A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL: A EUROPEAN REVIEW

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SUMMARY. Children and young learners in Europe face a number of challenges, including an uncertain future marked by approaching wars, poverty, social and cultural inequalities, media manipulation, online safety, cyberbullying, technology addiction, and vulnerabilities that were exacerbated during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (UNICEF Innocenti 2020). Among European children, 35% of 13-year-olds and 40% of 15-year-olds report feeling depressed, nervous, and having psychosomatic symptoms more than once a week (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2020). Promoting and intervening in well-being at school is therefore one of the priorities for schools today. Some of the findings of the recent study on student learning and well-being conducted by the OECD (2020) on the results of PISA 2018 and the WHO's Health Behavior School Checklist (HBSC) study (Inchley et al. 2020) provide further food for thought. Although most students in OECD countries reported feeling socially connected at school, about one in four disagreed that it was easy to make friends at school and about one in five reported feeling like an outsider at school (OECD 2020). Well-being of children and young people is a multifaceted phenomenon and the focus of this report on the school context should not be interpreted as an indication that it is exclusively an education issue, but it is certainly one of the privileged contexts for intervention. The European Commission's recent review of the Recommendation on key competencies for lifelong learning led to the inclusion of *personal, social and learning to learn* (PSLL) as one of the key competences for lifelong learning (EU Council 2018).

Through a systematic review, this paper attempts to present the indicators that have been identified in the literature, and in light of related EU and national policies, communications, and reports that can serve as a theoretical framework for future research on school well-being. In particular, it attempts to explore how school climate can reflect the qualities and characteristics of school life through the different dimensions that emerged from the survey.

KEYWORDS: well-being, school climate, conceptual model, literature review.

INTRODUCTION

While the quantitative demand for education seems to have been fully satisfied in recent years with the achievement of objectives such as mass schooling and the fight against social exclusion, an equally central and strategic objective emerges at

this point in history in light of these successes: the quality of education and training. The shift from an exclusively quantitative to a purely qualitative focus on the problem of education also marks the transition from an education system that is primarily concerned with the product of education to one that is increasingly concerned with the learning process of the subject and, above all, with the ways and means by which this is achieved. The relationship between learning, the quality of the educational experience, and the psychophysical well-being of students is now an issue that needs to be addressed in the panorama of problems related to improving the quality of education and life in general. Schools are not only places where students learn academic skills; they also help students become more resilient in the face of adversity, feel more connected to the people around them, and have higher aspirations for the future. Finally, school is the first place where children experience society in all its facets, and these experiences can have a profound influence on students' attitudes in life outside school (OECD 2015). Indeed, from a social constructivist perspective, the learning process is increasingly shaped as a social journey characterized by relationships between people. The learning environment is a human environment, and the varying quality of the relationships that characterize it determines the effectiveness or otherwise of the learning journey. The pursuit of a positive school climate in the educational relationship means, first and foremost, taking care that the individuals within the school context live the teaching/learning experience well as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this paper is mainly based on the use of secondary data, with a particular focus on well-being and its decline in school contexts. The review of the European literature, in particular recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses and other key studies in the field, was designed to determine the impact of interventions on student outcomes and to identify effective practices. The review focused on specific areas: in this paper we will highlight the area of school climate. In addition, we briefly mention initiatives and examples of good practice in EU countries aimed at promoting well-being.

The literature review made use of three key academic databases (SCOPUS, ERIC, and SCHOLAR) and focused primarily on review of studies or meta-analyses carried out in approximately the last 10 years. The main criteria for including papers were that they were systematic, with a focus on reviews based on randomized controlled trials; that they assessed the quality of the studies, and that they were European-wide studies, or at least studies conducted on European territory.

We also conducted a detailed literature review on specific aspects of the whole school approach, such as systemic interventions, classroom climate, and whole school ecology. Reference was also made to EU policy documents.

DEFINING WELL-BEING IN SCHOOL

Before defining indicators of school well-being, it is important to define what is meant by well-being. In this paper, we will use the WHO (2018) definition of well-being as it relates to mental health. Mental health is "a state of well-being in which a person realises his or her own abilities and can cope with the normal stresses of life, including a positive sense of identity, an ability to manage thoughts and emotions, to build social relationships, and to acquire an education that allows active citizenship as an adult. This definition is sometimes referred to also as positive mental health, to distinguish it from the traditional concept of mental health issues such as mental illness" (NESET 2021: 21).

However, we could define well-being as a dynamic state in which children and young people are able to develop their potential, learn and play creatively and productively, build positive relationships with others, develop a sense of belonging and contribute positively to the life of their social and cultural context (Deighton et al. 2019: 6).

A broader definition of well-being includes physical and mental well-being, quality of life, and subjective well-being. Subjective well-being has three interrelated indicators. psychological well-being (which includes positive self-esteem and agency), life satisfaction, and hope for the future. Indeed, psychological vulnerability is a risk factor for mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, but also for behaviors that negatively affect physical health (e.g., smoking and alcohol) (Shcherbaytykh 2000). A thematic analysis of the literature conducted by Riebschleger et al. (2017) identified five main themes to consider as content areas of psychological well-being for children and adolescents: to raise awareness of mental illness and its cure, to promote self-reliance skills, to increase information on how to get help for mental health problems, and to identify risk factors. Bale et al. (2018) add more specific areas: the ability to recognize mental health difficulties, focusing on the most common ones such as anxiety and depression; knowledge of coping and prevention strategies (e.g. lifestyle, support networks); understanding one's own well-being needs in order to manage one's own mental health and be aware of the experiences of others, and awareness of available support (e.g. significant adults, professional help). Studies on the psychological well-being of primary school children are rare.

Emotional well-being is also a complex construct (e.g. the presence of positive feelings such as happiness or gratitude and the absence of negative feelings such as sadness and anger). As Domotrovich and colleagues (2017) show, emotional education is a crucial element for school-based interventions: research shows that emotional competence is crucial for positive and healthy development, is a predictor of positive outcomes in later life, and can be promoted through targeted interventions in schools. Emotional education plays a key role in changing behavior in different areas of life. Therefore, emotional education should not be seen as an add-on in schools, but as a necessary pathway to promote effective learning and well-being for all and to prepare future competent citizens (Weare 2015).

Finally, there is social well-being (the development of positive relationships with other people, participation in social life and a sense of belonging) (Rees et al. 2020). People with poor social skills and low assertiveness will find it more difficult to resist peer pressure, while the opposite is true for people with a good repertoire of social behavior (Pedrosa 2009). It may be interesting at this point to compare the definition of well-being in general with the more specific definition of student well-being and then with respect to teachers.

The PISA survey, using the OECD (2017) approach to define well-being as a reference, mainly considers four dimensions: psychological, social, cognitive, and physical.
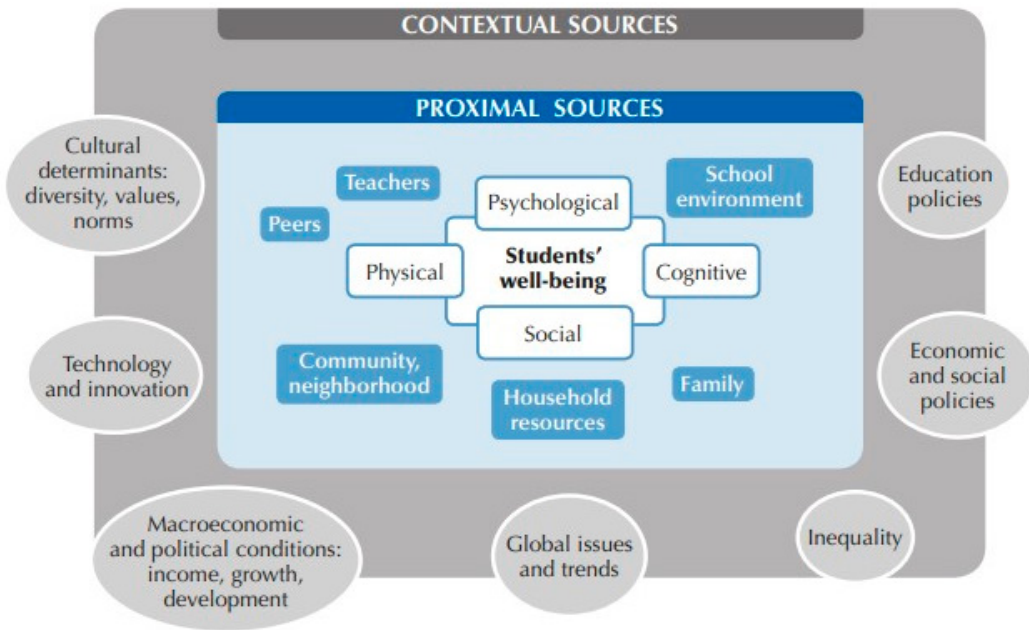

Figure 1. Dimensions and sources of students' Well-being (OECD 2017)

The reference for student welfare is to Ben-Arieh et al. (2013): "Student's well-being, as defined in this report, refers to the psychological, cognitive, social, and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life. This definition of well-being combines a children's rights approach, that emphasises the right of all children to have a happy life here and now, with a development approach, that underscores the importance of students developing the skills to improve their well-being in the present and in the future."

The diagram (Figure 1) shows that we cannot refer to just one indicator, but that the concept of student well-being is composed of several dimensions. Student well-being is the result of the interaction between four different but related domains (as seen before). Each dimension can be considered in isolation, but with the understanding that it must then be considered in relation to the others. This allows us to define a student's quality of life.

Teachers' well-being at work is on the European and national policy agenda. The Council Conclusions on "European Teachers and Trainers of the Future" (2020) emphasize that the well-being of teachers is a key factor in improving the attractiveness of the profession: "The well-being of teachers and trainers underpins their job satisfaction and enthusiasm and affects the attractiveness of the profession and, consequently, their retention in it. It is an important factor in quality and effectiveness, linked to their motivation and to the motivation and performance of learners." EU countries are therefore urged to consider teacher well-being and resilience as a key policy area. The European Commission's study on policies to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession in Europe highlights stress as one of the factors that make the teaching profession particularly difficult (European Commission 2013: 175). The OECD (2020: 102) points out that teachers who experience high levels of stress at work are more likely to want to leave teaching in the next five years for another career. There is evidence that teachers' stress can affect the quality of their teaching and the motivation of their students (Fernet et al. 2012; Klusmann et al. 2008). One study found that teachers' stress levels also influence primary school students' stress levels in the morning when they arrive at school (Oberle, Schonert-Reichl 2016). Some evidence also links teachers' stress to job satisfaction (Collie, Shapka, Perry 2012), commitment (Klassen et al. 2013), burnout rates (Betoret 2009), and leaving the profession (Skaalvik, Skaalvik 2011). The analysis shows that many teachers across Europe experience stress at work. The data seem to indicate that stress levels are lowest when teachers work in school environments that they perceive as collaborative, when they feel confident in motivating pupils and managing their behavior, and when they feel autonomous in their work. In contrast, teachers report higher levels of stress when they work in classrooms that they perceive as restless, when they work longer hours, and when they

are subject to evaluation as a requirement for career progression (EACEA 2021: 142). The dimensions most commonly used to analyze teachers' well-being are: stress at work, mental health, physical health, and work-life balance (TALIS 2018). Overall, 24% and 22% of teachers in Europe report that their work has a negative impact on their mental and physical health, respectively. However, in Belgium and Portugal, more than half of teachers believe that their work has a negative impact on their mental and physical health. Mental health is also a concern for one in three teachers in Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Latvia, and the United Kingdom. An important factor is the balance between personal and professional life (which is usually seen as a factor in the attractiveness of the teaching profession). Fifty-five percent of EU teachers say that their job allows them to have a lot or enough free time for their personal life. In the UK and Iceland, only one in four teachers say they have enough or a lot of free time for their personal life (TALIS 2018). Interestingly, some research reports the importance of certain contextual elements. In particular, factors that influence teachers' well-being are student behavior (Collie et al. 2012), school climate (Wolgast, Fischer 2017), and teachers' sense of autonomy (Pearson, Moomaw 2005).

SCHOOL CLIMATE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR WELL-BEING

A positive school climate is an environment where children are learning and growing up. Students will learn more and achieve at higher levels when data drives decision-making, students are engaged, teachers and staff are competent, and families and the community are involved. There are several levels of possible intervention to promote well-being through a positive school climate. Let us try to define them according to a systemic logic (Bronfenbrenner 1989), starting from the macro context and arriving at the micro.

If we consider the macro level, a participatory, flexible, bottom-up approach to mental health promotion based on the principles of empowerment, democracy, and ownership is more likely to be adopted in the European context and thus more likely to be successful (Weare, Nind 2011): "European theory tends to be holistic, emphasizing not just behaviour change and knowledge acquisition, but also changes in attitudes, beliefs and value, while European health education has long pioneered active classroom methodologies, involving experiential learning, classroom interaction, games, simulations and group work of various kind <...> European context have a tradition in operating on a non-prescriptive, flexible and principles bases" (65). School staff, students, and parents need to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of programs and initiatives through a bottom-up

approach (Rosen et al. 2020; Weare, Nind 2011). Inchley et al. (2007) emphasize the need to "root" mental health interventions at school, with "shared ownership," collaboration and empowerment of the school community, and with the intervention being linked to the core objectives and ethos of the school (NESET 2021: 48).

At the meso level, however, in their meta-analysis of reviews of mental health programs, Weare and Nind (2011) made a distinction between what appeared to work in the European and US contexts. They argued that a comprehensive approach in schools, as seen in the European context, is more likely to be successful and sustainable if it is participatory, flexible and bottom-up. School staff, pupils, and parents, as well as the local community and local institutions, need to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of programs and initiatives to ensure that they are relevant and sustainable in the long term. The sustainability of successful interventions depends on their adaptation to the ecology of the school and community in which they are implemented (Barry et al. 2017). Inchley et al (2007) emphasize the need for well-being interventions to be *rooted* in the culture, ethos, and core aims of the school, with shared goals and collaboration bringing the empowerment and accountability of the whole school community into play. However, as highlighted above in relation to the macro context, bottom-up, consultative, and relational approaches are often difficult to implement and are often resisted by staff due to wider sociopolitical pressures both within and outside schools.

Finally, at the micro level, a positive classroom climate centered on caring relationships, collaboration, equity, and inclusion is essential for mental health and well-being. Key processes include supportive peer relationships, inclusive practices, caring relationships between teachers and students, and social constructivist pedagogical strategies that promote students' autonomy and active engagement in meaningful activities and collaborative learning (Atkinson et al. 2019). The classroom climate becomes a laboratory for students to experience care, support, empathy, respect, connection, inclusion, and a sense of belonging, and to practice their skills in emotional regulation, goal setting, problem solving, overcoming challenges, giving and receiving support, working collaboratively and problem solving (Aldridge, McChesney 2018; Wang et al. 2020). A social relational approach to mental health and well-being provides a foundational support upon which the other components are built and developed. Peer bullying, coercive classroom management, unequal treatment, exclusion, and academic pressure and stress for students (which in turn are potential causes of mental health problems for teachers) are elements that cannot coexist with a positive school climate (Inchley et al. 2020). The teacher, in particular, can affect the success or failure of students through the school by choosing strategies in classroom management and communication with students, to which

the students react with their different characteristics and personalities. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship must be central to the development of a good classroom climate (Brophy-Herb 2007).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH BASED ON WELL-BEING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

We can conclude that pursuing a positive school climate can illuminate the characteristics that make each person unique and promote inclusivity, individual interests, and aptitudes, and authentically reconstruct the personal path of growth and existential development (with reference to all those involved in the process). Well-being in school and in the classroom is an essential component of learning that allows students to define and construct knowledge, starting from the students' learning processes; only in a state of well-being comprised of cognitive, emotional and affective autonomy, and democratic participation in the learning processes is it possible to filter, interpret, and internalize the disciplines that can be structured in the subjects' identity heritage.

The process of well-being appears to be sustainable when it is not only concerned with the definition of the object of knowledge, but rather with the way in which it is appropriated, particularly with the emotional state of the subject in the act of knowledge, hence the strategic importance of the didactic and educational setting and the learning environment as environmental and social facilitators of the learning relationship. In fact, the well-being of students requires investment in the acquisition of academic, non-cognitive, and work skills necessary to function well in the present and in the future. Indeed, as we said at the beginning, well-being is a dynamic state: without sufficient investment in developing skills in the present, it is unlikely that they will enjoy well-being as adults. Regarding teachers, different countries could analyze how accountability policies translate into teacher workload, pressure, and lower levels of well-being. Similarly, the role, weight, and dynamics of evaluation and continuous professional development for career progression should be further explored, taking into account their relationship with perceived stress levels. Authorities could focus on measures to improve the social skills of teachers, enabling them to develop a collaborative culture in schools and improve their self-confidence. Building meaningful relationships with pupils and professionally relevant relationships with colleagues becomes crucial. Such actions could aim at developing support structures, initial training, and continuous professional development programs that can play a role both at the school level and for each individual teacher.

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GEROVĖS MOKYKLOJE KONCEPTUALUSIS MODELIS: EUROPOS APŽVALGA

SANTRAUKA. Vaikai ir besimokantis jaunimas Europoje susiduria su įvairiais sunkumais dėl neaiškios ateities, kurią lemia karai, skurdas, socialinė ir kultūrinė nelygybė, žiniasklaidos manipuliavimas, saugumo stygius internete, elektroninės patyčios, priklausomybė nuo technologijų ir padidėjęs pažeidžiamumas per Covid-19 pandemiją ir po jos (UNICEF *Innocenti* 2020). 35 proc. Europos trylikamečių ir 40 proc. penkiolikmečių teigia, kad jie jaučiasi prislėgti, nervingi ir patiria psichosomatinių simptomų dažniau nei kartą per savaitę (PSO Europos regioninis biuras 2020). Todėl šiuo metu vienas pagrindinių mokyklų tikslų – skatinti gerovę, imtis veiksmų jai gerinti. Ekonominio bendradarbiavimo ir plėtros organizacijos (EBPO) atliktos studijos apie mokinių mokymąsi ir gerovę (2020), susijusios su PISA 2018 metų rezultatais, taip pat ir Pasaulio sveikatos organizacijos (PSO) atlikto Sveiko elgesio mokykloje (HBSC) tyrimo (Inchley et al. 2020) išvados suteikia daug galimybių pamąstyti. Nors dauguma mokinių

iš EBPO šalių teigia, kad jie mokykloje jaučiasi socialiai integruoti, vis dėlto apie ketvirtadalis jų nesutinka, kad lengva rasti draugų mokykloje, o apie penktadalis jaučiasi atstumti (OECD 2020). Vaikų ir jaunimo gerovė yra sudėtingas reiškinys, todėl neturėtų būti apsiribojama vien tik švietimo problemomis, nors straipsnyje daugiausia dėmesio skiriama mokyklos kontekstui. Tačiau, be abejo, mokykla yra svarbi vieta, kur galima imtis veiksmų. Europos Komisijai naujai persvarsčius Rekomendaciją dėl bendrųjų visą gyvenimą trunkančių gebėjimų, būtent asmeninė, socialinė ir mokymosi gebėjimų (PSLL) kategorija buvo įtraukta kaip vienas iš bendrųjų visą gyvenimą trunkančio mokymosi gebėjimų (ES Taryba 2018).

Šiame straipsnyje siekiama susisteminti rodiklius, nustatytus apžvelgiant ES bei nacionalinę politiką, komunikaciją ir ataskaitas. Šie rodikliai kaip teorinis pagrindas gali būti naudingi būsimiems gerovės mokykloje tyrimams. Pirmiausia siekiama ištirti, kaip mokyklos klimatas gali atspindėti jos gyvenimo ypatumus ir savybes, atsižvelgiant į skirtingus tyrimo aspektus.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: gerovė, mokyklos klimatas, konceptualusis modelis, literatūros apžvalga.