

High Level Policy Forum, Sao Paulo, 24 - 25 March 2014

Skills for Social Progress

Today's socio-economic climate brings new challenges that affect the future of children and young people. Although access to education has improved considerably, a good education no longer guarantees a good job. The young have been particularly affected by rising unemployment following the financial crisis. Health challenges such as obesity are on the rise, while the state of ageing population, civic engagement and environmental outlook are worrying. Furthermore, inequalities in income, labour market and social outcomes are widening. Education has a strong potential to address these challenges by enhancing a variety of skills. Cognitive skills matter, but social and emotional skills, such as passion to achieve goals, sociability and resilience are just as important. Most OECD and partner countries recognise the importance of developing social and emotional skills through schooling. Countries differ, however, in the approaches to foster these skills. Moreover, there are big gaps between stakeholder's knowledge, expectations and capabilities about how best to mobilise children's social and emotional skills.

Why do social and emotional skills matter?

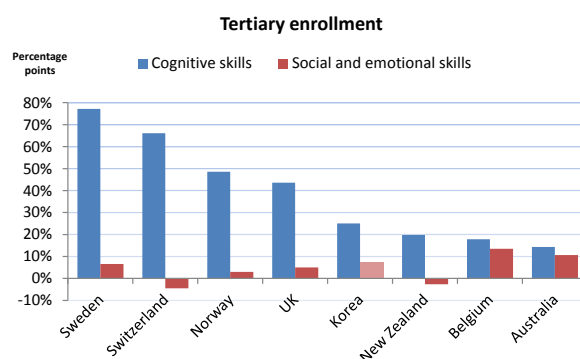
Skills drive economic growth and social progress. We all know that cognitive skills such as literacy, numeracy and problem-solving matter. But social and emotional skills such as perseverance, self-control and emotional stability are as important as cognitive skills in driving children's lifetime success. Empirical evidence and common sense tell us that social and emotional skills allow people to better meet the challenges of daily life. Individuals who persevere and work hard are more likely to succeed in a highly dynamic and skill-driven labour market. Those who are better able to control their impulses are more likely to follow healthier lifestyles and remain fit. Individuals who are capable of coping with their emotions and adapting to change are more likely to weather the storms of life such as job loss, family disintegration or crime.

Cognitive skills have strong effects on education and labour market outcomes, whereas social and emotional skills have large effects on diverse social outcomes

Cognitive skills enhance individuals' future education and career prospects. Their influence on educational and labour market outcomes largely outweighs that of social and emotional skills. In Sweden, for example, moving a 3rd grade student from the lowest to the highest decile of cognitive skills increases tertiary enrolment by 77 percentage-points, while the corresponding effects of increasing social and emotional skills is an increase of only 7 percentage-points.

Cognitive skills have a high impact on tertiary enrolment.

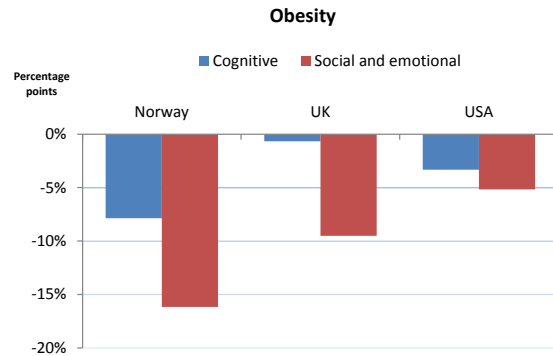
Percentage-point changes in outcomes due to a simulated increase in skills from the lowest to the highest decile.



Source: OECD (2014), ESP International Report: Skills for Social Progress

Social and emotional skills, on the other hand, have a greater impact on improving social outcomes such as obesity, depression, bullying, anti-social behaviour and life satisfaction. The social impact of increasing social and emotional skills is generally higher than the social impact of increasing cognitive skills. In the United Kingdom, for example, moving a child from the lowest to the highest cognitive decile has practically no effect on obesity, while the equivalent effect of raising social and emotional skills reduces the chances of obesity by almost 10 percentage-points.

Social and emotional skills have a large impact on obesity.
 Percentage-point changes in outcomes due to a simulated increase in skills from the lowest to the highest decile.



Source: OECD (2014), ESP International Report: Skills for Social Progress

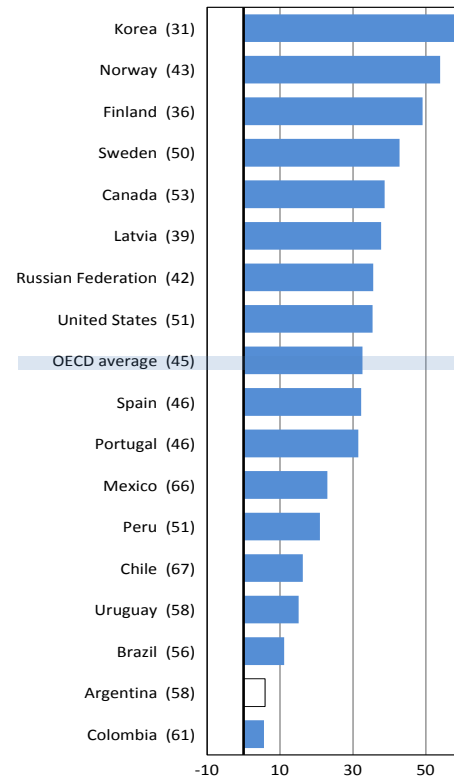
Both cognitive and social and emotional skills need to be fostered for individuals and societies to prosper.

Social and emotional skills also matter because they help develop cognitive skills. Latest PISA results show perseverance is a key ingredient for students' success in mathematics. Students who believe they can succeed in mathematics if they put enough effort score higher in mathematics than those who do not believe so. Across OECD countries, the difference in mathematics performance between those who reported high levels of perseverance and those with low levels is close to one year of schooling.

Investing in social and emotional skills, especially among the disadvantaged population during early childhood, is one of the best ways to reduce social and economic inequalities. Schooling gaps across socio-economic groups have more to do with skill deficits than family income during the schooling years. Children who lack stimulating learning environments and those who are exposed to stressful situations are more likely to lose out in their skill development in relation to their better-off peers.

Students' belief that success is earned through hard work is associated with better mathematics performance.

Percentage of students who believe they can succeed if they invest enough effort shown in parenthesis next to country name



Score-point difference in mathematics, associated with students' believing that they can succeed in mathematics if they put enough effort

Source: OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Database, Table III.3.3g

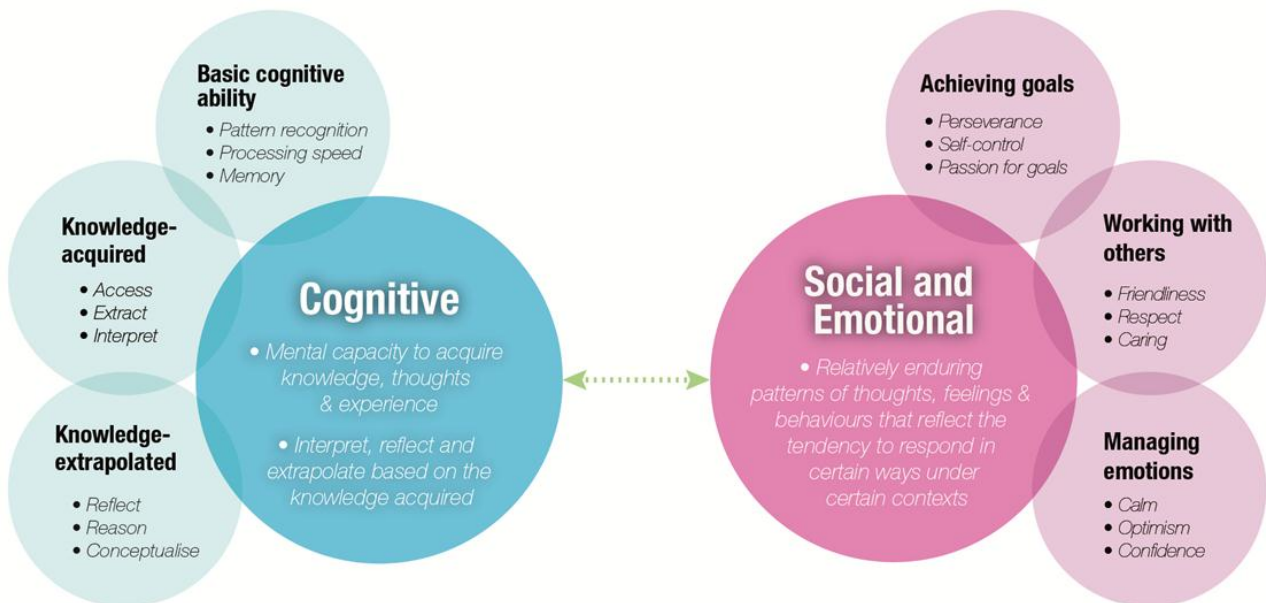
Which skills matter?

Children need a well-balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional skills to achieve lifetime success.

Cognitive skills that matter include the capacity to interpret, reflect, reason, think abstractly, digest complex ideas and solve problems. Cognitive skills do not merely reflect the breadth of knowledge acquired or how quickly an individual can calculate a sum; they also mean the capacity of “making sense” of a situation and “figuring out” what to do when confronted with a new problem.

Social and emotional skills manifest themselves in countless everyday situations. They play a role when individuals work with others, achieve goals and manage emotions. They are important at all stages of life. For example, controlling emotions may help prevent young children from disrupting teachers’ class or losing a friend. The same skills may help keep away adolescents from abandoning school, abusing drugs, or having unprotected sex. Empirical studies suggest conscientiousness, sociability and emotional coping are among the most important social and emotional skills that children and society would benefit from developing.

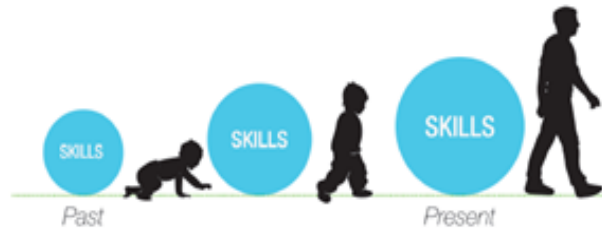
Skills that drive individual success and social progress are multi-dimensional



Many of the so-called 21st century skills, such as creativity and critical thinking, have both cognitive and social and emotional elements. Research shows creative people, for example, tend to be more open to new experiences, less conscientious and more extravert.

Skills beget skills

Skills develop progressively, building on skills formed earlier on. The first years lay the foundations for future skill development. While strong foundations increase the chances of positive outcomes, weak foundations are more likely to lead to struggles. There are cumulative effects on what children learn and what they don't. Skills beget skills: those with higher skills at the onset tend to achieve more than others.



Skills are not set in stone: they are malleable.

Learning contexts that drive skills

Skills are developed not only in classrooms, but in a wide range of family, community and workplace settings. Each learning context contributes to the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Their relative importance, however, changes across the life course. Parents play a crucial role particularly during infancy and early childhood, but school and community become increasingly important as a child enters formal education. The workplace is a key learning context during late adolescence and adulthood.

Learning contexts can complement each other when enhancing children's skills. For example, a child's math and language skills can be enhanced when school lessons are reinforced by related activities at home or in the community. Likewise, a child's self-esteem and sense of respect towards others are best nurtured when school, home and the community work together towards the same goal.

Learning takes place in a variety of contexts



Why should policy makers worry about developing social and emotional skills?

The majority of young persons across the OECD and partner economies finish upper-secondary and many of them also complete tertiary education. However, educational attainment no longer ensures children's lifetime success. In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to move directly from school into work. On the other hand, employers are also struggling in finding employees with the skills they need.

At the same time, technological progress has had a major impact on the way people study, work and socialise, and it will continue to transform our societies. Our globalised world needs individuals who can quickly adapt and thrive amidst the unforeseen challenges of tomorrow.

These challenges can only be met by individuals with a comprehensive set of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Policy makers need to consider a wide range of capabilities, where social and emotional skills are just as important as cognitive skills.

What can education stakeholders do to enhance skills?

Most OECD and partner countries recognise the need to develop students' social and emotional skills such as autonomy, responsibility and ability to co-operate with others. The evidence provided in the background report for this Forum identifies a number of promising initiatives to foster social and emotional skills. However, the report also notices there are gaps in the knowledge and efforts on how best to mobilise children's social and emotional skills. Education stakeholders should exchange knowledge on the best policies and practices that promote social and emotional skills.

Education stakeholders need to better understand the state of the skills that promote economic and social progress. The background report of this Forum shows social and emotional skills matter as much as cognitive skills in raising future prospects; that such skills are malleable; and that they can be reliably measured.

We need to measure what matters to make a difference.

Measures of social and emotional skills can provide valuable information to improve learning contexts and ensure they are conducive to skill development. With such measures, policy makers would be able to better determine education policy priorities, schools would be able to better adapt curricular and extra-curricular practices, and parents would be able to better enrich their home learning environment and parenting practices.



1. Policy Makers' Forum

Monday 24 March, 2014 [9:00-13:00]

The Policy Makers' Forum invites education leaders from around the world to discuss ways to better prepare our children to face the diverse socio-economic challenges of the 21st century. It aims to shed light on the power of social and emotional skills, given the important role these play in children's success in life.

There will be roundtable sessions, all of which are closed to the public. Ministers and other leaders of education will participate in the debates and propose policy challenges, education practices and innovative ideas pertinent to the country. Professor James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics from the University of Chicago, will provide a keynote speech as well as comments on the debate. At the end of the roundtables, the chair of the Forum, Mr José Henrique Paim (Minister of Education, Brazil) will summarise the discussions and provide key messages that will be presented at a press conference scheduled after the Policy Maker's Forum. The chair's summary will also feature in the upcoming OECD report, "Skills for Social Progress", to be published after the Forum.

2. Policy Players' Forum

Monday 24 March, 2014 [15:00-18:30]

The Policy Players' Forum invites superintendents, heads of school districts, directors of major education programmes and initiatives from around the world to discuss ways to better translate existing skills policies into effective practices. It aims to suggest how children's social and emotional skills can be improved in light of the current policy climate.

There will be two roundtable sessions. The first session invites roundtable participants to comment on the current policy climate for skills development, on how they are coping with it and on how to improve the situation. The second session brings together policy makers and policy players to identify the gaps that may exist between education policies and practices, and the ways to bridge these gaps. Each roundtable will focus on a specific issue and questions as described below.

Questions

Roundtable 1: Challenges in enhancing social and emotional skills

- Do superintendents, school administrators and teachers believe social and emotional skills are as important as cognitive skills in driving individual success, reducing inequalities and generating social progress? Which are the most important social and emotional skills that need to be fostered?
- Do teachers employ pedagogy and extra-curricular activities specifically designed to enhance social and emotional skills? What are the most successful practices for teaching social and emotional skills?
- Do schools regularly assess social and emotional skills? If so, which social and emotional skills are assessed? Is assessment helpful in fostering social and emotional skills?
- How can schools involve parents and broader communities in skills development practices?

Roundtable 2: Identifying and addressing the gaps between education policies and practices

- What is the current policy climate around social and emotional skills?
- Do policy players feel they have enough knowledge and system support to implement effective practices for social and emotional skills development?
- Can private educational institutions and foundations play an important role in bridging the gaps between education policies and practices? If so, how?

3. Researchers' Forum

Tuesday 25 March, 2014 [9:00-13:00]

The Researchers' Forum invites experts from around the world and across diverse disciplines to assess the state of the evidence on the socio-economic returns to investing in social and emotional skills and on how skills are acquired. In addition, the researchers will discuss how they might better address the concerns of policy makers and policy players in light of the conclusions of the two Forums held the day before. This will help identify the types of research and related data collection required in the future.

There will be three research debates. The first one invites experts to identify the learning contexts and nature of skills that affect children's educational, labour market and social outcomes. The second debate discusses the state of the technology available to reliably measure social and emotional skills between early childhood and adolescence. The last debate invites researchers to discuss the future research agenda, including data collection and research programmes, to better address the needs of education policy makers, schools and teachers.

Questions

Debate 1: Identifying and developing social and emotional skills that drive children's lifetime success

- Which are the most important social and emotional skills for children's future?
- Which are the most important learning contexts driving social and emotional skills development across different countries?
- What are the sensitive periods for skills formation?
- What types of school-based interventions enhance social and emotional skills?
- What can be learned from large-scale cross-sectional and longitudinal studies?

Debate 2: Measuring social and emotional skills that matter

- How can social and emotional skills be measured reliably among children and adolescents? What are the best measurement methods?
- What are the best methods to reliably compare social and emotional skills across countries and cultures?

Debate 3: The research agenda

- Do researchers have the right tools to identify the learning contexts and skills that cause large socio-economic returns? What are the best methodologies to do this? Do these methodologies need to be improved?
- What can be done to improve the evidence base?
- What kind of micro-data do researchers need?

4. Concluding Debate

Tuesday 25 March, 2014 [15:00-18:00]

The concluding debate will gather all stakeholders to identify a comprehensive approach to skills development.

Questions

Debate: Towards a comprehensive approach to skills development

- Do policy makers and policy players efficiently mobilise the existing knowledge in developing policies and improving practices?
- Do researchers produce the right evidence for policy makers and policy players? Are the results well-communicated to policy makers and policy players?
- What can be done to ensure that education policies and practices regarding social and emotional skills are aligned?
- What can be done to ensure learning contexts mutually support each other?
- How can we increase the engagement of teachers, parents and students in the efforts to raise skills?