



Health and Education Interdependence: Thriving from Birth to Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review *Health and Education Interdependence: Thriving from Birth to Adulthood*, a collective book edited by R. Midford, G. Nutton, B. Hyndman and S. Silburn, and published by Springer in 2020. The book offers a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between health and education during childhood and adolescence, and its impacts on the entire individual's life. Although the contributing authors have generally addressed the relationship between education and health in the Australian context, the book provides valuable data and insights for other countries as well.

KEYWORDS

Book review; health; education; childhood; social and economic inequalities.

Book Review: Health and Education Interdependence

Research shows that health and education are highly interrelated factors which are central to individual and social well-being. Health inequalities increased in tandem with socioeconomic disparities. Individuals with greater educational achievements experience better health and longer lifespans in contrast to those with lower levels of education (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018; Zimmerman et al., 2015).

Health and Education Interdependence: Thriving from Birth to Adulthood, a collective book edited by R. Midford, G. Nutton, B. Hyndman and S. Silburn (published by Springer, 2020) offers a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between health and education during childhood and adolescence, and its impacts on the entire individual's life. The editors define the main purpose of the book as "to broaden understanding of the interconnection, that often gets overlooked, between the health and education sectors, as each has their own traditions and tend to work in isolation from the other" (p. 336). The book is aimed at a wide audience including policy-makers, educators, researchers and school programme designers "who are curious about how these two major disciplines intersect throughout our development into adulthood" (p. 337). Although the contributing authors have generally addressed the relationship between education and health in the Australian context, the book provides valuable data and insights for other countries as well.

The book is divided into five parts. The Part I, *Understanding the Interplay Between Health and Education in Child Development*, provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the intricate relationship between health and education in shaping a child's developmental trajectory. The Part I contains three chapters. The Chapter 1, *A Preview of How Health and Education Interact to Influence the Course of a Child's Development* written by R. Midford, G. Nutton, B. Hyndman and S. Silburn, sets the stage for the subsequent discussions by emphasizing the interconnectedness of these two domains. In this introducing chapter, the authors who are also the book's editors present the book reviewing briefly all chapters.

In the Chapter 2, *Social Determinants of Health and Education: Understanding Intersectionalities During Childhood*, R. Sabates and A. Yardeni focuses on the influence of social determinants on the connection between health and education underscoring the significant role played by social determinants in forecasting inequalities in both learning and health. The chapter highlights the necessity for a comprehensive strategy encompassing policy, implementation, and research that addresses the wider societal and institutional origins of inequalities:

To 'Leave No Child Behind', and to promote their full development, requires policy approaches and support to counteract existing structures of inequity. Potential reductions in health and learning inequalities cannot be achieved, unless policy and interventions are informed by the complex ways in which individuals interact in their social context. (p. 28)

In chapter 3, *The Importance of Physical Health: The Impact of Otitis Media on Hearing Loss and Education Outcomes*, D. Howard addresses the problem of auditory impairment in young kids highlighting its detrimental effects social and educational outcomes. The author reports that roughly 90% of hearing loss resulting from middle ear infections during childhood is concentrated in

developing countries where children belonging to underprivileged communities suffer from more severe and prolonged instances of this disease compared to their counterparts in developed countries. The author states also that children who have difficulty hearing require educators who are proficient in employing both visual and auditory methods of communication. Unfortunately, the existing education systems largely fall short in adequately training professionals with the necessary abilities to effectively assist children with hearing challenges.

While the first part of the book is more introductory, the organization of the other parts follows the developmental process of children, and each focused on one of the developmental periods: Part II on “*early years*”, Part III on “*primary years*”, Part IV on “*high school*” and Part V on “*life-long implications*”. Part II, *Perinatal to Preschool: Health and Development During the Early Years*, is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 4, *Attachment Security: Influences on Social and Emotional Competence, Executive Functioning and Readiness for School*, S. Mares and C. McMahon investigate the effect of the early attachment relationships on the educational life of children. They argue that the quality of early relationships impacts hugely the neurobiological growth, subsequently affecting social and psychological well-being over one's lifetime, and that early secure attachments and the ability for self-regulation, executive functions, data processing, cognitive skills, and language development establish the groundwork for active participation and achievement in an educational environment.

The Chapter 5, *Children on the Edge: Starting School with Additional Health and Developmental Needs* written by M. O'Connor, J. Quach, and S. Goldfeld, investigates the challenges and obstacles faced in school by children with additional health and developmental needs (AHDN). The authors highlight that “even conditions with no direct impact on cognitive or neurological functioning -like allergies or asthma- can influence academic performance through pathways such as school absenteeism” (p. 75). Due to the predominant focus on individuals with more profound disabilities, the children with AHDN frequently receive insufficient attention both in academic research and educational policy. Enabling these children to achieve their maximum capabilities necessitates sustained and well-coordinated endeavors across both healthcare and educational systems.

In sixth chapter, *Children Who Can Guess What Is in the Teacher's Head: Understanding Engagement in Schooling from a Sociocultural Perspective*, H. Harper and B. Parkin explore specific pedagogic strategies to enable teacher to establish positive affect in classrooms, to develop students' attention to academic learning, and thus to ensure children's participation and inclusion in learning activities. They “suggest that students' capacity to focus and attend to learning is not so much a function of their individual abilities, but more a result of socially constructed meaning making which is fostered by expert teachers through moment-to-moment pedagogic choices” (p. 91).

In Chapter 7, *Life-Long Benefits of High Quality Preschool Experiences*, G. Nutton highlights the importance of high-quality preschool programs to support children for reaching their full potential in terms of life outcomes (health, education, civic participation).

The final chapter of Part II, *The Child, Between School, Family and Community: Understanding the Transition to School for Aboriginal Children in Australia's Northern Territory*, written by G. Robinson and

W. Tyler, addresses the issue of school readiness and transition to school of minority groups children in Australian context.

Part III, *Health and School Success: The Primary Years*, is divided into four chapters. In the Chapter 9, *Nutrition and Learning in the Australian Context*, S. Velardo, J. Fane, S. Jong and M. Watson focus on the importance of healthy diet to promote the best conditions for effective learning, cognitive ability, leading to improved focus, higher IQ scores, and better academic performance. They point out also the importance of learning environments for promoting healthy nutrition:

The interdependence of nutrition and education highlights the potential for teachers and schools to help children build positive relationships with food, by teaching children about nutrition and supporting them to make informed and supported choices. Such efforts will also maximise students' potential for a healthy adulthood. Teachers can work towards establishing a classroom environment that is encouraging and supportive, and that normalizes healthy practices, without criticising 'bad' food choices. Experiential learning opportunities should be adopted wherever possible, to build children's practical skills and capacity for critical thought and social action. (p. 171)

The Chapter 10, *Physical Activity and Learning* written by B. Hyndman, M. Winslade, and B. Wright, examines the mutual relationship between acquiring the ability to engage in physical activities and the effects of taking part in these activities on the process of learning. The authors argue that it is crucial to instill physical activity habits in children, as current global patterns demonstrate that many children prefer sedentary activities despite the ready accessibility of opportunities for physical activities. A strong relationship exists between engaging in physical activities and cognitive performance, elucidating various beneficial alterations in brain function through movement, enhanced conduct, scholastic achievement, and other cognitive capabilities.

H. Cahill and B. Dadvand explore in the Chapter 11 how Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs based on evidence can positively impact the mental and emotional well-being of both school staff and students. They argue that well-designed SEL programs can play a pivotal role in mitigating risky behaviors like smoking, alcohol consumption, and other drug use among the students. SEL programs can also address emotional distress, fortify school engagement, and enhance social relationships and academic performance. Moreover, SEL programs have the potential to bolster teacher well-being, foster stronger teacher-student relationship, and enhance the use of student-centered teaching approaches by teachers.

In the Chapter 12, *Building Emotional Safety for Students in School Environments: Challenges and Opportunities*, M. Shean and D. Mander highlight the importance of ensuring emotional well-being for students in school environment:

Emotional safety is considered a defining component of a positive learning environment and is related to psychological well-being, and positive academic and social outcomes. In schools, emotional safety is developed through supportive relationships; being valued and treated with respect; and clear boundaries and support for students to achieve their potential academically, socially and personally. Research indicates that emotionally unsafe environments lead to stress, lower attendance at school, and less engagement in learning, whereas emotionally safe environments are related to more positive identity development, better learning experiences and greater feelings of worth. (p.225)

Part IV of the book, *Continuing the Journey: Health and Success in High School*, explores the relationship between health and education at the high school level focusing on sexual and drug education. In the Chapter 13, *Who am I? The Role of Health Promotion and School Education in Young People's Sexual Health and Wellbeing*, S. Dyson addresses the issues related to the young people, gender and sexuality, and the interrelation between sexual education and respectful relationships education. The author argues that in the prevailing education and health promotion approaches, adolescent sexuality has frequently been treated as an issue to be managed and controlled, and she proposes a perspective that highlights strengths and embraces a positive attitude towards sexuality in school-based health promotion programs, employing critical thinking and ethical approaches to sexuality education and relationship guidance.

In the Chapter 14, *Taking a Skills Focused, Harm Reduction Approach to School Drug Education*, R. Midford and H. Cahill underline the ineffectiveness of drug prevention education taught in schools since the 1960s, and propose effective research-based programs which can provide young people with the skills to reduce harm:

Historically, school drug education, has not been considered effective prevention. Now, though, there is a better understanding of the elements that need to be present for a program to be effective, and research-based programs have been the most successful in changing drug use behaviour. Schools can play a role in drug prevention, but to maximise their influence they have to provide programs that are well researched, relevant and credible. In this regard, a harm reduction focus offers distinct advantages. (p. 269)

The last part of the book, *Life-Long Implications of the Health Education Nexus*, is divided in three chapters. The Chapter 15, *Health Literacy Across the Life Course: Understanding Equity and the Influence of Culture and Gender* written by S. Ireland and J. A. Smith, investigates health literacy concept in the context of equity, gender and culture. The authors “argue that a health literacy environment framework shifts the responsibility of good health away from an individual to a shared population-based responsibility between citizens, health systems and health service providers” (p. 291).

In the following chapter, S. Silburn explores the field of epigenetics highlighting its aspects related to brain development and functioning that are pertinent to children's learning. The author reports that epigenetics provides the evidence that the human genome can be altered due to exposure to persistent stress, nutritional problems, and other various pre- and post-natal detrimental environmental factors. These negative impacts are more commonly encountered by children raised in impoverished circumstances. This is also thought to be a significant factor contributing to the increased probability of developmental, behavioral, and educational difficulties among children growing up in poverty.

In the last chapter of the book, *Drawing it Together: Understanding the Interaction of Health and Education in the Development Trajectory*, the editors B. Hyndman, R. Midford, Georgie Nutton, and S. Silburn provide an overview of the findings presented in the previous chapters, and explore the measures to be implemented during early childhood and throughout schooling that can enhance educational achievements and positively impact across the lifespan on health behaviour.

The editors conclude the book with a call to “reflecting on the health-education nexus” aiming to explore how both the health and education domains can collaborate and jointly contribute to enhancing learning and well-being spanning from infancy to adulthood:

An enhanced understanding of the education-health nexus can unlock further ideas and strategies to benefit people across the lifespan to complement other settings such as the home and neighbourhood. It has often been difficult for researchers, policy-makers and educational practitioners to focus on the intersection between both health and education. [...] The book has the ability to inform future research and practice in diverse fields from general early childhood, primary and secondary education into sport, physical, health education and health sciences. The challenge is now set for this work to be taken up more broadly by researchers, policy makers, health practitioners and educators across these fields. There is a strong community interest into how the health and education sectors can, by working together, provide more positive health and learning outcomes for young people. This book showcases a broad range of empirical evidence to provide a unique insight into the synergies between health and education. It also raises the potential benefits, insights and influences of further health and education intersections that are waiting to be uncovered. The consistent theme running through all the chapters is that increasing understanding of how health and education interact during an individual's development has considerable potential to positively influence their life. This can in turn have a positive impact on the communities in which these individuals live. Overall, the book presents a strong argument that ‘educated people are more likely to be healthy people and vice versa’. (p. 336-337)

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