

Humphrey, N. *Social and Emotional Learning: A critical appraisal*. Pp 167 (Pbk). London: Sage Publications 2013. ISBN 978-1-4462-5696-1

Humphrey commences his critique providing the reader with an analysis and resume of social and emotional learning (SEL), exploring its historical origins and relevance within progressive educational practice today. A range of global perspectives are provided which stimulate thought processes relating to quality of assessment and implementation of SEL interventions, with opportunities to develop current practice arrangements in schools and consider the benefits of social and emotional competence for children and young people. Contrasting opinions and research findings are integral to each chapter, providing a stimulating and refreshing opportunity to reflect upon and re-evaluate social and emotional teaching and learning and associated outcomes.

The book focuses primarily on universal, preventative SEL but acknowledges that the majority of school-initiated SEL work is an early intervention strategy stimulated by social, emotional and/or behavioural challenges experienced by children and young people. Stigma attached to targeted work is considered, and the perception of SEL as a deficit model is reviewed with focus upon SEL as a mechanism for societal control. Humphrey considers the cost effectiveness of SEL, and discusses the ability of variable and, at times, inconsistent evidence-based research findings to accurately measure positive outcomes.

Throughout, evaluation of discussions and statements is encouraged with 'pause for reflection', provocative questioning to stimulate critical thinking, enabling the reader to contextualise wider perspectives on SEL within their existing professional experiences and providing the potential to influence the way in which SEL is delivered in the future. Further relevant reading recommendations are provided at the end of each chapter.

Specifically, chapters 4 and 7 stretch the reader's thoughts and understanding of SEL. Chapter 4 provides international perspectives from the United States, United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Australia, Sweden and Singapore. This enables global comparison regarding implementation of SEL, and considers the range of flexibility in approaches to SEL. In particular, the integrated model utilised in Sweden where SEL is weaved through academic learning, rather than taught as a standalone curriculum topic, presents the opportunity to re-visit both application and assessment of SEL practices. This invokes debate regarding the integration of SEL within the school curriculum, and whether embedding SEL within core academic subjects could provide improved outcomes for children and young people. International case studies are provided in chapter 7, where the extent to which universal SEL intervention affects a range of outcomes for children and young people is considered. Humphrey lists the positive impacts of SEL including social and

emotional skills, attitudes, positive social behaviour, conduct problems, emotional distress and academic performance. Critical reflection is provided regarding the limitations of evaluation, including null findings and the potential for cultural transference because the majority of evidence is secured from the United States. Political and cultural example of this is provided for Northern Ireland, where the emotional well-being of school age children has been identified as a priority for policy makers, attributable to the country's social and political history including '*The Troubles*'. Whilst cultural variations and individual differences are considered, there is scope to further consider the relevance and impact of SEL for specific cohorts, perhaps children in care, children with special educational needs and children attending alternative educational provision.

Pivotal to Humphrey's argument is the potential influence of SEL to increase academic attainment, with appropriate reference to conflicting research findings relating to these claims. This is highly relevant for students in education studies courses, and also for a broad sector of disciplines including those with professional interests in (early) childhood, young people and education, social policy and policy makers, family and community, social care and safeguarding, philosophy and ethics, special educational needs and disability, parenting, general health, child and adult mental health and well-being, and criminal justice. Sufficient clarity and explanation is provided that students who are new to the subjects of social and emotional learning can comfortably engage with the text and readily absorb the concepts, theories and research discussed. Current and future educational practitioners and leaders have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of SEL with the purpose of enhancing their holistic practice, gaining an increased sense of self-efficacy in promoting the future life chances of their protégés through high quality implementation of SEL programmes. Researchers will readily identify future research opportunities which could influence progress in educational practice regarding the implementation of SEL within educational settings; in particular, the limitations of current evaluation methodology.

Humphrey provides a humble and diverse evaluation of SEL within educational arenas today, proffering permission for the reader to determine and interpret their personal opinions on this emotive and controversial subject. Humphrey concludes that SEL is a global phenomenon, which is neither educational fad nor panacea, and encourages further research to secure the permanence and value of SEL within educational systems in order to promote improved social and emotional outcomes for children and young people.

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