Social and Emotional Education

Programme director: Krisztián Józsa, PhD, Dr. habil.

The overall framework of the training programme

The programme focuses on the social and affective aspects of education. The broad category of affect includes emotional factors, attitudes, interest, motivation, and it also shows overlaps with certain components of social behaviour. Although this area has been in the focus of education research for a long time, only in recent decades have schools and kindergartens become the subject of direct inquiry in this regard. By the present day, such research has accumulated evidence of the crucial role affective factors play in academic performance. Some affective variables are stronger predictors of school success than intelligence. The research of emotions and motives is strongly linked to that of social relationships. Social relationships are founded on social skills and motives. The high developmental level of these is also essential in academic performance and social adjustment.

Research in recent decades has radically transformed our understanding of humans as social beings. In addition to Educational Science, important findings come from, for example, Human Ethology, Psychology, Sociology and Neurophysiology. This interdisciplinary approach is crucial for understanding childhood development. Education puts the primary focus on malleability and the possibilities for facilitating development, and as a helping profession, this discipline defines education as activity to help and to facilitate development. This modern interdisciplinary approach enables a broad foundation of issues in education in terms of both theory and empirical research. The research programme offers research topics primarily in the exploration of social and emotional competence, and of affective factors that influence the development of one's personality and play an important role in academic achievement, as well as in learning motivation. In addition, broader issues in education – such as in-service teachers as professional helpers; the connections of learning motivation and the social environment; moral development and its facilitation; or the comprehensive analysis of how schools convey values – are also covered within the framework of the programme.

The Social and Emotional Education training programme works in close research cooperation with the Institute of Education, the Institute of Psychology and the Institute of Behavioral Sciences of the University of Szeged, and it also has strong ties with the Social Competence Research Group.

Main areas of research

1. Social behaviour development and its facilitation

Besides biological factors, the characteristics and the changes of social behaviour are influenced by, on the one hand, the psychic (cognitive, emotional, and social) characteristics of one's personality; and on the other hand, environmental factors, in conjunction and in interaction with each other. The scope of psychic characteristics is quite wide, while environmental factors include cultural, institutional, physical, and personal impacts. The system of psychic components that determine social behaviour is

social competence, which comprises of numerous motives, skills, abilities, habits, models, and knowledge. The past 10 years have seen an impressive growth in the number of studies that focus not only on the age- and gender-related characteristics of social competence, but also on the exploration of the relationships between various variables and the changes of associations over time. The results of these complex studies provide a sound basis for kindergarten and school programmes that aim to facilitate the development of various psychic characteristics. Concurrently, a growing number of studies target the similarities and differences of social competence due to cultural impact, however, most of these studies undertake to examine the role of family background and that of educational actors (e.g., peers, teachers) – which are not completely separable from cultural influences –, using cross-sectional or longitudinal designs. The following research areas are offered within the framework of the training programme:

a) The developmental process and level of the cognitive components of social competence (e.g., decision-making, or control) in children of kindergarten, primary and secondary school age. Exploring the relationship of the construct under investigation with another component of social competence, or an environmental factor.

b) The developmental process and level of the emotional components of social competence (e.g., exhibiting and understanding emotions) in children of kindergarten, primary and secondary school age. Exploring the relationship of the construct under investigation with another component of social competence, or an environmental factor.

c) The developmental process and level of the social components of social competence (e.g., communication, or assertiveness) in children of kindergarten, primary and secondary school age. Exploring the relationship of the construct under investigation with another component of social competence, or an environmental factor.

d) Developing a programme to facilitate the development of given components of social competence, determining the effects of such programmes among children of kindergarten, primary and secondary school age.

2. Emotional development and its educational connections

The number of studies that highlight the role of emotions in personality development has been rapidly growing in recent decades. Since emotions are present in all aspects of our lives, recognising, understanding, regulating, and managing our emotions are crucial skills because they influence our cognition, goal-oriented actions, and our behaviour as a whole. Within the training programme, it is possible to:

a) examine the early manifestation, recognition, understanding and management of emotions in different age groups;

b) study the verbal and non-verbal aspects of emotions;

c) explore research methods in the field of emotions;

d) examine the influencing factors of emotional awareness;

e) analyse the relationship of emotions with other affective and cognitive components; and to

f) explore possibilities to facilitate emotional awareness.

3. Self-regulation and factors influencing it

Self-regulation plays a fundamental role in successful problem solving both in school and in our everyday lives. Self-regulation realises the consciously control and monitoring of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. The development of self-regulation is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. Its research has ties to temperament research, Neuropsychology, and the socio-cognitive approach to research. Studies so far have mainly focused on effort control, the executive functions, and the field of self-regulated learning. Within the training programme, it is possible to:

a) explore the basic components, skills, and processes of self-regulation;

b) examine its pace of development;

c) explore what early life experiences, family and additional environmental factors have a strong impact on its development;

d) explore its adaptive and maladaptive functioning;

e) analyse its relationships with affective and cognitive areas; and

f) explore possibilities to facilitate its development.

4. Learning motivation

One of the indispensable components of lifelong learning – an expectation in knowledge societies – is a positive attitude to learning. Therefore, motivation to learn should not only be treated as a tool that supports instruction, but rather as one of the primary goals of education. Learning motives and the various skills and abilities enhance each other to ensure the high functioning of competencies, high academic achievement, and social adjustment. In recent years, a number of new trends and theoretical models have emerged in learning motivation research. Findings have confirmed the decisive role of mastery motivation in one's personality development and in academic achievement. Special attention has been paid to content-specific motives, i.e. motives activated in specific situations and contexts. A current comprehensive theoretical model is self-determination theory. Learning motivation is influenced by both individual and environmental factors. Exploring the relationship between learning motivation and the environmental factors is a priority area from the perspective of formal education. Main research areas of the training programme include:

a) examining various components of learning motivation, developing instruments, testing theoretical models;

b) analysing the changes in learning motivation with age;

c) exploring the relationships of learning motivation and various skills, abilities, and achievement indicators;

d) examining the relationship of learning motivation with family characteristics and with schooling;

e) learning motivation from a cross-cultural or cross national perspective;

f) developing and testing programmes to facilitate and strengthen various components of learning motivation.

5. System-level support for equity in education

Equity in education means providing learning opportunities to all students, for example, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender identity or immigrant status, so that they can all be successful in school with respect to cognitive achievement, social-emotional development, and well-being. Ensuring equity in education is not only a moral responsibility, but a shared social interest; we can consider it wise investment in education that will pay off. Within the training programme, it is possible to explore the system-level barriers to equity in education and examine possible solutions to these.