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Book Review

Nurturing the wellbeing of students in difficulty: The legacy of Paul Cooper

Author: Carmel Cefai

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Reviewer: Tristan Middleton

Carmel Cefai presents this publication inspired by his co-honorary chair of the European Network for Social and Emotional Competence (ENSEC). Alongside a retrospective chapter and a piece about the nature of inclusion by Paul Cooper, his legacy of 30 years of academic work in the field of inclusive education and learners with social, emotional and mental health needs is used as a springboard for a range of authors to present chapters from their own work which develops from Cooper's writing.

Cefai's introduction (Chapter 1) points to Cooper's promoting the importance of listening to students' voices, in particular those who have experienced exclusion. This resonates with the current work of Sarah Martin-Denham and Mel Ainscow's ongoing work which proposes a democratic co-creation approach to inclusive schools. The introduction goes on to outline a number of influential works by Cooper over a period of 18 years, his editorship of the *Emotional Behavioural Difficulties* journal, and work in establishing ENSEC alongside the *International Journal of Emotional Education*.

Paul Cooper authors Chapter 2, offering the history of his own education, his journey into teaching and then his steps into academia. The chapter not only provides an insight into Paul Cooper's experiences but also his values and some key principles, which highlight his inclusive perspective on education.

Chapter 3 is co-authored by Paul Cooper and Michalis Kakos. It begins from an interactionist perspective, examining ideas about self-identity, with a particular focus on adolescent development.

The chapter challenges thinking about norms, conformity and development, proposing that inclusive educators should consider reframing notions of adolescent conformity, to accept the role of difference and resistance as part of the developing process of self-identity.

In Chapter 4 Brahm Norwich brings together the work of Cooper and other key authors in the field of inclusive education, including Boxall, Shakespeare (Tom), Bronfenbrenner, Slee, Florian & Black-Hawkins, Ainscow and even the seminal work of Oliver, to consider the biopsychosocial model of disability and its relevance to learners with ADHD. Norwich extends the argument, attributed to Cooper, that an either/or perspective on the biological, psychological and social influences on development should be replaced by a *both-and* approach.

Chapter 5 offers Paul Downes' philosophical treatise on the spatial nature of core elements of Cooper's work. It presents the concept of diametric and concentric spaces, aligning concentric thinking with Cooper's relational approach and promoting an agentic methodology.

In Chapter 6 Valeria Cavioni and Guisi Antonia Toto contextualise a research study into the attitudes of trainee teachers within Cooper's perspective of the nurturing teacher developing their pupils' sense of belonging.

Chapter 7 presents Su Xiong Xu's view of the Chinese government's policy reforms as a move towards inclusive education for children and

young people with Special Educational Needs. This chapter contributes to the debate about whether special schools should be part of providing the development of inclusive education.

In Chapter 8 David Colley presents the influence of Cooper's work on developing nurture groups and the broader development of nurturing approaches in education, focusing in particular on the Scottish context, moving from nurturing schools to nurturing communities and nurturing cities.

Chapter 9 from Carmel Borg is an exposé of the School of Barbiana as an emancipatory nurture group. The chapter outlines the history of the school's founder, Don Lorenzo Milani, and makes the case for the school as an alternative to the hegemonic attitudes that fail many children. Written from a critical theory perspective, this chapter reveals the history of a beautiful community of nurturing learning.

In Chapter 10 Corinna Barker and Helen Cowie draw a link between Cooper's commitment to nurture groups and the need for the nurture of daughters of absent fathers. The significance of the daughter-father attachment relationship and the particular impact on the self-esteem of girls who have absent fathers is argued. This chapter presents a research project carried out with adult women who reflected on their experience as children with absent fathers. It then returns to nurture groups and nurturing schools as a way of supporting fatherless girls.

Chapter 11 uses select findings from Cooper's 2013 research in Hong Kong for Kate Winchester and Chris Forlin to present their action research. This project evaluated an arts-based pedagogy intervention with disadvantaged communities in Australia. Using Munns' 2021 Student Engagement Framework the authors conclude that an arts-based approach to learning can enhance learner engagement and motivation.

In Chapter 12 Colleen McLaughlin takes forward the work of Cooper and his team on school exclusion through the PASE project. It draws parallels between school exclusion and mental

ill health among children and young people to reinforce the argument that there is a need to consider the driving forces within our schooling system and the extent to which it serves the learners' needs within it.

Chapter 13 forefronts the importance of the voices of children identified with social emotional and behavioural difficulties. Maria Poulou draws upon Cooper's work on listening to the voices of children and young people and explores the barriers and benefits of gaining their perspectives, making the case that there is much work to do in this field.

Chapter 14 uses Cooper's work looking at ADHD for Coleen Gilkes-Collymore and Garry Hornby to present the findings of their research project into the experience of mothers of children identified with ADHD in Barbados. It identifies key barriers experienced by the mothers and makes the case for both social and educational support, as well as a reframing of the conceptualisation of behaviour.

The respect and affection for Paul Cooper is clearly communicated through the chapters of this eclectic and wide-ranging book, and Cooper's presence brings together the drive for a more sympathetic learning experience for children and young people who are marginalised in the education system. Written for an international audience, this book will be of particular interest to students and scholars of inclusive education and the development of policy and practice for learners who are marginalised as a result of social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Of particular interest to readers of the *International Journal of Nurture in Education* will be Part 2 of the book, which focuses on nurture groups. This draws on Cooper's work to consider the history of nurture in education and how nurture practice in education can develop.

