

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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Integrating Theory and Research into Practice

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