

Schools, psychosocial wellbeing and agency: From fragmentation to coherence

(Original title - The school's contribution to young people's wellbeing with a particular emphasis on agency)

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Abstract

This paper is about the relationship between everyday practice in schools, and the development of agency. It examines two areas of current concern in which agency is seen to play a key role: young people's mental health or human flourishing and their development as citizens. The argument is made that the foundation stone of agency is self efficacy and that related crucial attitudes and beliefs are learned in school. The role of agency in learning and its importance in young people's psychosocial development are discussed. The latter part of the paper focuses upon how schools can become effectively agency orientated.

Keywords: Agency, education, mental health, participation

Introduction

There is currently great concern in many Western societies, particularly the UK, regarding the general flourishing of our young people and their ability to withstand the complexities and challenges they face. We now know from research studies, that the development of agency in schools could be crucial for mental health, and for the ability to act and live well in a world that is complex and challenging. I explore this evidence in this paper. In so doing I am drawing on psychological and sociological perspectives in relationship to education. There are certain key assumptions being made: that schools matter greatly and can have a lasting impact on psychosocial aspects of young people's lives (Rutter, 1991); that particular school contexts matter, as does the wider social context in which schools are located and that learning about agency is rooted in the daily life and interactions in schools.

I examine current trends and challenges in the context of education and suggest that this topic involves exploring 'the material, social, psychological and cultural element of everyday life' in schools (Nolas, 2014, p.130). Although this is an argument for complexity, it is not an argument for fragmentation; we need a coherent, integrated and spiral approach to the development of agency and human flourishing. This paper is a challenge to the conception of the school as a neutral space in this project.

Concerns about young people in relationship to agency

There are currently two areas of great concern around young people nowadays in the UK and elsewhere. First, about the mental health of young people, and secondly about the engagement of young people with, and participation in society. Both these concerns are linked to the development of agency, but first I detail the concerns.

I begin with the psychosocial wellbeing of young people. The overall number of people with mental health problems has not changed significantly in recent years, although there have been some changes in patterns. The statement by Langley et al (2017) probably reflects an accurate state of affairs.

‘There has been concern about a long-term increase in child and adolescent mental health problems over the second half of the 20th Century (Collishaw, 2015). Recent evidence suggests that levels of emotional and behavioural problems among children levelled off or reduced up to 2008 [2-7]. Although there is some evidence to suggest limited change in the early adolescent age group, with perhaps the exception of emotional problems in adolescent girls [4], we know less about young children in the period since then, which has included a global financial crisis.’ (p.3)

Other data are available on issues such as money, poverty and jobs and their relationship to mental health. Recent trends suggest that adolescent mental health problems may be worsening in the UK and that this may reflect the roles of changing family, school and broader social contexts (Collishaw, 2015). A recent blog by the Chair of the UK Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Robb, 2018) noted the strong connections between mental health and poverty, for the latter is worsening in the UK, especially child poverty. There is also the global trend of the growing divide between rich and poor. So social contexts matter.

The statistics for mental health difficulties and young people show that *how* young people are coping with mental health problems is getting worse and the number of people who self harm and have suicidal thoughts is increasing (McManus et al, 2016). Another important recent finding is that depression will be the second leading cause of disability adjusted life years (DALYs) by 2020 (greater than heart disease): the two major issues for young people are depression and anxiety (see the World Health Organisation on this). There is now major national and international concern regarding education, poverty, employment, future mental health disorder and related outcomes (UNICEF, 2017). For the first time, world leaders are recognizing the promotion of mental health and well-being, and the prevention and treatment of substance abuse as health priorities within the global development agenda. The promotion of mental health and wellbeing has now become UN Sustainable Development Goal 3.

Related to these concerns about mental health problems are research findings on the subjective wellbeing of young people. The Good Childhood Report (Pople and Rees, 2017) has been measuring children’s subjective wellbeing over the last 6 years and the summary of the 2017 report includes the following:

- Most children aged 10 to 17 have high levels of subjective well-being, with between 3% and 12% unhappy with their lives overall or aspects of their lives depending on the domain of life being asked about. Children are most happy with their family relationships and least happy with the school that they go to and their appearance. These findings are consistent with previous Good Childhood Reports.

- The latest available evidence on trends over time shows that between 2009 and 2015, there was a decrease in happiness with friends and life as a whole and, marginally, for appearance. There was an increase in happiness with schoolwork over the same period.

These continue trends seen in previous Good Childhood Reports.

- In terms of gender differences, girls continue to be less happy than boys with their friendships, appearance and life as a whole, while boys continue to be less happy than girls with their schoolwork. There is a long-standing and growing gender difference in feelings about appearance.

Other international studies such as Innocenti Report Card (UNICEF, 2017), which looked at child well-being across 41 countries of the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) mirrored these concerns with inequality and wellbeing. The majority of countries surveyed saw an increase in adolescent self-reporting of mental health issues between 2010 and 2014. One adolescent in four reported experiencing two or more psychological symptoms more than once a week. So mental health problems and subjective wellbeing are key concerns for our care and development of young people. A later section focuses on the response to this issue and the role of the school in supporting thriving, flourishing children.

A second concern regarding young people is their engagement with society and their participation in traditional institutions, processes of decision making and political activity. (Fahmy, 2016). Amidst the international debates about democracy and forms of participation has been a focus on young people and whether they are engaged or not. The data on this are not conclusive, as with mental health. This picture of dynamic trends does, however, shows us the need to take seriously the development of our young citizens as part of the work of the school in a democracy. (Fielding and Moss, 2011).

Agency and its place in development

This section explores what is meant by agency and the role that it plays in the emotional or psychological development of young people and in their development as citizens.

The understanding of agency we are using here is that it is the capacity to exercise control in shaping our own lives. Or, as Jean Gordon described it in text she shared with us as contributors to this volume:

Learner agency is about having the power, combined with choices, to take meaningful action and see the results of your decisions. It can be thought of as a

catalyst for change or transformation. Within a school context, learner agency is about shifting the ownership of learning from teachers to students, enabling students to have the understanding, ability, and opportunity to be part of the learning design and to take action to intervene in the learning process, to affect outcomes and become powerful lifelong learners.

(CORE Ten Trends 2017, CORE Education)

Agency has more than one aspect. It is formed in interaction and is a socio-cognitive process where ‘people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and engage in self-reflection, and are not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by external events.’ (Bandura, 1999). The foundation of human agency can be seen as self efficacy:

Among the mechanisms through which human agency is exercised, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. This belief system is the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce changes by one’s actions.

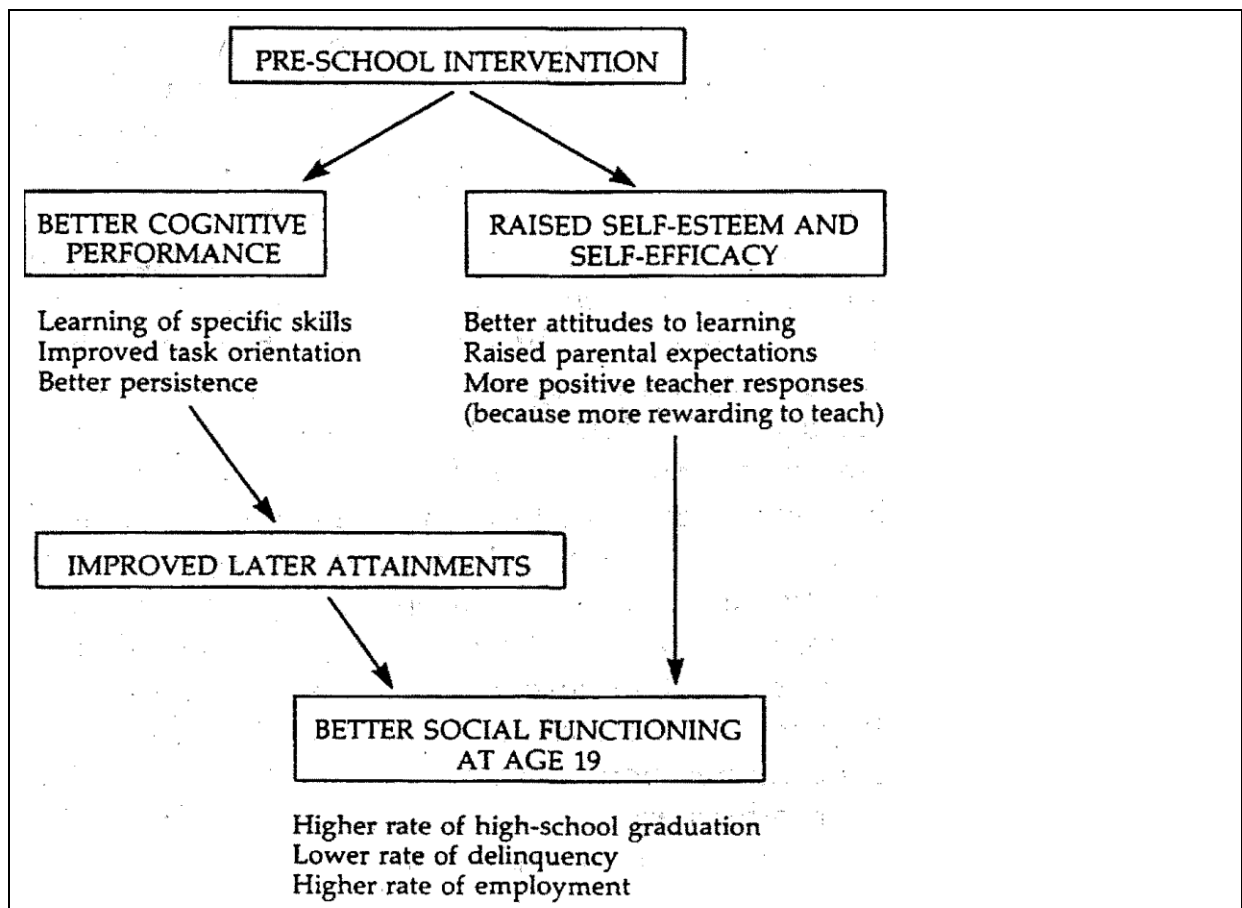
(Bandura, 1999:28)

The next section examines the work of two key researchers, Michael Rutter and Carol Dweck, to explore the relationship between self efficacy, education and the flourishing of young people.

Self efficacy and education

In 1982, Michael Rutter and his team undertook a ground breaking study of schooling entitled *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. They concluded that the time spent in school matters greatly, on many dimensions. Schools are complex social organisations and many factors intermingle to affect the academic, social and psychological outcomes for young people. In a seminal article in 1991, Rutter laid out the social pathways from school, suggesting that good school experiences can be surprisingly long-lasting in some circumstances. ‘This is because experiences at one point in a child’s life tend to influence what happens afterwards in a complicated set of indirect chain reactions’ (Rutter 1991:3). The research showed that the school makes a considerable difference to attainment, which is itself also affected by other factors; but here we focus on the long-term impacts of schooling on later life. Figure 1 demonstrates the key elements of the many aspects of this impact.

Figure 1. Postulated pathways mediating benefits of good early education (based on Schweinhart and Weikart, 1980 and Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984 – in Rutter 1991, p.6)



These studies showed that following effective early childhood education the first ensuing mediating factor was acquiring key capacities and skills, including numeracy and literacy. The second key aspect of the pathway is mediated by raised self esteem, self efficacy, social maturity and competence. These are the motivational and behavioural components.

.. Schooling does matter greatly. Moreover, the benefits can be surprisingly long lasting. It is crucial to appreciate that these long-term benefits rely on both effects on cognitive performance (in terms of learning specific skills, improved task orientation and better persistence) and effects of self-esteem and self-efficacy (with respect to better attitudes to learning, raised parental expectations and more positive teacher responses because the children are more rewarding to teach). In some circumstances positive school experiences of both academic and non-academic kinds can have a protective effect for children under stress and living otherwise unrewarding lives. These last points remind us once again that school provides a set of a social experiences for children as well as a place for scholastic learning, and that effective schools have both aspects of children's lives as part of their goals. (Rutter, 1991:9).

In Rutter's argument there is no polarity between the cognitive and the psychosocial or between learning and the development of agency or self efficacy. They are inextricably linked: schools are seen as having wide, human, social purposes. The sustained growth of agency is shown to be

essential to later life. Current debates about education fall into the trap of posing the cognitive and psychosocial as alternatives, not partners in education, and of setting narrow purposes and tightly defined targets.

Rutter's identification of self-efficacy or agency as a key quality in the lifecourse links to the work of another psychologist, Carol Dweck. She started her professional career researching learned helplessness and depression, but moved on to bridge developmental psychology, social psychology, and personality psychology. She researched the self-conceptions, or mindsets that people use to structure the self and guide their behaviour. She has examined the origins of these mindsets, their role in motivation, self-regulation and learning (Dweck, 1999 & 2006). She has shown the importance of the beliefs we have about ourselves and in particular the beliefs we hold around ability, effort and self-efficacy or agency. She described two distinct and opposing key mindsets: a growth mindset or a fixed mindset. She has convincingly shown that these mindsets are linked to views about ability (Dweck, 2006). She argues that all learners can be placed on a continuum according to their constructions of ability.. If we have a performance or fixed mindset we believe that ability is immutable and probably distributed along a Bell curve. Dweck also calls this an 'entity theory' of ability.

If we have a learning or growth mindset we believe success is based on hard work, learning, training and persistence; we have an 'incremental' theory of intelligence, that is we believe that we can increase achievement through effort or learning. We do not fear failure and are more likely to engage with challenges.

In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.

(Dweck, 2012).

Responses to failure are important here for they deeply influence emotional reactions, the motivation to tackle problems and self evaluation. So, if a pupil attempts to solve a maths problem and 'fails' to get the right answer, what becomes important is the explanation that one gives oneself. An entity or fixed mindset approach leads to an explanation like this: 'I am not able enough to solve this problem. The more I try, the more I show my lack of ability since I would be able to do it easily if I were able enough'. This leads to downplaying effort or persistence and can lead to feelings of failure and helplessness (Dweck, 1999:5). A pupil with a growth mindset may respond by thinking: 'what did I do that lead to failure? I need to try harder or learn a new strategy'. This is a mastery oriented response to failure. In responding to failure, self efficacy is undermined by the fixed mindset as pupils feel they have no control; in the growth mindset, the pupil's response to failure may increase self efficacy. A recent study (McCaislin et

al, 2016) on emotional responses to failure shows the ‘importance of context - cultural (poverty density), social (classroom social/instructional format) and personal (readiness in the coregulation of students self-conscious emotions and coping.’ (p1.) Their study links outer influences to internal and classroom based influences.

The implications of Dweck’s work are significant for mental health, learning and success. Those learners with a growth mindset are more likely to persist in the face of challenge and to continue to want to learn, both within and outside the school. They feel they are potential agents in their world. Those with a fixed mindset are likely to feel and act helplessly, a key element in some mental health problems and in being able to participate as a citizen. Importantly, Dweck also argues that learners can develop these mindsets and teachers can encourage students to persist and to think about learning in a certain way.

How are these mindsets developed? They are shaped through learning, from the earliest years.. ‘Children as young as those in preschool already had elaborated notions about their goodness and badness, including whether or not these were stable traits’ (Dweck, 1999:143). Key processes are feedback and the attitudes of adults when interacting with children and young people. As Bandura (1999) reminded us, self efficacy is interactional, dynamic and importantly for education, mutable. Their beliefs about self efficacy play an important part in young people’s motivation in their present and in their futures. They also deeply affect the presence or absence of feelings of self-worth and mastery. Kamis and Dweck (1999) explored the role of praise and criticism. They found that praise or criticism that was person-focussed, rather than process-focused could create vulnerability, in that it tended to develop a fixed ability focus. Well-intentioned efforts to praise children, in order to develop ‘positive self esteem’, may instead be creating problems for the future and more damaging than supportive.

We can see from these key studies that agency or self efficacy is certainly a central feature of education; this understanding necessitates a look at the dynamics of learning. What are we teaching young people in and through the structures and processes of education? The importance of school as a site for learning about self, ability and agency is emphasised in these research studies. They illuminate the need to understand that this learning is relational, interactional, starts young and sometimes appears to be paradoxical. For example, Dweck (1999) has shown how praising pupils and building complex systems to boost self-esteem is actually reinforcing a fixed mindset. It sets up a search for praise and reward reinforcing the idea that doing it right and getting rewarded is the way to make progress. An alternative may be to experiment and try different strategies, possibly working towards an ambiguous outcome.

The positioning of young people as agentic

If we are to develop agency and self efficacy it is necessary to reposition young people as actors in their social worlds – as ‘agentic’ people. Moran-Ellis and Sünker (2013) argue that throughout the 1990s sociological studies have repositioned children and young people, locating them as

social actors and opening up the possibility of understanding their actions as agentic¹ rather than as the signs of development and socialisation, or lack thereof. Moran-Ellis (2017) argues that children are actors and therefore there is a need to rethink the relationship between children, agency and schools. Schools are not passive in their contribution to the development of efficacy or agency and she underlines the interactional nature of agency development. There is a need to treat agency as embedded within interactional relations (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998:12)

...Children's social competence is a constantly negotiated dynamic, a phenomenon which is stabilised, to a greater or lesser degree, in and through the interactions between human actors and the material and cultural resources which are available, and which can be recruited to play a part in the constitution of specific, situated activities.
(Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998:15)

Clarifying this, they argue that competence is not an inherent characteristic of children in general or a child in particular, rather it '...has more to do with children's ability to manage their social surroundings, to engage in meaningful social action within given interactional contexts' (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998:16). Moran-Ellis (2018) uses the term 'social competence' to encompass being culturally and socially skilled in interaction, and able to act with reference to the rules and precepts of social interaction. She argues that there are some key pieces of research which show how children have much greater levels of social competence than adults normally acknowledge, but whether this can be viewed as being agentic, or not, depends on the particular constellation of competency skills, social and physical resources available to the child, as well as the structural power relations in which their interactions are embedded at any one particular time and in any one particular arena. 'Hence, children may be able to exercise agency in one setting but not in another and may be able to draw on certain resources to support their agentic efforts at one time but not at another' (Moran Ellis 2013:12).

Children's agency is therefore about how the adults position them, perceive them and provide spaces within which they can operate. Moran-Ellis argues that scope and scale are two key concepts that need to be examined as constituent part of the context. How much scope is there for children to be agentic in schools and on what scale? What scale is significant, allowing children and young people to act as serious contributors to their lives? Agency entails the trust of adults and *their* mindsets, in terms of how they perceive children as agentic or not. Adults have power over the nature and degree of the participatory spaces.

The systems we have set up to assess and make schools accountable have dangers associated with them, in particular, the danger that we treat children and young people as objects providing

¹ Agentic can be defined as - Social cognition theory perspective in which people are producers as well as products of social systems.

- Milgram's theory about the agentic state which is the psychological state the obedient subject is in when he or she is obeying authority. (Wiktionary) is this footnote really necessary?

outcomes, rather than as persons interacting in spaces where issues of power and participation are crucial. York and Kirschner (2015) show too how student positioning by adults shapes opportunities for students to develop collective systemic agency, as well as the more individual agency already discussed.

The sociological work described reinforces the need to think about developing agency or self efficacy in young people and in particular their power to act and in which arenas of school life. How we perceive and position young people in schools in relation to agency becomes a professional responsibility. Do we provide young people, and indeed, young children, with arenas for participation? Do we review and evaluate the scale and scope of their participation? Power and interaction are key in the development of the learner and the citizen.

Obstacles to developing agency and self efficacy

This section explores the implications for schools and for policy makers of the previous debates.

One of the key drivers of practice at national and international level is the OECD PISA (Programme for Student Assessment) tables which rank countries in terms of their educational outputs. In 2002 Finland was at the top of this table: Pasi Sahlberg (2012a) has written extensively about the unpredicted consequences of this ranking process. He has argued that, since the 1980s, a dominant, global model of education has emerged, which he has labelled the GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement. He argues that there are five dominant characteristics of this movement: (Sahlberg, 2015):

1. Standardisation of education

Since the 1980s, education has become much more outcomes focused, with an accompanying belief that setting standards will ‘necessarily improve the quality of expected outcomes. Enforcement of external testing and evaluation systems to assess how well these standards have been attained emerged from standards-oriented educational policies’ (ibid). This has involved frequent testing, target setting and test-based accountability.

2. Focus on core subjects

Numeracy and literacy have become the prime indices of educational reforms.

3. The search for low-risk ways to reach learning

This search ‘minimises experimentation, reduces the use of alternative pedagogical approaches and limits risk-taking in schools and classrooms’ (ibid)

4. Use of corporate models of management

The key point here is that educational policies and ideas are driven by outcomes that are narrowly focused and more suitable for business than humans.

5. Test based accountability models

The effect of these models is that ‘the success or failure of schools and teachers is often determined by standardised tests and external teacher evaluations’.

(Sahlberg, 2012b)

These trends constitute a paradigm of education that, as Sahlberg says, is largely based on transferring business models to schools and relying on cognitive outcomes as the sole measure of good education. If agency is crucial to the development of healthy and engaged citizens, then it is paradoxical that educational policy movements seem to be going in the opposite direction. They emphasise testing, outcomes and performance, all the things that Dweck has shown are likely to develop a sense of contingent self-worth and a performance or fixed mindset. The measurement of worth is external, based on the normal distribution of ability, a concept challenged deeply by Dweck and many others. These trends render both teachers and students vulnerable. Signs of this vulnerability can be seen in the poor teacher retention rates in the UK. 'Almost a quarter of the teachers who have qualified since 2011 have already left the profession, according to official figures that have prompted further concerns about the pressures on the profession' (The Guardian, 2017). In the conclusion to this paper, I propose a different paradigm, of which there are copious examples in action, in many quarters of the world. It does not polarise learning and wellbeing, or high attainment and the social dimensions of education; rather it integrates them in a rich and meaningful way.

A way forward - an educational model of agency development

The goals of education

If we were to take the development of agency seriously, it would involve integrating it as an aim into all aspects of education in a coherent way. Coherence is important because children learn from everything they experience; the key aspects of their experience in terms of mental health and wellbeing are their sense of agency, flourishing and self efficacy. I have endeavoured to show that our view of the purposes and outcomes of schooling today are in themselves making a contribution to the problems of wellbeing. Just as in economics there is now anxiety about the lack of contribution to the public good, and concerns about equality, so it is with education. The purpose of education is to enhance wellbeing – it is a central purpose and we have forgotten this in our adoption of neo-liberal aims for education. Schools can play a major part in creating agency and in framing young people as agentic. The development of agency is in turn a major contributor to wellbeing and to a positive life course. We are using some methods of accountability, teaching, learning and assessment which are not contributing to young people's development of agency or self efficacy. They may well be doing the opposite. Every part of our education system needs to recognise the importance of agency, its complexity and how its development is threaded through all the everyday processes of school.

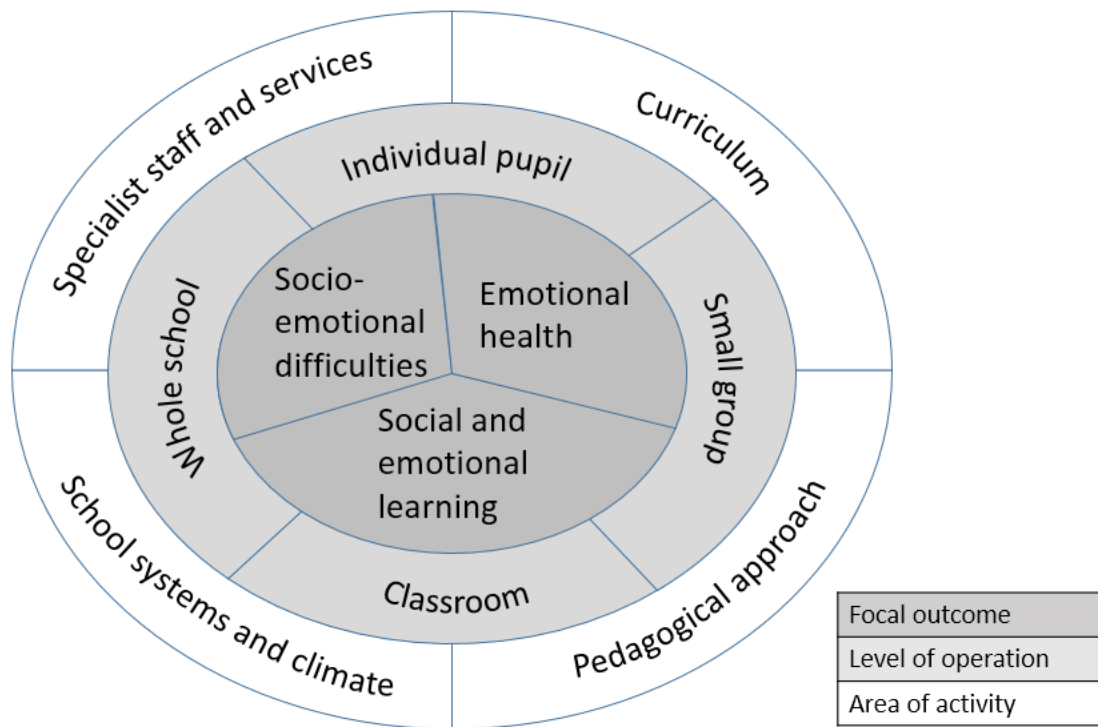
The first implication is for our current conceptions and articulations of the goals of education, and the accountability mechanisms that drive the practices of pupils, parents and teachers. The goals would be framed – or re-framed – to emphasise the development and valuing of agency and self efficacy in schools. This would require a conscious reflection on the following:

- Building a community in which all can participate, in which there is scope for young people and adults to act as agents in their own spheres. This would entail some autonomy and engagement in decision making.
- Emphasising the creation of a community in which all can flourish cognitively, socially and emotionally, through challenge, learning and relationships
- Systematically reflecting on what and how young people are learning about themselves, including their beliefs about self, learning and efficacy.
- Acknowledging that agency is learned in interaction, so engaging seriously with relationships
- Aiming for coherence between these elements, and aligning them with measures of value, worth and accountability.

Arenas of action

In a recent review of research for the Welsh Government of the factors that promote emotional health, wellbeing and resilience in primary schools (Banerjee et al, 2016), we showed that the available evidence supported the model shown below (figure 2). We proposed the accompanying conceptual framework to capture three dimensions of school-based approaches to promoting well-being. In synthesising the research evidence, we represented our understanding ‘within a three-dimensional wheel with the focal outcome on the innermost disc, the level of operation on a second, concentric disc, and the area of activity on the third outermost disc. As shown in the figure below, ‘the central disc draws attention to the way in which various programmes have been directed not only to the prevention and/or reduction of socio-emotional *problems* (such as emotional difficulties, aggression and bullying), but also to developing underlying social and emotional skills, and to the broader goal of proactively fostering emotional health. Work towards these focal outcomes can take place through an array of activities (e.g. dedicated curriculum lessons, work on school systems and climate) occurring at several different levels of operation (e.g. universal work for the whole school, targeted intervention for an individual pupil). (Banarjee et al, 2016:15). The picture of practice is often that these areas are unconnected resulting in a fragmented approach, which does not look across the whole piece nor does it look at the potential tensions, conflicting aims and messages and how these can be bridged.

This model can be applied to the arenas or areas of action for the development of agency. Developing agency would inform activity in all these areas of activity. In the classroom we would scrutinise our processes of teaching, learning and assessment to examine what young people are learning about themselves and agency from the messages to them from adults and peers. How are the pedagogical processes being used contributing to mindsets? Are we giving young people scope to act in the life of the classroom and the school in significant ways?



The key aspects of agency to focus upon would be:

- The quality and nature of relationships and interactions between teachers and pupils, pupils and pupils and the school and parents or carers
- The processes of learning and assessment and their impact upon agency
- The processes of decision making and participation
- The degree of autonomy and that teachers and pupils have. (Priestley and Biesta, 2016)

The model in figure 2 can be used as a tool for reflection and planning.

Examples of these concepts in action

In conclusion, I present some examples from practice to illustrate the real-world development and lived experience of these ideas. The first comes from the renowned provision for young children, from birth to six, in the town of Reggio Emilia, in Italy. In the years since the end of World War Two, this small, remarkable community has developed, and extensively documented, a range of educational practices in the early years that are rooted in the intimate relationship between the children, the teachers, the schools and their community. The philosophy of practice is based upon a notion of democratic participation (see Fielding and Moss, 2011, for a fuller account). The child is seen as a citizen from birth: ‘rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and to other children’ (Malaguzzi 1993, p.10 in Fielding and Moss, 2011). These relationships are seen as central to their growth and development; accordingly, the teachers and other educators have developed a ‘pedagogy of relationships and listening’. This concept, the ‘pedagogy of relationships’ is useful in thinking about the interactive

nature of developing views of agency, and beliefs about learning. Assessment of children's learning is undertaken through pedagogical documentation. These observations by the experienced educators are the basis of their regular, systematic and shared reflections on the quality of children's understanding, and their growth as a community of learners. It is a form of rigorous research, and imaginative enquiry. Fielding and Moss (2011:9) quote Howard Gardner, writing after a visit to Reggio ... 'most important is the capacious and inspiring conception of children - as active, engaged, exploring young spirits, capable of remaining with questions and themes for many weeks, able to express themselves in many languages [disciplines].' The Reggio approach encapsulates the integration of the relational, the social and the cognitive that is the dynamic base for the development of agency.

The second example, on a smaller scale, is an interaction I observed between a teacher and a pupil in a classroom which encapsulated for me the importance of the teacher's mindset and consciousness of agency when she is engaging with pupils. This teacher had established a 'study buddy' system in her classroom, where pupils were paired and if one was away the 'buddy' would collect materials and update the other on their return. This was clearly a good classroom management strategy but it was more than that. I watched one pupil approach the teacher and say that he had been away from school and his study buddy had not performed the agreed tasks. The teacher paused and said, 'I am sorry to hear that, that is difficult. What are you going to do about it? How can I help you in what you plan to do?' This struck me as an agency oriented response but not one that I have seen used very often. The teacher was clearly consciously aiming to build the child's capacity to solve problems and interact.

These are the micro and macro processes and approaches that will help young people tackle the challenges they face in their future. The debates around mental health have shown that we have to help young people face challenge and ambiguity equipped with the belief that they can be effective agents in their world. This belief can be learned through the complex web of school processes - feedback and interaction from adults, peers and community members including family. We have to help young people reflect on what they are learning about themselves and their beliefs but we have to take the pedagogy of relationships in school as seriously as we do the cognitive curriculum. That would enable us to create a community in which young people are supported, listened to, have rewarding and fulfilling relationships, belong, participate, are challenged to achieve and make the most of their opportunities - in other words to flourish socially, individually and cognitively.

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