



Book Reviews

This issue focuses on the recently published book *Nurturing the wellbeing of students in difficulty. The legacy of Paul Cooper*, edited by Carmel Cefai to celebrate the legacy of Paul Cooper. Wendy Sims-Schouten gives a thoughtful review which does justice to the enormous contribution that Paul Cooper has made in his lifetime to research and practice that deepens our understanding of children experiencing and expressing emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Helen Cowie
Reviews Editor

1. *Nurturing the wellbeing of students in difficulty. The legacy of Paul Cooper.*

Author:	Carmel Cefai (Ed.)
Publisher:	Peter Lang
Publication Country:	Oxford, UK/New York, USA
Year of Publication:	2024
ISBN:	9781803743431 (pdf), 9781803743424 (pbk), 9781803743448 (ebk)

This book pays tribute to Professor Paul Cooper and his long career in the field of young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, as part of which he centralised evidence-based and ‘what works’ practices. Specifically, as Carmel Cefai highlights in the Introduction to the edited volume “Paul was clearly challenging lineal, reductionist and within-child conceptualisations of challenging behaviour” (p. 4). The edited book is a diverse collection centred around four core Parts and fourteen chapters, bringing together a set of reflections by international authors on the understanding of the nature of SEBD (social, emotional and behavioural difficulties) and the challenges of equitable inclusive education in relation to students with SEBD. As such,

<https://doi.org/10.56300/PRZR4494>

this is a powerful and eclectic book showcasing applications of Cooper's work in a wide range of settings and contexts with a focus on nurturing and enhancing the wellbeing of marginalised and disadvantaged children. Here, Cooper's passion and impact in childhood studies shines through, specifically with a focus on children who were not only silenced and disenfranchised, but also frequently at the receiving end of punitive and exclusionary practices.

The book starts with a reflection by Paul Cooper himself, entitled 'A Brief and Incomplete Account of Some Early Adventures in Education', exploring not only his early work and interventions in education, but also his own personal background, as someone born in a working-class family. This is followed by chapters from colleagues across the world related to those areas where Paul's work made a significant impact, such as psycho-educational interventions for students with SEBD, social and emotional education, the voices and inclusion of students with SEBD, biopsychosocial perspectives and nurture groups. Part I introduces Cooper's work and career, while the other three parts address applications of his work, in relation to Diversity and Inclusion (Part II), Nurture Groups (Part III) and Engaging Students with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (Part IV).

Altogether, the book provides some powerful insights into children and young people's lived experiences. For example, chapter 3 (the first chapter of Part II) on 'Identity as Difference' by Kakos and Cooper departs from problematising the interactionist dyadic conceptualisations of individuality based on the distinction between 'I' and the social selves, moving to an exploration of the psychoanalytical construction of identity and the process of subjectification. Here Kakos and Cooper suggest that the recognition of the significance of distinctiveness may lead our understanding of identity construction much closer to individuals' lived experience, especially in adolescence. This is developed further in chapter 4, by Norwich, on applications of the biopsychosocial model to understandings of inclusion in education. Norwich refers to this as "a way to combine and bring together a more complex synthesis not just as an intellectual exercise, but as critical to enhancing educational practice, especially for those with disability and difficulties" (p. 53).

As in interdisciplinary research what appeals to me is the focus on interdisciplinarity in the book, drawing together knowledge from a range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, biology, philosophy and arts. For example, chapter 5 by Downes explores Cooper's interdisciplinary work across psychology, education and philosophy and related key themes of what can be construed as an emotional-relational turn for education. Furthermore, Winchester and Forlin (chapter 11), discuss applications of an arts-based programme to overcoming disengagement of students. In addition to this, the book includes impactful reflections on perspectives and experiences from not only young people, but also teachers and parents. An example of the latter are chapters 6 and 14. Chapter 6, by Cavioni and Toto, explores perceptions of pre-service teachers in special education, and chapter 14 by Gilkes-Collymore and Hornby critically discusses the experiences of mothers of children with ADHD in the Caribbean. As well as interdisciplinarity, the international nature of the book is also a strong feature, drawing together knowledge, voices and expertise from a range of countries, cultures and underrepresented groups, such as in relation to special education in China (chapter 7, the final chapter under Part II).

Part III is centred around ‘nurture groups’, a form of educational provision for children with social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, and starts with chapter 8 by Colley ‘From Nurture Groups to Nurturing Cities’. Drawing on evidence-based research, viewed through the lens of nurture, Colley highlights that ‘troubling’ behaviours in school are understood to be a communication of an unmet need and the nurture group offers a safe base where carefully planned routines promote an increased sense of security and self-worth. Following on from this, in chapter 9, Borg provides insight into emancipatory nurture groups as projects of hope and possibility, providing the example of the school of Barbiana (Italy). Part III ends with chapter 10, by Barker and Cowie, who apply nurture group principles to a rather neglected group: the daughters of absent fathers.

The final Part of the book, Part IV, provides a series of immersive examples of engaging students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Using arts-based pedagogy, Winchester and Forlin, investigate the relationship between student engagement, creativity and social-emotional learning working students from three disadvantaged communities in Australia, reporting examples of high cognitive, affective and operative engagement. In the chapter that follows entitled ‘Looking the Wrong Way’, McLaughlin explores a vital current issue in education, namely the lack of attendance and inclusion in school and how this is related to the mental health of students. Giving the example of ‘ghost children’ and covid-19 pandemic, McLaughlin points to the benefits of engaging with education as a tool that aims for social and emotional impact, is engaging, encourages agency, sense of belonging, connection and the formation of significant relationships. Listening to students’ voices is key here, as Poulou highlights in the subsequent chapter entitled ‘From students ‘without voices’ to students with ... ‘low voices’, concluding that the voiceless SEBD students from the past are still waiting for the opportunity to be heard. For me the latter is key, as all children and young people have voices, but the problem lies in the fact that those voices are often not heard or listened to. Not only are children and young people often silenced, so are parents and the final chapter of the book sheds a powerful light on this by exploring the experiences of mothers of children with ADHD in the Caribbean.

All in all, a book worth reading, showcasing, through the work and insights of a wide variety of authors, how Paul Cooper’s pioneering work was instrumental in advancing the field of social, emotional and behaviour difficulties and the perspectives and wellbeing of students, especially those most marginalised.

Wendy Sims-Schouten
University College London