

Preface

For a long time, research and teaching have primarily focused on students' cognitive development, with the aim of teaching all learners academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, in recent years—particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated school closures—there has been a growing recognition of the importance of students' socio-emotional development. Calls have been intensified to support students' well-being and mental health and to promote socio-emotional competences.

Despite the increased focus on socio-emotional development as an educational goal, it should be borne in mind that a significant number of students is still failing to meet minimum academic standards. Strengthening the basic academic skills of low-achieving students remains a critical priority in order to prepare them to participate equitably in society. Yet, prioritizing academic remediation could inadvertently undermine contemporary educational goals related to socio-emotional growth. Focusing mainly on the promotion of basic academic competences including mastery of basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and STEM skills might increase low-achievers' psychological stress, leading to a possible “vicious circle” in which pressure to achieve academically hinders the development of the psychological resources needed for effective learning.

These potentially competing perspectives on education—on the one hand, the imperative to develop basic cognitive skills, and on the other, the importance of nurturing socio-emotional skills—raise critical questions. How can these different educational goals be reconciled? Are these educational goals in conflict or to what extent can they support each other given certain conditions? What roles do socio-emotional aspects—such as motivation, emotions, and well-being—play in academic learning? How can we design effective socio-emotional learning programs, particularly for low-achievers or diverse learners?

The 9th volume of the series *Dortmund Symposium on Empirical Educational Research* (9. Dortmunder Symposium der Empirischen Bildungsforschung) explores these fundamental questions with a series of theoretical and empirical contributions. The volume explores the interplay of academic and socio-emotional development with a particular emphasis on promoting these areas in school practice.

The first chapter by Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman on *Socio-emotional learning: Promising synergies with academic learning in early adolescence* taps into the

implementation of socio-emotional learning in heterogeneous groups. This chapter outlines core definitions of social and emotional learning (SEL), describes the typical developmental trajectories of SEL—especially in secondary schooling—and highlights how well-designed classroom experiences enhance meaningful learning that simultaneously foster academic learning and meet the psychological needs of young people. It concludes with practical implications for educators seeking to integrate SEL into instructional practice.

In the second contribution, Elsbeth Stern presents the chapter *Learning and performance do not have to come at the expense of socio-emotional development*. The chapter stresses the importance of imparting practical and transferable knowledge, which calls for learning environments that meet the affordances and constraints of human information processing by supporting both cognitive and socio-emotional goals. A well-structured learning environment which adequately fosters cognitive development takes into account intelligence and reasoning ability, which, if approached systematically, also addresses the motivational side of learning and the diversity of learners.

The third chapter by Florian Schmiedek *Learning for at-risk students: A dynamic perspective* centers on students at a heightened risk for academic failure and socio-emotional challenges. The contribution highlights that variables related to achievement and socio-emotional aspects such as well-being and mental health are interconnected in complex, dynamic, and individual ways. The chapter cautions against overly generalized approaches and emphasizes the need to adopt within-person methodologies that capture individual learning dynamics over time. The contribution argues that methods such as dynamic within-person analyses should be used more frequently in educational research to provide more nuanced insights for both research and practice.

The second part of contributions highlights the role of specific socio-emotional constructs—such as emotions, well-being, and motivation—and their impact on learning. Anne Frenzel’s and Thomas Goetz’ chapter on *Learning and emotions* explores the reciprocal relationship between learning (and performance) and performance-related emotions. Their chapter underscores how learning environments that promote emotional development enhance cognitive development and vice versa. The authors also explain why competition between the two educational goals is more likely in a learning environment where performance is evaluated on the basis of social comparisons than in an environment that focuses on mastery in learning. The authors stress the central role of teachers as “instructors” rather than “examiners” to facilitate both emotional and academic development.

Carmen Zurbriggen’s contribution on *Well-being and learning: Taking inclusive education as a prominent example* investigates the multifaceted links be-

tween school well-being and learning. Insights are not only provided on a theoretical level but also with a glimpse into current research on the relationship between school well-being and performance, as well as factors in the learning environment that can influence this relationship. Drawing on results from studies in the area of inclusive education, the chapter highlights that adaptive teaching and a supportive classroom climate have the potential to simultaneously enhance school well-being and performance in secondary education.

The volume concludes with Ricarda Steinmayr on *Learning and motivation: Which motivation is important and how to foster it*. She critically examines whether the widely held assumption that motivation is a decisive and easily malleable factor in school performance stands up to empirical scrutiny. The chapter unpacks the complex idea that motivation functions as an umbrella term for a variety of constructs that are linked to learning and performance in varying degrees, and discusses how various dimensions of motivation interact dynamically with factors such as teachers' attitudes and behaviors and students' emotions. This chapter offers evidence-based recommendations for identifying and fostering those motivational aspects most relevant for learning.

Overall, the contributions in the volume make a timely and important statement: Current educational research can enrich the multidimensional educational processes by simultaneously cultivating both socio-emotional and cognitive development. This dual focus recognizes learning as a multidimensional process that centers on the individual, while also emphasizing the central role of teachers and instruction to attain these goals for successful education. By addressing these aspects conceptually and empirically, the volume advances the broader goal of developing more inclusive, equitable, and effective educational systems.

Dortmund, November 2025

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