

## Editorial

### The Current Issue

There is no shortage of information about what mental health in children and young people and what can be done about it. Newspapers, magazines, television and the internet are awash with information relating to the topic. Academics from various disciplines generate voluminous theories and ideas on the topic on an apparently daily basis. One of the problems that the reader is confronted by, however, is the challenge of sifting through the sheer volume of available information and making judgements about the relative merits of different views and positions. A major aim of *the International Journal of Emotional Education* is to help readers from a range of disciplines to make sense of mental health issues in children and young people within an evidence-based approach (cf. Cooper and Jacobs 2011). The quality of an evidence-base approach depends almost entirely on the robustness of the methods used to identify, gather, evaluate and interpret appropriate evidence. Central to these processes is instrumentation of one kind or another. *The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)* is one of the most widely-used mental health screening instruments for children and young people. Strong claims can be made for its reliability and validity as a tool for identifying the distribution of important mental health characteristics among populations of children and young people (Goodman 1997).

The SDQ continues to generate considerable amount of international data that is essential to our understanding of the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people. It has been translated into more than forty languages, one of the most recent of which is Maltese. In the first paper in this edition, Cefai, Camilleri, Cooper and Said (Malta) discuss the structure and use of the teacher and parent Maltese SDQ. The authors examine the psychometric properties of the instrument, including construct validity, internal consistency, and inter-rater and test-retest reliabilities. They suggest the possible use of the Maltese SDQ as a three factor structure, namely internalized, externalized and prosocial dimensions instead of the five subscales, as well as its potential use as an indicator of resilience.

In the second paper, Couture, Cooper and Royer (Canada) make use of the SDQ to establish the concurrent validity of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall 1998), a diagnostic instrument used by teachers in nurture groups to measure children's level of emotional and behavioural functioning as an aid to the development of individual development plans. The results of their study indicate that the two measures appear to identify similar behavioural characteristics in the same children, thus supporting the claims of the

Boxall Profile as a valid and reliable tool for diagnostic and research purposes. Whilst the Boxall Profile, however, contains some 60 items and will take a considerable period of time to complete and interpret, the SDQ has 25 short items and can be completed in a very short space of time. Thus, in contrast to the Boxall Profile, the SDQ is designed as a tool for screening large number of people, and may thus be seen as a practical and reliable screening tool for nurture groups.

The next two papers discuss evidence-based practice in relation to interventions for children and young people with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. Kam, Wong and Fung (Hong Kong) describe a feasibility study of the implementation of the PATHS program in a number of schools in Hong Kong. PATHS is a school-based social-emotional learning program that promotes emotion understanding, emotion regulation and problem solving skills (Greenberg and Kusché 1993). The authors reported an improvement in the students' emotional understanding and regulation and in prosocial behaviour, but they also underlined the problems in effectiveness when program fidelity is not adhered to. The study also highlights the need to take the needs of the local educational context into consideration when implementing programs devised in other countries and cultures.

In the next paper, Renati, Cavioni and Zanetti (Italy) evaluate the effectiveness of a program they developed themselves to promote emotional regulation amongst primary school children. The 'aRRabbiadiaro' (Anger Diary) is a narrative tool for young children to help them reflect on how they cope with anger in their everyday life and consequently learn to manage their anger. The authors argue that though they did not find conclusive evidence for its effectiveness at this stage, the diary could be a promising tool to promote children's emotional education. Again this study highlights the need for evidence-based practice, and illustrates how evaluations like these could help to improve effective practice in emotional education.

On a rather different note from the first four papers, the final paper focuses on the life-course transitions of young women from secondary school to post secondary education or the world of work. Spiteri and DeGiovanni (Malta) present the stories of eight young Maltese women and the difficulties they experienced at this critical stage in their lives. The authors discuss the key issue of the various influences shaping the trajectory of these young people, underlining the interaction of individual resources with the influence of the various agents of socialization. They argue, however, on the need for the individual to retain agency in the face of the powerful social influences if they are to be empowered to make their own choices about their future.

### **Special issues 2012-2015**

We would like to remind you of the special issues for the forthcoming years:

- April 2012: Social-emotional aspects of substance abuse in children and young people, guest edited by Professor Nathaniel Riggs ([nriggs@usc.edu](mailto:nriggs@usc.edu))
- April 2013: Assessment of children and young people with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, guest edited by Professor Neil Humphrey ([neil.humphrey@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:neil.humphrey@manchester.ac.uk))

- April 2014: Positive Psychology for Children and Young People, guest edited by Professor Jane Gillham ([jgillha1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:jgillha1@swarthmore.edu))
- April 2015 Neuroscience and Emotional Education, edited by ourselves.

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## References

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