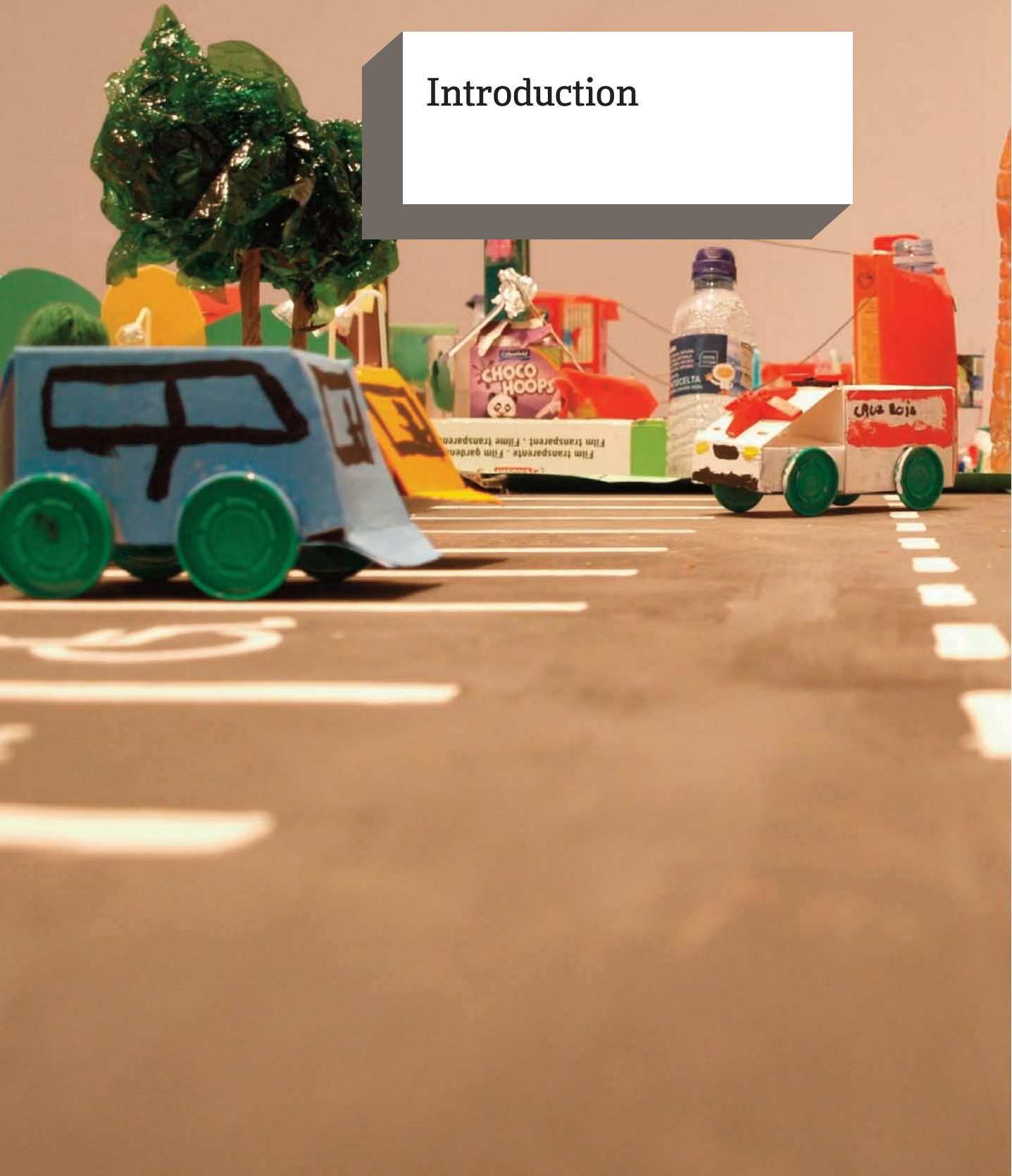


Introduction



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Education for the Unexpected

Christopher Clouder

*"As educators have long known, it is simply not enough for students to master knowledge and logical reasoning skills in the traditional academic sense. They must be able to choose among and recruit those skills and knowledge usefully outside of the structured context of school and laboratory. Because these choices are grounded in emotion and emotional thought When we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions we fail to appreciate a critical force in student's learning. One could argue, in fact, we fail to appreciate the very reason that students learn at all."*¹
(Immordino-Yang, M. H. and Damasio, A. *We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education*. 2007)

When this series of studies of Social and Emotional Education was started in 2007 we had little idea that it would lead us to investigating innovative educational practices in sixteen countries. Throughout this research, with the on-going generous support of the Botin Foundation, we have found common human factors that exhibit themselves in a myriad of ways depending on complex local factors, cultural influences and interactions, ideals and individual courage and awareness. That the children need an education that is relevant to their present condition and prepares them for their future is not contested, but what that condition is and what the future holds for them is. We coined the term Social and Emotional Education, after much debate, precisely to try and catch that change in educational thinking with all its diversity and contradictions. We have not been looking for universal programmes that would resolve the dilemmas of 21st century education but have rather explored practices and effectiveness in all the countries we have studied to show that whatever is or has been achieved is the result of unique circumstances, committed school communities and insightful practitioners. By sharing these experiences the hope is that others will also find their own way, encouraged and inspired by what we publish and disseminate. Our findings consistently show that children who experience learning for life as an enriching and innovative experience, as well as a challenging one, will be more able to confront the uncertainties ahead with understanding, creativity and a sense of responsibility.

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The world seemed turbulent enough at that time, in 2007, but is certainly even more turbulent now, as changes and pressures accumulate like storm clouds around us, what dramatic prospects lie ahead for our children? One possible reaction is to retreat into the past and that has become the educational policy of some countries we have been looking at. So much so that an updated version of previous reports could be quite different from the original chapters. But resorting to an anachronistic educational perspective is hardly a sustainable answer in a fast evolving world and is unlikely to provide our children with the abilities they will need in an unforeseeable and seemingly daunting future. The frequently noted disconnect between the classroom and the world of work needs to be bridged, especially in volatile times when we are expected to change our careers, if we are lucky enough to have one, every few years and have to live with more flexible identities.

The Knowledge Works Forecast 3.00² speaks of regenerating the learning ecosystem in the face of five disruptive forces, the sources of which have already been placed into our daily lives. They list: **democratised start-ups**, which will lead to disruptive social innovations such as open access to start-up knowledge, expertise and networks becomes more prevalent; **high fidelity living**, as data floods human sense-making capacities and people will be able to target more precisely their interaction with the world; **de-institutionalised production**, within which human activities will increasingly be independent of institutions and these activities become more ad-hoc, dynamic and networked; **customisable value webs**, allowing new business models to become more creative in interacting with their customers; and **shareable cities**, where urban infrastructure is shaped by new patterns of human connection and contribution. What might have sounded like science fiction not so many years ago is no longer so, as these issues have become increasingly acute in the last few years. Vaclav Havel wrote from his prison cell in 1975 *“For we never know when some inconspicuous spark of knowledge may suddenly light up the road for the whole of society, without society ever perhaps realising how it came to see the road. Even those other innumerable flashes of knowledge which never illuminate the path ahead... fulfil a certain range of society’s potentialities – either its creative powers or simply its liberties”*.³ When such knowledge becomes a spark that kindles a new thought or innovative experience then that deeply affects our emotional life and is the goal of all good teaching. Improvisation is a spur to learning and developing.

Not the least disruptive is the increasing prevalence of disorientating youth unemployment, which raises fundamental questions as to what our schools are for if they do not provide preparation for flourishing in uncertainty and developing the necessary skills of resilience and creativity. The OECD claims that 26 million young people, 15 to 24 year olds, in the rich world are not in employment, training or education. The World Bank database puts a figure of 260

million for young people in the developing world who are “inactive”. The *Economist* puts the total global figure at 290 million who are neither working nor studying – almost a quarter of the world’s young people. And these figures might not even include all the young women who in certain countries are not considered part of the workforce because of cultural traditions and practices.⁴ These tragic circumstances leave deep scars, blight lives at a time of personal high expectations and energy, and form social and familial tensions that affect more people than the young people themselves. The countries where there is a close relationship between education and work, such as Germany, have the lowest rates of youth unemployment and, with luck, these countries could provide examples of good practice for others to emulate. This state of affairs is in itself a pointer to the need to change the way we prepare the next generation for their futures. On the other side of the scale the demand for highly skilled knowledge workers and researchers has grown enormously, tripling, in Portugal alone, in the 14 years between 1996 and 2010.⁵ This demand has led to an unprecedented expansion in tertiary education systems, with countries vying for success in the global market. Adding the factor of opportunities for full-time work declining and part-time work increasing and the need for a greater flexibility of skills the pressure for training and school reform is unavoidable.

Most of the countries we have written about have undergone a financial crisis lately but often such financial turmoil is symptomatic of something deeper that is awry in our societies and touches on the values we hold and exemplify. *“Although the crisis was initiated and propagated by deficiencies in the global financial system and regulatory mechanisms, its consequences for individual lives go far beyond the economic effects to issues such as unemployment and drastic decreases in earnings and assets. There are concerns that the crisis has led to a decline in individuals’ health, political trust and social engagement.”*⁶ It may be under the radar of many commentators but our children will also not be immune to these effects. *“Again, education is assumed to have the potential to strengthen civic and social engagement. As with health, however, the relationship is two-way: while education can influence civic and social engagement, people’s levels of civic and social engagement can have a marked influence on their educational success and on the distribution of educational opportunity.”*⁷ In a new world of infinite connection brought about by technological innovation as well as by our immediate personal connections in our daily contacts with each other the balance is difficult to find. Obesity, poverty and cyberbullying deeply affect children’s emotional lives and learning capacities and are societal problems as well as individual ones.

Even if schooling itself is unable to change, or is too tardy in doing so, the young people in school certainly are and this inevitably will lead to new tensions. The onset of puberty among young girls has fallen by five years since 1920 and this drop continues at the rate of five

“...while education can influence civic and social engagement, people’s levels of civic and social engagement can have a marked influence on their educational success and on the distribution of educational opportunity” (OECD, 2010).

months for each passing decade. Boys too are showing similar tendencies. Childhood, as it was known in the past, is becoming briefer and the need to prepare intellectually and emotionally for adulthood is greater than ever. Schools cannot ethically stand aside from this phenomenon and should be empowered to tailor their curricula and methodologies accordingly. Without this the sense of irrelevance of our educational institutions will increase. The image in the first page of Galdós’ novel *Fortunata and Jacinta* comes to mind where two students at the back of the class fry an egg while the undisturbed professor meanders on about metaphysics.

In her book *Don’t go back to school: a Handbook for Learning Anything* Kio Stark recounts a series of interviews with independent learners which reveal four key common tangents: learning is collaborative rather than alone, the importance of academic credentials in many professions is declining, the most fulfilling learning experiences tend to take place out of school, and those happiest about learning are those who learn out of intrinsic motivation rather than in pursuit of extrinsic rewards. When she interviewed people who did go to school about what they liked most about the experience they unanimously cited ‘*other people*’. Michael Fullon’s research into the startling improvement in educational achievement in Ontario comes to a similar conclusion in that collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other and are well led and supported by school principals, results in better learning for students. This peer culture is ‘interactive professionalism’ and “*It turns out that blatant accountability focusing on tests, standards and the like is not the best way to get results....there is no greater motivator than internal accountability to oneself and ones’ peers. It makes for a better profession, and it makes for a better system*”.⁸ Such thinking has been taken up, for example, in the Lumiar schools in Brazil where they realise that knowledge is not enough and the future will be built by those who can collaborate and apply insight and sound judgement to different and unexpected challenges.

These challenges are the moments of learning that come unexpectedly and unplanned. It is precisely because they are not anticipated that they have the power to transform things.

Consequently we have to educate ourselves for the unexpected, as in the Swedish poet Thomas Tranströmer's wonderful poem *Romanesque Arches* on the spark that enables us suddenly to appreciate our own hidden potential and that of other people: On entering a vast and dark Romanesque church accompanied by a group of jostling tourists he had an unexpected experience where-

*Vault gaped behind vault, no complete view.
A few candle flames flickered.
An angel with no face embraced me
and whispered through my whole body:
"Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!
Inside you, vault opens behind vault endlessly.
You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be."
Blind with tears
I was pushed out on the sun-seething piazza
together with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. Tanaka, and Signora Sabatini,
and inside each of them vault opened behind vault endlessly.*

*(Romanska Bågar, Tomas Tranströmer from För Levande och Döda.
Trans. Robin Fulton, 1989)*

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We live in a state of unprecedented 'jostling', be it caused by our increasingly crowded planet, the threat of over-use of the earth's resources and the conflicts that could ensue, technological impingement on most of our waking hours and rampant economic rivalry at an international level. In such a frenzied time we easily forget that our children's' education is also about enjoyment and the healthy development of their individuality combined with an awareness of the potential of others. In an age of utilitarian policymaking where the striving for measurable effectiveness, increased political sensitivity to quantifiable competitiveness and national political ambitions to obtain higher-ranking scores in international league tables increasingly

dictate the educational agenda, we run the risk of losing other factors that contribute positively to human well-being. Is it a heresy to suggest that school should be fun as well as challenging? That learning learn as an end in itself creates a positive attitude to oneself and the world? That schools should also be places of social learning that open our minds to other people and other ways? That in the process of becoming we need not feel ashamed of our imperfections? The view that academic success is a product of cognitive skills has ruled educational policy for decades and test scores tend to become the ultimate arbiter of success. Yet as Paul Tough demonstrates in his book *How Children Succeed* it is becoming more widely recognised that it is the non-cognitive skills like curiosity and persistence that are highly predictive of success, “...character strengths that matter so much to young people’s success are not innate; they don’t appear in us magically, as a result of good luck or good genes. And they are not simply a choice. They are rooted in brain chemistry, and they are moulded, in measurable and predictable ways, by the environment in which children grow up. That means the rest of us –society as a whole– can do an enormous amount to influence the development of children.”⁹ And this influence we can wield for good or ill.

We have to educate ourselves for the unexpected.

In a hyperactive and driven world we can forget children too have the right to stillness. “Boredom is not comfortable but out of this empty space much creativity can be born. Nature abhors a vacuum and we try to fill it. Some young people who do not have the interior resources or the response to deal with that boredom creatively then sometimes end up smashing up bus shelters or taking cars out for a joyride.”¹⁰ Children require stand-and-stare time and that can stimulate imagination as many artists testify. Instead, this uncomfortable space is frequently filled with screen time or an abundance of activity driven on by parents who feel either guilty or wish their children to ‘progress’ and achieve as rapidly as possible. Children, like adults, need time to reflect on their learning and behaviour. If we wish to develop a social ethos that encompasses qualities such as respect, honesty, compassion and dignity this starts in childhood and at school.

“A good way to rid oneself of a sense of discomfort is to do something. That uneasy, dissatisfied feeling is actual force vibrating out of order”
(William Morris).

This ability to find your own individual path in life in an uncertain world calls for self-motivation and that is even more determinative in finding fulfilment within societies that can no longer offer traditional pathways and careers. Children and young people need enthusiasm, not just repetitious curricula geared exclusively to obtaining high exam results “*That is the way to learn the most, that when you are doing something with such enjoyment that you don’t notice that the time passes.*” (Albert Einstein).¹¹ Love of learning can become a way of life in a practical as well as in an ideal sense and to cope with the complexities of modern life it is sorely needed.

It is the non-cognitive skills like curiosity and persistence that are highly predictive of success (Paul Tough, 2013).

Czikzentmihalyi called this propensity ‘flow’, and by that he meant being so absorbed in a task that challenges you to do the best that you can. In fact it means learning by doing. In his influential book *Creativity* he suggests that human beings are torn between two opposite impulses: the least effort imperative and the claim of creativity. “*However, unless enough people are motivated by the enjoyment that comes from confronting challenges, by discovering new ways of being and doing, there is no evolution of culture, no progress in thought or feeling.*”¹² And this is the flow we find naturally in play. Children are naturally creative, that is what we call play. Yet in many schools that behaviour is confined to the playground and excluded from the ‘serious work of learning’. “*...we realize how much children are capable of. At the same time we see that adults have a role in creating the conditions for children to exercise their agency by giving room for initiative, providing a rich environment and engaging in ‘companionable’ relationships with children. The latter includes standing side by side with children and developing ourselves as much as the children do in their interactions. Lack of imagination can be seen as our major obstacle in changing our view of the child and making education more effective.*”¹³ When children spend time playing they develop a cognitive skill, among other things, called ‘executive function’. This is not a particularly felicitous term but it includes the ability to self-regulate, to observe and understand your emotions and then to adjust them accordingly. Through this children can learn to control their emotions and behaviour, exert self-control and self-discipline and can resist impulses that could be either detrimental to them or socially harmful. These are key factors for thriving in unstable conditions. Children able to manage their feelings are better able to learn. And poor executive function is connected to high drop out rates, drug use and criminal activity. However, pressurised early schooling is causing children’s

play to be diminished and with it important personal and social skills. Play is increasingly viewed as a waste of time when cognitive skills are set as a premium with no view to the long-term impact of this deprivation. With this perspective the value of Social and Emotional Education in raising our awareness and changing our ways could be vital.

When discussing the role of emotions in schools it should not be forgotten that teachers have emotions too. Although research into emotional management in teaching is not voluminous we “ought to inquire into how teachers manage their emotions in an era of accountability, standardization and marketization that has tended to ignore the caring aspects of teaching and divested teachers’ attention from emotionality to measurable school outputs.”¹⁴ Here we enter the realm of personal and cultural determinants which are vastly differentiated but a common thread is the quality of care for the children or students and the teacher’s sense of responsibility. Emotions occur in social interactions and children’s exposure to teachers’ emotions has a deep impact on their development and well-being, especially as ‘their’ teacher is for a period an important focal point in their lives. And it is the unexpected moment in the classroom or other learning contexts which illuminates our emotions and that the children recognise and respect. Scripted and programmed teaching does not prepare us sufficiently for this moment of pedagogical artistry. But when that artistry is fully experienced a new path reveals itself to the teacher that if followed with courage and inspiration becomes an enthusing, illuminating and emotionally satisfying moment that creates a sense of community and hope – a moment that is remembered in times of adversity and setback by both students and the practitioner.

In the chapters in this third International Analysis of Social and Emotional Education there are many unexpected insights. In all cases we have put the educational practices in the context of their countries, their history, geography, culture and educational principles. But we are looking beyond what is rooted in the past, however much that should rightfully be acknowledged and respected. Our role has been to find the seeds of the future of our children’s education in the present in the hope that recognising what has value and meaning for them now can be disseminated for others to be encouraged and inspired to continue this task.

“The future is not something that happens, but something that is constructed – constructed on our choice, or our failure to choose... The nature of the major problems we face show us clearly the nature of these choices. They are not technical but moral choices. They are a statement of what we believe a good society to be.”¹⁵



Christopher Clouder FRSA was appointed in 2009 the Director of the Botín Platform for Innovation in Education, based in Santander, Spain, which promotes social and emotional education and creative learning in schools across the world. From 1989 to 2012 he was the founding CEO of the European Council for Steiner-Waldorf Education, speaking for 700 European Steiner schools in 27 countries. He has had a long teaching career working with adolescents and in teacher education. In 1997 he co-founded the Alliance for Childhood, a global network of advocates for the quality of childhood. He gives keynote lectures at conferences, universities and teacher education courses internationally on educational matters, play and imagination in childhood, cultural evolution and challenging contemporary issues around childhood, creativity and social and emotional education. He has published numerous books and writes articles on education and childhood. He is also currently the Pedagogical Director of il Liceo dei Colli in Florence.

Endnotes

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