



**RESILIENT
PRESCHOOLS**

IO2.A2.1
Curriculum

For Preschool Teachers





Consortium

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Introduction to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project

Resilience and Wellbeing in preschool education to prevent emotional, social and behavioural problems” – RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project is funded by the European Commission under the ERASMUS+ programme KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices (Strategic Partnerships for school education); project number: 2020-1-CY01-KA201-066080. The Project was launched in December 2020 with 24 months duration (01/12/2020 – 31/11/2022).

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).

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 preschool education settings. 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 capital, thus magnifying the possible future benefits. Additionally, by fortifying young children’s resilience and wellbeing, their academic performance will be enhanced as well.

To achieve the aforementioned aims, the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project will create the following Intellectual Outputs:

IO1: A positive education toolkit for preschool teachers: The RESILIENT PRESCHOOL Toolkit will include useful information and practical applications for Preschool Educators to teach children how to strengthen their psychological resilience and improve their overall wellbeing. The Toolkit will be based on their unique needs and will offer a variety of Positive Psychology concepts and PERMA wellbeing model - a chapter for each of PERMA’s 5 core pillars of wellbeing and happiness: (P) Positive Emotions, (E)Engagement, (R)Relationships, (M) Meaning, (A) Accomplishment.

IO2: A training package (training program and material) for preschool teachers: a versatile and user-friendly Training Package that will equip the participating Preschool Educators with skills, strategies and techniques that derive from PERMA Model and Character Education theories in order to improve their student’s overall wellbeing and school experience.

IO3: eLearning Space and OERs: the collection of tools will include the IO1 Toolkit, IO2 Training Material, online modules, digital resources, training material and guidelines for Preschool Educators



and other interested parties or adult education providers to use. The research analysis presented in the next pages was conducted to provide the Consortium with the needed data and context for the successful development of the IO1 Toolkit - a practical source of information for providing support to Preschool Teachers and enable them to acquire or amplify skills, strategies and techniques that derive from the core principles of Positive Psychology, PERMA Model and Character Education, with the purpose to improve their student's overall wellbeing, school experience and bring about a positive change in the general school climate.



Introduction to RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Curriculum

The present Curriculum is part of an innovative training package aiming to help preschool teachers promote preschool children's psychological resilience and wellbeing. Specifically, within the framework of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Project's Intellectual Output 2 **a training package** (training program and material) for preschool teachers was developed. The main purpose of the Training Package (training program and material) is to provide **an attractive, versatile and user-friendly practical material adapted to preschool settings for Preschool Teachers**. By using the Training Package, it is expected early childhood educators be equipped with skills, strategies and techniques that derive from PERMA Model and Character Education theories in order to build their capacity to foster their student's psychological resilience and wellbeing.

The RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS training package is composed of:

- **The RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Curriculum**
- **The RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Guide**

The main aim of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS **Curriculum** is to describe the theoretical foundations as well as the theoretical framework and goals of five core modules derive from PERMA evidenced based wellbeing Model and Character Education theories:

- 1. Resilience and mindfulness**
- 2. Character strengths and values**
- 3. Positive emotions**
- 4. Positive relationships**
- 5. Achievement & Self-Esteem**

Based on these 5 core modules, the **Curriculum** is structured in five chapters; for each of the five aforementioned modules, definitions and are specified the related concepts and values are included. In addition, each module-chapter describes the importance of each module and its related concepts in the school context, how does the module act and how the preschool teachers will be benefited by undertaking this module. Finally, the Curriculum offers concrete and research bound information, definitions, evidence-based activities from the field of Positive Psychology, examples and case studies for developing effective strategies, interventions and activities on the related notions of each module within school settings. The material is approached and captured through the scientific lens



of the evidence-based Positive Psychology methodology, whilst is also adapted in such manner that can be utilized in contemporary Preschool Education settings and curriculum.

The Curriculum intents to map the preschool teachers' competences by providing in detail the description of the learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills, describing each competence and its value for preschool children. It is structured in a way that allows easy adaptability in multiple contexts and support the sustainability and compatibility of the training programme to upcoming social and learning challenges.

How to Utilize the Curriculum:

- **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 RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Curriculum is accompanied by the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Guide. The Guide includes practical information for the preschool teachers as well as activities structured in lesson plans in order to support, use properly and get the most out of the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS Curriculum.



Module 1: Resilience and Mindfulness

Definition of Resilience and Mindfulness

Preschool educators are responsible for assisting children to be more healthy, powerful, resilient, aware and kind human beings. By doing that they are helping with our future. This is not an easy task especially in such difficult times due to the COVID pandemic that has brought about a sense of fear and anxiety. This phenomenon has led to short term as well as long term psychosocial and mental health implications for children. Findings reveal that children felt uncertain, fearful and isolated during current times. Studies have also shown that children experienced disturbed sleep, nightmares, poor appetite, agitation, inattention and separation related anxiety (US National Library of Medicine - National Institutes of Health, 2020).

Therefore, this module aspires to **offer preschool teachers, experts and educators a helping hand with wellbeing, mindfulness tools, relaxations and calming strategies that might add to their daily teaching curriculum**. It will provide to preschool educators with **basic and essential competencies, skills and knowledge** regarding **body and emotional awareness and regulation**.

Preschool teachers might be already using strategies in their classroom or working with children individually (as your daily routine). However, this curriculum will be an additional source of inspiration. This training follows methods of positive psychology that will help preschool teachers, experts and educators get better equipped at supporting children as well as adapt for their own mindful and self-care practice.

This Curriculum and Learning Modules are part of the project RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS, **aiming to empower children in preschools and their educators on wellbeing, mental, physical and social health in order to build their resilience**.

Aims of the module

- **GENERAL AIMS OF THE MODULE**
 - Explore the definitions and benefits of mindfulness and resilience building practices.
 - Introduce basic concepts of mindfulness and resilience building activities.



- Explore ways on how mindfulness and resilience building activities can be taught to preschool children.
- Bring concrete examples of mindfulness and resilience building activities for the classroom.
- Encourage educators to take care of their own wellbeing and practice mindfulness themselves.

- **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After finishing this module, learners, educators and other experts will be able to:

- Understand the concepts and benefits of mindfulness and resilience building practices.
- Have direct experience with practicing concrete mindfulness and resilience building activities.
- Have tools and tips on how to teach mindfulness and resilience to children in their classroom.
- Have tools and tips on how to practice mindfulness in their own lives and support their own wellbeing.
- Recognize how mindfulness can promote positive mental, emotional and social health.

Which concepts does this module address?

Positive psychology has integrated contemplative practices such as mindfulness within the range of grounded and empowering techniques of the positive aspects of being human (Cébolla, Enrique, Alvear, Garcia-Campayo, 2017). Mindfulness and activities that build resilience include cultivating awareness as well as self-regulation. Once we know what we feel we can regulate it. These skills are also framed within Social-Emotional Learning (Hawkins, 2017). Regular repetition of these practices strengthens neural connections (Willard, 2016) that positively influence children's development,



create healthy coping strategies and can remain imprinted in a child's nervous system for lifelong. Concepts that are addressed in this module are the following:

1. Physical Health - Body Awareness

Body awareness means how conscious and connected we are to our own body. It's also known as kinesthesia, or the awareness of the position and movement of body parts in relation to muscles and joints (Hoshaw, 2021).

You might know the saying: Healthy body = healthy mind/spirit. Promoting healthy physical and motor development is key. Physical activity plays a fundamental role in maintaining and regaining physical and mental health. It helps children with healthy physical, emotional and mental health but it also improves school performance, attentional functions, intelligence, decision making etc. (Tihanyi, Sági, Csala, Köteles, 2016).

Physical exercise might be also used to draw children's attention away from external events and stimuli. Teaching body awareness through mindful movement is a way to educate about the body and breath and it is a tool for becoming calm, and for strengthening concentration. The benefit of such exercises is the gradual calming of the nervous system and creating resilience of the nervous fibers and nervous system, which gains the flexibility to manage and reduce tension and stress and moves towards relaxation. Body consciousness anchors the individual from the thought process towards experiencing. The person thus has greater control over his/her inner processes which we call in this paper as regulation.

2. Mental and Emotional Health - Mind and Emotions Awareness

Children's everyday life contains many events in which regulation skills are required. A wide range of desires, noise, transitions, large amounts of information and growing requirements burden children's stress systems. Their prefrontal neural connections – which take care of appropriate regulation of stress – are still maturing, and children's tolerance limits are narrower than those of adults (Sajaniemi et al. 2015). The developing brain is especially adaptable to the effects of risk factors during the first 5 years of life (Shonkoff et al. 2009). Children's inability to regulate stress endangers favorable advancements in social, emotional and cognitive development and increases the risk of social exclusion (Compas, Connor-Smith & Jaser 2004). Early childhood is a time of opportunity for interventions that reduce or moderate the effects of stress exposures. Reducing the toxic stress of



children and intervening early to improve preschool practices has the potential for improving the life course of children, families and future generations (DeSocio 2015; Nieminen, Sajaniemi, 2016).

Through the suggested activities in this module, children learn about thoughts and emotions. They learn to name them, to be able to take a stand on them and to create healthy coping strategies for dealing with thoughts and emotions. Children usually do not have the vocabulary to name their thought processes and emotions, and they need the adults to guide them through this. If the child is not able to process, for example, long-term stress, fear, anxiety, he/she may develop unhealthy compensatory behavior, which can be destructive (e.g., anger, rage etc.) and/or self-destructive (e.g., eating disorders, depression, self-harming behavior etc.). With this module, we want to prevent these destructive compensation strategies by teaching children about their world of emotions and thoughts. Constantly increasing (neuro)scientific research shows the benefits of training awareness, attention and calming skills, which have been shown to protect against the adverse effects of stress (e.g., Siegel 2009). Mindful awareness has also been shown to alter brain functions, mental activity and interpersonal relationships towards well-being (Siegel 2009; Nieminen, Sajaniemi, 2016).

3. Self-agency and Autonomy

According to Self-Determination Theory, awareness is central to the process of healthy regulation. When people act with autonomy, they engage in behaviors that are identical with their self-endorsed values and authentic interests. Extensive research has shown the significant physical and mental benefits that such autonomous regulation yields. In contrast, when people engage in activities based on introjections (the unconscious adoption of the ideas or attitudes of others) or external pressures, the regulation of their behavior is controlled, and such regulation is associated with diminished persistence and performance, and more impoverished experience and well-being (Shultz & Ryan, n. d.).

4. Self-compassion and Kindness to self

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards ourselves the same way we would act towards a good friend when we are having a difficult time, failing, or noticing something we don't like about ourselves. Instead of just ignoring the pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, we can stop to tell ourselves "This is really difficult right now," how can we comfort and care for ourselves at this



moment? Self-compassion means we are kind and understanding when confronted with the failings (Neff, n. d.).

Self-compassion, defined by the three components of self-kindness, sensing oneself as **part of a common humanity**, and maintaining perspective in challenging circumstances, was examined as a potential mediator of the relationship of mindfulness to various outcome measures. (US National Library of Medicine - National Institutes of Health, 2014).

5. Happiness and Joy

Can joy be cultivated? And, if so, can we teach our kids how to be more joyful in their lives? Joy can be cultivated and we can teach children to be more joyful in their lives. It takes knowing what kinds of practices bring true happiness. For example, helping kids to set intentions for happiness because paying attention to the good things that happen in life rather than focusing only on the bad can help rewire their brains for happiness. We teach mindfulness meditation because mindfulness has been shown to decrease stress and increase happiness (Baraz & Lilyanna, 2016).

Why do Resilience and Mindfulness matter?

Building **resilience** is like building muscle, increasing resilience takes time and intentionality. Focusing on four core components—connection, wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning—can empower you to withstand and learn from difficult and traumatic experiences. (American Psychology Association, 2012)

By undertaking of this module activities, participants (children as well as educators and experts) will recognize how **mindfulness** and resilience building tools can promote positive **effect on mental health** which manifests as deeper breathing, calmer nervous system, mindful awareness of one's actions, being more “centered” in the body rather than going with the swiftness of the mind. The module activities will have a positive influence on the motor-cognitive development of the child as well as overall physical and mental development.

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**
- **Lowers stress**
- **Increases positive mood**
- **Increases resilience** (Burke, 2010; Greenberg & Harris, 2011; Hooker & Fodor, 2014).

Results of integrated **mindfulness and relaxation work with children** showed significant **decreases in anxiety, ADHD behaviors, depression and somatic distress** (Weare, 2012).

How does the module act?

This module acts as an introduction on how to apply mindfulness and resilience building tools into the classroom and into the school culture. Modules give suggestions to the teachers and experts for preschool education.

The aim of this Curriculum is to educate teachers about the basic concepts of mindfulness and practices in order to enrich children with more wellbeing and support their flexibility to deal with situations and life.

Why are Resilience and Mindfulness important in the school context?

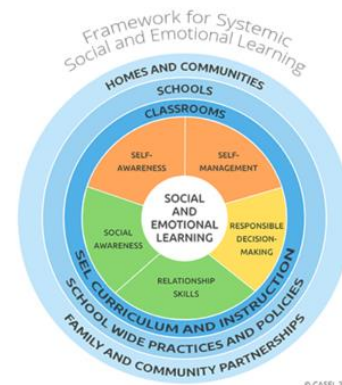
This module is not only to benefit individuals but also can influence the school culture, families and communities as well. According to the Wheel of Social - Emotional learning (CASEL 2017) - this module directly influences Self-awareness and Self-management.



Self-awareness is the ability to accurately **recognize** your emotions and thoughts and know how they influence behavior.

Self-management is the ability to **regulate** your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. (Washoe County School District, n. d.)

By completing this module, teachers and educators will be able to address issues and challenges that children face in their life and will be able to promote a more mindful approach within the classroom and the whole school culture.



Picture retrieved from: <http://www.wcsddata.net/data-topics/sel/>

Participants will gain the following skills, competences and knowledge:

- Understanding why and how to create mindful environments for children.
- Understanding the mindfulness and resilience concepts and the influence on mental health and wellbeing.
- Knowing how to use and apply various relaxation and mindfulness tools and practices for children.
- Administrators will gain understanding and tips on how to cultivate a mindful school culture.

After direct practicing of suggested activities, the participants will have direct experience of the benefits on the body, mind and emotions.

How to promote Resilience and Mindfulness in classroom settings?

We encourage you to experiment with the different lesson plans and practices and determine which activities may be of most benefit for your classroom or school setting. Perhaps you will use the whole set of lessons or maybe you'll draw from a few. We encourage you to test things out on your own and see these practices as a starting point and source of inspiration. The good practice suggests that people who teach these practices incorporate them into their own lives. We highly recommend you



to develop your own mindfulness and self-care practice alongside the use of this curriculum. Short mindfulness exercises can be introduced:

WHEN

- During morning circles
- Before any activity where concentration and focus are needed
- During recess
- For rising children's attention and cooperation
- Before resting to allow children to calm down
- After resting to awake the children
- After lunch

HOW

- Breathing exercise
- Observation
- Movement
- Guided imaginary
- Sensory experiences

BY

- Creating regular time for the activities
- Explaining children about the concept and how they and their surroundings can benefit from it
- The educator/expert example
- Involving teachers, school, parents and community in the wellbeing concept

With each lesson, we encourage the teachers to provide opportunities for children as well as for themselves to notice and describe elements of the sensations, thoughts and emotions while linking those experiences to the lessons being taught.



What will children gain from the module activities:

- A joy for living and pleasure from movement/play
- Consciousness and understanding of their surroundings
- Increased ability to concentrate and improvement in school work
- The ability to understand and observe the processes and functioning of the body, mind and emotions
- A holistic development and healthy balance of mind, body and psychic
- Healthy posture
- Improvement in blood circulation
- Strengthened immune system
- Improvement in self-awareness and confidence

Examples and Case studies

TEACH PAWS

Paws b was designed by **experienced classroom and mindfulness teachers**: a core development team of Tabitha Sawyer and Rhian Roxburgh, teachers at Ysgol Pen Y Bryn in North Wales, and Sarah Silvertown, a senior mindfulness teacher and trainer with the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at Bangor University in Wales. **Paws b was also co-developed with the students themselves, which has helped it to become a very responsive and student-centered curriculum.**

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/teach-paws-b/>

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/the-evidence-base/>

CENTER FOR HEALTHY MINDS

It was founded by world renowned **neuroscientist Dr. Richard J. Davidson**. The Center for Healthy Minds at the **University of Wisconsin-Madison** envisions a kinder, wiser, more compassionate world. Their mission is to cultivate wellbeing and relieve suffering through a scientific understanding of the mind. Faced with mental and physical health challenges at a global scale, they conduct scientific research to bring new insights aimed at improving the well-being of people of all backgrounds and ages. www.centerhealthyminds.org



Center for Healthy minds developed also the **KINDNESS CURRICULUM**

It is a curriculum for preschool educators to teach kindness and compassion in schools just like math and reading. The Kindness Curriculum was developed by the affiliated research organization, the Center for Healthy Minds at University of Wisconsin-Madison, guided by their mission to cultivate well-being and relieve suffering through a scientific understanding of the mind.

<https://hminnovations.org/well-being-tools#Kindness-Curriculum>

MINDFUL SCHOOLS

Mindful Schools was founded on the belief that the benefits of mindfulness should be accessible for all communities - especially those who have been impacted by inequity. The vision is for all children to learn in “mindful schools” that nurture a new generation of leaders to create a more equitable and thriving world. The program began in 2007, when educators at an independent school in Oakland, California, noticed many of their students were “living with a lot of turmoil.” A small and passionate team gathered their experience in mindfulness, education, and social-emotional learning to develop a response with one requirement—the program must also support students at a neighboring public school.

Now, with a network of more than 60,000 educators working to implement mindfulness, and an unwavering commitment to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into our work, we are uniquely poised to cultivate joyful and just learning communities, no matter what the future holds.

<https://www.mindfulschools.org/>

YOGA IN MY SCHOOL (Yoga and mindfulness programs for schools)

Yoga In My School's mission is to share mindfulness and yoga skills inspiring others to be their best selves. Preschool yoga classes enable children to develop healthy habits from an early age. YIMS Preschool Yoga classes support physical, emotional and mental wellness and development of children aged 2-5 by combining yoga poses with engaging songs and stories which exercise social, sensory and motor skills. We offer an extensive list of themes to compliment those taught in your Preschool program.

<https://yogainmyschool.com/>



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Module 2: Character Strengths and Values

Module 2 “Character Strengths and Values” is especially designed in order to provide material that will support Preschool Educators to be in a position to guide young children on how to identify their signature character strengths and values. Cultivating character strengths and highlighting the importance of values in life will help children to their life-journey and self-development and prosper in all aspects of life (intrapersonal, interpersonal and academically).

“Each person brings his or her own characteristics to life, and these interact with the different ecologies to produce behavior”. ~ Christopher Peterson, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (2004)

Definition of Character Strengths and Values

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.

VIA classification, aims to identify and bring to the surface the individual’s most dominant character strengths which with the appropriate cultivation and utilization, can contribute greatly to optimizing the personal, social and professional development of each individual across their lifespan (Park & Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Moreover, it’s important to point out that character strengths stem from a deeper place representing the person’s **“moral values”** and perpetuates this notion toward all aspects of life.

As Banicki (2014) eloquently investigates in a relevant article, the initial aim of classifying character strengths from Peterson and Seligman (2004), was an attempt to counteract mainstream psychology, which for the most of it was arguably neglecting on investigating positive human functioning and was emphasizing on suffering and trauma. In particular VIA classification was a proposed as a response to the most popular and widely known psychiatric classification of mental disorders the Diagnostic and



Statistical Manual (DSM; APA, 2000), in an attempted to derail the focus of the scientific community and the public in general from eliminating weaknesses or healing trauma, to amplifying the existing strengths (Banicki, 2014).

It's important to note that character strengths can be distinguished from related individual differences such as talents and abilities. Character strengths are not static or automated responses or behaviors, rather are innate dynamic mechanisms and depend on the person's choice of actions. Based on the individual's choices and life goals, during their lifespan and personal development individuals have the opportunity to frequently reflect on their character strengths and proceed to relevant actions that may amplify or stall them.

Aims of the module

The purpose of this module is to provide material that will support Preschool Educators to help children identify their signature character strengths and values connected with them and in subsequence cultivate and nourish them

More specifically this module aims to:

- Help educators to find the ways/methods to identify the children's character strengths and virtues
- Offer a pool of material to Preschool Educators on the aforementioned thematic topics
- Equip educators on how to effectively support children to develop their most prominent traits and lead healthier and fulfilling lives
- Eliminate any perspective or existing challenging behaviors
- Promote a culture of unity, diversity, empathy, acceptance

Which values does this module address?

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

Kramer (2011), notes that wisdom is conceptualized as a higher form of “intelligence”; a constellation of personal attributes that constitute a high caliber functioning that reflects cognitive, affective and behavioral maturity, which enables attributes like high awareness, broad-mindedness and deep concern for humanity in general (Kramer, 2011).

Similarly, according to Erickson (1963), wisdom is the lasting outcome and a favorable conclusion of the last psychosocial stage of adult life “ego integrity” (acceptance versus despair), whereas the person has the capacity to accept and own up to both past victories and disenchantments.

Moreover, based on Peterson & Seligman’s (2004) and VIA, the virtues of wisdom and knowledge also ignites curiosity, imagination and creativity, hence the more proficient a person becomes at gaining new information the more they gain perspective and thirstier for learning. This dynamic mechanism is further developing the virtue of wisdom and knowledge and enhances individual cognitive abilities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

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

The virtue of courage has been celebrated since ancient times and has been historically highly regarded, since it is the main force that drives people to face their intrapersonal difficulties. Being courageous means voluntarily pursuing a socially fitting goal, despite the possible risk and the fear that derives from dealing with a challenging situation (Magnano et al., 2017).

According to Peterson & Seligman (2004), courage is constituted of not just observable actions, but it also encompasses notions like motivation, emotions, cognitions, decision-making processes and people express them through the lens of “courage”. Moreover, the more courageous a person becomes, simultaneously amplifies its integrity and levels of vitality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).



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

By humanity Peterson & Seligman (2004), are referring to the virtues closely related with interpersonal skills and human interaction. “Humanity” reflects abundance of kindness and exceptional generosity even when an equitable exchange would suffice (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

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

Historically the notion of “justice”, was always interconnected with the various facets of individual and collective human experience. Plato in the Republic approaches justice as an overarching virtue for both individuals and organized societies, to such an extent that anything considered as “ethical” also “just” (LeBar, 2020).

According to Peterson & Seligman (2004), there are prominent cultural differences regarding how people view and comprehend the notion of “justice”, however the shared notion is that some standard should held people and groups accountable and in practice to protect intuitive notions of what is fair and not (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

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

Temperance is connected with the ability of a person to control impulses and not to succumb to over-indulgence. Often is referred to as “having strength of character” and is connected with having the capacity to make the most sensible and beneficial choice and avoid what is wrong and can potentially harm the person (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).



6. Transcendence:

- **appreciation of beauty 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

Transcendence refers to a person's capacity to experience gratitude and be aware of the positive things that have happened and a greater awareness and sensitivity to surroundings. Transcendence can enable individuals to connect to a "larger universe" and give a sense of meaning and purpose to life (Lavy & Benish – Weisman, 2021).

Overall, character strengths are evaluated and ranked for each individual using as a touch point how they utilize it in their daily lives and how useful it can become as a tool to fulfill their own life goals and aspirations. Peterson and Seligman (2004), propose that most individuals have between three to seven core or "signature" strengths. Signature strengths are closely connected with the person's most distinctive traits and thus more frequently practiced. Several studies point out that the utilization of individual signature strengths is closely correlated with higher levels of a variety of other positive aspects that infuse a person's life, to name a few: overall wellbeing, life satisfaction and having meaning and purpose in life (Proctor, Maltby & Linley, 2011).

Why do Character Strengths and Values matter?

The main goal of identifying and classifying character strengths and encouraging virtues to children is to equip them with all the necessary tools that will support their healthy and continuous development in all areas of their life (personal, interpersonal, academic) and to have a positive experience of life. Cultivating from a young age their character strengths will enable them to reach their full potential and subsequently lead meaningful lives in harmony with community and others. According to Peterson & Seligman (2004) cultivating character strengths from a young age could offer encouraging tangible outcomes like:

- **subjective well-being (happiness)**
- **acceptance of oneself**



- reverence for life
- competence, efficacy, and mastery
- mental and physical health
- rich and supportive social networks
- respect by and for others
- satisfying work
- material sufficiency
- healthy communities and families

How does the module act?

The module acts as an introduction to the practical applications and offers to the reader – user a general scope of “character strengths and virtues”, origins, utilization and good practices. In addition, the module presents important terminology that will be used in later stages and suggests relevant literature and resources for those who would like to investigate relevant notions in more depth.

Why are Character Strengths and Values important in the school context?

The period of early childhood is a critical era for children and offers many opportunities for the development of their physical, cognitive, emotional and social skills, all of which will constitute the solid foundation for their lifelong development as individuals (Ross et al., 1999).

Shoshani and Aviv’s (2012) study’s results on character strengths and the transition of young children to elementary school, pointed out that identifying and cultivating character strengths in preschoolers will enable them to approach their educational path at any level with more zest and they will be more subjective to change and receptive to acquire new knowledge. Shoshani & Shwartz (2018), in a later examination of the correlation of character strengths to children’s wellbeing in educational settings, indicate that character strengths applications have considerable importance for the healthy and holistic development of children on any level. Moreover, they suggested that investing on character strengths from an early age, buffers against the development of future mental health dysfunctions, whilst also enabling resources that enhance children’s capacities for flourishing and self-accomplishment (Shoshani & Shwartz, 2018).

Lai et al. (2018), in their study evaluated the application of PERMA-H programme, with a special focus in character strengths building to senior primary school students. The results indicated that cultivating



character strengths to students, increased positive engagement with school life and elevated overall life satisfaction. Moreover, the focus on a character-strengths based approach did not only benefited students themselves, but a more general positive shift in the whole school climate was observed. This important breakthrough indicated that identification and utilization of character strengths create and multiply opportunities for more positive interactions among all members of school community (Lai et al., 2018).

Weber and Ruch (2012) in a relevant study they investigated the impact of the 24-character strengths established in the VIA Classification when it comes to schooling and Education. More specifically they study the correlation amongst character strengths, positive experience at school, student-teachers quality and nature of interaction and relationship, and overall school academic achievement. The results pointed out that specific character strengths like perspective, prudence, gratitude, hope, self-regulation, love of learning, were significantly interconnected with higher grades and academic performance (Weber & Ruch, 2012).

Traditional schooling is not only about transmitting knowledge or enhancing children's cognitive ability exclusively, but to also teach children values, encourage self-discovery and provide a safe space for them to explore, learn how to interact with others successfully, form healthy long-lasting relationships and discover themselves as well (Bikos, 2004; Friedrich, Flunger, Nagensgast, Jonkmann, & Trautweit 2015; Johnson, 1999).

The aims of character education and the aims of schooling go hand in hand. The optimal goal of any educator is to see their student's flourish, thrive and lead happy lives. Character strengths and virtues identification are the absolute backbone of any individual's development and by providing children from a young age the support and guidance to find their signature strengths is safeguarding their healthy and successful development.

How to promote Character Strengths and Values in classroom settings?

Below you will find some suggestions based on relevant previous practices and studies. However, all Educators are encouraged to modify all the aforementioned notions based on their student's needs and unique characteristics, specific settings, cultural differences, classroom logistics, preferred lesson plans and teaching approaches.

- Use the VIA Classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as your main guide



- Give a vivid example through story-telling and creating opportunities for discussion and reflection. Moreover, there are a plethora of books especially designed for character education in the market, which you can utilize to optimize the results.
- Use “praise” wisely, by naming specific behaviors and/or characteristics that you wish to praise and encourage. Point out the particular character strengths that were used to achieve the desirable outcome. For example, if a child finishes a difficult task, you can say something like: “Well, done for not giving up and being persistent!”
- Embed character strengths and virtues in your curriculum. You can start small by just introducing the meaning and terminology to young preschoolers and you can build on that.
- Routine & Structures in a collective scale, by cultivating an overall positive culture in the classroom. Encourage students to identify and give praise to themselves and to each other for using their signature character strengths. In a more group sense, you can end the day with a note-quote that points out a specific notion, for example: “I observed today a great deal of kindness and thoughtfulness within the classroom, all children were polite and willing to help each other! Well done! Keep it up!”
- Face-to-face mini interviews. After helping the students to pin-out their signature character strengths, set up a schedule with 10-minute slots once a week to talk to each student individually and reflect on their own character strengths and reflect on how they are making the best of it in their everyday lives and/or interactions with others.

Below find some Good Practices and connected material that Preschool Educators can utilize for inspiration and/or incorporate them or parts of them in their own teaching curriculum:

ARETI Programme: (<https://iodevelopment.eu/books/>) ARETI is an education programme in 12 basic life values (Respect, Cooperation, Justice, Responsibility, Love, Kindness, Boldness, Freedom, Peace, Citizenship, Humbleness, Leadership) which form the basis for shaping good character. 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 programme is addressed to children, parents and teachers. Its implementation started in 2007 and it continues every year until today. Approximately 3000 children have participated in the programme until now as well as hundreds of parents and teachers. Cyprus’s Ministry of Justice and Public Order has introduced it to its action plan for the prevention of violence and delinquency. Therefore, the programme can be used as a



prevention and/ or a way of dealing with aggression, bullying, gender-based violence (GBV), anxiety, stress, depression, and burnout.



Picture retrieved from: <https://iodevelopment.eu/books/>

Character Strengths Bunting:

<https://instituteofpositiveeducation.com/collections/character-strengths-resources/products/character-strengths-bunting>

This activity is designed to help Educators to celebrate their students' strengths with the 'Character Strengths Bunting'. This resource is designed so the Educators can drag and drop a photo for each student onto the bunting, based on one of their self-identified signature strengths. Complete with a research summary and a colourful, engaging design, these resources can potentially inspire all students to view themselves, and each other, through the lens of character strengths.



Picture Retrieved from: <https://instituteofpositiveeducation.com/collections/character-strengths-resources/products/character-strengths-bunting>



Happy Classrooms (“Aulas felices”): (https://educaposit.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_0.html)

The Happy Classrooms (“Aulas felices”) program developed by the SATI team (a work group of specialized Educators located in Zaragoza, Spain) and aims at working on positive education. It is designed for children and youths in pre-school, primary and secondary education. The program focuses its applications on character strengths and mindfulness. It is freely available for access and distribution.

Objectives	Programme components	Elements of school curriculum in which it is integrated	Intervention levels	Target students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To enhance the personal and social development of students. -To promote happiness in students, teachers and families. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mindfulness. 2. Education of the 24 character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Global proposals. . Specific proposals. . Personalized plans. . Joint work between families and schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Key Competences: sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, social and civic competences, and learning to learn. -Guidance and Counselling Programmes. -Values Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Classrooms. -Teaching teams (organized by levels or subject departments). -The Educational Centre. -The Educational Community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students of Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education.

Picture Retrieved from: https://educaposit.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_0.html



PEEC Sample Lesson:

(<https://instituteofpositiveeducation.com/collections/free-resources/products/peec-sample-lesson-world-happiness-day>)

PEEC is an acronym for Positive Education Enhanced Curriculum. It is a curriculum that has been designed to support teachers, and value-add to their practice wisdom and experience in delivering Positive Education. PEEC encompasses almost 300 lessons from Early Learning (4 years of age) through to Year 12 (18 years of age).



Picture Retrieved from: <https://instituteofpositiveeducation.com/collections/free-resources/products/peec-sample-lesson-world-happiness-day>



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Module 3: Positive Emotions

Definition of Positive Emotions

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, a **positive emotion** is an emotional reaction designed to express a positive affect, such as happiness when one attains a goal, relief when a danger has been avoided, or contentment when one is satisfied with the present state of affairs. Positive emotions are not simply “happy feelings” that we chase to feel momentary pleasure; like the more negative emotions, they play a significant role in everyday life.

The list of positive emotions that people experience is nearly endless. All of these words do not refer to emotions as scholars understand them, but they are the words most often used by people in describing their own emotions, which gives us a good foundation for positive emotions as they are commonly experienced. Moreover, positive emotion is more than an immediate marker of wellbeing, it may also contribute to the development of wellbeing over time. Fredrickson (2004) identified the following as the ten most common positive emotions:

- Joy
- Gratitude
- Serenity
- Interest
- Hope
- Pride
- Amusement
- Inspiration
- Awe
- Love

According to Fredrickson’s (2009) broaden and build theory of positive emotions, positive emotions play an essential role in our survival. Positive emotions, like love, joy, and gratitude, promote new and creative actions, ideas, and social bonds. When people experience positive emotions, their minds broaden and they open up to new possibilities and ideas. At the same time, positive emotions help people build their personal well-being resources, ranging from physical resources to intellectual resources, and social resources. The theory also suggests that negative emotions serve the opposite function of positive ones. When threatened with negative emotions like anxiety, fear, frustration, or



anger, the mind constricts and focuses in on the imposing threat (real or imagined), thus limiting one's ability to be open to new ideas and build resources and relationships.

Importance of Positive Emotions:

According to Fredrickson (2004) Positive Emotions are important due to the following reasons:

- Influence behaviour starting early in development, but do not map on to specific behavioural tendencies as readily as negative emotion.
- Expand behavioural possibilities, invite other-oriented social interactions and potentially mitigates risk for negative behaviours.
- Influence behaviour by broadening one's attention and momentary thought–action repertoire, thereby expanding novel and creative actions, and promoting better use of physical, intellectual, and psychological resources.
- Promote self-regulation, problem solving and cognitive flexibility, opening individuals up to a greater number of possible behavioural outcomes.
- Enhance future orientation. It promotes optimism and increases feelings of personal control and power making people more likely to believe good things will happen in the future.
- is also associated with behavioural changes, including increased goal directed behaviour, approach and persistence.
- Open individuals up to the potential for positive psychological and behavioural outcomes and promote the kinds of cognitions and behaviours likely to produce such outcomes.

Aims of the module

The aim of the module is to introduce the theoretical background of positive emotions as part of the PERMA model as well as to provide innovative and appealing tools for pre-school teachers in order to include the PERMA model in their class activities with the children.

By the end of this module, the teachers will be able to:

- Understand the importance and benefits of including the PERMA model in pre-school education.
- Understand the importance and benefits of positive emotions.
- Introduce the concepts of gratitude and optimism in the class activities.



- Practice concrete positive emotions activities in the class.
- Apply tools to develop positive emotions at the level of children in preschool.
- Apply activities and strategies to develop the sense of positive emotions in the class.
- Recognise the importance of positive emotional health and promote it among children.

Which concepts does this module address?

Among others two important values that the module of positive emotions address are gratitude and optimism. Below you will find a description of the two core values of this module.

1. Gratitude

Many of us express gratitude by saying “thank you” to someone who has helped us or given us a gift. From a scientific perspective, however, gratitude is not just an action: it is also a positive emotion that serves a biological purpose. Positive psychology defines gratitude in a way where scientists can measure its effects, and thus argue that gratitude is more than feeling thankful: it is a deeper appreciation for someone (or something) that produces longer lasting positivity.

“Gratitude has a dual meaning: a worldly one and a transcendent one. In its worldly sense, gratitude is a feeling that occurs in interpersonal exchanges when one person acknowledges receiving a valuable benefit from another. Gratitude is a cognitive-affective state that is typically associated with the perception that one has received a personal benefit that was not intentionally sought after, deserved, or earned but rather because of the good intentions of another person” (Emmons & Stern, 2013).

There are many synonyms of gratitude, including:

- acknowledgment
- grace
- gracefulness
- praise
- recognition
- requital
- responsiveness
- thankfulness



Children can use gratitude to form new social relations or to strengthen current ones. Acts of gratitude can be used to apologize, make amends and help solve other problems. Alternatively, people may feel gracious because it can be an intrinsically rewarding process. Simply being grateful for being alive is a great way to motivate oneself to seize the day.

The idea that tomorrow is not guaranteed is a strong motivator for some people to be their “best self” today. Gratitude is a selfless act. Its acts are done unconditionally, to show to people that they are appreciated. “A gift that is freely given” is one way to understand what these acts are like. For example, if someone is sad and you write them a note of appreciation, you are likely not asking for something in return for this person; instead, you are reminding them of their value, and expressing gratitude for their existence. At the moment, you are not waiting for a “return note” from this person. Even when we do not expect a return, sometimes they happen. Gratitude can be contagious, in a good way. Moreover, it is an educable attitude, and applying designed methods since early childhood will assure the development of respectful adults.

2. Optimism

Optimism is the attitude that good things will happen and that people’s wishes or aims will ultimately be fulfilled. Optimists are people who anticipate positive outcomes, whether serendipitously or through perseverance and effort, and who are confident of attaining desired goals. Most individuals lie somewhere on the spectrum between the two polar opposites of pure optimism and pure pessimism but tend to demonstrate sometimes strong, relatively stable or situational tendencies in one direction or the other.

Although these explanations may seem harmless, researcher Martin Seligman has found that people who explain their experiences in pessimistic ways have a higher risk for depression, lower academic and professional achievement, and lower physical health than those who hold optimistic views.

The good news, according to Seligman, is that we are not born pessimistic or optimistic—these are ways of thinking that we learn from our families and teachers, the media, and our social context.

Pessimistic explanations include the ideas that causes are permanent, pervasive, and personal, while optimistic ones are that causes are temporary, specific, and changeable with effort. As with other social and emotional competencies, optimism is a learnable skill. Children and adults can increase their optimism and improve the way they respond to small and big challenges. As educators, teachers



cannot always anticipate when students will face stressful events in their lives, but we can work to provide them with the necessary skills to navigate successfully through life.

Optimism is a protective factor—it can help people, no matter the age, respond to problems with a sense of confidence and a belief in their personal ability, even when they're under stress.

Nevertheless, optimists do better academically, socially and have better health than pessimists so it makes sense to promote the skills of optimistic thinking to children. Optimists look at the flip side of negative events for some good, some hope and some reason to be positive. The basis for optimism is in the way that a person thinks about the causes of events, which is reflected in the way he or she explains events.

Of course, children learn optimism or pessimism from their experiences of success and through their interactions with parents, teachers and other significant adults. Parents and teachers model optimism and pessimism for children. Adults model an optimistic or pessimistic attitude by the way they react to both adverse and positive events that happen in their lives.

Why do Positive Emotions matter?

Positive education is about merging flourishing—positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment—with traditional education. While many schools focus primarily on academic performance, positive education is about developing your child's sense of well-being and social responsibility. While the idea of helping students build on their strengths and nurturing their resilience and well-being has been at the heart of Montessori and Steiner approaches for some time, Dr. Martin Seligman is leading the effort to bring positive psychology into more schools.

Obviously, the need for positive education is growing with the worldwide prevalence of depression among young people (Seligman, 2020).

The module, as part of the Resilient Preschools Curriculum, will be the key of assessment of what schools and educators are doing well already and represents the tool which facilitates the adoption of the PERMA model at the level of preschool education. Consequently, by the means of the theoretical, methodological and activity background developed through the curriculum and module, it will be facilitated to embed positive education into the school strategy, so it becomes a genuine school culture. Moreover, the module will provide the evaluation framework in order to assess the effectiveness and results of positive emotions at the level of class.



Actually, the module will equip educators with all necessary tools to promote and develop positive-oriented skills and competences in students, helping them become truthful adults able to cope with challenges, stress and psychological pressure over time, cultivating a positive mind set and way of life.

Last but not least, the effects of positive psychology on children are innumerable. Happiness is contagious; those with happy friends and significant others are more likely to be happy in the future. People who perform acts of kindness towards others not only get a boost in well-being, but they are also more accepted by their peers. Gratitude is a big contributor to happiness in life, suggesting that the more we cultivate gratitude, the happier we will be (Emmons & Stern, 2013). Oxytocin may provoke greater trust, empathy, and morality in humans, meaning that giving hugs or other shows of physical affection may give you a big boost to your overall well-being. Happiness, character strengths, and good social relationships act as buffers against disappointments and setbacks (Seligman, 2020).

How does the module act?

The module is part of the holistic approach of Resilient Preschool Curriculum, focusing on training educators about the basic concepts and practises of positive emotions in order to enrich children with more wellbeing and support their flexibility to deal with situations and life. It represents a theoretical, methodological and activity content for educators on how to develop and cultivate positive emotions in order to improve communication, self-control, well-being, combat anxiety, stress and, finally, to increase the level of resilience and positivity. Using these in positive education improves mental health and life satisfaction as well as improves academic success and creative thinking.

The module is more than teaching a class in well-being and positive emotions. We know that this does not produce sustainable change. Instead, it involves training teachers and staff in the science of well-being and how it can be integrated into school curriculum. It is giving them an opportunity to learn it, implement it in their own lives, teach it to their students and embed it into all areas of the school.

Why are Positive Emotions important in the school context?

Schools now are seen as institutions where their role extends beyond academic competence to further preparing the “whole child”. In fact, the focus on schools as a means for preparing young people for adulthood is one of the hallmarks of developed countries. Therefore, it would appear schools have a duty of care to educate their students on the research and application of wellbeing and implement



interventions aimed at increasing the optimal functioning of their students and staff, thus hopefully reducing the incidence of mental illness which often appears during the early stages of puberty (Bozkurt, 2014).

The module is highly important in school context as educators will be equipped with the necessary methodology and tools in order to promote and enhance the positive emotions of their children at class, developing those skills and competencies which will assure the psychological development of future positive and healthy adults. Positive education is proposed, where schools teach achievement and accomplishment along with positive psychology-informed mental health skills. In other words, positive education wants to bring positive psychology's goals of well-being and mental health support for everyone into the school setting (Norrish, Robinson & Williams, 2011). By means of this module, educators will go beyond the class conventions and will bring positive emotions in the daily routines and activities.

Apart from the benefits for educators and children, the module will impact the entire school environment, by promoting and improving general well-being and cultivating positive attitudes. In this way, positive school systems will be created.

How to promote Positive Emotions in classroom settings?

Educators will be actively encouraged to include the module content and activities in the classroom, in the framework of different lessons or as individual and independent lessons. Moreover, positive emotions are not compulsory part of formal intervention, but they also can be part of the informal interaction between children and educators:

1. Start the day with a check-in
2. Nurture a culture of kindness
3. Build their social-emotional vocabulary
4. Allow for talk time
5. Use anchor charts to teach social-emotional skills
6. Help students manage feelings and emotions
7. Encourage expression through art
8. Share admiration and appreciation.



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Module 4: Positive Relationships

Definition of Positive Relationships

Relationships include all the various interactions that individuals have with others. Within the context of Positive Psychology, **Positive Relationships** are defined as the child's ability to create and maintain strong relationships with self and others (peers, friends, family members, carers, teachers, adults etc.) (Norrish, Robinson & Williams, 2011). The notion of Positive Relationships refers to feeling supported and loved by others, connected and secure with them (Seligman, 2011).

Children's development does not occur in isolation. Social contexts have a large influence on healthy development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For the individual, as a social creature, other people matter. Therefore, having positive relationships with others is an important part of wellbeing. In addition, establishing positive relationships may help children develop resilience skills that help them manage difficult life circumstances (Climie & Deen, 2014). Positive relationships constitute the third core pillar of wellbeing in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011).

Aims of the module

The purpose of this module is to help teachers promote positive relationships in school. More specifically, this module aims to:

- Help children to develop social and emotional skills that promote relationships with others.
- Fostering healthy interpersonal relationships.
- Learn how to positively interact with others.
- Recognize the importance of connectedness and thriving relationships.
- Learn how to develop empathy, forgiveness, kindness, and compassion towards others.

Which concepts does this module address?

Positive relationships are promoted through the development of strengths such as, kindness, empathy, forgiveness, and social intelligence; notions that constitute the virtue of humanity (Peterson



& Seligman 2004). The present section provides a definition and a short description of each value that this module addresses.

1. Kindness

Kindness refers to being nice and generous with others; doing good deeds; helping others and taking care of them. Kindness refers to “seeing with your heart” (Santomero, 2019) and its synonym is altruistic love (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Kindness can be expressed in two ways: (a) as a fleeting act directed toward strangers (e.g. giving up your seat on the bus for a mother with her infant or smiling at someone you pass in the hallway) and (b) a profound gift to family members and friends (e.g. bringing a meal to a sick neighbor; donating time and money to take care of someone in need) (Peterson & Seligman 2004).

When children are kind and compassionate, they become more aware about others’ thoughts and feelings. Therefore, they develop relationships through acts of caring and be kind towards others. According to the developmental theorists (e.g. Piaget, 1973), toddlers by the age of three are very focused on “me” and “mine”, therefore adults should more often discuss with them about the “we”. When children are three, four or five years old, adults can help children practice kindness by making them aware about the needs and the feelings of others. In addition, it is important to model kindness and encourage children in kind habits too. For preschool children this means, for example, helping an elderly neighbor or breaking a cookie in half to share with a younger brother. Another strategy to promote kindness to the children is to provide opportunities to be helpful and responsible during the daily routines. For instance, suggest helping to set the table for lunch, cleaning up the toys, plant the flowers or ask to help peers.

2. Empathy

Empathy represents someone’s ability to develop a realistic awareness of the emotional state of another, namely one individual is proposed to experience a similar emotional reaction to another person or to that person’s situation (Howe et al., 2008). As preschool children going through the ego-centric developmental stage, they are more inclined to think mostly about themselves and their immediate needs and less familiar to consider the needs and feelings of others (Piaget, 1973).

However, increased empathic ability has been associated with positive social skills, whereas deficits in empathy were related to behavioral difficulties and poor academic achievement (Dadds et al.,



2008). Specifically, helping children to develop a sense of empathy has several beneficial effects, like building stronger relationships with other children and adults (e.g., family members, teachers), promoting positive social interactions and supporting tolerance and acceptance of others.

3. Forgiveness

Forgiveness represents a set of prosocial/psychological changes that occur within an individual who has been offended or damaged by someone (Haslip et al., 2019). It refers to someone's choice to let go of anger toward someone who hurt him/her and to think, feel, or act with kindness toward that person. Forgiveness helps to repair relationships and thus promotes cooperation (Oostenbroek & Vaish, 2019). Studies showed that children, after participating in programs for learning forgiveness, performed better at school, had fewer behavior problems and more positive interactions with their parents and teachers.

4. Social intelligence

Social intelligence is a broad notion that includes the aforementioned values (e.g., kindness, empathy, forgiveness). Social intelligence refers to the quality of individuals' relationships and the way that someone interacts with others. Helping children to develop social intelligence constitutes a powerful strategy to help them build positive relationships (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Promoting social intelligence includes teaching social skills in the following areas: a) social awareness, empathy, and the ability to see things from others' points of view, (b) effective communication, listening, and conflict resolution skills; and (c) responsible decision making and considering the consequences of one's actions (CASEL, 2003).

Why do Positive Relationships matter?

Positive relationships are crucial for a child's development. Through the relationships, children learn how to think, understand, communicate, behave, express emotions and develop social skills. Social and emotional skills are rooted in secure relationships with primary adults during infancy, toddler, and preschool years (National Research Council, National Academies, 2001). Researchers suggest that individuals have a fundamental biological and psychological need for social interactions and connectedness (Ainsworth et al., 2015). Humans have a deep need to feel secure in their connections to others and to deem oneself worthy of care, compassion, love and respect (Ryan & Deci, 2000).



The growing body of literature demonstrated the benefits for preschool children of maintaining positive relationships with others. The benefits of positive relationships have been identified on a physical and psychological level. On a psychological level the support by others has been associated with wellbeing (Hicks & King, 2009). Social support constitutes an integral part to wellbeing and mental health. For instance, social support has been found to help the child by providing self-regulation in stressful times, thus contributing to coping and resilience (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In addition, researchers (e.g., Kern et al., 2015; Taylor, 2011) have found that positive relationships have been associated with greater life satisfaction, hope, gratitude, and spirituality. Positive relationships have been related with better academic outcomes too (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). On a physical level, relationships with others have been associated with better health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996).

Furthermore, the importance of positive relationships for preschool children has been demonstrated from several research studies. Research findings suggest that preschool children who experienced positive interactions with adults during infancy have fewer behavioral problems (e.g., Wartner et al., 1994) and tend to engage in more positive social interactions with peers in preschool years (e.g., Rose-Krasnor et al., 1996). They are, also, likely to engage in more successful play, be more cooperative and achieve more friendships with peers (e.g., Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). Finally, studies suggest that children who experience positive interactions during early years are more ego-resilient and are more competent to solve conflict by themselves (Suess et al., 1992).

On the other hand, children without adequate social and emotional competences may face behavioral problems with long-term, developmental implications (Ainsworth et al., 2015). Researchers found that children who have poor relationships are more likely to engage in aggressive and disruptive behaviors and may experience loneliness, low self-esteem, and an inability to successfully develop social skills (e.g., Madill et al., 2014).

How does the module act?

According to the bio-ecological model of human development, children grow and thrive within social contexts, which influence their development. Specifically, the bio-ecological model of human development describes the multiple embedded social contexts which impact direct and indirect on children's development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. According to the bio-ecological framework the child is settled in the center of these embedded social contexts, where directly interacts with the microsystem and mesosystem (e.g. the parents, family members,



teachers) and indirectly accepts the effects of the exosystem and macrosystem (e.g. the culture) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

In addition, the attachment theory suggests that children's early experiences of secure attachment with others influences aspects of their development as well as the quality of their later relationships. Through secure attachments with parents, family members, carers and peers, children explore and learn about their world. By building positive relationships, the child feels secure, safe, and confident to explore the environment (Ainsworth et al., 2015). Warm and loving interactions between an adult (e.g. parent or teacher) and the child help the child develop confidence, resilience and communication.

Both theoretical models highlight the importance of nurturing children within a context of close and dependable relationships that provide love, security, and responsive interactions. Therefore, positive relationships are fundamental for a child's development.

Why are Positive Relationships important in the school context?

Research suggests that relationships are essential for wellbeing. When considering relationships in the school context there are four types of relationships to consider: the teacher-child relationship, the teacher-parent relationship, the colleague relationships between teachers and the relationships between peers. Below it is provided a short description regarding the importance of promoting positive relationships in these four types of relationships embedded in the school context.

Teacher-child relationship

Empirical evidence has shown that high quality teacher-child relationships are important determinants of children's socio-emotional, behavioural and academic functioning at school. Researchers (Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Pianta, 2011) have identified three patterns that characterize the quality of the teacher-child relationship in early childhood education: closeness, conflict, and dependency. Closeness concerns the positive affect and children's and teachers' degree of personal communication. Conflict refers to the frequency of disagreements between teacher and children. Dependency refers to the child's degree of inappropriate developmental dependency (Gregoriadis & Tsigilis, 2008). The pattern of teacher-child relationship can positively or negatively influence children's ability to succeed in school.



Teacher-Parent Relationship

Positive relationships between teacher and parent benefit children, parents and teacher. Parents benefit by becoming more aware about how the school works and getting advice on how to support and help the children at home. An effective communication and a positive relationship between teacher and parent may encourage parents to develop a greater willingness to cooperate with school staff for children's wellbeing. Regarding teachers, poor parent-teacher relationships may contribute to teacher's burnout, add significant stress at work, increase anxiety and workload. A positive parent-teacher relationship can reduce stress and teachers may feel more valued and supported. Finally, a child can have better behaviour at school. The child may also adopt a positive attitude towards school, as a positive parent-teacher relationship makes him/her feel like the important people in his/her life are working together. In addition, a positive parent-teacher relationship can boost academic achievement as it enables both parties (teachers and parents) to cooperate and effectively plan support for a child's learning based on individual needs.

Colleague Relationships Between Teachers

Positive colleague relationships among teachers can contribute to a more positive school climate. Teaching profession is associated with high levels of perceived stress, which can be experienced as unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression (Kyriacou, 2001). In a recent study, researchers (Wolgast & Fischer 2017) found that frequent cooperation with colleagues reduced perceived stress, indicating the importance of creating and promoting positive relationships among school staff.

Relationships Between Peers

The establishment of effective and appropriate peer relationships has implications for children's cognitive, communicative, and social development. Through relationships with peers, children develop social skills, such as cooperation, sharing, helping, and problem solving. In addition, children's ability to create positive relationships with peers promotes the acquisition of self-confidence and self-esteem (Schneider et al., 2001).



How to promote Positive Relationships in classroom settings?

Below there are some good practices and connected material that preschool educators can utilize for inspiration and/or incorporate them or parts of them in their own teaching curriculum.

Practical Strategies for Building Positive Relationships with Children

Joseph & Strain (2004) proposed some practical strategies for teachers for building positive relationships with the children in the classroom:

- ✓ Share information about yourself and find something in common with the child.
- ✓ Have parents fill out interest surveys about their child.
- ✓ Find out what a child's favorite book is and read it to the whole class.
- ✓ Ask children to bring in family photos and give them an opportunity to share them with you and their peers.
- ✓ Write/draw all of the special things about a child on a T-shirt and let them wear it around.
- ✓ Listen to a child's ideas and stories and be an appreciated audience.
- ✓ Learn some of a child's home language.
- ✓ Post children's work around the classroom.
- ✓ Acknowledge a child's effort and give compliments liberally.
- ✓ Call a child's parents in front of the child to say what a great day he/she is having, or send home positive notes.
- ✓ Greet every child at the door by name.
- ✓ Play a game or play outside on the playground, with a child.
- ✓ Give hugs, "high fives", and thumbs up for accomplishing tasks.
- ✓ Hold a child's hand.
- ✓ Call a child after a bad day and say, "I'm sorry, we had a bad day today. I know tomorrow is going to be better!"
- ✓ When a child misses a day of school tell the child how much he/she missed.

Sesame Street's Everyday Heroes

In the webpage (<http://everydayheroes.sesamestreet.org>) of *Sesame Street's Everyday Heroes*, the familiar characters of Sesame Street help explain how kids can be everyday heroes through songs



and videos. Kids can even download an “Everyday Hero” badge to wear and can join the “Everyday Heroes Club.”



Picture retrieved from:

<http://everydayheroes.sesamestreet.org>

All about me book

In order for teachers to create and promote positive relationships in the classroom, it is important to gain a thorough understanding of children’s background, preferences and interests. The “All about me book” could be written each week during the school year for each child. It could include family photos, photos of the child in the classroom, some bold answers from an interview with the child, drawing from the child etc.

Good Practices in Early Childhood Education

The e-book *Good Practices in Early Childhood Education: Looking at Early Educators' Perspectives in Six European Countries* (Gregoriadis et al., 2014), includes 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 are examples that the European teachers implement in their classrooms and reflect the ideas of early childhood educators in Europe about what constitutes a good practice and a qualitatively good preschool environment. The interactive e-book is freely available on the website: <http://earlychange.teithe.gr/>



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Module 5: Achievement and Self-Esteem

Definition of Achievement and Self-Esteem

This module aims to contribute to the RESILIENT PRESCHOOLS project objectives of promoting the capacity of preschool teachers to foster the psychological resilience of preschool children and safe proof of their overall wellbeing. The value of developing these capacities, as early as preschooler's age is crucial, as the sooner children start to be aware and build up their capacities and character strengths, the better will be the results in the long- run.

The project's training package addresses several psychological traits that arise from Positive Psychology principles, Positive Education and the PERMA model of Seligman's (2011). Positive Psychology recommends evidence-based hands-on tools for enhancing people's well-being and can provide useful information and practical tools and activities for preschool teachers to help them teach their children how to strengthen their psychological resilience and improve their overall wellbeing.

Throughout this module, participants can get to know better the PERMA model, particularly, one of its fundamental human motivators – the Accomplishment / Achievement, which represents the A of PERMA acronym. In this model, **Accomplishment** is also frequently identified as achievement, mastery, or competence and is related to a sense of confidence and competence through the attainment of meaningful outcomes. Moreover, the module will also refer to the concept of **Self-esteem**, particularly, in what concerns the importance of achievement and its influence on self-concept and self-esteem.

Aims of the module

The main aim of this module is to present the theoretical background of Achievement and Self-Esteem in the framework of the PERMA model and provide useful tools and activities that preschool teachers can use with themselves and their children.

By the end of this module, the teachers will be able to:

- Understand the benefits of implementing PP and PERMA model in their practice, particularly, in what concerns the promotion of achievement and its importance for the development of self-concept and self-esteem.



- Adopt daily habits to strengthen both their achievement and well-being in preschool children.
- Adapt and apply practical activities, tools and interventions to promote self-esteem as well as a sense of accomplishment and self-motivation of their children (e.g. achievement list, peer observations, setting SMART goals, solution-focused conversations and celebration of achievements...).

Which concepts does this module address?

This module addresses Achievement/Accomplishment and Self-esteem.

1. Achievement/Accomplishment

ACCOMPLISHMENT can be defined as a process of fulfilling goals, the capability of performing daily activities and having a perception and sensation about **achievement** (Butler & Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011).

The accomplishment factor of the PERMA model intends to promote a sense of **confidence** and **competence** through the attainment of meaningful outcomes (Norrish et al., 2013, p. 152). The sense of accomplishment is a result of working towards and reaching goals and aspirations, mastering an endeavour, being motivated and having the necessary persistence to finish what you have settled. According to some authors, like Sheldon et al. (2009) accomplishing **meaningful goals** can **lead to positive emotions and wellbeing**. Therefore, accomplishment includes several dimensions like **persistence**, **perseverance**, and **passion** to attain goals. Additionally, according to some authors accomplishment can also have a positive impact on culture, as it can promote the **progress of new ideas upon culture by empowering people** to cut down barriers and work with their potentials (Slavin et al., 2012 quoted by Nebrida & Dullas, 2018).

Teachers are the biggest resource for education and school. For children wellbeing, teachers must be well too. Therefore, teachers need to manage the several stressors present in their life and for that, they need to create moments to regularly build efficacy, learn resilience and practice optimism as protective factors. In the classroom, accomplishment promotes the importance of teaching children **to take advantage of opportunities, persist in case of failure, be resilient against disappointments and maintain effort** (Morrish et al., 2018). In early childhood education, teachers can support



accomplishment when encouraging children's efforts, witness and share their achievements and feel pride in accomplishments (Baker et al., 2017). Accomplishment is key to build self-confidence and beliefs in futuristic goals (Seligman, 2011).

2. Self-esteem

The other concept addressed in the module is **SELF-ESTEEM**.

Self-esteem refers to a **person's global sense of his/her value or worth**. According to Morris Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is simply one's attitude toward oneself and this author depicted it as a "favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the self". The self-esteem concept can be defined as how much an individual appreciates and likes themselves and perceives to be a valuable person (Rosenberg, 1965). Recent studies reinforce that it is a **self-referential judgment** with a potentially significant impact on **personal** and **scholarly adaptation**, both in **motivational** and **performance** terms.

Several factors **affect the development of self-esteem** including the family, school, socio-economic status, etc. A person who feels like a valued member of the family or school is more likely to develop positive self-esteem. Self-esteem has been observed to be closely linked to feelings of self-worth (Ibidem), therefore the school can have a relevant role to protect and promote positive self-esteem as it can significantly influence the relationship between personal judgments and the definition of achievement goals.

Why Achievement and Self-Esteem matter?

The main aim of Positive Psychology is to promote the holistic wellbeing of all actors and stakeholders involved in the school ecosystem. In several countries, Positive Psychology programs have suggested positive results in terms of cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development and globally enhancing wellbeing and psychological resilience.

Teachers and students are key assets in schools. Teachers' wellbeing is deeply related to their teaching practice, retention decisions and the learning, achievement, engagement, and wellbeing of their students (Mansfield, 2020). For teachers to be able to teach and nurture happiness and well-being in their students, they first and foremost need to be happy themselves (McCallum & Price, 2010).



Therefore, an essential aim of positive education and this module **is to help teachers and students to have a mindset, design and implement activities that develop their children's potential through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes.** Accomplishment refers to the use of personal skills and effort as a person goes towards the desired goals (Seligman, 2011). For teachers and students to thrive personally and professionally, they can benefit from regularly identifying, stating, and celebrating their achievements. It is also pertinent to mention that resilience is vital to overcome potential obstacles and challenges and to persist flexible alongside the pathway to achievement. When offered to teachers the possibility to learn and experience evidence-based wellbeing interventions, they can reinforce their psychological capacity, cope better with stress, be more productive and contribute to others growth and development.

In this module, participants will gain more knowledge and tools/activities to use in their work and classroom to promote and enhance their (own and) student's positive accomplishment, in a holistic approach whereby accomplishment and wellbeing are both valued objectives that contribute to flourishing. Teachers will be more aware and engaged to start equipping their children with skills and resources to help them to dedicate effort to crucial goals, capitalise on opportunities, and cope adaptively with setbacks and challenges.

How does the module act?

This module will support participants to promote positive accomplishment and self-esteem. Through this module participants will:

- Identify the importance of goals in professional and professional life, namely in school, social activities, family and leisure time and other dimensions.
- Acknowledge the value of defining meaningful goals, connected to values. A vital component of positive accomplishment is the ability to work towards meaningful goals. Research sustains that people who have goals aligned with their values are more likely to achieve success (Sheldon & Marko, 2001).
- Learn how to define and write meaningful goals that better respond to its interests, values and competencies (using the SMART approach: specific, measurable, attractive, realistic, and timely).
- Establish wellbeing as a goal: as the definition of goals that target personal growth and connections with others can increase wellbeing (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2005).



- Valorise the celebration of achievements and their importance to positive self-esteem.
- Understand the importance of failure as a learning/growth experience and an opportunity to seek out feedback to improve performance.
- Be aware of concepts like “grit” and “resilience”. According to Seligman (2011), grit has the following formula “grit = skill x effort”, where effort is time devoted to practice, increasing skills, and obtaining experience. According to this view, natural talent and intelligence are important dimensions of success but commitment, perseverance, and continuous effort also play fundamental functions.
- Recognise the differences between fixed and growth mindsets and how change can be promoted at this level.

Why are Achievement and Self-Esteem important in the school context?

Achievement and Self-Esteem are essential for the school context, as participants will have access to knowledge and tools/activities/interventions to use in the classroom to promote and enhance their (own and) children’s **positive accomplishments and self-esteem**. Teachers will be more aware and engaged to start equipping their children with skills and resources to help them to dedicate effort to crucial goals, capitalise on opportunities, and cope adaptively with setbacks and challenges (Trautwein et al., 2006).

A vital objective of positive education is to support school children to achieve and develop their potential through striving for and accomplishing meaningful outcomes. Within this model, the spotlight on wellbeing and flourishing is interrelated with the hard work to help students to learn, perform well academically, and develop attitudes, skills, and competencies (Seligman, 2011). The value accomplishment entails helping students to embrace opportunities, learn from failures, and keep efforts in hardship (Norrish et al., 2011). The world is increasingly challenging and competitive, and schools have a key role and privileged opportunities for assisting students to cope proactively with opportunities and obstacles. Also, at the community level, it’s fundamental that children can pursue goals that will have a positive impact in the future.

Accomplishment is vital as it promotes the importance of teaching children to take advantage of opportunities, persist in case of failure and be resilient against disappointments and maintain effort and positive self-esteem. Teachers can play a key role, through the encouragement, support, witness and celebration of the children’s efforts (Norrish et al., 2011).



How to promote Achievement and Self-Esteem in classroom settings?

Some strategies that can help preschool teachers to promote children's self-esteem, confidence and achievement in the classroom are the following

- Praise and acknowledge accomplishments
- Create realistic expectations
- Embrace a growth mindset
- Increase sense of ownership
- Don't compare one child to another

In addition to these strategies, the module can be promoted in the classroom through the implementation and adaptation of the activities proposed in the guide to each preschool classroom specific context.

The proposed activities to address these subjects may be separated or organized in lessons plans (for example a lesson may be structured on two or three activities) depending on the different topics tackled and the intended pedagogical intentionality.



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