Unequal Opportunities – and what to do about them

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Central Hall Westminster
The long-term effects of social and emotional skills in childhood

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Motivation

• Clearly known that gaps in cognitive development open early and persist through childhood, and have lasting consequences for life chances

• Less clearly recognised that differences in childhood social and emotional development is also key in explaining unequal opportunities

• A programme of work this year for the Early Intervention Foundation has addressed this
• Are there major long-run gains to investing in children’s social and emotional development?

• Extensive literature, mainly based on observational cohort studies, supports that some skills and attributes are very important for ‘success’ in life.

• High on the political agenda – though language used and policies change over time. ‘Grit’, ‘Perseverance’, ‘Character’, ‘Emotional intelligence’
Introduce into the school curriculum course on life skills, emotional intelligence and parenting to better equip our children and young people to the challenges of modern living.
CALL FOR TENDERS
LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN CITIES

Box 1. OECD’s Longitudinal Study of Social and Emotional Skills in Cities (initial considerations)

- Objectives
  To identify the drivers and consequences of social and emotional skills

- Survey delivery
  Schools (students and teachers) and home (parents)

- Target cohorts
  Children in Grades 1 and 7 (approximately ages 6 and 12, respectively)

- Survey coverage
  Cities (with an option of state or nation-wide coverage)

- Timeline
  Developmental work: 2015-19; Main study: 2019/20 onwards
Investing in the Emerging Field of Character Research

September 2015

By Marc Sternberg: We're pledging $6.5 million over the next three years to support character research.
To thrive in today's innovation-driven economy, workers need a different mix of skills than in the past. In addition to foundational skills like literacy and numeracy, they need competencies like collaboration, creativity and problem-solving, and character qualities like persistence, curiosity and initiative.
Examines long-term effects of social and emotional skills in childhood:

1. Literature review

2. Data Analysis – based on new cohort studies data
   a. Outcomes in mid-life (BCS70)
   b. Social and emotional skills in childhood in contemporary childhood (MCS)

Context of wider programme of work by the Early Intervention Foundation, reviewing effectiveness of policies e.g. implemented in schools, and in communities
Self-perceptions, awareness (e.g. self-esteem, efficacy, self-concept)

Motivation (e.g. intrinsic and extrinsic motivations)

Self-control and self-regulation (e.g. lack of these reflected in conduct problems)

Social skills (e.g. extroversion, friendships)

Resilience and coping (outcomes turning out better than predicted given a specific adversity, e.g. low SES)

Emotional well-being
Policy-makers are considering large-scale programs aimed at self-control to improve citizens’ health and wealth and reduce crime. Experimental and economic studies suggest such programs could reap benefits. Yet, is self-control important for the health, wealth, and public safety of the population? Following a cohort of 1,000 children from birth to the age of 32 y, we show that childhood self-control predicts physical health, substance dependence, personal finances, and criminal offending outcomes, following a gradient of self-control. Effects of children’s self-control could be disentangled from their intelligence and social class as well as from mistakes they made as adolescents. In another cohort of 500 sibling-pairs, the sibling with lower self-control had poorer outcomes, despite shared family background. Interventions addressing self-control might reduce a panoply of societal costs, save taxpayers money, and promote prosperity.
We estimate such a model using the British Cohort Study (1970). We show that the most powerful childhood predictor of adult life-satisfaction is the child’s emotional health, followed by the child’s conduct. The least powerful predictor is the child’s intellectual development. This may have implications for educational policy. Among adult circumstances, family income accounts for only 0.5% of the variance of life-satisfaction. Mental and physical health are much more important.
ACCOUNTING FOR INTERGENERATIONAL INCOME PERSISTENCE: NONCOGNITIVE SKILLS, ABILITY AND EDUCATION*

Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Lindsey Macmillan

We analyse in detail the factors that lead to intergenerational persistence among sons, where this is measured as the association between childhood family income and later adult earnings. We seek to account for the level of income persistence in the 1970 BCS cohort and also to explore the decline in mobility in the UK between the 1958 NCDS cohort and the 1970 cohort. The mediating factors considered are cognitive skills, non-cognitive traits, educational attainment and labour market attachment. Changes in the relationships between these variables, parental income and earnings are able to explain over 80% of the rise in intergenerational persistence across the cohorts.
Literature Summary

• Strongest evidence lies in the domain of self-control and self-regulation: most consistently predictive of a wide range of life outcomes

• Also consistent evidence for the importance of
  • Self-esteem and the belief that one’s actions can make a difference
  • Social skills
  • Emotional well-being

• To date, less evidence around long-term motivation, and resilience, but this probably has more to do with lack of research, rather than that they are not important
Limitations of the Literature

• **Causality:**
  - Very few studies identify causal effects

• **Consistency:** differences across studies in;
  - How skills are measured, at what age and what they are called
  - How heterogeneity across children and families is accounted for
  - Age at which adult outcomes are measured

• **Multiple skills and outcomes:**
  - Most studies examine effect of a single domain skill – few studies simultaneously considered multiple, distinct measures
  - Most studies explore effect on a single outcome, rather than multiple outcomes
What we do

• We estimate the association between a number of social and emotional skills measured at age 10, and a wide range of outcomes measured at age 42 using new data from 1970 British Cohort Study

• Our regressions always include a ‘vector of skills’ in childhood and outcomes at age 42 – so controlling for them all together

• We consider outcomes across a number of domains

• We condition on a broad set of child, parent and family characteristics

• We use this analysis to assess the extent to which different skills matter, making comparisons across different outcomes in a consistent way

• Not presented here: we explore the extent to which formal educational attainment mediates skill-outcome associations
Controls
Birth-weight
Gender
Older siblings
Ethnicity
Cognitive ability
Parental education
Age
Employment
Family income
Housing tenure
Mother Mental health

Age 10 skills
Self-perceptions
Self-esteem
Self-concept
Locus of control
Self-regulation/self-control
Good conduct
Conscientiousness
Social skills
Emotional well-being

Outcomes at 42
Mental health and well-being
Education
Socio-economic status
Labour markets
Family
Health and behaviours
Childhood skills and Life Satisfaction

Notes:
Shaded boxes represent 95% confidence intervals
Childhood skills and Top Job Status

Notes:
Shaded boxes represent 95% confidence intervals
Summary of findings across different outcomes

- Social and emotional skills are especially important for
  - mental well-being and health outcomes,
  - some SES/labour market outcomes, e.g. family income, and if in employment

  - But less important for other SES/labour market outcomes (e.g. educational attainment, wages, attaining a ‘top job’ in your career)

- This suggests there are potentially significant benefits to effective interventions which enhance social and emotional skills, as a complement to cognitive learning

- Measures of self-control (conduct, conscientiousness) and an internal locus of control especially important
Intergenerational transmission of ‘top jobs’

• Social and emotional skill differences play a role in transmission of ‘top job’ status from one generation to the next

• To achieve a top profession, clear advantage to having parents with professional careers:
  - 49.6% of those with a parent in a ‘top job’ obtain a ‘top job’ themselves in adulthood
  - 26.0% of those with parents not in top jobs (difference of 23.6 ppts)

• Parents with top jobs have better socially skilled children and more cognitively able ones: among social and emotional skills, locus of control, and application stand out

• Social and emotional skills play a small but important explanation for the intergenerational pattern (around 10% of the gap)
• Children from poorer households tend to show, on average, worse self-control (conduct) and emotional health than their wealthier peers.

• These differences are evident by the age of 3 years old and persist at least up to age 11.
• Ages 3-11 trajectories in Conduct

➢ By family income
  • Strong social gradient in conduct
  • Apparent by age 3
  • Remains broadly constant to age 11

➢ By gender
  • Boys display greater conduct problems
  • Apparent by age 3
• Ages 3-11 trajectories in Emotional Health

- By family income
  • Strong social gradient in emotional health
  • Apparent by age 3
  • Remains broadly constant to age 11

- By gender
  • Little difference by gender
• Preliminary: differences according to family income appear starker than a generation ago (but differences by gender are unchanged)
• A clear body of evidence on importance of social and emotional skills in early life. Close relationship to children’s mental health, which is also very important but distinct

• The analysis we cite and undertake ourselves is all based on observational data – so a note of caution on whether all these associations are truly ‘causal’; moreover causal pathways maybe diverse/complex

• Strongly suggestive that if effective policies can be found, these are likely to lead to benefits in the here and now, and myriad of benefits later in life.

• Important for social mobility, because of the early and persistent social differences in these skills across childhood
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