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Social-emotional Skills Development, the Design of a Project in a Danish School

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Abstract: This study is inspired by the theoretical framework of socio-emotional education. This is concerned with the process through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand, manage emotions, establish, and maintain positive relationships. This study deals with a practical educational experience developed in a school in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark. The participants were teachers and children, aged 9/10 years old, from a school located in the district of Nørrebro, selected based on the necessity to develop social and emotional skills such as self-awareness and self-management. The approach of the research is qualitative, through the development of a participant observation process and an immersion in the field where the researcher has an active role and participants are conscious to be observed. The investigation shows a plan of activities to practice emotional skills and a chronogram to understand the implementation of the project. This is supplemented by an analysis of human and material resources. The present study responds to the need to spread the implementation of a socio-emotional education project in the northern European context. It marks a significant step for the diffusion of socio-emotional education in an inclusive system careful to the mental health of everyone involved.

Keywords: *Social and emotional education; Nordic education system; self-awareness; self-management; teacher training.*

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Introduction

The present study is the result of an observational experience conducted during the months of May, June, August, and September 2022, in a school in the center of Copenhagen. The purpose of the observation was to learn about the methodologies and strategies that develop social-emotional education processes in children aged 6-11. The choice of the school 'Nørrebro Park Skole' was driven by the implementation in the school's curriculum of a compulsory task called Klassen Tid: a dedicated time when pupils and teachers talk in an intimate and confidential environment. Although there are no specific social-emotional education programmes, these activities help the development of social-emotional skills. The Danish public school Folkeskolen, as expressed in LBK no. 1396 of 28/09/2020, is based on the idea of well-being. The Ministry of Education promotes the value of the development of the child because they believe the promotion of academic skills cannot exist without the well-being of the student.

In June 2013 the government (Danish Ministry of Education, 2013) set three national goals:

- reaching students to their full potential.
- reducing the importance of social background in educational outcomes.
- improving student welfare through respect for knowledge and professional practice(Nusche et al., 2016).

Although there are these specific references to care for children's social and emotional profiles, there are no mandatory programmes for the development of social and emotional competencies (Fundacion Botin, 2015). The Centre for Disease, Control and Prevention report (National Centre for Health Statistics and Health, 2012) makes us reflect on the increase in mental health problems referring to children from 3 to 12 years old and adolescents between 12-17 years old. 21st-century society requires a focus on the development of various competencies for effective teaching.

Problem statement

After the observation and conducting interviews with teachers, the following needsare highlighted:

- Verbal bullying (use of inappropriate terms).
- Lack of emotional management and control.
- Lack of integration of some pupils in the group, as they are seen as disruptiveelements.

- Lack of self-esteem.

Ruiz-Aranda et al. (2008) state that it is necessary for interventions on emotional education to be carried out systematically and with a programme of proven effectiveness. Before the implementation, it is important to consider the needs, the theoretical model and the support of the whole education community, families, students, and teachers.

Research question

During Klassen Tid, activities usually take place by the circle time's methodology. Specifically, the teacher invites the pupils to express their feelings, and emotions about life in the classroom and their relationships with others. But what happens if a pupil has problems recognizing these emotions? Identifying, labelling and talking about emotions are competencies that need to be learned.

Purpose of the study

These questions justify the need for the design of a project to develop social-emotional competencies. Bisquerra and Pérez (2007) understand that emotional competencies are a set of knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand, express and regulate emotional phenomena appropriately. Evidence from previous research strongly supports the benefits of social and emotional education on social, emotional and academic outcomes (Zins et al., 2004). The definition formulated by Pérez-González (2008, p. 527) is accepted, inspired by Bisquerra (2000) who defines emotional or socioemotional education as:

"The educational process planned and developed through programmes, with a non-specific primary prevention character aimed at both developing EI and socioemotional competencies in the short, medium and long term, and to enhance the integral development of the person, with the ultimate aim of increasing personaland social well-being".

Therefore, the following project follows the contribution of the frameworks proposed by Bisquerra (2000, 2003) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2006). After a brief description of the characteristics of the educational system in Denmark, there follows a detailed analysis of the phases that make up the project plan.

The analysis is characterized by a presentation of the methodologies and resources implemented. It follows the time plan during which the activities are expected to be developed. This is accompanied by a description

of the single activities with a definition of objectives, time, space, and methodologies used.

Characteristics of Danish education

In Denmark, the public school system consists of primary and lower secondary schools. There are usually classes with a maximum of 30 children of the same age, and they stay in the same class from preschool to year 9 (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014). The Danish public school aims to provide school-age children with knowledge and skills that prepare them for further education and training, and to promote the all-around development of the school child (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014). In Danish schools, one hour a week is dedicated to Klassens Tid, an empathy lesson for students aged 6-16. It is a fundamental part of the Danish curriculum and is a time during which pupils discuss their problems and try to find a solution based on really listening and understanding (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). If there are no problems to discuss, the children simply spend the time together relaxing and enjoyingthe hygge style. This classroom time reinforces character education. After an observation phase with observation tools validated by a committee of experts in emotional education, it emerges that teachers in Norrebro Park Skole practice active strategies based on group work, decision making and active problem-solving (Cascales-Martínez & Lalomia, 2021). The teaching style is oriented towards respect for freedom under responsibility. Children participate in everyday life and are motivated to take the initiative, with an attitude of openness and curiosity (NPS, 2021). The organization of activities is based on the needs and wishes of the child, where creativity, free play and workshops are common. The basic concept is to offer the child a safe environment, where he/she is the protagonist, knowing routines, agreements, and rules. The key word is care, for their physical, mental, emotional, and social needs and the development of self-esteem. The activities promoted should challenge the children socially, motorically, creatively and intellectually. In summary, activities are organized in such a way that children are free and independent. They are free to choose which books to read or which activities to do. They have the freedom to be children. And it is the freedom that stimulates creativity and a good emotional state in the child.

How reflects Sánchez et al., (2016) in designing educational programs there are many common factors such as the aims, objectives, approaches, the skills they aim to develop, the contents they cover and

the methods to employ. This will be followed by a detailed description of the steps that led to the designof the implementation plan.

Objectives of the activities' plan

The activities were designed considering the following aims:

- To develop emotional awareness and control of emotions.
- To recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and their influence on behaviour.
- To develop a sense of confidence and optimism.
- Regulating one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations.
- Managing stress and controlling impulses.

Contents of the project

Self-awareness and emotional regulation skills are possible through education and training. As Bisquerra (2012) states, the fact that it is possible to have an emotional education and that there are different proposals, doesn't mean that it is easy. It is known that emotional competencies are the most difficult to acquire. Considering the specific aspects of this project, the activities are meant to develop emotional awareness, which is what allows us to sustain and label emotions, paying attention to the emotional signals of facial expression, body movement and tone of voice (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Bisquerra (2012) considers emotional awareness as the ability to know our emotions and those of others, through the observation of our behaviour, recognizing the intensity of emotions, and evaluating causes and consequences using emotional language expressed verbally and non-verbally. According to the CASEL (2013) definition, working with emotional awareness presupposes assessing strengths and weaknesses, and developing forms of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and positive thinking. Following the samples offered by Character Strong (2022), when referring to these competencies the following aspects are to be considered: Recognition of emotions-identifying and labelling feelings; Identification of one's positive qualities and weaknesses; Confidence and self-efficacy; Self-determination; Hope and optimism. The area of controlling emotions allows us to manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, manage stress, start positive conversations, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles (Chowdhury, 2021). In addition, it focuses on the ability to set goals and monitor progress persisting in the face of difficulties and overcoming

adversity. Allows to develop critical thinking skills that enable them to solve problems effectively and make conscious decisions. Express positive and negative emotions appropriately in a wide range of situations and demonstrate mindfulness and focused awareness. All of these will make students actively participate in social and academic tasks through their strengths being able to use self-management and problem-solving skills in academic learning. More specifically, this content area considers emotional regulation; the practice of feeling gratitude; the development of mindfulness and focused awareness; goal setting, problem-solving and decision-making; resilience to overcome difficulties; critical and creative thinking; self-motivation.

Research methods

This research has focused on the design's implementation of a social and emotionaleducation program.

Participants

The people involved are the class teacher who proposed to implement the program, designed by the researcher. In addition, the reference person for Special Educational Needs is present to support, evaluate and disseminate the tested activities. It is foreseen that the head teacher will be involved in the observation of certain moments of the program and subsequentlyin its dissemination. The students involved are the children aged 9-10 years old who committed themselves to getting involved by accepting the teacher's suggestions and becoming support for others. For each activity, the pupils will have to draw cards representing a clear result of the project developed in class.

Procedures

The project was developed during the school year 2021/2022 and involved 22 sessions of 3 hours per month. It is planned that an average of 3 activities per month will be carried out considering the achievement of the planned objectives and expected results. These activities constitute a toolbox that teachers can review and change depending on the specific demands and needs of the group. Specifically, it was planned to train the teacher involved in the development of the program for a maximum of 5 hours per month. An online space was used, through the application Padlet, to share the activities carried out with practical explanations, videos, and useful links for understanding them. Padlet is an educational-oriented online platform which

works as an empty page where it is possible to put whatever is needed. The training activity was supported by an explanation of social and emotional contents through sharing texts and theories proposed by experts in social and emotional education.

Teaching's strategy

Emotional education programs should employ active and participatory teaching-learning techniques. For example, cooperative learning can help to meet the needs of students' diverse learning styles. Specific techniques could be guided reading, guided discussion, brainstorming, dramatization, film forum, disco forum, artistic expression, or case studies. The aim is to foster strategies and skills that are functional and generalizable to everyday life. The framework of an emotional education program presupposes the facilitation of real situations. Therefore, these emotional education programs must offer practical opportunities. As CASEL (2013) explains, it is essential to create an organic system through morning meetings, implementation of peace centers, and daily checks. Forthe competence related to emotional control, the mindfulness technique was used, which iseffective in reducing the negative effects of stress by increasing awareness of thoughts. Depending on how the teacher regulates his or her own emotions, he or she will help the pupil to manage his or her own. Some techniques are breathing, physical activity, visualization, and internal dialogue (Bisquerra, 2020). In addition, another strategy is to teach through games which are a fun and interactive way to practice pupils' social and emotional skills, such as self-management and relating to others.

Findings

It is necessary to develop the project with a broad vision, supporting the curricular work by building a true socio-emotional school community. For this reason, the organization ofthe environment is relevant to permit the implementation of the activities as appears in table 1.

Table 1. Plan of the activities

SESSION	OBJECTIVE	COMPETENCE	DURATION ANDSPACE	METHODOLOGY
The emotional barometer	Analise problematic situations Be aware of own emotions	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Extra classroom	Circle time and case study
Act and reflect, I play the role of …	Analise conflicts situations Know one's own emotions and those of others,through observation of one's own behavior.	Self-awareness and emotional management	30 minutes Extra classroom	Role playing and circle time
The golden square	Develop social-emotional management strategies Practice mindfulness	Emotional management	30 minutes Inside the classroom	Mindfulness techniques
The magic tree	Develop social-emotional management strategies Practice mindfulness	Emotional management	30 minutes Park school	Mindfulness techniques
Anger in a drawing	Identify and depict anger through drawing	Self-awareness	30 minutes Inside the classroom	Large group discussion Individual work
Sadness in a drawing	Identify and depict sadness through drawing	Self-awareness	30 minutes Inside the classroom	Large group discussion Individual work
The corner of kindness	Express positive emotions Manage emotional states	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Extra classroom	Circle time and individualreflection

The tree of gratitude	Express positive emotions. Manage emotional states.	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Brainstorming and individualwork
I feel joyful	Develop creativity. Recognize moods. Express emotions.	Self-awareness	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Group work
The worry boxes	Identify fear Develop emotional management strategies	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Large group discussion andpair work
The mood meter	Recognize moods Develop an emotional vocabulary	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Small group work and largegroup discussion
The emotional brain	Understand emotions in the brain Use emotional language	Self-awareness	30 minutes Inside the classroom	Videos and on-line games
I'm wrong and that'sOK	Recognize moods Use emotional language	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Plays
	Communicate emotional states			
Strengths and weaknesses	Use self-management and resilience skills Recognize strengths and weaknesses	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Group work
My positive mindset	Communicate emotional states Regulate	Self-awareness	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Peer work and problem solving

	emotions Identify positive behaviors Develop a spirit of optimism			
Goal setting: planningan event	Implement problem solving strategies Identify objectives	Self-awareness and emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Problem solving and groupwork
I need help	Identify moods Communicate one's emotions Search for a solution Develop socio-emotional management strategies Regulate emotions Develop socio-emotional management strategies	Self-awareness and emotional management	30 minutes Inside and outside the classroom	Individual and group work
I practice the self-talking	Regulate emotions Identify moods	Self-awareness and emotional management	30 minutes Inside the classroom	Individual work Group work
I'm the buddy of	Develop responsible behaviors Develop socio-emotional management strategies Implement creative strategies	Emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom and in the whole education system	Work with the whole classroom
The development ofthe creativity	Regulate emotions	Social awareness and emotional management	Inside the classroom and outside 45 minutes	Group work and individualreflection

Days of hugs	Develop kindness behaviors Experience mindfulness techniques	Emotional management	20 minutes Inside the classroom	Group work
Practicing the resilience	Recognize in painting, dance and other forms of expression a technique of relaxation. Reflect on one's own strengths	Emotional management	45 minutes Inside the classroom	Multiple intelligences technique

Source: Author's own conception
Note: own elaboration. The duration of all the activities can be varied. This table only offers suggested timing because many factors should be considered: how the students are feeling if there are some conflicts or special needs inside the classroom

The classroom environment was settled with specific corners to motivate the development of actions related to social-emotional competencies. It is provided to use specific walls (feelings wall, calm and affection corner, mood meter). Objects and school games that help the development of competencies (board games, posters) were needed. The school administration provided the necessary material (paper, laminator, paints and other materials) to carry out the activities, both in their preparatory phase and in their practical realization. The table below describes the timetable for collocating each practice in a specific month.

Table 1. The timetable

October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
The emotional barometer I act and reflect "Iplay the role of ..." The golden square	The magic trees The anger in a drawing The sadness in a drawing	The corner of affection The tree of gratitude	The mood meter The worry boxes I feel joyful	Hugs days I'm wrong and that's OK	The emotional brain I'm the buddy of … Goal setting: planning an event	Strengths and weaknesses My positive mindset I need help	Practicing the resilience I practice the self-talking	The development of the creativity

Note: own elaboration

Discussion

Recognizing the importance of social and emotional development to children's health, well-being and academic success should cheer the consciousness of administrators and educative staff to make SEL part of the learning standards of the educational system. The present study has proposed implementing a Social and Emotional Education framework to teach some emotional skills. At this point, it's required an SEL assessment to monitor the implementation of the project by collecting data. In their review of assessment tools in SEE, Frydenberg et al. (2017) stress that the choice of measure should depend on both the age group and the purpose of the assessment. Due to the suggestions of non-standardized performance-based assessment, it seems to be efficient to use tools for formative assessment. Teachers can use it during the process through the project-based learning strategy, the creation of a rubric and the application of self-assessment (Cefai et al., 2021). For this purpose, the website shared with the teacher will be considered a place where the project can be shared following every single step. The teacher fills in a weekly diary where they record their thoughts and feelings about what they are good at, analysing strengths and what needs to be developed further and where they need more help. A diary is a self-assessment tool in which teachers record their experiences every week. They can express themselves by writing down their thoughts and feelings, writing a story, drawing, or adding a picture/poster/photograph of their work. The teachers can also share their work with their peers in small groups to promote collaborative learning assessment. The evaluation of the proposal considers two parameters. On the one hand, the motivation provoked in the children, the degree of participation of the group and their immersion in the project are evaluated (Cejudo, 2015). For this purpose, a specific corner is set up to collect the children's responses to each activity, together with the teacher's reflections. On the other hand, the impact of the project on the pupils is considered. It is possible to assess students' progress through interviews or questionnaires. At the end of the activities, the teacher can also assign specific tasks related to the learning objective. The methodology will consider the research and meta-analyses reported in the CASEL guide (2013). The data collection instruments are as follows: teacher observations with reflective field diary, pupils' oral and narrative testimonies, materials produced by the students, and a final questionnaire. All the activities were chosen according to the curricular areas and subjects requested by the activities plan of the school. At the end of the project, the following results were achieved:

- Drawings made by the children.
- Web space to share the project with an application for direct use by the pupils.
- Publication of papers on the school website and local education magazine.
- Videos of the practices were carried out with interviews of the children and educational staff involved.

After a comparison of different programs made by Calleja et al., (2016), it is shown that although all the programs have diverse structures in the number of hours, activities, and sessions, all of them emphasize the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of participants. In fact, despite having chosen to develop specific content referring to intrapersonal skills, it came naturally to also work on the skills that allow people to build a relationship with others and share their opinions and emotions. The choice to work on promoting emotional awareness and emotional control was a consequence of an observation process and a subsequent reflection with the class teacher. In the design of the activity plan, several theoretical references were considered with the aim of choosing the best activities adapted to the context. The main challenge is the implementation of the design. The support of the whole educational community of experts and leaders is a priority.

Collaboration with experts and teachers from the context itself would have been appropriate because the choice of strategies and methodologies to be adopted cannot be separated from the context. The evaluation aspect is complex, both in deciding on the method of data collection and analysis and in the actual implementation. However, the design of the project has been thought of with an idea of flexibility, this is justified for the relevance of the topic. Emotional processes need effort and proper skills, so the educational activities to be delivered should be varied and open depending on the needs of the students.

Conclusions

The present study raises several new questions for future inquiry and contemporary issues to be considered inside the school. Children should be able to recognize and name simple emotions such as sadness, anger, and joy. At school, for example, they spend most of their time playing with others. But do they have the tools to manage this time properly? How do children express themselves? And if they express the emotional state they feel, do they also know how to control themselves? Although families indeed play a fundamental role in children's development, it is essential not to forget that

children spend a good part of the day at school and that is where the crux of the matter lies. On many occasions, teachers could have great difficulty in managing the temperament of some pupils who show difficulties in managing and controlling unpleasant emotions. What are unpleasant emotions? They are those that challenge us that provoke feelings that are difficult to manage and that become landmines in the classroom. Some of these manifestations hide other problems which may require psychological support and/or counselling, but many of them are just manifestations that can be prevented with good social and emotional education. This reflection supported the meaningful aspect of the project. This research is limited to a single school in a Nordic country. Indeed, the necessity of developing social and emotional skills emerged from one reality, with the awareness that the Danish context is broad and offers different points of view. For this reason, it would be advisable to obtain data by carrying out this analysis with the participation of several schools and, consequently, several teachers and school staff involved. During the elaboration of the project, it was considered whether the design met the identified needs together with the coherence of the project. It has been reflected in the strategies that will help to meet the planned aims. Future perspectives could be extremely interesting. As the project was described, it presents the opportunity to spread the whole plan and the results through different communication tools. It was planned, at the end of the program and considering the results obtained, to collaborate with a publishing house to have the support of an illustrator who, following the cards drawn up by the pupils, will have to define the content of the drawings without modifying the original idea. The idea to create a web page to guarantee the open access of the content to the students involved and all the staff of the school is currently being considered. This is to raise awareness of the benefits of treating social and emotional content together with the other subjects. The interest in how to implement social and emotional learning in the classroom has grown so much that the need arose to visit different schools in Denmark. This need is motivated by the fact that we want to have as broad a view as possible of the Danish system. It is essential to develop a more precise analysis and to be able to bring this form of innovation that makes the Nordic education system so effective to other places. We, therefore, believe it is extremely important that the design of emotional projects carried out in different schools be researched, evaluated, and published to provide informed knowledge about the results that can help to implement systematic interventions in terms of the development of emotional skills. Finally, it is planned to create an audio-visual text to be

distributed to teachers to raise their awareness of the subject, as well as face-to-face workshops to sharethe practices and results of the project.

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