



## VALUES AND BELIEFS IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT.

Social and emotional education, in comparison with other types of education, obviously operates with values and beliefs transposed through competences in schools programs. The present study makes a brief overview of the beliefs identified from systematic observations in a program of social and emotional education developed in Romania.

**Keywords:** social and emotional education, beliefs, CASEL, social and emotional education standards and competences, axiology of education

### BACKGROUNDS IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

Social and emotional education represents a new problem emerged in the sciences of education field, that is increasingly becoming a complementary component of academic learning and a revolution of teaching process, through the complexity and the benefits it generates. Of course this type of education has been not created in a void of educational thinking and practice, from a pure coincidence or from the spontaneity of the exploratory educational experiments, but from the challenges of macro-social changes, from the inadequate coping skills of children and from families and communities ebulliences. Although it's been a while since it was proclaimed the need for counterbalancing the knowledge acquisition in favor of the logical and axiological structures such as skills and attitudes, yet this approach is fragmentary, rather identifiable within the aims of education and less directly related to the explicit educational contents. This is due to the complexity and generalization being operated in the sphere of values which allows a much less analytical intercession, subordinated in measurable and observable behaviors. On the other hand, attaching an exhaustive importance to academic education, the learning of efficient ways of life management shall be considered as a natural aspect that the students will learn anyway, under the premise that all adults handle difficult situations without having received special education in this respect.

Social and emotional learning, particularly as it is known in the U.S., is found in educational theory and practice in the international context with the same name or using other terms or variations such as: personal and social development, social and emotional aspects of learning, emotional intelligence, emotional learning, social and emotional competence, social and emotional education, emotional literacy, mental health and well being, social, emotional and behavioral skills, life skills. After International Academy of Education and International Bureau of Education (UNESCO) social and emotional learning “is a way of teaching and organizing classrooms and schools that help children learn a set of skills needed to manage life tasks successfully, such as learning, forming relationships, communicating effectively, being sensitive to others’ needs and getting along with others.” (Elias, 2003: 7). In the chapter one from *Children Needs III* about social and emotional learning Joseph Zins and Maurice Elias define the concept as follows: “In simple terms, social and emotional learning (SEL) is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, competencies that clearly are essential for all students. Thus, SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions.” (Zins, Elias, 2006:1)

In American perspective social and emotional education involves the development of five groups of skills summarized by CASEL as follows:

- “*Self-awareness*—accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence



- *Self-management*—regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately
- *Social awareness*—being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources
- *Relationship skills*—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed
- *Responsible decision-making*—making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community” (CASEL, Skills and Competencies, Web)

From the British perspective there are five social and emotional aspects of learning correlative with those from U.S., which represent the ultimate aims of educational programs: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Training of social and emotional skills through formal and non formal educational programs includes a number of obvious benefits summarized by Professor Katherine Weare and Gay Gray of the University of Southampton in the study published in 2003 “*What works in developing children’s emotional and social competence and wellbeing?*”: greater educational and work success, improvements in behavior, increased inclusion, improved learning, greater social cohesion, improvements to mental health. (Weare, Gray, 2003: 34-36). In December 2008, the Organization CASEL ends a stage of its complex multi-year study led by John Payton, Roger P. Weissberg and Joseph A. Durlak, with the report “*The Positive Impact of SEL for Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students: Findings from Three Scientific Reviews*” . This report summarizes the results of three large-scale synthesis of research on the impact of social and emotional learning programs on students in primary and secondary education. Thus, students who followed the social and emotional education programs have shown improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes towards self, school and others, social behavior, academic performance, and reducing conduct problems and emotional stress. Moreover, SEL interventions were effective, both in school and after-school structures, for students with and without problems, from different environments and at all stages of schooling. The results were preserved in the follow-up and were effective when carried out by school staff so they can be incorporated into routine educational practice. (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, 2008: 5-6)

### **THE MERGING OF GOALS AND VALUES IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS**

Social and emotional education, as it is today defined and recognized as a pedagogical concept, just need to respond to synthetic and generalized social and emotional skills and abilities, which just by their nature, they cannot be approached with the left hemisphere of the brain, but treated as a whole, although in a structured teaching. Not aleatory social and emotional education is seen as a reference framework that can encompass the various initiatives, perspectives, current preventive programs in the national curriculum and at the same time aims to teach students social and emotional skills, to improve school climate and involve parents and community as a whole. This type of education focuses not only on training children for capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with



others, but also on ensuring a safe and affective learning environment with contribution of all school staff. If it is the materialization of socio-emotional learning through classroom programs in formal curriculum of national education system, more than any other matter, we need to appeal to values to identify the meaning of life and personal development of each stage of schooling in the form of a spiral. These identifiable values at an objective level should be reported at the real life experiences, at the reality as it is perceived by each child. The process of awareness and adherence to a value system is an undertaking durable intercession involving the redefinition at different age stages and becomes more effective if started at an early age. The school, mainly through the instruments of social and emotional education, promotes values as tolerance, mutual respect, celebrating diversity, uniqueness, responsibility in taking decisions, team spirit and cooperation, empathy, resilience, emotional self-control and active citizenship. In the context of programs aimed at socio-emotional development of children is fundamental ability to operate with general values of humanity translating them to those of the community which the child belongs to, to the establishment of a personal axiological referential governed by a high degree of autonomy.

Moral education (or character education as it is known in the U.S. education system), the fundamental component of the harmonious development of the child, although it has a complex theory including axiological aspects, clear goals and methods of effective action, dilutes through the diffusion of responsibility of the obtained results among various educational factors: the entire teaching staff, the implied school culture, the major contribution of parental education, and socialization processes carried out in the community. Moral education remains poor at taking shape of expected results by easily identifiable and measurable objectives, at the content adaptation, at the use of appropriate methods of training and at allocation of sufficient space in the curriculum. There are also approaches as philosophy for children that appeal to axiological principles through the metaphors, sapiential tales, texts with dilemmas, but lacking of an experiential component. Social and emotional education seeks to combine weaknesses of both approaches in forming skills by appealing to values theory, to the wisdom of life situations and to operational tools used in everyday context. Touch aspects of the culture dialogues, of the statuses and different human origins, of the diversity and the privacy respect. From another perspective, social and emotional education in the school has undertaken the role to create value, even if they are applicable in a small community or at least to resemnificate, to rearrange them in a particular constellation of the children's values system. At the same time, social and emotional education is a major contributor to validation of the values of children by juxtaposing internal criteria, subjective to external ones at the social macro and micro level. Thus, the children's personality becomes consonant through the unification in a systemic way of individual needs with ethical and religious precepts, or with social functioning.

In Anglo-Saxon countries where it was researched thoroughly and effectively implemented the social and emotional education programs, the values guiding the five relevant issues which, although named differently, have significant overlaps. Thus in the U.S., social and emotional learning (concept used with the same respect for social and emotional education) contributes to the formation of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, making responsible decisions and relationship skills. On the other hand, the program Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning applied widely in British schools is about self-awareness, managing emotions, motivation, empathy and social skills following the model proposed by Goleman. It is obvious that in developing and perfecting these capabilities is necessary the recourse to the values instances placed on various levels of the axis absolutization-relativization or universal-particular. Moreover, each of these high values are re-lived and updated in social and emotional learning experiences conducted in the classroom or in the entire educational environment, gaining consistency and subjective load.



The general values of social and emotional education should be detected from the advanced purposes of the programs, at least nationally and from the expected results, the social and emotional skills and abilities. The aims of social and emotional education include in their very essence structured values about human nature, social relationships, moral choices, wellbeing, contributing greatly to the formation of the student as a man and active citizen. Approaching in a holistic way personal and interpersonal aspects of child development, social and emotional education allows a return to the spiritual roots of the human being which underlie at every aspect of our existence.

An important example of the materialization of values through educational programs is the experience of U.S. State of Illinois that, after a consistent and systematic implementation, proposed social and emotional learning standards in a form known up to this time as a reference marker.

*Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.*

- Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals

*Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.*

- Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

*Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.*

- Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions
- Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.
- Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

(CASEL, Standards and Policies, Web)

Whether they follow American or British model, social and emotional skills can be divided into two categories according to Gardner model: interpersonal (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, motivation) and interpersonal (social awareness, relationship skills, empathy). For example, the English SEAL Program (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), based on Goleman's classification, translate each of the five components in statements like "I can, I know, I feel, I mean I do, I respect, I admit" covering each of the issues properly. Self-awareness is reflected in self-knowledge and understanding of own feelings; emotional state management in the expression of feelings and reactions and strategies appropriate to the negative psychological states; the motivation in the approach to setting goals and planning their performance through persistence and resilience, continuous review and revision; empathy is primarily aimed at understanding the feelings of others, and valuing and supporting them; social skills are manifested through belonging to a community, friendship and other relationships, teamwork, conflict resolution, assertiveness and making wise choices. (DfES, 2005: 40-43)

Katherine Weare of the University of Southampton has developed an axiological based taxonomy, on the one hand for emotional competences, and the other for social competences. In view of Weare, emotional skills include the presence of self-esteem, an accurate and positive self-concept, autonomy, experiencing a full range of emotions, expression and control of



emotions, increasing emotional intensity and frequency and resilience. In the range of social skills, taxonomy aims attachment to others, empathy, sensitivity, effective communication and relationship management. (Weare, 2003: 77-80)

In addition to the aims of social and emotional education that are based axiologically, we can find values and principles in the missions that various organizations or national educational systems assert for public audience. From this point of view, even small organizations, such as a school or class can present their declarations of intention to adhere to values and possibly post them clearly to inform beneficiaries and contributors. In this sense, can be a code of conduct called “The Golden Rules”, eventually achieved by contribution of children and which has to be respected by them, but also by other participants in the educational process.

In Romania an educational policy document was published in 2008, which gives a major importance to social and emotional development called “Early Education Curriculum for 0-7 years”. From our point of view, it seems to be the most advanced educational policy documents in the social and emotional education field, probably because it is among the most recently published and is based on the latest scientifically validated research in psychology and developmental pedagogy. Thus, as the new education law states among the values underlying the curriculum, are harmonious child development and inclusion, and among the principles and requirements should be holistic approach, including socio-emotional development, celebrate diversity, focusing the educational approaches on the needs of families. One of the fundamental objectives laid down in this curriculum is “to discover the each child’s identity, autonomy and development of a positive self-image” (MECT, 2008: 6), clearly aimed at components of social and emotional education. The curriculum is divided into areas of development, of which we are particularly interested in the B (social - emotional) and the E (skills and attitudes to learning). The document states that social development aimed at the child’s social life debut, the ability to establish and maintain interaction with adults and children, and these interactions mediate how children perceive themselves and their world. Emotional development focuses on children’s ability to perceive and express emotions, understand and respond to emotions of others, to develop self-esteem, crucial to this area. In close correlation with self-esteem develops the child’s self-image, which decisively influences the learning process. (MECT, 2008: 8)

### **IDENTIFIED BELIEFS IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Next we make a brief overview of the principles and beliefs that operate social and emotional education programs which we currently develop in Romania after a British model. Beliefs listed were collected from practical-experiential activities conducted with children aged between 6-12 years, by observation method by three independent observers. Without claiming to be exhaustive or effectively categorized according to various criteria of social or spiritual life, especially because research is still ongoing and not primarily intended to investigate the present values and beliefs in social and emotional education programs, we enumerate them as they were collected from activities, because they can be examples of good practice and premises for future studies in the axiology of education.

- Emotions must be expressed because they produce individual catharsis, awake empathy and allow disclosure of their own perspectives on a state of facts or circumstances.
- Emotional control lies in our power and mental states we create, so we can manage.
- Strong emotional states affect how we think and act.
- There are emotional self-control techniques that can be learned and successfully applied in everyday life
- Reality can be understood, judged, assessed using subjective settings, thus changing the thinking and action frames, we change our mental states, even if the objective reality remains the same.



- There are new beginnings in every moment of our existence, so we can begin to change at any time and any aspect of life.
- Opportunities should be turned to account whenever it occurs, since they are learning experiences.
- The tough times are lessons to learn, if we don't figure it out the meaning and we don't learn anything, they will be repeated until we acquire the key experience.
- Each of us has a life story structured of the past-present-future axis and certain themes that obviously appear; sometimes if we change the theme and enrich the story, we can produce positive affective states.
- We inter-exist, rather than exist, we are part of the communities in which we exercise different roles that should be consistent, complementary and consonant.
- The feeling of belonging creates roots that allow increased flexibility in relationships and different social contexts.
- We are different and essentially similar, and diversity is an opportunity that should be celebrated for providing rich and attractive learning experiences.
- In the social relationship there are several partners, with rights and responsibilities, who can initiate and respond to rapport.
- Effective communication is based on active listening, mutual respect and includes non-verbal emotional issues.
- Well-being is a mental health component, so in any personal and social circumstances should be manifested fully.
- Assault, harassment, bullying is a component of dominance relationships between individuals, it occurs in a social context that meet an aggressor, a victim, but also a group of people who do not react at all or interfere poorly in the conflict solving.
- Goals govern our existence, they are in hierarchical and interdependent structures in terms of content and time period covered; involves a planning process, persevering in tasks and celebrating the achievement. It must be so flexible that it can be adjusted according to the existential circumstances.
- The team is more than sum of its parts, it is beneficial to each member, as the success is more easily achieved if the rules are respected or negotiated when they become ineffective.
- I feel good in my skin, I know the strengths and weaknesses, I relate to others as a complex human being, willing to learn, consonant and congruent.
- I am free to create, to enjoy my creation as a mean of personal achievement.
- Every moment of my life may represent a new beginning; it depends on me to accept the change and to apply it to everyday situations.
- Solving team tasks involves at first discussions about the organization, negotiating rules and roles and then move to action.
- Any situation can be improved by redefinition, by appealing to the personal resources still underutilized, by adaptive rapporting to other individuals.

### CONCLUSIONS

This sum of beliefs based on personal and social life values represents the contents of social and emotional education programs and must be highlighted, discussed, analyzed as parts of the aimed competencies. Without a meta-analysis and a thoroughgoing study to the specific social and emotional learning activities these are only axiological landmarks that are not consistent in each student's personal structure. Therefore we consider useful to continue to identify these values and beliefs in the social and emotional education and more than that linking these principles with decision-making and behavioral acts, and with effective solutions to the challenges of everyday life. Approaching of deeply human issues and coordination of social relations is an enterprise to be held in the school under the supervision of teachers in specific



periods of time bestowed for social and emotional skills and generally by all means provided by a safe and healthy school environment.

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