What contribution can the recognition and exploration of emotion make to social justice in education?

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from a two-year research project exploring children’s experiences of emotional education. Emotional education refers to the teaching and learning approaches that aim to develop children’s ‘emotional skills’. Such approaches are given increasing consideration in primary schools in the UK and are supported by a range of educational policies most prominently SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) – ‘an explicit, structured, whole-curriculum framework and resource for teaching social, emotional and behavioural skills to all pupils’ (DfES, 2005, pg. 5).

The research involved a review of academic and practice-related literature, a policy analysis of emotion-based education initiatives and a concentrated ethnographic study in a junior school for a period of eight months.

The ethnographic study was carried out in a junior school in Sheffield. This school is described as a Wave 1 SEAL school. It was one of the first wave of primary schools in Sheffield to apply the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative.

This report is intended to extend debate regarding emotional education. It reflects upon the application of SEAL in education from a sociological perspective and is framed around a series of questions. This report explores what contribution the recognition and exploration of emotion can make to social justice in education. It is hoped that it will offer an opportunity for practitioners to reflect upon their practice by thinking about the social role of emotions at school.

Methods

The study included participant observations of students’ participation in a wide range of school-based activities, interviews with local authority representatives, interviews and focus groups with school staff and students, creative research workshops with students, and participatory research with a core group, self-named the ‘SEAL Squad’, of nine students (aged 9 -10).

Summary of findings and implications

The findings show the importance of valuing how children feel and the different ways they express emotion at school. They highlight the significance of the school context in shaping how children feel and how they express emotion. Emotion is an important part of how children learn to relate to others and build their relationships at school. The findings presented in this report are framed around four questions:

What contribution can the recognition and exploration of emotion make to social justice in education?
Who are the empowered?

Is emotional self-control a good thing?

Are both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions important in children’s social relations?

Are categorisations of children’s emotional dispositions enabling?

The key findings and implications are summarised below.

1. Who are the empowered?

SEAL is associated with children’s empowerment through fostering children’s voice. This report explores the varied role of emotion as children seek empowerment through their interactions with peers. In addition, this section of the report highlights the complexities of supporting children’s voice and involving children in decision-making processes. The findings are broadly summarised as follows:

- Children seek empowerment through their in-the-moment expression of emotion. Emotion is often used to influence the direction of an interaction or gain recognition from peers.

- Some children express emotions in ways which reinforce the school’s values about what and how emotion should be expressed. Other children express emotion in ways which negate these ‘feeling rules’ in order to be recognised by peers. The children who express emotion in ways which reinforce the feeling rules tend to be selected for positions of responsibility such as a school council member or peer mediator.

- Interactions between adults and children convey messages to other children about what types of emotional bodies are valued at the school. For example, children’s excitement is suppressed and calmness is encouraged.

- Involving children in decision making processes unintentionally reinforces the distinct social positions of adults and children at the school. When children’s views challenge adult ways of doing things, they are less likely to be heard.

- Children are active in sustaining their own social positions. They think that children are vulnerable and need to be kept safe from harm by adults. The children who accept their social position and support adult-orientated perspectives tend to get their voices heard.

Implications: These findings show that the ways children conduct themselves emotionally is integral to the way they are socially positioned at school. It is important to recognise the different ways that children choose to express themselves and their views. Perhaps formal meetings are not the best way to involve some children in decision making processes. There is scope to explore how other approaches may provide opportunities for the children who do not easily ‘fit’ the school system, to have a voice.

2. Is emotional self-control a ‘good’ thing?

The SEAL curriculum emphasises children’s self-control of emotions in certain ways. This report suggests that this emphasis can overlook the role of emotions in social organisation. Children’s emotional exchanges are embedded within power relations in which their social positions and
identities are shaped and re-shaped. This is evident in the following key findings.

- A focus upon children’s appropriate and inappropriate emotional expression can separate what children feel and how they express emotion from a social context. As children exchange emotion, whether they are being caring or mocking, they are differentiating themselves from others. Children’s emotional exchanges involve sustaining, contesting or redefining their own and others’ social positions at school.

- Children demonstrate a well-developed capacity to manage their emotions in their interactions. However, the choices they make about how to manage and express emotion sometimes conflict with the practices that the school promotes.

- Children’s identities are constructed through the ways that their emotions are rationalised by adults and peers. Once a child is attached to a particular identity, this frames how they are viewed by others and the relationships they build.

- Children’s expressions of anger seem to be associated with their experiences of injustice and struggles for power.

Implications: This report shows that children’s feelings and emotional responses are embedded within social hierarchies. Perhaps then, felt experience can be understood as a way of knowing about the social world. Such a view could extend emotional education from a focus upon emotional control to the exploration of emotions as part of wider power relations. For example, such an approach might ask children to explore the relationship between feelings of disgust and acts of discrimination or feelings of love and allegiance with others. Exploring emotion as a political force in this way connects emotional education with citizenship education and engages children with the everyday challenges to social justice.

3. Are both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions important in children’s social relations?

The SEAL learning outcomes tend to classify different emotions as positive and negative. The curriculum encourages children expression of positive emotion. However, this report shows that children’s expression of emotion, whether classified as positive or negative, is intrinsically linked to how they form their social relations. It is therefore difficult to limit children’s expression of negative emotions as they serve a social role. This is reflected in the following key findings.

- Children’s emotional exchanges with their peers reflect the roles they take in their relationships. Adults’ exchanges with children also reflect the roles they take, for example, as authority figure.

- Girls’ ‘fall-outs’ are used to sustain social norms in girl’s friendship groups. For example, being ‘mardy’ is not considered an acceptable way of presenting emotion. Girls who are ‘mardy’ are often disciplined by their peers through ‘degradation rituals’.

- The ways that girls present their emotion seems to influence their status within girls groups. For example, ‘mardy’ girls are included in these groups but their participation is carefully regulated by other members. In the
example used in this section, the ‘mardy’ girl showed resilience and determination by using strategies to keep her place in the girl group, even when the way she was treated by other group members seemed upsetting for her.

- In girls’ close relationships personal feelings are not a platform for ‘caring’ dialogue and sharing and listening. Girls’ relationships are fraught with fall-outs. An important aspect of these fall-outs appears to be establishing ‘feeling rules’, i.e. ways of managing and expressing emotion. Fall-outs can be understood as a strategy used by children to regulate the conduct of their friends and maintain social hierarchies within friendship groups.

**Implications:** These findings show that children’s expression of negative emotions serves a social role. It seems that children’s fall-outs are a way of negotiating the complexities of school life. However, children can get hurt through fall-outs, especially if they are repeated. In order to limit hurtful encounters between children, it is important to understand the role of fall-outs within a school context. Such an approach encourages the appraisal of social structures as well as the actions of individual children.

4. **Are categorisations of children’s emotional dispositions enabling?**

This section of the report suggests that children categorise the emotional dispositions of others according to their understanding of how adults’ value their emotions. The findings below show how children draw upon these categorisations as they present an emotional identity.

- Children acquire an understanding of how emotions and bodies are valued by adults. This is evident in children’s presentation of gender. Girls associate having a sexual identity with adulthood. Girls’ portrayal of themselves as ‘sexy’ and use of sexual language is perhaps a reflection of their interest in being part of the adult world.

- The girls’ increased appropriation of a ‘sexy’ identity coincided with their participation in sex and relationship education (SRE).

- Some children participate in the adult world by demonstrating their maturity. For one of the boys who participated in the research, maturity seems to be associated with emotional resilience. The control of emotions and being resilient is seen to be an indicator of masculinity by the boys. Boys who do more openly express their emotion are excluded from boys’ friendship groups.

**Implications:** These findings show that children’s presentations of their emotional identities are related to their perception of how male and female bodies are valued in the adult domain. The boys and girls who expressed their emotions through their bodies in ways that contested notions of ‘proper’ gender were excluded by peers. Perhaps within sex and relationship education there is scope for exploring emotions, gender and identity in order to engage with the gender norms that influence children’s judgements and dismissal of others.
1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a two-year research project exploring children’s experiences of emotional education. Emotional education refers to the teaching and learning approaches that aim to develop children’s ‘emotional skills’. Such approaches are given increasing consideration in primary schools in the UK. These skills are seen as a remedy for the mental health problems perceived to be facing contemporary society, and are supported by a range of educational policies most prominently SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) – ‘an explicit, structured, whole-curriculum framework and resource for teaching social, emotional and behavioural skills to all pupils’ (DfES, 2005, pg. 5).

These practices are associated with a democratic vision of education. From this perspective they foster children’s voice, as children are encouraged to express their feelings and relinquish adult control, as children learn to self-manage their feelings and actions (DfES 2005).

From a counter perspective emotional education is defined as a form of governance, within which children’s self-management is aligned with predetermined values (Boler 1999) that support a particular type of emotionality (Gillies 2011).

This report suggests that emotional education cannot be simply classified as a pedagogy that either fosters or limits children’s emotional expression. Instead, this report aims to explore how both agency and control are an integral part of children’s relationships at school. The report will focus specifically upon the role of emotion in children’s relationships at a SEAL school.

This report is intended to extend practice within schools with an interest in emotional education. It reflects upon the application of SEAL in education from a sociological perspective and asks thought-provoking questions in order to engage with the title question - ‘what contribution the recognition and exploration of emotion can make to social justice in education’. It is hoped that it will offer an opportunity for school leaders and teachers to reflect upon their practice by thinking about the social role of emotions at school.
2. Context

The research was carried out in a junior school in Sheffield. This school is described as a Wave 1 SEAL school. It was one of the first wave of primary schools in Sheffield to apply the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative. Interconnected with SEAL is an inclusive approach to supporting students with special education needs through teaching and learning opportunities both in the main school and in an Integrated Resource Unit. The school has received recognition by Ofsted for its commitment to children’s social and emotional development as well as invitations to share their approaches to SEAL at local and national conferences. The SEAL agenda is described by staff as the foundation for many of the school’s embedded approaches to emotional education.

The school integrates a range of practices and activities under the umbrella of emotional education throughout the school day, including registration, playtimes, class-based lessons and assemblies, and extends them into the home, through set homework or training for parents and carers. These practices and activities include:

- The school’s ‘core values’. These guide how teachers allocate rewards to children. These core values are: we are respectful, caring and polite; we are always ready to learn; we are determined, we persevere and we are resilient; we respect difference and diversity; we work together cooperatively; we have a voice and we listen to others.

- A range of reward opportunities for those students who have ‘achieved’ the school’s core values, such as a ‘praise pod’, weekly awards assemblies, peer-led SEAL certificate nominations and in-class reward systems.

- Records of children’s playground conduct written by lunchtime supervisors and shared with teaching staff. These help teachers to relate playground incidents with children’s classroom behaviour.

- The feeling barometer. Every morning and afternoon, during registration, the children share with their teacher and class a number to represent how they are feeling on a scale of one-to-ten. A member of staff tracks these numbers and, if it seems appropriate, will offer the children with low scores a one-to-one session.

- One-to-one sessions for children who may be having a difficult time, to talk to an adult about how they are feeling.

- A weekly SEAL lesson and SEAL assembly. In these activities children are encouraged to, for example, develop more expansive vocabularies of emotion, learn techniques to control emotions, identify emotional expression through body clues or describe the positive and negative...
feelings in relation to events. In addition, SEAL homework is set for children to complete with the support of their parents and carers.

- The school council. Children from each year group and the integrated resource nominate themselves for the position of school councillor and are then selected by teaching staff to represent their class and communicate issues they or their peers may have.

- A ‘peer-mediation’ scheme. Through this scheme a group of Year 5 and 6 children (ages 9 - 11) participate in conflict resolution training to enable them to support their peers to overcome disagreements during playtime.

- School staff receive training in emotional education approaches, such as conflict resolution. Training events are also provided for parents.
3. Research design

Methodology, Methods, Participants

The research involved a review of academic and practice-related literature, a policy analysis of emotion-based education initiatives and a concentrated ethnographic study in a junior school for a period of eight months. The study focused upon Year 5 students. The study included participant observations of students’ participation in a wide range of school-based activities, interviews with local authority representatives, interviews and focus groups with school staff and students, creative research workshops with students, and participatory research with a core group, self-named the ‘SEAL Squad’, of nine students (aged 9 -10). The SEAL squad created dens, short films and presentations as part of the research process. They had opportunities to share their creations with the wider school community. Additional students from Year 5 participated in the research through in-class workshops and, for those who wanted to be more involved, a lunchtime film and scrapbook club.

Summary of Fieldwork Activity

- 4 in-class activities with Year 5 children
- 13 research workshops/meetings with ‘SEAL squad’
- 7 focus groups with ‘SEAL squad’
- 3 school assemblies with ‘SEAL squad’
- Creation of 6 films with ‘SEAL squad’ and Year 5 children
- Film review workshop with ‘SEAL squad’
- 10 scrapbook workshops with ‘SEAL squad’ and Year 5 children
- 9 Interviews with Year 5 children
- 3 interviews with school staff
- 2 focus groups with school staff
- 2 interviews with Local Authority representatives
- Observation and participation in school life over an 8 month period
- Documentary research
4. Research Findings

4.1. Who are the empowered?

‘A lot of [emotional education is about] encouraging children to be empowered, to have the language to resolve conflict and difficulties, and express how they are feeling about a certain issue and ... to feel good about themselves.’ (Headteacher)

The association of empowerment with emotional education encourages the questions ‘how is empowerment understood?’ and within this understanding ‘who are the empowered?’ Empowerment at the school is often associated by staff with ‘having a voice’. The expression of ‘voice’ is also seen to encompass the expression of emotion.

‘I think that [this school] quite rightly has been recognised as a SEAL school ... it’s an environment where the children are allowed to express themselves and their feelings and [are] encouraged to do so at every opportunity from circle time to school council and it’s great really, that they get a chance to air their views.’ (Teacher)

Hochschild (2003) suggests that the management and expression of emotion is tied to ‘feeling rules’, which are constructed in interactions with others and shape ideas about what an individual should be feeling in a particular situation and in which ways they should communicate their emotion to others. At school, when children express emotion with adults and peers they are together constructing feeling rules.

Feeling rules can be understood as context-specific and are of particular times and places (Barbaret 2001). Given this, a universal set of feeling rules by which people should conform does not exist, but instead feeling rules are representative of particular social, cultural, historical, political and economic forces present within specific contexts. Therefore, it is important to remember that the feeling rules present in the school, some of which are defined in the emotional curriculum and reworked by the school to form a set of ‘Core Values’, are influenced by such wider forces.

Feeling rules change in different situations and with different people, for example the feeling rules that bound an informal encounter such as a group of friends playing ‘tig’ in the playground are different from those within a more formal encounter such as a School Council meeting.
Feeling rules can be reinforced by children as they seek to direct their encounters. For example, during a hands-on and playful activity in a classroom setting, two boys, Justin and Harry, were role-playing in a corner of the room. During the role-play, Justin knocks a hat from Harry’s head. Harry, frustrated, asks Justin twice to ‘pass’ his hat back to him. Harry’s request ends the role-play and communicates to Justin a feeling rule. Harry suggests that Justin’s actions were inappropriate because they stirred his frustration.

Children can also negate feeling rules in order to instead be recognised by their peers. For one of the girls, recognition is sought by shouting in order to get others to listen. Whereas one of the boys discredited his peer’s achievements to gain recognition for himself.

The methods that children use to direct their interactions or seek recognition can be quite different. However, leadership and recognition do not occur when children deviate from their typical method. For example, the girl who shouts is not heard by her peers when she does not shout.

In interactions, children often focus on the immediate effects of expressing emotion, particularly to gain recognition. In their interactions, they are less concerned by how emotion ‘should’ be expressed. Some children frequently negate the feeling rules and instead express emotions in ways that might help them be recognised.

The children that behave according to and reinforce feeling rules, tend to be more likely to be selected for positions of responsibility at the school, such as school council member or peer-mediator. In addition, within their interactions with adults, it seems that children’s ‘voices’ are more likely to be heard when they conform to these perceived ‘right’ ways of managing and expressing emotion, as will be explored in the following example of a School Council meeting.

At the first School Council meeting of the school year, eight children from mainstream classes and one boy from the integrated resource came together to share and discuss their views with two members of school staff about what should change in the school. The children came prepared with ideas based on their own and their peers’ reflections. The adults also invited the children on a tour of the school to communicate what they liked and what could be improved. Ryan, from the integrated resource, was particularly excited by this opportunity and eager to share his views. On one occasion during the tour, he taps Mr Davidson, the headteacher, on the shoulder repeatedly to get his attention.

*Mr Davidson says to him, ‘don’t keep doing that to me, it could get annoying’. Mrs Williams asks him, ‘what do you do if you want to speak’. Ryan raises his hand to demonstrate what he should do. She says to him ‘you wouldn’t like it if he tapped you’. ‘I would’, Ryan replies.* (Fieldnotes)

Ryan continued to express his excitement through his gestures and the way he moved his body. He later jumped with his hand in the air and was told by Mrs Williams, ‘you don’t need to jump, we’ll always come to you’. These interactions with Ryan, while they do not diffuse Ryan’s physical expression of his excitement and eagerness, communicated to his peers what types of emotional bodies are expected within these ‘grown-up’ meetings. The other children followed these feeling rules throughout the walk around.
While particular types of emotional engagements are expected from the children by the adults, it also appears that there are certain conventions that bind how adults engage with the children. During the tour, the adults used a range of ways to communicate they had heard the children’s views, such as verbally communicating their support for a child’s perspective.

George, from Year 5, says that books should be put back when they are used by children in the library. Hayley suggests that they ‘move the table so people get used to putting books back’. Mrs Williams responds, ‘don’t give them the excuse to dump it’. Mr Davidson, the headteacher, states ‘I like things tidy’. (Fieldnotes)

However, when the children’s views came into tension with adult-orientated rationales, the children were offered an alternative perspective to challenge their view.

Ryan suggests that at dinnertime ‘you should be able to sit with friends’. (the children are allocated seats by the lunchtime supervisors). Mrs Williams asks him, ‘isn’t it nice to sit with new people though?’ Ryan doesn’t agree, he says he always ends up sitting with girls and cites the Christmas meal as an example. He explains that this is the reason why he has packed lunch. (Fieldnotes)

In this case Ryan did not change his view but presents a compelling argument for why the lunchtime protocol should be reviewed. Rather than discounting his view, Mrs Williams suggested that they may change things for the Christmas meal as she told Ryan, ‘we’ll have to think about how we do the Christmas meal then’. In acknowledging one aspect of Ryan’s complaint, Mrs Williams also limited further discussion about changing the seating system already used at lunchtime, which is adopted by lunchtime supervisors as a way of minimising conflict.

These examples reflect some of the challenges of involving children in decision-making. Children are encouraged to make decisions about the school’s operations but their perspectives and those of adults can sometimes differ. Both positions draw upon legitimate rationales, yet adult-orientated perspectives tend to be the ones that are taken up. For example, one of the children on the tour suggested that all children should know the code for the door of the ICT suite so they can get in there to use a computer when the room is not in use. Mrs Williams said she was not sure about that idea and suggested that maybe ‘they will need to talk about that one’. Therefore these kinds of decision-making practices unintentionally work to reinforce the distinct social positions of adults and children at the school.

Children are also active in sustaining their social position, this is not a one-way (top-down) process. For example, in a conversation about the school’s new security gates the children share how they feel they need to be kept safe from harm.

George from Year 5 says that ‘robbers can’t get into the school’... a younger girl adds to this saying that the gates mean that ‘the teenagers can’t get in’... ‘they used to make the Y3 children upset, calling them names and the dinnerladies didn’t used to say anything, and they were much bigger then us. With the gates it’s easier for us to be more safe’. (Fieldnotes)
Within these ‘grown-up’ meetings the children and adults together sustained a culturally constructed view of children as in need of protection through adult supervision. Those children who concurred with this view of themselves tended to have their voices heard, whereas those who challenged this, such as the child who suggested that all children should have access to the ICT suite, tended to be encouraged to take on an alternative position or told that will be discussed in the future. This also happened within the classroom context when children share their perspectives in SEAL lessons.

In a SEAL lesson the children are discussing techniques to help them calm down, so that their ‘minds are more open to good ideas’ and to ‘good thinking’. Their teacher, Mr Collins, tells them... ‘You’ve got to help yourself to win the game of learning’. The children then start sharing their techniques to calm down. Didier says that he ‘counts to ten’. Rebecca says ‘take a deep breath’. Maram suggests to ‘walk away’. Alexandra says ‘scream in a pillow’. Someone shouts out, ‘what’s she mean?’ The teacher explains that it is like when you want to scream to let out all your anguish... Justin adds ‘sometimes I play on my Xbox’. The teacher reminds the children that they are thinking about when they are at school. (Fieldnotes)

While Justin’s view is not directly challenged, and instead the teacher addresses the whole class, there is a sense here that gaming is not an appropriate suggestion. Beyond the classroom setting, teachers and parents share a concern regarding children’s gaming not only because of the game content but also because online gaming puts children at risk of being ‘cyber-bullied’. The teacher’s response to Justin’s contribution to the discussion implies that gaming is not a valued way of managing emotion.

Earlier in this section it was suggested that children’s voices were heard when they were expressed in a conventional manner, which involves the child managing their emotions in particular ways (for example, children’s excitement and eagerness were expected to be suppressed during the tour as part of the School council meeting and calmness and patience were encouraged). These conventions, or feeling rules, are associated with how children are socially positioned at school, which is bound up with cultural constructions of children more widely. The children who are supported to express their own views, are those who both accept their position and the constraints that this imposes and support adult-orientated perspectives. These children are able to control their emotions in ways that align with the school’s explicit feeling rules. Working upon their own emotions in these ways is described by Hochschild as ‘emotional labour’ (2003). The next section will explore children’s emotional labour at school in more detail.
4.2. Is emotional self-control a ‘good’ thing?

The SEAL curriculum puts a particular emphasis on children’s emotional labour, the self-control of emotions. Indeed, the objectives of teaching children emotional skills is to encourage them to ‘manage strong feelings such as frustration, anger and anxiety’ and ‘be able to promote calm and optimistic states that promote the achievement of goals’ (DfES 2005, pg. 7).

Emotional education aims to teach children how to make ‘positive’ choices about how they respond to their emotions and therefore reduce conflict within their interactions with peers. In the following extract, a teacher describes a dispute between two children as an opportunity to encourage the children to reflect upon their own actions and how they influence the responses of others.

‘In a one-to-one or one-to-two group [I will ask] ‘what did you say to him, that’s probably why he might have reacted that way’ ... You’ve got to work on sort of the strategies between them... get them to think about what they did that might have provoked that person, because they’ll just see what that person did to them they won’t even contemplate until you remind them, ‘well what did you do that might have ... provoked them or upset them’ or ‘why do you think why he might have reacted in that way’.’ (Teacher)

Through encouraging these kinds of insights the aspiration is for children to be able to self-regulate their responses during similar incidents in the future. For the children, part of the process of managing feelings involves both in-the-moment self-regulation and out-the-moment conversations with others.

‘Like your brain has loads of feelings in your head and ... you have to think about lots of things and if you tell people then you can make them right, but if you don’t tell people you can’t make them right and you start worrying about things....’ (Boy - Year 5)

While emotional education encourages emotions to now enter into the classroom and be viewed as an important aspect of learning, the view of emotion and the relationship between emotion and learning that frames such pedagogy is worth exploring.

The SEAL curriculum categorises emotions into positive and negative. The curriculum draws upon the perspective of Goleman who states that ‘students who are anxious, angry or depressed don’t learn’ and states that ‘emotions overwhelm concentration’ (Goleman 1995, pg. 78). This view supports an historically constructed opposition between emotion and intelligence, where emotions are associated with irrationality and intelligence with rationality. Goleman popularised the term ‘emotional intelligence’ which, while aiming to
acknowledge this opposition, has encouraged the rationalisation of the ‘unpredictable’ emotional dimensions of the self. Gillies states that Goleman argues that ‘aggression, violence, impulsivity and school disengagement result from an inability to recognise and address emotion’ (2011, pg. 187). Children are therefore encouraged to engage with and name their feelings and act upon certain feelings in particular ways.

> 'At registration times in the morning and in the afternoons the children rate themselves in terms of how they’re feeling... You can spot patterns and then you can investigate that, and you can probe a little, and talk to them gently, and maybe coax out of them what the issues are and take some action to try and resolve it or help them to resolve it themselves.' (Headteacher)

The perceived benefits of SEAL approaches such as this, is that they foster children’s ‘happiness’.

Lisa (R): What do you think might be particularly important to the children about SEAL?

Head: I think that, I think it encourages them to be happy, to deal with their emotions ... and I think that’s the most important thing for children, for them to feel happy and if they don’t feel happy, that’s when you start getting, you know, problems in terms of disengagement or possible behaviour problems, or children withdrawing into themselves or not feeling engaged with their learning...

The consideration of children’s happiness within formal education is a welcome shift from a more traditional focus that prioritised academic success. It is important, however, to examine the SEAL rhetoric that making children happy will turn them into ‘model’ learners, who, for example, behave in the ‘right’ ways and appear engaged in lessons. Gillies (2011) argues that this association results in the evaluation of emotion (and thus happiness) in terms of ‘appropriateness’ (i.e. as demonstrative of the ‘model’ learner). The ‘inappropriate’ expression of emotion is associated with individual emotional needs. While these needs are attributed to social causes, such as the child’s homelife, the way a child is expected by adults to respond to such inner needs is through talking about them and learning strategies and techniques to keep their emotions under control, such as walking away.

Mrs Williams asks if everything is going well at playtime ... She asks if there have been any disagreements. He says that there haven’t really. She asks him what he does if there is a disagreement. Justin tells her that he walks away and decides to leave it. ‘That’s brilliant!’ Mrs Williams says that she thinks he can be a peer mediator next year, because he is saying all the right things – as a peer mediator would. It is good to see you doing the right things, she tells him (Fieldnotes).

A focus upon children’s abilities to control their expression of ‘inappropriate’ emotion separates felt experience and emotional exchanges from a ‘social and political context’ (Gillies, 2011, pg. 201). For example, children express emotions in their interactions in order to characterise their social relationships. The remainder of this section examines how children’s emotional exchanges
are embedded within power relations in which social positions and identities are shaped and re-shaped.

The following extract shows how Alexandra, Fred and Justin use playful mocking to set apart their own social positions. This runs parallel to Alexandra’s conversation with the researcher where she has been asked how she is nice to people. The children are discussing a written list of ‘promises’ that they made to one another during a research workshop.

Lisa (R): Were any of these your promises?
Alexandra: Mine was the first, I would be nice to everyone I meet.
Lisa (R): And how are you nice to people, what do you do to be nice?
Alexandra: (Speaking to Fred) You stop doing that
Fred: You have to me nice to me as well
Alexandra: Why?
Fred: ‘to everybody you meet’
Alexandra: You’re invisible, I haven’t met you
Fred: That means strangers as well. Hi stranger!
Alexandra: Like, I’m like nice, like
Fred: Like!
Alexandra: I’m like smiling
*Justin giggles*
Alexandra: I smile. I say ‘hello’
Justin: And you’re horrible!
Alexandra: If I don’t like something about somebody I don’t tell them and I’m nice to them and I ignore that feature that they have and stuff like that
Justin: And what you do is you go and tell a teacher and you get rid of it (clicks his fingers across his face as he says ‘get rid of it’)
Alexandra: I’ll get rid of you in (clicks fingers) in a minute if you don’t stop doing that!
Justin: I’ll kick your beehive if you don’t shut your mouth!

Fred taunts Alexandra by suggesting that her promise of being nice must also apply to him too, even though he is annoying her. Alexandra jokingly says that to her, he is ‘invisible’. Justin begins to taunt Alexandra too, again by joking that in some situations she does not adhere to her promise, instead she is ‘horrible’. Alexandra tells Justin that she will ‘get rid’ of him if he doesn’t stop. Justin retorts, ‘I'll kick your beehive’. This encounter can be understood as a struggle for recognition. Fred’s and Justin’s exchanges with Alexandra are like playful battles of wit. Outside of this encounter Alexandra is socially positioned as the student who, by her own words, ‘gets chosen for everything’. However, she seems to have a more fragile position here. The adult-led emotional practices she has learnt are irrelevant within this encounter, in which the children make carefully controlled exchanges of emotion, using mockery and jibes to shape how the encounter develops.

Emotions are integral to the social interaction. Personal feelings guide Alexandra’s, Fred’s and Justin’s reactions to one another. Justin’s closing comment, ‘if you don’t shut your mouth’, heard out of context and judged according to the values of SEAL may be deemed inappropriate and anti-social. However, within this context it can be understood as carefully attuned
to the encounter, in which each child is seeking recognition by sustaining, contesting or redefining their own and others’ social positions.

This extract reveals the children’s capacities to manage emotions in their interactions. However, the choices they make about how to manage and express emotion sometimes conflict with the practices that the school promotes. This has implications for the ways that children are socially positioned within the school and the ways they are characterised. For example, both children and adults are expected to express their emotion in ways that align with what is viewed as ‘appropriate’ at school. Children spotted doing the ‘right’ things will receive formal recognition from adults.

‘[The praise pod allows] members of staff to spot children doing the right things, showing emotional intelligence, demonstrating the qualities and virtues which we are wanting the children to display, showing the core values and [the children will be] be celebrated for it - reinforcing [what they have done] in a positive way’ (Headteacher).

As suggested earlier in this section, the responsibility to avoid the expression of emotion in ‘inappropriate’ ways, such as aggressive behaviour, is primarily viewed as an issue of self-management. Within the school children are also invited to explore the relationship between their feelings and their home and school experiences. In this way, emotion is seen as an expression of individual needs and therefore a means to explore what these may be and act upon them.

‘If anyone is upset or depressed or worried about something from home or school, we know it’s going to impact on their learning... why ask a child to perform in a Maths test or anything else, when at home there could be something really significant going on .... we can’t switch on and off easily, we carry stuff around’ (Teacher).

This identification of needs frames a meeting between Justin and the Headteacher to discuss Justin’s recent ‘outbursts’ with his peers.

Mr Davidson is speaking with a soft tone to his voice... He says to Justin, ‘this is the second time something like this has happened this week. This is unusual for you this year. I thought you were doing well and learning to control your anger’, like a grown-up’. Justin says that ‘it is hard sometimes’... Mr Davidson asks Justin why this is happening. He asks him if there is anything going on at home. Justin explains that his brother has been winding him up (Fieldnotes).

In this conversation anger is described as something which exists within Justin, which has its own force that Justin must learn to control - ‘I thought you were ... learning to control your anger’. Mr Davidson tries to identify a cause for Justin’s feelings of anger and implies that his behaviour communicates some distress beyond school. This concern reflects an appreciation of how contexts beyond school can affect a child’s behaviour. However, the focus of intervention is upon Justin’s self-management of his emotional expression.

Other children have communicated their dislike for Justin because they see him as unable to manage his emotion in ways that are appropriate in a mainstream classroom. They suggest he should be in the integrated resource.
Justin’s changeability seems to be a point of intrigue to his peers, who on occasions seem to push at him until they get a reaction. However, these stirrings do not always seem to be intentional acts. Rather, they seem to be generated by an understandable reluctance, framed by feelings of fear, to accommodate for Justin. Rather, it is easier to make an excuse as to why he cannot participate.

In this case, Harry explains how he told Justin that he could not join the game because there were ‘too many people playing’. For him, this was a legitimate reason to deny Justin’s participation. Justin’s response is to chase Harry. This story is shared as an example of how Justin ‘attacks people for no reason’. The encounters between Justin and the Headteacher and Justin and Harry are examples of how identities are constructed, through the repetition of events that are reasoned in particular ways. Such repetition leads to a fear of Justin; as one teacher states ‘you just don’t know what he will do’. It appears that he has become a fearful object (as a result of his perceived unpredictability).

Ahmed explores how fearfulness can ‘stick’ to objects and suggests that the association of a feeling to an individual is an ‘effect’ of an interaction (2004). In this sense fearfulness does not reside in an individual, rather the naming of the individual as fearsome is an effect of how interactions are read and reasoned by others. In the case of Justin, the identification of him as an irrationally angry individual, influences how his emotionality is conceptualised (as a problem resulting from Justin’s lack of self-control over his emotions) and how he is socially positioned by his peers (as different from them and in need of specialist support).

As explored in the focus group with Justin, Fred and Alexandra, Justin attempts to redefine his social position by contesting Alexandra’s position. Justin’s attempts to re-position himself are frequent but often undermined by his peers because of their own feelings of fear towards him (as when Harry tells him he cannot join his game).

Perhaps then, Justin’s expression of anger can be understood as not only just about him ‘trying to get his own way’, but also as a reaction to his experience of being repeatedly excluded by his peers. During many of the den-building workshops Justin was often not encouraged to contribute to the den. The contributions he did make were often undermined by his peers and often overlooked or destroyed. Through understanding Justin’s experience of exclusion, his expression of anger can be understood in a social context. Perhaps, anger is one of the few mechanism Justin can use to get his peers to hear him.
This section has shown how the SEAL curriculum emphasises children’s self-control of emotions in certain ways. The findings presented suggest that a focus upon emotional control can stigmatise particular children and overlook the role of emotions in how children organise their social worlds. It has been suggested that children’s informal emotional exchanges are embedded within power relations in which social positions and identities are shaped and reshaped. Children are able to carefully attune their emotional expression with their peers. However, the choices they make about how to express themselves can conflict with the practices the school promotes. The next section builds upon this by exploring the relevance of both positive and negative in children’s friendship groups.
3. Are both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions important in children’s social relations?

The SEAL curriculum classifies emotions as positive and negative. The teaching and learning approaches and activities it supports aim to foster children’s positive emotions. Through SEAL, representations of emotion, such as I feel scared or we feel excited, are seen as subjective reports. In the extract below a teacher describes how children’s personal feelings can have negative and positive consequences depending upon how the children themselves respond to them.

‘We are allowed to feel scared because situations make you feel scared, but how do you react to your scaredness, are you proactive or do you just retreat into your shell, because it could stop some children doing new things or stopping them from having a really good quality of life, which is what it is about really’ (Teacher).

Crossley (1998) states that ‘emotion does not lie outside of the social world ... It is positioned squarely within it’ (pg. 19) and suggests that ‘emotions play a constitutive role in social life’ (pg. 17). Perhaps then, emotions are not only influential in children’s sense of personal fulfilment, as reflected in the teacher’s comment, but also play an intrinsic role in the production of the social world. This section will look beyond ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ views of emotion and will explore the role of emotion in the construction of social relations.

Crossley suggests that ‘emotions ... can be and frequently are judged rational or irrational according to their relationship to their context’ (Pg. 19). Building on from this it is also possible to suggest that people within the same environment can hold contrasting views about other people’s expression of emotion, as reflected in the following example.

_During lunchtime a boy, David, hides small icepacks from a lunchbox belonging to his friend, Ellie, around the classroom for her to find. Ellie laughs. David is excited and finds increasingly unusual places to hide them. A lunchtime supervisor, Beryl, asks David ‘not to move from his seat’ (Fieldnotes)._  

Ellie and Beryl’s different perspectives of the same event are reflected in their emotional exchanges with David. David and Ellie’s emotional exchange communicates something of what their interaction means to each of them. For example, when Ellie laughs David seems to get more excited. Ellie’s laughter conveys her concordance with David’s humour. In contrast, Beryl’s response to David, to ask him not to move from his seat, asserts her status as an
authority figure. Beryl and Ellie’s contrasting emotional responses reflect and sustain their different relationships to David, as authority figure and friend.

The role of emotion in the organisation of social relations, will be explored further by examining the changing dynamics between three girls who regularly socialise with one another - Cheryl, Katie and Cathy. The interactions that take place between these three girls are sometimes antagonistic.

One of the female teachers jokes that Cheryl, Cathy and Katie will get sick of each other before the end of the week-long residential at the outdoor pursuits centre. She tells us that keep on falling out – ‘I said to them that if they can’t work together they would have to be separated ... One of them always seems to be left out’... She tells us that they could all work really well as part of a bigger group during the problem solving activity and describes this as ‘weird’ since they could not get on in a small group (Fieldnotes).

The teacher here has observed that the children ‘keep on falling out’ when they are working in a ‘small group’. However, the girls continue to want to work together even after they have fallen out. The remainder of this section explores how these fall-outs play a significant role in the social organisation of the group.

Goodwin explores how girls’ ‘interactive rituals’ are used to negotiate social order. For example, she examined how girls ‘construct hierarchically organised and differentiated social relations’ through their conversations (Goodwin 2006, pg. 247-248). The construction of social order seems a significant part of these girls fall-outs. This is evident in the following extract from a focus group with Cathy and Katie.

Katie: Hello! This girl’s coming to our school tomorrow, she’s called Cathy and she looks very cool and I want to be her bestest friend in the whole wide world

Cathy: What about me Katie, I’m the other Cathy, are you going to just leave me?

Katie: I’m going to leave Cathy, this other girl, she’s called Cathy Perry

Cathy: So you’re going to leave Cathy for Cathy

Katie: Yes. Cathy (pause) I don’t know what her other names is, but she looks really nice, really pretty, really bubbly, really fantastic, really creative, really...

Cathy: She speaks Spanish

Katie: And she speaks Spanish, oh la contino

Didier: Uno, dos, tres...

Katie: Cuatro, cinco, seis...

Didier: Da da da dum

...

Cathy: Katie are you really going to be horrible and leave?

Cathy asks Katie if she is going to ‘just’ leave her for a new girl who is joining their class with the same name. Using the word ‘just’ implies that leaving would fail to consider the full extent of her actions. Cathy emotionally qualifies the act of ‘leaving’ by describing it as a ‘horrible’ thing to do. Her use of emotive language, which portrays leaving in a negative way, is perhaps used to communicate to Katie that this is a hurtful thing to say and/or do.
In contrast to David’s and Ellie’s interaction, Cathy’s and Katie’s seems to be about something beyond relational closeness. For example, Katie seems to actively avoid defining her relationship to Cathy as one of friendship. In the following extract Cathy is talking about how people sometimes ‘torment’ her and can be ‘mean’. In response Katie shares a very positive account of her school experience, which Cathy suggests she contributes to by stating ‘I’m Katie’s friend’.

Cathy: I feel happy with my friends ... except for some people, they torment me sometimes, but that’s only sometimes and erm, and, I just feel comfortable at the school, I feel really happy at the school sometimes, when you’re not being, when some people are being not mean
Katie: It’s been really nice in the school since I’ve been here, I’ve been liking all my friends here, well, and...
Cathy: I’m Katie’s friend
Katie: And I’ve got lots of friends here, especially Mr Collins, and Lisa, Didier...
Didier: Wooo!
Katie: We’ve got Cheryl, Didier, Fred, Didier, Mr Collins...
Didier: Shall we just put it everybody in the class
Katie: Everybody in the class have been very nice to me since I’ve been a bit of a ...
Cathy: Does that include me?

Goodwin draws upon Garfinkel’s notion of ‘degradation rituals’ to describe the ways in which girls undermine those who break the social norms of a group or try to move above their social position within a group (2006, pg. 223). Perhaps Katie’s active choice not to name Cathy as a ‘friend’ can be understood in this way. Katie also makes a degrading reference to Cathy’s mum, who she describes as ‘really weird’ and implies that Cathy is also weird.

Cathy: My Mum Mrs Grange is a teaching assistant
Katie: She’s called Mrs Grange and she’s related to her cos she’s really weird

In doing so, Katie casts Cathy as having a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goodwin 2006). However, Cathy continues to show her allegiance to Katie. For example, at one point the children are talking about when they put red circular stickers on their heads and pretended to be Hindu. Didier describes this as offensive. Cathy agrees and adds, ‘but I wasn’t doing it, it was Katie, no it was Cheryl, it wasn’t Katie’.

Katie’s insult occurs despite Cathy’s earlier accusation that she was ‘mean’ for suggesting she was going to ‘leave’. Perhaps Katie’s response is a way of maintaining their distinct social positions. Katie’s insults follow Cathy’s attempt to use emotional manipulation to strengthen her allegiance to Katie. This is a resource that Cathy seems to draw upon more widely in order to manage her social interactions, but to little effect.

For example, Cheryl mocked Cathy during a focus group about bullying. This follows a workshop in which Cathy persistently used emotional manipulation in an attempt to be heard. Cathy’s peers were irritated by her because she was, as Katie stated, being ‘mardy’. The term mardy is used by children to describe someone throwing a tantrum to try and get their own way. During the focus
group Lionel draws upon a recent scenario, in which Cathy said she was being bullied. Cathy tells him he should not talk about that. However, Cheryl continues to discuss this in what seems to be a deliberate attempt to aggravate Cathy.

Lionel: If Cathy were being bullied by
Didier: Adam Gould
Cathy: You shouldn’t talk about that, this is going to go on
Lionel: Adam Gould has being bullying Cathy, right and
Cathy: Shut up
...
Didier: But Cathy has been bullied a lot
Lionel: And they were bullying each other
Cathy: Urgh
...
Cheryl: Cathy could be bullying me, yeah, and then I get upset and I can’t tell anyone, and I tell Florence, and then Adam Gould starts punching and she won’t tell anyone and she starts getting mardy
...
Cheryl: Well, Cathy is really...
Cathy: No, I’m not!
...
Cathy: It isn’t funny
Cheryl: ... I then would get upset and I can’t tell anyone and then Adam comes along and says are you all right and I say no and then he punches her, like he normally does, and then she starts getting mardy

She does not initially get a rise out of Cathy and then declares, ‘well, Cathy is really [bullying me]’. This comment does stir a reaction in Cathy. The researcher then invites Cathy to have her say, but her peers block her from contributing to the conversation by singing.

Lisa (R): Cathy, what did you want to say?
All: (Singing) All by myself
Didier: (Singing) All by myself
Lisa (R): Cathy, did you want to say something?
Alexandra: Lisa, you know in the assembly that we’re doing, could we have a bit of a role play in the middle of the role play? Could we start singing that?
All: (Singing - in the background) All by myself...
Cathy: Wasn’t that my idea?
Katie: No! That was my idea.

It seems that Cheryl’s degradation of Cathy is supported by others. Cathy is left excluded from the conversation. Regardless, Cathy does continue to try and get her voice heard. She states that an idea that Alexandra is suggesting originally came from her. Cathy seems to be seeking recognition for her contribution to the project. Yet, her peers do not address this.

It seems that Cathy’s peers exclude her when she behaves in a way which they refer to as ‘just being mardy’. However, Cathy’s response in the example used can also be understood as her reaction to not being heard.
The children also used the word ‘mardy’ in a play they wrote about bullying. The victims of bullying were associated as having emotional traits such as being ‘mardy’ or ‘snotty’.

Jaden (B): Why are you playing with her?!
Lucas (B): Do you mean that thing?!
Carlie: I’m not called that I’m called...
Danielle: She’s called Carlie!
Nicole (B): No, she’s a thing, a that, a little mardy girl and snotty girl, so why are you playing with that?
Jamie (B): You’re out of the gang, cos you’re playing with that thing, so go away!

It seems that being mardy is not a valued character trait. In the play the children show how those who are mardy are denounced by their peers. Perhaps then, both Cheryl’s and Katie’s responses can be understood as a form of discipline and an attempt to limit Cathy’s use of emotional manipulation.

Katie and Cheryl perhaps did not perceive Cathy to be suffering, regardless of whether she was or not. This was also reflected by Lionel, who stated that Cathy and Adam ‘were bullying each other’. Cathy’s continued ability to stand up for herself showed her resilience and determination, as demonstrated both in her interactions with Katie and Cheryl. Cathy’s peers seemed to see her in ways that opposed her requests for support. Their perception of Cathy as ‘mardy’ seems to enable Katie and Cheryl to trivialise Cathy’s presentations of distress and discipline her for acting in these ways.

This section has shown that fall-outs play an important role within children’s friendship groups in two ways. Firstly, they are a part of how the girl’s socially organise their relationships. Secondly, they are used as a way of regulating their friends’ behaviours according to the social norms of the group.

The girls’ interactions described in this section run counter to the school’s core value that children should be ‘respectful, caring and polite’. It also challenges the view that girls are naturally inclined to openly discuss and explore their feelings with other girls.

‘I think the children who manage their behaviour really well [are] usually girls because ... they talk things through quite outwardly a lot of the time ... It is perfect for them just to kind of enhance what they do already’ (Teacher).

For the three girls mentioned in this section personal feelings are not a platform for ‘caring’ dialogue. Rather, emotional exchanges are used to manage social hierarchies. In addition, emotional exchanges are not necessarily about sharing and listening but defining the feeling rules of the group. For example, Cathy was reprimanded by Katie for using emotion to try and manipulate others.

Conflict appears to play a significant role in the construction of girls’ friendships. Another teacher reflected upon this too. In contrast to boys’ fall-outs, he felt that the girls’ conflicts seemed to have more depth and be more prolonged.

‘... if there’s a argument on the football pitch with boys, it’s a very quick handshake and it’s forgotten about. Whereas, I think with some of the girls ... their arguments tended to go on deeper and
longer, and come to the surface every so often ... [and] ... be a lot more prolonged’ (Teacher).

The SEAL learning outcomes tend to classify different emotions as positive and negative. The curriculum encourages children expression of positive emotion. However, this report shows that children’s expression of emotion, whether classified as positive or negative, is intrinsically linked to the production of children’s worlds. While the girls’ fall-outs may be hurtful, they also serve to manage the emotional and social boundaries of the group. The reason why it can be difficult to manage girls’ fall-outs, as the teacher suggests, may be because they serve a social role. It seems that children’s fall-outs are a way for children to negotiate the complex power relations that are an important part of school life.
4. Are categorisations of children’s emotional dispositions enabling?

The previous section suggested that children regulate their peers’ emotional expression through their interactions and ‘degradation rituals’ (Goodwin 2006, pg. 223). This section explores how children categorise the emotional dispositions of others according to their understanding of how adults value their emotions.

Children construct characterisations of others which have an emotional quality. For example, one boy invited me to snub a girl on a reality TV show who he described as ‘arrogant’. However, emotional associations are not unique to children. People of all ages make judgements about other peoples’ emotional states. At the school, children are described by adults through their emotional characteristics, such as ‘caring’, ‘mature’ or ‘needy’. Children’s emotional exchanges with adults can reinforce these characteristics.

‘Cathy is quite flamboyant and out there and likes her needs to be met all the time, but when you have to talk to her about issues she cries really readily. And I know I had to talk to her the other week about shouting out all the time and she just went, you know, ‘I’ve had a really hard time being bullied’. She hasn’t got a lot of resilience about negative comments towards her. You know, [I shared some] mild negative comments and she immediately dragged up the last three years of playground issues’ (Teacher).

Mayall suggests that ‘childhood is a relational concept’ (1998, pg. 139). She states that ‘because of the authority and control adults exercise over all aspects of children’s lives, adult models not only importantly affect children’s experiences, knowledge and identity, they are also critical in constructing the personhood of children’ (pg. 139). Mayall suggests that children thus acquire an understanding of how adults value their emotions and their bodies. This, in turn, affects how children view themselves.

This is particularly noticeable in children’s presentations of gender. Girls present distinct types of femininity with their peers. For some girls, their femininity is expressed through an emerging sexual identity.

Carla: ... you want to go down and up and up and down
Kathryn: Like Justin frickin’
Carla: Kathryn, you want to do that with every boy in this school
Kathryn: I do!
Girls sometimes referred to themselves as being ‘sexy’. For example, one girl sang to others, ‘I’m very sexy, yeah, yeah, yeah’. Another girl likened being in a good mood to feeling ‘like I’m sexy, like a sexy bitch’. In one of the focus groups two girls taunted the only boy about a scenario he shared when a girl approached him at ice-skating. They pretended to be the girl in the story.

Kathryn: Are you all right? Do you want me to have babies?
Carla: Do you want to go to bed with me, so we can have two beautiful children and raise them to have big boobies?

The girls’ conversations with boys about sex and sexuality take place more frequently during the time when they are participating in relationship education lessons. They also started using frequently the ‘adult words’ for genitalia. In a focus group with Didier, Kathryn and Carla about a den-building workshop, they explained to the researcher the different ways that girls, boys and adults talk.

Carla: Almost all the girls like pretend to talk like a baby... We don’t find it talking like a baby...
Kathryn: I think it’s sexy
Carla: We find it talking like, it’s like a funny voice, we like doing it

... Lisa (R): And what do boys think about these voices?
Kathryn: Boys, I don’t even know
Didier: Don’t even go there, it’s so annoying
Kathryn: We don’t like boys do we at times?
Lisa (R): What about talking like a grown-up?
Didier: It’s miles better
Kathryn: Like this, oh my God, I can’t believe I’m like so pregnant
Didier: That’s like a baby
Carla: I like talking like both really

... Lisa (R): So how do boys talk?
Didier: Boys talk like grown-ups

In this conversation, the children commented upon the differences they perceive between boys and girls. Didier suggested that boys are more mature than girls. He argued that this is demonstrated through the choices boys make regarding what they say and how they say it. However, Carla said they enjoyed using ‘funny’ voices in their conversations.

When Kathryn mimicked the voice of an adult, she used a posh accent. The topic of conversation she chose was pregnancy. This perhaps reflects her association of sexuality with adults. Perhaps then her conversations about sex are about becoming adult and thus using the concepts and language of adulthood.

Mayall suggest that ‘the social worlds of childhood are sharply differentiated from those of adults’ (1998, pg. 139). However, she also claims that ‘children both expect and desire to participate in the activities they see adults engaging in at home’ and that this extends into schools (1998, pg. 143). This is evident in children’s delight at being nominated for roles such as ‘peer-mediator’ at the school. They agreed to take on this role because they
'wanted to help people ... [and their] ... school'. Perhaps then, the ways girls use language typically assigned to the ‘adult’ domain, reflects their interest in being a part of the adult world. This is also reflected in a conversation between Connie and the field researcher.

Connie asks me if I know what vagina means. I say that I do. I say that I was in the same sex education lesson as her... She asks me if I know what penis means. Again I say yes. She asks me if I know what nuggets are. I say that I don’t know. She points to her privates and says, but on a boys (Fieldnotes).

In contrast, some of the boys tend to participate in the adult world by demonstrating their maturity. Didier’s presentations of maturity were particularly recognised and valued by adults and enables his inclusion in their world. For example, Didier’s depiction of children’s fall-outs in the playground were trusted by adults, whereas other boys’ accounts were more likely to be disputed. Didier’s teacher also described him as ‘the most mature boy in the class’.

Adults seem to associate maturity with resilience. One teacher stated that boys ‘learn to be resilient on the football pitch’. It seems that boys are perceived to be more emotionally resilient than girls. Emotional resilience is a sign of boys masculinity amongst peers. For example, on the occasions when Didier fell over on the tarmac playground during football he always held back his tears. Rather, he would get up and carry on playing. This type of reaction is common amongst the ‘cool’ boys.

Didier demonstrates his emotional resilience by repressing his tears. Understanding resilience is one of the SEAL outcomes - children ‘think about the importance of resilience in overcoming obstacles in order to reach a goal’ (DfES, 2005a, pg. 1). Within the SEAL guidelines resilience is described as the ability to put ‘suffering behind [you] and take positive steps to build a better future’ (DfES, 2005b, pg. 37).

In tension with developing children’s resilience, SEAL also aims to challenge the repression of emotion strongly associated with being a man and encourages boys to realise it is fine to cry.

‘I think [SEAL] really helps a lot of the boys who internalise their feelings, get frustrated but don’t know why, and now they understand that, ‘hey, we all feel like that’ ... [and] ... boys can see that its fine to cry’ (Teacher).

However, one of the boys who does cry openly does not mix with other boys during playtimes. Instead he spends his time with groups of girls. On one occasion he was described as ‘gay’ by the boys. Cheryl stepped in to defend him.

David is accused of being ‘gay’ by the boys. Lionel says that he is gay because he talks about women’s privates. Cheryl tells them that if he was gay he would be talking about men’s privates (Fieldnotes).

A member of staff felt that David was not emotionally ready to take on roles of responsibility such as peer-mediator.
‘I didn’t choose him because he’s not ready, emotionally he’s not ready to come and do this, he wouldn’t have managed all week either, he’ll be ready next year’ (Teacher).

For David, his lack of emotional resilience leads to his exclusion from grown-up roles and boys’ groups. Teachers do also acknowledge that it is wrong to expect children to behave in uniform ways.

‘... we shouldn’t expect children to all behave in the same way because emotionally we have got children a year a part in age almost from September to August, we’ve got boys and girls and the expectation for them all to fit into this box and behave in a certain way is wrong’ (Teacher).

However, there still exist emotional stereotypes which guide what it means to be a ‘proper’ male or female.

This section has suggested that children categorise the emotional dispositions of others. Children’s categorisations relate to how children perceive male and female bodies to be valued in the adult domain and influence how the children themselves present gendered emotional identities. For both boys and girls this involves appropriating their perceptions of adult masculinity and femininity. Some of the girls appropriated sexual language in conversation with adults and peers. Whereas boys repressed and controlled their emotion in order to appear mature.

Children’s presentations of gender are also important to how they are socially positioned at school. David did not control his emotions as readily as other boys, who challenged his masculinity by suggesting he was gay. Boys who express ‘feminine’ emotions, such as David, seem to occupy a position outside of the boys’ domain and does not have any friends who are boys. However, mature boys, such as Didier, who control their emotions are well-respected by other boys. Girls who appropriate sexual language, also seem to have a certain degree of authority over other the girls. Kathryn, in particular, was a very popular girl to be friends with and was also one of the first to have a boyfriend.

Children present their gender in different ways, and many of which have not been explored in this section. However, children’s categorisations of emotional dispositions as either masculine or feminine are important to how they relate to and view their peers. At the same time, children’s perceptions of being a male or female adult influence how they present themselves emotionally.
5. Implications and further questions

The school involved in this study has shown a commitment to allowing emotions into education. Much of their practice is valued by many of the children at the school, who feel they are listened to and that how they feel is taken into consideration. Children are aware of how difficult periods in their life can affect their attainment and the school staff show a genuine concern and regard for the well-being of children. While children’s attainment is still a priority, a great focus is put upon children’s enjoyment of education and children’s rights to feel valued and be heard.

This report is intended to extend debate regarding emotional education. It reflects upon the application of SEAL in education from a sociological perspective and is framed around a series of questions. It is hoped that this report will offer an opportunity for practitioners to reflect upon their practice by thinking about the social role of emotions at school.

The research findings have shown that school life influences how children feel and the ways they express emotion. Emotion is important to how children build relationships and identities at school. This section explores the implications of these findings in response to the report title, ‘what contribution can the recognition and exploration of emotion make to social justice in education?’ These implications have given rise to further questions which are intended as starting points for reflective discussions amongst practitioners.

1. Who are the empowered?

SEAL is associated with children’s empowerment through supporting children’s voice. This report explored the varied role of emotion as children seek empowerment through their interactions with peers. In addition, the report highlighted the complexities of supporting children’s voice and involving children in decision-making processes. The ways that children express their emotion has a significant effect upon the roles they have at school. Children who have positions of responsibility, such as school council member, are encouraged to conduct themselves in a calm manner during adult-style meetings. Within these meetings, those children who are calm tend to have their views heard. However, these children also seem to have some sense of what adults think they should say and have learnt to say the ‘right’ things.

These findings show that the ways children conduct themselves emotionally is integral to the way they are socially positioned at school. It is important to recognise the different ways that children choose to express themselves and their views. Perhaps formal meetings are not the best way to involve
some children in decision making processes. There is scope to explore how other approaches may provide opportunities for the children who do not easily ‘fit’ the school system, to have a voice.

Further questions: How can all children have a voice and be heard at school? What kinds of opportunities can schools provide to support children’s different perspectives to inform decision-making?

2. Is emotional self-control a ‘good’ thing?

The SEAL curriculum emphasises children’s self-control of emotions in certain ways. This report suggests that this emphasis can overlook the role of emotions in social organisation. Children’s emotional exchanges are embedded within power relations in which their social positions and identities are shaped and re-shaped. This report has shown that children’s feelings and emotional responses vary depending upon their own experiences. For example, some children may develop a sensitivity towards being excluded because this happens to them on a regular basis. In these cases it is difficult for the children to contain their anger and frustration. Their communication of anger is perhaps one of the few resources they have left in order to be heard. Emotions are therefore stirred within social contexts.

This suggests that children’s feelings and emotional responses are embedded within social hierarchies. Perhaps then, felt experience can be understood as a way of knowing about the social world. Such a view could extend emotional education from a focus upon emotional control to the exploration of emotions as part of wider power relations. For example, such an approach might ask children to explore the relationship between feelings of disgust and acts of discrimination or feelings of love and allegiance with others. Exploring emotion as a political force in this way connects emotional education with citizenship education as it engages children with the everyday challenges to social justice.

Further questions: How can emotional education engage children with the political dimensions of emotion? What support would teacher’s need to further develop their practice within this area?

3. Are both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions important in children’s social relations?

The SEAL learning outcomes tend to classify different emotions as positive and negative. The curriculum encourages children expression of positive emotion. However, this report shows that children’s expression of emotion, whether classified as positive or negative, is intrinsically linked to the production of social relations. It is therefore difficult to limit children’s expression of negative emotions as they serve a social role. For example, girls’ fall-outs play a significant role in managing friendship groups. Fall-outs enable girls to develop the feeling rules that guide the interactions between group members. While fall-outs can appear substantial and sustained, the girls tend to continue their friendships. These findings contrast a commonly held perception that girls are naturally inclined to openly discuss and explore their feelings in caring ways. Rather it seems that girls actively influence the ways that emotions circulate between themselves and others in order to provoke fall-outs.
These findings show that negative emotions serve a social role. It seems that children’s fall-outs are a way of negotiating the complex power relations that are an important part of school life. However, children can get hurt through fall-outs, especially if they are repeated. In order to limit hurtful encounters between children, it is important to understand the role of fall-outs within a school context. Such an approach encourages the appraisal of social structures as well as the actions of individual children.

Further questions: How does the social environment at school influence children’s disputes and bullying practices? What procedures can be established to enable school leaders and teachers to reflect upon and respond to this question in order to develop bullying prevention and intervention programmes?

4. Are categorisations of children’s emotional dispositions enabling?

The report suggested that children categorise the emotional dispositions of others. Children’s categorisations relate to how children perceive male and female bodies to be valued in the adult domain. They influence how the children themselves present gendered emotional identities. Girls’ appropriated a sexual identity through which they defined themselves as ‘sexy’. Other girls took on a ‘girly’ identify. Boys managed their expression of emotion in order to present a masculine identity. The boys and girls who expressed their emotions through their bodies in ways that contested notions of ‘proper’ gender were excluded by peers. Interestingly, the girls’ increased appropriation of a ‘sexy’ identity coincided with their participation in sex and relationship education.

This suggests that there is scope within emotional education, and in particular sex and relationship education, to explore emotions, gender and identity in order to critique the gender norms that influence children’s judgements and dismissal of others.

Further questions: How can emotional education encourage children to explore and question the gender norms that lead to social inequalities at school? What support would teacher’s need to further consider such forms of social inequality and respond to them in their practice?
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