LJMU Research Online

Wood, P

Promoting and marginalising young children's social and emotional experiences through SEL

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/7792/

Article

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

Promoting and marginalising young children's social and emotional experiences through SEL

Dr Peter Wood

School of Education

Liverpool John Moores University

UK

7777 words

Corresponding author and address:

Dr. Peter Wood, Senior Lecturer

School of Education

Liverpool John Moores University, IM Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, Liverpool, L17 6BD

UK

p.j.wood@ljmu.ac.uk

Promoting and marginalising young children's social and emotional experiences through SEL

Abstract

This paper raises questions about social and emotional learning (SEL) as a facilitator of all children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. Drawing on qualitative data, in the form of group and individual interviews with a range of primary school and early years staff members across four case studies, the findings indicate that children's social and emotional behaviours linked to social class, gender and ethnicity were targeted through SEL, revealing a propensity for staff to endorse a normative model of experiences for young children. By clarifying some of the concerns around such monist approaches to SEL, I make the case for an agonistic model (Mouffe, 2005), that not only embraces difference and contestation, but uses them as a focus for learning.

Introduction

In this paper I illustrate how social and emotional learning (SEL) schemes have the capacity to impose a normative model of social and emotional experiences within schools. This article draws on data from a large study that focussed on the way SEL was being utilised across British primary schools, by their staff members. Here, I pay attention to one aspect of the findings, demonstrating how such schemes, in their operationalisation, may endorse and/or marginalise young children's social and emotional experiences. To do so, the paper makes use of qualitative data, in the form of the accounts of various staff members who worked with SEL across a range of primary schools. The article focusses on the interplay between staff members' existing perceptions of young children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, and their developing understanding of the SEL schemes within their schools. In contributing to the field, I identify social and emotional experiences linked to social class, gender and ethnicity that were targeted through the staff members' use of SEL and, in doing so, illustrate how the emotions, social behaviours and cultural norms that are experienced by young children, were consistently 'othered' (Paechter, 1998) in schools.

As a way of contextualising the findings, and in the section that follows, I provide an overview of recent educational policy and changes in the early years and primary school sectors in Britain, that have focussed on the development of children's social and emotional skills. Then, I provide details of the empirical study, the research process and methodologies employed, the staff member sample, and the analysis of data. Next, I present the research findings, that contribute explicitly to our understandings of SEL utilisation to 'other' the social and emotional experiences of children and aspects of their identity relating to: i) social class ii) gender iii) ethnicity. After considering

some of the consequences of using such schemes in this way, and clarifying particular concerns around a propensity for monist approaches to SEL and social and emotional development, I conclude by making the case for an alternative, agonistic model (Mouffe, 2005), where variance in the emotions, social behaviours and cultural norms that are experienced by young children should be viewed less as a point of contention and more as a focus for learning.

Educational policy and young children's social and emotional wellbeing in Britain

Public debate and opinion pertaining to the social and emotional experiences of children in Britain has intensified since the turn of the millennium. A range of 'dramatic events' (Hayden, 2010) involving young children, such as the abduction and murder of Jamie Bulger by two ten-year-old boys in 1992, and incidents of child neglect and cruelty, as in the case of Victoria Climbie in 2000, influenced the formation of an alternative approach to schooling, and although interest in children's wellbeing is 'nothing new' there is now 'far more attention being paid to social and emotional matters, in education' (Weare 2007, p. 239). In 2003, the 'Every Child Matters: Green Paper' identified the need to improve the emotional well-being of children in Britain, creating widespread consultation regarding the services provided, particularly within the education system. A year later, section 10 of the Children's Act (2004), utilised the term 'well-being' to define five outcomes, namely: to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution, and to achieve economic well-being. Stemming from the act was the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (2004) document which concentrated on improving the well-being of children in a number of institutions, including schools.

In essence, this document signalled a change in direction for policy makers as it recognised the important role that schools could and should play in meeting the social and emotional well-being needs of British children. Emphasis on this role gathered momentum following the publication of a report commissioned by UNICEF (2007) where, in comparison to those in 20 other 'wealthy' countries, children in Britain disliked school the most and had the highest rates of emotional ill health. This 'state of neglect' (Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson 2007) highlighted the need for the major improvements suggested in 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (2004) and so, in December 2007, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in Britain published 'A big picture of the curriculum', which identified the five outcomes of the 'Every Child Matters' as a main priority of early years and primary education.

Regarding the early years specifically, in 2008, a statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) maintained that young children must be supported in experiences that allow them to develop their social skills, disposition to learn, self-respect, and sense of self, with an emphasis on providers to ensure 'support for children's emotional well-being' (DCSF, 2008, p.12). Whilst explicit within many of the themes and commitments of the EYFS (2008), following a Government commissioned review of the framework in 2010, captured by Tickell (2011), children's personal, social and emotional development is now emphasised as 'crucial' (DfE, 2017, p. 7) and a 'prime' area of learning and development in subsequent revisions of the framework (see DfE, 2012; 2014; 2017). Over a similar period, Ofsted's common inspection frameworks have consistently identified social and emotional wellbeing as a priority for maintained schools and academies in Britain (see OFSTED 2009; 2012; 2014; 2016). To achieve this, across both sectors,

various schemes and educational initiatives have been utilised, and in the next section I present information relating to one of these.

Social and emotional learning

'Social and emotional learning' (SEL) schemes aim to develop social, emotional and behavioural skills, and intra and inter personal intelligence (Gardner 1983), and according to Weare (2007), help children to establish and maintain relationships with others, as they intend to facilitate their ability in understanding and responding to their own emotions and those of others. Two of the most recent examples of SEL in Britain is the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative, and its early years counterpart, Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD). With the fundamental aim of improving children's social and emotional skills (DfES, 2005), SEAL focusses on developing children's self-awareness, emotional control, empathy, motivation and social skills, and so makes use of Goleman's (1995) notion of emotional intelligence as a guiding concept, to structures its delivery over three waves of intervention. The scheme takes the form of whole-school development work, where social and emotional skills are not only promoted but explicitly taught across the curriculum in classroom based SEAL lessons. This, as well as other whole-school events including assemblies and playground activities form the 'first wave' of SEAL, which has the fundamental objective of developing a whole-school ethos where social, emotional and behavioural development is prioritised, (Humphrey, Kalambouka, Bolton, Lendrum, Wigelsworth, Lennie and Farrell, 2008). Children may also be supported in a second wave, via small group work sessions, whilst for those who the previous two waves have not been successful, one-to-one intervention, known as 'wave three', is also an option.

Evaluations of the scheme have been offered by a host of authors, where more detailed overviews of the initiative can be found (see Hallam, Rhamie and Shaw 2006; Humphrey et al. 2008; Banerjee 2010), but, in the main, the consensus seems to reveal favourable outcomes, including improvements in pupils' social and emotional skills (Humphrey et al. 2008), anger management strategies (Hallam, 2009) and higher attainment (Banerjee, 2010). Continuing the optimism afforded to the scheme, Weare (2007) maintained that SEAL and SEAD contribute 'directly to the realisation of the 'Every Child Matters agenda' (p. 241), which has encouraged past governments to advocate their use in early years and school settings as a way of promoting 'emotional health' (see DCSF 2010) amongst young children. Although there is research to the contrary, that casts doubt over the effectiveness of the schemes as a means of improving the 'core…targetted' social and emotional skills of children (Humphrey et al, 2008, p. 90), more vehement opposition may be found in the views of those who challenge the legitimacy of SEL as an educational tool per se. Complementing Craig's (2007) criticism of SEAL as an 'experiment' that, in the long term, may impede wellbeing, Ecclestone and Hayes' (2009, p.383) work, on what they term 'therapeutic education', posits that SEL, in its portrayal of 'people as needing more and more emotional support', creates a degree of 'anxiousness' amongst young children that hinders social and emotional development in the long term.

Whilst the varied opinions explored in the research introduced above are useful in an evaluative sense, they do little to detail the varied and complex nature of SEL schemes (Mistry, Burton and Brundrett, 2004), nor do they demonstrate the variance in the way they may be being delivered, not only between staff, but schools in general. As there is a distinct tendency for researchers to use summative assessments to evaluate the impact of SEL, insight into how schools interpret and

negotiate such schemes is required. Indeed, there have been calls for work to comprehend how 'social and emotional dimensions of school functioning...links to the schools' approaches to implementation' (Banerjee, 2010, p. 9), whilst others have expressed a need for research focussing on the extent to which schools vary in the 'fidelity' of following the official guidance associated with SEL (Humphrey, Lendrum and Wigelsworth, 2010). Consequently, concerns have been raised that the discourses of emotions inherent in SEL are susceptible to exploitation (Burman, 2009), as it has been claimed such schemes can be utilised for identity construction (Hartley, 2003) and the imposition of 'appropriate' feelings and behaviours (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008) in schools. In this article I contribute to these on-going debates by sharing the views of a range of primary school staff members who worked with SEL in their daily practice. In uncovering how they interpreted the scheme and then put it to use in their schools, an unanticipated finding related to the prevalence of staff to engage with SEL as a vehicle to marginalise and/or promote certain values, norms, behaviours and emotions linked to social class, gender and ethnicity, and experienced by children. The research process from which this finding was made is detailed next.

The research study

The data from which this article draws its focus was derived from a large study that explored the interpretation and use of the SEAL initiative, amongst a range of staff members, in primary schools in a town in Northern England. Drawing on Hargreaves' (1995) typology of school culture and popular notions of 'whole-school approaches' (Weare 2000; 2004; 2007; Banerjee 2010), this study focussed specifically on the main motivations for using SEAL in primary schools; how the scheme was being interpreted and utilised; and the influences of any variance in motivation, interpretation and use. All primary schools implementing the SEAL initiative in the town were

approached to take part in a three phased, mixed-methods empirical investigation. Phase one, a 29-item questionnaire that employed a combination of both Likert-scale and open-ended forms of response, was completed by 402 staff members across 38 primary schools, whilst phases two (10 focus group interviews with 44 staff members) and three (24 semi-structured interviews with primary school staff) were conducted in four schools, selected in order to achieve a maximum variation (Henry 1990) of case studies. Consequently, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and utilised in the main study. The quantitative element of the study, carried out in phase one, was employed to access the views of a broad range of staff members and to determine any similarities/differences between groups in their appraisal of SEAL across a wide number of schools, whilst qualitative data, retrieved in phases two and three respectively, were used to develop understanding and to uncover meaning (Plano-Clark and Badiee 2010) so that the topics of interpretation and utilisation could be explored in depth, (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Each phase of the empirical investigation drew from differing research frameworks, both with distinct ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Pring 2000). The dilemma I faced when mixing methods lied with the status attributed to each research paradigm (Plano-Clark and Badiee 2010), as leaning to a quantitative focussed study suggested a more positivist approach to ontology, where an objective, external reality is deemed to be identifiable (Guba and Lincoln 1994); whilst favouring a more qualitative investigation associated the research with interpretivism and the acceptance of a multi-faceted vision of reality (Bryman 2001).

With the main study's focus on motivation, interpretation, perception and use in mind, more status was attributed to the qualitative experiences of staff and, as such, the data presented in this paper are drawn from phases two and three only. Interviews, both group and individual, were recorded

and transcribed, and Atlas.ti software was utilised to help organise this data. Employing an iterative approach to analysis (see Denzin 1970), each qualitative phase aimed to add depth to the findings made during the previous phase/s and by employing a mixture of top-down deductive and bottom-up inductive processes (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2010), this approach allowed the data analysis to be both exploratory and confirmatory. Although data analysis was guided by the main study's aims and, as a consequence, produced a range of thematic findings both within and between the cases, the focus of this article stems from just one of these aims, which focussed on the interpretation and practice of the scheme across schools. As such, the analysis presented in the remainder of the article is representative of just one of the main study's emerging analytical themes and, by utilising quotations that have been extracted from the focus group and individual interviews with the various staff members, is descriptive in its portrayal of SEAL practice across the four case study schools. The research followed all ethical procedures outlined by the British Educational Research Association (2011). Other main ethical concerns, that surrounded the discussion of controversial topics, largely emerged within the qualitative phases, and became particularly problematic during the phase two, focus groups, where occasionally participants spoke openly and freely about the practices of their colleagues, at times, in derogatory ways. Acting on Kitzinger and Farquhar's (1999) advice of steering 'sensitive dialogue' to 'safer territory', as focus group facilitator, and through a combination of fortune and coercion, I managed to guide the group discussion to more amicable ground and on completion of each group interview I reminded participants of their own ethical obligations, and specifically regarding informed consent which guaranteed that 'what was discussed in the focus group should stay within the confines of the group'. In keeping with the ethical stance employed in the main study, and to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout

this article, the names of the staff members utilised in the next section, where I report the findings, are allocated pseudonyms.

Providing alternatives, endorsing norms or marginalising experiences?

Before detailing how SEAL was interpreted, it is necessary to explore the staff members' motivations for using the scheme. During all three phases of study, but most prominently across the two qualitative phases, staff members readily identified their personal rationale for utilising SEAL, with three distinct views being offered: the scheme provides children with alternative approaches in their management of social and emotional behaviours; the scheme acts as a means to promote certain norms; the scheme may be used as a vehicle to marginalise experiences. In order to contextualise the main findings that follow, each of these viewpoints will now be explored briefly in this initial section of the findings.

A significant proportion of staff felt that the main purpose of the scheme was behavioural, as it taught children a variety of social and emotional responses to some of the more difficult situations they may experience throughout childhood. For Ella, an assistant head teacher, SEAL allowed pupils to contextualise and adapt their behaviours by identifying the "*different paths that children can go down*" when faced with testing emotional experiences. Others, such as head teacher, Stanley, echoed the sentiments offered above by maintaining the scheme develops children "*to the point where he or she can make the right choices and the right decisions in the right moment, at the right situation*". This popular rationale for SEAL, with its emphasis on developing alternative behaviours for children, is captured well in the extract below:

Sophie (Inclusion): *A child might find themselves in different situations and in different roles in their life when they go out into the big world and at least they've got an understanding, through SEAL, of what's going on in different societies and in different communities, and they might be able to respond differently and know what's socially acceptable.*

The social and cultural contexts that affect children's behaviours have been widely examined over the years (see Williams 1966; Willis 1977; Hall 1992), and it is clear that environmental milieu inherently influences the meanings that children give to their own, and others', social and emotional experiences (Saarni 2007). Whilst identified by some as a tool that may allow children to adapt behaviours in varying contexts, for others, the scheme was viewed more as a vehicle to endorse the "*British way of life*" (Samantha – Teaching Assistant: TA) as it was perceived to teach children how to behave in the line with "*the rules*" (Lilian – TA) "*in this country*" (Alice – Head teacher). In identifying education as a means of cultural maintenance (Schensul, 1985), SEAL, as an aspect of curriculum, was widely recognised by staff as a form of values education in its endorsement of cultural norms in Britain, as is shown:

Daisy (Inclusion): *We've got a lot of things to learn from (other) communities, however I do think that a lot of the problems come because there isn't integration here….I'm afraid I'm very much against a multi-cultural society… I think we've got our culture in this country and we need to move forward with that, and this is where SEAL is useful.*

The likely consequences of such monist (see Gilborn 1995; Skinner and McCollum 2000) realisations of SEL will be discussed later, but Daisy's views hint at the potential for the scheme to marginalise the experiences of groups of school children in Britain, particularly those who don't occupy a place in her vision of "*our culture*". Although staff members also urged schools to "*understand and acknowledge diversity*" (Bob – Learning Mentor) and to "*respect individual…and cultural differences*" (Bethany – Assistant head), the interpretation and practice of the scheme demonstrated how such concerns were not always heeded, and in the next section I examine three areas of children's social and emotional experiences, relating to social class, gender and ethnicity, that were marginalised and 'othered' (Paechter, 1998) by the utilisation of SEAL in schools.

'Othering' young children's social and emotional experiences: The influence of social class, gender and ethnicity

Social Class   In their discussions of SEAL interpretation and practice, a range of staff members, across the four case study primary schools, identified social class as an important variable. Head teachers such as Abigail, teachers like Jane, as well as members of support and welfare staff including Lilian and Charlotte, saw the scheme as a means to resist some of the social and emotional experiences deemed common to children, that are recognised at home and in the surrounding community. A theme for staff related to a belief that young children from "*low socio-economic backgrounds were less capable of controlling emotions effectively*" (Jess - TA) and presented issues with "*social skills and motivation*" (Molly – Welfare). Consequently, staff such as Amber, a TA, maintained that SEAL would be *"more commonly used where there's children*

who need it more….in deprived areas". Staff were relatively consistent in their views that children who live in areas of socio-economic deprivation require more support in the management of social and emotional experiences, which in turn positioned SEAL as a scheme that would be most effective in schools that drew pupils from such areas. In the next extract, Summer, a teacher, shares her thoughts on this matter:

> **Summer (Teacher):** *I've used SEAL here and I've used it in my previous school, and I see in my previous school it being more relevant and needed there. I think a lot of the children need more guidance there in the emotional side of things, dealing with anger and dealing with some of the issues that SEAL brings up, and I think some children don't necessarily have that there because of the poor area.*

Notions of compensatory education are inherent in Summer's views and capture a popular belief amongst the staff member sample that identified the scheme as a remedy for cultural deprivation. Such views of education are by no means novel or unfamiliar (see Bloom, Davis and Hess 1965; Bernstein, 1970) but they do consolidate research findings that indicate a propensity for compensatory education in schools located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, (see Schneiders, Drukker, Van der Ende, Verhulst, Van Os, and Nicolson 2003), where the social and emotional behaviours of its pupils are widely targeted (see Beland 2007; Amatea and West-Olatunji; 2008). Whilst, at face value, this alignment of SEAL and compensatory education presents few problems, staff members did share concerns that the scheme was being used to de-legitimise social and emotional behaviours that many children found common within their

surrounding area, such as *"acting tough"* (Charlotte – TA) and *"being aggressive"* (Amber – Welfare). As an advocate for peaceful conflict resolution through restorative justice processes, SEAL explicitly opposes aggressive conflict resolution strategies (see, DCSF 2005). For some staff, this endorsement marginalised social and emotional experiences that were acknowledged as important in the low socio-economic areas that surrounded some schools, which in turn 'othered' behaviours prioritised by some children at home and amongst their peer groups. Regarding this matter specifically, Rebeka states that:

> **Rebeka (Learning mentor):** *SEAL is a lovely, lovely idea but when children have been brought up around here (in an area of social deprivation),…the big bad world is not necessarily as kind as SEAL. SEAL is a lovely way of saying, 'right I'm angry now, so we'll talk about it and I'll apologise', but the world doesn't act like that….especially not around here. In the area where we are, they would just get smacked. If they hit a child, often the other child would just hit them back; it's built inside them, it's like their mechanism.*

By de-authorising the knowledge, experiences and behaviours of these groups of children, the scheme demonstrated the potential for 'working-class ideals....being forced into the background of educated life' (Evans 2006, p. 11), in its positioning of other class experiences as the standard of class-based normativity (Bourdieu 1984; Connell, 1994; Reay 2008). The consequences of utilising SEL in this way will be discussed later in the paper but prior to doing so I explore the role of gender and its influence on children's social and emotional experiences.

Gender   For staff, gendered expectations also influenced the propensity for some of the aggressive, '*tough*' behaviours discussed above. Indeed, staff members' views of children's social and emotional experiences were highly gendered in the data gathered. Chief amongst these gendered views was the belief that "*boys are more aggressive than girls...in anything that they do*" (Amber – Welfare), with an overwhelming majority of staff members, within the qualitative phases of the study, maintaining that boys display more visible, violent behaviours in comparison to girls, as is exemplified in the extract below:

Abigail (Head teacher):   *Boys (show)...extremely aggressive behaviour that is not acceptable in the classroom....like refusing to do work, throwing furniture around, fighting, swearing, and that is predominantly boys...Girls sulk and be bitches...but you can cope with that in a classroom, you can cope with squabbling girls.*

Although the sample identified a variety of variables, such as the media and friendship groups, as influencing and reinforcing these expectations, most felt that the children's parents were the main facilitators of the aggressive behaviours witnessed amongst boys. Staff members consistently argued that some "*fathers encourage violent acts*" (Bethany – Assistant head) by offering advice such as "*if you get hit, hit back*" (Stanley – Head teacher), with others suggesting they "*like their sons to be aggressive,...so in a conflict situation they would expect their sons to kick or hit or be violent*" (Alice – Head teacher). As these aggressive social and emotional experiences were associated with a lack of emotional control that "*raised the most disruption in the classroom*" (Sophie – Inclusion co-ordinator), jeopardising the teachers' ability to teach, staff members across

the case study schools felt that boys were often targeted through additional SEAL support, as is argued below:

> **Joanna (Teacher):** *I think boys…resolve any problem with a fight, whereas girls wouldn't fight, they just bitch,…and I would say a fight has more profile than the girls bickering. If the girls fell out all year, that is when, after a long period of time, they would go into a SEAL group. But if a boy had three fights in a week they would be in a SEAL group.*

This finding, that the social and emotional learning of boys was prioritised in schools, opposes the views of researchers such as Palmer (2009) and Bloom (2009) who maintain that the needs of boys are being ignored. In line with Charlton, Mills, Martino and Beckett's (2007) notion of the 'sacrificial girls', the social and emotional learning needs of girls were largely overlooked across the case study schools. It should be said that there was an acknowledgement, amongst the sample, that girls also display 'inappropriate' behaviour. However, as such behaviours were less visible and thus deemed of less importance (Helwag-Laursen, Carrico and Pegram 2004; Lebrun 2006) they were less likely to be targeted through SEAL. By giving emotional control, just one aspect of children's social and emotional experiences, prominence over others, the case study schools attempted to temper behaviours central in 'the making of men' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and in the reproduction of traditional, hegemonic notions of masculinity (Connell, 2000), but in doing so denied those with less salient social and emotional difficulties the opportunity to develop their skills through use of the scheme. Whilst this explicit example of 'the marginalisation of

girls'…where 'their performance is seen as peripheral to that of boys' (Francis and Skelton 2005, p. 104) is in keeping with notions of the 'boy turn' (Weaver-Hightower 2003) and 'recuperative masculinity politics' (Lingard and Douglas 1999), this prioritisation of boys' behaviours is further evidence of the utilisation of SEL as a vehicle to endorse a normative model of social and emotional experiences in schools. Next, in the final part of this section, I share data that demonstrates how the scheme has been interpreted and used to marginalise the experiences and realities of young children shaped by ethnicity.

Ethnicity   Gender and ethnicity were often conflated, by staff, as important influences of children's experiences. When discussing social and emotional behaviours valued in the home and in school, staff members across the case study schools identified 'confidence' and 'independence' as characteristics where differing attitudes between the two settings prevailed, with ethnicity and gender being central to these disparate beliefs. Many staff members, across the case study schools, such as Alice (Head teacher), Samantha (TA) and Jane (Teacher) spoke about Asian girls, and how the schools' advocation of confidence and independence as behavioural norms often differed to parental expectations of deference. Regarding this point, Jane offered the following view:

> **Jane (Teacher):**   *With them being Asian I know the background that they're coming from; young girls aren't encouraged to be confident, independent or forthcoming with their ideas in the home, yet they are in school.*

When discussing SEAL specifically, staff members spoke readily about the use of the scheme as a means of endorsing certain social behaviours. Indeed, within the SEAL curriculum, as part of 'Green set resource' for the 'Good to be me!' theme (DfES, 2005, p. 20), teachers are asked to 'explain to the children that there are four things' needed to be assertive: 'body language; eye contact; tone of voice; the words used', and further evidence can be found within the many resources (see, DfES, 2005) where such behaviours are taught and endorsed as central tenets of appropriate social behaviours. Yet, whilst these behaviours were encouraged through SEAL, they were deemed as inappropriate for children in some communities as, is shown below:

Bob (Learning mentor): *Asian children are taught to drop their gaze…it's just a sign of respect.*

•

Jane (Teacher): *You'll find that with Asian children, (they are taught to) 'lower (their) eyes.'…. if children get told off and look at their parent, that's disrespectful. You're supposed to lower your gaze....It's what they've been taught at home and in the mosque.*

As was the case with social and emotional behaviours influenced by social class and gender, the SEAL initiative operated across the case study schools to marginalise specific norms and experiences influenced by ethnicity. The calls to '*acknowledge diversity'* and '*respect cultural differences'* voiced by Bob and Bethany respectively were not always apparent in the data that captured the scheme's interpretation and practice in schools. In fact, on the contrary, elements of

cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) were explicit in the views offered, as can be seen in the extracts below:

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

•

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

Such views not only illustrate a 'fear of cultural disintegration' (Apple 2006, p. 17), but also amplify concerns that associate children's social, emotional, behavioural and moral development with negative constructions of the Muslim 'other' (Lander, 2016). By problematising such behaviours, staff members made use of existing, hegemonic cultural frameworks as a means to legitimise the 'othering' (Paechter, 1998) of experiences exhibited by some Asian children. In this respect, aspects of structural violence (Galtung, 1969), in its subtle targeting of behaviours that placed Asian children at a disadvantage in schools, and cultural racism (Crozier and Davies, 2008), in its rejection and marginalisation of their social and emotional norms, were also apparent in this interpretation and utilisation of SEAL. With cultural pollution (Apple, 2006) being voiced as a concern for some staff (see Daisy's extract above), SEAL, as a scheme, was identified as an aspect of the curricula well positioned to act as a 'prime area of attack' to maintain and 'restore hegemonic notions of culture' (Apple 2006, p. 39). Undoubtedly, the implications of interpreting and utilising

SEL in such ways are far reaching and it is to the consequences for children's social and emotional experiences that this paper now turns.

The implications of SEL to promote and marginalise children's experiences

In their denial and problematisation of children's social and emotional experiences, and in its promotion of culturally specific, 'appropriate' skills', staff and the SEAL scheme demonstrated a propensity for the prioritisation of cultural monism within SEL, (Gilborn 1995; Skinner and McCollum 2000). Foucauldian notions of 'normalisation' through 'disciplinary power' are apparent in this use of SEAL, as culturally set norms were standardised by staff, with those individuals considered to be deviating from such norms being targeted. SEAL, as a disciplinary tool, was interpreted and used to reform, fix and/or rehabilitate these children (Foucault, 1977). In this sense, the scheme became a mechanism of cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and, in its 'othering' of children's behaviour, the school became an institution of subjectification (Althusser, 1970; Biesta, 2015) that helped to regulate and confine their social and emotional experiences (Foucault, 1977). Whilst celebrated by some staff, others felt this endorsement and marginalisation of experiences would ultimately hinder the children's ability to adapt and contextualise behaviour, creating social and emotional problems in the longer term, as is shown:

> **Edith (Welfare):**   *It could kind of screw you up a bit, being told one thing by somebody else and something by the other….a lot of kids probably couldn't make their own mind up what to do in life.*

-

> **Sarah (1 on 1 support):** *Whatever they do away from school, it might be difficult for a child of that age to have the two different things and maybe they'll get mixed up with what they're expected to do.*

By 'imposing an orthodoxy of appropriate feelings' and emotions (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008, p. 42), there was a reticence to acknowledge the multiple realities that exist within children's lives both in and away from school. The use of SEAL across the case study schools offered a framework that endorsed not only appropriate behaviours, feelings and responses to events, but a normative model of social and emotional experiences in schools. That said, whilst monist approaches to SEL were privileged across the case study schools, staff members also demonstrated an inclination to destabilise the convention that positions 'schools as expert' and 'parents as novice' (Dale 1996), as Stanley shows:

> **Stanley (Head teacher):** *We do our best with parents, or at least we think we do but we need to realise that we can learn far more from home than they can from school. We really need that close co-operation and help to understand what goes on in the home and in the area.*

In not only demonstrating a willingness to learn from surrounding communities, but by also recognising parents as 'experts', Stanley, here, embraces concepts which have been shown to be central tenets of effective home-school communication programmes (see Whalley, 2001; Hughes and Greenhoulgh, 2005), that hint at the potential for the mutual exchange of knowledge regarding children's social and emotional development. What is most striking in Stanley's view, however,

is his acknowledgement of a more pluralist approach, where the championed concept is one where multiple values exist, and that that these often conflict with one another, (Weber, 1946).

Future directions and concluding comments

Although any mutual exchange of knowledge between school and home will not happen by chance, work on democratic schooling demonstrates how educational settings who acknowledge and 'reflect difference in age, culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, aspirations and abilities' (Beane and Apple 1999, p. 11) are well situated to achieve this. As such, I suggest that SEL may be better framed not by seeking out contingent points of consensus (Arthur, 2005) but by acknowledging difference, allowing for more pluralist conceptualisations of children's social and emotional experiences, and whilst there may be 'no rational solution' to such conflicts, there is a distinct need to 'recognise the legitimacy' of the 'other' (Mouffe 2005, p. 20) as bringing contestation into the public sphere will allow different hegemonic projects to be confronted. Yet, instead of trying to reconcile conflicting interests and social and emotional experiences, by embracing the concept of 'agonism' (Mouffe, 2005) - the positive reframing of 'antagonism' - schools could utilise difference, within educational settings, as a focal point for learning. By exploring the variety and multitude of experiences that are significant to individual children's lives, SEL, as such, may provide a safe space for them to develop social and emotional skills in interaction with others.

As this project only accessed the views of staff members across four primary schools, in one town in Northern England, issues of generalisability exist, meaning the findings should be not be seen

as a definitive depiction of SEL interpretation and use across all primary schools. That said, this focus uncovered some interesting and unexpected practices that draw our attention to the practicalities faced by schools and their staff in their quest to develop children's social, emotional and behavioural skills. Although children's lives away from school were acknowledged by staff, there was reluctance to embrace these in activities of social and emotional development. Conversely, there was a distinct tendency for SEL to operate as a means to problematise these varied realities. Such narrow interpretations of SEL have the potential to undermine young children's behaviours and experiences influenced by their social class, gender and ethnicity, meaning schools and their staff members may wish to welcome pluralist formats, that embrace difference and contestation as central tenets of these schemes in the future. By placing less emphasis on agreement and more on the positive power of disagreement in the classroom, SEL may then become a valued platform that supports children to articulate, clarify and develop their own social and emotional experiences.

References

Althusser, L. (1970) *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.* London: Verso Books

Amatea, E. S., and West-Olatunji, C. A. (2008). Joining the conversation about educating our poorest children: Emerging leadership roles for school counsellors in high-poverty schools. *Professional School Counseling, 11 (6).*

Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the 'right' way: Markets, standards, God and inequality (2nd Ed).* London: Routledge.

Arthur, J. (2005) The re-emergence of character education in British education policy, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 53(3), 239-254.

Banerjee, R. (2010). *Social and emotional aspects of learning in schools: Contributions to improving attainment, behaviour, and attendance. A report on data from the National Strategies Tracker School Project.* Available at URL: http://www.nsonline.org.uk/node/486406 (Accessed March 2017)

Beane, J. A and Apple, M. W. (1999) The case for democratic schools. In M. W. Apple and J. A. Beane (Eds), *Democratic schools: Lessons from the chalk face.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Beland, K. (2007). Relating to Romeo: Connecting students and curricula. *Principal Leadership, 7 (7),* pp.16-21.

Bernstein, B. (1970). Education cannot compensate for society. *New Society, 15 (387),* pp. 344–47.

Biesta, G. (2015) What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education, Research, Development and Policy*, 50 (1), pp. 75-87.

Bloom, A. (2009). Boys get a raw deal and their needs are ignored in schools, claims expert. *Times Educational Supplement, 4841*, p. 11.

Bloom, B. S., Davis, A, and Hess, R. (1965) *Compensatory education for cultural deprivation.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P., and Richardson, D. (2007) An index of child well-being in the European Union. *Journal of Social Indicators Research*, *80*, pp. 133-177.

British Educational Research Association. (2011). *Ethical Guidelines* http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1t9gr/BERAEthicalGuideline/resources/index.htm?

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (2nd Ed)* Sage: London.

Bryman, A. (2001). *Social research methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burman, E. (2009). Beyond 'emotional literacy' in feminist and educational research. *British Educational Research Journal*, *35 (1),* pp. 137-155.

Charlton, E., Mills, M., Martino, W., and Beckett, L. (2007). Sacrificial girls: A case study of the impact of streaming and setting on gender reform. *British Educational Research Journal, 33 (4),* pp. 459–78.

Connell, R. W. (1994). Poverty and education. *Harvard Educational Review, 64 (2),* pp. 125-149.

Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and boys.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Corbin, J., and Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research (3rd Ed).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Craig. C. (2007). *The potential dangers of a systematic, explicit approach to teaching social and emotional skills.* Glasgow: Centre for Confidence and Well-Being.

Crozier, G., and Davies, J. (2008). 'The trouble is they don't mix': Self-segregation or enforced exclusion? *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 11 (3),* pp. 285–301.

Dale, N. (1996). *Working with families of children with special educational needs: Partnership and practice.* London: Routledge.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2008) *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* Nottingham: DCSF Publications

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2010). *Promoting the emotional health of children and young people: Guidance for children's trust partnerships, including how to deliver NI 50.* Nottingham: DCSF Publications.

Department for Education. (2012) *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* London: DfE Publications

Department for Education. (2014) *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* London: DfE Publications

Department for Education. (2017) *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* London: DfE Publications

Department for Education and Skills. (2003) *Every child matters*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills. (2004) *Every child matters: Change for children*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills. (2005). *Excellence and enjoyment: Social and emotional aspects of learning: Getting on and falling out.* London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills. (2005). *Excellence and enjoyment: Social and emotional aspects of learning: Good to be me!* London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Excellence and enjoyment: Social and emotional aspects of learning: Guidance.* London: HMSO

Denzin, N. (1970). *The research act in sociology.* London: Butterworth.

Ecclestone, K., and Hayes, D. (2008). *The dangerous rise of therapeutic education.* London: Routledge.

Ecclestone, K., and Hayes, D. (2009). Changing the subject: The educational implications of developing emotional well-being. *Oxford Review of Education, 35 (3),* pp. 371-389.

Evans, G. (2006). *Educational failure and working class white children in Britain.* Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Allen Lane.

Francis, B., and Skelton, C. (2005). *Reassessing gender and achievement.* London: Routledge.

Galtung, J. (1969) Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research,* 6 (3), pp. 167-191

Galtung, J. (1990) Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research,* 27(3), pp. 291–305.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences.* New York: Basic Books.

Gilborn, D. (1995) *Racism in real schools.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* London: Bloomsbury.

Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hall, S. (1992). Race, culture, and communications: Looking backward and forward at Cultural Studies. *Rethinking Marxism, 5 (1),* pp. 10-18.

Hallam, S. (2009). An evaluation of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme: Promoting positive behaviour, effective learning and well-being in primary school children. *Oxford Review of Education, 35 (3),* pp. 313-330.

Hallam, S., Rhamie, J., and Shaw, J. (2006). *Evaluation of the primary behaviour and attendance pilot*. *Research Report RR717.* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Hartley, D. (2003). The instrumentalisation of the expressive in education. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 1*, pp. 6–19.

Hayden, C. (2010). *Crime, anti-social behaviour and schools.* Paper presented at SEBDA International Conference: Transforming Troubled Lives. Keble College, Oxford University 14-17 September 2010.

Hargreaves, D. H. (1995). School culture, school effectiveness and school improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 6 (1),* pp. 23-46.

Helwag-Laursen, M., Carrico, A., and Pegram, A. M. (2004). To nod or not to nod: An observational study of nonverbal communication and status in female and male college students. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 28 (4).*

Hughes, M., and Greenhough, P. (2006) Boxes, bags and videotape: enhancing home-school communication through knowledge exchange activities. *Educational Review - Special Issue*, 58 (4), pp. 471-487.

Humphrey, N., Kalambouka, A., Bolton, J., Lendrum, A., Wigelsworth, M., Lennie, C., and Farrell, P. (2008). *Primary social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL): Evaluation of small group work*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Humphrey, N., Lendrum, A., and Wigelsworth, M. (2010). *Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme in secondary schools: National evaluation*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Kitzinger, J., and Farquhar, C. (1999). The analytical potential of 'sensitive moments' in focus group discussions. In R.S. Barbour and J. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Developing focus group research: Politics, theory and practice.* London: Sage.

Lander, V. (2016) Introduction to fundamental British values, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 42(3), 274-279.

Lebrun, M. (2006). *Student depression: A silent crisis in our schools and communities*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Education.

Lingard, B., and Douglas, P. (1999). *Men engaging feminisms*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994). *The making of men: Masculinities, sexualities and schooling.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mistry, M., Burton, N., and Brundett, M. (2004). Managing LSAs: An evaluation of the use of learning support assistants in an urban primary school. *School Leadership and Management, 24 (2),* 125-137.

Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the political.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Ofsted. (2009) The framework for school inspection from September 2009. Manchester: Crown copyright.

Ofsted. (2012) The framework for school inspection from January 2012. Manchester: Crown copyright.

Ofsted. (2014) The framework for school inspection from September 2014. Manchester: Crown copyright. Ofsted (2016) School inspection framework.

Palmer, S. (2009). *21st century boys: How modern life is driving them off the rails and how we can get them back on track.* London: Orion Books.

Paechter, C. F. (1998) *Educating the other: Gender, power and schooling.* London: Falmer.

Plano-Clark, V.L., and Badiee, M. (2010). Research questions in mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research (2nd Ed).* London: Sage.

Pring, J. (2000) *Philosophy of educational research.* London: Continuum.

Qualification and Curriculum Authority. (2007). *A big picture of the curriculum*. QCA borderline.

Reay, D. (2008). Class out of place: The white middle classes and intersectionalities of class and 'race' in urban state schooling in England. In L. Weis (Ed.), *The way class works: Readings on school, family and the economy.* London: Routledge.

Saarni, C. (2007). The development of emotional competence: Pathways for helping children to become emotionally intelligent. In R. Bar-on, R. G. Maree and M. J. Elias (Eds.), *Educating people to be emotionally intelligent.* Rondebosch: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Schensul, J.J. (1985) Cultural maintenance and cultural transformation: Educational transformation in the eighties. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly,* 16 (1), pp. 63-68.

Schneiders, J., Drukker, M., Van der Ende, J., Verhulst, F. C., Van Os, J., and Nicolson, N. A. (2003). Neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage and behavioural problems from late childhood into early adolescence. *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health, 57*, pp. 699–703.

Skinner, G. D. and McCollum, A. (2000) Values education, citizenship and the challenge of cultural diversity. In R. Bailey (Ed), *Teaching values and citizenship across the curriculum.* Derby: Kogan Page.

Teddlie, C., and Tashakkori, A. (2010). Overview of contemporary issues in mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research (2nd Ed).* London: Sage.

Tickell (2011) *The early years: Foundations for life, health and learning.* London: DfE Publications.

UNICEF (United Nations Children Fund) (2007). *Report Card 7. An overview of child well-being in rich countries: A comprehensive assessment of the lives and well-being of children and adolescents in the economically advanced nations*. Innocenti Research Centre

Weare, K. (2000). *Promoting mental, emotional and social health: A whole-school approach.* London: Routledge.

Weare, K. (2004). *Developing the emotionally literate school.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Weare, K. (2007). Delivering 'Every Child Matters': The central role of social and emotional learning in schools. *Education 3-13, 35 (3),* pp. 239-248.

Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "boy turn" in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research, 73 (4),* pp. 471-498.

Weber, M. (1946) *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology.* Translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright-Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.

Whalley, M. (2001) *Involving Parents in their Children's Learning*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Williams, R. (1966). *Culture and society, 1780-1950*. New York: Harper and Row.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working-class kids get working-class jobs.* New York: Columbia University Press.