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The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

RAGNHILD DYBDAHL AND JAMES WILLIAMS¹

Emergencies—including conflict, disasters, and forced migration—have negative effects on the psychosocial development of individuals, as well as on the short- and long-term development of local and global communities. Children and youth are particularly vulnerable in these circumstances because of the exposure to adversity, and because they miss out on education, play, nurturing care, and other important childhood experiences. The malnutrition, violence, and grief children experience are associated with neurodevelopmental outcomes and cognitive changes that are likely to affect their learning (Herringa 2017; Shonkoff and Garner 2012; Goenjian et al. 2005; Moore and Varela 2010; Charlson et al. 2019). Moreover, it is not only students who are affected by these mental health conditions but their teachers, parents, caregivers, and community members.

It is widely believed that education can play a central role in the protection and promotion of children’s psychosocial wellbeing in multiple ways. First, education appears to have positive effects on psychosocial wellbeing in and of itself. In addition, educational settings are often staging points for the provision of psychosocial support (Bosqui and Marshoud 2018). Second, schools and other educational settings can provide some stability by offering children safety, predictability, and a sense of accomplishment, dignity, and hope. Third, efforts to bring schooling and mental health interventions together, as embodied by social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula and instructional practices, can help all students acquire the attitudes and skills they need to manage and regulate their complex and difficult emotions, build prosocial attitudes, learn empathy and awareness of others, and develop conflict-resolution skills (Mahoney, Durlak, and Weissberg 2018). Equipping students with these skills in emergency contexts may help reduce the risk of conflict in fragile environments, while simultaneously helping children manage challenging situations.

Finally, advances in cognitive science further highlight the critical nature of the social and emotional dimensions of learning (Jones and Khan 2017). Beyond the cognitive content knowledge children are expected to acquire, positive experiences in educational settings can help children learn to live and thrive—by themselves and with others.

¹ Ragnhild Dybdahl and James Williams served as lead editors for this special issue of the *Journal on Education in Emergencies* and contributed equally to its development and production. Their names are listed alphabetically.

Until recently, the social and emotional dimensions of schooling have been largely informal, and often peripheral to what is considered the primary cognitive purpose of education. And yet, human development researchers from a number of fields increasingly argue that learning and thinking are inherently social and emotional, and that emotional and psychological engagement are inherent in and necessary for learning: “Quite literally, it is neurobiologically impossible to think deeply about or remember information about which one has had no emotion because the healthy brain does not waste energy processing information that does not matter to the individual” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2018, 29). Scientist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang makes a similar claim in Smart et al. (2019): “What I argue—drawing on psychological, anthropological, and even biological perspectives—is that the very nature of human biology is social . . . There is no such thing as non-social thought: your values are derived from and situated in the cultural and temporal context in which you live” (288). This body of research has led to increasing emphasis on the noncognitive dimensions of education, particularly in the industrialized world.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of the noncognitive dimensions of education, a consensus on terminology and conceptual grounding has yet to be developed. A number of foundational conceptual frameworks have been proposed, most prominently the CASEL framework noted above (Mahoney et al. 2018; see also CASEL 2020a, 2020b), typologies of key 21st-century competencies (OECD 2005), as well as syntheses of the existing research on learning, including the psychosocial and social and emotional components (Jones 2018; National Academies 2018; INEE 2016, 2018; IASC 2017; UNICEF 2015; IFRC 2009; USAID 2019; Bub and Dalrymple 2020). Classification schemes vary widely in their value orientations and research bases, ranging from individual psychologically focused conceptions, such as that of CASEL, to socially oriented ideas of social and emotional skills, such as those of Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7, to formulations grounded in the cultivation of human capital, such as that of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). More recent resilience-enhancing interventions often focus on social-environmental interventions and target factors in the social and material environments in order to strengthen the community and schools by providing, for example, support and tools for teachers and parents (Miller et al. 2021). There has been a call for more conceptual clarity in the field of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), which suggests that putting more focus on the causal models that guide decisions on what interventions are appropriate in different conditions and populations may strengthen responses and avoid doing harm (Miller et al. 2021).

Importantly, notwithstanding the lack of consensus in terminology, recent efforts have been made to operationalize promising research findings. For example, recent guidance from the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies (2018) outlines approaches for incorporating psychosocial support (PSS) and social and emotional learning (SEL) into formal and nonformal education responses to emergencies.² In addition, a recent toolkit (MHPSS.net 2021) on MHPSS and education in emergencies (EiE) has made more than 160 resources, tools, and key documents about standards and guidelines available to practitioners in the field.

Despite rapid growth in the body of research on PSS/SEL and efforts to put these findings to use, large gaps in the evidence and the implementation of tools remain. For example, the research does not make it clear how children's and youth's psychosocial wellbeing intersects with emergencies and education. Moreover, there is limited awareness of the available approaches to promoting PSS/SEL or of the appropriate use of these tools.

Thus, many EiE practitioners are working to develop and implement PSS/SEL programming while simultaneously working with researchers to collect evidence on particular measures, instruments, and programs. To this end, the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies has commissioned a measurement library in which it can store tools and measures developed by researchers and practitioners working on PSS/SEL in emergency contexts (see <https://inee.org/measurement-library>).³ Reviewing and making this evidence public is an important part of building knowledge for the field. A substantial body of research has been carried out in high-income countries and in nonemergency contexts, far less in low-income nations and conflict-affected contexts.

This special issue, which contributes to the evidence on PSS/SEL in emergencies, provides a snapshot of strategies and tools developed and used to understand the status of wellbeing and psychosocial support and the effectiveness of programming. It contains six research articles, three field notes, two book reviews, and one commentary. The authors who contributed to the issue work at 30 institutions based in more than 12 countries.

2 Though differing in origins and emphasis, much of the research in the field applies to both concepts, in which case we refer to the collective work in this area as psychosocial support and social and emotional learning, or PSS/SEL.

3 To represent the stages of development of different measures, the measurement library uses images of an olive tree—a seedling to represent measures in their initial stages; a sapling to denote measures with some good evidence; and a mature tree to indicate measures with well-documented validity and reliability for the intended purpose and ready for use.

Assessment and measurement are at the center of much current research on PSS/SEL. This is reflected in this issue as well, where most of the articles wrestle in one way or another with how to conceptualize and appropriately measure the aspects of PSS and SEL they target. As is made clear in this issue, it is challenging to develop appropriate measurement instruments for children and young people affected by conflict. There are tradeoffs between developing ideal measurement processes in the laboratory, confirming their feasibility in the field, and meeting the immediate needs of children and their teachers for effective programming. Local agents, often teachers, must be able to administer and use measurement instruments to assess the wellbeing of their students, and that of other teachers and children's caregivers. Program field staff members need to be able to monitor and evaluate programs, whereas researchers and humanitarian and development agencies need research evidence in order to develop an understanding of what works, with whom, and where.

Complicating these issues are questions related to contextualization: To what extent are the constructs developed in the West, often in the US or UK, universal? To what extent do such constructs capture the understanding of PSS/SEL that is important to children, families, and societies in non-Western contexts? To what extent is understanding of self-efficacy or prosocial behavior universal? Research from developing contexts suggests that traditional agricultural societies put greater value on group responsibility and solidarity than on individual traits (Jukes et al. 2018; Jeong 2019), yet within such societies, teachers and parents may attach different values to different attributes. Parents may focus on respect for authority, whereas teachers may emphasize curiosity and other values that lend themselves to new ways of thinking that are needed in the larger world (see, e.g., Jukes et al. 2018). On the other hand, non-Western researchers such as Kagitcibasi (2005) criticize a simple collectivist versus individualistic understanding and thus are developing more nuanced alternative conceptualizations.

We are pleased that such theories and research from beyond the Global North are incorporated into the articles in this issue, along with questions about context and the processes of contextualization. Indeed, industrialized societies vary in how they weigh and value different SEL components. Japanese educators, for example, may put more emphasis on prosocial identification with the collective than on individual achievement.

We identify several themes running through this issue. First, a number of authors discuss the development of PSS/SEL measures to monitor and evaluate program effectiveness. Nikhit D'Sa and Allyson Krupar begin their article, "Developing and Validating the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment: Evidence from a Pilot Test with Syrian Refugee Children in Iraq," by noting the lack of low- or no-cost instruments that can be adapted to different situations to collect data on children and young people affected by crisis and conflict, often in low-resource settings. To help remedy this situation, the authors tested the validity and reliability of the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) for Syrian refugee children ages 6-12 who are living in Iraq. The ISELA's performance- and scenario-based measures of self-concept, stress management, perseverance, empathy, and conflict resolution can be used reliably by groups of assessors. Of particular note in the article is the authors' thoughtful discussion of tradeoffs between psychometric rigor and feasibility under field conditions.

In their article, "Teachers' Observations of Learners' Social and Emotional Learning: Psychometric Evidence for Program Evaluation in Education in Emergencies," Ha Yeon Kim, Kalina Gjicali, Zezhen Wu, and Carly Tubbs Dolan describe how they developed and tested the Teachers' Observation of Learners' Social Emotional Learning (TOOLSEL) with a sample of 3,661 displaced Syrian children enrolled in Lebanese public schools, and with those taking part in a nonformal remedial program. The TOOLSEL is a questionnaire for teachers about children's classroom behavior that is intended to assess social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive competencies among primary school-age children in fragile, conflict-affected settings. The authors provide a detailed discussion of the feasible, reliable, and valid use of the instrument, along with cautions against its misuse. Recognizing that the TOOLSEL was developed using knowledge and tools from high-resource, nonconflict settings, the authors propose adaptations like their own as an intermediate step to take when conditions do not permit the development of SEL measures rooted in a full, participant-informed co-construction of knowledge research process.

Next, in "Creating a Tool to Measure Children's Wellbeing: A PSS Intervention in South Sudan," Moses Olayemi, Melissa Tucker, Mamour Choul, Tom Purekal, Arlene Benitez, Wendy Wheaton, and Jennifer DeBoer report on their development of an instrument to measure student wellbeing in South Sudan. They created the instrument to help evaluate the impact of a psychosocial support program offered by local teachers, who were trained to facilitate PSS activities in child-friendly spaces for 560,000 primary school children. The authors detail their process of developing and adapting the instrument, during which they drew

from questionnaires that were well-tested and widely used, but in very different contexts. They found that the three core domains identified by experts (emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, and resilience) were important in the context of South Sudan, but with important nuances. Wellbeing, for example, was understood in terms of social relationships and individually. Resilience in particular was modified to a self-regulation factor. The authors suggest that all such instruments be tested before they are used in the field in order to assess their fit with local meanings and contexts; that they be revised and retested based on the findings; and that local leaders be engaged to play a leading role in the adaptation process.

Continuing on the measurement theme, Fernanda Soares, Nina Menezes Cunha, and Paul Frisoli discuss the development of the Wellbeing Holistic Assessment for Teachers (WHAT) tool to measure teacher wellbeing in their article, titled “How Do We Know If Teachers Are Well? The Wellbeing Holistic Assessment for Teachers Tool.” The WHAT tool, which uses self-reported data from 1,659 Salvadoran teachers, is a combination of four commonly used measures that were translated into Spanish and adapted to local conditions. The authors conclude that the WHAT tool can be used to measure the wellbeing of teachers in the Salvadoran context in terms of emotion regulation, perceived stress, emotional exhaustion, and classroom management self-efficacy; however, the instrument has not been tested for program-evaluation purposes. The authors recommend that the WHAT tool undergo “a rigorous contextual adaptation process,” including “translation, back translation, cognitive interviewing, and pilot testing,” all while bearing in mind “the normative nature of teacher wellbeing” (183).

In their article, “Evaluating the 3Cs Program for Caregivers of Young Children Affected by the Armed Conflict in Colombia,” Lina María González Ballesteros, José M. Flores, Ana María Ortiz Hoyos, Amalia Londoño Tobón, Sascha Hein, Felipe Bolívar Rincon, Oscar Gómez, and Liliana Angélica Ponguta describe the development and evaluation of a resilience wellbeing promotion intervention for caregivers of young children who are enrolled in home-based and institutional early childhood development centers in Colombia. The intervention combines several psychosocial intervention approaches, the application of community-participatory research principles, and the utilization of early childhood development settings as an entry point for implementation. An important contribution of the intervention is the combined pragmatic and applied approaches, with a contextual and theoretical framework that builds on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. The authors emphasize risk and protective factors at the macro and meso levels, and at the micro level in the target communities.

In “How Family Relationships Predict the Effectiveness of a Psychosocial Group Intervention among War-Affected Children,” Raija-Leena Punamäki, Kirsi Peltonen, Marwan Diab, and Samir R. Qouta focus similarly on the important role caregivers and family members play in supporting children’s wellbeing. Their study integrates systems theory, attachment theory, and resilience theory, which resulted in a more profound understanding of the different buffering effects of various family types and has important practical implications. This study seriously addresses the cultural context of Palestine to deepen our understanding of why and how psychosocial support can affect children differently, based on families’ resources, support, and emotional patterns. Despite the considerable attention given in the literature to social support and the crucial role of supportive relationships, this article describes a rare example of research that examines the moderating impact of attachment, parenting, and sibling relationships on the effectiveness of the help given children traumatized by war. It is also a rare empirical study of a family systems approach.

In our first field note, titled “Using a Participatory Approach to Create SEL Programming: The Case of *Ahlan Simsim*,” Shanna Kohn, Kim Foulds, Charlotte Cole, Mackenzie Matthews, and Laila Hussein argue for the critical importance of participatory and trauma-informed approaches to designing SEL content for children affected by conflict and trauma. They detail the processes used to create *Ahlan Simsim*, a Sesame Street television program for children in the Middle East that is designed to bring early learning to children and families affected by the Syrian crisis through the media and direct services. The bottom-up development process involved communities and local child-development experts in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon in refining the program focus area and creating locally relevant, trauma-informed content that draws from the SEL strategies most appropriate and effective for audiences in the Syrian response area. Through a series of steps designed to examine the social and emotional landscapes of children and their caregivers, the program developers created a framework of common emotions that children often had difficulty naming, and related coping strategies. The authors claim that the bottom-up development process, which drew from the children’s existing knowledge to avoid retraumatizing them, was essential to meeting the particular needs of these children.

The field note by Sergiy Bogdanov, Andriy Girnyk, Vira Chernobrovkina, Volodymyr Chernobrovkin, Alexander Vinogradov, Kateryna Harbar, Yuliya Kovalevskaya, Oksana Basenko, Irina Ivanyuk, Kimberly Hook, and Mike Wessells, titled “Developing a Culturally Relevant Measure of Resilience for War-Affected Adolescents in Eastern Ukraine,” describes the development and the

psychometric properties of the first measure of resilience specifically created for war-affected adolescents in Eastern Ukraine. The article describes this important new instrument for measuring resilience, and the theoretical and methodological rigor and innovation it demonstrates. The authors designed a mixed methods study that used a systematic qualitative data analysis and triangulation to identify local concepts of resilience, which subsequently informed the development of an instrument to measure resilience. This inductively developed concept of resilience in Ukraine was further operationalized through a set of questionnaire items, which were validated using exploratory structural equation modeling. The instrument is a brief, reliable, and valid measure of resilience factors on different socioecological levels. Interestingly, some of the findings also provide suggestions for interventions, such as PSS programs in Ukraine, that could build more open school ecosystems that engage parents as active actors in the education process.

In their field note, “Developing the Group Facilitation Assessment of Competencies Tool for Group-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions in Humanitarian and Low-Resource Settings,” Gloria A. Pedersen, Manaswi Sangraula, Pragya Shrestha, Pooja Lakshmin, Alison Schafer, Renasha Ghimire, Nagendra P. Luitel, Mark J. D. Jordans, and Brandon A. Kohrt describe the development of a tool to assess the group facilitation competencies of the individuals who provide MHPSS services. Group-based services are useful in low-resource environments and where technical expertise is limited, with the further advantage of enhancing participants’ social support, empathy, and collective problem-solving. Aimed at adult facilitators, the Group Facilitation Assessment of Competencies Tool, or GroupACT, is a structured observational tool that assesses group facilitation competencies during standardized role-plays with actor clients, or with actual clients during the delivery of group sessions. These facilitation competencies include developing and reviewing group ground rules, facilitating participation among all group members, fostering empathy among members, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, addressing barriers to attendance, time management, and ensuring group confidentiality. The authors provide suggestions on using the tool to provide group-based MHPSS services in the health, education, protection, and other humanitarian sectors.

Turning to the book reviews, in a fascinating review of *Can Big Bird Fight Terrorism? Children’s Television and Globalized Multicultural Education*, Naomi A. Moland’s provocative book based on the innovative Sesame Street initiative in Nigeria, Kate Lapham brings unusual clarity to issues the book’s author raises about the educational power of media, and television in particular; the inherent challenges of teaching multiculturalism in culturally divided societies; and the

role external actors can play in local and national issues, among others. The review and the book both provide richly nuanced discussions of matters of place, of self and other, and the role of education in identity-based conflict.

Solfrid Raknes reviewed the *NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the Social, the Emotional and the Sustainable*, edited by Andy Smart, Margaret Sinclair, Aaron Benavot, Jean Bernard, Colette Chabbott, S. Garnett Russell, and James Williams. Raknes points to the book's comprehensive coverage of SEL and the inspiration the volume can offer as it addresses how to educate children to have the skills needed to achieve the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals: skills for life, skills for the 21st century, and the skills needed in a modern, unequal, globalized, and polluted world. It should be noted that NISSEM has now published two additional global briefs (see NISSEM.org).

In their timely commentary, "How the Education in Emergencies Field Can Help the United States Respond to COVID-19," Rebecca Winthrop and Helen Shwe Hadani see the COVID-19 pandemic as bringing EiE to the developed world, in particular the United States. Looking at the US experience of the pandemic and its educational response, the writers see both successes and failures in the US response, lessons for future emergencies in a world where disease pays little attention to GDP, and innovations that can be shared. Their observations provide an important commentary on the times in which this special issue is appearing.

Looking back and writing as we near the end of 2021, we note that the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly highlighted the psychosocial, social, and socioemotional nature of the school experience for children and their families. Even in the most advantaged areas of the world that are free of conflict and have had sufficient resources and infrastructure to continue schooling during the lockdowns, it is clear that children and their families depend to a far greater extent than many had thought—both socially and emotionally—on school. School closings and restrictions on public gatherings have taken a high toll on the learning and social experiences of young people everywhere, even those lucky enough to be in school or learning online. But many children are not so lucky. Pandemic-related barriers have limited almost all children's exposure to school and have kept many children—temporarily at least—out altogether. Much has rightfully been made of the pandemic's exacerbation of existing disparities in the provision of, access to, and quality of learning. Yet prior to the pandemic, children and young people in emergencies and those affected by conflict were even more likely than others to be out of school, to be in psychosocial distress, and to be in particular need of a curriculum based in PSS/SEL. All of these challenges have grown worse during the pandemic.

In these ways, this special issue underscores the critical importance of providing education in a time of global emergency and has deeply sharpened our appreciation of how reliant children, their families and communities, and the world as a whole are on education and schooling to provide psychosocial anchors, social and emotional connections and meaning, relationships, and learning.

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