

## 6. Implications for education policy and practice

Thursday 19th and Friday 20th November 2009

The University of Nottingham

Interventions for emotional well-being require schools, welfare and health agencies to collaborate more closely than ever before. This has significant implications for educational goals, practices and outcomes and for professional roles and the knowledge, skills and practices they require. An overriding question is whether education can and should attempt to develop emotional well-being as a response to deep-seated social problems.

### ORGANISERS

Kathryn Ecclestone (Oxford Brookes University)  
Dennis Hayes (Canterbury Christ Church University)  
Vanessa Pupavac (University of Nottingham)  
Beverley Clack (Oxford Brookes University)  
Matthew Taylor (Royal Society of Arts)

### SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Guida de Abreu (Oxford Brookes University); Sarah Amsler (Kingston University); James Arthur (NICER); Barrie Axford (Oxford Brookes University); John Cornwall (Canterbury Christ Church University); Joshua Foa Deinstag (UCLA, USA); Dolan Cummings (Culture Wars); Mark Duffield (University of Bristol); Frank Furedi (University of Kent); William Gibson (Oxford Brookes University); Ed Harcourt (University of Oxford); Harry Hendrick (University of Southern Denmark); Felicity Huppert (University of Cambridge); Ellie Lee (University of Kent); Elizabeth Leo (Oxford Brookes University) James L. Nolan (Williams College, USA); James Park (ANTIDOTE); Gavin Poynter (University of East London); Rudi Rose (Ghent University); Jonathan Sharples (University of Oxford); John Stewart (Glasgow Caledonian University); Linden West (Canterbury Christ Church University); Joanna Williams (University of Kent); Susannah Wright (Oxford Brookes University).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the seminar series, and details of venues, please contact:

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## Changing the human subject?

Interdisciplinary perspectives on emotional well-being and social justice in education policy and practice

Very diverse concerns drive the idea that the state should develop the emotional well-being of children, young people and adults throughout education and social policy.

### *Numerous interventions across education and welfare policy address many goals:*

- raising educational and social attainment;
- providing a better measure of social justice than narrow targets; encouraging emotional labour as part of human and personal capital for the labour market;
- remedying the emotional damage of exclusion; encouraging engagement with personalised public services;
- creating an emotionally literate,
- self-aware,
- tolerant citizenry.

Such goals arise from the British government's particular conceptualisation of social justice since 1997. This depicts social exclusion as caused by destructive material, social and personal factors in a cycle of deprivation that damages the self-esteem and emotional well-being of disadvantaged individuals and groups and creates 'complex needs' that have to be addressed by welfare and other agencies. From this perspective, emotional deprivation is as, or more, important than social and material deprivation in people's sense of well-being.

In addition to a rapid increase in courses in positive psychology and well-being, and the embedding of ideas about emotional well-being in professional development and training programmes, there has been a huge growth in policy-related activity in universities, private consultancies, think tanks, local authorities, campaigning organisations and charities. Together with a growing array of assessments and interventions, policy and practice present the human subject as a legitimate focus for state intervention and raise new questions about the purposes and activities of state education. Interrogating these questions is crucial because policy plays a central role in shaping a culture's account of human potential and the social relations that follow from it.

A central aim in this seminar series is to open up an area that is highly contested but which has not, so far, been subjected to critical debate. The series is the first time that claims about emotional well-being, and the implicit and explicit depictions of the human subject that underpin policy and practice in this area, have been debated between academics from different disciplines and representatives from practitioners and policy groups. It is also the first time that debates about emotional well-being in the British context have been related to other countries and historical contexts.

Each seminar will explore different perspectives on the conceptual and practical relationship between emotional well-being and social justice and the series as a whole aims to offer a synthesis which evaluates how this relationship creates new types of interventions, new ideas about educational purposes and practices and new images of human potential.

## PROGRAMME

### 1. Political and sociological perspectives: the British context

Tuesday December 9th 2008,

Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University

The New Labour government's 'Third Way' ethos presents the welfare state as crucial for supporting people's psychological well-being, and regards emotional well-being as central to its particular conception of social justice. Numerous initiatives and a rapid rise in policy-related research, training and consultancy to encourage practitioners to develop and assess emotional well-being change the role of state agencies and lead to new interventions and assessment instruments. Such developments not only suggest that educational institutions are a key site for developing emotional well-being but also that this is educationally and socially progressive.

### 2. Political and sociological perspectives: international contexts

Tuesday February 3rd 2009,

Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University

Domestic policy concerns in the United States and in parts of Europe, and concerns about the emotional well-being of populations, influence strategies from the World Bank's poverty reduction approaches and humanitarian aid programmes, to global

security strategies in the war on terror. Concerns about emotional well-being are integral to the shift from geopolitics to bio-politics, where an emphasis on non-material aid affects ideas about how to change subjectivity. These developments have major implications for ideas about international relations between donor and developing countries and for concepts of global and local social justice and citizenship.

### 3. Philosophical and theological perspectives

Wednesday April 22nd 2009

Canterbury Christ Church University

Political preoccupation with emotional well-being both reflects and responds to cultural ideas about identity and about what it means to be human. It raises questions about the interplay between emotional and rational development, and the priority given to one or the other. A view that everyday experiences cause emotional distress and need psychological or therapeutic interventions reflects underlying images of a victimised, 'diminished' or 'demoralised' view of the human subject. Yet, optimistic images of the human subject have also long been contested in philosophy, theology and psychology, raising questions about appropriate health and educational interventions and the way in which religious education is being appropriated for emotional well-being.

### 4. Psychological perspectives

Wednesday June 10th 2009

Canterbury Christ Church University

Interventions to measure and develop emotional well-being draw extensively on cognitive and developmental psychology and on more recent ideas in positive psychology. Both implicitly and explicitly, these developments and their underlying psychological assumptions offer particular views of identity, human development and about ways of changing or influencing one's sense of self. This event relates cognitive, socio-cultural and psycho-analytical perspectives to discussion of philosophical perspectives in seminar 4.

### 5. Historical perspectives

Tuesday July 7th 2009

Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University

Notions of resilience, optimism, stoicism and a positive view of life as new themes in policies for emotional well-being contrast with more diminished images in the first manifestations of New Labour social policy, and with other images in earlier periods. Historical perspectives illuminate continuity and change in conceptualisations of well-being, social justice and the human subject, and their relationship to debates about moral education and moral risk, schooling's role in children's health and welfare and