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 Emotional manipulation in social and emotional learning and pastoral support: the 'dark side' of emotional intelligence and its consequences for schools

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/14197/

Article

Emotional Manipulation in Social and Emotional Learning and Pastoral Support: The 'dark side' of Emotional Intelligence and its Consequences for Schools

Abstract

The facilitation of children's emotional intelligence (EI) through social and emotional learning (SEL) and wider pastoral support schemes is common practice in schools. Although the benefits of enhanced EI have been widely reported, little is known about its 'dark side': emotional manipulation, or how this may manifest in school settings. Focus group and individual interview data gathered from staff members working across case study schools located in a town in the North West of England inform the points raised in this paper. The article explores the extent to which emotional manipulation takes place in the strategies and forms of support utilised by schools to enhance children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. The ramifications of emotionally manipulative behaviours are discussed and recommendations for future directives are made.

Introduction

In this paper, I examine case study data from primary schools in the North West of England who utilised Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and wider pastoral support schemes to help structure activities designed to improve children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. These forms of support largely adopted Emotional Intelligence (EI) as both a conceptual and theoretical framework and here I make the case that the interpretation of EI, by schools and the staff members within them, strongly influenced their enactment of the interventions utilised. As these were used to predominantly target one aspect of EI: the ability to control emotions, I argue that theory, or at least its consumption, has the potential to inhibit inclusive practice in our schools. The data revealed a fascinating scenario where specific forms of learning and support were deemed, by children, as rewards for displays of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which in turn led to instances where pupils engaged in acts of Emotional Manipulation, in order to access such learning and support. The article contributes to the field in a variety of ways. In heed of Evans' (2017, p.200) call, it aims to rectify the continued 'dearth of empirical research' targeting 'the meaning and expression of emotion within school-based SEL interventions' and wider pastoral support, and also satisfies the need for more qualitative explorations of EI in our schools (see Merrel, 2008). Furthermore, the article adds to our understanding of EI's 'dark side' (Austin, Farrelly, Black and Moore, 2007), and the potential for emotional manipulation in school-based support, both of which are areas of research that are distinctly lacking in the field (Kilduff, Chiabaru, and Menges, 2010; Abell, Brewer, Qualter and Austin, 2016). The primary aim of the article, however, is to increase awareness of the practicalities faced by practitioners when interpreting, using and enacting theoretical concepts and interventions that are central to the social, emotional and behavioural work taking place within schools.

Across countries, and certainly in Britain, a variety of schemes that attempt to develop recipients' abilities to: form positive relationships with others; to understand themselves and their own emotions; and to respond to the emotions of others in beneficial ways (Weare, 2007), have been adopted in the hope of promoting emotional well-being and mental health. With the recent green paper (see DoH and DfE, 2017) identifying abilities related to self-awareness, emotional control and social skills as being crucial to positive wellbeing there is, once again, a recognition that schools and their staff are well positioned to facilitate improvements in children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Whilst not explicitly identified as a theoretical framework in the green paper or, indeed, in initiatives such as the 'National Healthy Schools Programme' (NHSP), and 'Nurture Groups', all, in various guises, identify abilities associated with EI as pertinent to mental health and emotional well-being. The utilisation of EI as a guiding concept for practice is regularly observed in SEL schemes, such as the 'Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Social Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiatives. Indeed, the employment of EI, by schools, as a model to promote children's emotional well-being (Weissberg, 2000) as a means of reducing mental health problems (Kam, Greenberg and Walls, 2003) is common (Viguer, Cantero and Banuls, 2017), even though questions persist such as: can EI be taught in school and does improved EI have an impact on children's social and emotional health? (Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, and Woods, 2007). Often, the answers to these questions are difficult to locate due to the varying conceptualisations and competing models that attempt to capture what, exactly, EI is.

Emotional Intelligence: Developing definitions and competing concepts

Initially coined by Payne (1985), EI received its first real level of publicity in research carried out by Salovey and Mayer (1990 p. 189) who defined the term as 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions', identifying four integral factors of EI: the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) maintained that those in possession of these four factors would be able to regulate and adapt not only their own emotions but those of others. Goleman's (1995; 1996; 1998) work on EI and his view that this aptitude is more important to life success than IQ has helped to produce the degree of notoriety regarding his theory today. Defined as the ability to 'recognise your own feelings and those of others' and to manage 'emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships' (Goleman, 1995, p. 26), he identifies five key components of EI: self-awareness, emotional control, empathy, self-motivation, social skills. A flurry of research activity and publications captured numerous contributions to the field of EI, with a range of competing models being proposed (see Gardner, Kornhaber and Wake 1995; Bar-On, 1997; Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey 1999; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000), and although it should be noted that all, to differing degrees, acknowledge three key features: (i) personal attributes (including self-esteem, self-motivation); (ii) social characteristics (such as empathy, assertiveness, social skills) and (iii) emotional traits (like emotional control and expression), the array of theoretical positions in the field illustrates the complexities associated with EI.

Researchers readily point out the nuanced nature of the concept as many (see Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000; Petrides, and Furnham 2001) maintain EI consists of two conceptually distinct entities: *trait* and *ability* EI. The former, according to Humphrey et al (2007, p.243),

relates to 'emotional self-efficacy' and one's beliefs in relation to emotions management, whilst the latter refers to an individual's 'cognitive–emotional ability' in perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). As such, popularised models of EI proposed by the likes of Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997) should be considered as *mixed* models due to their incorporation of both *trait* and *ability* EI. Furthermore, whilst some view terms like emotional *competence* and *literacy* as 'common aliases' (Humphrey et al. 2007, p. 239) of EI, others are quick to acknowledge how these concepts are fundamentally different. According to Goleman (1995), 'emotional intelligence' is the ability to recognise and understand, whilst 'emotional competence' is the 'learned capability' based on EI, which allows the individual to act. Thus, one is the capacity to comprehend, whilst the other is the ability to control and regulate emotions. Research by many authors, including Bar-On (1997) and Petrides and Furnham (2001), claim that aspects such as 'intelligence' and 'competence' are not so obviously linked, with Wakeman (2006) arguing the concepts 'are fundamentally different in character' (p. 72), and others suggesting EI is by no means a good indicator of performance (see Mayer, Salovey and Caruso 2000). More recently, researchers including Hyde and Grieve (2014) point to an ability where individuals manipulate emotions - either their own or those of others - for self-serving purposes and as such bring into focus the possibility of a 'dark side of emotional intelligence' (Austin, Farrelly, Black and Moore, 2007.p.180)

Emotional manipulation

Conceptualisations of EI have overwhelmingly been positive, with an emphasis on the benefits the aptitude may bring (Di Fabio and Palazescchi, 2009), although recent work has begun to focus on the use and control of emotions in negative and malicious ways (Grieve, 2011). It should be noted that research into the 'emotionally cunning' (Carr, 2000) is by no means novel.

Indeed, the field of Emotional Machiavellianism has been prevalent for 50 years (see Christie and Geis, 1970). That said, research during this period does tend to illustrate that individuals deemed high in levels of Machiavellianism are often emotionally detached in situations of social interaction (Christie and Geis, 1970), struggle with emotional control and self-awareness, (Simon, Francis, and Lombardo, 1990) and lack empathy (Wastell and Booth, 2003), traits central to EI. As such, the concept of Emotional Manipulation - where individuals utilise high-level social and emotional competencies, read situations, manage the emotions of others and manipulate their behaviour in order to suit their own interests – is now a growing area of research within the EI field, (Austin et al, 2007, p. 180). The ability to manipulate social situations and the emotions of oneself and others for personal gain is, according to some, an aptitude that is not 'clearly distinguishable from emotional intelligence' (Carr, 2000, p.31). Indeed, it has been argued that components of EI, such as the ability to understand, regulate, control and express emotions are high in individuals that engage in Emotional Manipulation (Grieve, 2011). The premise follows that high levels of EI positively correlates with an ability to identify and infer emotional states, which in turn facilitates the capacity of 'a person behaving in a deceitful manner', (Barlow, Qualter and Stylianou, 2010, p. 78).

Those interested in such links predominantly make use of correlational analyses, utilising existing tools, inventories and scales, such as the *Kiddie Mach* (Christie and Geis, 1970), the *Bar-On EQi,* (Bar-On, 1997) and the *MSCEIT*, (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2002), that gather both self-report and performance data; the former in relation to emotional manipulation, and the latter two in relation to EI (see Grieve, 2011; Abell, Brewer, Qualter and Austin, 2016). In their identification of EI as an assessable commodity, the inventories cited above are firmly rooted in neo-liberal approaches to education that legitimise targets, indicators and evaluations and the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2010). Indeed, the permeation of neo-liberalism in

allied fields has been widely cited, with a range of authors maintaining that once spiritual practices associated with 'mindfulness' have now been commodified, (Wilson, 2016; Stanley, Purser and Singh, 2018).

Consequently, there have been calls for more detailed studies in the field that go beyond the use of self-report and performance measures (Barlow et al. 2010). With scepticism in EI measurement apparent and growing (see Humphrey, et al. 2007), alternative means of evaluation have been sought, with some now championing a move away from 'measurement' towards more qualitative forms of interpretation, use and enactment (Austin et al. 2007). Supporters of this move maintain that the aptitude should not be reduced to a number determined in a test, but should, instead, be explored using techniques such as behavioural observations and clinical interviewing (Merrel, 2008), as only by establishing how EI is understood and acted upon can we begin to situate the concept as a useful one in schools (Chapman, 2005). Although our understanding of Emotional Manipulation is improving, the use of EI in non-prosocial contexts still requires attention, (De Raad 2005). Indeed, there is a dearth of research in general on this darker aspect of emotional intelligence, (Kilduff, Chiabaru, and Menges, 2010), with the work that does exist focussing on adult (Abell, et al 2016) and higher education student populations (Austin et al, 2007; Grieve, 2011). As such, there is a distinct need for research that explores the potential for the enactment of emotionally manipulative behaviours in children, in school settings. Whilst neither Emotional Manipulation or Emotional Intelligence for that matter were the fundamental focus of the research upon which this article is based, both were particularly pertinent in the views of the participants. In the next section I show how these views were collected, when I detail the empirical study and the process of data analysis.

The Research Study

The main aim of the research study was to identify how staff members working in primary schools interpreted, understood and made use of tools designed to improve children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, with a specific focus on SEL and pastoral support. To help meet this aim I utilised data drawn from a comparative study of primary schools, all located in the same town in the North West of England.

Methodology

Embracing a mixed methods design, three forms of data collection techniques were utilised: questionnaires with 402 staff members across 38 primary schools; 10 focus groups, comprising of a total of 44 participants; and 24 individual interviews. Data were collected in three phases, and as a deductive stance was embraced, each informed the focus and formation of the tools utilised in subsequent phases. As such, data derived from the first phase questionnaire served numerous purposes, such as providing topics for discussion in the focus groups (phase two) and interviews (phase three), as well as acting as a valuable resource in the sampling of the four case study schools, in which phases two and three were carried out. Data relating to the various schools' demographics were gathered during the questionnaire phase, as was detail relating to the types of interventions in place that targeted children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Four schools were approached to take part in phases two and three, based on commonality in their commitment to social, emotional and behavioural development, and difference in their size, number of pupils on roll, social class (categorised by pupil eligibility for free school meals), ethnicity, religious character, and type and duration of

intervention use. The main purpose of sampling a maximum variation (Patton, 1990) of schools in this way was to uncover how their individual needs, contexts and priorities affected the interaction with, and enactment of, the various forms of support.

To help understand these aspects further the sampling of staff members for the phase two focus groups was non-random and purposive in nature. Consequently, data were gathered from the following 'naturally occurring groups' (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999) across the four case study schools: management staff; teaching staff; and non-teaching staff. This strategy is widely advocated in the focus group literature (see Macnaghten and Myers 2004) due to the well-developed routines for 'talking to each other' within such groups, which facilitates the likelihood of in-depth explorations of subject matter. In phase three, and using a stratified purposeful sampling strategy (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), one staff member from each of the following distinct groups: management, inclusion coordinators, teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral staff, and welfare staff, in each case study school, was interviewed individually. Each focus group and individual interview was carried out in a quiet classroom within the respective school. Although semi-structured in nature, both forms of data collection were guided by schedules that were identical for each group and individual interviewee. The schedules allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the issues associated with the study's main aim including, but not limited to: the perceived purpose of the interventions; the main motivations for utilising the schemes; how the tools were being implemented across schools; their impact; and the influences behind all of the above. In all cases, ethical procedures, from the collection of data through to its analysis, adhered to British Educational Research Association (2011) guidelines.

After transcribing all qualitative data, gathered across the 10 focus groups and 24 interviews, ATLAS.ti software helped with its organisation. The analysis of data employed a conventional thematic approach (see Cresswell, 2005) but also was iterative in nature allowing the process to be both exploratory and confirmatory. Guided by the overall aim of the study, sub themes relating to the motivations for using; the purpose; implementation; and effects of, SEL and wider pastoral support allowed for an exhaustive analysis of the interpretation and enactment of tools designed to improve children's social, emotional and behavioural skills in primary schools. The process of data analysis produced a range of themes, some of which have been reported elsewhere (see Wood 2018; 2020). Although within and between school variations were identified, one common finding stemming from a range of sub-themes, and popular amongst staff members across the case study schools, was the use of SEL and pastoral support to target pupils' EI, with emphasis placed on their emotional control in particular. Furthermore, the sample pointed to a range of examples where both the schemes, and the perceived rewards they brought, created scenarios where children engaged in emotionally manipulative behaviours, as will be detailed next. As the focus here is on findings derived from the four case study schools, the questionnaire data is not explored; instead, the data reported takes the form of extracts gathered from the focus group and individual interviews and in all cases the participants' identities have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms.

Findings

Both within and between the cases, staff members were unanimous in their belief that the forms of support available in schools should be utilised to enhance children's EI to help improve their social, emotional and behavioural skills. That said, there was a degree of variance when participants offered their views on what they felt EI encompassed, which in turn influenced the enactment of support on offer. One common belief, gleaned from the data across schools and

the range of staff members interviewed, was that ultimately EI was an ability to control emotions so that children could refrain from displaying aggressive behaviours. As will be seen, such conceptualisations of EI had consequences for not only the support on offer but how it was perceived by both staff and children.

Staff member perceptions of EI: Prioritising emotional control

Levels of understanding of EI varied greatly between the staff groups, with members of the leadership and management teams showcasing the most comprehensive knowledge of the theory. When asked about the purpose of the support available in schools, Bethany, an assistant head teacher, claimed "*It's about improving emotional intelligence, that is...giving value and importance to social skills….motivational skills, relationships with each other, managing feelings….(and) self-awareness"*. Other leaders saw EI as an ability to "*deal with situations in life; good, bad and indifferent"* (Abigail – Head teacher) and to "*respond to any given situation……in the most appropriate and positive way"* (Stanley – Head teacher), in turn emphasising that support should target the way pupils control emotions so that they can adapt behaviour accordingly. Teachers, like Fred, felt the support was most effective for "*getting the children to think about how they speak to other people,..and the vocabulary used to describe their feelings...so that they don't lose their temper"* whilst Lilian, a teaching assistant, claimed SEL and pastoral support ultimately was about encouraging "*appropriate social behaviour….especially for those who struggle with anger"* (Lilian – TA).

As can be seen, although staff did point to a range of tenets of EI - such as self-awareness (Abigail and Stanley), and social skills (Fred and Lilian) – all prioritised emotional control as the focus of the social, emotional and behavioural work across the cases. Participants identified a range of motives that influenced the schools' decisions to prioritise emotional control. Chief

amongst these was a belief that a child's lack of emotional control would be detrimental to the function of the learning environment. Compared with other elements of EI, such as motivation and empathy, staff members often felt that a child's inability to control emotions would manifest in behavioural incidents that were clearly salient and visible in a classroom or playground. Charlotte, a teaching assistant, maintained that *"emotional control is the biggest problem because it's the most obvious problem. If…there's somebody angry with behavioural problems, you see that straight away. You try and deal with that…as it can disrupt the full class".* Such uses of support to target emotional control were also acknowledged by teachers, like Joanna:

Joanna (Teacher): *Children with anger problems create more nuisance if in class or even out of class. I think they are seen as priority because it's the disruption they bring. If you have boys or girls fighting in the classroom or throwing chairs and things, they are much more disruptive to the other children and the learning that should be taking place.*

The findings presented here support those made elsewhere in the literature (see McReady and Soloway 2010; Reid 2011) in that they re-inforce the view that emotional orthodoxy, and specifically 'appropriate' emotional reactions to stress, are widely prioritised by schools in their behavior management systems, which in turn has particular consequences for pupils displaying social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. As such, children's emotional intelligence is judged and evaluated in terms of appropriate behavior with those 'who dissent from sanctioned models of expression…being marked out as personally lacking' and deemed

in need of removal 'from mainstream classrooms to receive therapeutically styled interventions.' (Gillies, 2011, p. 201).

Although a point of contention for the staff members across the case study schools, such interventions were usually reserved for children displaying behavioural difficulties. Staff members often felt that children viewed their removal from classroom-based lessons, so that they could access pastoral support in the form of one-to-one work with the *"cool teachers and the learning mentors"* (Vera - Welfare) and SEL-based small group work, as rewards for displaying aggressive behaviour. Samantha, a teaching assistant, argued that "*children with anger issues are strategic with their behaviour….they misbehave knowing that they won't need to be in formal classrooms doing work. They know that instead they'll be making things in small groups, doing art or playing cricket and football on the yard with the Learning Mentor"*. In the next section I turn to the concept of emotional manipulation to help comprehend this 'strategy'.

Manipulating behaviours to access support

As a consequence of the rewarding elements attached to SEL and pastoral support, staff members commonly stated that some children imitated and performed inappropriate behaviours in view of certain staff members, with the specific aim of accessing support. Teaching and non-teaching staff members felt these manipulative behaviours occurred often, as the following extracts illustrate:

Vera (Welfare): *It always seems to be….the naughty children, those that are always fighting, that are always swearing, that loser their temper, they are the ones that get the support. The thing is, they know it too, so they continue to misbehave. The children that are doing exactly what they should be doing at school don't get to come out of class or work with small groups, so they aren't getting equal attention and equal rewards. To get special attention you have to misbehave and that's what all the children understand.*

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Leroy (Teacher): *It's come to the point where we see kids who are playing the system and (they) get their rewards, such as going out of class and working in groups, and they get these each and every day for effectively misbehaving*

Whilst children seemingly manipulated emotions and performed negative behaviours in order to access the rewards associated with SEL and pastoral support, others, it was claimed, were perceived to perform positive behaviours around certain staff members in order to be deemed emotionally intelligent. The following two extracts, the first taken from a teacher focus group and the second from an interview with a learning mentor, pick up on this point:

Barbara (Teacher): *…a lot of the things we have in school now, like the rewards for catching children behaving nicely, for example: 'catch me working well with others', it doesn't mean that the children had*

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	learnt to work well in a group; it means that when the teacher is watching they work well
Dee (Teacher):	*So is it a bit like going through a speed camera? Once you've passed it you speed up.*
Barbara:	*Yeah, you always slow down, yeah, that's how I think of it. I think sometimes it's just a case of being caught at the right time doing the right thing so you access the rewards, not that you've learnt how to do it properly.*

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Rebeka (Learning mentor):	*There are some boys in year 6 who I work with on their behavioral issues, and if an incident has happened they get a certain teacher, a certain senior member of staff and they just know it's like a 'walk in the park'. So they have to nod and look like they are listening to her and understanding her, and they say the spiel and give the impression they can manage their emotions, so that they can go and play. As soon as the teacher's back is turned those same boys will immediately go back to misbehaving*

In these extracts, Barbara, Dee and Rebeka show that children are capable of identifying positive and appropriate behaviours and then, when in site of adults, can imitate and perform these behaviours in order to present themselves as emotionally intelligent. Such claims aren't necessarily new, bearing in mind previous work by the likes of Tauber (1999) who argues that children are adept in identifying the behaviours teachers deem appropriate and conform to these

expectations, and Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2002) who claim individuals are able to demonstrate skills which they may not be fully competent with. Yet, these 'demonstrations of conformity' (Espinsoa and Laffey, 2003) were just one example of manipulative behaviours witnessed by staff, with others, such as Leroy and Vera, maintaining that children regularly imitate those of a child deemed lacking in EI, in order to access SEL and pastoral support. These uses of social and emotional skills in negative contexts (Grieve and Mahar, 2010) are acts of emotional manipulation as the children are strategically influencing others 'in order to obtain a desired outcome' (Grieve, 2011, p. 981). The consequences of this manipulative behaviour manifest in a variety of ways, impacting on the social, emotional and behavioural work with children across schools, as will be shown in the next section.

Consequences of emotional manipulation

As has been shown, pupils perceived incapable of effective emotional control became the focal point of the SEL and wider pastoral support in schools. Consequently, staff members felt that children with other social, emotional and behavioural issues were often denied support and became largely ignored. This point was touched upon by Rebeka, a learning mentor:

Rebeka (Learning mentor): *Supporting the kids with anger problems is the main part of my job but then again it's only one part of my job. So when a child kicks off, I am asked to deal with him until he is ok, and sometimes that's a full day of a job. This means all of my work with the well behaved, brilliant children, you know the ones who are a bit shy or lacking confidence, all that gets thrown out of the window because one kid has anger issues. For instance, I'm*

supposed to do a small group on a Friday, trying to promote self-esteem and confidence. Last week, at lunch time, one year five boy kicked off and the majority of my afternoon was spent on the yard, trying to calm him down.

As is alluded to by Rebeka, the "*well behaved, brilliant children*", those whose social and emotional issues did not align with the schools' prioritisation of emotional control, were often overlooked and denied the input that SEL and pastoral support may have provided. The decisions to prioritise emotional control positioned children capable in this area as not in need of additional support. Consequently, such practices were felt by children with less salient social and emotional problems. In adapting the support to target the most visible elements of EI, the four case study schools did not always utilise SEL and wider pastoral support to effectively develop the ability as a whole, and amongst all pupils. The product of this misuse was a large proportion of school children who became "*invisible*" (Lilian - Teaching assistant) concerning the development of their social, emotional and behavioural skills more widely. In the following extract, Leroy, a teacher, shares his concerns regarding this matter:

Leroy (Teacher): *I think the pastoral work is good for the children whose emotional and behavioural difficulties you can actually see. I think sometimes it's the ones that you may not see, and I know it's difficult to pinpoint that, it's spotting the quiet, invisible child in your class who seems to do everything as you wish them to do, those who are no problem at all. Deep down inside you don't know if they have an emotional problem, you don't know if they*

> *have issues with emotions and things like social skills,*
> *confidence and self-esteem.*

Initially touched upon by Foster (1930) and discussed more recently in works of Books (2006) and Charlton, Mills, Martino and Beckett (2007), there are a range of difficulties and problems faced by a significant number of children and young people that go largely unseen in schools. These 'invisible children' (Books, 2006) are often socially devalued as the problems they face are not viewed as a priority within the individual schools they attend. As, across the case study schools, emotional control was prioritised as the central tenet of EI, many children with potential difficulties with motivation, self-esteem, self-awareness etc., were denied the additional support that SEL may have provided. Below, Lilian offers her views on this matter:

Lilian (TA): *You've got your behavioural children who kick off at the slightest thing and they get taken out of class, and work with learning mentors and have fun in SEL small groups to work on their behavioural skills. The invisible children, those kids that just get on with it, they don't get that chance, because that group of children just do what they are supposed to do.*

By prioritising certain aspects of EI, schools utilised the support available to target specific behaviours and as emotional control received prominence, other abilities were neglected. Children, identified as lacking in this prioritised area, accessed the extra support with the aim of reducing these inabilities within the schools as a whole. Not only that, but staff regularly pointed to examples of emotionally manipulative behaviour on the children's part, the result of

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which led to a monopoly of support. As such, the mishandling and misinterpretation of emotional intelligence as a theoretical base for SEL and pastoral support produced environments which excluded the social and emotional development of large numbers of children across the case study schools.

Discussion

The findings reported here shed light on some of the ongoing debates relating to the theory of emotional intelligence and its basis for social, emotional and behavioural work. Those, for example, that have labelled the concept as overly simplistic (see Craig 2008), have contested its association with emotional competence (Goleman, 1995; Wakeman, 2006), and pondered on it potential 'dark side' (Austin, et al 2007) would have been encouraged by the staff member testimonies. One interesting finding, related to children targeted by SEL and pastoral support, was the belief that all in differing degrees were unable to control emotions, yet some proved capable in emotional manipulation, and although no evidence for causality was found or indeed investigated, the views of staff members working in schools do seem to corroborate those made elsewhere, that emotional intelligence does not positively correlate with manipulation (see Hyde and Grieve, 2014). One dominant theme, in keeping with those reported elsewhere (e.g. Gillies 2011), was the prioritisation of emotional control, and as emphasis on this domain provided the main catalyst for the social, emotional and behavioural work within schools, it would be wise to consider the extent to which EI can, and perhaps, should be taught, bearing in mind its potential for misinterpretation and use, as reported here. Such considerations have long been discussed and reveal a degree of scepticism on the part of educators regarding the merits of 'emotional education' (Zeidner. Matthews and Roberts, 2004), with some seeing it as being beyond the primary remit of schools (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). Furthermore, as

there have been few firm conclusions regarding its 'teachability' (Humphrey et al 2007, p.247) in educational settings, some feel that 'EI is not the panacea that some writers claim' (Barchard, 2003, p. 856) and that by relying solely on the concept as the basis for SEL and pastoral support schools may be taking overly simplistic approaches to dealing with rather complex social, emotional and behavioural issues.

Consequently, it is advised that schools should have far loftier ambitions for their social, emotional and behavioural work, beyond merely its potential to develop EI. In emphasising SEL and pastoral support as a means to facilitate emotional control specifically, and then judging children by their ability to adhere to specific constructs of what 'being in control' looked like, schools utilised support based on a child's deficit, which in turn failed to acknowledge the varied range of social, emotional and behavioural issues faced by all children. As such, the enactment of SEL and pastoral support witnessed across the case study schools did not capture the 'complex and socially connected reality' (Gillies, 2011, p. 201) of children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties more widely. One way in which schools may wish to operate such support is to refrain from the tendencies witnessed in the examples reported here, where 'normative frameworks' (Youdell, 2006) of social and emotional behaviours were operationalised to distinguish pupils as emotionally intelligent or not, and then designating interventions in response. This is not to say that social, emotional and behavioural work in schools should not continue to focus on children deemed to struggle with emotional control, as only by facilitating the ability to understand, and then act on negative thoughts, beliefs and emotions can they begin to deal with these in more positive ways. As has been reported (see Barlow et al, 2010), gaining a deep understanding of one's own emotions facilitates the ability to recognise, appreciate and respond to the feelings of others, making it

less likely for individuals to manipulate situations that cause upset or hurt (Abell, et al 2016). That said, with a body of work (see Mate 2003, 2019) identifying the far reaching negative consequences of childhood emotional suppression, schools and their practitioners need to be advocates of healthy emotional recognition and expression. With this in mind, it is hoped that schools deviate from concentrating on improving specific branches of emotional intelligence, by instead targetting the aptitude as a whole in *all* children, and that they should also consider the swathe of variables that influence children's social, emotional and behavioural development, as means of acknowledging its holistic nature.

With concern regarding the applicability of emotional orthodoxy cross-culturally, brought about by the 'dominant emotional literacy agenda' that often contrasts 'with the cultures and experiences that shape' (Gillies, 2011, p. 201) children's everyday school life, and how this in turn is influencing the social and emotional work that takes place in schools (see Massing, 2018; Gershon and Pelliteri, 2018), it is suggested that schools should refrain from rooting their SEL and pastoral support in a single, universal theory. As such, and in addition to the quest to improve EI, social, emotional and behavioural work that embraces cultural intelligence (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004), for example, will allow children to understand and effectively respond to individuals and groups with specific cultural beliefs, values and attitudes in varying contexts. Furthermore, by focussing support around concepts such as 'agonism' (Mouffe, 2005) there will likely be the realisation that social and emotional experiences within any given classroom will not only differ but will inevitably compete. Such concepts, it is felt, will create environments where 'difference' not 'orthodoxy' becomes the catalyst for the social and emotional learning that takes place. By replacing practices that utilise a universal definition of emotions, with approaches that embrace a multitude of theoretical lenses, and that are in turn

culturally responsive and inclusive, the support available to children should not only acknowledge, but celebrate difference as just one of the many complexities involved in their social, emotional and behavioural lives. Key to the success of such approaches are the practitioners who work with the children and their ability to not only engage in, but to prioritise their 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983). With calls now for a remodelling of the education professional that is grounded in emotional labour (see Osgood, 2010; Page, 2018), the need for practitioners to harness their feelings to guide their work (see Recchia, Shin and Snaider, 2018) and to reflect on their own social and emotional knowledge when interacting with pupils (White, 2016) has never been more clear.

Acknowledging the fact that there is little hard evidence that enhanced emotional skills specifically, results in improvements in attainment, attendance, and confidence (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009), and despite concerns that such 'discourses of emotions' are susceptible to exploitation (Burman, 2009), 'emotionality' has become a focus of curriculum in its own right (Gillies, 2011). More recently there have been calls for schools to equip children with the intra- and inter-personal skills that are central to emotionality as part of advice for school-based reform to prioritise universal, mental health screening as a key foci of education (see Humphrey and Wigelsworth, 2016). Indeed, the role of schools in the promotion of positive emotional well-being and mental health in Britain has received much attention in recent years. The current Conservative government's green paper: *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* for example positions schools 'at the heart of efforts' to identify and intervene in issues relating to children's well-being and mental health, in order to 'prevent problems escalating' (DoH and DfE, 2017, p.3) in later life. With schools consistently being positioned as platforms to facilitate emotional skills to help encourage positive mental health and well-

being, it is important that 'whole-school approaches' that foster an 'ethos of care' (Warin, 2017) are sought. The benefits of such approaches are widely advocated in the literature (see Weare 2000; Humphrey et al, 2007; Warin 2017) where all of which, in differing guises and to varying extents, claim that only high-quality and well-implemented interventions, located across the whole-school, can bring about meaningful change (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger, 2011). It should be noted that achieving such holistic and integrated approaches do not happen by chance (see Weare, 2004), and bearing in mind that schools inhabit a variety of 'generations, genders, classes, departments and occupational groups' (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2008, p. 39) that often produce and maintain cultural variety and fragmentation rather than unity and congruence (Martin 2002), 'whole-school approaches' should be seen as an ideal to help produce better outcomes for children.

Conclusion

Not only was the resurgence in school-based social, emotional and behavioural work witnessed in the practices captured during the research reported here but so too were the complexities associated with its enactment. Staff regularly and consistently acknowledged the variety of social norms, cultural values and multiple realities that children experience and, as such, openly challenged the use of single, universal theories, such as EI, as a guide for their practice. Bearing in mind concerns regarding its many competing definitions, conceptualisation and tools of measurement, the findings reported in this article suggest a continuation of EI as a key driver for practice in current enactments of SEL and wider pastoral schemes within schools. The data also revealed a tendency for staff to focus support on those children displaying difficulties with emotional control specifically, and in doing so illustrated the potential for the mis-interpretation of theory and its ramifications for practice. Staff members working across the four case study

schools discussed the consequences of such decisions, pointing to the potential for children to engage in acts of emotional manipulation, and for others, with perhaps less salient issues, being denied the opportunity to work on their social, emotional and behavioural skills. Consequently, it is hoped that schools and staff invested in emotional labour will take heed of the conclusions forwarded here, by appreciating the nuances associated with their own social, emotional and behavioural work. Although embracing multiple theoretical lenses is a useful step towards combatting some of the issues experienced by the staff in this article, ultimately an emphasis on emotionality at the heart of support, practice and pedagogy more widely is needed. Indeed, the recent prevalent devaluation of emotions in education policy (Page, 2018), that has excluded skills such as 'emotionality' and 'care' from current conceptualisations of teacher professionalism, only reinforces neo-liberal approaches to not only teaching, but the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills in schools. Bearing in mind that compulsory education is once again being positioned as a conduit for social, emotional and behavioural development, and that EI remains a prominent theoretical concept in such work, it is hoped this article is a timely reminder of both the pitfalls of relying on a single, universal theory for the basis of SEL and pastoral support in schools, and the need for emotionality to be identified as the central pillar of practice.

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