preschool children, and, in particular, how parents, teachers and children understand the concept. Qualitative data analyses indicate that parents and teachers have different views on what defines resilience. Teachers appear to be more context-oriented, focusing on co-operation, concrete help and support, while parents seem to emphasize more personal characteristics which may help them to increase resilience. Analysis of quantitative data indicates that parents have more positive views of children's resilience than teachers.

The fourth paper by Johannes Finne and Frode Svartdal (Norway) investigated the outcome benefit of a social-perception training programme aimed at primary and secondary school students in a Norwegian municipality. Findings from a pre-post study indicated overall positive changes in pupils' executive functions and other central socio-emotional outcomes, including increased social skills and improved peer relations. The authors argue that building emotional, cognitive, and social competencies fosters young people's acceptance, respect, and ability to live successfully together with people of diverse backgrounds.

In the fifth paper, Sue Roffey (UK) discusses how incorporating the ASPIRE (Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect and Equity) principles and pedagogy for social and emotional learning in schools may help address diversity across needs and cultures. Social and emotional learning is an approach to education that not only provides knowledge and skills but also supports mental health, in particular when it is embedded in a congruent learning environment.

The sixth paper by Maria Poulou (Greece) looked at teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence, social and emotional learning, and teacher-student relationships and how these are related to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. She reports that while teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence and social emotional learning were not related to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, such difficulties were related to teacher-student conflictual relationships. This finding underlines the key role of classroom relationships in students' behaviour and engagement in the learning process.

In this edition we are also publishing two discussion papers and a short research report. In the first discussion paper, Helen Cowie, Carrie-Anne Myers, and Rashid Aziz (UK) discuss the present situation in Europe in general and in post-Brexit Britain in particular, where perhaps more diverse groups of people than ever will have to find ways to build society together. The paper focuses on the legal and moral aspects of the current situation in Europe and the U.K., issues of intolerance and prejudice, and interventions that promote

tolerance and xenophilia in a range of social contexts. The authors end their paper with a call to social scientists to take active roles in society to fight intolerance and prejudice.

In the second discussion paper, Valeria Cavioni, Ilaria Grazzani, and Veronica Ornaghi (Italy) discuss the role of social and emotional learning in facilitating the inclusion of children with learning disability. The authors first describe the various social and emotional difficulties students with learning disability may face at school. They then argue that such difficulties can be addressed through social and emotional learning, and describe how universal social and emotional learning programmes may facilitate the academic and social inclusion of students with learning disability.

In a short research report, Hannelore Reicher and Marlies Maticsek-Jauk (Austria) discuss depression in children and young people, arguing that while it is well-known that depressed students underachieve in school, and that school can play an important role in the prevention of depressive symptoms, depression is often overlooked by schools, teachers, and peers. The authors call for the implementation of systematic social and emotional learning programmes in school as a way to support the education and inclusion of children and young people with depression.

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