



**RESILIENT
PRESCHOOLS**

IO1.A2.3 Toolkit

For Preschool Teachers





Erasmus+

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Introduction to the Project

“Resilience and Wellbeing in preschool education to prevent emotional, social and behavioural problems” – **RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS** Project has been funded with support from the European Commission; project number: 2020-1-CY01-KA201-066080.

RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Consortium is constituted by **six (6) partners** (P1: Cyprus Pedagogical Institute – leader, P2: Institute of Development CY, P3: Motion Digital s.r.o, P4: International Hellenic University, P5: Universitatea Din Pitesti, & P6: Municipio De Lousada) **from five (5) different countries** (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, & Portugal). The Project duration is **24 months** (01/12/2020 – 31/11/2022).

RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project’s main aim is to create material for practical applications and guidance to Preschool Teachers on how to utilize **Positive Psychology** in teaching young children. Through several concepts deriving from Positive Psychology’s methods and principles, preschool students will be given the opportunity to start building from a young age their psychological capacity - life-skills, thus magnifying the possible future benefits. Additionally, by fortifying young children’s resilience and wellbeing, their academic performance will be enhanced as well.

Positive Education, is an emerging concept that incorporates the aforementioned notions into education. To be more accurate Positive Education is the combination of traditional Education Principles with Positive Psychology approaches, with a focus on the use of classroom interventions that will help children to cultivate their resilience, positive emotions and engagement (Baker, Green, & Falecki, 2017). The material that RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS will develop during its lifespan will follow the main structure of the most known and globally praised Positive Psychology practical application - the **PERMA model** (P-Positive Emotion, E-Engagement, R-Relationships, M-Meaning, A-Accomplishment) (Seligman, 2011).

To achieve the aforementioned aims, the following Intellectual Outputs will be created during the lifespan of RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project:

- **IO1: A positive education toolkit for preschool teachers**
- **IO2: A training package (training program and material) for preschool teachers**
- **IO3: eLearning Space and OERs**



Toolkit: User's Guide

"Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching kids what counts is best" – Bob Talbert

For the creation of this Toolkit, RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Consortium conducted extensive Research in each partner country in order to acquire a **vault with data**, resources and good practices; all were used to identify the specific needs and current practices connected with **Preschool Education** and the **psychological wellbeing of preschool children**. All the data gathered were used to create this Toolkit which is available for free to Preschool Teachers, any other relevant professionals and the public in general.

Focusing on notions like "**Wellbeing**" and "**Psychological Resilience**", the main objective of this Toolkit is to create a practical source of information that would support Preschool Teachers and equip them with skills, strategies and techniques that derive from the core principles of **Positive Psychology, PERMA Model and Character Education** – all notions that will be discussed in the next pages – with the sole purpose to improve their student's overall wellbeing, school experience and bring about a positive change in the general school climate.

This Toolkit offers concrete and research bound information, definitions, real-life case studies, methodologies and curriculum suggestions for developing effective strategies, interventions and activities within school settings. All the material were approached and captured through the scientific lens of the evidence-based Positive Psychology methodology, whilst also adapted in such manner that can be utilized in contemporary Preschool Education settings and curriculum.

How to Utilize the Toolkit:

- **Preschool Educators:** Foster skills, acquire information, apply practices in Education Settings
- **Adult/ School Educators:** reference tool for Trainers, School Counsellors, School Principals, Psychologists, Professionals working with Preschool Educators or Preschool Children

The material is structured in a way that takes into consideration that the reader might be new to all the notions, thus makes sure to introduce the reader to the necessary theoretical background and definitions. Additional material and references are also provided for those who might wish to investigate certain notions and aspects into more depth.



Preschool Educators and/or any other readers – professionals are encouraged to alter, adapt and implement any material and information provided in compliance with their own specific goals or limitations (time availability, logistics, cultural differences, education system – curriculum of each country, specific characteristics of school classroom, material availability, desired learning outcomes, facilitator’s own characteristics).

1. Introduction to Positive Psychology

“Psychology should be just as concerned with human strength as it is with weakness, it should also be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst” – Martin Seligman (2004)

Martin Seligman, regarded as the father of Positive Psychology officially initiated it as a new domain – branch of Psychology in 1998, when he chose it as a theme during serving his tenure as president of the **American Psychological Association (APA)**. Since 2000 and beyond, Seligman’s call for emphasis on the positive aspects of life and less focus on trauma and dysfunctionality, has been answered by a vast volume of researchers and practitioners around the world, provoking thousands of studies on positive psychology and relevant notions and thus establishing a concrete evidence-based ground for the application of Positive Psychology principles in various settings; individual life satisfaction, relationships, career, education, business, communities.

Positive Psychology nowadays is known as the **applied field of psychology** which explores individuals’ strengths, focuses on building positive habits, aptitudes and relationships, with the main aim to enhance people’s lives and promote their overall functioning (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Thus, in contrast with traditional Psychology approaches who investigate how to change dysfunctional behaviors or heal past trauma for therapeutic purposes, Positive Psychology focuses on **what is going well with people** (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007) and enables them to amplify all those positive aspects in order to **flourish** and reach an **optimum level of functioning** (Seligman, 2011).

As previously mentioned, research and practical applications conducted under the umbrella of Positive Psychology aim to identify, understand and endorse any aspects and factors that can help **individuals, groups and larger communities** to function in optimum levels (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The



field of positive psychology focuses at three different levels – the subjective, the individual and the group level (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The subjective level involves the study of positive experiences such as positive emotions, happiness, and meaning in life, optimism, hope, and flow. The individual level comprises the study of the personal qualities that define a “good person” and focuses on character strengths and virtues such as capacity for love, courage, forgiveness, creativity and wisdom (Boniwell, 2012).

In summary, Positive Psychology approaches are centered on the cardinal concepts of **optimism, hope, gratitude and joy**, but also go deeper than the mere preoccupation with positive emotions. The field of Positive Psychology also investigates notions like **individual character strengths, self-esteem, and habits** that create a life flourished with wellbeing; to achieve that Positive Psychology methodologies propose ways how such traits can be applicable to individual’s everyday lives, work and interpersonal relationships. When all those bits and traits come together, they create **a meaningful life and a prolong sense of purposeful existence**.

The project will adopt the model for positive education described in diagram below. The PERMA model as proposed by Seligman (2011) with the adaptation of Norrish (2015).

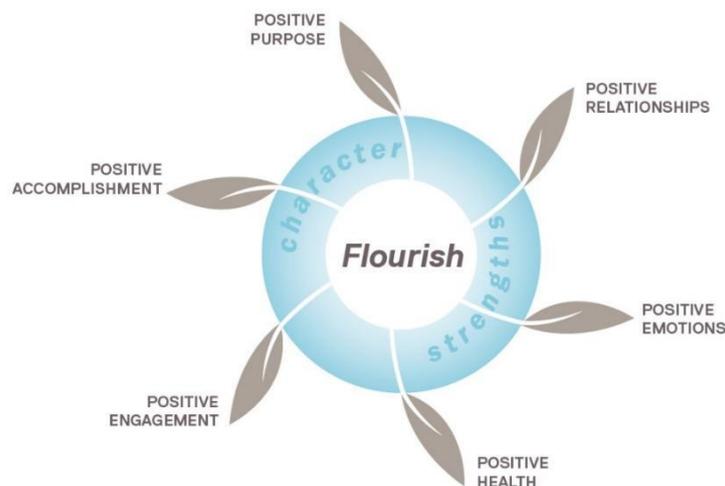


Diagram: The 6 domains of Positive Education, taken from the Geelong positive education model



The leaves represent the six domains of positive education, those things that are 'taught':

- positive emotions
- positive relationships
- positive purpose
- positive meaning
- positive health
- positive engagement

Each domain has a set of skills and evidence-informed concepts. Underpinning the domains are character strengths which act as the supporting pathways to the domains.

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2. Definition of Key Concepts

As previously mentioned, the preliminary stage of **RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS** Project included the conduction of an extensive **desk and field research**. Positive Psychology's field is vast and it's gaining ground day by day, thus in the attempt to adopt relevant practices and theories in Preschool Education settings, the partners agreed to deduce and establish a list of Key Concepts that seemed to be the most prominent and a good fit with the project's aims and objectives.

In this section the reader will find a short description of each Key Concept and definitions, which will be useful in order to follow and comprehend fully the next modules and notions to be discussed:

1. Wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined as the state of prolonged contentment - enjoying a state of being comfortable, healthy and joyous. However, the meaning of "wellbeing" is more **complex and multidimensional** that just simply a mere experience of positive emotions. With a closer investigation, one comes to the realization that an overall sense of wellbeing cannot be achieved without having a balance in a variety of key elements: physical, emotional or psychological, social, spiritual, mental or intellectual, economical. Moreover, it's important to point out that more often than not, the factors that influence one's wellbeing are interconnected. For example, a fulfilling career-path provides not only financial security, but also a sense of purpose, the possibility of creating friendships and social connections with similar-minded people and a sense of belonging.

The theory of wellbeing is embodied in the founding disciplines of **Positive Psychology** and the **PERMA model** developed by Seligman (2011), where research has shown that there are five core pillars underpinning wellbeing: **(P)ositive Emotions, (E)ngagement, (R)elationships, (M)eaning, (A)ccomplishment**.

2. Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bend but not to break, bounce back and perhaps even flourish in the face of adversity and achieve emotional or mental growth. The American Psychological Association (2014)



defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress”.

3. Social – Emotional Learning

Social – Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process of developing capacities like self-awareness, emotional and behavioral self-regulation and communication skills; all pivotal for academic, professional and overall life happiness and success. Individuals that manage to acquire strong social-emotional skills are more likely to find way to effectively cope with everyday challenges, reach the maximum of their potential and flourish in every level. Social-Emotional Learning not only improves Academic performance, but also increases prosocial behaviors, such as kindness, altruism and empathy (Weissberg et al. 2015).

4. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as the capacity of an individual to be fully aware of his /her thoughts and emotions and to be connected to the present moment; also known as “here and now”. Simultaneously, the individual is still fully aware of their surroundings and environment, without allowing any stimuli to destruct or disturb them. On the contrary, the individual is in a permanent on-going mental state of adapting and experiencing acceptance, curiosity and self-growth (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). By practicing mindfulness one can gradually achieve high levels of introspection and understanding of the true nature of thoughts and emotions. Children are uniquely suited to benefit from mindfulness practices. Healthy habits embedded in daily routine early in life will shape behaviors and personal traits well in adulthood, with mindfulness children will have the opportunity to develop a strong self-regulation system and will be able to find serenity and tranquility even when facing challenge. Children of all ages and in any developmental stage can benefit from mindfulness, according to relevant research practicing mindfulness for children improves social and communication skills, strengthens self-control, lowers levels of anxiety and stress and increases positive mood and resilience (Burke, 2010; Greenberg & Harris, 2011; Hooker & Fodor, 2014).



“Young children live moment to moment. They react emotionally in response to an immediate circumstance, and then they just as quickly let it go and move on to the next experience” - Hooker & Fodor (2014).

5. Character Strengths

Character strengths are defined as positive traits which are reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They exist in degrees and can be measured as individual differences (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). “**Character Strengths and Virtues**” the phenomenal book created by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, is regarded as the backbone of the science of positive psychology and remains one of the most substantive efforts generated by the field. Peterson and Seligman (2004), developed a list of character traits – strengths and assorted assessment tools to identify those traits in each person. The most well-known and prominent example is Values in Action (VIA) classification.

The **VIA Classification describes of 24 widely-valued character strengths**, organized under six broad virtues:

1. Wisdom and knowledge:

- **curiosity:** taking an interest in all of ongoing experiences and surroundings
- **creativity:** thinking of novel and productive ways to perform or express notions
- **open-mindedness:** open and respectful to new ideas and beliefs
- **love of learning:** mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
- **perspective:** being able to provide wise counsel to others with empathy

2. Courage:

- **honesty:** speaking the truth and presenting oneself with authenticity
- **bravery:** not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
- **persistence:** continuing firmly an opinion or course of action in spite of challenges
- **zest:** approaching life with excitement and favorable energy



3. Humanity:

- **kindness:** being friendly, generous, and considerate
- **love:** valuing close relations with others
- **social intelligence:** being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others

4. Justice:

- **fairness:** treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
- **leadership:** the action of leading a group of people or an organization
- **teamwork:** working well as member of a group or team

5. Temperance:

- **forgiveness:** the ability to forgive others
- **modesty:** the quality of not talking about your abilities and achievements
- **prudence:** being careful about one's choices
- **self-regulation:** Regulating what one feels and actions

6. Transcendence:

- **aesthetics appreciation and excellence:** noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
- **gratitude:** being aware of and thankful for one's blessings
- **hope:** expecting the best and working to achieve it
- **humor:** the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech
- **spirituality:** having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

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3. Desk and Field Research: Summary of findings

Cyprus

CPI (Cyprus Pedagogical Institute) and **IoD (Institute of Development CY)** collaborated for the production of all Desk and Field Research stages in Cyprus (Desk Research, Focus Group, Individual Interviews, Questionnaire).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MOECSY) of Cyprus is responsible for the education of children of the age of three years and over, who attend public, community and private schools. With the decision of the Council of Ministers with number 84.078 and date 9.1.2018, compulsory Pre-Primary education is established at the age of 4 years and the compulsory Pre-Primary class at the age of 5 years old. The Department of Primary Education is responsible to ensure that all children aged 4 8/12 and above are enrolled in a public or community Pre-Primary school. In addition, in public or community Pre-Primary schools the educational needs of a number of 3 - 4 8/12-year-olds are satisfied, according to availability. However, it is the parents' decision which type of Pre-Primary school they wish for their children to attend, public, community or private.

According to the job description published in the Cyprus Government Gazette, all Pre-primary school level teachers in the public and community sector in Cyprus are university graduates. Pre-Primary Education has a value of its own and simultaneously carries out work of fundamental importance to the qualitative upgrade of Primary Education. This view of Pre-Primary agrees with the European educational reality and the outcomes of scientific educational research. Cyprus, as a member of the Council of Europe and as a full member of the European Union, adopts programmes, which relate and correspond to the European ones.



Main Challenges

Main Challenges pre-schools face with regards to the resilience and well-being in preschools (and key challenges and problems that preschool teachers face)/ critical review of current practices and policies on early childhood education).

Due to COVID19 restrictive measures **all Research Steps** (Desk Research Data gathering, Focus Group, Individual Interviews, Questionnaires) in **Cyprus** were conducted Online and/or using Digital Means (Online Meeting Applications, Telephone, Google Forms), to protect the health and safety of all parties involved.

Eight (8) Preschool Educators attended the 2 hour online Focus Group in Cyprus. **Five (5)** professionals, experts in Early Education Field, participated in the interviews conducted in Cyprus for the needs of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project. All the participants from the Focus Group and Individual Interviews, were Preschool Educators with a broad multiyear experience in the field in various positions - teaching, guidance and/or education leadership positions.

Cyprus conducted the **RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS survey** for Preschool in the Greek language. The target was for each partner country to collect 20 completed survey responses, Cyprus managed to **collect 100 responses**.

According to the data gathered, there is a clear need for Preschool Educators in Cyprus to find **reliable research-based sources** and access more training, in order to be able to introduce and apply the aforementioned notions to their teaching curriculum. It is worth noting that although preschool teachers try to integrate activities related to emotional and social learning, their efforts largely depend on their own creativity and initiative. Moreover, the School Management and Administration in Cyprus can also become more involved and informed about these important matters, something that can be used as a solid ground to create **a more positive, nurturing and empathetic School Culture**.

All participants noted that due to the aftermath of COVID19, all school staff, children and parents as well, seem to be still emotionally numb and/or reserved from the traumatic life-changing events. Hence, by incorporating applications of Positive Psychology in school settings and giving emphasis on character strengths, virtues, meaning and positive emotion will help all parties to find their lost enthusiasm.



Find below in bullet-point few of the prominent outcomes:

- All Educators agreed that the main challenge they are currently facing is adjusting to the new reality due to the COVID 19 pandemic aftermath and the health and safety restrictions. The aforementioned ramifications do not only affect the Educators themselves, but they also affect all other groups of individuals in the school community (children, parents, school staff and administration).
- Preschool Education needs to safeguard its **own unique identity and educational – developmental aims** and shouldn't become just a stepping stone to Elementary Level School.
- Classrooms should be divided according to children's ages and **developmental stage**. Having classrooms with ages 3-6 years old, prevents the teachers from choosing the optimal activities and educational objectives, based on their students' developmental level and abilities.
- Preschool teachers suggest that the holistic development of children should be taken into consideration by giving special emphasis on social, emotional and moral development at an early stage.
- Preschool Teachers in Cyprus noted that they are often required to teach a big class with a large number of students.
- Even though the CPI has been a valuable supporter and defender of the importance of Preschool Education, the Preschool Education Sector is often marginalized in Cyprus.
- Cyprus has only three (3) Preschool Education Inspectors that are responsible to monitor and provide support to all Preschool Teachers in the country, thus Preschool Educators do not have the opportunity to get constructive feedback and guidance as frequently as they would like or need to.



National Curriculum

Areas in the national curriculum relevant to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

The educational program of a pre-primary school aims to prepare adequately the young children for primary school, with emphasis on a free and creative play, through individual approaches that focus on children, in an environment that reinforces cooperative learning, experimentation and team work. An emphasis is given on the attribution of personal interest towards each child separately, depending on his/her individual traits, skills and needs, support, trust, acceptance, safety and respect of their unique characteristics and aptitudes.

Pre-Primary Education is responsible among other for complementing the task of a family, for the support, with every means, of the most complete possible development of a child, for satisfaction of the basic needs of his/her personality and his/her exposure to supporting and constructive experiences, with the aim of realizing his/her skills and capabilities and of developing a positive self-image.

Pre-Primary curriculum adopts a holistic approach and is structured around four main aspects of child development namely Cognitive Empowerment, Personal and Social Awareness, Emotional Empowerment and Motor Development. Different subjects (Language education, Arts, Social studies, “Social, political, economic, historical, geographical, religious and ethical context”, Mathematics, Musical education, Physical education and Natural science) contribute towards the development of the four main aspects. Children’s learning is organised via free and structured play and project approach is the method which is adopted by the teachers.

(Link: http://archeia.moec.gov.cy/sd/270/dee_nip_proscholiki_ekpaidefsi.pdf)



Programmes related to the project

The Programme Social and Emotional Education in Schools was implemented in 100 primary and 4 early year settings in Cyprus. The programme was a school-based prevention programme and teachers were trained in ten areas of study in order to be able to implement the programme. Those were: Communication, Acknowledgment and expression of emotions, Self-awareness and self-esteem, dealing with stressful situations, Conflict resolution, Multicultural and Diversity, Personal difference and family characteristics, learning procedures, Social competences, dealing with crisis.

(Link: https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=425%3A2010-10-10-11-16-28&catid=80%3A2010-10-08-10-37-42&Itemid=312&lang=en)

ARETI Programme: The Institute of Development has been implementing for more than a decade, the “ARETI” programme, which is an educational programme in 12 basic life values which form the basis for shaping an individual with an intrinsic understanding of honour, values and chivalry. The programme fills a gap in the upbringing of children with special emphasis on the moral, emotional and social development (Charalambous 2009; Charalambous 2010).

The Pathway of the Heart is a small, human scale, curriculum development programme that was implemented in 200 early years’ settings in Cyprus for a period of 3 years. It was developed by Maria Eracleous as part of her postgraduate studies. The programme was adopted by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (Department of Primary Education and Cyprus Pedagogical Institute). The programme not only gave teachers space for change and adaptation, but was developed by teachers themselves.

There is a need of **raising awareness** regarding the existence of Positive Psychology and connected tools and practices, which can amplify the teacher’s approaches and **enrich their own mastery skillset**.

(Link: <http://www.schools.ac.cy/dde/circular/data/Doc7414a.pdf>)

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Czech Republic

Main Challenges

Main Challenges pre-schools face with regards to the resilience and well-being in preschools (and key challenges and problems that preschool teachers face)/ critical review of current practices and policies on early childhood education).

The preschool education in the **Czech Republic** is legally recognized and defined in a law no. 561/2004 /part 2 together with the Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education from 2005. The main administrative responsibility for preschool education in the Czech Republic is in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, although more responsibilities are delegated to municipal and local authorities. Since 1990 establishment of private schools has been made possible.

The aim of the Czech preschool education defined as: *“Pre-school education supports the development of the personality of a pre-school child, participates in kid’s healthy emotional, intellectual and physical development and the acquisition of the basic rules of behavior, basic values of life and interpersonal relationships.”* (Zákony pro lidi, n.d.)

The main challenges were recognized by the Czechs preschool educators during the **RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS** research activities (focus group, interviews and a questionnaire):

- **High Number of Children in the classroom** - especially in the state preschools there can occur 24 - 28 children per teacher, given by law. This affects the quality and individual approach. For a larger number of children, it may be more difficult to take care of their safety at the same time.
- **Insufficient acknowledgment** of the demanding profession of preschool teachers in terms of financial and social status in the Czech Republic.
- **Insufficient support in teachers training** especially when it comes to strengthening their communication skills towards parents and the school team. Main aim of amplifying teacher’s communication skills should be to create a respectful and fruitful cooperation among all parties in order to reassure the wellbeing and optimal learning capacity for the child/ren. This is also influenced by the amount of work that the teachers are called to manage. Supporting teachers in matters concerning managerial or administrative tasks is crucial especially for creating a sense of unity and cooperation between the preschool and the families.



- **Overwhelming administrative workload** that lays on the preschool teachers.

- **Physical and Psychological Wellbeing aspect** and how to maintain theirs or their students, is not the part of teacher's school education / training. This aspect highly influences the wellbeing of the children, they learn not only what they hear but also what they feel and see. This factor will prevent burnout of the teachers and losing their valuable long term learned skills.
- **Supervision and/or support from other professionals/experts (counsellors, psychologists, social workers etc.)** for the teachers as well as for children. Any psychological or psychotherapeutic training of the teachers seems to be an advantage, and there is a serious call for access to professional supervision. The school and budget priorities are set by the management of the preschool in line with the financial allocations preferences they need to make. There is no specific financial allocation for supervisions in the education field in the Czech Republic like for instance in social work.

National Curriculum

Areas in the national curriculum relevant to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

The [Framework Education Programme of the Czech Republic](#) (FEP PE) defines that preschool education aims to facilitate the child's future journey through life and education. Its task is to **develop the child's personality, support his/her physical development and health, their personal satisfaction and wellbeing**. As well as to assist the child in understanding of the surrounding world etc. An important task of preschool, is to create a solid foundation for the child's further education by supporting the individual development capacities of children in all circumstances, so that when leaving the kindergarten/preschool, each child has reached the ideal level of knowledge and development.

Preschool education adapts as much as possible to **developmental, physiological, cognitive, social and emotional needs of children** in this age group and ensures that these specifics are fully respected in their education. Therefore preschool education must provide an appropriate, children-friendly and interesting environment filled with challenges, and rich in content, where the child can feel confident, safe, joyful and happy, and which allows the child to behave naturally and have fun.



Educational content in FEP PE is organized in five education areas: **biological, psychological, interpersonal, socio-cultural and environmental**. These areas are called:

- **A child and their body** - the aim of the teachers' efforts in the biological area is to stimulate and promote growth and neuromuscular development of the child, enhance their physical wellbeing, improve their physical fitness and health culture. To lead them to healthy living habits by e.g. locomotor activities (running, walking etc.), other activities (ball games, hiking etc.) as well as health oriented activities (stretching, muscle relaxation, breathing and relaxation techniques) etc.
- **A child and their mind** - The aim of teachers education efforts in the area of psychology is to promote the child's mental wellbeing, their mental abilities and resilience, the development of their intellect, speech and language, cognitive processes and functions, feelings and will, as well as self-expression etc.
- **A child and the other person** - The aim of the teacher's educational efforts in the area of interpersonal relations is to stimulate the child in creating relations to another child or adult, strengthen, enrich and cultivate their communication and ensure that these relationships are well kept.
- **A child and the others** - The aim in the socio-cultural area is to introduce the child to other peoples fellowship and to rules of living in a community, bring them into the world of material and spiritual values, into the world of culture and art, help the child acquire necessary skills, habits and attitudes and enable them to actively participate in shaping a well-functioning social environment.
- **A child and the world** - The aim in the environmental area is to establish the child's elementary awareness of the surrounding world and its events, of human impact on the environment and create a basic foundation for the child's open and responsible attitude towards the environment. (Research Institute of Education, 2004).

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Greece

Main Challenges

Main Challenges pre-schools face with regards to the resilience and well-being in preschools (and key challenges and problems that preschool teachers face)/ critical review of current practices and policies on early childhood education).

The early childhood educational system in Greece falls into a split model consisted of two parallel but distinct sections (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2018). The first section concerns the early childhood education and care, which includes the childcare centres that accommodate infants and children aged from 2.5 to 4 years old. The second section covers the pre-primary education and contains the kindergarten centers that provide services for children from 4 to 6 years old (Gregoriadis et al., 2018a). Attendance in childcare centers is optional. Since 2018 the two-years attendance in kindergartens became compulsory by law. Therefore, compulsory education in Greece starts at the age of 4 years old.

The general purpose of the Greek early childhood education is to promote and support children's physical, emotional, mental and social development (MoE/Pi, 2002). Within this framework, childcare centres aim to support a comprehensive development of children, while providing care services to working parents (Megalonidou, 2020). However, there are no specific curriculum requirements for early childhood education care (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2014). For kindergartens there is a national curriculum covered five areas: literacy, mathematics, science and environment, creation and expression, and computer science (MoE/Pi, 2002). The curriculum is accompanied by the Preschool Teacher Guide, which is designed to support teachers implement the curriculum efficiently (Dafermou et al., 2006).

Within this educational context preschool teachers face nowadays a series of positive and negative challenges that demand to be flexible and adaptable. Participants in the research processes of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS project mentioned that the recent establishment of the two-years compulsory attendance in pre-primary education is a positive challenge as this reform highlights the support and the promotion of the Preschool Education in Greece. Nevertheless, teachers work in overpopulated classes (20-25 children per class) with children having a wide range of ages (3-6 years old), in some cases in not well-equipped buildings. Although, it is demanding and challenging to observe and focus on children's personal needs and personal strengths, teachers have to adapt the



program and the learning activities in children's different developmental stages and interests. In addition, the management of a) unexpected situations in the classroom, b) their relationship with parents and c) the relationship among the school staff were considered as the main challenges early childhood educators face nowadays.

Regarding the psychological resilience and well-being, the Educational Work Coordinators within the regional centers for educational planning organize some occasional seminars and meetings to inform preschool educators about Positive Education. They aimed to inform teachers about contemporary pedagogical processes in Preschool Education, empower their confidence, coordinate and encourage them. However, these seminars are optional. Therefore, many preschool educators are not informed or trained for this purpose.

Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic, the long-lasting lockdown and the relevant safety measures in schools were mentioned as the main challenges pre-schools face during the last year. This situation and the consequent adjustment into the new reality (both in school and in the virtual classroom) brought a redefinition of the learning process, which resulted additional stress in preschool teachers in order to correspond in the recent demands and challenges.

National Curriculum

Areas in the national curriculum relevant to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

The Greek early childhood national curriculum belongs to the category of national curricula that do not provide specific practices and policies for wellbeing promotion (see, for instance the Irish Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice or the nationally approved learning frameworks in Australia, UK and USA, that include wellbeing as a desired outcome). Nonetheless, it is a curriculum that adopts a holistic approach, as it aims to promote children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development (MoE/Pi, 2002). It recognizes the social character of knowledge and emphasizes the socio-cultural perspectives of learning (Birbili, 2014). Therefore, one could argue that from this holistic perspective of children's development, the national curriculum for early childhood education implies the importance of promotion children's wellbeing and early childhood



educators are required to support children's social and emotional health and resilience beyond the academic outcomes.

However, at an institutional level the Greek state's anticipation for promoting psychological wellbeing and resilience is limited. For kindergartens an effort was made in the pilot revised national curriculum with the inclusion of the section of "the individual and social development" (Birbili, 2014). This area of the program highlights the critical role of individual and social development in children's life, it describes some methodologies and teaching approaches promoting the individual and social development and suggests several activities for the development of self-esteem, self-regulation, personal strength, social competences and interactions.

Besides this guide pre-service teachers may be educated in the field of positive education and exercise practices to increase wellbeing during their undergraduate studies, depending on the course program of each department. In-service educators might be informed about the applications of positive psychology in education in Continuing Professional Development seminars and courses, that usually organized by Educational Work Coordinators and Schools of Education in Universities respectively (Gregoriadis et al., 2018b).

In sum, despite psychological wellbeing is part of Greek educational discourse, due to the absence of relevant official practices and policies for promotion the psychological wellbeing, the early childhood educators in Greece are not trained officially or in an organized way for that purpose. This conclusion was confirmed by the findings from the research processes of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS project too, as the majority of the participated teachers admitted that although they are not educated and trained in this field, they find time and space in their teaching curriculum to include notions related to psychological wellbeing and resilience (during the whole school day or within organized activities). Participant teachers mentioned that psychological wellbeing should be an important aspect of Preschool Education and were interested in learning more about topics related to Positive Psychology practices especially how to build psychological resilience and promote wellbeing to preschool children, how to provide positive feedback and supporting them on how to cope with stress and adversities.



Therefore, the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS project may further support the Greek preschool teachers toward providing quality resources to amplify their skills in nurturing children’s wellbeing, character traits and resilience.

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Romania

Main Challenges

Main Challenges pre-schools face with regards to the resilience and well-being in preschools (and key challenges and problems that preschool teachers face)/ critical review of current practices and policies on early childhood education).

The main challenges that that we have identified during the need analysis implemented in Romania through Focus Groups, interviews and application of questionnaires are:

- **too much emphasis on pre-schoolers' cognitive development** and not enough on their preparation for life, autonomy, solving the problems they face, taking care of themselves, adapting to new situations;
- **parents' ambitions towards the child** (sometimes aberrant) - as they are not interested in having children with emotional well-being, but children with good results; parents not prepared for their parental role, they do not involve enough, they provide low support to educators and school; the competition generated by parents putting pressure on pupils (*"You have to be the best!"*) but also on the teacher (who is socially evaluated - involuntarily - by the performance of his pupils);
- the somewhat **inflexible, rigid curriculum**; it should be adapted to allow the educator to be creative and fit the realities of current pupils' live;
- **not enough support on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Government**, especially for the private kindergartens and for rural areas (inadequate infrastructure, lack of certain auxiliary materials and special teaching resources adapted to preschool age - intuitive materials adequate to their concrete thinking);
- **lack of preschool counselling office** with specific equipment (that generates lack of material & psychological comfort of both the pre-schooler and the counsellor) and insufficient support provided to counsellor by educators;
- **overpopulated classes** (30-35 children), especially in urban zones and metropolises and **underpopulated classes** (12-9-7 children) in rural areas where there is total simultaneous education;
- **lack of authority of the teacher counsellor in the child's eyes** (*"You are not my teacher, thus I do not have to listen to you!"*);
- **insufficient number of specialized personnel**: educators, assistant-educators, carers, counsellors, psycho-pedagogists, experts



- **inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education** (the educator cannot properly work with a class of 35 children of which 3-4 are with SEN); lack of adapted programs and didactic materials for them, and hence pupils' problems to adapt and to socialize with peers;
- **different economic level among pupils' families** (rich vs poor families) which implicitly make pupils' learning and psychological well-being unequal, discriminatory.
- **the negative influence of the exposure of preschool children to the media**, the Internet with images and programs inadequate to preschool age, that impede the creation of active listening capacity and the correct understanding of perceived information;

The existing initiatives regarding fostering Psychological Resilience in Preschool mostly belongs to school environment itself and/or civil society (NGOs, parents associations) and not to authorities and Government. Teachers know and apply specific activities and practices to promote and sustain positive environment and children' psychological wellbeing and resilience, but they acknowledge they need more support and training in this regard and would be glad to be provided with such professional courses. Thus, in the field good practices already exist, that provide remarkable results.

National Curriculum

Areas in the national curriculum relevant to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

As shown above, preschool and primary teachers in Romania face a series of challenges, some systemic, some local. Among the most important and commonly acknowledged: lack of didactic resources and equipment, lack of premises, over- and under-populated classes, lack of specialized staffs, lack of parents' support.

However, despite this not so good situation, the curriculum in force since 2019 represents a step forward and a solid methodological framework that include and support socio-emotional development of children in preschool and primary education. The Romanian curriculum has a very important component, such a field of development, called "socio-emotional development". This would be the area where the "Resilient Preschools" project can integrate with its results. Therefore, the current Romanian curriculum is a new, modernized curriculum that is functional, which is already



being implemented, but there is still a need for relevant training for teachers regarding creating skills of preschool educators for the field of pre-schoolers' emotional education and social development. This training needs to be done especially through awareness increase and by offering new tools about to learn how to use and apply them effectively in class, for the benefit of pre-schoolers.

The majority of teachers who completed the online questionnaire (77%) are not familiar with the PERMA model of Positive Emotions, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Positive Psychology is known to teachers but only at an entry level, its benefits are acknowledged and embraced but more training is needed (teachers who participated in both the Focus Group and questionnaire-based survey have acknowledged this need). However, most of the young teachers already place a lot of emphasis on positive psychology, on the positive motivation of learning in their classroom activities and they do this by implementing didactic games.

Thus, although the compulsory curriculum is busy and rigid, teachers find ways to include in their teaching activities (so not only in extracurricular activities) the cultivation of well-being, character strengths, positive emotions during the ability classes and music classes for younger children, or during history and geography classes for elderly children; unfortunately, this is not practiced in all disciplines, so it is not done often enough (only 1-2 times a month) because it requires from teachers more time to prepare.

The general perspective at teachers' level regarding the theme of our project, namely their perspective upon the potential of building children's psychological wellbeing and resilience, is a positive, optimistic one, the single concern being due to Covid-19 pandemic effects upon the children with SEN who could not attend school and thus are at risk of not promoting the school year (the obligatory kindergarten year before entering the primary school).



Portugal

Main Challenges

Main Challenges pre-schools face with regards to the resilience and well-being in preschools (and key challenges and problems that preschool teachers face)/ critical review of current practices and policies on early childhood education).

The preschool education in **Portugal** is legally recognized and defined in a framework-law no. 5/97 of 10th February. Thus, since 1997 Portugal recognized preschool education as *“the first stage from basic education within the process of lifelong learning and complementary to the familiar educational intervention, establishing a strong cooperation, promoting the balanced training and development of the child for their total inclusion in the society as an autonomous, free and supportive human being”*.

The curriculum on preschool education is defined by the **Portuguese Ministry of Education** and expected to be applied by each institution (public or private) and works as the common foundation to preschool education in Portugal, acknowledging that it is up to each preschool education institution to build upon these Portuguese State’s guidelines.

The most known and successful national interventions promoting psychological well-being, in Portugal, are mainly launched by a National collaboration between the Portuguese Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health; these interventions are part of the National Plan for Health Education, which includes as one of the main goals the development of resilient communities and safe environments, based on the WHO guidelines. Thus, each public school-group in Portugal, has an autonomous administration to design, implement and assess the Health Education Program for the schools in their group (includes preschools, basic, and secondary schools).

Apart from the guidelines from the National authorities (Ministry and School-group administration), preschool teachers have autonomy to design and plan the teaching activities for children, taking into attention the learning areas of (1) individual and social development, (2) expression and communication, and (3) understanding the world.

With this window of opportunities for preschool teachers, the development of resilience with preschool children and the promotion of their wellbeing is challenged by a set of factors that impair their work. The following challenges were described by Portuguese preschool educators during the **RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS** research activities (focus group, interviews and a questionnaire).



- The **high number of children per classroom/educator influences the quality of the work** to be done with the children; each children presents a different developmental stage for which there are specific characteristics and emotional needs to take into account and require a different intervention from the preschool educator.
- The socioemotional competences in preschool education are mainly developed and implemented by specialists (e.g. speech therapists and child psychologists) in class, creating the need to **better capacitate preschool educators to make sure that these activities are replicated by them with children**, afterwards, and don't rely on these specialists only.
- There are good practices for preschool education, and dedicated to socioemotional competences and wellbeing, created in the Academia; nevertheless, these knowledge and practices hardly reaches the preschools, thus all the **new approaches to the education are not updated in the preschool education or takes more time than it should to reach this target group**.

National Curriculum

Areas in the national curriculum relevant to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

The Portuguese State's guidelines for preschool education includes three main areas of learning that are defined to promote a balance between training and development of the child, aiming for their total inclusion in the society as an autonomous, free and supportive human being. Thus, the content of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS project is very welcome by the Portuguese National Curriculum for preschool education, as it includes:

- (1) Individual and social development: Transversal area of learning aiming to **promote the relationship of each child with themselves, with others and with the World**. In this learning process, children will develop attitudes, values and obligations fundamental for a successful lifelong learning and as an **autonomous, conscious and supportive citizen**.



- (2) Expression and communication: A multiple area with different fields of learning which are related, as all are essential forms of communication to be developed by children **to be able to interact with the others, express their thoughts and emotions**, and meaningfully represent the world we live in. The fields of learning include: Physical Education; Artistic Education (visual arts, drama, music and dance); Verbal and Written Communication; Math.
- (3) Understanding the World: Based on the spontaneous curiosity of children and their wish to know more and understand why. This area of learning is strongly connected with natural and social sciences but also with the other areas of learning identified, once it aims to deep, relate and communicate what children already know with other realities to arise their **interest to explore, question, discover and understand** new theories.

Moreover, there are National programs that support the National Curriculum in specific areas – citizenship, health and arts – and all include resilience and wellbeing as key areas of development also in preschool education.

The program for citizenship education, embraces the guidelines for **health education**. In this case, the concepts related with psychological well-being are presented in the area of mental health and identifies the need to develop the following concepts:

Identity - developing competences to assert their individuality, to explore their individual characteristics and identify their differences and the others in the group.

Belonging - learning the value of being different, sharing and cooperating.

Communication - expressing the affections and being able to say yes and no, by developing the capacity to argue and to express their needs and desires.

Emotions - identifying the basic sensations and emotions and expressing those in a constructive way. Respecting the feelings of the others in the group and relating their feelings with lived situations.

Autonomy - recognizing the others in the group as autonomous individuals and execute the foresee activities autonomously.



Interaction - creating healthy relationships based on the respect, cooperation and tolerance. Knowing how to dialogue and value creativity and the constrictive side of playfulness.

Resilience - identifying positive qualities, interests and experiences in themselves. Exploring different options to solve a problem. Learning how to take a decision.

Portugal is also part of the European platform SHE: Schools for Health in Europe, which aims “to improve the health of children and young people in Europe, including reducing health inequalities, through a specific setting focus on schools”. This platform allows members to be part of an international learning environment dedicated to school health promotion and education, capacitating individuals with health skills and action competencies that can be promoted through the curriculum, enabling students to build competencies and take action related to health, well-being and educational attainment.



4. Factors that influence wellbeing and resilience

Wellbeing and its components

As defined in paragraph 2 of this toolkit, wellbeing is generally understood as the quality of people's lives. It is a dynamic state that is enhanced when people can fulfil their personal and social goals. It is understood both in relation to objective measures, such as household income, educational resources and health status; and subjective indicators such as happiness, perceptions of quality of life and life satisfaction.

Factors that influence wellbeing

Every aspect of our life influences our state of wellbeing. Researchers investigating happiness have found the following factors enhance a person's wellbeing:

- Happy intimate relationship with a partner.
- Network of close friends.
- Enjoyable and fulfilling career.
- Enough money.
- Regular exercise.
- Nutritional diet.
- Enough sleep.
- Purposefulness / Spiritual or religious beliefs.
- Fun hobbies and leisure pursuits.
- Healthy self-esteem.
- Optimistic outlook.
- Realistic and achievable goals.
- Sense of purpose and meaning.
- A sense of belonging.
- The ability to adapt to change.





- Living in a fair and democratic society.

Few tips how to achieve and enhance wellbeing:

- Develop and maintain strong relationships with family and friends.
- Try to find work that you find enjoyable and rewarding, rather than just working for the best pay.
- Eat wholesome, nutritious foods; develop a positive relationship with food.
- Do regular physical activity. Find one that you enjoy.
- Meditate - try mindfulness meditation, yoga, pray or any other spiritual-purposefulness personal rituals or spend time in nature, draw, bake, dance.
- Become involved in activities that interest you and keep learning new things.
- Join local organizations or clubs that appeal to you. Meet new people.
- Set yourself achievable goals and work towards them.
- Develop a friendly relationship with all your emotions, talk about your emotions with trusted people and establish a support network for difficult times (friends, family, professionals).
- Try to enjoy each day, establish a gratitude practice even for little things. (Better Health Channel. n.d.) (Huppert, 2014; Rath et al., 2010; Ruggeri et al., 2020).

Childhood wellbeing

Childhood wellbeing is defined in many different ways. A wide variety of domains and measures in research are used to assess levels of childhood wellbeing.

There is some emerging consensus that childhood wellbeing is multi-dimensional, should include dimensions of **physical, emotional and social wellbeing**; should focus on the **immediate lives of children but also consider their future lives**.



In Australia, researchers worked extensively with 126 children (aged 8-15 years) in rural and urban locations to develop wellbeing indicators from children and young people’s perspectives (Table 1). The study concluded that the three overriding concepts of wellbeing as defined by children were a **positive sense of self, security and agency**. **Emotional and relational wellbeing** were integral to these concepts (Fattore et al, 2007, 2009).

Table 1: Wellbeing from children's perspective

Wellbeing from children’s perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feelings of happiness but also the ability to integrate sadness into one’s life and be able to deal with it. ● Feeling secure in social relations. ● Being a moral actor in relation to oneself, making decisions in one’s own best interests and behaving well in relation to others. ● Having autonomy and agency and being able to act freely, exert choices and exert influence but being able to do so within strong social relations. ● Keeping safe and feeling secure. This was understood in relation to personal safety; feeling secure within families, and global safety. ● Having a positive sense of self including being valued by others; and having a positive self; taking time out / having your own space to reflect. ● Having material resources which linked to having enough money for a decent standard of living for the family. Such needs were not viewed on an individual basis but were centred on the family having enough money. ● Having a good physical environment and home to be in. Young people valued open spaces in which they felt safe; the home as a place of safety and security; the family as a place for having fun and having time out.
Source: Fattore et al. (2007)

(Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, 2010)



Resilience and its components

Resilience might have different meanings or attributes given based on the settings. When it comes to psychological or emotional resilience usually is referred to the ability of a person to “**bounce back**”, recover or even thrive amidst adversities. Moreover, an individual facing adversity can go further than merely coping by finding meaning in the trauma-inducing events and utilizing this meaning to enhance their well-being or to fuel them to pursuit their goals with more zeal. Such an individual experiences post-traumatic growth, a process in which one cognitively associates benefits with the situations or events that have generated the experienced trauma (Elder, 1998; Feeney & Collins, 2014; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014).

Factors that influence resilience

In general, it is accepted that resilience is inherently related to the resources that an individual can draw on to overcome adversity (Richardson, 2002; Southwick et al., 2014). These protective factors come in a wide variety of forms that combine to *make* a person resilient.

- **Individual factors.** It is with this level that psychologists are typically concerned. It involves the psychological and neurobiological factors that can play a role in maintaining and recovering well-being after traumatic events or setbacks. This level of resilience typically depends on individual personality and coping styles, but it can extend to include physical and cognitive abilities as well as neurocognitive structures and neural responses to stressors.
- **Social factors.** These factors concern the social relationships one has and whether an individual can call on and expect support in times of crisis. These can involve family, friends, coworkers, or really anyone in one’s social network who could provide social, emotional, and even financial support to the individual. Research has demonstrated that having such relationships can be an important determinant of whether an individual can cope with major stressors such as the loss of a job, the dissolution of a marriage, or chronic physical illness. Social support is widely construed to contain both affective and instrumental components. Adams, King, and King et al. (1996; p. 412) note that “there is a growing consensus that social

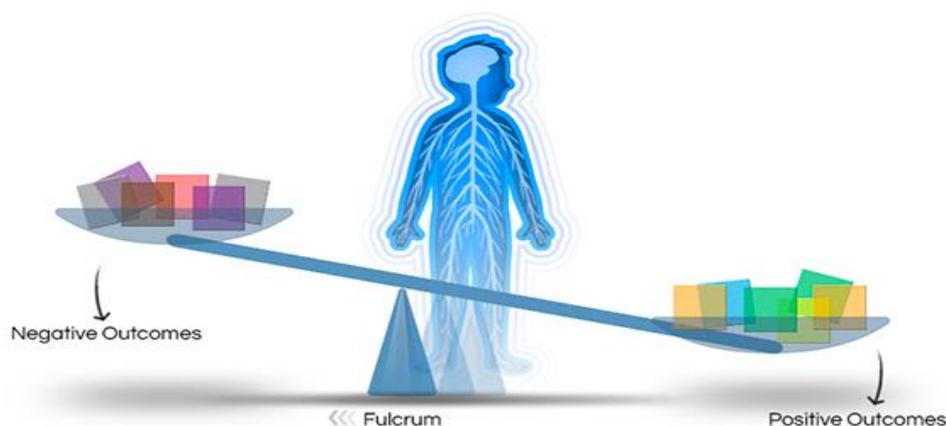


support can come from both work and non-work sources and that this support is primarily in the form of either emotional support (e.g., listening and providing empathy) or instrumental support (e.g., tangible assistance aimed at solving a problem).”

- **Community factors.** This type of resilience goes beyond individual capacities and takes into account economic, institutional, ecological, and infrastructure capacities when evaluating which communities are most likely to be resilient in the face of tragedies such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or even economic downturns (Cutter et al., 2008; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008; Murphy, 2007). For instance, it might not only be necessary to know whether or not a given area has emergency services, but also how well integrated the services are in terms of communication and coordination. (Harns, Brady, Wood, Silard, 2018)

Resilience in children

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University suggests the following visual to help us understand the development of resilience. Try to visualize a balance scale or seesaw. Protective experiences and coping skills on one side counterbalance significant adversity on the other. Resilience is evident when a child’s health and development tips toward positive outcomes — even when a heavy load of factors is stacked on the negative outcome side (Center of the Developing Child Harvard University, n.d.).





Over time, the cumulative impact of positive life experiences and coping skills can shift the fulcrum's position, making it easier to achieve positive outcomes.

The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is **at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult**. These relationships provide the personalized responsiveness, scaffolding, and protection that buffer children from developmental disruption. They also build key capacities—such as the ability to plan, monitor, and regulate behavior—that enable children to respond adaptively to adversity and thrive (Childhood Wellbeing Centre, 2010). This combination of supportive relationships, adaptive skill-building, and positive experiences is the foundation of resilience. **That's why your role as preschool teachers is very important.**

Children who do well in the face of serious hardship typically have a biological resistance to adversity and strong relationships with the important adults in their family and community. Resilience is the result of a combination of protective factors. Neither individual characteristics nor social environments alone are likely to ensure positive outcomes for children who experience prolonged periods of toxic stress. It is the **interaction between biology and environment** that builds a child's ability to cope with adversity and overcome threats to healthy development.

Research has identified a common set of factors that predispose children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity. Individuals who demonstrate resilience in response to one form of adversity may not necessarily do so in response to another. Yet when **these positive influences are operating effectively, they “stack the scale” with positive weight and optimize resilience across multiple contexts**. These counterbalancing factors include:

- facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;
- building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;
- providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and
- mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions. (Center of the Developing Child Harvard University, n. d.)



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5. How can school promote wellbeing and resilience?

Key prerequisites for successful implementation of wellbeing and resilience in your school

Before you start thinking about concrete tools and activities that you can do with kids in the classroom, let's establish the key prerequisites that will help you and school management to set up a good framework for your next steps.

- Have the topic of resilience and **wellbeing as one of the main values in school's curriculum**. School management, teachers and staff should all have this topic as a common priority so there will be better balance between academic performance and emotional wellbeing. Honest personal interest and common unity are crucial key points.
- Publicly present and promote the “new” conception of school legislation that emphasizes the care of good mental health, wellbeing and resilience as well as academic achievement. Make wellbeing a priority in school improvement plans. You can start e.g. with **promoting those four key areas**: prevention, physical activity, healthy eating and emotional wellbeing.
- Establish a **measurement framework** of newly implemented procedures. That would help the kindergarten to effectively track their investment into a wellbeing approach.
- **Equip teachers and school staff with good quality education**. They should be trained to understand children's psychological development, identify signs of mental health issues, understand the concept of wellbeing and be capable of having and using the right tools to process their own and children's emotions effectively, so they can strengthen their resilience. **Role of teachers in this process** is to create safe and supportive learning environments, provide consistent guidelines for behavior, model appropriate responses and behavior and provide opportunities for goal setting, success, failure and reflection.
- In the approach itself, focus on the “**strengths-based approach**” which is the core idea of **positive psychology**. In strengths-based approach teachers emphasize children's self-determination and strengths. By using positivity and affecting them, they can learn how to handle their own attitudes about their emotions, capacities, rights, quirks and similarities.
- Kindergarten should be a place where not only the children should feel safe but the teachers should definitely feel good and accepted as well! Therefore, while talking about wellbeing and



resilience in the space of kindergarten, please, keep in mind that it is of great importance to count with all the members involved, teachers especially! Because who else in the preschool environment turns out to be the closest and most adored role model? **Dear teachers, please, take good care of yourself!** Dear school management, please, support the wellbeing of your teachers, school staff and yours as well!

- Have a **school counselor** accessible for teachers and parents as well. It's highly recommended that teachers regularly use **services of professional supervisors** and process their emotions in a safe, supportive environment.



6. What is Positive Education?

Positive Education is an emerging concept that incorporates the notions of resilience, wellbeing and character traits into education. The benefits of Positive Education are already scientifically validated and include the prevention and management of psychosocial problems, the increase of psychological resilience, among others, that shield children since early ages (Shoshani et al., 2016). Nevertheless, while there are valid and developmentally appropriate ways in which strategies and research from positive psychology can be applied in early childhood settings –for the benefit of children and educators–these are currently underutilized/unknown (Baker et al., 2017).

6.1 Introduction to the PERMA-H model

The PERMA-H model derives from the field of Positive Psychology and provides a science-informed framework for schools to encourage and support their students and staff to flourish (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA-H model is a multidimensional approach to wellbeing and resilience including several psychological components. The first version of the PERMA model consisted of five core pillars of wellbeing: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment. Later, the model was upgraded to PERMA-H model, where H stands for Health (Norrish & Seligman, 2015). The present chapter provides a description of each concept of PERMA-H's model pillars and the benefits for students.

(P) Positive Emotions

The Positive Emotion domain focuses on the importance of supporting children to experience positive emotions, as well as responding to negative emotions in a healthy way. Positive emotions stand in the center of Positive Education as one of its main goals is to support students experience positive emotional experiences (Norrish, Robinson & Williams, 2011). Positive emotions include feelings such as joy, gratitude, hope, curiosity, pride, love, awe, interest, contentment, inspiration that allow individuals to flourish (Fredrickson, 2011).

Empirical evidence showed that positive emotions have long-term influence in individuals' life as they empower psychological resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2000) and enhance emotional well-being



(Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). In addition, positive emotions are related to children's cognitive development and academic attainment. Research findings (Pekrun et al., 2002) suggest that student who express positive emotions in school have increased motivation and effort in the learning process, they exhibit improved cognitive functioning such as meta-cognitive strategies, critical thinking, creativity and concept elaboration and have better academic performance.

(E) Engagement

Engagement refers to being interested, curious, concentrated in an activity and insisted on achieving a goal. High levels of engagement, conceptualized as "flow", have connected with a series of benefits for children's well-being, including higher self-esteem and lower pessimism (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi 2003), increased school enjoyment, happiness and fewer problematic behaviours (Froh et al., 2010). In addition to positive outcomes for wellbeing, engagement is associated with learning and educational attainment (Shernoff et al., 2014). Flow in children can be fostered during experiential and interactive activities (e.g., teamwork, discussions), by providing choice between various activities, setting clear goals and expectations, teaching skills in an incremental way and providing regular and specific feedback (Shernoff et al., 2014). Furthermore, understanding, nurturing and promoting children's character strengths, interests, unique abilities and capacities, teachers can help children achieve greater levels of engagement, increased psychological wellbeing and enhanced resilience after stressful events (Norrish et al., 2013).

(R) Relationships

Relationships play a critical role in preschool children's development. This domain refers to social and emotional skills that help the individual to create good relationships with self and others (Norrish et al., 2013). Supportive school relationships have been linked with wellbeing and resilience. Warmth and responsive interactions among the child, the peers and the teacher are basic prerequisites for children's and teacher's wellbeing (Baker et al., 2017). From positive education perspective relationships may be developed by providing stimuli for communication, can be enhanced by using the strengths of gratitude and forgiveness and be retained by nurturing self-compassion, kindness, and forgiveness (Norrish et al., 2013).



(M) Meaning

Meaning has been defined as having a sense of the self, knowing your strengths and serving something greater than yourself (Seligman, 2011). Meaning is increased through the interactions with others (Erikson, 1963). Early childhood is the most appropriate period to support children engage in meaningful activities, as from the moment they are born, they explore the world and seek meaning in every interaction, experience and relationship (Baker et al., 2017). Engagement in meaningful activities has important impact on students' psychological and physical wellbeing (Norrish & Seligman, 2015). Meaning, also, provides a basis for a strong and resilient life (Frankl, 1948).

(A) Accomplishment

The accomplishment domain focuses on developing confidence and competence through striving and achieving meaningful outcomes (Norrish et al., 2013, p. 152). Accomplishing meaningful goals leads to positive emotions and wellbeing (Sheldon et al., 2010). From Positive Education approach, accomplishment does not exclusively refer to academic performance. Accomplishment promotes the importance of teach children to take advantages of opportunities, persist in failures, resilient against disappointments and maintain effort (Morrish et al., 2018). In early childhood education teachers support accomplishment when encourage children's efforts, witness and share their achievements and feel pride in accomplishments (Baker et al., 2017).

(H) Health

Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) (1948) constitution as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing". The domain of Health in Positive Education is referred to a holistic approach of children's development too and defined as the engagement in sustainable behaviors to promote physical and psychological health (Norrish et al. 2013). Health recently added in the PERMA model as recognized its important role in children's learning. Nutrition, sleep and physical activity play a vital role in mental health. Children who have general health behaviours in nutrition, exercise and sleep perform better at school (World Health Organization, 2011).

Besides the physical health the broad construct of health refers to mental health as well as to optimism, resilience and mindfulness (Norrish et al. 2013). Resilience is related with the ability to maintain a healthy and flourishing life, despite experiencing challenges and difficulties (Norrish &



Seligman 2015). Resilience could be enhanced via helping students to identify unhelpful thinking habits and challenge them through practicing mindfulness (Morrish et al., 2018). Mindfulness is another strategy to promote physical and psychological well-being in students by exercising an awareness of present-moment experience without judgment (Jennings, 2015).

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6.2 Importance of resilience in preschool education

Educational resilience appears to be a necessity in a society like ours where pupils face a multitude of situations that affect their school and professional development - from individual to systemic risk factors. It has been observed that pupils with educational resilience developed in early education are those who manage to maintain their high learning motivation and school performance even if the risk conditions are present that place them in a position of vulnerability and school failure.

Given that the period of compulsory education overlaps with the period of personality structuring, the school and its actors (professionals who work directly with children) need to rethink, reformulate and redefine their educational roles and goals. The main function of the school is to socialize by learning and internalizing common norms and values, in order to maintain social well-being. In the process of achieving the educational ideal, the school must re-assume, reaffirm and to strengthen its role of formation: formation of harmoniously structured personalities, which support pro-social, moral behaviors. This approach can be achieved by changing the beliefs and attitudes of the school / teachers towards pupils, by developing the knowledge and skills to interact with pupils and their families. The school environment can be either an additional risk factor for the psychopathological development of children, or a resource of factors that protect children from the negative effects of other risk factors to which they are exposed (Condly, 2006).

Whether it is about adults or children, being a resilient person means possessing certain features which assures the personal well-being. In the case of the early school environment, the knowledge of these features is useful to all school actors and also represents objectives to be achieved in the process of obtaining and increasing pupils' resilience.

The features of a resilient person are:

- Maintaining composure in a crisis or other challenging situations;
- Tolerance of uncertain situations;
- Maintaining optimism;
- Rapid adaptation to new situations;
- Maintaining a sense of humor;



- Forming a good self-opinion;
- Maintaining curiosity and the need to ask questions;
- Finding solutions to solve problems;
- Flexible behavior in different situations;
- Permanent enrichment of knowledge from different learning situations (own experiences or the experiences of others);
- Maintaining confidence in his empathic qualities and intuition (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2018; Donnellan & Robins, 2010; Luthans, et al. 2006).

Last but not least, the role of a positive socio-affective climate in school / class, the importance and quality of relationships between pupils and, especially, between the pupil and a supportive professional (teacher, school counselor, social worker, etc.) should be emphasized. The earlier resilience is developed, the happier the pupils are, having all the perspectives to become optimistic, humorous, calm, creative and confident adult.



6.3 Importance of wellbeing in preschool education

Children's wellbeing currently occupies a central place in major international policy documents concerning children's lives. The whole world is now shifting from economic and academic performance oriented goals and measures, towards those that encompass social progress, quality of life and wellbeing.

A strong sense of wellbeing enables children to engage positively and confidently with their environment and therefore to take full advantage of learning opportunities. Indeed, **'wellbeing is central to learning and learning contributes to wellbeing'**.

Preschool education plays a major role in child development. Children who have been supported to develop a strong socio-emotional wellbeing foundation in early years demonstrate a **greater capacity to manage their own and others' emotions, assert themselves when required, rely increasingly on verbal reasoning versus emotionally led responses** (Mayr & Ulich, 2009). As children enter formal schooling a wide range of social skills come into play. A developing flexibility that allows them to accommodate between different behaviours and interactions also serves as a basis for wellbeing (Bernard, 2012). The more practice children have in activities that strengthen emerging wellbeing dispositions, the more **automatic positive neural pathways are formed in their brains** and the set of cognitive and social capabilities that underpin the development of wellbeing are built and strengthened (Australian National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004)

Research done as part of the European SEED project (2017-2019) indicates that children's long term success at school is influenced as much by social, emotional and self-regulation skills as by academic skills and knowledge. Social and emotional development is a main contributor to successful school transitions and a **significant preventative factor of disruptive behaviour, and mental health problems**. Not paying attention to social and emotional development is harmful to children's capacity to learn and to thrive. It is also expensive in terms of the socio-economic costs associated with bullying, violence and mental health problems.

Early childhood educators are the most important partners in providing a rich learning environment in the classroom and now we know that the social emotional and instructional features of educator-



child and child-child interactions are positively related to children's development of self-regulation, and social skills. (SEED Project Consortium, 2018)

Despite their responsibilities, early childhood teachers are not consistently acknowledged as members of a workforce with specialized knowledge or competencies worthy of professional compensation and respect, they rarely receive the support needed and their wellbeing is negatively influenced by such stress. Early childhood teachers' well-being is an important factor potentially impacting the young children in care, and children's behavioral problems (H. Jeon et al., 2018; L. Jeon et al., 2014; Kwon et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2016).

Paying attention and actively enhancing teacher's wellbeing both individually and systematically is a key base for the valuable preschool teachers to handle the responsibilities and to support the wellbeing of children.

Positive Psychology focuses on the goal of promoting the holistic well-being of everyone involved in school (Norrish, 2015). Falecki and Mann (2020), report that teachers make learning happen and this makes them the greatest asset in the schools since evidence shows that how teachers feel about their lives and to the extent that they feel satisfied with their quality of everyday experience, is associated with their teaching practice, retention decisions and the learning, achievement and wellbeing of students (Mansfield, 2020). Therefore, for teachers to be able to teach and foster happiness and well-being in their students, they first and foremost need to be happy themselves (McCallum & Price, 2010). Of particular importance for the classroom is the effect of "emotional contagion," the transfer of frequent positive emotions from teachers to their students (Frenzel et al., 2009). The frequency of positive emotions also corresponds to frequent use of effective teaching strategies (Moè et al., 2010).

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6.4 Benefits for Teachers

It is a truism that over a lifetime, most workers, regardless of the particularity of their work context, role or status, will need at one time or another – for shorter or longer periods, or as an everyday feature of their work processes – to call upon reserves of physical, psychological or emotional energy if they are to carry out their work to the best of their ability. It is also the case of

Schools and classrooms, especially, are demanding of energy of these kinds, partly because not every pupil chooses to be there and partly because successful teaching and learning requires cognitive, social and emotional investment by both teachers and pupils.

Teachers' stress impacts more than just their professional lives. The multitude of stressing factors can take their toll on the personal lives of teachers, the success and well-being of pupils, and a school's overall ability to meet the diverse needs of its pupils. If we can build teacher resilience, and combat these factors, then we can not only hope to retain good teachers but also create a better more successful education experience for all. The impact of this is outstanding. When teacher resilience is a priority within a school, teachers are more open to new ideas and are better able to implement future professional development. This is why teacher resilience needs to be a priority.

When teacher well-being is improved then:

- teachers' personal lives improve;
- pupil stress/anxiety decreases;
- pupil performance increases;
- schools' ability to meet pupil's needs increases.

Positivity breeds positivity. The entire ecosystem of a school or pre-school can be impacted by simply giving teachers a voice, providing them the knowledge and tools to develop resiliency in their careers.

Teachers' resilience, apart from nurturing well-being, contributes to:

- staff retention;
- increased productivity;
- smoother organizational change;
- managing stress;



- emotion regulation
- be present in the moment;
- practice active listening (Cherkowski, 2018; Roffey, 2012; Wong & Zhang, 2014).

More important, it not only reduces their reported stress levels, but it also improves the quality of the environment within the classroom. The environment is found to be more emotionally supportive, interactions became more emotionally positive and the teachers demonstrated a greater sensitivity to the needs of the pupil – all of which has been linked with improved learning in pupils (Baker, Green, & Falecki, 2017; GreRoeser et al., 2012).

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6.5 Importance of teachers wellbeing (learn it, embed it, teach it)

Referring to the context of education, the phrase well-being or wellbeing appears more and more frequently, the meaning of which refers to the quality of life of a person in terms of health, material condition and access to education or quality social services.

In education, in recent years, well-being has become an important component at least in the vision of those responsible for the quality of education and the lives of education beneficiaries.

It was understood at least theoretically and it was seen in fact that it is not enough to go to class and teach if we are teachers, but it also matters the impact we have on those in front of whom we are, becoming responsible for their well-being and involvement.

To begin with, the teacher first learns about him/herself so that he/she can teach with authenticity and integrity. Today, the teacher is a visionary leader, an educator with compassion and motivation, open to learning and adapting to the generation he models and inspires. Respectively, teachers need to take care of this well-being, to be aware of the value they have in front of pupils, to find tools that will help them manage stress levels effectively, to expand their creativity, to improve their communication skills, to increase their awareness self that refers to values, needs, emotions, thoughts and patterns of behavior.

The well-being of teachers is not just a deep problem for them; it also has a major impact on pupils' learning outcomes, children's development. The well-being of teachers has a significant impact not only on the results of pupils' exams, but also has an effect on children's own social and emotional well-being, creating a negative study environment, which leads to deteriorating quality of relationships between teachers and pupils. To reduce the risk of stress experienced by teachers, in other words, to increase well-being at work, specialists in the field recommend:

- to create training programs, stress management;
- to do something every week to remember why he became a teacher in the first place;
- to adopt a growth mentality, to try new things, to reflect on new ideas;
- to focus on kindness and gratitude, on positive emotions;
- stronger social connections;
- to create clear boundaries between home and school;



- to find proactive ways to manage stress to form emotional endurance (hobbies, reading a book, yoga, meditation or exercises that involve deep breathing, etc.).

Schools and teachers need to find time to support each other, because this is really very important. When teachers perceive school as a place where a high level of compassion is promoted, the level of stress is reduced and job satisfaction is increased, along with teachers' commitment to school life. A school-wide approach to emotional health aims to create a positive school culture, with supportive, empathetic relationships between staff, pupils and parents (Jennings, 2015; Naglieri, LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2013; McLean et al. 2015).

Studies show that teachers find meaning in their work through having an impact on their students' lives and through positive relationships with students and colleagues (Turner & Thieling, 2019). Therefore, supporting teachers to find meaning in their work and to engage in meaningful work activities may serve to improve teacher wellbeing.

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7. Good Practices

7.1 Practical Applications

Sweet Words Jar – a jar with quotes from stories / fairytale time that makes the children and/or others feel good. Ask each child once a week to tell you (the Educator/Facilitator) one “sweet word” for someone else perhaps a compliment, something positive that happened that day, a happy moment – memory, write it in a piece of paper and place it in the jar. Prior or after story time, take one or a few pieces of paper from the jar and read them out loud for the whole class. It makes children feel good about themselves for saying something nice for another person and also makes the other person feel appreciated. The whole class can enjoy this “sweet” happy moment and improve the overall climate of the classroom.



Image Retrieved from: <https://hip2save.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/kindness-jars-craft.jpg?fit=1200%2C630&strip=all>



Calmness Elevator – Take a large carton box (large enough for the children to stand inside and simulate an elevator experience) and ask the children to help you to decorate it with beautiful pictures placed in the inside (preferably to draw / paint the pictures themselves). When a child feels frustrated or angry encourage them to visit the box (stand inside the box as they would do in an elevator and count to 10 - supposedly level 10 of the building – imitating the function of an elevator. Prompt the child to carefully observe and absorb the beautiful pictures. This practice will give them time and space to regain their calmness and stillness and learn to focus on the positive aspects of life.



Image Retrieved from: <https://thumbs.dreamstime.com/z/kids-drawing-wall-childrens-group-draw-color-paintings-walls-child-paint-art-cartoon-vector-illustration-kindergarten-kid-133245703.jpg>

Anger-meter – when a child feels angry or frustrated, ask them to evaluate – measure their anger based on four levels (calm, mild irritation, anger, rage), prompt the child/ren to discuss and reflect on the severity of their emotion and how rage and reacting based on rage can hurt others around us.

Alternative ☑ Anger Volcano – measuring the levels of lava to make sure the volcano will not erupt.

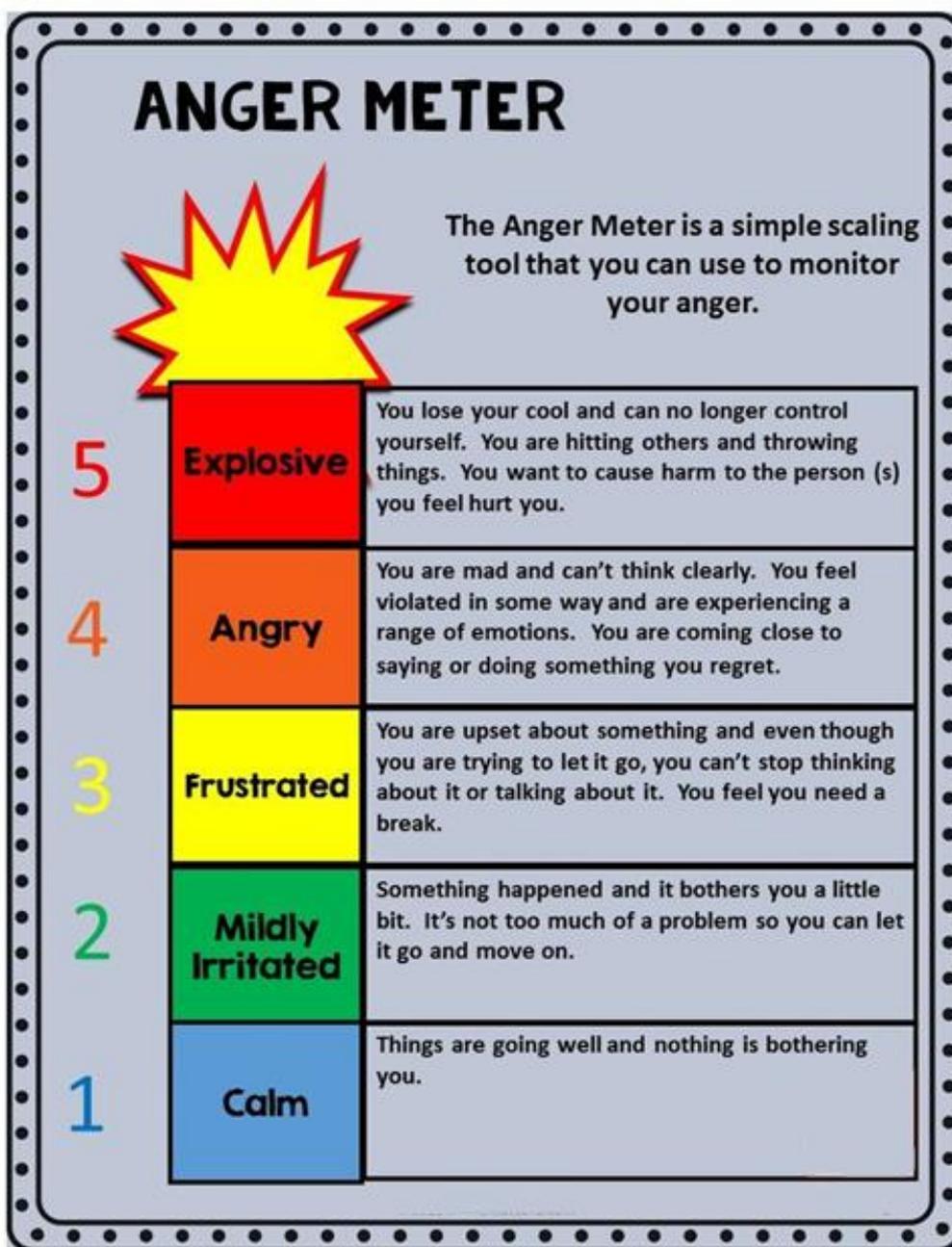


Image Retrieved from: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/96/96/d7/9696d7c853d0c4e56d51bedb78e172f8.jpg>

“Show me what you are feeling” - Ask individual students to choose an emotion from the list – chart below. Encourage them not to share with their classmates which emotion they’ve chosen. Ask children to model the body language that reflects the emotion. While students are modeling emotions, ask their classmates to look for clues to help them guess the emotion that’s being modeled. Remind students that it’s not always easy and obvious how a person is feeling on the inside. Moreover, initiate a conversation regarding diversity and that not every person experience or express their emotions the same way.



Image Retrieved from: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Character-Emotions-Charts-FREE-2370313>



ZIPPY'S FRIENDS

Zippy's Friends is a school based social emotional learning programme for 5-7 year olds. The programme is taught to the whole class by [teachers trained](#) in Zippy's Friends in the UK and [internationally](#). The programme was developed jointly by Partnership for Children, academics and educational resources specialists. Zippy's Friends has been running around the world since 1998 and is now in over 30 countries.

The fundamental concept behind the programme is very simple – if we can teach young children how to cope with difficulties, they should be better able to handle problems and crises in adolescence and later life. Zippy's Friends has been evaluated and found to improve children's coping skills, social skills, emotional literacy, improve the class climate and reduce bullying. The programme was originally created to prevent suicidal behaviour. Read more about the [evaluation studies of Zippy's Friends](#) ([link: https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/research.html](https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/research.html))

Zippy's Friends is based around a series of stories and the programme has 24 sessions of 45 minutes. The six modules cover: feelings, communication, friendship, conflict, change and loss, moving forward. Children develop their own positive strategies to deal with problems through engaging activities: listening to stories, discussion, games, role-play and drawing. (Partnership for Children, n. d.)

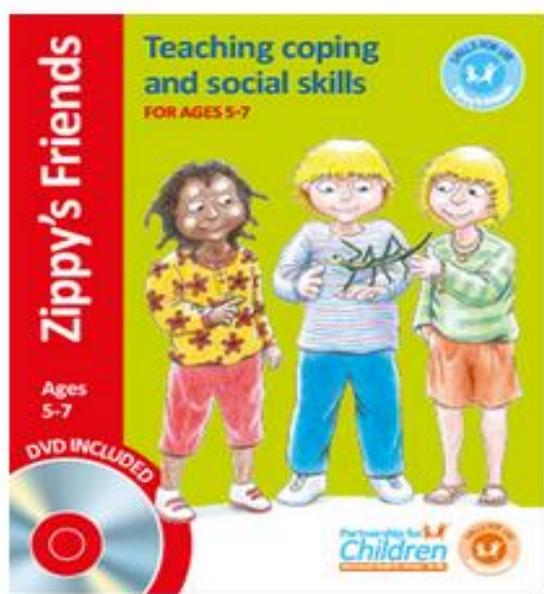


Image Retrieved from:

<https://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk/uploads/images/What%20we%20do/ZippysFriendsCover.jpg>



MINDFULNESS PRACTICES IN PRESCHOOLS

Mindfulness benefits have been proved by many international studies with adults and children:

Mindfulness practices have been shown to improve both physical and mental health in school-age children. Yoga improves balance, strength, endurance in children. Mindfulness practices offer psychological benefits for children as well. A growing body of research has already shown that yoga can improve focus, memory, self-esteem, academic performance, and classroom behavior, and can even reduce anxiety and stress in children. Emerging research studies also suggest that mindfulness practices can help children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). (Harvard Health Publishing, 2016)

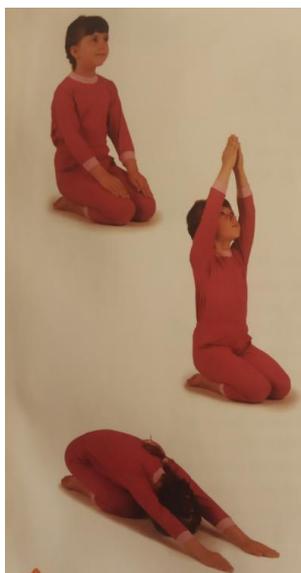
Here is an example of such a good practice from a private international school in Prague - [Happy Child](https://www.happychild.cz/en/) (<https://www.happychild.cz/en/>).

They offer mindfulness practices, breathing exercises and relaxation for their children as well as for the teachers and parents as a benefit to improve their wellbeing and health. "Children are naturally dynamic and the attention is distracted. Practicing yoga calms the children and they can concentrate better. ". It provides guidance for educators on mindfulness activities that significantly affect the **physical, mental and emotional condition of children** and which are the primary prevention of disease. The book systematically guides you on how to use mindfulness practices and breathing for children from 3 months to teenagers. (Paramhans Svámí Mahéšvarananda, 2014)

Practicing mindfulness and better breathing positions helps to improve the muscular balance, stimulate blood circulation, harmonize the organs (heart, pancreas, liver, kidneys etc.), activate the metabolism, affect the psyche positively and balance the vegetative nervous system. **Breathing exercises** deepen and relax the breathing, stimulate metabolism and blood circulation, strengthen the psyche, harmonize the organs. **Meditation and mindfulness** relax physically and mentally, improve self-consciousness and self-esteem, optimize concentration, deepen the ability of a quicker relaxation, grants inner peace, harmony and calmness.



Examples of the Mindful Breathing techniques and their effects:



Child/Rabbit pose - stimulates and oxygenates the brain centers and supports their right function. By breathing into the stomach it brings blood flow into the organs which stimulates their function as well. It is a calming position. Kids often fall asleep while performing it.



Cobra pose - position is good for calming strong emotions - like rage, anger. Overall it strengthens the back and arms (helps developing a balanced posture). It also improves eyesight (by looking up). It stimulates the kidneys and

liver. (Paramhans Svámí Mahéšvarananda, 2014)

Example of simple mindfulness practice for children: Children can sit or lay down on their back. By bringing hands on their tummy they can observe how they are rising up and falling down. Kids can visualize that the abdomen is a balloon that expands and contracts. This way children connect to their bodies, develop awareness of breath, the body gets more oxygenated. The focus on breathing brings the nervous system into balance, helping the right function of all the organs, thus improving their immune system and overall resilience.





Early Change project

The Early Change project (www.earlychange.teithe.gr) is a European project funded with the support from the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. The project was conducted between 2011 and 2014. The consortium of the Early Change project included academic staff, early childhood teachers and caregivers from six European countries (Greece, Portugal, Finland, Denmark, Cyprus and Romania). The Early Change project was designed to support the professional development of early childhood educators, to evaluate the quality of the preschool environment in the participating countries and to collect good practices in early childhood education from the six partner countries (Zachopoulou et al., 2018).

One of the deliverables of the project was an e-book entitled *Good Practices in Early Childhood Education: Looking at Early Educators' Perspectives in Six European Countries* (Gregoriadis et al., 2014), consisted of two sections: 1) a presentation of a comparative study of the quality of the early childhood educational systems of the six partner countries and 2) a list of 146 good practices for educators related to five categories of the daily practices in early childhood education environments: (a) Health & Safety, (b) Activities/Play, (c) Interactions, (d) Classroom Management, and (e) Diversity/Inclusion. The presented practices were examples that the participating teachers implemented in their classrooms and reflect the ideas of early childhood educators in Europe about what constitute a good practice and a qualitatively good preschool environment. The interactive e-book is freely available on the project's website.

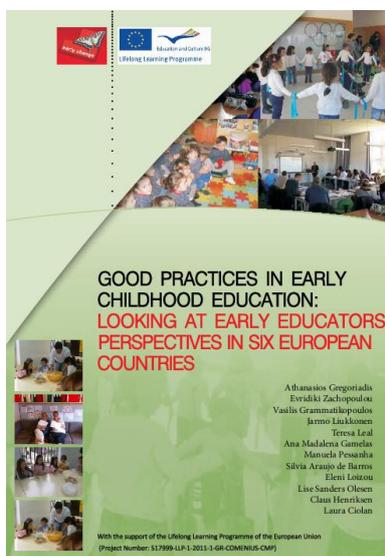


Image Retrieved from: www.earlychange.teithe.gr



SIA-ProD: An Innovative Self-Improvement Approach for the Professional Development of Early Educators

The SIA-ProD project (www.sia-prod.com) is another European project, funded with support from the European Commission and conducted based on their experience and expertise of seven organisations/institutions from four European countries (Greece, Cyprus, German and Italy). The purpose of the project was to provide to practitioners with the methodology and the instruments for self-evaluation and self-improvement at a 'low cost' way. The SIA-ProD program used an alternative approach, named Discrete Choice Modeling (DCM), for the training and professional development of early educators (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2019). By implementing the innovative DCM method in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the consortium of the project developed a self-assessment tool and a self-improvement educational package to investigate and in turn to support the way early childhood educators promote physical activities in their classroom.

The Self-Improvement Educational Package (SIEP) provides knowledge, ideas, practical strategies and supportive materials for specific dimensions of planning and teaching effectively physical activities in early childhood education. The SIEP aims to help teachers enhance the quality of their in-service training. The SIEP is freely available on the project's website.



Image Retrieved from: www.sia-prod.com



RESCUR: Resilience Curriculum

The RESCUR (www.rescur.eu) is a European project financed by the EU Comenius Programme conducted by six European University partners (from Malta, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Sweden and Croatia). On a time that the involved partner countries fell into a social, economic and technological crisis, the three-year program (2012-2015) aimed to develop a resilience curriculum for early and primary education in Europe (Cefai et al., 2014). The purpose of the curriculum was to increase children's resilience skills in order to overcome crisis' challenges and to achieve academic success and social and emotional wellbeing as young citizens in the EU. An additional goal of the project was to support the resilience skills of vulnerable children such as Roma children, children with disability, gifted children, and children of refugees, immigrants and ethnic minorities (Matsopoulos et al., 2020). The RESCUR programme includes early and primary teachers' manual as well as parents' manual.



BEHAVIOR STIMULATION POSITIVE CHILDREN - GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE for the positive education of parents, teachers and pupils - Supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism. April, 2011

The guide appeared at the initiative of the Save the Children organization, which it wanted to give all those who work with children and parents an informational resource, with effective methods of educating the child. Experience developed by Save the Children consultants, psychological and educational training offered to teachers but also to parents was the basis of this guide, which summarizes the essential information on what an educator and a parent need to build one healthy and functional relationship with the child. The guide proposes a model for changing psycho-educational practices in the school environment, replacing aggressive behaviors with appropriate relationship behaviors, learning ways to cope and manage conflicts. The guide is aimed at all those who target to improve their skills, knowledge and behaviors. All actors involved in children's education and discipline are envisaged - educators, teachers, psychologists, counselors. They, in turn, reach another category of adults with fundamental role in raising a healthy and balanced child - namely, the parents.



"SĂ ÎNVĂȚĂM REZILIENȚA!" – Bine ai revenit la școală!" (LET'S LEARN RESILIENCE - Welcome back to school!

This is an educational project initiated and implemented by the teacher and school counsellor Simona Domnica Crăciun from CJRAE Sibiu (CJRAE - County Center for Resources and Educational Assistance) which aims to provide emotional support to pupils from the National College" Octavian Goga "Sibiu who started school this year, thus helping them to learn resilient ways to adapt to current Covid-19 conditions by developing coping mechanisms, such as:

- recasting (re-signifying a negative situation, by identifying positive / neutral aspects);
- requesting support from close people or other reference persons;
Creating useful routines;
- increasing self-confidence;
- exploring and communicating negative emotions;
- humor, like "making fun of trouble";
- exercise, sport;
- increasing empathy and tolerance;
- Cultivating optimism ("after the rain the sun always comes out!")

and many other techniques.

Resilience is seen as the ability to learn from the difficult situations we face, to look for opportunities, to learn how to become emotionally strong.

FREE WORKSHOPS FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS "DEVELOPING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS"

The Psychiatric Hospital "Dr. Gheorghe Preda" Sibiu, Sibiu County School Inspectorate and Sibiu County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, carries out in partnership the project initiated by the Ministry of Health within the school units from Sibiu County in Romania, considering the support of free workshops for parents and educators in order to develop social and emotional skills in children and adolescents. The project ran between 1.10.2017 - 31.12.2017 within many school units: "King Ferdinand" High School Sibiu, High School no. 8 Sibiu, Secondary School No.13 Sibiu, "Căsuța Poveștilor" Kindergarten Sibiu, Kindergarten with extended programme no. 6 Cisnădie and Kindergarten with extended program no. 18 Sibiu. The workshops organized in the framework of the project were supported by a primary pediatric psychiatrist and a psychologist, with the participation



of teachers and school counsellors from the County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance Sibiu in the schools where they work.

The resource provided by this project is a training package for parents, based on the idea that children learn behaviors by interacting with those around them. Consequently, changing a child's behavior actually involves changing the behaviors of those in his environment - parents, teachers, colleagues, friends. Both parents and educators / teachers are an essential source and learning context for the child. Children's behaviors are learned in interaction with other children, in interaction with parents and teachers. In order to support children in learning functional attitudes and behaviors in order to maintain their emotional and social health, it is necessary to involve all those who interact with the child: parents, teachers, colleagues. At the end of the workshops, the participants were offered, free of charge, the manual *“Training curriculum for parents in order to develop children's social and emotional skills”*.



Image Retrieved from : <https://rrlip.ca/userdata/news/65bb91febe5b364c25ad48dafc680181.png>



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7.2 Case Studies from other countries

(eg Positive Education Applications in Geelong Grammar School)

The Geelong Grammar School (GGS), from Australia, decided to implement a Positive Education teaching, in 2008. The school trained the staff about the skills of positive psychology (resilience, character strengths, gratitude, positive communication, and optimism), emphasizing how the teachers could use the skills also in their own lives and giving examples of how to teach them to children. Following the training, the school staff was continuously supported to ensure the success of the program.

Today, the school has their own model of Positive Education (Figure 1), aiming to build a positive culture that places wellbeing at the heart of education.

The school acknowledges that the implementation of Positive Education is an ongoing journey, where continuous learning, applying and reflecting are practiced and **feedback is always welcomed and encouraged**.

The model of Positive Education begins in the centre circle, where it says **Flourish** - refers to the experience of life going well, when we are feeling good and functioning effectively. The Model moves outward to **Character Strengths** – as ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that come naturally and easily to a person and that can and do change with our changing life experience and context. Then, comprises six related domains that contributes meaningfully to overall wellbeing – **Positive Relationships, Emotions, Health, Engagement, Accomplishment & Purpose**. As we move to the outside, we find the repeated processes **Learn, Live, Teach and Embed**.



Figure 1. Positive Education Model at GGS.

“We have made many mistakes over the past nine years as we have implemented our Positive Education programme, but each of these mistakes have provided rich insights into assisting individuals within our school community, and the wider community as a whole to flourish.”

More info: <https://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/What-is-Positive-Education>



PlayFACTO School, from Singapore, was established in 2015 and the first Positive Education school in Singapore. The school was supported by the Positive Education Schools Association in the country to develop a model based on the science of well-being and happiness and focuses on specific skills that assist students to strengthen their relationships, build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience, promote mindfulness and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

The model implemented follows the 5 main areas of the PERMA model: **Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning & Achievement**. When implementing the model, it was agreed that the point was not to eliminate all negative emotions from children, but to expand on the positive emotions that can help them to build on their psychological, social and physical capabilities.

To achieve this, the PlayFACTO School defined 2 main areas of action:

- » to equip all students with the necessary skills to flourish in the 21st Century
- » to cultivate the intellectual minds of students to develop a broad set of character strengths, virtues and competencies, which when combined support their overall well-being.

More info: <https://playfactoschool.com.sg/about-us/overview/>

The Positive Education Schools Association is an international network of educational members who share an interest in an evidence-based approach to wellbeing and a commitment to supporting schools to flourish. This Association is based in Australia but intervenes at international level to lead, promote and foster the implementation and development of Positive Education.

More info: <https://www.pesa.edu.au/>



Figure 2. *PlayFACTO School Brand Personality.*



The Incredible Years is a program developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton in Seattle, and already implement in Portugal through Coimbra University. The evidence-based intervention programs have as main objectives: (1) to promote the social, emotional and academic competence of children; (2) to prevent and reduce behaviour problems, in an early and efficient way. The used collaborative approach is **centered on the promotion of positive educational practices** and uses video modeling and the practice of strategies in the sessions (role-play) as intervention methodologies. The effectiveness of the Incredible Years programs has been amply demonstrated in the prevention and early intervention in behavior problems in children of preschool age. In Portugal, the program is capacitating parents and educators, since 2007 and through their participation in funded workshops, to (1) promote the mental health of children of preschool age; (2) increase the effectiveness of professionals who deal with children on a daily basis; (3) promote a positive interaction between the school, health professionals and the family; and (4) contribute to reduce social inequalities, facilitating the access of needy populations to empirically validated programs.

More info:

<https://www.uc.pt/fpce/anosincriveis/projeto> (Portugal)

<https://www.incredibleyears.com/> (USA)

ScholaVie is an association from France, specialized in the development of socio-emotional skills, well-being of young people and those who support them. The association brings both theoretical / scientific and practical / educational expertise on key 21st century skills, such as self-confidence, emotional intelligence, motivation, strengths, resilience, creativity, stress management or even empathy and critical thinking. Based on these skills, the association develops, test and offer educational professionals support, resources and tools to freely use research results for school success. **All the resources are freely available here:** <https://www.scholavie.fr/fr/nos-offres/92/nos-outils>

Spotlighters is an Erasmus+ co-funded project dedicated to inform educators and students of the potential long-terms effects of stress and provides them with the competences to reduce these potential complications from arising. The project consortium is currently testing open educational



resources (OER), translated in several languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Danish and Finnish), **enabling educators and learners to acquire skills in understanding and managing stress.**

One of the OER is a software tool to support educators understand the mood changes in students - <https://classmood.upf.edu/>. Other OER for teachers, including workshops and handbook will be soon available here: <http://www.spotlighters.eu/>



7.3 Wellbeing, Resilience, mindfulness, positive education good practices

- **SCHOOLS FOR HEALTH**

Since 1991, the Czech Republic has joined the World Health Organization's global strategy, entitled "Health 21", which declares a long-term program to improve the health of the population by making the Schools For Health project now available to schools. ". Since 1993, the program has also been linked to the ["Schools for health"](#).

The guarantor for CR is the National Health Institute (Státní zdravotní ústav). On the EU level it is ["Schools for health in Europe"](#).

The goal of the program is to promote health at all its levels. The aim of the transformation of the school is to permanently enable the optimal development of the pupil and the teacher in cooperation with parents and the community, in terms of physical, mental and social area. The program is also a tool for early primary prevention of civilization diseases , antisocial behavior and all addictions.

Every preschool, primary or secondary school in the CR can apply to participate in the program in the form of a project. The program is not an alternative direction in education, but sets out the principles and guidelines that every school should ideally uphold. Preschool proceeds in this program according to the curriculum, which is in accordance with the information areas required by the Framework Educational Program for Preschool Education. (Schools for Health in Europe, n. d.)



- **STEP BY STEP**

The Programme “**Step by step**” of the [International Step by Step Association](#) is an early childhood program originally an initiative of the Open Society Institute which is applied to over 30 countries. There are 102 preschools as well as elementary schools in the Czech Republic involved. ISSA promotes a strategic and holistic approach to children. They developed a series of Strategic Goals which guide our work, grow our network and propose the best possible ways to advocate for and support competent Early Childhood Development systems.



The programme supports professional development and teaching practises and among others it also includes special initiatives for Roma and children with special needs. (International Step by Step Association,n.d.)

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8. Methods, tools, and approaches for nurturing preschool student's wellbeing, character traits and resilience

Since school is the place where children spend the greatest part of their time beyond home, it is an ideal place to nurture preschool student's wellbeing, character traits and resilience through engagement in meaningful activities. The present chapter describes methodologies for teachers to nurture student's wellbeing, character traits and resilience.

Play

Play is considered as the "dominant activity" for children's social, emotional and cognitive development. Through interactions in play, children develop and demonstrate improved verbal communication, high levels of social skills, creative use of play materials, imaginative and divergent thinking and problem-solving competencies.

Play is, also, an effective medium to build children's resilience and promote wellbeing (Barnett, 1990). Through playful interactions children find space to become more self-aware, empathic, motivated and more able to manage their feelings in realistic or imaginative situations (Fleer, 2015). Play demonstrates and develops the social and emotional strengths of children. Risk-taking as part of the play is important in building resilience as it allows children to encounter challenges in a safe setting; they learn possibilities and boundaries (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Children frequently seek out and enjoy risk-taking (Stephenson, 2003), and risk-taking is an integral part of extending physical prowess and therefore independence. They, also, learn risk assessment and how to monitor risk situations, all of which are important in the development of resilience.

The outdoor play provides an open environment for safe, collaborative, imaginative and challenging play. The external environment provides challenge to the children so they could test their own boundaries and engage in imaginative, creative and slightly risky play in a safe environment (McArdle et al., 2013).



Storytelling

Storytelling is another commonly used approach in preschool education. Storytelling is a suitable activity for decompression and relaxation. In fairytales children identify with heroes, they concerned and empathize their feelings and find solutions to their own difficulties. In addition, children learn to listen with patience and respect. Through storytelling children may be helped identify and enhance their character strengths as they learn with an informal way about notions of fairness, justice, honesty, equality e.t.c. (Arguís et al. 2014).

Problem solving

Problem solving activities enhance student's motivation in accomplishing outcomes. Solving a wide range of problems demands memory skills, creative thinking and the use of various learning strategies. Problem solving strategies focuses on the process not the result. When children try to solve a challenging problem, they may explore, identify and develop their strengths; processes that help children enhance their resilience. Achieving meaningful goals leads to positive emotions and wellbeing (Norrish et al., 2011). Providing children with tasks and problems that offer opportunities for a mix of failure and success is most likely to sustain their high motivation, be challenged, work harder and thus nurture resilient (Hamachek, 1995). Teachers may help children be more motivated in challenging situations by encourage them feel worthwhile and adequate. A verbal reward, a positive comment, a receptive and warm smile and a friendly touch are appropriate ways of communicating the idea to a student that he or she is worthwhile and "successful" person. When children feel the sense of personal success, they are more likely to set realistic and meaningful goals as they do not have to prove something to themselves and to others.

Arts

Arts have a dominant role is early childhood curriculum. Children paint, sing, doing crafts, dance and make stories in their everyday lives. Through these activities, children build capacities that orient children's healthy learning and promote their cognitive, social, communicative, imaginative and/or motor development (Hallam, 2010). For example, while music, movement and dance contribute to optimize children's motor skills development (Henriksson-Macaulay & Welch, 2015), drama fosters



children's socio-emotional knowledge, skills, and attitudes about themselves and the world around them (Szecsi, 2008). During role plays children interact, cooperate, discuss and negotiate thus social and language development is enhanced. In addition, arts provide children with non-academic benefits such as improved motivation and self-esteem, cultural awareness, improved emotional expression, as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity (Magsamen & Battro, 2011).

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is a method in which students help each other in order to achieve a common goal. They use and improve their communication skills and they are motivated by the team to actively participate in the activity. As the children are working together for a common goal, they learn to respect each other's opinions, the behavior of helping the group members is becoming prominent and the self-confidence is increased. Children view cooperative learning approaches as more positive, pleasant and interpersonally enhancing (Hamachek, 1995). In addition, they offer a variety of advantages for students compared to the traditional methods as children's social skills are enhanced, the quality of their relationships is improved and greater psychological health and self-esteem is achieved (Johnson et al., 1998).

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9. Evaluation tools for self -assessment and self-reflection

The Classroom Diary is a valuable resource for the educators and for children assessment, as well.

Educators can reflect about what happened in class and can be organised as makes more sense for the educators needs of self-assessment and self-reflection. These diaries also represent a training opportunity for the educators, as it impacts in the writer personal and professional development (Silva, D., Leite, C., & Fernandes, P., 2009).

When writing about what happened in class, the educator is able to find the personal perspective about what actually occurred (Zabalza, 2004) and this allows to: recreate mentally the educator's experience; structure the events, summing up; realise a personal lecture of the classes at the educator's pace; clarifying their own ideas about each event written; connect and relate the information created with present knowledge; and, create meaning.

Do you know the painting Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez?

This painting is from the XVII century and creates an uncertain relationship between the viewer and the figures depicted. Exactly what often happens in class – uncertain understandings of events, uncertain attitudes, behaviours that deserve attention to understand them better in the next opportunity they occur.

Just like Diego Velázquez (the painter), you are always pictured in the 'scene' and in this exercise you must list all the moments (or the most relevant for you) and your presence – at physical and emotional level. How did you react? How children interacted with you in that moment? What movement(s) you made to intervene? In what way did you interfere? How different it must have been if you did nothing? If you were not there?



Image Retrieved from:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b3/Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez_-_Las_Meninas.jpg/411px-Diego_Vel%C3%A1zquez_-_Las_Meninas.jpg



Conclusions

Nowadays **Positive Education** seem to become more and more important for achieving the aim of the 21st century education and for better preparing the small children for the real-life situations. Studies (Baker, Green, & Falecki, 2017; Seligman, 2011; Arguís, R. et al, 2010) have emphasized on the excellent effects that the implementation of approaches and practices of **Positive Psychology** and of **PERMA model** (P-Positive Emotion, E-Engagement, R-Relationships, M-Meaning, A-Accomplishment) has in early education.

Based on desk and field-based research, the consortium of the **RESILIENT PRESCHOOL** project developed this **Toolkit** as a **useful instrument** and a practical source of information for **Preschool Teachers** and for any other relevant professionals, to help improve their student's overall wellbeing, school experience and bring about a positive change in the general school climate.

Applying Positive Psychology - that is focusing **on what is going well with people** - to pre-schoolers, increases their **wellbeing** and strengthens **individual character strengths, self-esteem** and **positive habits**, while building children's **optimism, hope, gratitude and joy**.

Benefits of practicing **psychological resilience, social-emotional learning** and **mindfulness** in Early Education are undoubted and teachers should systematically pursuit obtaining them, for harmonious development and grow of their students.

Among the main **challenges** that the preschool teachers face nowadays, we identified the need to adjust to the new reality due to the COVID 19 pandemic, overpopulated classes, insufficient monitoring and support staffs, insufficient teacher training, overwhelming administrative workload, wide range of students' ages (3-6 years old), the negative influence of the exposure of preschool children to the media, inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream education, new approaches to the education not updated.

Exist already, in some countries, certain **programmes** which are **related to** the topic of **RESILIENT PRESCHOOL** project - like the programmes The Social and Emotional Education in Schools and ARETI for shaping good character (Cyprus), and they represent a valuable input for us when developing



project's outcomes. But more can be done in the domain and we hope this Toolkit makes a step forward in this direction.

Educational curriculum of project countries includes, to a certain extent, approaches and content for emotional empowerment (Cyprus), psychological and interpersonal skills (Czech Republic), individual and social development (Greece and Portugal) or socio-emotional development (Romania), however RESILIENT PRESCHOOL field research identified more 'on-target' content is needed to be included in the curriculum as well as enhanced special teachers' training in this field.

The **RESILIENT PRESCHOOL Toolkit** constitutes effective 'food for thought' and a 'supply' of theory embedded in practice, by providing teachers with theoretical models, methods, tools, approaches, activities, good practices, applications, case studies and tools for self-assessment and self-reflection and we really hope it will be largely used by all those interested in improving pre-schoolers wellbeing and psychological resilience.



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