An International Research Network to Connect Social Emotional Learning and Career Development

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Abstract

More than in the past teachers and educators are requested to cope with the many challenges that came from a technological and globalized world. Resilient educators able to meet their students' needs and prepare them to be ready to successfully enter the future world of work require educators highly equipped. Accordingly, the framework to which CASEL has given substance in more than twenty years of research to the promotion of a series of skills that allow the development of resources and strengths as well as to prevent counterproductive behavior and unsatisfactory results appears to be crucial. With this in mind, an international research network (IRN) was launched in 2018 to examine first, the educator perspective on the nature and value of social emotional learning, and secondly, to outline an educator SEL self-efficacy measure. Researchers from 20 countries, among which China, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, Singapore, and United States collected data with a research protocol that included three open questions. They met for the first time at the university of Padova, Italy, on July 2019 to discuss the first preliminary results. Using NVivo, a coding booklet was, in fact, developed for analyzing answers provided by participants. The experience of this international collaboration will be presented and cross-cultural reflections on these results will be discussed. Some insights will be also provided on the second phase that aims to establish a new, cross-cultural SEL measure and help educators access to research-based positive development resources.

Keywords: *Socioemotional learning; career development.*

1. Introduction

The technological and globalized world that characterize our time have a profound impact also on education. More than in the past teachers and educators are requested to cope with the many challenges that came from a technological and globalized world. Studies on megatrends about the future of work and societies depict very complex scenarios. Ten challenges are reported for example in the 'Long-Term Megatrends 2020' [1] report published by the Italian Institute for the Future: Internet decoupling with more than one DNS root zone; The gap between the urban world and the provincial (or rural) one; A renewed interest in psychedelic research for patients with depression and many other neurological diseases; The escalating space arms race and the development of hypersonic arms; The intergenerational conflict; Toward a new green deal; Quantum supremacy to solve a problem that classical computers practically cannot; The growing importance of Artic; An increasing escalation of far-right terrorism; The pet boom. As in many report like this the pandemic was not included.
Possible future scenarios are constantly characterized by the uncertainty that a specific combination of events, some of them not predictable, completely change present and future choices. Globalization and social media play a crucial role as sounding board of many events and situations, making difficult understanding their importance, anticipating consequences, decision making and future planning. The covid-19 situation we are experiencing is an example of the high complexity of our world where a very unexpected event changed the lifestyle of many countries and impacted many sectors of the society, from the single to the groups to the nations.
Actually the importance of taking care of the future is recommended also by many international organizations that, as the UN, remarks the need to devote more effort to environmental, economic and social sustainability. Education of quality for all and dignified work are some of the sustainability goals that teachers and educators are called to pursue with their job in order to increase the opportunity of a better personal and working life for their students and their communities. Positive outcomes could be in fact seen as something that transcends the here and now of the school walls to pour into people's contexts of life for the present and the future. It is evident that teachers and educators play a significant role as concern both content related activities as well as an articulated set of life skills and competences that include the social and emotional ones. Accordingly, taking into consideration how teachers perceived their social and emotional competences as group of professionals engaged in

youth development emerge as crucial. Research in fact shows that Social and emotional learning (SEL) is relevant also for the teachers' experience at work and this is related to teachers stress and job satisfaction [2] as well as to class management and children success [3].

With all this in mind, this project aims to study how teachers and educators value these competences and the relation they perceive with the future school and career development of their students.

1.2 The CASEL model

With the aim of focusing on positive youth development we found in the work done by the the United States by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) one useful model for anchoring our project. The systemic social and emotional learning model (SEL) is defined as the process through which children and adults effectively acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, to establish and achieve goals, to try and show empathy for others, to establish and maintain relationships positive, and to take decisions responsibly [4].

As it can be seen from the wheel with which it is represented, this framework has its core right in the center of the model with the individual social emotional development and the five core competencies: self-awareness, that is knowing personal strengths and limitations; self-management, that is effectively managing negative emotions, and setting and achieving goals; social awareness, that is understanding and empathizing others' feelings and perspectives; social management, that is using positive interactional and cooperative skills; and decision making, that is making valuable and effective choices about personal behavior and social interaction. All of this is very much grounded in the settings where kids and adults spend their time. Obviously classrooms and schools but also partnerships with families and communities are taken into account. Accordingly, research and practice efforts are devoted to thinking about how to optimize conditions for social and emotional development in all of those settings and elaborate solutions and working path. Its relevance is testified by more than 20 years of research that show its many positive outcomes for students as concern school success and performance, mental health and adaptive behaviors, positive developmental support [5], [6].

2. The project

The World Educational Research Association International Research Network (SEL IRN) was started on May 2018 thanks to the initiative of Lea Ferrari (Italy) and V. Scott Solberg (United States), and the project coordinator Chong Park (United States). It is being conducted as part of a larger cross-cultural research program referred to as *Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Professional Development for Educators and Effective Teaching* and is formally recognized by the World Education Research Association as an International Research Network *(2019-2022).* Research teams from 15 countries are exploring educator perspectives on the nature and value of SEL and its connection to school and career development of their students.

2.1 The measure

The group of career development researchers, collectively designed a qualitative survey questionnaire that aims to examine educators' perceptions on the nature and value of SEL in their teaching. The open-ended survey were organized around CASEL's five core competencies of social emotional learning and three questions that were the focus of the common understanding. Each country team worked with high level of autonomy, created additional questions as needed for their cultural, socio-political contexts and provided additional resources at the end of survey.

2.2. The procedure

As a IRN we worked through the zoom platform and from September 2018 to February 2019, we had more than 13 virtual meetings plus more than 15 one-on-one meetings. We had our first in-person meeting in Padova, Italy on June 2019. Fifteen countries have successfully completed the first phase of the project, collecting survey data from educators and analyzing the data using a modified grounded theory and NVivo. The group will continue to analyze and compare the data across countries in order to create a SEL measure and professional development strategies as expected in the phase 2 and 3.

2.3 Participants

Each country team involved, based on its network and possibilities educators who work in schools and are in charge to provide some kind of career education or related activities. Most of the countries involved teachers. The sample size of the 15 countries varied from 18 to 95.

2.4 The codebook development

For most of the countries the thematic analyses were run initially paper and pencil. Nvivo program was also introduced as analytic tool useful to create a coding system for each country and proceed to the comparison across countries. Each country code consists in a list of the code, the definitions produced by the research team for each code, and the best example selected among the answers provided by the educators. The number of codes/themes ranged from 7 to 131.

2.5 Some preliminary results

In using NVivo the cluster analysis solution was chosen because it allow to process words similarities. This cluster analysis in fact compares the level of association between educator responses to generate higher level codes.

As concern the comparison across countries, the analysis of correlations show that the coding system they developed is highly related. US are highly correlated with Turkey, China, Japan, Romania, Greece. South Africa, Italy and Guatemala emerged as less correlated.

As concern the content, the 5 SEL competences resulted in most of the codes.

Nvivo analyses and group discussions allowed to identify some common codes/ themes as well as some themes that are unique to a particular country. As concern the specific codes that were produced, "Empathy" and "communication" are two examples of SEL skills that emerged as important in most countries. The unique themes are better understood referring the social and political contexts of each country. "Verbalization" emerged from Japanese data could be understand in the cultural importance attributed to reflection or thinking more than acting and in the importance for teachers to teach students to express their feelings with words. In South Africa, it is critical for educators to consider a culture of violence and children at disadvantaged backgrounds. Themes, such as "forgiveness," "free expression," "loss," and "restorative justice," revealed the unique societal situation that South African educators are facing. In US a unique code is represented by 'technological communication' and underscore the challenges for an advanced IT country.

3. Lesson learned

Involving educators in data collection was hard in many countries especially when SEL is not known. To respect the team group timeline is crucial for the progress of an international project that is not founding. The huge amount of data take time to be understood. The connection between SEL and CD is possible and more simple to understand if we involve educators. We are now working on cross cultural understanding of empathy as well as on a new measure development.

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