

Book Review

Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development. (2015). *Skills for social progress: The power of social and emotional skills*. Paris, France: Author. ISBN: 978-92-64-22614-2 (Print); ISBN: 978-92-64-22615-9 (PDF), doi:10.1787/9789264226159-en, 136 pages.

To the uninitiated observer, technology and engineering education classrooms often appear to be places of organized chaos. This oxymoronic term describes a complex environment- that appears on the surface as disorganized and haphazard while actually functioning with clearly defined objectives and operating procedures embraced by the participants (“Organized Chaos,” n.d.; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014). These classes are marked by a sense of greater mission. Students have the freedom to toggle between independent and collaborative work and use a variety of tools—both traditional and high tech. The end result of this organized chaos might be a physical prototype or a 3D rendering of a solution or the delivery of a presentation; however, the true value in this loose philosophy lies in the soft skills that students develop along the way.

In *Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills*, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) quantifies the value and role of social and emotional skills, also known as soft skills, in global education. Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson (2012) define soft skills as “nontechnical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts” (p. 162). OECD’s *Skills for Social Progress* provides an overlapping and more digestible definition for social and emotional skills, describing them as “the kind of skills involved in achieving goals, working with others and managing emotions” (p. 34), exactly the kind of skills gained by students in the organized chaos of technology and engineering education classrooms. The central finding of *Skills for Social Progress* is that social and emotional skills are increasingly necessary to succeed in the labor market and lead to increased civic engagement and overall life satisfaction. Accordingly, if students need social and emotional skills to succeed in life and technology and engineering education develops these soft skills, the data and conclusions presented in *Skills for Social Progress* support the need for technology and engineering education.

Overview

Comprised of 36 member countries, the OECD (2019) works to “build better policies for better lives” by “establishing international norms and finding evidence-based solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges” (paras. 1–2). *Skills for Social Progress* is one of many publications from the OECD that deals with the broad topics of education and the labor

market; however, this is the organization's first book to specifically link both cognitive and social and emotional skills to individual well-being and social progress. Nine OECD countries, including the United States, participated in the study that resulted in *Skills for Social Progress*. The chapters are logically organized, beginning with a detailed description of the state of the world: Access to education is up, youth employment is down, obesity is staggeringly high, incidences of bullying continue to skyrocket, and civic engagement is in decline. With this established, the authors then move on to conceptualizing the relationship between learning contexts, skills, and social progress before progressing to a detailed analysis of the correlations between cognitive, social, and emotional skills and children's outcomes. A variety of tables and graphs are utilized throughout the book, making the content easy to understand.

A Missed Opportunity

Multiple chapters in the book are dedicated to examining contexts in which social and emotional skills bloom. Although a variety of factors nurture this skill development, the OECD authors specifically identify families, schools, and communities as being highly influential in creating a "holistic and coherent" environment for children (p. 90). In addressing the role of the school, *Skills for Social Progress* holds that it is not necessary to carve valuable time out of the school day to teach social and emotional skills in isolation; instead, these skills can be effectually developed within existing subjects by "introducing project-based work that involves dynamic and interactive problem solving based on real-life problems" (p. 85). Despite using these words that so aptly describe technology and engineering education, there is no mention by name of the value of this existing part of the general education curriculum. The authors of *Skills for Social Progress* missed an opportunity to present readers with a ready-made, easily-implementable solution to the question: How do we teach social and emotional skills? The answer is to look to our technology and engineering classrooms. This book only represents the beginning of the research necessary to truly understand the development of social and emotional skills and the impact of these skills on the world, the OECD is embarking on a more involved journey to collect longitudinal data from a variety of OECD countries. Hopefully, this future research will yield even more rich data and will acknowledge technology and engineering education as a viable means to increase social and emotional skill development.

Conclusion

James Heckman, American economist and Nobel laureate, and Tim Kautz (2012) asserted that "soft skills predict success in life" (p. 451). The data and conclusions presented in *Skills for Social Progress* undoubtedly support this claim. Social and emotional skills play a key role in the future well-being of children and provide a clear path for continued social progress. Technology and

engineering educators are constantly asked to defend their worth and define their place within the larger educational curriculum. *Skills for Social Progress* provides evidence that although cognitive skills will always remain important, the need for the development of solid social and emotional skills is on the rise. Enterprising technology and engineering educators would be well suited to use *Skills for Social Progress* as a means to garner support for their classrooms, dynamic places of organized chaos in which soft skills naturally flourish.

References

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Lauren Lapinski (llapi001@odu.edu) is a graduate student at Old Dominion University.