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Emotional Intelligence and Social and Emotional Learning: (Mis)Interpretation of Theory and its Influence on Practice

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Abstract

Drawing on qualitative case study data gathered from a range of managerial, teaching and non-teaching staff members across four British primary schools, this paper focusses on the activities used to enhance the social, emotional and behavioural skills of children within these establishments. The data revealed how staff hoped to improve the pupils' levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI) through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) models. Whilst differences and similarities are reported both within and between schools, the findings indicate that staff interpretation of EI as a theoretical and conceptual framework strongly influenced their social and emotional work with children. I make the case that the (mis)interpretation of theory led to instances where some behaviours, valued within specific communities, were marginalised and problematized by the schools' enactment of SEL practice. After discussing the main implications of these findings, a range of directives are offered that may allow schools to achieve more culturally inclusive practice when utilising SEL in future.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; Social and emotional learning; Early childhood; Teachers; Pedagogy

Emotional Intelligence and Social and Emotional Learning: (Mis)Interpretation of Theory and its Influence on Practice

Although conceived of in the 1920s, it is only during the past thirty years that emotional intelligence (EI) has been researched and discussed as a relatively valid form of aptitude. First touched upon by Thorndike (1920) as an ability to understand and manage other people and to act 'wisely' in human relations, and then later by Wechsler (1940), as 'non-intellective' skills that are 'necessary' for people to succeed in life, it was not until Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences that the concepts that underpin the theory began to gather support as an accepted phenomenon. His notions of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences lay the foundations for contemporary theories of EI. Numerous theoretical contributions to the field of EI have been offered (see Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 1997), and whilst disparity undoubtedly exists across these models, there is a degree of commonality also, with the majority identifying key facets drawn from: (1) personal traits such as adaptability, self-esteem, self-motivation, etc; (2) social characteristics including empathy, assertiveness, social and relationship skills, etc; and (3) emotional attributes like emotional expression, management, regulation, etc., (Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell and Woods, 2007).

Whilst it has been claimed that possession of EI facilitates interpersonal relationships due to improved social skills, emotional management, self-awareness and levels of empathy (Boyatzis and Sala, 2004), it has also been argued that the aptitude has not been adequately discussed and researched in cross-cultural contexts (Earley and Peterson, 2004; Lee and Sukoco, 2007). Indeed, others are quick to point out how tenets of EI, including social skills and emotional control are culturally specific and consequently concepts of 'appropriate' social and emotional behaviours vary in response to context, and according to cultural norms, (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Furthermore, a swathe of regional and cultural variations in emotional and

social perception and expression, reported by the likes of Elfenbein, Beaupré, Lévesque and Hess (2007), cast doubt on the cross-cultural applicability of EI. Indeed, as it has become clear that emotions have both universal and culture-specific features, calls for more research distinguishing the two have been made (see Shao, Coucet and Caruso, 2015).

Across countries, social and emotional learning (SEL) models have been adopted to promote EI amongst young children as, in the main, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making are targeted (Dusenbury and Weissberg, 2017). Although the precise nature of these models vary from country to country, their role in early childhood education (ECE) has been advocated (see Rivers, Tominey, O' Ryon and Rackett, 2013), with others pointing to its influence on children's ability to learn (see, Kwon, Hanrahan, and Kupzyk, 2017), academic success (see, McKown, 2017), and key role in laying the foundations for development (see, Gershon and Pelliteri, 2018). Although questions such as: can EI can be taught in school, and does improved EI have an impact on children's emotional health, persist (Humphrey, et al. 2007), the British-based Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative (DfES, 2005) utilises EI as a guiding concept for practice, with evaluatory studies supporting its role in improvements in this aptitude as well as social and emotional skills more widely (see Hallam, 2009; Banerjee, 2010).

Whilst support is forthcoming, others assert that SEAL is a form of detrimental 'therapeutic education' as it influences children to be self-obsessed, hindering their future aspirations and ambitions, (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008). Furthermore, there is now a growing body of work that maintains SEAL, in its championing of specific social and emotional behaviours that outline 'the type of person' a child should become, operationalises as a means of social control that endorses and marginalises specific values (Craig, 2007, p. 11). Practitioners using this model have also been criticised for not only coaching, but coercing

children into experiencing specific constructions of social and emotional well-being (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008), with more recent research illustrating its potential in countering the endeavours of parents, by highlighting and endorsing alternative values in schools (Wood and Warin, 2014). Central to these criticisms is the role of the practitioner, and their promotion of specific social and emotional skills. Of particular relevance to this debate is the influence of emotions in teaching and its role in culturally appropriate pedagogy, and it is to these practices that this paper now turns its attention.

Emotional and cultural aspects of teaching

The role of emotions in teaching is by no means a novel area of research, yet debates still rage regarding its influence on ECE practice. Whilst the best teachers base their practices on love, care and intimacy (Page, 2018), implicit assumptions concerning the components of professionalism within ECE implies a detachment from emotions (Madrid, Fernie and Kantor, 2015). As such, ECE professionals are instead judged by their ability to meet arbitrary standards and performative demands, and in doing so enact a 'technicist' approach (Alexander, 2004) to practice, grounded in emotional neutrality (Taggert, 2011). This positioning of emotions as being less consequential and important to the ECE professional than neo-liberal principles of standards and performance has been continually reinforced in policy and practice, where those working with young children in in education continue to endure low pay and status, (Shin, 2015). Despite this, and in addition to the swathe of researchers interested in this field, ECE professionals consistently recognise and value the central role of emotions, love, care and intimacy in their work with young children.

ECE workers constantly regulate their emotions and display specific behaviors as part of their role, and this ability to manage feelings is central in meeting the emotional requirements of the profession. It has been argued that this 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983), needs to

be the focus of a remodelling of professionalism in ECE (Osgood, 2010), to one that legitimises the views of practitioners today who harness their own feelings and emotions to guide their work (see Recchia, Shin and Snaider, 2018). What it means to be an ECE professional is also heavily inspired by the personal relationships teachers have with the children in their care. This 'cannot be done in an emotionally anaesthetised way' as such interaction requires 'emotional work of the highest calibre' (Elfer, Goldschmeid and Selleck, 2003, p. 27). Indeed, more recently, research has demonstrated how the effective utilisation of emotions strongly influences the quality of adult-child interactions, as a teachers' ability to mediate and develop their own emotional knowledge has been shown to improve their interpersonal relationships with the young children they teach, in turn facilitating the likelihood of academic success (Torres, Domoitrovich and Bierman, 2015)

Teacher-student interactions in ECE settings are grounded in emotions, yet caution is required so as to not 'over-emphasise' these relationships (White, 2016) as young children do not live in isolation, nor is the teacher their only emotional barometer. Furthermore, and due to the power imbalances that exist between the various stakeholders in the classroom, we need to be aware of the disproportionate nature of the adult–child relationship (Page, 2018) where the former enjoy a greater share of 'power' in these environments and, as such, are well positioned to endorse dominant ways of 'doing emotion'. Indeed, we have recently been reminded of the complex emotional worlds of ECE settings, where although often competing and contradictory social and emotional practices are experienced and enacted, some are affirmed whilst others are oppressed and transformed (Madrid et al, 2015). Such findings make explicit the need to dispense of practices that aim to utilise a universal definition of emotions, in favour of more culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies, and in doing so re-affirm the importance of a teachers' ability to critically reflect on their own position when forming relationships with the children they teach, (White, 2016)

Schooling and the use of curriculum has been identified as a ‘prime area of attack’ to help both maintain and ‘restore hegemonic notions of culture’ (Apple 2006, p. 39), and whilst education can enlighten it can also oppress (Freire, 1970). In this sense, education becomes a form of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) and a tool of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984). Certainly, for some, both explicitly and implicitly, overtly and covertly, it can shape and change individuals to adapt them to dominant cultural values’ (Boler and Zembylas, 2012, p. 111). Indeed, Zembylas (2012) furthers such criticism by adding to the growing body of research that points to European and Western models of SEL as vehicles that merely endorse the dominant culture’s assumptions about emotion. Consequently, the affirmation of more critically reflective teaching (Osgood, 2010) that is guided by emotions and care (Page, 2018) now carries specific leverage, and in light of contemporary findings that position pedagogical and professionalised realities in ECE settings within Western norms (Massing, 2018), calls for more research that examines the utilization of SEL models in differing cultural contexts that pays attention to ethnic-differences and experiences, made by authors in the field such as Gershon and Pelliteri, (2018), are warranted

Research rationale and aims

In recognition of the concerns raised above, this article captures how EI as a theoretical concept was understood and interpreted by practitioners working in schools, and how these conceptualisations influenced their approach to developing the social, emotional and behavioural skills of the children with whom they worked. As has been alluded to, little is known concerning how EI is interpreted, understood and enacted cross-culturally, or how this may be influencing the social and emotional work that takes place in schools, by practitioners. By capturing how staff members interpreted and used EI as a theoretical framework to guide their enactment of SEL across primary schools, this article contributes to the calls voiced

above, and in the next section the research process from which the basis of this article is grounded is detailed.

The research study

Overview of the main study

The fundamental aim of the main study was to determine how primary school staff members, across four case studies, understood and made use of SEL models. In order to do so, the following research questions were addressed: What are the main motivations for using SEL in primary schools? How is SEL being interpreted in primary schools? What are the influences behind these interpretations? A mixed methods empirical investigation, that combined quantitative and qualitative strategies, was embraced to help understand these questions. Data were collected from a range of school staff members such as head teachers, teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff, etc, across three phases of study, with each employing a separate methodological approach. These consisted of a 29-item questionnaire, completed by 402 staff members across 38 primary schools in the quantitative first phase of the study, as well as the two qualitative phases reported later in this article. The project produced numerous themes, all of which derived from the three phases of study, but for the purpose of this paper specifically, the quotations utilised to illuminate the findings reported have been taken from the two qualitative phases.

The SEL model

The SEL initiative 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) was used across all four case study primary schools. SEAL is a curriculum based resource with the aim of 'developing all children's social, emotional and behavioural skills' (DfES, 2005, p. 6), that draws heavily on Goleman's (1995) notion of EI, utilising the concept as a structure for a

variety of activities including whole-school work, assemblies, classroom based lessons, small group work sessions and intervention with individual children. These activities aim to develop EI amongst the children through the study of seven themes: New Beginnings; Getting on and falling out; Say no to bullying; Goal for goals!; Good to be me; Relationships; Changes, with each targeting specific elements of the aptitude. As there is a distinct tendency for researchers to use summative assessments to evaluate the impact of SEL, insight into how schools interpret and negotiate such models is required. Indeed, it has been shown 'that schools implement SEAL work in very different ways' meaning 'the variations in implementation need to be captured' (Banerjee, 2010, p. 9). Whilst findings from the main study, and reported elsewhere (see Wood, 2017, Wood and Brownhill, 2018), have unpicked some of these variations, this paper focusses on the role of SEL in inhibiting culturally inclusive practice in schools.

The case study schools

To help answer the study's research questions, data from a comparative study of four schools (all drawn from a town in the North-West of England), sampled in order to obtain a maximum variation (Henry, 1990) of case studies, was utilised. The aim of this strategy was to sample a number of case study schools that varied with regards to their size, number of pupils on roll, social class (categorised by pupil eligibility for free school meals), ethnicity and religious character. 'School A' is a small school that draws pupils from a prosperous area of the town, with less than 5% of its pupils being eligible for free school meals. 'School B' has less than 200 children on roll, and draws pupils from an affluent catchment area. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals here is well below the national average. 'School C' is the largest in the town (570 pupils on roll), and is located in an urban area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage (almost one third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals). Unlike Schools A, B and D, all of whom draw pupils from largely white, British

backgrounds, the vast majority of children at 'School C' are of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. 'School D' is located in an area of social disadvantage with the number of pupils eligible for free school meals at over 20%.

Data collection

An interpretivist research paradigm that embraced an iterative approach to data collection was employed. As such, each of the empirical phases reported here were developed as a means to add depth to the findings made during the previous phase/s. Whilst, as mentioned, the larger study also embraced quantitative methods, in the guise of a large scale questionnaire across all schools in the town, the data reported in this article was collected using two qualitative strategies: focus groups and individual interviews. Semi-structured focus group interviews with groups of primary school management/teaching staff and non-teaching staff, were used across each of the four schools and, in two cases, a range of staff selected from the 'whole school'. In total, there were ten focus group interviews, sampled from naturally occurring clusters, comprising of a total of 44 staff members across the four case study schools. As was the case with the focus-groups, the sampling strategy utilised for the individual interviews was non-random and purposive. Employing a stratified purposeful sampling scheme (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007), one staff member from each of the following distinct groups: management, inclusion co-ordinator, teacher, teaching assistant, pastoral staff and welfare staff, in all four case study schools, were interviewed. As such, there were 24 semi-structured interviews with individual staff members across the four case study schools. Although semi-structured in nature, both forms of data collection ultimately focused on staff members' perceptions of SEL, their beliefs in relation to the motivations for its use, its function in school in general, their own use of the model, and its impact. Throughout all stages of the

study, including the collection and analysis of data, all ethical procedures outlined by the British Educational Research Association (2011) were adhered to.

Data analysis

All focus group and individual interviews were transcribed and the data was organised using Atlas ti software. An iterative approach, that employed conventional thematic analysis embraced by the likes of Cresswell (2005), allowed the process to be both exploratory and confirmatory. In an attempt to establish 'descriptive validity' (Maxwell, 1992), and to make my interpretations of the participants' views as 'true' as possible, confirmation of the themes reported in the section that follows, were sought, checked and validated using data collected from the quantitative data and both the focus groups and individual interviews. In keeping with the iterative stance employed, these themes were continuously re-visited and developed throughout all three empirical phases. Although a range of themes were reported in the main study, the analysis presented in the remainder of the article is representative of just one of these analytical themes, namely, how the interpretation of EI influenced the use of SEL.

Findings and analysis: Interpreting EI and utilising SEL

The data revealed how staff member interpretations of EI influenced the practice of SEL within schools. Each staff member and case study school held individual interpretations of the theory and deemed any potential improvement in the pupils' levels of EI as a main motivator for the implementation of SEL. However, as conceptualisations of this theory varied so too did the enactment of SEL, and the ways in which staff worked with children to develop their social, emotional and behavioural skills.

Varying interpretations of EI according to role

Few practitioners across the four schools demonstrated a holistic awareness of the various components associated with EI, with those who did often being members of the respective leadership and management teams. Bethany, an assistant head teacher, best captured the epitome of EI in stating "*It's giving value and importance to social skills….motivational skills, relationships with each other, managing feelings….(and) self-awareness",* whilst the four head teachers identified children's ability to adapt and behave appropriately in given contexts as the main indicator of EI, as captured below:

Hannah (Head teacher): *EI is about understanding that you always have a choice and making those choices that are best for you, and the other individuals around you in a given situation.*

•

Alice (Head teacher): *Emotional intelligence...is probably being reached when a person can use a range of strategies to be able to control either themselves or others in a situation.*

•

Abigail (Head teacher): *Emotional intelligence is the ability to deal with situations in life; good, bad and indifferent situations, so that they can cope.*

•

Stanley (Head teacher): *In a nutshell, emotional intelligence is how one responds to any given situation……in the most appropriate way.*

Whilst members of the respective schools' leadership teams presented more universal conceptualisations of EI, others focussed on specific components of the aptitude, with the varying roles performed by individual staff members throughout the school day influencing their interpretation of the theory. Staff members whose time was occupied with managing behavioural incidents on the school-yard and in the classroom associated EI with the specific branch of emotional control, as is captured by Charlotte, a teaching assistant (TA) with responsibility for playtime supervision:

Charlotte (TA): *It's about controlling your emotions. Emotional control is the biggest problem because it's the most obvious problem. If you go into a classroom or on the school-yard and there's somebody angry with behavioural problems, you see that straight away. You try and deal with that for the classroom because that can disrupt the full class....Similarly, on the yard, you just can't allow a child to lose control there.*

This view, that emotional intelligence was largely the ability to control one's emotions was common amongst non-teaching staff, with other aspects of EI, such as self-awareness, motivation and empathy largely overlooked. As many staff members maintained the purpose of SEL was to enhance EI, and bearing in mind that a large proportion of non-teaching staff felt the term related to emotional control specifically, SEL, amongst this population, was perceived as an umbrella term for behaviour management. Authors such as McReady (2010)

and Reid (2011) testify that school staff commonly utilise SEL initiatives as behaviour management strategies to enhance the pupils' emotional reactions to stress.

Whilst these findings further demonstrate how SEL 'initiatives have particular consequences for pupils viewed as behaviourally challenging' (Gillies, 2011, p. 210), homogenising the views of non-teaching staff in this way would detract from the wealth and depth of data they offered. Indeed, social skills such as "*effective communication"* (Edith – Welfare assistant), "*appropriate social behaviour"* (Lilian – TA) and "*independence*" (Rebekah – Learning Mentor) were all prioritised as key aspects of EI by a range of non-teaching members. Regardless of role, the use of SEL as a means of improving pupils' social skills and emotional control was commonly observed across the case studies, and although this demonstrated a degree of consistency between schools, it also revealed how the interpretation of EI and subsequent application of SEL had particular consequences for children from deprived and/or minority ethnic backgrounds, as is discussed next.

Understanding EI across schools

The comprehension of EI as a theory varied between staff members within schools, with each borrowing from their own personal aims, goals and experiences to understand and make use of the term. However, it was the individual school's definition that often took precedence. Each school defined the term in light of its own existing needs and aims and linked the pupils' inabilities, in relation to these needs, to a lack of EI. Instead of utilising emotional knowledge to guide practice (Recchia, Shin and Snaider, 2018), staff members at School A, located in an affluent part of the town, aligned social deprivation with a lack EI, as they felt behavioural issues are most common in children of low socio-economic status and, as a consequence, SEL would be most effective in schools that draw pupils from these areas, as is captured below:

Summer (Teacher): *I've used SEAL here and I've used it in my previous school, and I see in my previous school it being more relevant and needed there. It was in a deprived area, and I think a lot of the children needed more guidance…with emotional intelligence,…and dealing with anger, which are some of the issues that SEAL brings up…I think some children didn't necessarily have that there, because of the poor area surrounding the school.*

Few at School A recognised the pupils' ability to control emotions as problematic and subsequently staff here felt that SEL was "*not really for children with anger problems"* (Sarah - Teacher). Such findings are in keeping with previous work linking social and emotional skills to socio-economic status. Although Cooper (2005a) argues that the interaction between socio-economic status and socio-emotional skills is complex, he re-affirms that teacher perceptions of a child's social class strongly influences their views on their ability to learn and develop social and emotional skills. This, coupled with the views of Summer and Sarah, showcase the need for practitioners to critically reflect on their own position in their interactions with pupils (White, 2016), so as to not abuse their position and power when aiming to facilitate all children's social and emotional skills.

One popular belief held by a selection of staff members in Schools C and D, related to the view that children from low socio-economic backgrounds lacked EI. Many spoke about the children's physical appearance, claiming those who were "*neglected*" (Charlotte – TA) were often the ones with lower levels of EI. In relation to this point and in response to the question: *"What would a child that lacked emotional intelligence look like?*", Amber and Lilian replied:

Amber (Welfare): *Always in trouble, poor concentration, maybe not dressed properly, a lack of food. I would say they're deprived children really…I think you'd be able to pick a child out. If I had a group of children and you put one in that wasn't highly emotional intelligent, I think I'd be able to pick it out by looking at their appearance…..They'd probably look tired, probably look unkempt.*

•

Lilian (TA): *You know by looking at them. If they're dirty, like if they've got up themselves in a morning and they've had nothing to eat, they haven't brushed their hair, you know there are certain children that do stand out.*

In keeping with this mind-set, staff members frequently argued that children from low socio-economic backgrounds would also be less likely to be "*capable of controlling emotions effectively*" (Jess – TA) and frequently presented issues with "*social skills and motivation"* (Molly – Welfare Assistant). At School C, and as alluded to above, staff members of varying roles often prioritised emotional control and specifically social skills, as central tenets of EI. The school's intake, and the community it served, seemingly influenced this interpretation of EI, with staff maintaining a *"distinct lack"* of EI was common amongst "*the poorer children of….the Asian community"* (Samantha – TA). As a demonstration of the disproportionate nature of power relations in teacher-child interactions (Page, 2018), children from minority-

ethnic backgrounds fell under scrutiny as they were deemed unlikely to "*display appropriate social skills"* (Sophie – Inclusion Co-ordinator), and were thus viewed, by some, as 'drudges' (Crozier and Davies, 2007) of the school's resources. Samantha offers the following views in relation to this point:

Samantha (TA): *We have an English as an additional language problem here, and this really affects their poor social skills, so we have to use SEAL to teach them our manners and everything like that....We get Asian children in here that can't do anything themselves at four years old, whereas 20 years ago our pupils could do a lot more.*

Due to *"their"* English as an additional language needs and subsequent "*poor social skills*", something that Edith, a TA at the school, felt was caused by minimal parental "*input from being young"*, minority ethnic children were positioned as in need of the support proffered through SEL. As a result, and in keeping with previous findings (see Crozier and Davies, 2007; Crozier and Davies, 2008; Pyo-Hong and Lise-Halvorsen, 2009), not only were children of minority ethnic backgrounds set apart and 'othered' (Paechter, 1998) as inadequate, failing and lacking, but so too were their parents. Whilst it is clear that the findings reported, so far, have uncovered teaching practices that lack critical examination of the knowledge base and power relations on the professionals' part (Boler, 1999), or any hint of emotional risk in terms of their challenging of dominant practices that espouse hegemonic values, (Boler and Zembylas, 2012), they do reveal how the theoretical construct of EI have the potential for misinterpretation. In

the next section, I explore how these (mis)interpretations of theory influenced the practice of SEL in schools.

The consequences of these interpretations: SEL in practice

In prioritising emotional control and social skills as primary tenets of EI, there were particular consequences for children from low socio-economic and minority-ethnic backgrounds. As pupils from such backgrounds were to judged be insufficient in their ability to control emotions or to display appropriate social skills, or both, in keeping with recent research that demonstrates how practices in ECE settings are entrenched in Western norms (Massing, 2018), SEL was operationalised as a tool of "*social and cultural integration"* (John – Management) to target specific behaviours, that were often valued in the communities of these children.

Emotional responses to conflict was discussed widely by staff, and many understood that behaviours such as "*acting tough*" (Charlotte – TA) and "*being aggressive*" (Amber – Welfare), were common and, indeed, expected in some deprived areas. Rebeka, a Learning mentor at school D maintained that children "*have been brought up to display anger"* as "*in the area where we are…it's expected of them".* Yet, whilst such behaviours were deemed appropriate in the context of community norms, the schools, in their use of SEL to encourage non-violent reactions to conflict such as "*breathing slowly and counting to ten"* (Molly – Welfare assistant) and "*walking away from trouble"* (Betty – Welfare assistant), were reticent to not only embrace agonistic approaches to teaching (Mouffe, 2005), as 'difference' as a stimulus for learning was refused, they also illustrated how staff have the potential to endorse dominant cultural values and behaviours (Boler and Zembylas, 2012)

There was also the view that children of ethnic minority heritage *"aren't encouraged to be confident, independent or forthcoming with their ideas"* (Jane – Teacher), with other specific social behaviours including a reluctance to make eye contact with teachers and

avoidance of strong body language, also being problematized. Although some staff were quick to point that such behaviours are widely endorsed *"at home and in the mosque"* (Jane – Teacher), as they are viewed culturally as "*a sign of respect"* (Bob - Learning mentor), SEL was utilised within schools to encourage children to be assertive. Not only do such thoughts illuminate the work of Zembylas (2012) that labels Euro-Western SEL initiatives as tools that promote hegemonic ways of 'doing emotion', they also reveal a 'fear of cultural disintegration' (Apple, 2006, p. 17) on part of the schools' staff, as is captured by the quotes below:

Alice (Head teacher): *Those Asian children are going to have to learn that in this country, if you want something, you have to look somebody in the eye, because it's expected here.*

•

Charlotte (TA): *An Asian girl can't come into a school like this and put their head down; it's the rules, you've got to behave by them.*

Although some staff did recognise that these applications of the initiative were "*narrow minded*" (Erica – Learning mentor at School D), the findings illuminate those made elsewhere in demonstrating how a school's location, and the communities they serve, influence the enactment of SEL programmes (see Beland, 2007; Amatea and West-Olatunji, 2008; Wood and Warin, 2014). By specifically targeting children of minority ethnic heritage and/or those living in social and economic hardship, the findings echo previous claims of schools as institutions of subjectification (Althusser, 1970; Biesta, 2015) who engage in cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) and racism (Crozier and Davies, 2008), and also illustrate how culturally inclusive practices are being neglected as a consequence of theory mis-interpretation. The

imposition of such cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) through SEL, supports recent claims that 'education as a political practice does not necessarily equate to practices that are always liberating' (Urban, 2019, p. 3)

This notion, that EI mis-interpretation has created environments where children from specific backgrounds, and their accompanying social and cultural behaviours, are viewed problematically by school is contentious and was opposed by some staff members, particularly management staff, across the case studies. Stanley, the head teacher at School C, for example, felt that the use of SEL to target emotional control was just "*a chunk"* of the overall utilisation of the model in his school, whilst Amber (Head teacher at School D) felt that the inconsistencies in SEL use across her school were because "*many non-teaching staff hadn't been trained".* The inconsistent nature of appropriate training, as a means of overcoming some of the issues presented above, was a common theme verbalised by staff across the four schools. Hannah, the head teacher at School A for example mentioned that *"emotional intelligence and SEL training….was aimed at teachers only"* and that she didn't *"think any of the support staff went on the training that was delivered",* whilst non-teaching staff, such as Edith widely claimed they had *"never been informed about SEAL".* Such views support claims of a persistent and targeted devaluation of 'emotions' in education policy and practice (Page, 2018), illustrating how they may become detached from the work of key professionals within ECE settings (Madrid,et al, 2015).

Of the four case study schools, School C, in particular, recognised the importance of training for all staff across the 'whole school', but even here the content presented to non-teaching staff was often dissimilar to that accessed by management and teaching staff. Returning to the influence of job role covered above, Joanna, a teacher at School C felt that "*non-teaching staff deal with conflict and that's probably why they've had training on that*

area.", whilst management and teachers *"need a more rounded overview of emotional intelligence and how to improve it"*. One key revelation from these findings, however, was the lack of critically reflective emotional practice (Osgood, 2010), or pedagogical approaches that are grounded in emotionality (Page, 2018). With the unique needs of the school, the staff members' key roles and responsibilities, and inconsistent training all cited as variables in the varying interpretations of theory and enactment of SEL, in the next section I explore ways and means in which schools may overcome this, so that more culturally inclusive practice may be realised.

Discussion

This study's exploration of staff members' perceptions of EI and the importance placed upon specific aspects by schools exposed certain scenarios where children, based on their social class and/or ethnicity, were positioned as problematic, and thus targeted through SEL. Such practices, it is argued, position both EI as a theory and SEL as an initiative as potential agents of cultural and ideological hegemony (Apple, 2004) due to their role in 'othering' children deemed socially deprived and/or of minority ethnic background. In these cases, the 'othering' practices embody negative consequences for these children by reaffirming specific norms - that they don't necessarily acknowledge as cultural appropriate - as superior, (Crozier and Davies, 2008). In order to combat such manifestations of theory and practice and as a means of facilitating the realisation of culturally inclusive practice, future SEL models should rely less heavily on single, universal concepts as a theoretical base. In the example explored in this paper, staff and pupils may have benefitted from exposure to the notion of 'cultural intelligence', as in doing so they may have been better situated in recognising specific social and cultural practices of the children. SEL models, it is recommended, may find it beneficial to utilise Earley and Mosakowski's (2004) 'six steps to cultivating cultural intelligence' - which

outlines how the aptitude can be developed - as a means of improving intercultural competence, in addition to EI, which may aide the likelihood of more culturally inclusive practice across schools.

In keeping with the view that EI has consistently defied a clear and agreed definition (Humphrey et al., 2007), staff members, based on their individual roles and working environment, interpreted theory in specific ways, that in turn influenced how they made use of SEL. Across all four case study schools, staff drew from very specific 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) to comprehend both EI as a theory and SEL as an initiative to improve this aptitude amongst pupils. As the organisations that formed the four case studies inhabited a 'variety of generations, genders, classes, departments and occupational groups' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008, p. 39), advice that schools should emphasise a 'coherent co-ordinated approach across all parts' (Weare, 2004, p. 55) and that 'considerable effort has to go into ensuring congruence between the various parts' (Weare, 2007, p. 246), was not heeded, illustrating approaches that embraced variety and fragmentation rather than unity and congruence (Martin, 2002).

In schools, head teachers and members of management influence 'meaning making' more than others (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008) and, as such, their actions, conversations and decisions are crucial in the formation of ideals and values (Deal and Peterson, 1999). As a means of acknowledging the needs and beliefs of their organisation, whilst simultaneously guarding against mis-practice, it may be useful for school leaders to become both 'anthropological sleuths' and 'visionaries' (Deal and Peterson, 1999), when utilising theoretical ideas as a base for educational interventions such as those reported here. By acknowledging the norms and values that define current school culture whilst also communicating the ambitions of the organisation moving forward, school leaders are well

positioned to encourage culturally inclusive practice. That said, school leaders often 'want a culture that is clear, consistent and consensual...where all the staff are pulling in the shared direction' (Hargreaves 1999, p. 57), yet by striving for this ideal they avoid exposure to the lack of consensus that characterises schools in real life. As such, it is recommended that head teachers employ more inclusive approaches to training, that acknowledge each staff member's role and the school's culture, to frame the comprehension of theoretical ideas and educational initiatives.

Calls for enhanced equality between the staff groups regarding training opportunities have been widely reported (Reay, 2001; Osgood, 2005; 2009), yet specifically relating to SEL models, full staff training in ECE settings (Smith, O'Donnell, Easton and Rudd, 2007) and existing teacher education programmes is still deemed to be lacking, meaning staff often lack the necessary skills for dealing with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs (MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath and Page, 2006; Adera and Bullock, 2010). Although the drive for improved child mental health and well-being is becoming more popular, the level of attention it receives in teacher education and training 'on the job' has not (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell and Webster, 2007).

Consequently, it is recommended that future training - be it in schools for current staff or universities/colleges for aspiring teachers - places 'emotions' at the heart of practice. Undoubtedly, any such training needs to be sensitive to the ever-increasing regulation of practice and accountability measures (Perryman, Maguire, Braun and Ball, 2017), reduction in autonomy (Parker, 2015), and 'performative' demands associated with the profession, (Ball, 2010), all of which have heightened experiences of stress, anxiety, burnout, emotional exhaustion (Larrivee, 2012) and de-professionalization (Osgood, 2010). Yet, only by embracing the crucial role of 'emotions' in teaching can we begin to move towards more

culturally relevant pedagogies in SEL. As the findings reported in this paper have shown, school staff need to 'recognise the legitimacy' of the 'other' (Mouffe 2005, p. 20) and to acknowledge and value the often conflicting social and emotional experiences that school children face, as only by doing so can dominant positions be confronted.

By utilising Mouffe's (2005) notion of agonism as a guiding theme, with conflict and disagreement acting as a stimulus for learning, educational settings may then become spaces where the variety and multitude of experiences that are significant to individuals are not only acknowledged but celebrated. In order to recognise the multiple and heterogeneous nature of children's social and emotional experiences teachers and the training they receive should be influenced by concepts central to a 'pedagogy of discomfort' (Boler, 1999), which asks educators to critically examine the habits, knowledge, and power relations that shape their practice. Although this approach, as Boler and Zembylas (2012) maintain, 'involves considerable emotional and intellectual risk', by dismantling 'old habits' (p. 124) and replacing them with new, educators can re-examine their own hegemonic values, and in doing so 'challenge the interest of the ruling class' (p. 112).

The reframing of teacher training, so that it embraces fully the role of emotions in practice, would be a welcomed step but doing this alone, I fear, would bring about superficial change. The prevalent devaluation of emotions in education policy (Page, 2018), that positions concepts and skills such as emotionality, love and care as separate from the discourses of professionalism serves to reify neo-liberal notions of teaching. These, as such, position teachers as 'technicians' 'who implement the educational ideas and procedures of others, rather than professionals who think about these matters for themselves.' (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Instead, emotions should be viewed as the epitome of professionalism in ECE, and 'reclaimed' as a vital and credible catalyst for practice (Osgood, 2010). Indeed, approaches to pedagogy based

on care and love have been shown to facilitate the renewal of teachers' professional skills' (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2013), with others providing instruction for practitioners to engage in more critically reflective practice (Osgood (2010) as a means of embracing concepts of professionalism situated in emotionality, (Page, 2018).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, schools will and should respond to their own particular needs and demands yet the privileging of certain aspects of EI reported in this paper does pose some practical issues concerning the cultural validity of the theory in general. Notions of what is and is not accepted as 'appropriate behaviour' are bound by the social and cultural contexts in which they occur and profoundly influence the meanings that children give to their own emotions and behaviours, and to the situation in which they are elicited (Saarni, 2007). By allowing individual theory to influence practice in the instances reported here, schools and their educators seemed keen to promote monistic principles in their SEL work with children. At the heart of such practice was an urge for unanimity (Arthur, 2005), and an expectation that children set aside their own interests, values and traits. The schools' insensitivities to varying cultural norms, and attempts at coerced conformity, instead demonstrated an approach to SEL far removed from the calls for educational establishments to achieve 'unforced consensus' (Taylor, 1999). Rather than striving for consensus, schools may find value in employing more agonistic approaches (Mouffe, 2005) that embrace conflict and contestation as tools that facilitate more culturally inclusive practices in the classroom. In order to achieve this, schools need to challenge views that locate the use of 'emotions' in teaching as a pedagogical failure, and instead encourage practitioners to not only celebrate but regularly harness their own emotions as a central aspect of their practice.

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