Measuring essential skills & non-academic outcomes

This is the first version of the SPECTRUM database. If you have any feedback on the resource, please get in touch with info@eefoundation.org.uk

There is growing evidence that children’s social and emotional skills – their ability to respond to setbacks, work well with others, build relationships, manage emotions, and cope with difficult situations – are associated with success at school, as well as positive outcomes in adulthood, such as stable employment, physical and mental health, and well-being. However, despite a growing interest in these skills, much less is known about what can be done to develop them.

To help build this evidence, EEF has so far funded over a dozen trials with a focus on social and emotional skills, including under the related concept of ‘character’ with the Department for Education. Alongside EEF’s core focus on academic attainment, this is likely to be an area of our work that grows in future, including approaches that support children to manage their own learning, and a wider set of ‘essential skills’ that prepare children for success in adult life. We aim to evaluate the impact of promising programmes and school-wide approaches on both academic attainment and wider outcomes, and understand which factors support successful implementation in schools.

However, one of the challenges in this field is the considerable debate about how to define and measure various aspects of social and emotional development, as demonstrated by the confusing and contested terminology, and overwhelming number of measures available. To help address this, the University of Manchester completed a systematic review of concepts and measures in this area, building on EEF’s initial review by UCL Institute of Education in 2013.

The review team’s umbrella term for this work was ‘SPECTRUM’: Social, Psychological, Emotional, Concepts of self, and Resilience: Understanding and Measurement.