

# HOPEs

## Happiness, Optimism, Positivity and Ethos in Schools

Curriculum

Prepared by:



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## Introduction to HOPEs



Happiness, Optimism, Positivity and Ethos in schools (HOPEs) 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). The project was launched in September 2016 with 24 months duration and is implemented in five EU countries (Cyprus: Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, N. Charalambous Institute of Development Ltd, Grantxpert Consulting Ltd; Greece: Panteio University of Social and Political Studies; Ireland: Profexcel.Net Ltd [ICEPE - Institute of Child Education and Psychology, Europe]; Malta: University of Malta, & Portugal: Instituto Universitário [ISPA]). The newly developed strategic partnership was created based on extensive expertise of all members of the consortium in topics related to Positive Psychology (PP), Educational Psychology (EP) and Character Education (CE).

Strengthening teachers' ability to positively interact and influence students' behaviour and competences might result in more effective and meaningful education in schools. An innovative educational programme was developed that is based on the theoretical framework of positive psychology and character education. Trained teachers may become more motivated to improve their teaching methods and to guide their students in issues related to good character development, psychological resilience, happiness and positivity.

Character education is an emerging trend in EU education, aspiring to challenge the intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviour problems that arise from a moral decline or confusion in the value system of individuals, communities and societies. Character education involves teaching values through the curriculum, creating moral communities in schools, fostering classroom democracy and using cooperative learning and conflict resolution methods (Lickona, 1993). Both positive psychology and character education are considered prerequisites for success, both at school and thereafter.

HOPEs aims to apply joined principles, methods and techniques of positive psychology and character education in schools. By educating primary school teachers (direct target group) through training in participating EU countries, they will be in a position to transfer new knowledge and skills to school settings and specifically students (indirect target group) at a



national and an EU level. The application of the newly proposed training programme may lead to the development of students' happiness – good character and better academic achievement.



## Broad Objectives

HOPEs intends to support the development and implementation of new approaches in primary education by enhancing the efforts of teachers to get accustomed to current trends and strengthen their professional and personal development. The development of a new curriculum that rests on the theoretical framework of positive psychology and character education is expected to result in an increase of teachers' (prospective and practicing) professional skills. By integrating positive aspects in the academic curriculum, HOPEs aims to motivate teachers to improve their teaching methods leading to a more effective teaching, which in turn might increase positivity, resilience and engagement among young students. Developing an innovative curriculum that combines PP aspects with CE resources may achieve a more advantageous school environment for students and educators providing them with the necessary tools to improve their academic, and professional development as well as their quality of life in general.

### The Objectives of the project:

- To develop, test and publish an innovative educational package based on PP and CE, in both hardcopy format, and as an online platform,
- To enrich teachers' personal and professional development focusing on five educational pillars: positive emotions, values and character strengths, positive purpose, positive coping and positive relationships.
- To familiarize primary school teachers with the principles, methods and techniques of PP and CE to create a positive culture in schools, based on panhuman values.

In particular, training teachers using the HOPEs programme is expected to increase their job satisfaction, self-esteem, resilience and happiness levels, contribute to their self-regulation ability, increase their engagement level, and to positively influence their schools (students and

other faculty members) and communities. Thus, schools and communities are expected to become more solution oriented rather than focusing on problems. Development of a positive culture in schools might contribute to the well-being levels and prevention of behavioural problems in students. Students will be provided with tools to help them become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and to increase their self-esteem. Finally, it is expected that students will become better able to handle stress and develop critical-thinking and decision-making skills in order to make responsible decisions based on universal values such as responsibility and respect.

HOPEs has a transnational character since the development of the training programme will involve 7 organizations from 5 different EU countries. Moreover, the applications of PP and CE can be beneficial for all humans regardless of nationality, race and geographical location. The goals of PP are shared widely, both within societies and across the world. Research has identified a range of character strengths and virtues that are valued by all major cultures because of their contribution to individual and societal flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

## Positive Psychology: An introduction



Positive psychology is a new and fast-growing field in the science of psychology that focuses on the positive dimensions of human existence. Its purpose is to uncover, understand and strengthen the factors that help people flourish and function optimally as individuals, as groups and as societies (Gable & Haidt, 2005). In other words, positive psychology aims at building and developing the best qualities in life. The purpose of positive psychology is to re-orient psychological theory, research and practice from what is wrong and how to fix it to what is right and how to strengthen it. Positive psychology redirects the focus of psychology to the ordinary human being, to the study of common human strengths and virtues and to successful human functioning (Sheldon & King, 2001). It also emphasizes positive mental health, positive development and positive aging, positive relationships, positive education and positive work environments.

The field of positive psychology is aimed at three different levels – the subjective, the individual and the group level (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The subjective level involves the study of positive experiences such as positive emotions, happiness, meaning in life, optimism, hope, and flow (these will be further discussed in the curriculum). The individual level comprises the study of the personal qualities that define a “good person” (Boniwell, 2012) and focuses on character strengths and virtues such as capacity for love, courage, forgiveness, creativity and wisdom. Positive psychology, however, goes beyond the subjective and personal levels and includes the study of positive institutions such as democracy or a strong family; these institutions constitute the foundation of virtues and positive emotions (Seligman, 2002). At this level positive group and community qualities such as social responsibility, altruism, and work ethics are also emphasized (Boniwell, 2012).

The ultimate goal of positive psychology is to create interventions that attempt to improve people’s lives, both on an individual and social level. A broad range of interventions targeting different populations and contexts have been created with the purpose to increase happiness and well-being, improve physical and mental health, or develop resilience (Parks-Sheiner, 2009). All these interventions have a common element: their aim is not to move people



from dysfunction to average functioning but to help them move towards optimum functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Education is a field that can and has benefited from the incorporation of positive psychology principles and interventions. In particular, positive education aims at teaching schoolchildren both conventional skills and skills to improve their well-being and resilience (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In other words, positive psychology can be combined with traditional education so that emphasis is given not only to training the mind but also to training the heart. The introduction of positive psychology at schools could help students cope with life's adversities, develop positive attitudes towards themselves, function positively and contribute to society (Waters, 2014). Seligman et al. (2009) argue that there are three important reasons to teach well-being in schools: "as an antidote to depression, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking" (p. 295).

These claims have been supported by research. A number of school-wide interventions which use the principles of positive psychology have been tested scientifically, showing very promising results in increasing student well-being and improving relationships and academic performance (Waters, 2011).

In terms of prevention, school interventions that focus on cultivating students' well-being and resilience have shown important reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety, hopelessness and behavioral problems (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Seligman et al., 2009). Other programmes focusing on social and positive character development have resulted in lower rates of negative behaviors such as bullying, lower substance use and violence (Beets et al., 2009; Li et al., 2011).

The capacity of positive psychology interventions to improve well-being and life satisfaction has also been supported by research. For example, it has been demonstrated that positive qualities such as hope, life satisfaction and self-worth can be enhanced by a brief hope intervention and that this enhancement can be maintained for 18 months after the intervention (Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009).



Finally, in terms of school achievement, research has shown that school programmes that target behavior and character can positively influence achievement, attendance and disciplinary outcomes (Snyder et al., 2010).

These research findings clearly show the many benefits of incorporating positive psychology in education, both in the prevention of negative outcomes and in the promotion of positive outcomes for children, and ultimately, for the whole school community and society.

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## Values & Character Strengths: An Introduction



Character, citizenship, civic, and moral education are terms that are used to cover a broad category of qualities such as; respect, responsibility, empathy, caring, tolerance, and service to others. Often these terms are used interchangeably as there is no single teaching approach or agreed content (Arthur & Harrison, 2012). The HOPEs project consortium has agreed to use the term “Character” and “Character Education” (CE) throughout the curriculum. The rationale behind this is that the Greek term “*êthikos*” (ethical) is the adjective related with *êthos* (character), as the project’s name implies [Happiness, Optimism, Positivity and Ethos in schools]. Moral virtue, or excellence of character, are a combination of qualities that make a person ethically admirable. Moreover, the term “character” used in this curriculum has no associations with dogma.

Aristotle, like other philosophers, proposed that a happy life should give a valuable place to the exercise of virtues, as these are not products of fortune but rather of learning and cultivation. Thus, virtuous exercise perfects human life. Virtues have two different components according to Aristotle, the behavioural aspect (action) and the psychological aspect (right motives, aims, concerns, & perspective) / cognitive aspect (knowledge and belief). Thus, the education of emotional responses is vital for the development of a virtuous character. To conclude, Aristotle believed that if emotional responses are taught properly, then people will take pleasure or pain in the right things.

Character education is being revived in the last few years, since it faded away towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century for a variety of reasons. Before this, since ancient times and up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century character education was cultivated as a priority, thus it is not a new concept.

The roots of character education can be found in philosophical paradigms, for example, Aristotle proposed that our character can be cultivated through the development of habits and virtues, with the support of the community. Teachers and parents can help children to learn to know, to love and to practice good action. He saw character as being built voluntarily by individuals themselves, and this leads to a good life (Vargas, Gonzalez-Torres, 2009).



On the other hand, Rousseau (18<sup>th</sup> Century) gave emphasis to the autonomy of children to form habits of their own, since he thought people are naturally predisposed towards good. This entailed that a child should be unrestricted and free of influences, as he thought that these children would develop into adults that are masters of themselves that attend to their own reason and will (Vargas, Gonzalez-Torres, 2009).

Humanistic psychology has been influenced by Aristotle's ethics. The movement of Humanistic Psychology, influenced by the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, gave a different emphasis to psychology. Whereas traditional psychology saw what was wrong with people, humanistic psychology focused on enhancing human potential, and humanists sought to identify a positive model for human growth that viewed individuals in a more holistic way. Thus, the positive scope of human flourishing is based on the Aristotelian worldview, later influenced by humanistic psychology, and more recently by positive psychology. The positive psychology trend that has emerged has revitalised the concept of character education and strengths, with new methodologies for research and education (Jubilee Centre, 2017).

The cultivation of character is a process that requires the efforts of both the developing individual and the society and its schools. A society that has decided to empower its members to live well will treat character education as a right every child has. Good character can lead to a flourishing life and learning how to balance virtues and values should be of great interest to schools. Flourishing means to fulfil ones' potential and be happy. It requires moral, intellectual and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, and generic virtues of self-management (known as enabling and performance virtues). All are necessary to achieve full potential in life. Through character education, children will develop to become confident and companionate individuals who contribute to the society.

Character education is not about indoctrination and mindless conditioning. The ultimate goal of all proper character education is to equip students with the intellectual tools to make wise choices of their own, within the framework of a democratic society. Critical thinking is a fundamental component of a well-rounded character.

The development of the HOPEs curriculum was based on the Aristotelian model, where children learn values, love these values and learn how to practice them to become habits, with

the help of teachers and parents. The rationale is to help students become smart and to become good (Lickona, 1991, pg6).



For the purpose of this project, the consortium carried out research to identify the psychological state of primary school teachers in the five partner countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Malta and Portugal). This was done in order to observe; depression, stress, anxiety, resilience and well-being levels of teachers. In addition to these, another questionnaire was given, that deals with CE. Teachers were presented with 12 panhuman values (love, offer, responsibility, boldness, justice, cooperation, citizenship, peace, respect, leadership, modesty and freedom) and were asked to prioritise and evaluate them on a Likert Scale. According to this research, the top 4 values that are most prominent are; love, peace, respect and responsibility, and these are the values that this curriculum aims to help children learn the knowledge, to love them and get to practice them through experiential activities.



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## \*Module 1: Introduction to Positive Emotions\*



### What are Emotions?

Emotions should be differentiated from other affective states as mood or feeling states. Emotions can be characterized as short and intense affective episodes being a reaction or subjective response to a particular event or person that is important to the individual (Fridja, 1988; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2004). A mood tends to be longer lasting general affective state without a specific referent. Feeling states are usually associated with physical sensations. Emotions differ from physical sensations because emotions require cognitive appraisals to be initiated whereas physical sensations (e.g. pleasure) can be caused simply by changing the immediate physical environment (e.g.: eating).

Emotions are understood as a flexible response sequence arising when the subject evaluates the situation as relevant or as offering important challenges and opportunities (Gross, 1998; Koole et al., 2011). Emotions are generated from person-situation transactions which an individual perceives as relevant (Jacobs & Gross, 2014).

The main components of emotions are:

- appraisal (one's interpretation of the situation);
- subjective experience (one's previous experiences);
- physiological change (body temperature and heart rate);
- emotional expression (facial expressions);
- action tendencies (laugh and cry out).

Emotions facilitate decision making; motivate us to action; help us to survive/adapt in the world; help us to understand others; and help others to understand us.

### What is Emotional Literacy (EL)?

Emotional literacy can be conceptualized as the ability to process emotional information, enabling people to differentiate affective states, to differentiate between emotions and the





resulting actions, to interpret own and others affective states, and to express emotions adequately.



Goleman (1996) suggested five core concepts for the development of Emotional Literacy:

- self-awareness (capacity to recognise your feelings as they happen),
- emotional control (self-regulation of emotional reactions),
- motivation (determination to work with your emotions to overcome challenge),
- empathy (emotional sensibility to other's feelings),
- social skills (social skills to work collaboratively or to lead people).

## Why are Emotions Important in Learning and Teaching?

Emotions are present in our daily lives as well as in the school context, and for this reason emotional competence plays an important role in well-being and in learning and teaching. Research shows that individuals with high emotional competence effectively manage their feelings, handle stress, confront failure with optimism and persist in the face of difficulty (Tait, 2008). Thus, the promotion of emotional skills is highly beneficial to individuals' global adjustment, development and well-being (Moreira et al., 2010; Shankland & Rosset, 2016; Valiente et al., 2012).

In this sense, in recent years, a dynamic approach to the emotional dimension in the school setting has been promoted through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which gradually established a presence within school curricula (e.g., Humphrey et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Research on different SEL programmes showed that this kind of programmes were associated to better academic performance and learning (Zins et al., 2004).

## Why Positive Emotions matter?

Everyone wants to feel good as much as possible. But feeling good is not only desired but also desirable. Experiencing positive emotions is frequently a good thing for any individual person and for others around them. Evidence from empirical data shows that experienced and expressed positive emotions relate to well-being, quality of life, sociability, altruism, liking of self and other



people, having better health and stronger immune systems, having more effective conflict resolution skills, greater resistance to adversity, coping, and having more original thinking or creativity (Burns et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2006; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Isen et al., 1987; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Sin, 2016; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

## How Positive Emotions Act?

The Broaden and Build Theory of positive emotions (BBT) proposes that positive emotions broaden people's momentary attentional resources, and the scope of their cognition and behaviour repertoires (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2013; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). This broader awareness creates opportunities to build enduring social, intellectual, psychological and physical personal resources (Fredrickson et al., 2008) due to the creation of patterns of thinking more open to information, more integrative, more flexible, more creative, and more open to wider behavioural options (e.g. Bolte et al., 2003; Compton et al., 2004; Dreisbach, 2006; Estrada et al., 1997; Kahn, & Isen, 1993; Phillips et al., 2002; Pyone, & Isen, 2011). Those built resources produce subsequent experiences of positive emotions, triggering upward spirals toward emotional, mental and physical well-being and optimal functioning (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Garland et al., 2010).

Through broadening attention and thinking, positive emotions can create the opportunities to build new, or reinforce existing, mental, psychological, social and physical resources. Children playing at the schoolyard or young adolescents engaging in outdoor social activities, for instance, could primarily be motivated by pleasure itself but they also contribute to developing physical resources (e.g. strength, coordination, cardiovascular resistance), social (e.g., new and stronger friendships), intellectual (e.g. problem-solving skills and new information learning) and psychological (develop sense of direction and goal-setting, resilience and optimism) (Fredrickson, 2003).

Research on the build hypothesis of Broaden and Build Theory (BBT) shows that all these impacts of the broadening awareness of positive emotions may actually occur (Fredrickson, 2013). Longitudinal research shows that daily experience of positive emotions predicts

broadened coping resources and greater trait resiliency, self-efficacy beliefs, more self-control (willingness to wait for desired rewards) and future-oriented time thinking without discounting the value of future results, interpersonal trust in close relationships, and social connectedness (e.g., Cohn et al., 2009; Gable et al., 2006; Mauss et al., 2011; Pyone, & Isen, 2011; Salavanova et al., 2006; Salavanova et al., 2011). These increments on psychological functioning then predict greater frequency of positive emotions giving support to the reciprocal and sequential effects of positive emotions (Garland et al., 2010).

### Why Positive Emotions are Important in School Context?

Positive emotions contribute to academic adjustment, because they encourage exploring, combining diverse materials, and broadening strategies and methods to solve problems.

At a more global level the effects of positive emotions can be traced to academic achievement, level of satisfaction with school, and school engagement (Graziano et al., 2007; Reschly et al., 2008; Valiente et al., 2012). At a more specific level, positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope, pride, contentment and enthusiasm are related to the willingness to approach, invest effort, and to repeat the task and the learning experience (Ouweneel et al., 2011; Reschly et al., 2008; Suldo et al., 2011). Furthermore, the described effects of positive emotions on cognitive processing (see “How Positive Emotions Act?” section) improve memory, comprehension and knowledge construction, facilitating learning, as well as thinking creatively and flexibly, motivating exploratory behaviour, and reinforcing problem-solving skills (Cohn et al., 2009; Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Hinton et al., 2008; Isen et al., 1987).

Positive emotions also foster emotional (Schmid et al., 2011) and social (Richards, & Huppert, 2011; Shin, et al., 2011) positive outcomes.

Efficient emotional regulation skills are also essential, as the learning process sometimes entails negative emotional experiences (e.g. stress and test anxiety). Building positive emotions and happiness in the classroom has been linked to an improvement in important personal resources such as adaptive coping skills (Reschly et al., 2008) and a sense of resiliency (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2006) that helps students sustain effort and

determination while dealing with emotional difficulties in the process of learning and interactions with others. Research also shows that positive emotions facilitate recovery from negative emotional experiences (Frederickson & Levenson, 1998; Papousek et al., 2010). All these results put evidence on the value of positive emotions in children and adolescents' well-being and flourishing in the school context.

The research in positive psychology shows that the success of programmes and interventions depends on the active collaboration among transdisciplinary professionals. Moreover, positive education can function both as preventive and promotional, having higher efficacy when implemented as a whole-school approach with a practical application framework (Kibe & Boniwell, 2015).

Some studies highlight the role of the teacher, the instructional strategies, and the interpersonal relationships in classrooms to encourage the experience of frequent positive emotions in students (Graziano et al., 2007; Reschly et. al., 2008). Positive emotions may broaden students' thinking, coping, and engagement in their schooling. According to these ideas Frederickson (2001) states that focusing on personal and environmental assets in educational organization may increase the possibility of students experiencing positive emotions in school, encouraging an "upward spiral" of success.

## How to promote Positive Emotions in the Classroom?

The promotion of positive emotions in the classroom implies the construction of safe learning environments where students' basic psychological needs are satisfied and they feel free to express their feelings. Thus, a positive tone must be the cornerstone of teacher action, providing situations for students to express and understand their emotions (Coelho & Figueira, 2011; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Seligman et al., 2012).

From a methodological point of view, it implies the use of active learning methodologies, which aim to promote knowledge acquisition in an integrated way, as well as the development of attitudes and competencies in students. Furthermore, the learning environments should

support the construction of autonomy and the development of feelings of competence and engagement by students (Carvalho et al., 2016; Coelho & Figueira, 2011; Coelho et al., 2016).



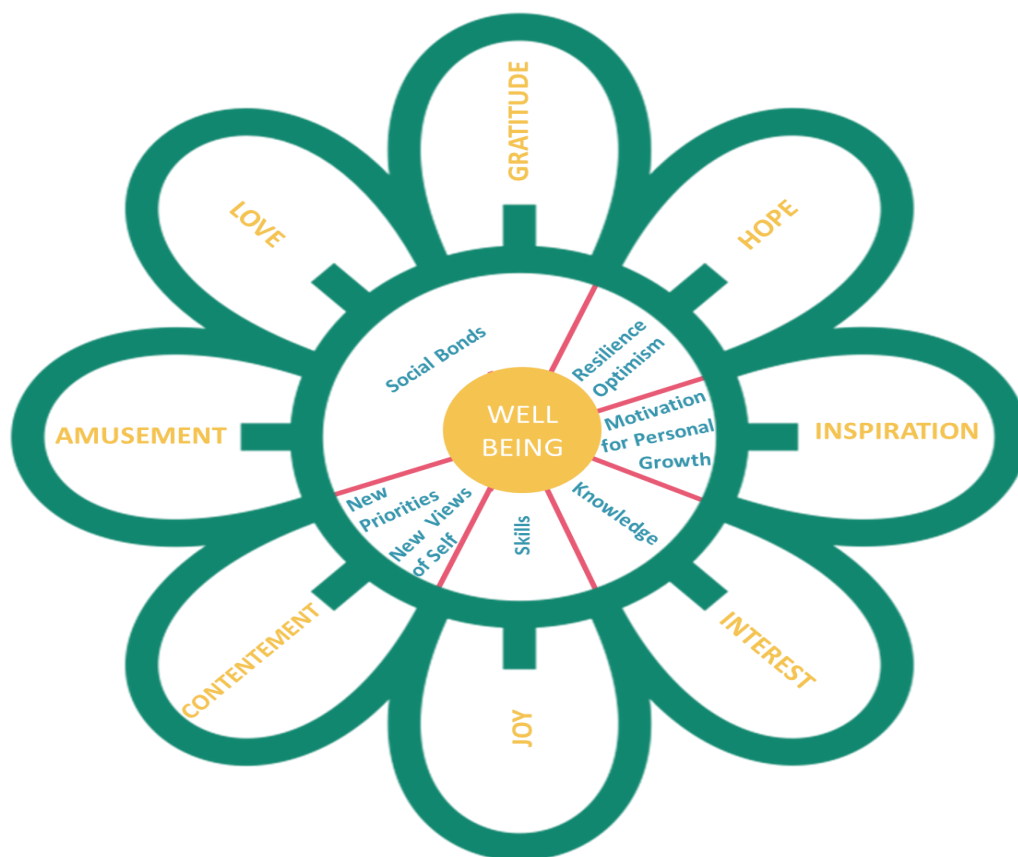
## Which Positive Emotions does this Module Address?

This module addresses the following positive emotions: joy, love, gratitude, contentment, interest, inspiration, amusement and hope.

Pekrun, Goets, Titz and Perry, (2002), in a literature review (relating emotions to learning, tests, performance, work or achievement), identified a set of positive emotions usually studied which comprise: joy, pride, enthusiasm, hope, gratitude and relief. The diversity of positive emotions is also emphasized by Fredrickson (2013) who identified the 10 more frequently experienced in people's daily life: love, joy, gratitude, contentment, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration and awe. Love is identified as the most frequently felt positive emotion. It is usually felt in safe interpersonal relationships. Joy arises when an unexpected good situation/event occurs. Gratitude emerges when a good result/occurrence is attributed to another person. Contentment, arises when circumstances are considered as appreciated, valued, right or satisfying. Interest develops in situations viewed as safe and also with novelty and challenge. Differing from the other positive emotions Hope arises in dire circumstances, when one fears the worst but expects to have a chance of getting better. Pride emerges when one achieves important outcomes that are socially valued. People can feel Amusement when some 'non-serious social incongruity' occurs. Inspiration emerges when people observe a good action or performance. Awe arises when people are overwhelmed by something or towards someone beautiful or powerful (Fredrickson, 2013).

According to Fredrickson (2013), experiencing positive emotions helps to build durable resources. These resources are different according to the emotion felt. Figure 1 below (The "Emotions Daisy") represents the relationship between positive emotions and the associated resources. At the heart of the figure we include well-being which can be affected both by positive emotions and by the resources that positive emotions help to build.

Fig. 1 – “Emotions Daisy”



### Aims of this module

Through the activities of this module children will:

1. Develop emotional literacy which comprise:
  - a) to know their own emotions better;
  - b) to identify emotions expressed by others;
  - c) to label emotions correctly;
2. Learn to express different emotions
3. Develop and learn to express positive emotions in different situations: positive, neutral and potentially negative situations;
4. Learn to use positive emotions in interpersonal contexts

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## \*Module 2: Introduction to Values & Character Strengths \*



### What is Character?

The word character derives from the Greek word “χαρακτήρας,” which is used to refer to a mark impressed upon a coin. The word today though means the set of qualities that are typical to a person, i.e.: a person’s manner reflects their character. Character is the composite of psychological characteristics that impact the child’s capacity and tendency to be an effective moral advocate, i.e.: to be socially and personally responsible, ethical, and self-managed (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). Good character is not the absence of deficits and problems but rather a well-developed family of positive traits (Park & Peterson, 2009). Character traits are “concerned with a person’s moral worth” (Goldie, 2004, p. 27). They are what defines a person’s integrity (Homiak, 2016). A morally mature person respects human dignity, cares about the welfare of others, integrates individual interest and social responsibilities, illustrates integrity, reflects on moral choices and seeks peaceful management of conflict (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development -ASCD, 1988). Thus, character is an aspect of depth and morality, whereas personality traits are biological innate traits, such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Prince, as cited in Fernald, 1920).

### What is Character Education?

*“Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity. When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it’s clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe is right- even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within” (Lickona, 1991, pg., 51).*

There are several definitions of character education. It has been proposed that character education is the strategic instruction that promotes social and personal responsibility and the



development of the good character traits and moral virtues that make this possible (Vessels & Boyd, 1996). Others (Fertman & van Linden, 1999), have proposed that it is the formal instruction in honesty, trust, cooperation, respect, responsibility, hope, determination, and loyalty. Tomaselli and Golden (1996) defined it as everything the school does to help students make better, more effective choices and decisions; the students must identify, understand, and learn how to act on their own values.

The Character Education Partnership states that it is “the long-term process of helping young people develop good character, i.e. knowing, caring about, and acting on core ethical values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for self and others” (p. 3). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) on the other hand defines character education as whatever schools do to influence how students think, feel, and act regarding issues of right and wrong (ASCD, 1988).

## Why is Character Education Important in Learning and Teaching?

The teaching of good character is particularly important in today’s society since adolescents face many opportunities and challenges unknown to earlier generations. They are flooded with a lot of information and influences through the media, parents, teachers, and peers in today’s culture. At the same time, there are many more day-to-day pressures interrupting the time that parents and children have together (Haynes, & Thomas, 2007). Thus, it is challenging for children to find reliable and consistent ethical paradigms that will direct their development and later life.

## What are Values and Virtues?

The justification for teaching values is to achieve a supportive classroom environment, where students have the opportunity to express themselves in a free manner, and be tolerant of other people’s opinions (Brady, 2011).

Values, just like habits, need to be cultivated when there is appropriate motivation and skills to act on them through repetition. For instance, an ethically good value such as respect can

become a virtue when we act on it, respecting others. Aristotle stated *“Virtues are not mere thoughts but habits we develop by performing virtuous actions”* (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Taking it a step further, virtuous activity is a crucial component of happiness (Aristotle).

All virtues have three components. These are moral knowledge (“the head”), moral feeling (the “heart”) and moral behaviour (the “hand”). Moral knowledge refers to comprehending the specific virtue and its requirements in association with human relationships. Moreover, one should be emotionally committed to it, namely feeling guilty when not practiced, and have a moral indignation when others are wrongly treated. This shows moral feeling. Moral behaviour on the other hand, is practicing the value. Hence, a value becomes a virtue through our behaviour (Lickona, 1997).

To become a good teacher, it is a necessity to demonstrate good character and commitment to the value of what is being taught. The integrity of character of teachers is as important as the mastery of the academic subject taught (The Jubilee Centre, n/d). Thus, to cultivate good character in children teachers need to demonstrate good character, help students to get accustomed with what virtues are, to appreciate why they are important and create a desire to acquire them, and finally, help their students practice them on a daily basis. To create this desire and for children to be open to being taught values, adults need to develop caring relationships with children, where they demonstrate respect, for character education to be transmitted (Lickona, 1997). When students identify their own values, it helps them direct their lives as they wish (Lipe, undated, 6). This affirmation of values protects against a variety of stressors by expanding people’s views of themselves and their resources and facilitating perspective on what is most important (Baer, 2015).

## What are Character Strengths?

Character strengths can be defined as positive and stable personality traits that become apparent in our thoughts (cognition), feelings (affect), willing (conation or volition) and action (behaviour). A character strength is “a disposition to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human



flourishing” (Yearley, 1990, p, 13). They have a moral value and benefit oneself and others. They are seen as the basic building blocks of human goodness and human flourishing. A strength is different from a talent as the former is valued for moral and intrinsic reasons whereas the latter is valued for its tangible outcomes (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

All people have a unique set of character strengths, as they can be high or low on different strengths. These can be expressed in different situations and different degrees according to the social situation they are in. Character strengths are plural, and combined they form a complex profile, and usually they are expressed in combination (e.g. love and humility). Thus, they interact with each other and can increase or decrease other strengths. They are stable but can change over time, due to important life events or as a result of interventions or conscious lifestyle changes.

A **balanced** expression of character strengths is important, as they can be overused or underused (Niemiec, 2013). As Aristotle (2000) stated, the right combination of strengths, expressed to the right degree, in the right situation is the golden mean of character strengths.

There is an increasing interest in positive child and adolescent development, and particularly the advantages of cultivating good character. For this reason, a theoretical framework has been developed, as well as a classification structure of virtues, the Values-In-Action – Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is a multidimensional perspective to character, with 24-character strengths, that fall under six categories. Wisdom includes strengths as creativity, curiosity, judgement, love of learning and perspective. Courage incorporates bravery, perseverance, honesty and zest. Humanity involves strengths such as love, kindness and social intelligence. Justice contains teamwork, fairness and leadership. Temperance includes forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation. Transcendence incorporates appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality (please refer to Appendix 1 for definitions).

Adolescents that take the online survey, receive their scores in hierarchical order (from 1-24), and the “top five” represent the person’s strengths profile (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These top five-character strengths are the ones that people feel they own and practice often, even though they possess all the strengths, the difference is the degree (Park & Peterson, 2009).

It has been demonstrated that people who first identify them, and then use them in a new way on a daily basis are happier (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005), since they feel fulfilled. These strengths have an association to peoples' sense of self, identity and authenticity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As a result, their levels of well-being increase (Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2011).

Character strengths need to be practiced, as virtues to become habits. However, if they are not encouraged, they may be lost over the course of development (Peterson, 2006). They are strengthened through regular activity and application in life (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005).

Helping students find their character strengths is very important for their well-being, but it becomes crucial with students that face academic, emotional and behavioural, and disability challenges (Park, 2015). As everyone has their individual strengths independent of their academic progress, children feel that intrinsically rewarded when they explore and exercise them (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eadese, Linley, 2011). Teachers can help students to compare their strengths within themselves, identify the most prominent, and assist them to apply them in their daily routines. Moreover, when it is done in the classroom setting, children have the opportunity to recognise and appreciate that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses (Peterson, 2006).

There is growing evidence that cultivating character and character strengths in children and adolescents helps their well-being and overall flourishing (Park & Peterson, 2009; The Jubilee Centre, n/d). This means that character strengths are not only important in cultivating happiness but also to fulfil one's potential (The Jubilee Centre, n/d).

Moreover, character strengths are related to life satisfaction, reduced psychopathology, less internalising and externalising behaviour problems, and better academic achievement (Park & Peterson, 2009). Life satisfaction is related to school satisfaction, teacher support, and perceived academic achievement, competence, and self-efficacy (Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006), but also works as a protective factor against stress and developing other psychological disorders (Suldo & Huebner, 2004).

Activities that help people cultivate their character strengths have been found to increase happiness and well-being in adults (Seligman et al., 2005, 2009; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) and adolescent happiness (Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eades, Linley, 2011). It was found that in youth participating in such interventions, their self-esteem and positive affect were increased.

According to the Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), it seems that children experience positive emotions from cultivating their personal character strengths, and thus their life satisfaction is enhanced. The after-effect of such interventions will help to develop long-lasting resources that will empower them to flourish in a variety of areas in their life.

### Why does Positive Character matter?

Character education and development acts as a foundation for personal growth. By practicing skills and traits such as responsibility, that promote development of character, children are in a position to build a pool of skills and strengths that can help them throughout their lives. For example, self-esteem, resilience and integrity are traits that can support children at home, in the school environment and in the wider community (Meiners, 2015).

Moreover, character development is the bedrock for lifelong learning. This is the ongoing, self-motivated pursuit of knowledge. This can be for personal and/or professional purposes. Thus, it aids in self-sustainability (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). It has been demonstrated that schools that have incorporated character education in their schools, had positive outcomes such as; increased academic performance and attendance and decreased behavioural problems (e.g. Snyder, Flay, Vuchinich, Acock, Washburn, Beets, Kin-Kit, 2010).

Character education acts as a good basis for which stable and lasting relationships are built on. The rationale is that as they learn of virtues such as; respect, responsibility, love and peace, they learn to think of others and their needs, together with their own. Moreover, children will be happier as they are taught skills such as cooperation and teamwork through safe opportunities at the school and at home (Meiners, 2015).

## How does Character Education Act?



Character Education (CE) is about promoting a core set of universally acknowledged values, and not about promoting moral ideas of a particular system (The Jubilee Centre, n/d). By offering children this opportunity, they will be better equipped to flourish – i.e. to fulfil their potential. To flourish, students need intellectual, moral and community virtues as well as self-management values. CE helps in the process of acquiring these skills and then strengthening them. The aim of schools should be in helping students reach their full potential, flourish, and become thriving learners, effective contributors and later on responsible citizens (The Jubilee Centre, n/d).

This is achieved when children learn what is ethically important and act accordingly, since they know what type of person they want to become. Hence, CE provides the rationale, language and tools to help students to develop. This intellectual process (or practical wisdom) benefits children as they become reflective and autonomous, learning to choose alternative behaviours in challenging situations. Hence, critical thinking is a dynamic aspect of a balanced character, and the progression is empowering and liberating to children (The Jubilee Centre, n/d).

Thus, CE can shape good citizens. Our character affects others, since it is something we communicate to others every day through our behaviour. Therefore, good character influences homes, schools and communities. Children need character education so they have virtues that anchor them. Without it, children may not realise the consequences of their actions or the needs of others. Developing a respectful and responsible character is a skill every child needs in order to thrive, find fulfilment, and be an influence for good in society (Meiners, 2015).

## Why is Character Education Important in School Context?

Schools must concentrate on attaining a balance between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains at the different stages of child development, thus both CE and academic competencies are important (Williams, 2000).



Delinquency has been a problem for schools and communities. As a consequence, short-term solutions were proposed in schools (e.g.: guards at the school premises). However, measures need to be long-term. Character education concentrated on the causes of violence and aggression and facilitated making the school environment safe, where such behaviours were detected and prevented (Schaeffer, 1999). Schools have the responsibility of developing academic education as well as ethical values in children, as this will result in good citizens. A good citizen is one that knows and understands rights and responsibilities in their society (Schaeffer, 1998).

## How to promote Positive Character in the Classroom?

### Models of Character Education:

<b>Direct instruction:</b>	A direct instruction paradigm advocates teaching young people the virtues of society. There is a strong focus on the training of habits, or virtuous behaviour.
<b>Indirect instruction:</b>	An indirect instruction paradigm focuses on building a child's understanding and socio-moral development, which in turn emphasizes the interpersonal interactions of peers under the guidance of caring adults.
<b>Community building:</b>	The community building paradigm focuses on the environment and caring relationships and on building moral communities (Williams, 2000).

The research on CE has demonstrated that there are pedagogical strategies that are most prevalent and effective when teaching CE. These are;

1. Professional development for implementation,
2. Direct Teaching Strategies,
3. Family/Community Participation, and,
4. Modelling/Mentoring

(Berkowitz, & Bier, 2005).

## Professional development for implementation:

The first one is considered important for effective pedagogy, that is, teachers should receive training on the material they would like to implement in their classes. This is the reason why professional development is vital, as teachers need to feel confident to teach CE.

The most widespread interactive strategies are; role playing, cooperative learning, and peer discussions. These are reviewed in the methodology section more analytically (see pages 90, 91, 93 for a description).

### 1. Direct Teaching Strategies

Might include instruction/demonstration/speakers. Furthermore, these strategies may take the form of classroom lectures given by the teacher, or demonstration of technical skills or first-hand accounts of various historical events.

### 2. Family/Community Participation

Teachers often face the challenge that academic and character education are not reinforced at home from parents. Parent training is a technique that can help with this challenge, as parents have the opportunity to receive training on; parenting skills, advice on how to help their children develop positive connections to peers, negotiation and problem-solving. Schools can also send home activities that students can do at home with parents. Furthermore, schools can incorporate activities that encourage community involvement in schools and student/parent involvement in their community.

The school can help parents with educating them on matters like, their role in character development and how character is cultivated. Moreover, schools can send material at home. Parents can take part in surveys and offer commentary on materials. These actions build trust between the school and parents, and thus, both can work as partners in character education.

### 3. Modelling/Mentoring

The relationships between students and teachers needs to be one of quality, as this will serve as a foundation for the teaching process. Adult role models may be incorporated to

demonstrate how they made a positive change in people's lives. This will help students identify with and develop the skills to be successful in their future (Berkowitz, & Bier, 2005).

There is also a model of CE that can be applied at school settings (Linkona, 1991), and it will be briefly discussed. This model consists of 9 classroom strategies and 3 schoolwide strategies.

### Classroom strategies:

#### 1. Teachers as caregivers, models, mentors

Teachers can act as caregivers, moral models and moral mentors. Being an effective caregiver would involve being compassionate and respecting students, being helpful to students, and hence, building their self-respect. Moral reasoning can take place when teachers take the time to discuss morally meaningful events. Teachers can act as ethical mentors when they deliver moral guidance through explanation, storytelling, classroom discussion, and encouragement of positive behaviour.

#### 2. An ethical learning community

Furthermore, teachers should aim to create an ethical learning community. Children need to develop good and quality relationships with their teachers and their peers. Children should feel that they are members of their community, have a support system and feel responsible towards it.

#### 3. Character-based discipline

Discipline should act as a tool for moral growth, helping pupils to cultivate their self-control and respect for themselves and others. When teachers want to establish rules, emphasis should be on doing the right thing because it respects the rights and needs of others, and not based on rewards and punishment. Moreover, teachers can share their responsibility for classroom order with their students, and by inviting them to help construct good class rules, the teacher gives students the opportunity to develop moral insight into the necessity of rules and develop a commitment to follow them.

#### 4. A democratic classroom environment

Students should be involved on a systematic basis and in developmentally appropriate ways, in shared decision-making to find ways to make their classroom the best place to be and to learn. This will increase the responsibility of students and their engagement. Students have a support structure, where they feel accountable to practice virtues such as respect and responsibility.

#### 5. Teaching character through curriculum

Teachers can use the content of the curriculum to teach values too as the two can intersect, and teachers can find ways to incorporate these in any subject. It is important for students to ponder on questions such as; *“How should I live my life? What goals are worth pursuing?”* (The State University of New York n/d).

#### 6. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a process that can help with character development, as students have the opportunity to practice regularly in developing virtues, while they are learning academic material. Competencies that students can develop from this process are; communication skills, the ability to take perspective, the ability to work as a team and appreciate each other. Thus, it includes interdependence and individual accountability. To become skilled though, it is a gradual, developmental process (Slavin, 1990).

Cooperative learning has many positive effects on students, such as increased academic performance (e.g. Foley and O'Donnell 2002; Shachar and Sharan 1994; Slavin and Madden 1999). However, it extends to improved conflict resolution skills and greater cooperation between students (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, Smith, Dianda, 1996).

#### 7. Conscience of craft

Conscience of craft is the capacity to feel satisfaction at a job well done and to be ashamed of careless work is what (Green, 1985). In students, developing the sense of academic responsibility will help them get into the habit of doing their work well.

Through their academic work, students are able to develop work-related character traits that have enduring importance:



- Self-discipline, including the ability to delay gratification in order to pursue future goals
- Persistence in the face of failure
- Dependability, including a public sense of work as affecting the lives of others
- Diligence, concern to do a good job
- Academic responsibility

[adapted from State University of New York college at Cortland, n/d)

## 8. Ethical reflection

Ethical reflection is the process of being encouraged to develop the cognitive side of character. By doing this, students are able to be; morally aware, comprehending what virtues are and how they are applicable in real life, being in a position for perspective taking, reason morally, and make thoughtful moral decisions, and developing self-knowledge, including the capacity for self-criticism.

## 9. Teaching conflict resolution

Children taught conflict resolution skills are able to solve conflicts in a fair manner avoiding intimidation and aggression. Children have the resources for their interpersonal relationships.

### School-wide strategies:

#### 1 Creating a culture of excellence & ethics

To be effective in character education, it is proposed to develop a culture of excellence that fosters values. This involves defining, communicating, modelling, and teaching virtues.

#### 2 Caring beyond the classroom

Students need acquaintance with positive role models, and opportunities for service in their schools, families, and communities.

### 3 Schools, parents, and communities as partners



The relationship between the school and parents in character education is two-way. Parents should support the school in this process, and vice versa.

#### Which Values does this Module Address?

##### What is Responsibility?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, responsibility is the “state” of having a “duty” to deal with something, being accountable for one’s actions. It is something that is required to be done as part of a job or a role. Moreover, it is having control over someone, or the ability to act autonomously and take decisions without authorization. It is the ability to respond in a proficient manner and to make good choices. Referring to the moral aspect of responsibility, it is the ethical obligation to behave in a correct manner towards, or in respect of, self and others.

##### What is Respect?

Respect is a feeling of deep admiration for a person or something else that is evoked by abilities, qualities or achievements, even though respect is to be said to extend to all regardless of merit. Respect can refer to the regard for the feelings, wishes or rights of others (Oxford Dictionary). It is more than a feeling or an attitude though, it is expressed in our behaviour. We could be respecting someone/something out of fear, but also because of profound awe, a feeling that can be both humbling and uplifting. The concept of respect though is extended to all humans equally, independent of social position, and nonhuman animals, sentient creatures, plants, species, all living things, biotic communities and the natural ecosystem of the planet.

Moreover, self-respect is another valuable aspect of respect, that deals with our own intrinsic worth. Just as with our respect for others, self-respect involves cognition, valuation, affect, expectation, motivation, action, and reaction, that leads to an appreciation of oneself as having morally significant worth (Dillon, 2016). Children that are taught self-respect, improve their skills to learn and love. It is the foundation of the decisions we make, how we allow others

to treat us, and how we treat ourselves. It is a reminder of healthy boundaries which promotes happiness and success in life.



### What is Love?

Love is a feeling characterized by friendliness and good intentions, unselfish acts and strong interest. It can extend to philanthropy and altruism that involves actions of love. It is distinguished between three concepts (Bennett, 2013), these are; “eros,” “agape” and “philia.” Eros is the love between two people, agape is affectionate dedication and emotional bond between people and things, and philia is a friendly feeling towards not just one's friends but also possibly towards family members, business partners, and one's planet at large (Cooper, 1977).

### What is peace?

Peace can take up two different meanings. One is freedom from disturbance, tranquillity. It refers to an inner (mental or emotional) feeling of calmness. The other meaning refers to a period which there is no war or a war has ended (Oxford Dictionaries).

### Aims of this module:

Through the activities of this module children will:

- Reflect on and describe their personal attitudes and values that influence their well-being and sense of self-worth
- Demonstrate an understanding of how showing respect for self and others can contribute to people's sense of self-worth (tolerance, kindness, friendship, respect for others);
- Gain self-regulation skills to achieve personal well-being
- Acquire self-responsibility and responsibility to others
- Develop positive social skills through the cultivation of virtues
- Develop critical-thinking skills and decision-making skills to make responsible decisions
- Avoid harmful behaviours such as; violence, alcohol & drug use and other harmful behaviours



## Appendix 1: Character Strengths



<p><b>Wisdom and Knowledge</b></p> <p><b>Cognitive strengths that require the acquisition and use of knowledge</b></p>
<p><b>Creativity</b> (originality)</p> <p>Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it</p>
<p><b>Curiosity</b> (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience):</p> <p>Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering</p>
<p><b>Judgement</b> [critical thinking]:</p> <p>Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly</p>
<p><b>Love of Learning</b></p> <p>Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows</p>
<p><b>Perspective</b> [wisdom]:</p> <p>Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people</p>
<p><b>Courage</b></p> <p><b>Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition</b></p>
<p><b>Bravery</b> [valor]:</p> <p>Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it</p>
<p><b>Perseverance</b> [persistence, industriousness]:</p>

<p>Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks</p>
<p><b>Honesty</b> (authenticity, integrity):</p> <p>Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretence; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions</p>
<p><b>Zest</b> [vitality, enthusiasm, vigour, energy]:</p> <p>Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Humanity</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Interpersonal strengths that involve minding and befriending others</b></p>
<p><b>Love:</b></p> <p>Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people</p>
<p><b>Kindness</b> [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]:</p> <p>Doing favours and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them</p>
<p><b>Social Intelligence</b> [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]:</p> <p>Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Justice</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</b></p>
<p><b>Teamwork</b> [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]:</p> <p>Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share</p>
<p><b>Fairness</b></p> <p>Treating all people, the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.</p>
<p><b>Leadership</b></p>

Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done, and at the same time maintaining good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Temperance</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths that protect against excess</b></p>
<p><b>Forgiveness</b></p> <p>Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful</p>
<p><b>Humility</b></p> <p>Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is</p>
<p><b>Prudence</b></p> <p>Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted</p>
<p><b>Self-Regulation</b> [self-control]:</p> <p>Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Transcendence</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning</b></p>
<p><b>Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence</b> [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience</p>
<p><b>Gratitude</b> Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks</p>
<p><b>Hope</b> [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about</p>

**Humour** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

**Spirituality** [faith, purpose]:

Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

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## \*Module 3: Introduction to Positive Purpose\*



Purpose and meaning in life are important components of well-being and flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2011; Steger, 2009), and help people cope and adapt successfully to adversities and negative life events (Park, 2010; Silver & Updegraff, 2013). While meaning in life has been examined in the context of philosophy, literature, and religion throughout the ages, psychology's concern with meaning began with the work of Victor Frankl (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust and claimed that humans are driven by an innate tendency to find meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1963). He used his experience in a concentration camp to suggest that this innate tendency to find a purpose in our life helps us endure and overcome even the direst experiences. The advent of positive psychology with its focus on positive variables and on the conditions, that make life worth living has further promoted the study of meaning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### What is positive purpose?

Positive purpose is intimately related to the concept of meaning in life. When psychologists talk about meaning in life they usually refer to three components: coherence, significance and purpose (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela & Steger, 2016). In order for a life to be meaningful then, (a) it has to make sense and be comprehensible to the person living it, (b) it needs to have some significance or value, and (c) it needs to have a purpose.

**(a) Coherence** has to do with making sense of one's life. It is achieved when people reach an understanding of who they are, of what the world around them is like, and of their place in this surrounding world (Shin & Steger, 2014). This understanding helps us feel that the world is comprehensible and coherent, that our life is united by a continuous narrative and that our experiences are somehow integrated into our life (Martella & Steger, 2016).

**(b) Significance** refers to the feelings that a person's life is valuable, worthwhile or important. The significance of life is closely tied to the concept of eudaimonia, the ancient Greek word



(ευδαιμονία) that has to do with knowing oneself and actualizing one's innate potential (Ryff & Singer, 2008).



(c) The third component of meaning is **purpose in life**. Shin and Steger define purpose as “an individual’s long-term and overarching goal or mission to which they are highly committed and actively engaged” (Shin & Steger, 2014, p. 101), while Kashdan and McKnight (2009) define purpose in life as “a central, self-organizing life aim” (p. 304). Furthermore, positive purpose has to do with understanding, believing in, and serving something greater than the self and deliberately engaging in activities for the benefit of others. According to Martin Seligman, in order for our life to be worthwhile we need to use our signature strengths to contribute to the welfare of others and our communities (Seligman, 2011). A purpose in life motivates us and act as a compass that guides us in positive directions (Bronk, Finch, & Talib, 2010; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). When we have a purpose we pursue specific goals, which give structure, direction, agency and meaning to our lives.

## What is meaning, purpose and well-being (Models)

In positive psychology, there are several models which consider meaning and purpose as a vital component of well-being. Snyder and Lopez (2007) have proposed that a life characterized by happiness and meaning is actually a well-being life. According to Ryff and Singer’s model (2008), the core dimensions of psychological wellbeing are: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery (sense of control felt over the environment), autonomy, and positive relationships with others. In their approach, meaning in life holds a fundamental position on the conception of how people feel happy and is closely connected to life challenges and personal growth (Wong, 2014).

According to Wong’s model (2010, 2011) meaning constitutes the overarching framework for well-being and mental health. Wong talks about four components of meaning in his PURE model: Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, and Enjoyment/Evaluation. All four components are necessary for a life to be meaningful. The sources from which people derive meaning are positive emotion, achievement, relationships, intimacy, religion/spirituality, self-



transcendence, self-acceptance, and fairness/social justice (Wong, 1998). Wong (2014) believes that an individual could have high levels of wellbeing even in the absence of experiencing positive emotions and psychological flow, since meaning, virtue and spirituality are the most important pillars of wellbeing, while pleasure just accompanies them.

Consistent with the above approaches, Martin Seligman (2002) proposed an authentic happiness model, in which he distinguishes between the pleasant life, the good life and the meaningful life. According to his approach, the pleasant life is characterized by the experiencing and the pursuit of positive emotions (hedonic wellbeing). The good life has to do with implementing and cultivating one's character strengths in order to experience psychological flow.

Finally, the meaningful life is about using character strengths and personal virtues in the service of something greater than oneself. According to Seligman's research, people who engage in hedonic activities in order to experience positive emotions are happier during these activities than those who engage in eudaimonic pursuits. In the long run, however, those who lead a more eudaimonic life are more satisfied with their lives.

Recently, Martin Seligman (2011) has changed his theory in order to include more pillars of well-being. According to his revised theory, which is called PERMA, there are five pillars of individual psychological well-being and flourishing: experiencing positive emotions in everyday life [feelings of happiness] (P), experiencing psychological flow, absorption, engagement and satisfaction in everyday activities (E), building positive relationships that include feelings of social integration, feeling warmth, loved, cared about and supported by others, and being satisfied with one's social connections (R) (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2015), having meaning and a sense of purpose in life, the belief that one's life is valuable (M), and feeling competent and efficient due to accomplishment of personal goals (A). In line with PERMA theory, other major theoretical models about the components of well-being also suggest that individuals should have a sense of meaning in their lives in order to achieve high levels of well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2009; Keyes, 2002).



## Why is purpose important in School Context?

Research has shown that when we experience meaning and purpose in our life, we are more likely to experience increased well-being, better physical health and reduced distress (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch 2009; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, 2012). For example, research has shown that when people have purpose and meaning in their life they experience more positive emotions and life satisfaction, they have greater self-esteem, fewer depression symptoms and greater optimism (Bronk et al., 2009; Reker, 2005; Ryff, 1989; Steger, 2006; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Conversely, less meaning in life has been linked with more symptoms of depression and anxiety (Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2009). The more meaning in life people report, the greater well-being they experience and this is true for people at all life stages (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Furthermore, people who experience meaning in life have better general health and they engage less in health-risking behaviours (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2012; Steger, Fitch-Martin, Donnelly, & Rickard, 2014). In addition, when people have a purpose in life, they experience a healthier aging and have a longer life (Hill & Turiano, 2014; Krause, 2009).

An important role of purpose is that it helps youth develop in positive ways and form a healthy identity (Bronk, 2011; Bronk et al., 2009). For example, Bronk (2011) has shown that adolescents who were committed and engaged in personally meaningful, long-term aims were better able to understand their place in the social world and develop in positive ways. In other words, having a purpose in life facilitated their identity formation.

There is also an important connection between purpose and resilience. When people have a sense that their life has meaning and purpose, they are able to better handle the adversities they face and experience lower stress and anxiety (Ishida & Okada, 2006; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Park & Baumeister, 2016). Finally, research on meaning making has shown that when people manage to give meaning to traumatic or adverse experiences, they adapt better to



these experiences than people who have not managed to find meaning in them (Silver & Updegraff, 2013; Updegraff, Silver, & Holman, 2008).

## Why is purpose important in teaching and learning?

Each of us understands things in the light of our past experiences. So, for example, we may think of learning and teaching as something which takes place in a school or a college. However, a bit of reflection will show us that learning and teaching are much wider than that. Also, learning is closely connected with the overarching aims that we have in our life and consequently with purpose in life.

When students have a purpose in their life and are able to see how learning in class can help them achieve this purpose, they are more motivated to learn (Damon, 2009). When students do not understand how educational material is connected with their aims in life and do not know how their education will help them achieve these aims, they will not be willing to learn. Schoolwork becomes more relevant and has greater personal significance when students feel that it helps them achieve their goals and aspirations. As is obvious, teachers can play a crucial role in inspiring and helping students find a sense of purpose in their lives, helping them connect this purpose with the academic material.

Another important role that meaning and purpose play is that they help students build a healthy sense of self-worth and fulfilment (Norrish, 2015). Nowadays young people are constantly bombarded with alluring images of success built on materialistic and superficial pursuits. Having a meaningful purpose in their life, can help young people resist these tempting images and develop strong personal foundations. This will also make them more open to learning and more willing to participate in educational pursuits.

So, meaning could be a wonderful chance to engage students in learning and give a meaningful purpose to the experience of teaching. Last but not least we should remember that meaning enhances well-being and makes people happy, factors which are also extremely important not only in life but also in learning.

## How to promote purpose in the classroom



The schooling years are crucial in helping students develop both the foundations of purpose and meaning and the foundations of a positive identity (Bronk, 2011). Meaning can be implemented in the classrooms in a variety of ways. Designing learning experiences within a real-world can give students a meaningful way to practice skills and apply content knowledge. Allowing students to explore their own curiosities can add meaning to any subject area. Offering choices on how to display content mastery allows students to play to their strengths and can help academic work become more personally meaningful. Involving students in service-learning or place-based lessons can help students attach community meaning to the things they are studying in school.

Service-learning is a teaching strategy that incorporates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. There is a balanced emphasis on both students' learning and addressing the needs of the community (Fayetteville State University, n/d).

Place-based learning on the other hand, engages students in their local communities, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and is used as a foundation for the study of subjects on the academic curriculum (math, language etc.) It emphasises learning through participation in service projects for the school and community. This can help students' engagement, academic achievement and sense of efficacy, while at the same making contributions to resolving local issues (Centre for Place-based Learning and Community Engagement, n/d).

Teachers can help students select projects and activities that create a sense of meaning and purpose. Furthermore, helping students to use their strengths in order to pursue goals that have impact on others beyond themselves can make them feel increased significance and engagement in the school setting (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Structured activities that help students make sense of their identity, the world around them and their place in this world will help them increase the coherence in their lives (Shin &



Steger, 2014). This will help them understand what is important to them and develop aims that are worthwhile not only to themselves but to their wider community.

Finally, initiatives including student participation in peer support programmes and in classroom activities that foster leadership and decision-making can encourage a sense of meaning and purpose (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

## Model followed in this module

This module will follow Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, which is a holistic model of well-being. In this model, meaning and purpose are defined by actions, and actions are influenced by decisions made. The positive nature of meaning for well-being is connected to living a purposeful and productive life within a relational world. Leading a meaningful life means that individuals include in their repertoire of behaviours, actions of kindness, compassion and forgiveness. Forgiveness, kindness, love, trust, hope and gratitude are vital elements of well-being and make people feel connected to each other and to a higher purpose. Furthermore, according to PERMA theory in the core of the meaning pillar is the concept of empathy. Individuals learn not to harm others and care about them. Individuals act for the common good and they behave about-the-other in all action.

This module will help students through the comprehension of their lives to organize their experiences in a coherent narrative, create connections between past and new experiences, and regulate their behaviours in adaptive ways (Steger, 2009). A coherent understanding of a person's life is leading to purposes that are "self-concordant, autonomously chosen, and positively reinforcing" (Shin & Steger, 2014, p. 94). Purpose will also help students become more energized and engaged both in school and in their lives giving them direction, which will guide their everyday behaviour and increase their overall well-being (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Amongst the target-behaviours will be the enhancement of altruism and the use of student's strengths in the service of others.

## Aims of this module

Through the activities of this module children will:

1. Achieve a coherent understanding of themselves, the world around them and their place in this world
2. Understand their deeper values and their personal life philosophy
3. Identify important goals in school, social activities, leisure time and other aspects of their lives
4. Be able to reflect on, and plan how to reach those goals learning appropriate problem-solving strategies
5. Understand how their goals in life are connected to their schoolwork
6. Understand the importance of giving to others
7. Learn how to develop empathy, forgiveness, kindness, and compassion towards others
8. Learn how to use their strengths in order to help other students, the school community or the broader community through their participation in community service projects that they select and implement in cooperation with their teachers

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**\*Module 4: Introduction to Coping Positively\*****What is coping positively?**

Coping positively with difficult life situations requires us to develop in ourselves the qualities of resilience. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity and is the process of adapting positively in the face of hardship, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems. Recently, the definition of resilience has also been broadened to include coping with disruptive events in our everyday lives (Richardson, 2002). In short, resilience transforms victims into survivors and allows survivors to thrive.

People who are resilient draw on strengths in themselves, their relationships and their communities to help them cope with and overcome adversity. Resilience is a dynamic process, not a once off event; it develops as we mature and as we gain experience and better problem-solving and self-management skills. Resilience is rooted in relationships; it comes from our attachments, and supportive relationships with parents, family, friends and good relationships with others help us to cope with life's inevitable challenges (Seligman et al., 2009).

The good news is that the thinking skills that underpin resilience can be learnt and taught, and resiliency-building strategies can be introduced to children at a very early age. The Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) developed at the University of Pennsylvania (Gillham, Reivich and Jaycox, 2008) focuses on increasing the strengths of resilience in children and young people through developing flexible and accurate thinking; it targets evidence-based factors associated with resilience including optimism, self-regulation and strong relationships (Reivich, Gillham, et al., 2005). The Penn Resiliency Program has been adapted for schools in the UK and Australia, and pioneering schools all over the world are beginning to use approaches which are explicitly based on the science of positive psychology with impressive results (Seligman et al., 2009). These initiatives are not only helping students thrive, they are also renewing the creativity and optimism of teachers and helping them to flourish and enjoy their work (Eades, 2008).

So, not only can we build resilience in numerous indirect ways, such as by reducing risk factors, by strengthening protective assets and resources, and by creating climates which foster



the strengths and skills of resilience. We can also impact these competencies and skills directly, through teaching the key competencies essential to psychological fitness.



Coping positively and being resilient can involve a number of complementary skills, each of which gives us a different tool to help us cope in different situations. For example, optimism is a key marker for positive coping (Seligman, 2011). Optimism is future oriented – optimists believe that things can change for the better. Physical activity is also a key factor in coping positively, and we are all aware of the ‘feel good’ effect of exercise. Physical activity reduces anxiety and stress, increases quality of life and protects against cognitive impairments as we age (Lyubomirsky, 2010). Emotional regulation too can help us cope through difficult situations, helping us to experience what we are feeling, without suppressing those feelings, or likewise becoming overwhelmed by them. Practicing mindfulness, and being present in the moment, can also act as a preventative measure to becoming overwhelmed and swept away by our thoughts and feelings. Mindful awareness techniques help people to improve their wellbeing by training the mind to focus on experience in the present moment (Siegel, 2010). We will explore each of these facets of positive coping in more detail later in the module.

## Why resilience matters?

No matter what stage of life you’re at, or what you do, resilience matters. Whether in your personal or school life, resilience is something that you will need at some point, because the reality is that somewhere along the line you’ll come across obstacles and set-backs. Resilient people deal with stress and hardship in life better than most. No one walks a smooth road in life, and resilience is necessary to keep you on track when you’re really struggling or starting to lose hope.

Resilient people have learnt how to adjust to life’s ups and downs. They manage to maintain their focus in the face of serious challenges by adapting and keeping their end goal in mind no matter what. They keep strong because they are determined and motivated by some goal or priority. Resilience is very much a protective factor that lets us keep moving through the inevitable difficult times, allowing us not only to function, but to thrive in adversity (Neenan, 2009).



## Why is resilience important in teaching and learning?



Resilience is a life skill that all students (and also teachers) should focus on developing throughout their time in school. In cultivating resilience in the classroom, we are creating an environment which supports students in gaining the skills to respond to the challenges and setbacks of school life. These can include exam stress, relationships, issues around transition and change, and educational achievement. When students have resilience, they are open to learning because they *believe* that they can learn; they are receptive to assistance because it is not a criticism of their abilities; and they are comfortable not understanding concepts immediately because they see learning as a pursuit of knowledge and know that motivation and effort are just as important as knowing how to do something.

When a student spends time in the classroom without resilience—without that grit to pick themselves up and try again—critical learning and self-development time is lost. If, on the other hand, students are provided with the opportunity to learn about resilience and given the time to concretely apply it to their own situations, we truly can create the kind of people who are able to respond to challenges and setbacks, not only school life, but the wider life presents (Krovetz, 2007).

## How resilience acts?

The past quarter century of neurological research has revolutionized our understanding of how the brain creates and regulates emotion. Scientists used to think that the limbic system, a set of brain structures located above the brain stem but below the wrinkled, walnut-shaped cortex, was wholly responsible for producing and managing emotions. Recent studies suggest that it is not that simple. Though emotional impulses do originate in the limbic system, our expression of those emotions is regulated by the prefrontal cortex, a cortical brain structure located just behind the forehead which is associated with judgment and decision making.

The involvement of the prefrontal cortex in emotional responding is one of the things that separates humans from animals. Animals have little control over their expression of emotions.



When an animal's limbic system becomes activated, that animal will experience and act out the resulting emotion. Scared animals will instinctually run and hide, or get aggressive, for instance. Human beings, on the other hand are able to make judgments and decisions regarding their emotional state, and to act on those decisions even when those decisions run counter to their emotional state. Frightened humans can evaluate whether or not their fears are justified, and act counter to their fears, for instance, making a speech in public despite being afraid of possible negative judgments that might result. People's ability to change the way they experience emotion is important for two reasons: first because it means that people have a real, if limited, capacity to snap out of negative emotions that don't serve them, and second because choosing to snap out of negative emotions is usually a good decision that can have a positive influence on one's overall health (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

In part then, resilient people believe they can change their moods, and so they work to change their moods. The less resilient among us can instead fall prey to hopelessness. A major purpose of this module is to help convince those of you who do fall prey to hopelessness that it is possible to become more resilient (Seligman et al. (2009). We've just described how it is possible that you can change your negative moods to more positive ones. Now, let us tell you why it is a very good idea to do this.

### Why is resilience important in the school context?

In the school context students require a unique set of skills to be able to navigate the day to day challenges of academic achievement, relationships, and social and emotional interactions. The positive coping skills of patience, optimism, self-regulation and mindfulness can all be learned and can be enhanced by having a bond with a caring adult who models, teaches and reinforces these positive skills. Resilience is dependent upon experience and is necessary for learning. Many children entering school have different degrees of resilience just as they have different degrees of experience in reading and numeracy. Expecting these skills to be innate and hard wired in the brains of children is not realistic.

Just as we teach and establish the classroom structures for learning to read we can do the same for building and supporting resilience, a proactive skill in all our students. When teachers and schools establish resilient classrooms, they support memorable experiences for children and higher academic achievement. According to the Institute of Medicine (2004) caring schools that foster high expectations and self-autonomy have higher academic achievement.

Children can enter the school environment with adverse experiences that make them vulnerable to the challenges of learning. Poverty overwhelms almost one-in-five children and poverty can foster giving up when facing frustration. Today, building resilience in the classroom as a component of instruction is vital. Getting started or building on existing efforts can begin with reading materials on resilient classrooms. There is universal agreement that classroom management relies upon routines known to increase children's comfort and these kinds of structures are almost automatically in-place (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone, 2013). Most teachers use problem solving steps and data to improve resilience in their classrooms.

## How to promote resilience in the classroom?

**There are a number of different areas within which resilience can be facilitated and promoted:**

**Academic efficacy:** Creating an academic curriculum that is challenging and consciously supporting students requires both reinforcement and instructional supports to magnify that learner's academic achievement. This requires classroom prompts and timely feedback about success so that students are supporting each other's skills. Teachers can graph progress of individuals to help each see their progress. Students can also be encouraged to share mastery techniques and strategies with their peers.

**Behavioural self-control:** How a learner controls their behaviour is critical to effective teaching, peer learning and classroom management. Resilient students are attentive, active learners who thrive in classrooms that enable them to know what's coming, know what's expected of them,

and know if their behaviour is working well for them and the class. The following strategies can assist students in maintaining their self-control:

- Focus on routines that increase prediction;
- Provide immediate feedback to increase active learning;
- Connect behaviours to learning stresses and be positive in the evaluation of behaviours.

Self-control can be improved for both individuals and groups by using functional analysis of, say distracting talking-out, so that student(s) can see a viable alternative, practice it (role playing) and even self-reward their progress in reducing that disruptive talking out. Again, graphing progress helps students see their progress and the progress of their classmates.

**Academic self-determination:** The development of autonomy facilitates resilience and a sense of self-reliance, enabling students to set their own learning goals, and identifying what needs to be done to address those goals. Autonomy can be supported by making sure that the focus is upon mastery for each student rather than on comparing that student to others in a competitive way.

**Effective peer relationships:** When students are encouraged to work together as teams and when they are familiar with problem-solving and conflict resolution skills they are more likely to develop positive peer relationships and friendships. Providing time to discuss classroom issues in class meetings (discussed in the methodology module, please see page 93) helps students recognize each other's strengths and common feelings and concerns, thus enhancing effective peer relationships.

**Effective home-school relationships:** The home is the foundation for supporting resilience. Keeping a good home-school connection has been shown to improve academics, social skills and attendance. Mechanisms to increase these connections might include periodic positive personal notes, short fact sheets about the resilient classroom/school efforts and ideas for supporting

resilience. Seeking partnerships with parents, seeking and valuing their ideas can build the home-school partnership. Tips for parents on homework (Homework Helper) that include a feedback-loop can also be effective in including them in their child's learning and fostering resilience (Dwyer, 2013).



## What components of resilience does this module address?

### What is Optimism?

At the heart of positive coping is optimism - but what is the connection between optimism and coping? And why is it so important? Optimism implies that we believe we have the ability to cope with life's inevitable challenges and this reflects our sense of self-efficacy, and our faith in our ability to solve our own problems. Optimism is energizing, it motivates us to search for solutions and to keep working hard to cope with whatever occurs. Optimists believe that there is something to be learnt from adversity; they review and reflect on what has happened, take a balanced view and actively seek the lessons of experience. This approach helps reduce the likelihood of the same mistakes being made in the future, so their ability to cope actually increases.

Apart from enabling us to cope with difficult situations, optimism brings a host of other positive benefits. It is associated with longevity, lower rates of infection, fewer heart attacks, better marriages, better problem-solving and increased creativity (Seligman, 2011). And while it is not a panacea, it can protect against depression, raise our levels of achievement and enhance overall well-being. Thanks to the contribution of positive psychology we now know that optimism is a set of skills that can be taught and learned, a way of thinking that you can choose and a capacity that we can model and teach others.

### What is Positive Health?

Physical activity actually improves well-being on a variety of different levels – it improves both self-mastery and self-esteem. It also offers a positive distraction from your worries. It offers time out from your stressful day, gives you a breather and the effects can last for hours



afterwards. Some studies have compared the effects of meditation and exercise and show that they can have similar effects (Lyubomirsky, 2010). Of course, the experience is different, but both crucially produce positive emotions and pull you away from daily hassles and anxieties. And when you are involved with others in a physical activity it provides opportunities for making social connections. It can help in building relationships that will offer social support and combat the risk of loneliness or isolation. Choose an exercise or physical activity that works for you. Be realistic and build your routine up gradually.

### What is emotional regulation?

Getting stuck in an emotion or being overwhelmed and made prisoner of our feelings, limits our ability to cope and even to reach out to others for help.

Resilient people – both adults and children – are comfortable with their feelings and with expressing them. They have a good awareness and understanding of their own emotions and are comfortable talking about what they are feeling with people they trust. When they experience a tough time, they too feel sad, anxious or scared. The important difference is that they don't get 'stuck' in that feeling. When their emotions are overwhelming, so strong that they feel unable to cope, they have a range of techniques that they routinely use for calming themselves down (Gross, 2015).

We can see the earliest stages of emotional regulation in infancy when babies suck their thumbs or hold on to their blankets for comfort – this is self-soothing behaviour. Young children will often need our support to calm down - we can help them by setting firm and caring limits on their behaviour, giving them other choices for expressing their emotions and teaching them how to calm themselves, by modelling and direct instruction.

### What is coping with change?

Children report that moving, leaving friends, and changing grades, schools or classes can cause great anxiety. Transitions for some students result in academic difficulties, social/emotional problems, decline in self-concept, poor motivation, decreased attendance, and



increased dropout rates. Since schools are charged with helping children become well-adjusted citizens, school personnel have an important role in assisting students' adaptation to change. Most children will cope with these and feel accustomed to the changes by the end of the first couple of weeks. Others can take longer to learn to navigate their way around the school and may require ongoing support throughout their school days to allow him to fully access the curriculum.

Transitional periods are also opportunities for growth if children have learned coping skills and are given an opportunity to understand and adapt to their new environment. Ideally, a transition team is composed of school counsellors, teachers, administrators, parents and students. They collaborate, plan and support student transitions by acknowledging student concerns and by creating a sense of belonging in the new environment. A study which tracked students coping with the challenge of school transitions or new courses, found that those with growth mindsets outperformed their classmates even when they had the same initial skills and knowledge – having a growth mindset actually facilitates the development of ability over time (Blackwell et al., 2007).

### What is mindfulness?

*When we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace and love.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

Mindful awareness techniques help people to improve their wellbeing by training the mind to focus on experience in the present moment (Siegel, 2010). Scientific studies have also validated the powerful effects of mindfulness and established it as a valuable tool for reducing stress, anxiety and depression and increasing vitality and resilience. It opens us to learning and creativity, improves concentration and attention, and builds empathy and compassion (Siegel, 2010). In the classroom, the benefits of mindfulness and mediation are immense. Positive emotions and a calm inner state, help students learn more effectively and gain mastery over their emotions.

Mindfulness can easily be introduced to the classroom, and a good starting point is to explain the concept of mindfulness to the students as – "stopping the gossip in your head". There are many different techniques for meditating. Some methods involve repeating a word in your mind, slowly and thoughtfully, this is called a mantra. Jennifer Fox Eades (2008) recommends that you try this technique with the strengths you are working on with the class. Ask the students to choose one of the signature strengths and to repeat it in their heads, slowly and thoughtfully. When their minds wander, tell them to just bring it gently back to that word. Some students may need to practise mindfulness a number of times before they get the idea of what it should feel like. Others may respond to structured mindful activities to come into the here and now, and a selection of these techniques is expanded upon below (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1992).

## Aims of this module



Through the activities of this module children will:

1. Understand how building resilience and optimism can help them cope with difficult situations experienced both within and outside the school environment, and how this will help them thrive and build self-esteem and confidence;
2. Know the benefits of encouraging positive health behaviours, including exercise, and how these can build a solid foundation to help them cope in difficult times;
3. Understand how the awareness and regulation of emotions can assist students in coping with stressful situations, and how mindfulness can be an effective approach to tackling negative emotions;
4. Be aware of the effect transitions can have on them, and effective strategies for supporting them moving to new grades, classes or schools.



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## \*Module 5: Introduction to Positive Connections\*



### What are Positive Connections?

Positive connections are experienced when individuals feel loved, supported and satisfied with their relationships with others, according to the PERMA model (Butler & Kern, 2016). Other researchers have also described positive relationships as those that make an individual feel socially integrated and cared about by others (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2015).

### Why Positive Connections matter?

Positive interpersonal relationships that are characterised as warm and trusting are an important component of good overall health. Positive relationships have been associated with the maintenance of good physical health (Cohen, Gottlieb & Underwood, 2000; House, Landis & Umberson, 1988), positive psychological wellbeing and mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989), with lower levels of psychological distress (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins & Slaten, 1996), a reduced risk of mortality (Umberson & Montez, 2010), a reduced risk of psychiatric and physical morbidity, as well as a positive influence on the recovery from certain diseases (Cohen, Gottlieb & Underwood, 2000). In addition to this, positive social relationships, whereby one receives emotional support from others, have also been considered as an effective coping strategy that can be used to deal with stressful situations and buffer against stress (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989).

An important point is that these effects of positive relationships on general wellbeing start from early childhood and carry on throughout a person's lifetime (Umberson & Montez, 2010). This highlights the importance of the role of teachers in understanding and promoting positive relationships in the classroom environment from a young age and is especially important in the case of vulnerable children.

### Why are Positive Connections important in learning and teaching?

High-quality interpersonal relationships are important for young people to develop in a way so that they can function effectively, and this includes the positive connections that are



experienced in the classroom (Martin & Dowson, 2009). As young people spend a considerable amount of their time at school, the relationships experienced here have the potential to have a large impact on their lives. In fact, experiencing positive relationships with significant figures in a young person's life, such as teachers, is associated with the young person's capacity to function well in their social, affective and academic life (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Research indicates that supportive relationships at school, such as those between teachers and students and those between peers at school are also related to increased motivation, increased engagement and greater achievements at school (Martin & Wentzel, 1998).

Additionally, research suggests that positive relationships at school, particularly the relationships between teachers and students, can have an even greater impact in the case of vulnerable children. In fact, positive teacher-student relationships can have a protective effect on children with developmental vulnerabilities and lead to better outcomes at school, including more positive school adjustment (Baker, 2006).

## Why are Positive Connections important in School Context?

### Teacher-Student Relationships:

According to Werner and Smith (1989), among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of resilient children, outside of the family, was a teacher with whom the students had built a close relationship and who served as a positive model for personal identification. Research by Baker, Grant and Morlock (2008) also indicates that the quality of a teacher-student relationship predicts the child's successful adjustment at school, especially when the relationship is characterised by warmth and trust. This highlights the importance of the teacher-student relationship with regards to promoting resilience in vulnerable children. In fact, Pianta (1999) states that this protective effect operates for all students, but it is particularly effective for vulnerable children.

Baumrind (1967) developed three types of parenting styles, with a fourth parenting style added by Maccoby and Martin (1983). These four types of parenting styles were based on the dimensions of care/responsiveness and control/expectations in the relationship between the

parent and the child and were later adapted to the classroom environment. The styles are; authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved.



### **Authoritative style**

An authoritative style is the most effective style and one which is high in responsiveness and expectations. It is characterised by a warm, supportive classroom environment where the teacher holds high expectations and standards for students' behaviour and enforces classroom rules consistently. The teacher also explains why some behaviours are acceptable while others are not and includes students in decision-making.

### **Authoritarian style**

An authoritarian style is low in responsiveness and high in expectations. Teachers using an authoritarian style convey less emotional warmth than authoritative teachers yet still hold high expectations and standards for students' behaviours. They establish rules of behaviour without regard for the students' needs, expect rules to be obeyed without question and allow little give-and-take in teacher-student discussions.

### **Permissive style**

A permissive style is high in responsiveness but low in expectations. Teachers using this style provide a warm, supportive classroom environment and hold few expectations and standards for students' behaviours. Inappropriate behaviours are rarely punished and students are allowed to make many of their own decisions.

### **Uninvolved style**

An uninvolved style is the least effective and is characterised by low responsiveness and low expectations. Teachers provide little, if any, emotional support to students and hold few expectations or standards for students' behaviour. They have little interest in their students' welfare and needs and they may seem overwhelmed by their own problems.



### Teacher-Parent Relationships:

The relationship between teachers and parents affects children's early school adjustment (Hughes & Kwok, 2007) and a relationship that is characterised as warm and respectful is associated with more positive development of children (Marcon, 1999).

Parental involvement has also been shown to increase children's motivation at school (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Doan Holbein, 2005) and the degree of parental involvement in the school is positively related to children's achievement at school (Herman & Yeh, 1983). Parents and teachers can create effective partnerships for the benefit of children by collaborating on joint learning activities, supporting each other in their roles, and participating in decision-making activities together (Swick, 1991 as cited in Swick, 1992).

### Colleague Relationships Between Teachers:

According to Kardos and Johnson (2007), a large proportion of new teachers describe their work as solitary and feel as though they are expected to be prematurely expert and able to work independently, without the support of more experienced teachers. However, positive relationships between teachers as colleagues can promote the development of those teachers, both in a personal and professional sense, so that they are more likely to adopt more positive and effective ways of teaching (Nias, 2005). In fact, research has found that personal development of teachers frequently depends on the support received within the group, amongst colleagues (Nias, 2005).

Positive interactions between teachers, whether that is by discussing teaching practices or by the mentoring of a new teacher, can promote collective reflection on the teaching practices used and help to raise the standards of teaching (Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham & Oppong, 2007).

### Relationships Between Peers:

A child's development has been linked to the quality of their peer relationships at school, whereby the acceptance of a child by their peers, as well as their ability to make and maintain friendships and their participation within friendship groups is linked with better overall wellbeing

(Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Research also supports the idea that the relationships between peers at school can make a crucial difference in whether a child enjoys going to school or not (Ladd & Coleman, 1997).



According to Taylor, Repetti and Seeman (1997), the relationships between peers affect the mental and physical health of the child, as well as the general stress experienced at school. This highlights the importance of fostering positive relationships between peers, especially for the benefit of vulnerable children in the classroom.

Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge and Lapp (2002) highlighted the importance of positive peer relationships which can act as a protective factor in the case of vulnerable children with negative family experiences. Additionally, those children who enjoy positive peer relationships are more likely to enjoy a safe school environment and are less likely to be targets of violence, aggression and bullying (Wentzel, Russell & Baker, 2009), something that is of critical importance to vulnerable children. Research shows that the instructional approach that a teacher adopts has an impact on the peer relationships in that class, and teachers who involve students in decision-making processes are more likely to foster positive peer relationships in that class (Donohue, Perry & Weinstein, 2003).

## How can Positive Connections be promoted in the classroom?

### Positive connections can be promoted in the classroom by:

- **Connecting:** Building rapport/demonstrating friendliness (greeting and welcoming students, smiling, using students' names, showing interest, being friendly, using humour).
- **Respecting:** Showing positive regard and valuing students: treating students as individuals, being attentive to their needs and interested in students, respecting and valuing students, being fair and consistent.
- **Understanding:** Show empathy - Listening with interest, paraphrasing and reflecting feeling, being understanding, being open to students, knowing stories of their students' lives.

- **Supporting:** Offering help and supporting students - Responding to requests for help, being available to talk when students want to, maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
- **Giving Feedback:** Reinforcing expectations of success - Holding realistic expectations in terms of work and behaviour, acknowledging students, giving consistent and constructive feedback, putting emphasis on effort and persistence rather than ability.
- **Communication skills:** Effective teaching and the ability to build positive relationships in the class relies on successful communication (Johnson, 1999) that includes listening skills, empathy, authenticity, trust and effective non-verbal communication. It is also beneficial to show gratitude, forgiveness, self-compassion and acts of kindness in the classroom.
- **Cooperative learning:** Cooperative learning involves students working together in teams (Felder & Brent, 2007) and may also help to enhance peer relationships.
- **Active constructive responding:** Showing enthusiastic support in the form of active constructive responses can strengthen relationships (Gable, Reis, Impett & Asher, 2004)
- **Humour:** The use of humour is a key tool in the successful classroom interventions and can be used as a platform to build rapport (Fovet, 2009)
- **Constructive feedback:** Constructive feedback can facilitate the learning process. Feedback should be relevant, timely, factual, helpful, confidential, respectful, tailored to specific needs and encouraging (Ovando, 1994)

The guide and the handbook will include techniques on how to develop the skills mentioned above.

## Which model is followed in this module?



This module follows the PERMA model, which is described in more detail in Module 3 “Positive Purpose” (see page 56).

Butler and Kern (2016) developed a measure of wellbeing based on the PERMA model, where the following items were used to measure the relationships of an individual on an 11-point Likert scale: “To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?”, “To what extent do you feel loved?” and “How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?”. A higher score on each of these items indicates more positive relationships that are essential for an individual’s wellbeing.

## Aims of this module

Through the activities of this module children will:

1. Appreciate the importance and relevance of social connectedness, particularly the teacher-student relationship in the classroom, the teacher-parent relationship, the peer relationships between students and the colleague relationships between teachers
2. Identify the qualities of a supportive relationship
3. Build and maintain positive relationships

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## \*Methodology\*



In order to apply the proposed modules, the following specific methods or procedures are suggested:

- Storytelling - Changing the narrative
- Roleplays
- Arts
- Cooperative learning
- Case Method/ Scenarios/ Problem-Solving
- Testimonials / Quotes
- Group Discussions
- Games
- Brainstorming
- Experiential Learning

### Storytelling - Changing the narrative

Stories and storytelling is one the most common approach to teach primary school students basic principles of values and character strengths (Emmerson & Lee, 2013). Narrative therapy has also taught us that by changing the narrative we oftentimes change our lives and ultimately ourselves (White & Epston, 1990). In this project, it is important to encourage children to listen carefully to their own narratives regarding values and encourage them to rewrite or change part of the narrative as they choose.

Stories will be used to: a) address values like; respect, acceptance, love, responsibility and peace, b) provide examples of what quality relationships look like, and c) illustrate cases of successful emotional regulation and effective conflict resolution. Additionally, existing and well-known stories from children's books and TV shows will be provided to trace stereotypes and examine different alternative scenarios.



## Roleplays



Roleplaying, a derivative of a sociodrama, is a method for exploring the issues involved in complex social situations (Maier, 1991). It may be used for the training of professionals or in a classroom for the understanding of literature, history, and even science (Blatner & Blatner, 1997). Roleplay is ideal to cultivate the set of skills that are integral in forming and preserving respectful and mutually satisfying relationships and devoid of stereotypes. These skills require flexible, creative and rational thinking that can only be exercised, practiced, and learned in a process of interaction, risk-taking, self-expression, feedback and encouragement that could derive through roleplays (Bryce-Clegg, 2014).

Role-plays on the other hand help students understand the complexity of social and moral issues through taking the role of others different from themselves, or generally taking many different perspectives.

In this programme, roleplays will be used to a) build advanced social skills relevant to students' daily lives, and b) foster problem-solving skills to address uncomfortable moral related situations. To support role playing in the classroom scenarios will be created where children will be asked re-enact with the guidance of their teachers.

## Arts

Art expression is one of the most powerful educational tools when it comes to emotional awareness and regulation (Upitis, 2011). Integrating artistic activities in the curriculum has repeatedly been shown to correlate with enhanced learning outcomes, improved long-term retention of knowledge (Rinne, Gregory, Yarmolinskaya & Hardiman, 2011) lower stress levels and a positive classroom experience (Caterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Lessons from art therapy for children have demonstrated that art enables children to express their feelings and opinions and better understand their own emotional worlds (Dorson, 2014).

In this curriculum, art such as drawing, collage, sculpting can be employed to encourage children to express their existing views on values and relationships. This will serve as a baseline for this intervention and will offer teachers a quick snapshot of where individual pupils and the class-as a whole- stand on specific values. Progressively, there will be exercises and activities that will



incorporate artistic expression to assimilate new information and solidify learning acquired via experiential learning.



## Cooperative learning

Cooperative Learning, sometimes called small-group learning, is an instructional strategy in which small groups of students work together on a common task. The task can be as simple as solving a multi-step math problem together, or as complex as developing a design for a new kind of school. In some cases, each group member is individually accountable for part of the task; in other cases, group members work together without formal role assignments (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Cooperative learning offers students more opportunities to actively participate in their learning, and to question and challenge each other, share and discuss their ideas, and internalize their learning. Along with improving academic learning, cooperative learning results in higher group and individual achievement, better quality relationships with peers, and greater psychological health and self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson 1989).

More specifically, cooperative learning techniques teach students individual accountability and equal opportunity for success, working together in just, considerate and responsible manner. Moreover, they learn to recognise the legitimacy of each other's interest and resolving conflict that accommodate needs for all sides and criticizing ideas without criticizing people. Skills such as active listening, showing understanding, being able to express intense feeling without insulting another, and finding a solution that both parties agree, are fundamental for the development of good character (Lickona, & Davidson, 2005).

Cooperative learning will be used, firstly, to teach students values; secondly, to present patterns of quality peer relationships, and thirdly to encourage student discussion on values.

## Case Method/ Scenarios/ Problem-Solving

The case method is a teaching approach that uses decision-forcing cases to put students in the role of people who were faced with difficult decisions at some point in their life. Case Method is one of the teaching methods that call for discussion of real – life situations. The specific



method of learning does not provide THE answer but the participants in the discussion may develop and support several “answers” to the problem. The teacher who uses the case method/problem-solving is asking students to devise and defend solutions to the problems at the heart of each case. Case method, generally, uses problem-solving principles as most of the situations described in the cases are problems.

Problem-solving in general is described in literature as the ability to identify and solve problems by systematically applying appropriate skills (Fredericks, 2005).

Case Method/problem-solving may be used as one of the methods to implement the curriculum of the project in class. It is considered to be an ongoing activity where students will take what they know in order to discover what they do not know through three basic functions. These are; seeking information, generating new knowledge and making decisions. The process involves overcoming obstacles by generating hypotheses, testing predictions and reaching satisfactory solutions (Fredericks, 2005).

In this project case method/problem-solving may be used by applying the five-stage model proposed by Fredericks (2005) and earlier by Mahan (1967) for solving a problem. The model can be adopted by students in order to foster problem solving and decision-making skills, cultivate values and critical thinking through these stages:

1. Identify, understand or frame a problem
2. Describe any barriers or constraints. What is creating the problem?
3. Identify various solutions/hypotheses.
4. Try out a solution/testing hypothesis.
5. Evaluate the results. This can be achieved by promoting self-assessment through specific questions like “How do you feel about your progress so far?” “Are you satisfied with the results you obtained?” and “Why do you believe this is an appropriate response to the problem?”

## Testimonials / Quotes



Testimonials / quotes may be used as a method to apply the curriculum of HOPEs project. This teaching technique is achieved by using quotes / testimonials (a person's written or spoken statement) relevant of the subject in order to promote a discussion on the issue. Incorporating testimonials / quotes in teaching attracts students' immediate attention. They can be powerful and very inspiring tools for discussion.

## Group Discussions

According to Brookfield and Preskill (2005), discussion helps students explore a diversity of perspectives, increases their awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity, helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions, encourages attentive, respectful listening, helps students become connected to a topic, shows respect for student voices and experiences, affirms students as co-creators of knowledge and develops habits of collaborative learning. Furthermore, Blankenstein, Dolmans, Vleuten and Schmidt (2011) found that actively providing explanations during a discussion positively affects long-term memory.

However, Welty (1989) stresses the importance of the preparation for a group discussion which needs to merge process and content. It is important for the teacher to carefully think of questions which will promote discussion (beginning, transitions, and conclusion), not answers (Cazden, 2001). Group discussion is a complex process. The teacher must use questioning, listening, and response activities to shape the discussion towards the end. To teach successfully by the discussion method, teachers should also be aware of the message their bodies communicate –i.e. body language; each movement made, each stance taken, positioning of hands, and facial reactions (Welty, 1989).

Apart from the whole-class group discussions, there might be a small-group discussion, in which students work with each other or the teacher in smaller groups. When referring to smaller group discussion, it should be kept in mind that shy students can more comfortably contribute and students that are academically more advanced can help the less advanced ones (Welty, 1989).



Discussion activities are intended to help children work on consensus building and collaboration, contribute and take responsibility for how their classrooms operate regardless of their academic skills (Berkowitz, & Bier, 2007).

Peer interaction is an effective means to encourage child development and learning. When students engage in facilitated peer discussions of moral dilemmas, they tend to show accelerated development of moral reasoning relative to comparison subjects (Berkowitz, & Bier, 2007).

## Games

Although the game-based learning approach has already demonstrated its strengths from the students' point of view, the diffusion of game-based learning can be facilitated only if both students' and teachers' needs and goals are taken into account (Ketamo, Kiili, Arnab, & Dunwell, 2013). The teacher needs to introduce both the game and its learning objectives to the students. Also, after the game is played, the teacher should debrief the students on what they learned, by initiating a class discussion. This process ensures that learning occurs from playing the game (Sitzmann, 2011). We should also keep in mind that engagement in the game has a clear positive effect on learning and the challenge in the game is an especially strong predictor of learning outcomes (Hamair, Shernoff, Rowe, Collier, Asbell-Clarke, & Edwards, 2016).

Moreover, based on their literature review, Kangas, Koskinen and Krokfors (2017) suggest that the teacher has a significant role to play in all the faces of teaching and learning: in planning, realizing, and assessing the (game-based) learning process. In this programme emphasis is going to be given in the teacher's active role when integrating learning games into teaching.

## Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory suggests a holistic interactive perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour (Kolb, 1984). It accepts learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Thus, experiential learning is a process through which knowledge is derived from and tested through interactions with the environment, relying heavily on reflection and introspection (Kolb, 1984).

Since recent research suggests that pupils became less favourable to traditional teaching versus experiential learning (Kaldi, Filippatou, & Govaris, 2011) and that the development of complex skills is best achieved through experiential learning (Griffith, Steelman, Wildman, LeNoble, & Zhou, 2017), the programme will emphasize the benefits of experiential learning.

## Brainstorming

Brainstorming is one of the most useful tools for creative thinking. It encourages students (in large or small groups) to focus on a topic or problem and contribute to the free flow of ideas. Usually the teacher begins a brainstorming activity by asking students to express ideas, relevant words, or possible answers to a given question, problem, or topic. Two important characteristics of brainstorming activities are that student contributions are (a) accepted without criticism or judgement, and (b) usually summarized on a whiteboard or a flip chart by the teacher as the ideas are called out. These ideas are then examined by the students and they revisited at the end of the lesson/unit.

There are different formats of brainstorming. Some are:

### *Simple brainstorming*

As described above

### *Brainstorming in groups*

The class is divided into groups. The groups may be given the same topic, but they work in groups to record their ideas. Each group ideas are presented and students may be asked to note the ideas they have missed out. In this way, students are able to generate and understand all the ideas presented in a session.

### *Paired brainstorming*

In this strategy, the students work in pairs to generate ideas and note them down.

### *Pie method*

A circle is drawn and the topic is written in the centre of the circle. The circle is divided into 4 or 6 parts, representing sub-topics. Students generate ideas for each sub-topic. At the end of the brainstorming activity, the diagram represents all the ideas that make up the total topic.

### *Card method*

Students list their ideas on a stacked card and pass it to their right. The student on the right reads the idea on the card and adds to it. The card is passed around the class with each student contributing an idea. At the end, the teacher collects the card and may read back the ideas to the class.

### **Field Trip or Study Visit**

A field trip or a study visit is a trip by a group of students usually for observation or non-experimental research. Its purpose is to provide students with experiences outside their everyday activities, observing the subjects in their natural state and possibly collecting samples. Field trips or study visits also aim at introducing students to culture and the arts.

Field trips often unfold in 3 parts: preparation, activities and follow-up activity. Preparation applies to both the teacher and the students. Teachers acquaint themselves with the destination and the subject before the trip and arrange the activities to happen on the field trips. These often include: lectures, tours, worksheets, videos and demonstrations. Follow-up activities are generally discussions that occur in the classroom once the field trip is completed.

### **Digital Resources - Activities at the school level - Activities between teachers**

In addition to all the above methods we also suggest the use of digital resources (e.g. databases, books, journals, newspapers, magazines, archives, theses, conference papers, government papers, research reports, scripts, and monographs in a digital form) the various activities at the school level (e.g. protecting people in conflict, intercultural education, dealing with bullying) as well as the activities between teachers (e.g. exchanging visits in the class, co-teaching).



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