



Social Emotional Education Prototype Modelling in On-line Learning COVID-19 Environment (SEEP) for NEET – Monograph Review

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The relevance of the topic

The school closure periods and subsequent efforts for distance education has made all problems and shortcomings of formal education systems far more visible, especially to the general public.

Education research has accelerated, and there is a growing body of evidence around direct experiences with distance education as well as the general challenges and gaps in the systems highlighted by the situation. Masses of school-aged children and their teachers have experienced online learning for the first time, and policy makers provided schools little or no support from those very few existing examples that they could have learnt from (e.g. schools for children living in rural Australia⁶ or education for children prevented from going to school by illness in the Kórház Suli programme⁷).

The monograph builds on the research done in the Schulbarometer in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and similar data collection in the Baltic countries in this period. It is an interesting comparison as data shows that Germany was the least digitally engaged country in Europe before the school closures with Austria being at the penultimate place. It would be interesting to see the perceptions of school students

⁶ <https://www.acc.edu.au/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-online-school/>

⁷ <https://korhazsuli.hu/> <https://multinclud.eu/multinclud-case/hospiedu-korhazsuli-supporting-children-out-of-school-for-longer-periods/>

and parents for the Baltics as well – as the German-speaking research also surveyed them. But even asking school professionals only shows how important the supportive network around children has become (research mentions that “only” 60% of parents could participate in supporting the schooling of their children what in reality is an amazing number with nearly 2/3 of parents readily taking on the teacher’s role without notice or preparation). It is especially relevant for the book’s main focus, individuals “not in employment, education or training” (NEET). Available education data (e. g. Innocenti, University of Swansea, but also Schulbarometer) reveals that distance education failed to reach about 20–25% of school students even in the most digitally developed countries, and these groups largely overlap with those whose parents were not able to become homeschooling teachers.

Focusing on NEETs in the post-COVID period will be a very important task for all education systems around the world. Schools not only lost contact with a frighteningly high number of students, but they were the ones who were most likely not to return when schools reopened. All over Europe, school attendance has decreased and the intention not to participate (for various reasons, for example parents not believing that the state will provide this service without discrimination) is increasing. Young people without marketable qualifications have always been at risk of long-term unemployment, but the catastrophic and disproportionate governmental responses to the spreading of the new coronavirus hit those sectors most that could provide some chance for employment for these youth (the catering, hospitality, tourism and retail industries). This means that offering solutions for preventing young people from becoming NEETs as well as re-engaging them in formal education are a very important responsibilities for education policy.

The reviewer can only hope that the research done for and ideas gathered in the present monograph can lead to solutions, even online ones, that can reach this target group. As said before, the task at hand is really challenging as distance teaching efforts so far have failed to decrease, or rather increased the probability of swelling the NEET population.

The school closure periods also shed more light on the importance of social-emotional learning. Building resilience and character became just as important as building knowledge, and this has finally been recognised by a growing number of professionals. According to recent large-scale research (e.g. by the Brookings Institute, Council of Europe or Parents International), the shift of focus is also measurable in parental views, the key source of positive attitude towards school. When we talk about NEETs in the context of social-emotional learning, there are specificities that need to be considered, especially the fact that in their case there is often a multi-generational social-emotional learning deficit, even traumas related to learning and especially schooling. In their case, parental support when deciding on staying on or re-entering formal education is mostly missing.

In this field, the monograph and/or future work on prototyping could also build on current educational movements such as the Deep Learning⁸ movement that builds on the trigger social-emotional learning gives curricular learning and helps to create a positive attitude towards school.

The school closure periods have led to more teachers and schools embracing the advantages digital tools can lead to in formal education, but recent research (Kelly, 2021.) shows that mainstreaming digital use in the classroom is still an area that needs empowerment, training, coaching and peer support. The use of digital tools has unquestioned advantages for children with special education needs and those ill- fitting the systems. Mainstreaming the right digital tools can most probably lead to the turning of the tide and, as a result, less rather than more NEETs – NEETs often being former school students whose education needs were not met in the traditional classroom.

Adding to the discourse on fully online learning for these age groups is also quite topical, but it is important to focus on what we can learn from the last 20–22 months rather than trying to mainstream these experiences. There is a good reason why multiple voices argue for not closing schools without real reasons ever again. Most researchers and practitioners argue for offering support for the educators at hand (parents, family, older siblings) for non-curricular learning for the case of a well-founded school closure in the future if real danger occurs, and not trying to impose the burden of curricular education on them.

This, if implemented well, might be the suitable approach to reengaging NEETs in education, making it possible for them to set their own learning goals rather than imposing curricular ones on them (especially in a labour market environment reality that gives formal qualifications a rapidly decreasing value), too, and in a more and more digitalized world there is no reason to avoid focusing on appropriate online tools as long as their implementation also provides for a feeling of belonging and strong communities these young people may become members of. The monograph can support professional discourse in this field.

Suggestions for improvement

Social-emotional concepts

This section contains highly important arguments that verify the positive impact of digital technology on learning. In this field I miss some considerations about emphasising a healthy balance between online and offline activities, and probably a reference to international guidelines to ensure well-being (e. g. The WHO recommendations on sedentary screen time and other activities⁹) to ensure well-being.

⁸ <https://deep-learning.global/>

⁹ <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325147/WHO-NMH-PND-2019.4-eng.pdf>

It might also be beneficial for the whole publication to highlight the theoretical basis you are using for the prototyping. For example, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model can be mentioned as one concept. A growing number of researchers argue that in current realities religion and religious communities could replace the online environment and online communities in that model.

Historical overview

As the issue of NEETs mostly impacts students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, I think the publication would benefit from including theories by Paolo Freire. You may also consider highlighting how some of the pedagogies briefly mentioned, focusing a lot more on social-emotional learning than traditional approaches, are getting mainstreamed. Montessori¹⁰ and Waldorf pedagogies are good examples for that (regardless the Luddite approach of Steiner-Waldorf¹¹ schools to digital technology). In the case of Korczak, I miss the notion of child agency, a very important element of his work and also an important basis for social-emotional learning approaches.

Gamification

This part of the monograph is crucial, as the overall prototype you are aiming to propose and build is based on the concept of gamification and closely linked to its digital solutions. In this chapter, the author sometimes uses the notions of games in school, playful learning and gamification as synonyms while they are not.

Using games in the classroom surely adds to the enjoy ability of lessons. It is an important factor in the case of NEETs as one of the reasons for leaving school is definitely the lack of fun. However, teaching professionals need to be reminded that not all games have a direct educational outcome; they may only be a relaxing element. (Similarly, a word of warning can be added for programmes and applications, especially ones that target young children, that look like games, but are in fact only colorful traditional learning tools.)

Some forms of play and some games belong to the category of playful learning for any and all ages. Closely related to Csíkszentmihályi's concept of learning in the state of flow, these are solutions that are joyful, socially interactive, iterative (thus promoting trial and error), meaningful and actively engaging¹².

Gamification is a partly overlapping concept, can be digital or not, and builds on the successful elements of strategic online games. It is based on, among other things, setting personal and group goals, celebrating their achievement, being able to gain extras to counterbalance failures at some main activities, and mutual support of the

¹⁰ <https://www.supplydesk.co.uk/resource/pedagogy-profile-montessori-method/>

¹¹ <https://www.steinerwaldorf.org/steiner-education/what-is-steiner-education/>

¹² https://cms.learningthroughplay.com/media/wmtlmb0/learning-through-play_web.pdf

learners. Some specific interventions at schools targeting children at risk of becoming NEETs are (partly) built on this concept, mostly offline (e. g. No Bad Kid¹³).

Appropriate leadership

The monograph takes a very relevant glimpse on the needs of future school leaders in order to implement inclusive programmes, but the direct impact of improved leadership skills on children's learning could be made stronger.

Our recent research in European Education Policy Network on Teachers and School Leaders (EEPN) also shows that teachers have major capacity-building needs that might also be mentioned here, probably alongside with learning leadership concepts and types that makes the necessary shift from curriculum-centred education to student-centred provisions, a crucial element in successfully reaching out to NEETs.

Questions remaining open

The research collected in the monograph clearly supports the argument that emphasis on social- emotional learning, preserving or bringing back the joy of learning in school, a sense of belonging, and the engagement of parents in school learning will help prevent students becoming NEETs. It also appropriately argues for a gamified approach, one of the fastest growing student-centred learning methods. It is a method that could help NEETs form and achieve their own, meaningful learning goals, and also can help those at risk of becoming NEETs to find meaning in school. The main questions that I think still need to be addressed are:

1. How to reach and engage students at risk of becoming NEETs in using the proposed digital tools if compulsory digital provisions in the school closure period failed to reach them?
2. How to re-engage minors in formal education using these digital tools and how to provide solutions for those over 18 but falling under the scope of the Youth Guarantee?
3. Are the proposed solutions targeting traditional, age-segregated schools (that might mean they are not suitable for the individual NEET's age and needs), second-chance schools or trying to offer a path towards a non-age-segregated education system that could benefit not only NEETs, but also cater for the real diversity of students' need?

¹³ <https://nobadkid.org/>; <https://multininclude.eu/multininclude-case/no-bad-kids/>

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