

PEAS

Positive Education Actions
in Schools. An evidence-based toolkit
for classroom wellbeing
and psychosocial development

**Elena Lucciarini,
Sara Benini,
Jenny Marcionetti**



In response to the growing challenges of wellbeing and mental health in schools, teachers are now expected to foster not only academic learning but also essential psychosocial competences in their students. Yet how can these competences be taught in a concrete way, without overloading curricula or relying on complex programmes?

Developed as part of a large international research and training project, this book offers a practical, evidence-based approach to positive education in schools. Drawing on the ACTIONS framework developed by Professor Ilona Boniwell on the basis of extensive meta-analyses in positive psychology, it provides teachers with a clear, flexible and immediately usable toolbox.

Each chapter presents short interventions, full lesson plans and whole-school actions, suitable for all levels of compulsory education and directly aligned with transversal competences in Swiss curricula. An accessible theoretical introduction explains the scientific foundations of positive education and wellbeing development in schools.

Written by and for education professionals, this book supports teachers in integrating wellbeing and psychosocial competences into their everyday practice, fostering learning environments that are calmer, more effective and more humane.

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By Ilona Boniwell
Professor of Organisational Behaviour and
Coaching at HEC, CEO of Positran

Foreword

Education stands at a pivotal moment in history. For too long, we have measured success by narrow metrics—test scores, rankings, and rigid academic benchmarks—while neglecting the deeper, more essential dimensions of learning: joy, resilience, curiosity, and meaning. The consequences are undeniable: rising levels of student stress, disengagement, and mental health struggles, even among high achievers. But what if we could redefine education to include not just working to develop skilled minds, but also nurturing and encouraging thriving human beings? This book is an invitation to do just that—to embrace positive education, an approach that harmonises academic rigour with wellbeing, purpose, and the cultivation of human potential.

Why positive education matters now more than ever

We live in an era of unprecedented change. The challenges facing young people—climate anxiety, digital overload, economic uncertainty—demand more than rote memorisation or standardised test strategies. They require emotional agility, creativity, and the ability to find meaning amid complexity. Positive psychology, the science of human flourishing, offers a roadmap. Decades of research confirm that wellbeing is not a side effect of success; it is its foundation. Students who feel safe, valued, and engaged learn more deeply, persist through difficulties, and contribute positively to their communities. They will also be capable of adapting to the uncertain future—the future where many traditional pathways will die out and new ones will be invented.

Yet, traditional education systems often operate as if wellbeing and achievement are separate pursuits. We pit “hard skills” against “soft skills,” as if emotional intelligence and critical thinking are mutually exclusive in preparation for the future. This is a false dichotomy. In

practice, schools like Geelong Grammar in Australia, which pioneered positive education, have demonstrated that integrating wellbeing into the curriculum doesn't detract from academic excellence—it enhances it. When students understand their strengths, practise mindfulness, and build healthy relationships, they become better learners, collaborators, and problem-solvers.

A vision for schools of the future

Imagine walking into a school where:

- Morning circles replace rigid roll calls, with students sharing hopes for the day or moments of gratitude.
- Emotional literacy is taught with the same rigor as mathematical literacy.
- Lessons are designed around strengths, so a student who struggles with traditional maths might explore it through art or storytelling, discovering their unique pathway to mastery.
- Mistakes are celebrated as learning opportunities, and resilience is built through “failure-friendly” projects where the process matters as much as the outcome.
- Teachers are trained in wellbeing science, not just subject matter, and see themselves as mentors of flourishing, not just instructors of content.

This is not a distant dream. Schools worldwide—from public systems in Singapore to rural classrooms in South Africa—are proving that positive education is scalable, practical, and transformative. In Denmark, “hygge” (a culture of warmth and connection) is embedded in school design. In New Zealand, indigenous Māori principles of “whanaungatanga” (belonging) shape classroom practices. These innovations share a common thread: they recognise that learning happens best when students feel seen, supported, and inspired.

Breaking down the barriers

Positive education is all about creating learning environments where young people are equipped not only with knowledge and skills for their future careers but also with the psychosocial competencies to navigate life's inevitable ups and downs, to adapt skillsets, to build meaningful relationships, to find purpose, and to experience joy.

Yet, as appealing as it may sound, change is never easy, and the shift to positive education faces real obstacles:

- Standardised testing culture – Policymakers often prioritise metrics over meaning. Yet, even within rigid systems, teachers can carve out spaces for wellbeing—like “brain breaks,” reflection exercises, or strengths-based feedback.
- Teacher burnout – Educators can’t pour from an empty cup. This book includes strategies for staff wellbeing, because thriving teachers create thriving classrooms.
- Scepticism – Some argue that wellbeing is the family’s job, not the school’s. But with children spending 15,000+ hours in school, it’s the ideal place to practise resilience, empathy, and growth.
- Time – Even when the schools and teachers are open to introducing positive education, they are often faced with a simple yet almost impossible to solve problem—how to fit the extra learning and activities into already overflowing schedules.

How this book can help

The journey from understanding the *why* of Positive Education to implementing the *how* can often feel daunting. Teachers are at the forefront, juggling demanding curricula, diverse student needs, and the ever-present pressures of the modern classroom. They need more than just theories; they need tangible, accessible tools that can be seamlessly integrated into their daily practice without adding an overwhelming burden.

It is thus with immense pleasure and a profound sense of hope that I introduce “PEAS: Positive Education Actions in Schools.” In an education universe that often feels overwhelmingly complex and challenging, a book like this is not just timely; it is essential. Elena Lucciarini, Sara Benini, and Jenny Marcionetti have crafted a guide that is both visionary in its aspirations and remarkably practical in its application, offering a beacon for educators who are passionate about nurturing not just academic success, but the holistic wellbeing of their students. Their combined expertise as researchers, educators, and practitioners shines through on every page. They have translated complex theories into relatable language and actionable strategies, creating a resource that is both inspiring and incredibly useful.

The authors have meticulously grounded their work in scientific research, drawing from established models like PERMA+, CASEL, and the OECD Learning Compass, as well as major Swiss models of psychosocial competence. This scientific underpinning is crucial. Positive Education is not about fleeting fads or feel-good platitudes; it is about applying robust, evidence-based principles to create meaningful and sustainable change. The clear links provided to various curricula, including the Swiss models, make this book exceptionally relevant and directly applicable for teachers in that context, while its universal principles will resonate with educators worldwide.

This book is both a call to action and a toolkit. Inside, you'll find:

- The science made simple – Clear explanations of key concepts (like grit, flow, and growth mindset) and why they matter in the classroom.
- Spotlight on success – Case studies from schools that have reduced bullying, boosted engagement, and improved grades by putting wellbeing first.
- Practical exercises – From “strength spotting” to designing “kindness challenges,” actionable steps for teachers, parents, and leaders.
- Conversation starters – Tough questions to spark change: What’s the purpose of our school? How do we define success?

Taking ACTIONS on the right thing

I am particularly delighted to see the ACTIONS framework (Activity, Calming, Thinking, Identity, Optimism, Nourishing, Social, which I developed some years ago as a way to categorise Positive Psychology Interventions) being so thoughtfully adapted and expanded upon here for the specific context of schools (Boniwell, 2017). It’s a testament to the collaborative and evolving nature of our field that ideas can be shared, built upon, and tailored to meet diverse needs. The authors have taken this framework and populated it with a rich array of evidence-based interventions— some short and snappy, perfect for a five-minute brain break or a moment of calm, others more extensive, allowing for deeper exploration. The ACTIONS framework is both simple and powerful. Its memorable and intuitive structure empowers teachers to choose what resonates with them, what suits their students’ developmental stage, and what fits the unique climate of their classroom and school.

What you hold in your hands is thus a practical and time-optimised guide to shifting mindsets—both for students and for educators. It's an invitation to view wellbeing not as an optional add-on, but as a fundamental component of good teaching and effective learning. The “Take Action!” sections and reflective exercises woven throughout the book are particularly valuable, encouraging a personal engagement with the material that is crucial for genuine understanding and lasting change.

Teachers matter just as much

The authors rightly emphasise that teachers' own wellbeing is paramount—we cannot pour from an empty cup. This truth lies at the heart of creating sustainable positive education environments. Research consistently shows that when educators engage with wellbeing practices—whether through mindfulness, strengths-based approaches, or peer support networks—they replenish their emotional and psychological resources. Broad evidence base demonstrates that teacher wellbeing directly influences classroom climate, with flow-on effects to student engagement and achievement. When teachers model and embody wellbeing practices, they create a ripple effect—their renewed capacity for emotional regulation and positive relationships fosters safer, more supportive learning spaces where both they and their students can thrive.

This systemic effect occurs because teacher wellbeing is not an isolated variable, but a keystone of school culture. Educators who feel psychologically supported are better equipped to implement positive education practices with fidelity, from strength-based feedback to trauma-informed pedagogy. Moreover, schools embedding wellbeing into their operational fabric—through policies like reasonable workload expectations, peer mentoring systems, and leadership that values emotional labour—create self-reinforcing cycles of positivity. As the authors note, such environments don't just prevent burnout; they actively enhance professional satisfaction, making teaching more sustainable and rewarding. Ultimately, investing in teacher wellbeing isn't ancillary to educational success—it's the precondition for creating inclusive, effective schools where both adults and children flourish.

The ACTIONS framework can help not only students, but also teachers. Try out the interventions, and witness the positive transformations

that can unfold in your classroom and in the lives of your students (Boniwell, 2017).

A personal reflection

I'll never forget a conversation with a teenager who told me, "School feels like a race where no one tells you where the finish line is." That's the heart of the problem: education has become a means to an end—a diploma, a job—rather than a journey of discovery. But everything changes when we shift the focus from "What do you want to be?" to "Who do you want to become?"

"PEAS" champions a vision where schools become vibrant ecosystems of flourishing. This book is for the educators who dare to reimagine their classrooms, the parents who want more for their children than stress and burnout, and the students who deserve to love learning. The future of education isn't about choosing between achievement and wellbeing—it's about realising they are one and the same. In a recent paper that attempted to find consensus on wellbeing in education among psychologists, philosophers, and educators we argued that "The good of enhancing students' ability to engage in economic production is, by contrast, a far too narrow basis on which to justify the education that occupies a large and growing portion of people's lives and has far-reaching consequences for every aspect of their wellbeing" (Curren et al, 2024, p.144). This is not a utopian dream; it is an achievable reality, and this book provides a clear roadmap to get there, one PEA (Positive Education Action) at a time.

Let's begin this journey together.

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Introduction:

PEAS to meet you

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the *Positive Education Actions in Schools* (PEAS) book, your guide to integrating wellbeing into the classroom. Imagine a learning environment where students thrive not just academically, but emotionally, socially, and mentally. This vision lies at the heart of Positive Education, blending the science of Positive Psychology with practical strategies to create flourishing schools. Because of course school is about reading, writing, and counting, and you cannot achieve these skills (and others) if you're not feeling ok. It is not academics or wellbeing... it is both. Like two sides of the same coin. This book equips educators with a comprehensive toolkit for prioritising wellbeing without compromising academic excellence. From the theoretical fundamentals of well-established frameworks like PERMA+, CASEL, the OECD's Learning Compass, as well as Swiss models of psychosocial competences to the innovative ACTIONS approach (Activity, Calming, Thinking, Identity, Optimism, Nourishing, and Social), the PEAS book offers actionable insights for transforming teaching practices and fostering psychosocial competences.¹

Whether you are an experienced teacher, an education stakeholder, or simply passionate about creating better futures for young minds, this book is your guide to integrating wellbeing seamlessly into education. Dive into evidence-backed practices, explore innovative classroom interventions, and embrace the flexibility and personalisation possibilities of the ACTIONS toolkit approach that benefits students, teachers, and the whole school alike.

But this is not just a book to read! Reflective exercises and 'Take action' sections provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own practice, allowing you to immediately apply what you learn, enriching

¹ Psychosocial skills, socio-emotional learning, soft skills, life skills, character education, 21st century skills, wellbeing skills, transversal skills, noncognitive skills: each construct comes from slightly different theoretical and research fields: we decided to use psychosocial competences in this book in order to simplify the reading.

both your professional practice and your students’ experiences. By embracing Positive Education, you’ll help shape a brighter, more balanced future—one classroom at a time.

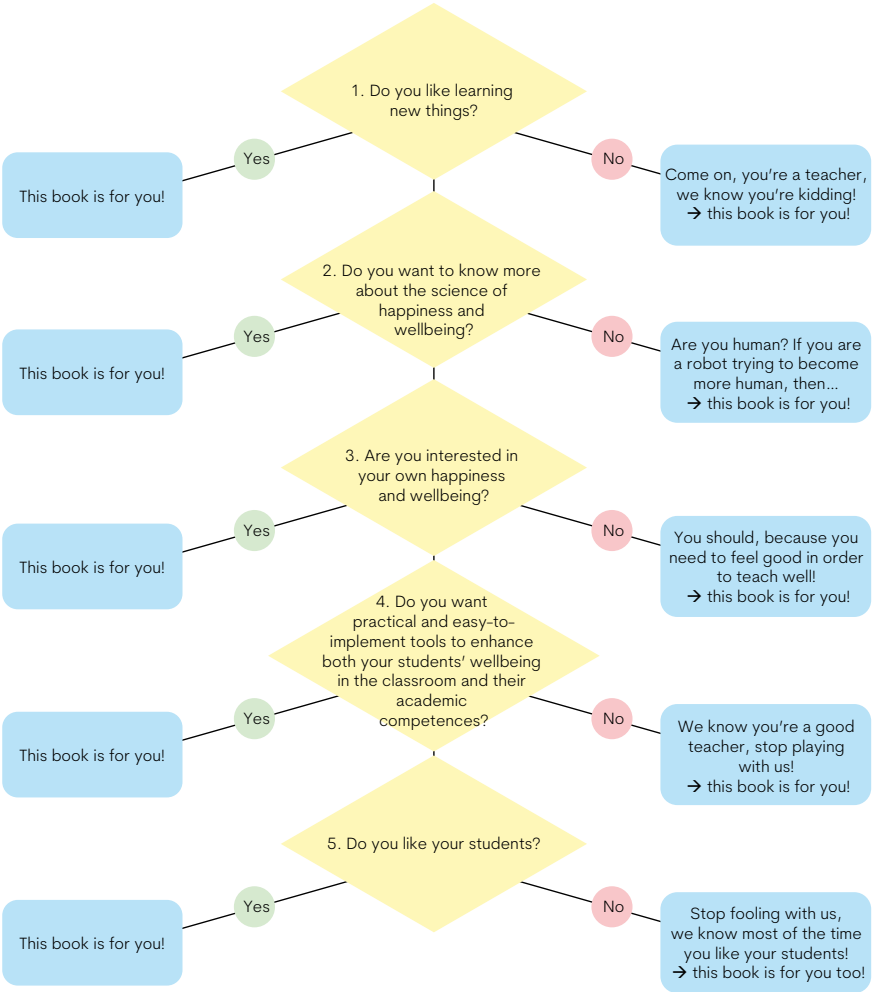
Are you ready to take action?

If so, please join us in this journey to redefine what education can achieve!

Warmly,
Elena, Sara, and Jenny

What you should definitely know before starting to read this book

Is this book for me?



How do I use this book?

Hello and welcome! This book has two distinct parts: you can either dive into the “what” of wellbeing and “why” it is important to include its training in schools, or into the “how” to do that.

In the “what,” you will get to know about what wellbeing competences are and what Positive Psychology and Positive Education are. In the “why,” you will find evidence that supports the importance of working on wellbeing at school. Several exercises (see “Take action!” boxes) and tests will allow you to make the connection between theory and practice straight away and will also help you get a better knowledge of yourself, and a better understanding of what is happening in terms of wellbeing, for you, your students and (why not?) your whole school.

In the “how,” you will discover short and long ACTIONS that you can choose for use with your students based on classroom climate, the wellbeing outcomes, and the impact on the development of the psychosocial resources you are looking for. Moreover, you will find the links to the *capacités transversales* of the *Plan d'Etude Romand*, the *competenze trasversali* of the *Piano di Studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese*, and the *überfachliche Kompetenzen* of the *Lehrplan21*.

Why does this book matter?

More and more scholars (Boniwell, 2006; Cipriano et al., 2023; Curren et al., 2024; Durlak et al., 2022; Hayes et al., 2025; Kern et al., 2024), along with the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), as well as the Swiss curricula (CIIP, 2011) are wholeheartedly in support of including universal psychosocial interventions in schools. Why? Well, first off, because research says these interventions can really help kids and teenagers with their mental health (Alam, 2022; Shankland & Rosset, 2017; Waters & Loton, 2019). Plus, science tells us that being happy and doing well in school go hand in hand. And guess what? School is one of the best places to reach kids and teens (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2022). This is where you can play a role!

In Swiss schools, we need to develop these psychosocial competences with our pupils! But here's the big question: how do we actually make this happen in schools or in our classrooms? There are many ways, like whole-school approaches and social-emotional learning

programmes. But if you're a high school teacher, for example, dealing with 45-minute classes, none of these approaches seem all that practical. The whole-school approach may be tricky because of politics and money, and most schools don't have the expertise. And programmes? They don't always fit into the strict curriculum, and nobody seems ready to fund them or give us extra time.

So, here is a different idea: let's talk about ACTIONS in the classroom. Scholars (Lucciarini et al., 2025) have looked at evidence-based Positive Psychology interventions and found something interesting. It turns out that short, personalised, science-backed, and easy-to-measure interventions can be a pretty powerful way to boost wellbeing and psychosocial competences in schools and classrooms. And here the toolbox approach comes to our aid. That is the reason for this book. To give all interested teachers a "toolbox" in which they can find, according to their needs and preferences, classroom- and school-tailored tools with which to effectively promote the psychosocial competences of their students in schools.

In this book, we dive into this toolbox approach to positive education through the ACTIONS model. By exploring the theory and research, we will show you the best possible interventions you can implement and use in the classroom.

One last important thing: even though we're giving you an extraordinary toolbox, the first essential tool is yourself. Developing your own wellbeing and psychosocial competences (for example through the "Take action!" activities) is therefore essential. It will help you get to know yourself better, understand what your students are experiencing, and, why not, transform the atmosphere of the whole school.

Important notice: emotions ahead!

Let's be honest: even with the best intentions, it's possible that some pages might stir something in you. Reading about wellbeing, reflecting on your own emotions, giving yourself a break or asking yourself deep questions can sometimes bring unexpected feelings to the surface. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you: it simply means you're human. The "Take action!" exercises, for example, are designed to generate positive experiences. And they almost always do. However, it can happen, even if rarely, that they awaken memories, touch a tender spot, or bring on a small moment of melancholy. That's normal. And that's perfectly okay. It's not a problem. The goal isn't to force wellbeing (we don't believe in "smile in the mirror and it will always smile back" or in easy motivational formulas), but to create a space for exploration, with gentleness and clarity. If any content or activity touches you more than you expected, don't face it alone: seek support from someone you trust (a colleague, a friend, or a professional). It's a meaningful experience: meeting someone who cares for your strengths and helps you build on them. And remember: you have the right to slow down, skip a page, come back to it later... or even stick the book in the freezer, just like Joey and Rachel do in *Friends*.

This book isn't just something to read. It's a guide to experience.

What is the PEAS project?

The PEAS project was born thanks to an encounter between the three authors, each of whom works on similar topics in teacher education in the Italian- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. This project is financially supported by Movetia. Movetia promotes exchanges, mobility and cooperation in education, continuing education, and youth work in Switzerland, Europe, and worldwide. You can find more information at www.movetia.ch. PEAS is a multilingual, international cooperation project between the Universities of Teacher Education (*Ticino Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana*, "SUPSI") and Wallis (*Haute école pédagogique du Valais*, "HEP-VS") and the Paris

School of Advanced Business Studies (*École des hautes études commerciales de Paris*, “HEC Paris”). Drawing on the latest research findings and evaluated interventions, the project partners collaborate to share practices, materials, and networks on Positive Education for teachers in all grades of compulsory education, to improve their curricula, and to contribute to the instructional and disciplinary innovation in the field of psychosocial competence development and wellbeing promotion in school, i.e., Positive Education. In addition to these joint activities, they published this evidence-informed teacher manual for the implementation of Positive Psychology interventions in school (classroom and whole-school). As part of this project, the authors also developed a teacher training course on positive education and an online platform where the project coordinators can upload materials, instruments, and content for teachers, and teachers can also upload their materials, and report on their experiences, efficacy perception, adaptations, etc.



Part 1

The science of wellbeing

1 Positive Psychology

"The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones."
(Hanson, 2020)

Before diving into the practical part of this book, it is strongly recommended that you read the following paragraphs. They will enable you to describe the main theoretical foundations of the positive education interventions presented in the book, and therefore to introduce the activities confidently to your class and to all stakeholders. This theoretical knowledge is essential and has had a massive impact on our teaching, which is why it is very important for us to share it with you. In fact, we believe that it is the key to the whole book.

We have a negativity bias (and loads of other ones). Have you noticed that during the lesson we often watch the kid who does not behave the way we expect? Or that the one mistake on the blackboard immediately jumps to our attention? Or when someone gives us feedback, we only remember the negative elements? It's normal! We display a cognitive bias: because of evolutionary causes, negative events and emotions have more impact than positive events and emotions on our psychology (Vaish et al., 2008). Good news: we can learn to reorient our attention to get a full and balanced view. Yes, there is a child showing disruptive behaviour, but there are 23 others who are looking at us, with big bright eyes and a smile, eager to learn (ok, maybe not

all 23... but you get the point, right?). Yes, that word is written incorrectly, but all the others are not: they are perfectly perfect. Yes, we may have received one negative comment, but beside that the feedback also highlighted the many aspects that went well. It is important to train ourselves to redirect our attention to the many things that went right, instead of dwelling on the one thing that went wrong, because research on feedback and on Positive Psychology (no worries, we'll tell you all about Positive Psychology in the paragraphs below) shows that, for example, emphasising what is correct or building on the students' strengths will be more efficient for their learning (Lucciarini & Bressoud, 2022). Therefore, we need to work on our psychosocial competences (we are going to tell you more about them too in the following paragraphs) in order to constantly reduce and reframe our innate negativity bias. This is where Positive Psychology comes to our aid.

We know what you are thinking: what is this sugar-coated, rainbowy, unicorny fluffy stuff? Well, Positive Psychology is not any of those things. It is an acclaimed field of research. Of course, there are numerous definitions of Positive Psychology. Here is our favourite one:

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal functioning on different levels: subjective, individuals, communities, groups, institutions, countries.

(Gable & Haidt, 2005)

Positive Psychology is the science of human flourishing: it looks mainly at what works, what does not, for whom and in which circumstances, by measuring different variables. Some central constructs related to wellbeing studied by positive psychology are: optimism, grit, resilience, emotional intelligence, emotional competences, motivation, character strengths, meditation, and gratitude. Positive Psychology is also an applied science (just have a look on the internet to see how many master's degrees in applied Positive Psychology there are!) that promotes wellbeing and, as the name suggests, the development of positive psychological resources in different contexts (e.g., professional, personal, educational).

A little bit of history

One must not value living as such but living well.

(Plato, trans. Jowette, B., 2022)

In the beginning, Positive Psychology's primary goal was to bring more balance to psychological research and practices (Linley et al., 2006). Indeed, instead of continuing to focus on what was missing, it chose to change the focus to resources. The official start of Positive Psychology is the speech made by Martin Seligman, at the 1999 American Psychology Association (APA) meeting). However, it did not magically appear out of nowhere. Positive Psychology is strongly influenced by many other fields and thinkers: Greek philosophers like Aristotle and the Stoics, Buddhism, humanist psychologists like Maslow (by the way, he seems to be the first one to have come up with the word Positive Psychology in 1954) and Rogers, Jung, Johada, and Allport (Boniwell, 2006). Seligman was certainly not alone when he launched Positive Psychology. He had met Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on a beach in Hawaii in 1997. They were aware of each other's work but had never talked. During these discussions, the two men conceived the whole movement (Sheldon et al., 2011).

Positive Psychology evolution

Positive Psychology is constantly evolving. It is now in its fourth wave.

The *first* wave focused on positive phenomena only (strengths, positive emotions, positive relationships, etc.). It was criticised because for being too simplistic (Lomas et al., 2021). Therefore, with the *second* wave, positive psychologists brought nuance, balance, and complexity. They emphasised the role of our dark side as necessary for our optimal development (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Research shows that not all positively valenced elements correlate with optimal results and that not all negatively valenced elements correlate with negative results. Positive Psychology Therapies arose during this second wave (Rashid & Seligman, 2018; Slade et al., 2017).

The *third* wave (Lomas et al., 2021) expanded until 2024. Its objective was to broaden Positive Psychology's scope (cultures, environments, systems, diversity). It also attempted to implement deontology guidelines for Positive Psychology practitioners because more and more people

were graduating in Positive Psychology. And finally, it aimed at broadening the research field including more qualitative methodologies as well.

We are today in the *fourth* wave, or regenerative Positive Psychology. Regenerative Positive Psychology is all about reimagining wellbeing—not just feeling good ourselves but ensuring that our planet and communities thrive too! Imagine a world where your happiness is linked to the health of the forests, oceans, and people around you. This new way of looking at wellbeing—one that doesn't just help you feel good in the moment but also strengthens the systems that keep us all thriving, is the heart of the fourth wave of Positive Psychology (Steger 2024).

This approach encourages us to adopt practices that help nature bounce back, tackling big challenges like climate change while building resilience and sustainable living. Plus, it prioritises fairness and justice, ensuring everyone gets a fair shot at wellbeing (Mangelsdorf, 2024; Steger, 2024). It's about more than just personal happiness; it's about growing stronger as individuals and as part of the larger systems—social, environmental, and beyond—that sustain life. For us teachers and our students, this shift offers a unique opportunity: to focus on durability.

Take action 1

Say thanks to Nature

It's time to recharge our energy while contributing to a healthier, more resilient world. Ready to give it a try? We're proposing an activity that strengthens your connection with nature—its effectiveness has even been tested in a randomised controlled study. It helps cultivate a sense of gratitude and positivity by focusing on the natural world.

How to do it

Every evening, list three things in nature you're grateful for that day. These might be simple things like the smell of rain, the sight of blooming flowers, or the sound of birds singing.

These questions can help you find them:

- Which natural elements brought you a sense of peace or joy today?
- Why are you grateful for them?
- How did they improve your day or shift your mood?

If you have a bit more time: draw, photograph, or write something inspired by one of the things you're grateful for.

Example: "Today, I'm grateful for the gentle breeze I felt while walking home. It reminded me to slow down and take a deep breath after a busy day."

A personal note: we really enjoy using our phones to take beautiful photos of nature and taking time in the evening to look at them again or share them on social media. What about you? Maybe we could all find in this a small source of calm and wonder.

And now?

What if you chose a moment this week to go out and meet the living world—just for the pleasure of feeling it and saying thank you?

Wellbeing

As mentioned in the introduction, positive psychology is the scientific study and application of what makes a life worth living and what makes people and communities flourish (Peterson, 2008). It focuses, therefore, more on positive events and positive characteristics (resources) like character strengths, optimism, life satisfaction, happiness, wellbeing, gratitude, self-esteem and self-confidence, hope, etc. But if we want to study wellbeing, we also need to be able to measure it somehow. So let us just remember how wellbeing is defined. As is often the case, there is no single definition of wellbeing, but depending on the school of thought or the focus of interest of the research groups engaged in the field, the components of the definition or models of wellbeing adopted may vary. Below we present those we think are the most relevant for the school context.

The PERMA+ model of flourishing

This model is the most famous one. We will, therefore, spend a little bit more time on this one. Seligman's PERMA+ model presents wellbeing in five dimensions (pathways) (Seligman, 2012): positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Each of these dimensions is a whole field of research in itself.

Seligman defines a more comprehensive and holistic approach to wellbeing rather than highlighting the pathways to happiness, as depicted in figure 1.

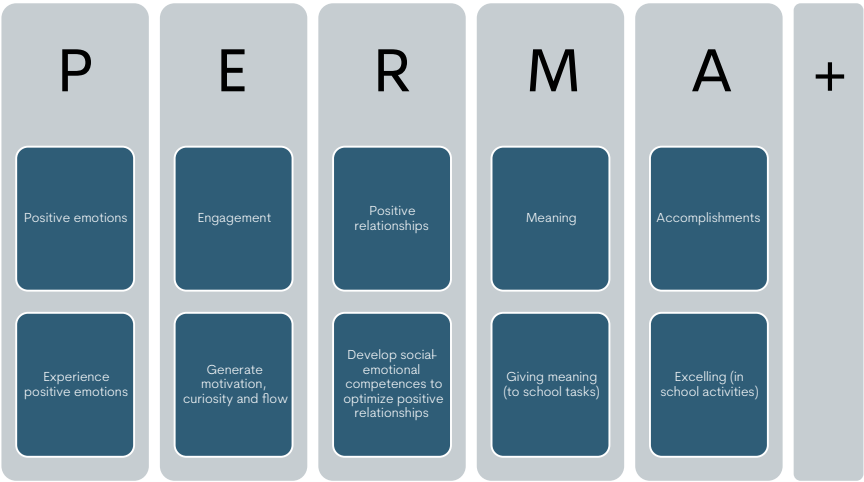


FIGURE 1 PERMA+ Model. Adapted from (Seligman, 2012).

P – Positive emotions

The science of positive emotions was developed and researched by Barbara Fredrickson (2004; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) including joy, interest, contentment and love. A key proposition is that these positive emotions broaden an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoire: joy sparks the urge to play, interest sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savour and integrate, and love sparks a recurring cycle of each of these urges within safe, close relationships. The broadened mindsets arising from these positive emotions are contrasted to the narrowed mindsets sparked by many negative emotions (i.e. specific action tendencies, such as attacking or fleeing). She was interested in the role of positively valenced emotions rather than negatively valenced ones, especially because psychology had dealt for a long time with disagreeable emotions and numerous scholars had written many books on that theme. Thus, she discovered that positive emotions, such as joy, pride, awe, love, gratitude, ... also have a specific role in the human psyche: they broaden resources and build new ones. For example, the role of interest is to help us build new knowledge.

Take action 2

Positive emotions

Giving a name to our emotions already means recognising them. And when we recognise them, we can understand them better, savour them more... and also regulate them more effectively (Mikolajczak et al., 2020). This awareness is an essential first step toward living better with ourselves. Returning to positive emotions also allows us to rekindle them, like gently fanning a flame keep its warmth alive a little longer.

How to do it

Take a moment to think back over your day. Close your eyes if it helps. Try to write down all the positive emotions you experienced. If you need a little help, you can use the list of emotions (see Appendix 2)

And now?

Read through your notes again in a few days. Notice whether certain emotions come up often. They might be your true sources of wellbeing.

E – Engagement

Have you ever been so concentrated on a task that you completely lost track of time? (We hope that this is the case now that you are reading this book!) Well... this is the “flow experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). It is linked to engagement and basically says that you are optimally motivated. Several factors can indicate that you are in the flow. Here is a list: : total concentration on the task, clear objectives and immediate feedback, altered perception of time (it passes very quickly or very slowly), feeling of fluidity, disappearance of distracting thoughts, a feeling of control and of accomplishment in the midst of action, without forced effort. Of course, there are other theories about motivation, for example, the one by well-renowned scientists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2012). They talk about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As teachers, you have probably heard of them and the self-determination theory (see *Psychological need satisfaction* in Chapter 1, p. 32).

Take action 3

Engagement

Recognising moments of flow means recognising what makes us come alive. And the more we know what fuels our engagement, the more we can activate it in our everyday lives—for ourselves, but also in our relationships, our projects, and our work. This kind of reflection can even pave the way for concrete changes: dedicating more time to an activity, rediscovering a passion we've set aside, or simply acknowledging what truly recharges us.

How to do it

Take a few minutes to reflect on the moments when you felt completely absorbed in an activity, to the point of losing track of time. It may be a recent experience or something further back in your memory. Here are some questions to guide you:

When was the last time you completely lost track of time?

What passions or hobbies put you into a state of flow?

What could you do to experience this state more often in your current life?

And now?

Flow is a precious signal: it shows you what connects you to yourself. Your task is to follow it! Come back to your answers regularly. Identify the activities that appear most often—they are your allies. Try integrating one of them, even for just a short moment, into your week. And if you feel something “pulling” you in, let yourself be carried by it. You're probably coming into contact with what gives meaning to your engagement.?

R – Relationships

Positive relationships are the number one factor of happiness (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Socialising and the feeling of being loved are essential to humans, as Aristotle expressed in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (2014). Sharing good news, going for walks, chatting on social media, doing something for someone we do not know, sharing a meal, or talking to someone increases wellbeing (Siedlecki et al., 2014). This

is also true in the classroom. You have probably already noticed that when pupils get along well, when you and your class share a significant and close relationship, you not only feel better, but your students also learn more effectively (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Take action 4

Positive relationships

Authentic, positive relationships are the number one factor in happiness. This key finding from the Harvard Study of Adult Development confirms that we are, at our core, social beings. Every benevolent interaction (a word, a look, attentive listening, a gesture) has the power to nourish our wellbeing. In the classroom, you may have already felt it: when relationships are healthy, the atmosphere changes. Learning flows more easily, tensions ease, and everyone feels more at home.

How to do it

List all the people with whom you share a deep, authentic relationship. You can include your pet, too! Reflect (and jot down, if you wish) what you do to keep them close to you. Reflect on how you know that they are close to you.

And now?

Keep your relationship map within reach. Revisit it, add to it and, above all, take care of those bonds that make you feel good.

M – Meaning

Meaning is a very interesting field too. Thinkers like Evgeny Osin (2023) or Michael Steger (2022) are working on this concept. Having a purpose in life and long-time perspectives help humans to be more resilient and get through challenges and difficulties. People with high levels of meaning are happier, more grateful, have more positive affects (love, joy, vitality), life satisfaction, wellbeing, ...(Russo-Netzer & Ivztan, 2023; Steger, 2022)

Take action 5**Meaning**

The meaning of life often hides in small moments. Noticing them already means cultivating them (Russo-Netzer & Ivztan, 2023; Steger, 2022). We don't need grand existential answers—we just need to pay attention to what resonates.

How to do it

Take a moment and think back over your week. Then answer this question:

- Which moment gave me the feeling that it “had value”?
- It might be an exchange, a smile, an activity, a word, an insight...
- Why that moment in particular? What does it reveal about what matters to me?

And now?

Try to relive that kind of moment—or to create one. Just once, this week.?

A – Accomplishments

Accomplishment—also known as achievement, mastery, or success—is key to wellbeing, in the classroom (and everywhere else). It's about setting goals, tackling challenges, and mastering new skills. By celebrating effort and a love of learning, you help students develop a strong sense of accomplishment. Encourage goal setting, tackle challenges, and celebrate victories. Focusing on intrinsic goals like personal growth boosts wellbeing more than chasing external rewards. (Seligman, 2012; Sigmundsson et al., 2023)

Take action 6**Accomplishment**

Taking the time to acknowledge a step forward or a success—even a tiny one—and to celebrate it means nurturing motivation, strengthening meaning... and doing yourself good.

How to do it

Answer the following questions:

- When do you feel competent or successful?
- How do you feel when you manage to accomplish something?

And now?

Smile. Have a coffee. Take a bath. Treat yourself to a massage. Do something that tells your brain: “Yes! I did it!” Or share this small moment with a colleague. You’ve earned it.

The “Plus” (+)

The Plus (+) in PERMA+ explores elements beyond Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, including optimism, nutrition, physical activity, and sleep—all crucial for mental wellbeing (Donaldson et al., 2022).

Optimism is key to resilience and wellbeing. Literature suggests that optimistic individuals live longer, recover better post-surgery, have lower depression levels, and adapt well to changes (Segerstrom, 2007). Physical activity is linked to wellbeing, reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, and improving mental focus (Kandola et al., 2019). Inactivity is often associated with negative emotions and poor health habits (Birdee et al., 2013). More and more evidence supports the claim that good nutrition impacts physical and mental health. Diets rich in vegetables and nutrients, and low in processed foods, are linked to higher wellbeing (Blanchflower et al., 2013; Firth et al., 2020). Studies have shown that good food impacts your emotional health (Constantin & Fonseca, 2020; O’Neil et al., 2014) the other will follow suit, as increasing evidence has shown that the food choices have a positive impact on several mental disorders. In this research paper we have tried to show that nutritional deficiencies have been proved to negatively impact on the mental sanity and that, consequently, specific nutrients can contribute to the alleviation of mood and mental disorders. Specific nutrients can affect cognitive processes and emotions, whereas the lack of vitamins, fatty acids, minerals and some macronutrients (proteins, carbohydrates and lipids. Quality sleep seems to foster mental and emotional resilience, while sleep deprivation leads to negative thinking and emotional vulnerability (Arora et al., 2022; Goldstein & Walker, 2014). Insomnia increases depression risk.

Take action 7

The “plus”

When the body feels good, everything goes a little better. Sleep, what we eat, and the way we move directly influence our mood, concentration, energy... and even motivation. They are pillars we shouldn't overlook. Good sleep, for example, is essential for psychological and emotional wellbeing (Baranwal et al., 2023; Loprinzi & Joyner, 2018). Sleeping well helps you concentrate better, regulate your emotions, and face the day with more energy.

How to do it

Try putting into practice habits that promote quality sleep. Here are some research-based tips for adults (and young people):

- get 7 to 9 hours of sleep (young people need up to 10–12!);
- reduce caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol (forbidden for young people);
- increase physical activity (a must for young people);
- limit screen time (crucial for adolescents' health);
- use your bedroom only for sleep and intimacy (this applies to everyone).

And now?

Improve your sleep, improve your wellbeing: each day, try to tick off at least three actions from the list. At the end of the week, reflect on how you felt..

Psychological need satisfaction

The self-determination theory is one of the most-cited theories in the world. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2012) have been working on this for four decades. Even after Deci's death, Ryan and his team are still very much active on the topic of happiness (Center for Self-determination Theory, n.d.). According to these scholars, humans have three basic psychological needs for optimal wellbeing and performance: autonomy (the feeling of having choices), competency (the experience of mastery), and relatedness (the feeling of being connected and belonging). Once these basic needs are satisfied, we function effectively and optimally. Many meta-analyses (studies that collect other studies on the same topic) were

reviewed by Ryan (2023). The results suggest, for example, that if you score high on the three needs, you are less anxious, less depressed, report better physical health, and are more satisfied with your life (Dittmar et al., 2014). Just to give you a taste of how much this is a question of science, research, and people working in labs, at a recent conference (Ryan, 2022), Ryan told us that his team was still investigating the theory in order to see whether a fourth need (for example, meaning), should be added... But that for now, it was not as strongly linked to other aspects of wellbeing as are autonomy, competency, and relatedness.

Subjective wellbeing

According to Ed Diener, one of the greatest Positive Psychologists (Diener, 1984), you are happy if you think that you are happy and if your life is linked to pleasure. It is true that this idea makes a lot of sense! For example, someone living in a shantytown in India may report a higher sense of happiness than someone living in a mansion in Zurich. Thus, according to Diener, wellbeing is reached if you have more positive emotions than negative ones, and if you feel satisfied with your life. This model is one of the most-cited ones in the field. It is linked with agreeable emotions like hope, contentment, pride, and joy. It is therefore important for how we perceive our quality of life. If our level of subjective wellbeing is high, our levels of mental health and physical health are also high (Ngamaba et al., 2017).

Psychological wellbeing

Another well-known model is the one developed by Carol Ryff and Corey Keyes (1995). According to them, wellbeing is not simply the absence of distress, but rather the result of six core dimensions that reflect a full, meaningful, and autonomous life: self-acceptance (having a positive attitude toward oneself, acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses), positive relationships (the ability to form warm, satisfying, and trusting relationships; being empathetic and capable of emotional intimacy), feeling independent (being independent and self-directed, able to resist social pressures and regulate oneself according to internal standards), environmental mastery (feeling capable of managing one's life and surroundings effectively, shaping them according to one's needs and values), meaning in life (having clear goals and direction, living with a sense of personal meaning), and personal growth (perceiving oneself as continuously

developing, striving to realise one's potential, and approaching new experiences as opportunities for learning). Ryff has empirically validated this model through various international studies (Ryff & Singer, 2008), showing that these dimensions are linked to better mental health, lower levels of depression, greater resilience to stress, and even biological indicators of wellbeing (e.g., immune and neuroendocrine functioning).

The healthy mind framework

Richard Davidson is a famous neuropsychologist who you may have seen with the Dalai Lama. He was one of the first scientists to measure the effects of mindfulness on human brains. His studies led him to the conclusion that wellbeing is a competence (thank nature for plasticity) and that four pillars (Davidson, 2016) constitute wellbeing: awareness, caring connection, understanding of self, and meaning. His idea is that you need to exercise each of the pillars to be happy. Awareness is linked to the practice of being mindful of what is happening in the present moment without judgement. It is "the attentiveness to perceptual impressions in one's environment as internal cues such as bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions" (Dahl et al., 2020). Caring connection and meaning are quite close to what Seligman described in his PERMA. As for insight, self-knowledge is a sense of self, of our thoughts and emotions. What we love about this research is that Davidson and his colleagues point out exactly how the brain is affected when you train these competences. For example, intentional training in mindfulness leads to an enhanced self-regulation that is shown in certain networks in the brain. It helps with working memory and attention and reduces mind wandering (Mrazek et al., 2013).

What about happiness?

Above, we presented some very famous models and frameworks that define wellbeing, but you should know that there are many more. But what about happiness? What is happiness? Is it not the same as wellbeing? These are great questions. The science of happiness is fascinating, and many scientists are working on it. Thus, you will come across as many models, theories, and scales to measure happiness. We are not going to dive too much into the differences between wellbeing, happiness, and flourishing here because it would lead us too far from our subject. As you can imagine, these constructs are subject to debate.

Happiness and wellbeing are related but not the same!

Happiness is often seen as having a preponderance of positive emotions whereas wellbeing is defined more multidimensionally. According to the World Health Organisation (Saraceno, 2002), wellbeing is very close to positive mental health, which is “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” In other words, being happy is often linked to hedonism and wellbeing to eudaimonism. Aristotle used to say that you need both the pleasant life (happiness, hedonism) and the good life (wellbeing, eudaimonism) (Aristotle, 2014).

The brain and happiness

According to neuroscientists, happiness is not primarily a cognitive construct—it is an immediate emotional experience rooted in the brain's neurobiological reward and motivation systems (Esch, 2022). Three neurobiologically distinct types of happiness can be identified, forming what Esch calls the “ABC model.”

Type A — wanting, approaching, and pleasure — refers to the active pursuit of reward: the drive to seek out new experiences, pleasures, and excitement. This type is particularly characteristic of young people and is linked to the brain's dopaminergic reward system.

Type B — avoiding, departing, and relief — refers to the happiness that comes from escaping discomfort or resolving stress. Rather than pursuing pleasure, this type involves the relief felt when a difficulty is overcome or a burden lifted. It tends to be more prominent in middle-aged adults navigating life's pressures.

Type C — non-wanting, staying, and satisfaction — refers to a deeper, quieter form of happiness: inner peace, contentment, and joy that does not depend on external rewards or the resolution of problems. This is the kind of happiness most associated with older people, and it underlies what researchers call the “satisfaction paradox” — the surprising finding that elderly people often report greater happiness than younger ones.

Paradoxically, it appears that these forms of happiness are not fixed: they can be cultivated and developed through practice. Contemplative practices such as mindfulness and meditation, for example, can train the brain toward the deeper contentment of Type C, regardless of age. Happiness, in this sense, is biological — but it can still be learned.

For biologists, several neurotransmitters contribute to these experiences: dopamine can be boosted through exercise, music, meditation,

and quality sleep; serotonin through exposure to sunlight, physical activity, and a fibre-rich diet; oxytocin — often called the “love hormone” — through physical affection, pro-social behaviours, and shared meals; and endorphins through exercise, laughter, music, and even chocolate (Dsouza et al., 2020). Dopamine can be produced by frequent exercise, yoga, listening to music, meditation, sunlight, and getting enough sleep. Serotonin can be enhanced through exposure to sunshine, massage, sports, and fibre-rich diets. Oxytocin is known as the love hormone: to optimise this hormone, cuddling, pro-social behaviours like staying in touch (through social media too) or sharing meals have shown to have an impact. Endorphins are released during high-stress levels and soothe us. Again, research shows that exercise, sex, love, music, chocolate-eating, meditation, and sunshine can boost endorphins.

Take action 8

Happiness

As we’ve seen, happiness is many things. Above, we shared with you only a limited number of happiness models. Just to give you an idea... Michel Hansenne found 99 different scales to measure it (Hansenne, 2021)! So, just like in cooking, everyone has their own personal recipe for happiness—their favourite ingredients, their little secrets. Try imagining yours here...

How to do it

Write your own recipe for happiness as if you were a real chef.

Here’s an example (kindly provided by Elena Lucciarini), just to show you the activity:

Basic ingredients (essential) for an optimal week:

At least 7 hours of restorative sleep per night (otherwise I’m a grumpy zombie)

Lots of authentic connections (a real exchange with students, colleagues, teammates, or someone dear to me)

At least 3 hours of CrossFit

Cuddles and tenderness

Ingredients that add flavour (optional but delightful):

A moment of pedagogical pride (when a student understands, when I see them fully engaged, when I try a new method and it works)

An unexpected laugh
 A Taylor Swift song
 An hour of ceramics to make cups and bowls for the people I love
 A social media post to savour happy memories

The little secret that changes everything:

Daring to say what I feel before it overflows.

Preparation time: variable—sometimes 5 minutes of breathing are enough, sometimes it takes a whole evening...

Your turn!

- Basic ingredients (essential) for an optimal week):
- Ingredients that add flavour (optional but delightful):
- The little secret that changes everything:
- Preparation time:

And now?

We often have preconceived ideas about what makes us happy: money, success, material comfort, beauty, etc. This exercise helps us better understand what truly contributes to our lasting wellbeing. Research shows that the simplest and most human factors are what really make us happy. The good news? Most of these “ingredients” of happiness are within reach and... already here!

But beware: We are not in a “happycracy” (Bouffard, 2019)!

You cannot (and we hope you do not want to) tell your kids (or colleagues, or yourself): “If you are unhappy, it is solely your fault, you did not do what you had to do to be happy, go and do some yoga.” It is not that simple. No... although studies have shown that some part of our wellbeing is due to genetics, a small part to life experience, and that we have quite a bit of agency on the rest of it... we should not forget about context and resources (Keyes, 2025; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021). For example, it might be easier for me to be able to get into these wellbeing competences learning and training because I’m in a more comfortable environment than a teenager who needs to flee from a war. The fact remains that psychosocial competences can be developed and trained, and in the following chapters we will explain why and how this can (indeed should) be done at school.

What competences for wellbeing?

"Wellbeing is fundamentally no different than learning to play the cello. If one practices the skills of wellbeing, one will get better at it."

(Davidson, 2016)

As we have seen, wellbeing can be learned, but what competences should we practice and work on? Psychosocial competences, which contribute to wellbeing by equipping individuals with tools to manage stress, build supportive social relationships, and adapt to challenges. In our personal view, psychosocial competences enable one to act on one or more of the pathways to wellbeing in Seligman's PERMA+ model (i.e., positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and the "+") and, as a result, to become globally satisfied with one's life as understood by Diener. The World Health Organisation (well ahead of its time back in 1986) formulated, in relation to wellbeing, its own definition of *life skills* at the first-ever global conference on Health Promotion in Ottawa. There were 200 participants from 38 countries, who together wrote guidelines, pointing to social-emotional education as a possible and desirable way to enhance health by the year 2000. The authors wrote that "Health promotion supports personal and social development through providing information, education for health, and enhancing life competences" (World Health Organisation, 1986). From 1986 onward, the wellbeing competences library has grown considerably. And this is why these competences nowadays go by many names: socio-emotional competences, soft skills, transversal capacities, non-cognitive competences, life skills, and many more. It's like they're competing in the "name that competence" Olympics! Lamboy and colleagues recently analysed the most-established models in literature and practice, on the basis of which they described psychosocial competences (see *Psychosocial competences* p. 45) (Lamboy et al., 2022) as: a coherent and interrelated set of psychological capacities (cognitive, emotional, and social), involving knowledge, intrapsychic processes and specific behaviours, which allow us to increase autonomy and empowerment, to maintain a state of psychological wellbeing, to favour optimal individual functioning, and to develop constructive interactions. So, at the end of the day, they're all about helping kids become emotional ninjas who can handle their feelings and relationships like champs (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Think of it as giving them the power to understand and manage their emotions, set epic goals,

spread kindness like confetti, build rock-solid friendships, and make decisions that won't end up on a blooper reel (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Hence, in the end, what competences do we actually need to work on? Which reference model do we use? According to Jones and Doolittle (2017), it is not easy to find one model of wellbeing and psychosocial competences that fits all; it would be like finding a needle in a haystack, so it is always a matter of making a choice according to one's needs and goals. In this book, we have decided to present the models we believe are best suited to the world of education, that have been established in research and practice, and that reflect the principles and competences underlying the theoretical concepts presented in the opening part of the book. We have also included the models of psychosocial competences described in Swiss compulsory school curricula. First, we introduce you to the character strengths classification developed by two big names in Positive Psychology, Seligman and Peterson (2004). Second, we'll talk about the CASEL and the OECD models because they're like the Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie of the SEL world—super famous and widely recognised. Then, we'll dive into the French Public Health model by Lamboy and her crew (2022). It's the hot new model in French-speaking countries, reviewing many models and evidence-based programmes. Finally, for Swiss schools we have our own personal psychosocial competences framework that we present in this chapter.

Character strengths

One of the first projects Martin Seligman undertook, along with Christopher Peterson, was focusing on the identification and development of the positive characteristics and resources a person has. They called them character strengths (widely studied in Positive Psychology), and defined them as “pre-existing qualities that arise naturally, feel authentic, are intrinsically motivating to use, and energising, thereby increasing the probability of healthy outcomes” (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010). These qualities are teachable and measurable, and influenced by context. Many studies suggest that strengths are effective to promote wellbeing and have beneficial effects in the classroom (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). The authors have classified 24 character strengths in 6 virtues and each person has all of them, simply in different combinations. We have great Swiss researchers working on this particular subject, like Willibald Ruch (2010), Lisa Wagner (2019), Fabian Gander (2020), or Nicolas Bressoud (2024). Also in Ticino, Marina Pettignano, Sara Benini, and

Jenny Marcionetti are conducting a study (the EduPosTI project) with the aim of understanding the potential effect of a character strengths intervention on wellbeing and transversal competences of kindergarten and primary school children and their teachers.

Take action 9

Discover your character strengths!

Research shows that knowing and using your character strengths can help you increase happiness and wellbeing, find meaning and purpose, improve relationships, manage stress and health, and, last but not least, achieve your goals.

How to do it

If you want to know your character strengths, you can take the test for free by visiting the VIA Institute on Character website (it takes about 20 minutes).



And now?

Once you have completed the test, you will receive a ranking of your strengths. It is important to note that everyone possesses all 24 strengths, but not in the same order or combination. We generally refer to 3–5 distinctive strengths (usually the top 3–5 on the list).

Your distinctive strengths are those that:

- require the least effort to use;
- give you energy when you put them into practice;
- make you feel authentic (“that’s me!”);
- make you say, “I love doing this!”

These strengths are a bit like our personal identity card. Once you have identified them, you have a variety of ways to put them into play (you will find some examples in the second part of the book, in the ACTIONS chapter *Identity*).

Social-emotional competences

Ever heard of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2023)? You can find out more about it at the following link



It's not just for the U.S.; governments worldwide are jumping on this bandwagon (Greenberg, 2023). The CASEL defines SEL as the *"process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, competences, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."* It defines 5 types of competences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship competences. The CASEL framework is a systemic and whole-school approach model: it is not just about what happens inside those classroom walls, but wraps around families, caregivers, and whole communities. The idea is simple: the more folks involved, the better it is for our learners. Let's learn a bit more about the different competences:

Self-Awareness: The mirror of the mind

Self-awareness is all about understanding oneself. Here's how to help students master it:

- emotional literacy: Teach students to recognise and name their emotions. It's like giving them the Rosetta Stone of their inner world.
- accurate self-perception: Encourage realistic self-assessment, because knowing your strengths and weaknesses is the first step to personal growth.
- self-confidence: Build their belief in their abilities. Think of it as installing a confidence booster pack.

Self-Management: The art of self-control

Self-management is about regulating emotions and behaviours. Here's the game plan:

- impulse control: Help students manage their impulses. It's like giving them the keys to their emotional Ferrari.
- stress management: Teach techniques to handle stress, so that cool heads prevail even in the heat of the moment.
- goal setting: Encourage setting and achieving personal and academic goals. Think of it as turning dreams into action plans.

Social Awareness: The empathy engine

Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathise with others. Here's how to cultivate it:

- perspective-taking: Teach students to see things from others' viewpoints. It's like giving them empathy binoculars.
- empathy: Foster genuine caring for others, because a little empathy goes a long way in building strong relationships.
- appreciating diversity: Promote respect for different backgrounds and cultures. Think of it as adding vibrant colours to the social tapestry.

Relationship skills: The social glue

Relationship skills are about building and maintaining healthy relationships. Here's the toolkit:

- communication: Teach effective verbal and non-verbal communication. It's like giving students a social Swiss Army knife.
- teamwork: Encourage collaboration and cooperation. Because together, everyone achieves more.
- conflict resolution: Equip students with strategies to resolve disagreements. Think of it as turning potential drama into productive dialogue.

Responsible decision-making: The ethical compass

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make ethical, constructive choices. Here's the roadmap:

- ethical responsibility: Promote consideration of ethical standards and safety concerns. Because doing the right thing is always the right thing.
- problem-solving: Teach students to analyse situations and solve problems. It's like giving them a problem-solving toolkit.

- reflection: Encourage thoughtful consideration of their choices. Think of it as adding a layer of wisdom to their decision-making process.

Agency and future orientation

This Learning Compass is no ordinary navigational tool: it was thought and constructed with government, school leaders, scholars, students, and school partners. This model is all about students' agency. They're basically teaching kids how to navigate life's crazy maze. It's not just a curriculum, it is really a compass helping develop psychosocial competences, inside but also outside the classroom. Because the tools to thrive are just as important as (or maybe even, more according to them) the academic competences (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 working group reviewed a large body of literature in order to come up with this model. At the heart of this compass, there are four core foundations: values, competences, knowledge, and attitude. Let's dive a bit into these four core foundations.

Values

Values are the moral compass that steers our students' decisions and actions. Here are the four core values to instil:

- respect for others: Cultivate empathy, tolerance, and understanding. Think of it as the social glue that keeps the classroom from turning into a reality TV show.
- respect for oneself: Encourage self-awareness, self-respect, and wellbeing, because a happy student is a productive student—and who doesn't want that?
- respect for the environment: Promote sustainable living. Let's turn our students into eco-warriors, one reusable water bottle at a time.
- respect for human rights: Stand up for fairness, justice, and equality. It's not just about playing nice; it's about creating a better world.

Competences

Competences are the skills students need to handle life's complexities. The Learning Compass outlines three key areas:

- cognitive and metacognitive skills: Foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. These are the Swiss Army knives of skills—versatile and invaluable.

- social and emotional skills: Build empathy, cooperation, and resilience. Think of these as emotional intelligence boosters—vital for navigating social jungles.
- practical and physical skills: Encourage the application of knowledge in real-world settings and promote physical health. Because what's the point of knowing something if you can't put it to good use?

Knowledge

Knowledge is the treasure trove of understanding that students need to make sense of the world. The Learning Compass divides it into two categories:

- disciplinary knowledge: Subject-specific insights in areas like math, science, and humanities. It's like giving students a well-stocked toolkit for intellectual endeavours.
- interdisciplinary knowledge: Integrate concepts across different subjects to tackle real-world issues. Think of it as the secret sauce that makes problem-solving not just possible, but elegant.

Attitudes

Attitudes reflect the mindsets and dispositions students bring to learning and life. Essential attitudes to cultivate include:

- curiosity and open-mindedness: Inspire a love for learning and openness to new experiences. Curiosity didn't kill the cat; it made it an expert explorer.
- responsibility and self-regulation: Teach students to own their actions and manage their learning.
- adaptability and resilience: Prepare them to bounce back from setbacks and thrive amidst change.

If you are intrigued by the model, you can explore it in depth at the following link



Psychosocial competences

The French Public Health Psychosocial Competences (PSC) framework was unveiled in 2022 (see table 1). The masterminds behind this masterpiece did their homework. They scoured the land for existing models. They took those models and evidence-based programmes

TABLE 1 The French Public Health Psychosocial Competences model. Adapted from (Public Health France/Santé Publique France., 2022).

	General competency	Specific competency
Cognitive competences	Self-awareness	Self-knowledge (strengths and limitations, goals, values, internal discourse)
		Critical thinking competences (identification of biases, influences...)
		Positive self-evaluation
		Mindful awareness of inner experiences
	Self-regulation	Impulsivity management
		Goal achievement competences (definition, planning...)
Emotional competences	Emotion and stress awareness	Understanding emotions and stress
		Identifying one's emotions and stress
	Emotion regulation	Expressing one's emotions in a positive way
		Managing one's emotions (including difficult emotions: anger, anxiety, sadness...)
	Stress management	Regulating one's stress in daily life
		Ability to cope with adversity
Social competences	Positive communication	Empathetic listening competences
		Effective communication (valuing, clear expression...)
	Positive relationships	Developing social bonds competences (reaching out, making connections, building friendships, etc.)
		Prosocial attitudes and behaviours (acceptance, collaboration, cooperation, mutual support...)
	Problem solving	Ability to ask for help
		Ability to be assertive and to say no
		Ability to resolve conflicts in a constructive way

into consideration and created their very own framework. The French Public Health Service wanted uniformity among policymakers and asked these scientists to work on this topic. There are three categories: cognitive, emotional, and social competences. These categories have subcategories, and those subcategories have sub-subcategories—it's like a Russian nesting doll of competences. For instance, under emotional competences, you have emotion and stress awareness, emotion regulation, and stress management.

Let's have a closer look.

Cognitive skills

Cognitive skills are the mental abilities that enable individuals to think, understand, and solve problems. Here are the three main skills to develop:

- self-awareness: The ability to recognise and understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and their influence on behaviour. Think of it as an internal mirror that helps students navigate their own minds.
- self-regulation: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations. This includes managing stress, self-discipline, and motivation. It's like having an internal thermostat that keeps emotions in check.
- constructive decision-making: The ability to make thoughtful and responsible decisions based on ethical standards, safety, and long-term consequences. It's the art of choosing the best path among multiple options.

Emotional skills

Emotional skills are crucial for understanding and managing one's own emotions, as well as those of others. Here are the three key skills:

- emotional awareness and stress recognition: The ability to identify and understand one's own emotions and those of others. Imagine an emotion detector that helps navigate the emotional world.
- emotion regulation: The ability to manage and express emotions appropriately and effectively. Think of it as an emotion regulator that maintains emotional balance.
- stress management: The use of techniques and strategies to manage stress effectively. It's like having an anti-stress toolkit always at hand.

If you want to know more about emotional competences, you should definitely read Moïra Mikolajczak's work (Mikolajczak, 2020).

Social skills

Social skills are essential for positive interactions with others. Here are the three fundamental skills:

- **constructive communication:** The ability to express one's thoughts and feelings clearly, respectfully, and appropriately. Imagine a communication compass that guides social interactions.
- **constructive relationships:** The ability to establish and maintain positive and healthy relationships with others. It's like building strong bridges between individuals.
- **problem-solving:** The ability to identify, analyse, and solve problems effectively. Think of it as a problem-solving kit that helps navigate social challenges.

Swiss models of psychosocial competences in schools

Swiss schools also have explicitly integrated psychosocial competences, which they define as the *compétences transversales* (French-speaking-part curriculum); *competenze trasversali* (Italian-speaking-part curriculum), and *überfachliche Kompetenzen* (German-speaking-part curriculum), into the curricula of their respective language regions. This demonstrates that these are relevant and central competences for the development of children and adolescents and that it is therefore also the school's task to take care of their teaching in (and out of) the classroom. There are three frameworks that are inherent to Swiss compulsory schooling curricula. They are part of the *Plan d'Etudes Romand*, the *Piano di Studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese* and the *Lehrplan21*.

Plan d'Etudes Romand

Let's begin with the Transversal Capacities, which are in the *Plan d'Etudes Romand* (in the French-speaking part of Switzerland). The *Plan d'Etudes Romand* is three-headed: subjects, general instruction, and transversal capacities.

You can find it here:



First, we have the academic subjects: languages, math, sciences, social sciences, arts, and even movement. Next, is the general instruction: we're talking about health and wellbeing, personal choices and projects, democracy learning, and understanding social, economic, and environmental connections. Psychosocial competences and wellbeing competences are mostly present in the transversal competences: collaboration, communication, learning strategies, creative thinking, and critical thinking. Let's dive into some of the most important elements of the five transversal competences.

Collaboration

Collaboration is key to building a lively and supportive classroom. Here's how to help students thrive in it:

- considering others: Encourage openness to cultural and ethnic diversity.
- self-knowledge: Help students identify their values and aspirations.
- group action: Promote teamwork and shared decisions.

Communication

Communication is the superpower that connects us all. Here's how to cultivate it:

- language codification: Teach students to adapt their language to suit different situations.
- resource analysis: Help them evaluate sources and extract valuable insights.
- resource utilisation: Encourage them to ask the right questions and use what they learn.

Learning strategies

Learning strategies help students tackle challenges with confidence. Here's the playbook:

- task management: Teach them to analyse situations and know when to ask for help.
- acquisition of work methods: Encourage organisation and precision in their work.
- choosing and relevance of methods: Help them assess and explain their approaches.

Creative thinking

Creative thinking inspires students to dream up fresh ideas. Here's how to nurture it:

- development of divergent thinking: Encourage them to draw from different sources and think big.
- recognition of sensitivity: Help them manage and channel their emotions.
- realisation of inventiveness: Support them in embracing new ideas and trying bold solutions.

Reflective approach

A reflective approach helps students think deeply and grow. Here's the guide:

- development of personal opinion: Teach them to break down problems and build thoughtful solutions.
- self-questioning and perspective-taking: Encourage them to consider other viewpoints and rethink their own.

Piano di studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese

In Switzerland's Italian-speaking region, the educational curricula known as the *Piano di studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese* (PdS) (Divisione della scuola, 2022) takes centre stage. You can access it here:



This framework is thoughtfully constructed around three core, interconnected pillars:

1. **Subjects** – covering mathematics, languages, social and natural sciences, arts, and movement.

2. **General education** – emphasising citizenship, culture and society, the environment, health, and wellbeing, economics, and consumption, as well as personal choices and life projects.
3. **Transversal competences** – a set of essential skills that bridge personal, social, and cognitive-methodological dimensions of individual growth.

Transversal competences are particularly noteworthy in the PdS (see table 2). These represent a blend of personal, social, intellectual, and methodological traits that students must activate across diverse learning and real-world contexts. Their purpose? To transform knowledge into actionable behaviour. The framework pinpoints seven key competences that students should develop throughout their schooling:

- Personal development
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Reflection and critical thinking
- Creative thinking and problem-solving
- Learning strategies
- Technology and media

Importantly, the PdS underscores the fact that these skills don't naturally emerge simply through subject-based learning or as a result of growing older. Instead, they require deliberate, targeted, and progressive cultivation over time. This approach has a profound impact on teaching practices, challenging educators across all cycles and disciplines to actively foster these competences. Although the PdS offers no specific guidelines on how to achieve this, it strongly recommends leveraging real or realistic teaching situations wherever possible. Finally, the framework highlights the importance of evaluating students' mastery of transversal competences to gauge their progress and awareness over time. The table below captures an overview of these competences, illustrating what mastery should look like by the end of the second and fifth primary school years, as well as at the conclusion of compulsory education.

TABLE 2 Piano di studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese. Adapted from (Dipartimento dell'educazione, della cultura e dello sport, 2020).

Competence	End of 2 nd grade	End of the 5 th grade	End of secondary school
Personal development: crucial for students to recognise their potential and manage their actions.	At the request of an adult, consider their potential and manage simple contexts of action.	When guided, take into account their potential and limits and manage contexts of action appropriate to their age.	Recognise their potential and limits and manage contexts of action appropriate to their age while respecting others.
Collaboration: key factor for creating a harmonious classroom dynamic	Guided by an adult, provide their own contribution in managing simple social contexts of action	Cooperate with others in managing contexts of action that are mostly familiar	Cooperate with others in managing social contexts of action effectively
Communication: the bridge that connects individuals	Communicate appropriately in familiar action contexts with simple structured languages	Communicate in action contexts using various languages they have experienced	Communicate in different action contexts with a variety of languages and expressive solutions
Critical thinking: the wisdom of reflection	Analyse and interpret their experiences or external phenomena based on adult guidance	Use tools and procedures to analyse and interpret their experiences or external phenomena	Autonomously analyse their experiences or external phenomena, relating and interpreting the data available and considering the context
Creative thinking and problem-solving: the spark of innovation	Face simple problematic situations using already experienced resolution procedures	Face problematic situations by adapting the resolution procedures they have experienced	Face problematic situations, even those with new and relatively complex characteristics
Learning strategies: the path to mastery	Face simple and familiar learning situations by reusing already experienced models and procedures	Face familiar learning situations using the models and experiences available to them	Face learning situations using models and experiences autonomously and personally
Technology and media: the modern toolkit	Experiment with and use simple technological and media tools autonomously, replicating models and procedures	Use various technological and media tools autonomously, recognizing their effects and replicating experienced models and procedures	Select, use, and integrate various technological and media tools autonomously, personally, and consciously

Lehrplan21

In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, the compulsory school curriculum is called *Lehrplan21* (LP21). You can find it here



It is structured in a) subjects (languages; maths; nature, people, society (NMG); design; music as well as movement and sport); b) interdisciplinary modules (media and computer science and vocational orientation); c) education for sustainable development; and d) transversal competences. The transversal competences refer to the knowledge and competences that play an important role in learning in and outside of school across all subject areas. They include personal, social, and methodological competences. All subject areas are involved in their development, each with their own specific content, subject-specific approaches, procedures, and perspectives on the world. The LP21 highlights, therefore, that this interplay between subject-specific and transversal competences development only works if the promotion of transversal competences is given a fixed and significant place in daily teaching. In the curriculum, for each subject, within the chapter about instructional suggestions, there is a nonspecific focus on transversal competences, where it is indicated which competences could be touched on while teaching the subject. Here are the seven transversal competences that are in the LP21:

Personal competences

Self-reflection: to know and use own resources. The students...

- can recognise their own feelings and express them appropriately.
- can recognise and formulate their interests and needs.
- can assess the strengths and weaknesses of their learning and social behaviour.
- can draw on their strengths and use them in a targeted manner.
- can analyse mistakes and think about alternative solutions.
- can look back on learning paths, describe and assess them.

- can compare their own assessments and judgements with those of others and draw conclusions (self-assessment and external assessment).
- can implement conclusions drawn from self-assessments and external assessments.

Independence: to increasingly master everyday school life and learning processes independently, to develop perseverance. The students...

- can find their way in new, unfamiliar situations.
- can accept challenges and deal with them constructively.
- can get support and help when they need it.
- can set up a suitable workplace, organise their own learning, manage their time and take breaks when necessary.
- can concentrate on a task and work on it with perseverance and discipline.
- can complete homework independently and prepare for tests.
- can complete assigned work carefully, reliably, and punctually.
- can use strategies to complete a task even in the face of resistance and obstacles.

Autonomy: to reflect and pursue their own goals and values. The students...

- can become aware of their own opinions and convictions (e.g., on gender roles) and communicate these.
- can scrutinise their own and other opinions and beliefs with regard to underlying arguments (facts, interests, values).
- can weigh up arguments and adopt their own point of view.
- can present the arguments for their own point of view in an understandable and credible way.
- can change a previous point of view on the basis of new insights; they can look for alternatives or new approaches in disputes.
- can adopt and defend their own point of view, even if this is contrary to prevailing opinions/expectations.

Social competences

Ability to engage in dialogue and cooperation: Exchanging ideas with people, working together. The students...

- can participate actively and in dialogue in collaboration with others.

- can listen attentively and recognise and incorporate the opinions and viewpoints of others.
- can negotiate agreements and adhere to rules in the group and in the classroom or in a student council.
- can pay attention to the opinions and viewpoints of others and respond to them in dialogue.
- can, depending on the situation, put aside or assert their own interests in favour of achieving the group's goals.
- can plan group work.
- can apply different forms of group work.

Conflict management competences: Naming conflicts, seeking solutions, resolving conflicts.

The students...

- can communicate in an objective and goal-orientated manner, apply the rules of conversation and address conflicts directly.
- can put themselves in another person's shoes and realise what that person thinks and feels.
- can communicate criticism appropriately, clearly, and decently and combine it with constructive suggestions.
- can accept criticism and scrutinise their own position.
- can apply forms and methods of constructive conflict resolution.
- can seek consensus in a conflict situation and recognise this consensus.
- can endure conflict situations that cannot be resolved and look for new conflict resolution options; if necessary, they seek support from third parties.
- can utilise the help provided by the school and accept instruments for non-violent conflict resolution.

Dealing with diversity: Experiencing diversity as enrichment, supporting equality. The students...

- can recognise and understand people's similarities and differences.
- can deal respectfully with people who have different learning requirements or who differ in terms of gender, skin colour, language, social background, religion, or lifestyle.
- can reflect on the impact of language and pay attention to the respectful use of language in relation to diversity.
- can recognise derogatory language use and do not passively accept it.

Methodological competences

Language skills: Develop a broad repertoire of linguistic forms of expression. The students...

- can recognise linguistic forms of expression and understand their meaning.
- can express different facts linguistically and make themselves understood by others.
- can understand and use technical terms and text types from the various subject areas.

Using information: Searching for, evaluating, processing, and presenting information

The students...

- can search for, collect, and summarise information from observations and experiments, from the Internet, books, and newspapers, from texts, tables, and statistics, from graphics and pictures, from surveys and interviews.
- are able to structure and summarise the information they have collected and distinguish between essential and secondary information.
- can compare information and make connections (networked thinking).
- can assess and evaluate the quality and significance of the collected and structured information.
- can prepare the results in different forms of presentation such as mind maps, reports, posters, or presentations and present them to others.

Problem solving: Acquiring learning strategies, planning, carrying out and reflecting on learning and work processes. The students...

- know general and subject-specific learning strategies and can use them.
- can view and understand the task and problem and ask questions if necessary.
- can assess how difficult or easy the tasks/problem solutions will be for them.
- can recognise familiar patterns behind the task/problem and derive a solution from them.
- can recognise new challenges and design creative solutions.
- can set goals for tasks and problem solutions and plan implementation steps.
- can carry out, document, and reflect on learning and work processes.

2 | Positive Education

As we mentioned before, Positive Psychology is an applied science, therefore it offers principles and tools to enhance our wellbeing resources and psychosocial competences. These strategies and materials are embedded in Positive Psychology interventions,² to enhance people's wellbeing, and positive psychologists then test them in order to see if they have the hypothesised effects. In other words, positive psychology interventions are evidence-based "treatment methods or intentional activities aimed at cultivating positive feelings, positive behaviours, or positive cognitions" (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Important notice: positive psychology and positive education are not...

Positive Discipline: An educational approach developed by Jane Nelsen in the 1980s, based on mutual respect and cooperation between adults and children. Although some of its techniques are close to scientifically studied concepts (such as the importance of encouragement), the approach as a whole has not been subjected to rigorous validation through empirical research.

² In this book and for clarity of reading purpose, Positive Psychology Interventions and Psychosocial Interventions are used as synonyms.

Positive thinking: A movement popularised by Norman Vincent Peale in his book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which promotes the idea that thinking positively alone is sufficient to transform one's life. While research has confirmed certain beneficial effects of optimism, the overall model of positive thinking, as well as its specific practices (daily affirmations, miraculous visualisations), is not grounded in robust scientific evidence.

Personal development: A broad industry offering a wide range of methods aimed at improving one's personal and professional life, popularised by figures such as Tony Robbins, Dale Carnegie, or Stephen Covey. Although some tools may have practical value, the majority of personal development techniques (Neuro-Linguistic Programming, the law of attraction, uncertified coaching, motivational seminars) lack solid scientific foundations and empirical evaluation of their effectiveness. This commercial industry often exploits confusion with scientific positive psychology in order to legitimise its approaches.

While antidepressant or anxiolytics are used sometimes to treat symptoms, Positive Psychology interventions are their counterpart in optimising wellbeing by strengthening one's resources.

These practices are central to this book because the exercises we propose are Positive Psychology interventions applied in school contexts. And this is where Positive Education comes in.

Take action 10

Me and Positive Education

Before looking for new ideas or strategies, it is essential to recognise what you already do, sometimes without being fully aware of it. But awareness gives confidence... and motivation! So it is important to value existing practices related to wellbeing.

How to do it

Take a moment to write down what you already do for the wellbeing of your colleagues and students. Let even the things that

seem “small” or “obvious” come to mind: they are often the most valuable.

And now?

You can supplement what you are already doing with new ideas and strategies, refining existing practices and expanding your scope with greater awareness and discernment. Let yourself be guided by the numerous activities you will find in the ACTIONS chapter.

One simple way to look at Positive Education is just to say that it is the science of Positive Psychology applied in school contexts. In fact, if psychosocial competences can be learned and developed, it is almost inevitable that the world of education has also embraced them. Positive Education³ will then apply the knowledge gathered in the psychological field and measure its implementation possibilities and its effects in education. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of Positive Psychology, defines positive education as the education of traditional skills together with wellbeing competences, without the latter compromising the development of the former. Indeed, psychosocial competences have been shown to have a positive influence on school performance as well as on the students’ wellbeing and positive adjustment (Seligman et al., 2009).

But... where is wellbeing in school?

Stress in school is a big deal! Never before have young people been so confronted with situations of stress and anxiety, much of it also in relation to their school experience. Did you know that school-related factors are the leading source of stress for young people in Switzerland? According to the Pro Juventute study (Lulzana Musliu et al., 2024), nearly half of young women (48.2%) and over a third of young men

³ The term “Positive Education” is often met with resistance in French-speaking contexts, as it has sparked considerable debate. Part of the challenge lies in the fact that people are not always referring to the same concept. From the perspective of Positive Psychology, Positive Education refers to the application of its scientific principles within school contexts. However, for some critics, the term has become associated with permissive or overly lenient approaches to raising and educating children, which creates misunderstanding and hinders productive discussion (Goldman, 2024).

(35.5%) identified exams and tests as their top stressors. Time management, performance pressure, and career planning follow close behind for young women, while high expectations and assignments add to the burden for young men. But it doesn't stop there—stress at school isn't just about grades. Social factors, such as peer pressure and concerns about fairness in school environments, also weigh heavily on students. These findings highlight that stress affects not only academic performance but also the social and emotional dynamics of school life.

Fortunately, this book isn't just about identifying challenges—it's about offering solutions. If school can be such a significant source of stress, how can we, as educators, create an environment where students feel supported academically, socially, and emotionally? One answer lies in building psychosocial competences, those teachable skills that help students navigate stress, build resilience, and thrive in and beyond the classroom. And that's exactly what this book is all about: providing you with practical, research-based strategies to integrate these life skills into your teaching.

Take action 11

Yes, you can make a difference!

If you are wondering how to start making a difference in your classroom, here are some practical steps, all supported by the interventions in this book:

1. initiate conversations about stress: Open the floor for students to share their challenges. Use activities that encourage open dialogue and normalise talking about emotions.
2. explore flexible ways to assess learning that still challenge students but could reduce pressure [example: flexible assessment approaches (Rideout, 2018), open book tests (Goothy et al., 2019), choice-based assessment (Spinney & Kerr, 2023)] how, and when students' learning is assessed. Alternatively, choice-based assessment is a learner-centered approach to assessment that allows students to choose, to some extent, what, how, and/or when their learning is assessed. A case study was designed to expose undergraduate students to a choice-based assessment strategy and subsequently measure the extent to which they agreed, or disagreed, that the strategy influenced

their level of engagement and satisfaction with their learning. Students voluntarily shared their perceptions over two survey cycles (n=22 in spring 2017 and n=36 in fall 2017]

3. promote wellbeing with short activities: Integrate this book's exercises into your lessons to develop psychosocial competences and foster a positive classroom culture. Of course, feedback, classroom councils, asking pupils what their needs are, etc... are of great help too!
4. work on your own psychosocial competences. By showing them how you deal with stress, it will give them an example to follow.

To discover lots of useful activities for this purpose, go to the ACTIONS chapter

Should I, or should I not?

Stress is part of life, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming. By teaching psychosocial competences, we're equipping you and your students with the competences needed to handle challenges with confidence. And the best part? These competences aren't just for school—they're for life.... Schools are the perfect place for working on them.

You might not yet be yet of the importance of bringing wellbeing competences in the classrooms or you still might need to convince others. We are ready for both options and wrote an entire rationale for you. Because sometimes, when you talk about positive education, people think you are a unicorn and/or that you are doing something linked to chakras and/or that there is not much proof around these themes, often linked to self-development. So here are 8 good, but also evidence-informed, reasons to teach psychosocial competences in school:

1. because psychosocial competences and wellbeing can be learned and taught
2. because students spend a lot of time in school, which makes school an ideal place to promote wellbeing and psychosocial competences
3. because part of a teacher's job is to develop psychosocial competences as much as academic ones; many curricula include them (see *Swiss models of psychosocial competences in schools* (p. 47) Chapter 1)

4. because in the end, that is what we all want for our children and students
5. because it is positively associated with students' learning as well as teachers' teaching
6. because it makes our students better adults, who grow up to be more resilient, confident, and successful in life
7. because emotions are contagious in the classroom
8. because we cannot put off caring for our children's and teens' mental health any longer

Yes, you should!

Let's teach wellbeing and psychosocial competences in school! However, as promising and relevant as this may sound, before we dive into the different arguments for teaching psychosocial competences in school, we must address the fact that developing these skills in the classrooms may face some challenges. Indeed, teachers are often under immense stress, grappling with burnout and even depression (e.g., Agyapong et al., 2022, 2023; Raciala (Pohaci) et al., 2021). Adding the responsibility of teaching wellbeing competences can feel overwhelming. Scholars like Kim (2023) even argue that psychosocial education should primarily occur at home, rather than in schools. And they have a point. The home—supported by parents and caregivers—plays a critical role in fostering children's emotional and social development (Istianti et al., 2023). Activities at home, such as teaching emotional regulation or promoting healthy social interactions, can significantly enhance a child's ability to navigate relationships and life challenges. Research supports this, showing that parental involvement is a key driver in developing strong social-emotional competences (e.g., Borelli et al., 2021; Chapman, 2024).

However, and this is why we would like to emphasise the importance of school, there is a great amount of variety in the ability of parents and caregivers to fulfil this role. Not all families have the time, resources, or knowledge to provide consistent support for developing psychosocial competences. This variability highlights the critical role schools play as a universal and equitable platform for fostering these essential skills. By offering a structured and inclusive environment, schools can ensure that all children, regardless of their home circumstances, have equal access to opportunities for social and emotional development (Yeager et al., 2018).

So, let's dive into the different arguments for teaching psychosocial competences in school.

1. Because psychosocial competences and wellbeing can be learned and taught

There are various ways in which we learn. One way is through neuroplasticity. Indeed, although the period of greatest plasticity is from birth to the age of 18, with persistence it is possible to change and modify one's brain throughout one's life. One nice (and a bit simplistic) way to explain it is by comparing our brain to a path through the forest. Imagine you are in a forest, and you need to go from point A to point B. The very first time you go from A to B, it is going to be difficult: you cannot really see where you're going, you may have to cut branches, it takes forever. But the more often you go from A to B and from B to A, the more you start creating a little path, which may become a trail, and maybe even a road... and now it is easy to go from A to B. Training wellbeing is the same: you just keep doing what works, and you'll get better at it. Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change by reorganising its structure and connections (Mateos-Aparicio & Rodríguez-Moreno, 2019). Our favourite study showing the brain's neuroplasticity is the one that put London Black Cab drivers' brains into MRI machines and showed that their brains were different from those of people who don't drive Black Cabs. Because they have to memorise 20,000 landmarks and 25,000 streets to become Black Cab drivers (it's called *The Knowledge*), researchers found that when their four-year training was over, the drivers' hippocampus had grown significantly (Maguire et al., 2006). This simply tells us that the brain can change and grow, and that we can learn new things and increase our competency in many areas, no matter what age. This also applies in the same way to resources and competences related to wellbeing. Of course, it is hard, it depends on your living conditions, it demands great persistence: but it is achievable! Another way we learn is through modelling. It is quite clear that if a teacher has good psychosocial competences, their students will too (Oliveira et al., 2021). As teachers we act as psychosocial models for our students. In a study conducted by Swiss teachers (Lucciarini et al., 2019) on teenage students doing short mindfulness sessions at the beginning of the lesson (therefore training their psychosocial competences along with the teacher), the

results showed that students also perceived the teacher as calmer and more efficient after meditation.

2. Because school is the ideal place

School is the ideal place to universally promote psychosocial competences. Many scholars (e.g., Boniwell et al., 2016; Bressoud, 2023; Curren et al., 2024; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) along with the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) advocate for the implementation of psychosocial interventions in schools. Children spend more time in classrooms than in any other place: 7618 hours for compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education in Switzerland (Wagner, 2022). Moreover, some children live in conflictual or abusive environments, have risky behaviours, and show psychological distress; school is a place where they can be safe (Paus et al., 2008; Platt et al., 2020).

3. Because it is part of the teacher's job

Well, yes. If you teach in Switzerland, your bible is either the *Plan d'Etude Romand* (PER; for Swiss French cantons), the *Piano di studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese* (PdS; for Swiss Italian cantons) or the *Lehrplan21* (LP21; for Swiss German cantons). If you are a Swiss teacher, it is part of your contract; you are asked to develop these competences.

In all three Swiss compulsory school curricula, in fact, there is explicit reference to wellbeing (and psychosocial skills). Teachers must at least address and cover the topic within some subjects and the general, interdisciplinary education (see for PER transversal capacities (example: identify emotions) and general training (health and wellbeing); for PdS *educazione allo sviluppo sostenibile* (*biosfera, salute e benessere; economia e consumi*); *salute benessere e motricità alla SI; scienze naturali; motricità*, and for LP21 *Bewegung und Sport*, BNE (Gesundheit), NMG 1.2 and 1.3. To some extent, however, they also have the assignment to develop the psychosocial competences during their classes. This is also meant within the transversal competences framework, where explicit reference is made to the development of important psychosocial competences (see *Swiss models of psychosocial competences in schools, Chapter 1* (p.47)). Teachers have to help students develop better physical, intellectual, emotional, and social self-knowledge. They also must, for example, help students recognise their own values, articulate their

strengths, identify their feelings, communicate respectfully, learn from mistakes, plan, and anticipate the way forward.

4. Because this is what we all want for our children and students

When Seligman—the so-called father of Positive Psychology—advocates for Positive Education, he often asks the audience two questions. Feel free to play along with us and take a moment to answer these two questions.

In two words or less, what do you most want for your children?

In two words or less, what are they taught in school?

Most of the time, you get answers like “happiness, life satisfaction, self-love, self-confidence” for question one. As for question two, you get “literacy, maths, discipline...”

At this point, Seligman says that there is little overlap between what schools teach and what we most want in life for our children. He argues that we can do both: research suggests that you can teach philosophy and geography AND wellbeing at the same time. We like this argument because it is relevant: it is not yet the case that all schools are working on helping children, students, and teachers thrive.

5. Because it is positively associated with students' learning as well as teachers' teaching

Academic competences and wellbeing competences go hand in hand. Happy students learn more efficiently. A lot of studies suggest that cognition and emotions are linked. But let us begin with a quiz on this topic (see take action 12).

Take action 12

Factors that influence learning

We often have preconceived ideas about what helps or hinders learning. This exercise allows you to identify and classify the factors that most positively or negatively influence student learning, in order to compare your insights with research findings and more effectively guide your pedagogical choices and priorities in the classroom.

How to do it

Let's do a quiz: rank these 11 elements from least effective to most effective in promoting learning.

- Students feeling disliked
- Reducing class size
- Positive peer influence
- After-school programmes
- Homework
- Collective self-efficacy (the whole educational team feeling they are stronger when working together)
- Working memory strength
- Clear goal intentions
- Teachers not labelling students
- Suspension
- Teacher-student relationships

The answers are the following:

1. Suspension (−0.20)
2. Students feeling disliked (−0.19)
3. Reducing class size (0.21)
4. Homework (0.29)
5. After school programmes (0.40)
6. Clear goal intentions (0.48)
7. Teacher-student relationships (0.52)
8. Positive peer influence (0.53)
9. Working memory strength (0.57)
10. Teachers not labelling students (0.61)
11. Collective self-efficacy (1.27)

The action above is based on John Hattie's studies on visible learning (Hattie, 2023) in which he wanted to find out what most impacts most student achievement. He found 252 factors amongst 1200 meta-analyses, summarising studies performed with more than 300 million students. It came as no surprise that many of the factors are linked to psychosocial competences and positive education. The element that has the most effect on learning is collective teacher efficacy (the idea that teachers feel like a team and make students understand that they work all together), followed by self-reported grades. So, teachers: work with your colleagues and make sure your students get the chance to self-evaluate their work and do peer evaluation. As for the one that most negatively affects learning, it is ADHD. It's very interesting to keep this in mind when we have ADHD students in our classrooms. If you want to know more, John Hattie also wrote a book dedicated to teachers: *Visible learning for teachers* (2012).

Other authors (Carew et al., 2020; Cavadini et al., 2021; Denervaud et al., 2019; Raver, 2002) have also looked at how developing psychosocial competences has a beneficial impact on learning. Learning to regulate your emotions has an impact on reading competences and academic results. Socio-emotional learning programmes have an impact on interactions, communication, group work, memory, and inhibition. Positive emotions in the classroom optimise learning, memorisation, academic performance, and satisfaction at school. A meta-analysis (Taylor et al., 2017) reviewing 82 studies conducted on almost 100,000 students showed that enhancing psychosocial competences had a positive impact on academic performance, conduct problems and optimised positive social behaviour. Other meta-analyses (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2022; Murano et al., 2020) showed similar effects on different age groups.

6. Because it makes our students better adults

The WHO (2020) recommends teaching emotional regulation, problem-solving, interpersonal competences, mindfulness, and stress management. Why? Because it works. According to numerous papers, kids who are psychosocially better equipped grow up to be healthier and happier adults. The British cohort study began in 1970 and is still following 17,000 people in the UK. This study shows that children displaying good emotional health, motivation, self-control, social

competences, and resilience become adults with better mental health, life satisfaction, wellbeing, income, education, job satisfaction, degree, employment, wealth, and relationships (Goodman et al., 2015).

Also, Durlak and colleagues' meta-analyses (Durlak et al., 2022) found that psychosocial competences interventions positively influenced not only academic performance, but also prosocial behaviour, attitudes, attention, conduct problems, emotional distress, behaviour and emotion difficulties, emotional competence, and drug use. Here's the rundown of the findings that showed medium to large effects in their meta-analyses:

- **Attitudes:** Improved significantly
- **Self-regulation:** Became better
- **Prosocial behaviour:** Increased
- **Conduct problems:** Decreased
- **Emotional distress:** Reduced
- **Behaviour and emotion difficulties:** Lessened
- **Emotional competences:** Enhanced
- **Academic performance:** Boosted
- **Drug use:** Went down

Moreover, scientists found that students with higher emotional quotients have better grades, have better mental health and relationships, are happier, and show less disruptive behaviour. So, here's the thing: teaching these competences doesn't just have immediate benefits; it also has long-term impacts. Kids who are adequately emotionally equipped are generally happier in their jobs and life (Goodman et al., 2015).

In summary: psychosocial competences are positively correlated with aspects of wellbeing in the classroom, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. They are also negatively associated with depression and anxiety (Encinar et al., 2017). Happy pupils learn more efficiently, and happy teachers teach more efficiently. This is part of our mantra. And guess what... it's not just a mantra... that is also what tonnes of research in school shows.

But beware, science, particularly social science, requires nuance. It's important to remember that no programme works 100% of the time for every student. If someone claims otherwise, it's probably an oversimplification. The authors explain that the results from SEL programmes can vary widely due to differences in how they are implemented, the

characteristics of the students involved, and the methods used to measure outcomes. Despite this variability, the overall evidence consistently shows that psychosocial learning programmes are beneficial. Their success depends largely on how carefully they are designed, introduced, and adapted to specific classroom settings. The key takeaway? Thoughtful planning and flexibility make all the difference. By embracing this nuanced approach, educators can ensure that positive psychology interventions truly meet the needs of their students and provide meaningful, long-lasting benefits.

7. Because emotions are contagious

It is important for us teachers to deal as best we can with our emotions before we get into the classroom. But before we dive into some more research results, please recall how you felt when you were scared of your teacher. Could you learn well? Normally, the answer should be a “no,” simply because when you are scared, your brain does not work in an optimal way for learning (Jones, 2019; Rix, 2015). We bet that if we ask you to recall one day that you were angry or really sad, you will say that you did not teach as well as you would have wanted. At least, that is our experience. You catch emotions quicker than viruses (Haag, 2019).

When it comes to emotions, teachers call the shots in the classroom. It is interesting to compare them with weather forecasters: they have the power to set the climate in the classroom. Emotions are indeed contagious and spread very rapidly. Our brain takes a sort of photo of other people’s behaviours and emotions. Then, our neurons “mirror” the same behaviours or emotions in our own brain. It’s called empathy. It comes as no surprise when scientists showed that stress is contagious: when teachers are stressed, pupils suffer collateral damage. Here is one of our favourite papers on the subject: Kimberly Schonert-Reichl and Eva Oberle (2016) wanted to know if there was a link between teachers’ burnout and their students’ stress. Teachers were asked to measure their level of burnout with a questionnaire (the Maslach Burnout Inventory). As for students: researchers collected their salivary cortisol, cortisol being the hormone increased by stress. The two researchers found that teachers with higher levels of burnout had pupils with significantly higher morning cortisol levels. Luckily for us, agreeable emotions are even more contagious than disagreeable

ones. Students who perceive their teachers being satisfied with their lives and happy to teach and be in the classroom tend to show a more positive attitude towards learning (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021).

Take action 13

The contagion

Emotions spread rapidly and influence atmosphere, attention, and cooperation. Understanding and managing this contagion makes it possible to improve the classroom climate, reduce collective stress and foster a more harmonious learning environment. Think about everyday life: have you ever experienced how contagious a simple smile can be? Try walking down the street smiling at the people you pass. You will notice that very often those who meet your gaze will smile back at you: we can “infect” complete strangers with positive emotions!

How to do it

Would you like to see just how contagious positive emotions are? Take a look at these two videos...

- the first is the famous and intense laughing fit between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton in 2003



- the other is called The Pig of Happiness



Reflect on or discuss these questions:

- What did you feel while watching these videos?
- What does this tell us about our ability to influence one another?
- Have you ever observed emotions spreading in everyday life?
- In the classroom, which emotions would you like to make more contagious, and how?

And now?

Be careful: this does not mean that we should always be happy, nor that we should suppress or deny our emotions (or ask students to do so). Psychosocial competences also include the ability to experience emotions, regulate them and express them appropriately. This is what helps to create a positive classroom climate, in which students can feel comfortable and learn effectively. Become aware of the teacher's role as an "emotional barometer" and use emotional contagion as a positive lever in the classroom.

Important disclaimer! Emotions, all of them, need to be expressed!

But beware, we are not saying that you should always be happy, or not feel what you feel and suppress your emotions (or ask your students to suppress them). Nope! Psychosocial competences are also about the ability to use emotions, to regulate and communicate them in the appropriate manner and in this way foster the creation of a positive classroom climate for students, which makes them feel good and learn well. Many studies show that teachers learning to master their emotional skills show higher psychosocial competences, manage their classrooms more efficiently, are less subject to distress, and show higher degree of wellbeing (Oliveira et al., 2021). This means that we are not telling you here to be permanently sunny and smiling in the classroom. No: sometimes you might be sad, angry, anxious. And that is ok! But instead of bottling everything up

within yourself, you could try to communicate clearly about it to the pupils. This will help them see that it is ok to not be ok, that it is ok to communicate about it, and that we can take care of each other when we are not ok. As teachers we act as psychosocial models for our students; we can show them possible and effective ways to cope with emotions (Aldrup et al., 2022). We can start by expressing those emotions in a genuine and appropriate way. In doing so we communicate to them that a) all emotions are ok, b) we all, teachers included, sometimes feel down and sometimes happy and there are appropriate ways to express and share one's feelings.

Here we want to share a story that happened to one of the authors of this book.

Some years ago, a tragic event shook me to my core when one of my students took their own life. The news devastated me, leaving me in a state of shock and deep sorrow.

The next day, I had to give a class at my high school. I could barely walk because my belly was aching like it never had before. I came in the classroom, sat on my chair. I got a whole class silenced. My students looked at me and one said "Are you ok? You don't look ok." I was not. I told them what happened, how I felt, that I should have seen something, that I was sad and angry, that I did not understand. Normally, in my philosophy classes, I jump around groups and laugh with them. It was not the case on that Tuesday. And then, the most amazing thing happened: a student, 16 years old, stood up in the middle of the class, came to me whilst I was talking to the whole class about Plato, and she hugged me on my chair and told me "You're giving us so much love, now it's our turn."

8. Because we cannot put off caring for our children's and teens' mental health any longer

The state of teenagers' and children's mental health is alarming, and the implementation of positive education tools and actions can have a significant impact on preventing and promoting positive mental health. Let's have a look at different studies showing how bad the situation is today. Gottlieb and colleagues (2022) at Stanford University

did a longitudinal study on 163 students and conducted several tests, including magnetic resonance imaging scans. They found out that the brains of US teens physically changed during the Covid-19 pandemic and aged faster than normal: “Adolescents assessed during the pandemic have neuroanatomical features that are more typical of individuals who are older or who experienced significant adversity in childhood” (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2020). The British national health service in 2023 (National Health Service, 2023) showed that the number of children in the UK needing therapy for serious mental health problems had risen by 39% in a year. Psychological centres for adolescents are full and suicide rates are on the rise even in Switzerland—in the top 10 of the happiest countries in the world (World Health Organisation, 2022). Statistics from December 2022 showed that the top-ranked cause of hospitalisation in Switzerland was, for the first time, mental health issues. Girls between the ages of 10 and 14 appear to be most at risk with a 52% increase in mental disorders in this population (OFS, 2022). Sure, COVID-19 has impacted young people’s mental health, but Jonathan Haidt (2024) and Greg Lukianoff (2018) suggest the roots of rising anxiety predate the pandemic. Overprotective parenting, though well-meaning, can limit opportunities for children to develop resilience. Social media amplifies this by fostering constant comparisons and unrealistic standards. Meanwhile, the decline of unstructured play—once a key avenue for learning through trial and error—further limits their ability to cope with challenges. The cultural trend of “safetyism,” which aims to eliminate discomfort, may also leave young people ill-prepared for life’s difficulties. Combined with poor sleep and the stress of a polarised world, these factors paint a broader picture of youth anxiety. However, Haidt and Lukianoff emphasise that stress is manageable with the right strategies: fostering independence, reducing social media use, encouraging free play, and teaching coping skills. It’s about equipping kids to navigate life, not shielding them from it.

Therefore, the implementation of primary prevention and mental health promotion interventions in schools cannot be postponed any longer. In this way, protective factors can be increased, and reinforced, and risk factors associated with mental health reduced (Lamboy et al., 2022). Positive education offers efficacious intervention strategies, underpinned by an effective articulation between knowledge produced by scientific research and that derived from experience (evidence-informed).

In brief

All the precited arguments highlight how imperative it is, particularly nowadays, to care for and promote our students' wellbeing (not only understood as the lack of difficulties or worries) by equipping our young people with the necessary skills and resources to achieve a healthy and fulfilling adult life. We must take advantage of the great opportunity that school offers, as a context in which our kids and teens spend most of their time, and which, if caring and supportive, can contribute significantly to the positive development and adjustment of our pupils. This handbook is our way of contributing and giving teachers some tools to do so.

Now that we are clear on the why... let us dive into the *how* these competences can be implemented in school contexts. See you in the next chapter!

How can we teach wellbeing in school?

Now we know the “what” but we still don’t know the “how.” By comparing the curricula of the three language regions in Switzerland, we can see that all three transversal competence frameworks invoke quite similar competences. As mentioned in the introductory chapters, the Swiss school system thus explicitly includes the development of transversal competences among the educational objectives pursued. However, apart from a few cross-references related to the subjects and a few generic instructional indications, in contrast to what is specified for the individual subjects, it does not provide any more specific indication for the constant and progressive development of these competences. At this point, we hope you are as puzzled as we were when we first dived into this subject: you are explicitly required to enhance wellbeing in the classroom through (for example) the development of psychosocial competences, but there is no instructional indication or support for doing so. And although things are moving fast in teacher education, to our knowledge there is still no (or very little) room in its curricula for these matters. And this is where this book comes in, explicitly and concretely showing a way to build student wellbeing and to work on the development of psychosocial competences in the classroom.

Teaching wellbeing competences in education can take various forms, and, again, it is not a one-size-fits-all deal. There are multiple

ways to build wellbeing in the classroom and several programmes and interventions have emerged that fit into the more general framework of social-emotional learning (SEL). To be honest, the SEL rollercoaster has been around since ancient Greek times! Plato and Aristotle talked about character development alongside the usual school subjects. They wanted kids to grow up to be wise, courageous, and cool as a cucumber. In Plato's *Republic*, bedtime stories were all about teaching kids about freedom, optimism, courage, and moderation (Plato, trans. Jowette, B., 2022). Aristotle also chimed in with his *Nicomachean Ethics*, saying that being a good person is just as important as acing exams (Aristotle, 2014). Although socio-emotional education was regarded as central to the development of the human being, it was not yet considered to be an integral part of the formal education of children and adolescents. Child psychiatrist James Comer kicked off SEL back in '68. He realised that if school and family weren't working together, it could seriously impact a kid's success (1986). So, he came up with the Comer School Development Program, which is all about building strong bonds and creating a school atmosphere that's more like a cosy family dinner than a math test (Ramirez-Smith, 1995). In this way, psychosocial competences and the promotion of wellbeing have gained an increasing place in educational discourse and practice in and out of school. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which traditionally have focused on physical health and academic achievement, now also target wellbeing (McCoy, 2022). Similarly, psychology and education have also deepened and broadened their scope by including these topics in their research, namely with studies on pupils and teachers' psychosocial competences (Durlak et al., 2011; Hodzic et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017). More and more research is also being carried out around SEL programme implementation and whole-school approaches. One way of sorting these different approaches is by using a two-pronged classification: explicit and implicit wellbeing education.

Implicit wellbeing education

By implicit, we mean "flexible ways to infuse learning about wellbeing into the student's daily life at school through academic subjects, co-curricular activities, the school yard, and so on" (Waters, 2021, p. 139). These are the subtle, yet powerful elements embedded in school environment and culture, like creating a welcoming and

inclusive classroom atmosphere where students feel safe and valued. But wait a moment, is it possible to teach Maths, English, French, or Geography at the same time as wellbeing? Yes, you can find ways to interweave the key concepts of wellbeing with the content and activities of the subject taught. For example, at the *École de Commerce et de Culture Générale* (ECCG) in Martigny, teachers found many possibilities to implement positive education through subjects, by working on students' CVs with character strengths, and teaching effective communication using NonViolent Communication (this is a great way to talk about the science of emotions). Other teachers use gratitude and other strengths in writing exercises. With smaller children, you can teach them how to read and write using emotions or gratitude as themes. The advantage here is that it makes it possible to reach many students across a range of discipline areas and does not limit the learning to just a formal wellbeing curriculum (see explicit wellbeing education).

Hence, the implicit approach allows us to promote student wellbeing through shaping the classroom environment (Waters, 2021) and can be adapted to the different teachers' personalities (their emotional intelligence, their psychosocial competences), their values and how they stick to it, their representations of what teaching is, and ultimately their behaviours in the classroom. This encompasses instructional choices, how they take care of the relationships in the classroom, their vision of what a teacher is (captain, gardener, referee, coach, etc.), what teaching is (discovering with the pupils, passing information, sharing, etc.), and their pedagogy (pupil-centred, subject-centred, etc.). According to Durlak (2011), teachers are the most suitable professionals for developing both wellbeing and academic competences in the classroom. Hence, the important role of teachers in implicit wellbeing education comes to light very clearly (and is also showed in different studies), since teachers who are more emotionally equipped are better at managing their job demands; they foster emotional intelligence in their students more effectively than other teachers and have students who perform better (Curci et al., 2014) especially when students are faced with subjects that require motivational investment along with cognitive effort, such as mathematics and sciences. In the present study, we investigated the effects of teachers' emotional intelligence (EI). It goes without saying that it is also important to work on teachers' own psychosocial competences

and to ensure that teachers can, in turn, work in a supportive environment. Indeed, teachers are more motivated and happier if their levels of autonomy, competency, and relatedness are high (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023). In a meta-analysis on 43 studies involving 3004 teachers who followed SEL programmes, scientists found that these programmes enhanced their emotional competences, wellbeing, and decreased their psychological distress (Oliveira et al., 2021). Teachers with good psychosocial competences are a resource for pupils because of what Bandura (1965) called vicarious learning: pupils learn when they observe teachers' actions, understanding the strategies they use when they succeed or fail. For example, when teachers regulate their emotions, students can imagine themselves doing the action, without actually doing it.

Important disclaimer! Teacher wellbeing is student wellbeing.

Teacher wellbeing plays a crucial role in shaping school experiences for students. According to a recent meta-analysis (Maricuțoiu et al., 2023), teachers' psychological (e.g., low stress and burnout, high life satisfaction) and emotional health (e.g., self-realisation, self-efficacy) is associated with the quality of teacher-student relationships and impacts various aspects of student outcomes, including wellbeing, engagement, and academic performance. Another study, by Zhou and colleagues (2024) on almost 90,000 teachers, identifies some important boosters of teacher wellbeing, such as: hope, autonomous motivation, psychological capital, and job competences. They also find factors like neuroticism and disengagement coping to be the strongest negative predictors of wellbeing. The researchers conclude that greater wellbeing leads to greater commitment to teaching, while low wellbeing increases thoughts of quitting. Moreover, burnout and work engagement are closely linked to overall wellbeing. Teachers are more motivated and happier if their levels of autonomy, competency and relatedness are high (Marcionetti & Castelli, 2023). Taylor and her colleagues (2017), but also Valente and colleagues (2020) also found that in the classroom, a sense of mastery has positive links with intrinsic

motivation and optimal functioning. Conversely, stress and burnout can negatively affect both your ability to teach effectively and your students' ability to learn and thrive (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Hence, it's important to keep in mind that teacher and student wellbeing are intertwined. Supporting teacher wellbeing can create a healthier and more engaging classroom environment, benefiting both educators and learners. So, taking care of your wellbeing as a teacher is not just about feeling better personally, it has a profound impact on the students and the overall classroom environment. Research shows that teachers who prioritise their mental and emotional health foster stronger connections with their students, create more positive classroom dynamics, and inspire greater student engagement and wellbeing. By investing in your wellbeing as a teacher, for example, developing and fostering your own psychosocial competences, but also through work-life balance, and seeking support when needed, you invest in your students' wellbeing and a more fulfilling teaching experience for yourself. So, feel free to share this piece of information with your principals and the whole school community: the more people who know about this important evidence, the sooner teachers will be able to work in a context sensitive to their and student wellbeing!

Explicit wellbeing education

Explicit wellbeing education encompasses intentional and indeed explicit actions aiming at teaching wellbeing. These are structured, deliberate activities and curricula designed to directly address and teach wellbeing skills and competences. When we explicitly teach wellbeing competences, we teach a competency *per se*. For example, we teach the vocabulary of emotions not only by showing students we have emotions and communicating them when appropriate: we also talk about why it is important to get the right words and we practice finding as many emotions as possible. There are different possibilities to implement explicit wellbeing education. Let's look at some examples:

Wellbeing programmes or targeted units

Explicit wellbeing education programmes require implementing evidence-based programmes like Positive Psychology interventions or SEL curricula as well as setting aside dedicated time for teaching wellbeing units of, for example, resilience, emotional regulation, and positive relationships. Positive Psychology intervention programmes, as well as social-emotional education programmes, are carefully coordinated curricula organised in sequential units and include learning experiences that focus on the development of knowledge, attitudes and competences directly related (explicitly and intentionally) to psychosocial competences and wellbeing. These programmes can be implemented in different ways:

- as stand-alone classroom instruction,
- by integrating SEL content with academic curricula,
- or as whole-school approaches (see following section).

There is a strong and growing demand for these programmes from educators, parents, students, and employers (Curren et al., 2024). You can find many evidence-based programmes that are used in classrooms. If you have the time, the training, and the authorisation to implement them (or have external professionals do so), it is a great way to implement positive education in your school.

Here are some examples of evidence-based programmes:

- SPARK Resilience (Boniwell et al., 2023),
- MindUP (2023),
- MindMatters (2019)
- Dot.be (Mindfulness in Schools Project, n.d.),
- Zippy's friends (Partnership for children, n.d.),
- Celebrating Strengths (Fox Eades, 2008),
- Personal Wellbeing Lessons for Secondary School (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012),
- Individual Strengths, Collective Power (Bressoud et al., 2023).

These programmes teach children mindfulness, resilience, and emotional competences. Wellbeing programmes are developed by experts, which is an advantage, however, they can have some disadvantages: following a set sequence may be difficult for some teachers who prefer sticking to their own books and methods, and who may not have had the opportunity to use other material. Moreover, some

of the activities are time-consuming and demand an adaptation effort that some teachers are not ready to do or that they cannot insert in the curricula. If you like to be flexible, you might not enjoy some of the activities that are scripted and follow a certain order. Moreover, it is quite demanding to implement programmes in schools: you often need money, a lot of support, teacher training, sometimes external professionals. You also need flexible headteachers, school systems, governments, and curricula. We like to recall what Seligman and his colleagues from the International Positive Education Network emphasised in 2017, “Any programme that teaches wellbeing to school children must replace some useful programme that already exists. There are only so many hours in the school day and not enough money to support what already exists.” (International Positive Education Network., 2017, p. 12).

Despite the various challenges related to wellbeing education programmes and the fact that they are only effective to a certain extent and in certain circumstances (Durlak et al., 2022; Kuyken et al., 2022), many authors suggest that education for happiness (i.e., explicit education) should be considered and encouraged (Curren et al., 2024; Morris, 2015; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Wood, 2020).

Toolbox approach

Conducting specific activities like gratitude journaling, goal-setting workshops, or guided discussions on mental health is mainly what we are working with in the practical part of this book. A fitting example is the “toolbox” approach. With the toolbox approach, teachers can implement explicit psychosocial competences through short, evidence-based, tailored, self-chosen, ready-to-use, and stand-alone Positive Psychology interventions. In other words, the proposed exercises are “one shot” exercises, aiming at enhancing happiness. What are the advantages?

- You can use them without prior specific knowledge or training, since they are short.
- You can use them anytime during school day
- You can adapt them to the classroom climate
- You can have your students choose what they want to do.

Unlike structured programmes, which impose a fixed sequence over several weeks or months, the “toolbox” approach offers maximum

flexibility. You can choose an activity according to the needs of the moment:

- Do you need to ease the atmosphere? Try a gratitude exercise.
- Has a conflict broken out in the classroom? Experiment with an activity focused on empathy or active listening.
- Is energy or motivation lacking? Choose an activity based on character strengths or physical movement.

This adaptability responds perfectly to the constantly changing dynamics of classroom life, where needs can shift from one day to the next, or even from one hour to the next. Another major advantage of this approach is that it preserves teachers' pedagogical autonomy. You remain fully in control of your teaching, choosing when, how and why to integrate these tools, without having to disrupt your planning or your style. You can decide whether an intervention lasts five minutes or twenty, whether it opens the day to create a positive climate or brings it to a close on a calm note. This freedom encourages genuine ownership: rather than "following" a programme, you build your own personal way of cultivating wellbeing in the classroom.

There are many papers on the effectiveness of Positive Psychology interventions, like a mega-analysis with 198 meta-analyses (Carr et al., 2024). Also, there is some promising evidence on short Positive Psychology interventions (e.g., Gorman & Green, 2016; Müller et al., 2021; Phang et al., 2015) such as "three good things" (Gander et al., 2016), and the importance of "micro-dosing of happiness" (Davidson, 2022). However, research on the implementation of the toolbox approaches is very new—Elena Lucciarini is doing her doctoral thesis on this specific topic, analysing several key questions: *How do teachers actually take ownership of these tools? Which factors facilitate or hinder their use? What is the impact on classroom climate and on students' wellbeing when these activities are used in a flexible and autonomous way?* There is already some initial evidence that highlights how this approach:

- allows for fine-grained personalisation, tailored to the specific needs of each group;
- strengthens teachers' engagement, as they become active protagonists rather than mere implementers;
- supports long-term sustainability, since the tools can be adapted and reused in different contexts—sometimes even beyond the classroom.

The “toolbox” approach is not a rigid programme, but an invitation to experiment, adapt, and create one’s own wellbeing routines, in harmony with one’s teaching style and with one’s students. It offers the freedom of a tailored approach, while remaining grounded in solid scientific evidence. And it is probably this very combination—flexibility, autonomy, and empirical grounding—that makes it a powerful tool for integrating psychosocial skills into everyday classroom life.

Combining both approaches: the whole-school approach

The combination of both implicit and explicit approaches flows into the whole-school approach. This holistic strategy integrates wellbeing into every aspect of school life, ensuring that wellbeing is not just an add-on but a core component of the educational experience. Whole-school approaches aim at enhancing wellbeing on the entire school environment: from students, to teachers, staff, parents, food, walls, subjects, architecture, etc. A meta-analysis summarising results obtained with almost 500,000 students suggests that whole-school approaches impact social and emotional competences and behaviour (Goldberg et al., 2019). There are also concrete examples of schools that have implemented the principles and practices of positive education on a general school-wide scale. Let us go through some of them and present examples and models that were developed specifically to enhance wellbeing at school with a whole-school approach.

The Geelong Grammar School and the PERMA model (Australia)

One of the first and perhaps most famous examples is the model developed at Geelong Grammar School in Australia. A quick visit to their website (2023) lets you know how important wellbeing is and how they were pioneers: they invited Professor Seligman and his team to the campus for six months in order to train the staff and implement Positive Education. Their model (Norrish et al., 2013) is based on the PERMA model, in which character strengths are central. The idea is that everything in this school aims to foster flourishing. Students benefit from wellbeing programmes, coaches for secondary years, children and educators practice meditation and mindfulness every day, they work on character strengths through role play and stories, they learn and practice emotional regulation, etc. Today, Geelong Grammar School has its own Institute of Positive Education and offers training.

The SEARCH framework

What we particularly appreciate about this model (Waters & Loton, 2019) is that the authors analysed a vast body of literature (no fewer than 18,000 studies!), examined what works and what does not, and identified six fundamental pathways to school wellbeing:

- **Strengths:** identifying and using strengths is important, especially in the school context. They help with cohesion, the quality of relationships, engagement, school achievement, and social competences. They are also linked to more positive emotions, wellbeing, better adaptation, less disruptive behaviour, more motivation, and less depression (Quinlan et al., 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2019).
- **Emotional management:** there is a vast literature on emotional competences and emotional intelligence in schools (Durlak et al., 2022; Gay et al., 2022; Valente et al., 2020). Enhancing emotional intelligence in pupils boosts wellbeing as well as academic outcomes. A specific place is given to gratitude exercises which enhance academic outcomes.
- **Attention and awareness:** paying attention to what is happening in the classroom has an impact on many different elements linked to wellbeing. The most-used interventions are meditation and mindfulness interventions which boost wellbeing, academic competences, calmness, competency, and attention and also decrease stress.
- **Relationships:** relationships are a key component of happiness. Children's social competences are very important in and out of schools. Interventions like mentoring improve relationships, academic outcomes, and wellbeing.
- **Coping:** coping relates to resilience competences: it is our capacity to manage elements that demand a lot of our resources and place us outside of our comfort zone. As for resilience, it is our capacity to bounce back when or after facing adversity. According to the authors of the SEARCH model, resilience programmes have a positive impact on stress, social competences, quality of relationships, and confidence.
- **Habits and goals:** Self-regulation helps students set new habits and achieve their goals. Empowering our students with self-regulation strategies and goal-based interventions improves their ability to set goals, their wellbeing, and their results at school (Kern et al., 2024).

Therefore, this model outlines six key pathways through which students' wellbeing and resilience can be cultivated in everyday school life (that is, through teaching, interactions, school routines and school culture), and not solely through special programmes.

The WHO Health Promoting School model

With the Health Promoting school (HPS) model, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was one of the first to elaborate on whole-school approaches and they also were the first ones to talk about psychosocial skills. The term was first used in a 1986 conference (World Health Organisation, 1986). With this model the WHO wanted to create an environment aiming at fostering psychosocial competence development in the entire school community. Rather than focusing only on individual health education lessons, the HPS model sees the entire school environment as a setting for positive change. According to the WHO, a health promoting school doesn't just teach about health—it lives it by fostering a healthy and supportive school environment, both physically and emotionally. Furthermore, it incorporates health into all aspects of school life, including curriculum, policies, relationships, and daily routines, involving the whole school community—students, staff, parents, and local partners—in building a culture of wellbeing. One of the core activities is therefore, the development of life skills and personal competencies so that students may make healthy choices and contribute to their community.

The PROSPER model

This Positive Education model (Noble & McGrath, 2015) focuses on six evidence-based criteria that teachers should consider to enhance wellbeing in schools: developing positive emotions (Positivity), teaching social competences and building positive classroom climates and relationships (Relationships), giving students optimal learning conditions and teaching them how to learn (Outcomes), using the strengths-based science to deal with heterogeneity in the classroom but also within the staff (Strengths), helping children develop a sense of meaning (Purpose), teaching and providing with the best evidence-based strategies to foster engagement (Engagement), and the explicit teaching of coping strategies (Resilience). With their PROSPER Model, the authors really focus on the importance of explicit teaching and on evidence-based strategies.

Take action 14

How about your school?

Recognising what already exists allows us to enhance ongoing initiatives, leverage them to go further, and open up reflection towards more ambitious paths, such as global approaches, while remaining aware of their challenges and complexity of implementation. Try to identify the actions already in place in your school that promote wellbeing and strengthen psychosocial skills.

How to do it

Look at your school: are there activities that involve the entire school community (students, teachers, staff, and families)?

Think about how these initiatives contribute to wellbeing. What psychosocial skills do they help to develop?

And now?

You can try to reflect with your colleagues on the opportunity to introduce a global approach in your school...

Is it time for Whole-School Approaches everywhere? Whole-School Approaches are great. However, it is quite hard to implement them for multiple reasons. As a teacher, I cannot simply go see my headteacher and say *"Hey, let's change everything we do and use this model instead."* Even if they agreed, in public schools, there are elements that only politics can manage. Moreover, there are not enough experts in the domain to get the right support to do so. In other words: it is ideal, it is what we shall aim for, it reminds us of the importance of involving the entire school community, but it is quite complex to implement.

The contexts that shape wellbeing—zoom on classroom management

While programmes allow us to teach our students how to develop their psychosocial competences and tap into positive resources, there is also the risk of placing too much responsibility on the individual to promote wellbeing while neglecting the important role played by the

context in which these competences are developed and brought into play. Lea Waters (2021), in this regard, invites us to consider all those aspects that affect the contexts that shape wellbeing (e.g., teacher–student relationships, classrooms, learning environments) as important aspects for the promotion of wellbeing at school. And this is where classroom management comes in. Classroom management can be linked in multiple ways to wellbeing and the development of psychosocial skills. One way of looking at it is seeing classroom management as an implicit and explicit way to introduce these skills. Indeed, working on relationships in your classroom can go through either implicit (showing how to behave in a group) or explicit (telling them to find the best rules to work together). The interventions we present in this book are also precious resources and strategies for managing your classroom. In fact, many classroom management strategies are linked to student wellbeing competences.

But wait... what is classroom management? It is basically what teachers do to help students learn and grow together. It's about supporting, guiding, and keeping them engaged. Research shows that it has a big impact on how well students do in school, like making them more interested in their studies (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Some experts also say that classroom management (Gaudreau, 2023) is twice as important as school rules when it comes to student success. One of our favourite models is the one developed by Nancy Gaudreau: it is based on a lot of research and is quite fun to work with. Nancy Gaudreau's model has six key elements: resources, setting expectations, building positive relationships, keeping students engaged, dealing with disruptive behaviour, and you (the teacher). She added this last key ingredient in her new book (Gaudreau, 2023). So, if we embed a positive education perspective while managing our classroom, we very likely will be able to teach both the competences of wellbeing and promote the academic development of our pupils. Let's dive into each of this model's dimensions and see if it can give you some new ideas on how to combine working towards wellbeing and academic goals!

The person behind the teacher: Here the focal point is all about recognising how a teacher's personal characteristics can totally shape how they handle their classroom. We're not just talking about teacher types and authority styles (you know, the "cool teacher" vs. the "strict teacher" vibes), but also how things like their attitude, self-efficacy, and emotional ninja skills play a huge role in keeping everything running

smoothly. Basically, if you want to nail classroom management, it's crucial to step back and take a good, hard look at yourself. Think of it like this: you're the captain of a ship, and you need to know what makes you tick so you can steer that classroom ship straight, avoiding any icebergs of chaos along the way! So, actually, teachers can, and should, develop their psychosocial competences, so why not do so by trying out some of the ACTIONS interventions?

Resources – a teacher's toolkit: Resources in the educational context can feel like a magician's hat—they encompass various elements, from time to pedagogical materials. It's like having a Swiss Army Knife of teaching at your disposal! Now, some of the short exercises we're about to unleash offer the kind of flexibility that would make a gymnast jealous. You can whip them out at any point in your class and make them into routines that can help pupils (Kern et al., 2024). Ever heard of the phrase “you eat with your eyes first?” Well, the same applies to learning. Imagine providing your students with visually appealing, stimulating, and engaging worksheets. It's like turning learning into a colourful adventure! We know that changing ways of presenting the material can also help pupils engage in tasks (Kern et al., 2015).

Setting expectations – the rulebook, minus the boring bits: Introducing wellbeing competences to children involves effective communication, clear explanations, and collaborative rule-setting. When it comes to setting expectations, think of it as crafting a short and sweet rulebook. You know, one that's more interesting than your phone's user manual. Gaudreau's advice? Keep it snappy, like a well-timed joke— ideally four to six rules that are as clear as day. Most importantly, leave judgments aside and focus on behaviours that you can check. Instead of saying “Make an effort” say “Be as quiet as a mouse when instructions are given.” See the difference? It's all about turning abstract into concrete! Another example: if you want the students to respect each other, think with them about what a classroom that is respectful looks like. This way, you'll get concrete elements to work with. Indeed, if they tell you “Respecting others means not talking at the same time, letting them finish their sentences, ...” you have proper rules you can observe and use. Want to know more? Gaudreau also draws attention to Bissonnette and colleagues' work (2016), which emphasises the explicit teaching of expected behaviours. The key idea here is highlighting and communicating desired behaviours to students rather than emphasising what is not expected. Clearly setting

these expectations is, indeed, a form of instructing students on appropriate conduct (Bissonnette et al., 2016)

Positive relationships – let’s make friends and let’s be friends (with your students too, yes): Time to become the Oprah of the classroom and give away positive relationships, like fabulous parting gifts to audience members! When you conduct the ACTIONS, you’re not just teaching wellbeing competences— you’re sprinkling magic friendship dust all around. By having a blast with these activities, you’re telling your students, “Hey, this wellbeing stuff is awesome!” (see *Lead by example* in Chapter 3). It’s like planting the seeds of lifelong camaraderie. Also, when teachers focus on enhancing students’ psychosocial competences and demonstrate their own enjoyment of these activities, they communicate positive emotions and implicitly teach valuable wellbeing competences (Sabornie & Espelage, 2023) (plus: don’t forget that emotions are contagious!). Using them may also lead to an improved self-image and a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Incorporating ACTIONS into the classroom as routines can be impactful, as Gaudreau suggests. These interventions can play a vital role in breaking down initial barriers and promoting a sense of unity among students. One more word on Feedback: we love this topic! Feedback plays an important role in the relationship we have with our students (and also has an important effect on academic achievement) (Wisniewski et al., 2020). We’ve even developed a tool to help teachers give effective feedback to students (Lucciarini & Bressoud, 2022)! By providing students with constructive feedback on their participation in these interventions and actively seeking their feedback in return, teachers not only demonstrate a genuine interest in student wellbeing development but also enhance their cognitive understanding of wellbeing competences. For example, an interesting activity to foster a positive relationship with your students is based on returning feedback based on the character strengths that you observe in them.

Important disclaimer: Giving effective feedback makes you feel good!

Picture yourself climbing a mountain. Would you rather have a vague “You’re doing great!” shouted from below, or specific guidance about where to place your next foothold? As teachers, the

feedback we give our students is much like being their climbing guide—it can either leave them uncertain at a precarious height or help them confidently reach new peaks.

Research shows that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning—when done right. But here’s the thing: not all feedback is created equal. That quick “Good job!” we sometimes hastily scribble on assignments? It’s like trying to navigate with a broken compass. What our students really need is feedback that illuminates the path forward. So, what makes feedback truly effective? Think of it as a three-part journey: First, establish solid ground. Before diving into feedback, ask yourself: Is this the right moment? Just as you wouldn’t shout climbing instructions during a thunderstorm, timing matters. A simple “Is now a good time to discuss your work?” can make all the difference. Next, build from strength. Start by highlighting what’s working well—and be specific! Instead of “Nice writing,” try, “The way you used vivid descriptions in your second paragraph really brought the scene to life.” When students understand their strengths, they’re better equipped to tackle challenges.

Finally, create a bridge to growth. Rather than pointing out what’s wrong, focus on what’s next. “How might you make your argument even stronger?” opens up possibilities, while “This argument is weak” closes doors.

Here’s a practical framework to remember:

- Start with permission
- Highlight specific strengths
- Discuss progress made
- Explore areas for growth
- Plan concrete next steps
- End with encouragement

But perhaps most importantly, remember that feedback is a conversation, not a monologue. Our students aren’t just passive receivers of our wisdom—they’re active partners in their learning journey. When we engage them in dialogue about their work, we’re not just helping them climb one mountain—we’re teaching them how to become skilled climbers themselves. After all, isn’t that what great teaching is all about?

Engagement – variety is the spice of learning: Remember, one size doesn't fit all in the classroom. Think of it as a buffet—everyone has their favourite dish. So, when you're doing ACTIONS like positive reminiscence, you can offer choices like writing, drawing, or daydreaming. It's like letting your students choose between pizza, burgers, or sushi—all equally delicious, just different! The key is to engage their unique tastes and styles. Because yes, students have preferences and do not all learn in the same way. Thus, teachers can employ a range of intervention methods to engage their students effectively (Kuyken et al., 2022). In my classroom, I like to think of the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan and use one of the three leverages: how do I make this student feel competent? How do I work so that this student feels he/she belongs to the group? What choices can I leave to him/her so that this student feels autonomous?

Dealing with disruptive behaviour – be a Jedi, not a Sith: Teaching wellbeing competences is a bit like herding cats—it can get tricky. But don't resort to the dark side with reactive measures! Gaudreau and a bunch of wise sages (2023) (including Yoda) say being proactive is the way to go. The literature on managing disruptive behaviour is as vast as the galaxy, so we're going to let you explore that like an intrepid space explorer. It's a whole adventure waiting for you! This chapter goes beyond the specific focus of this book.

Take Action 15

The 6 key ingredients of the Gaudreau model

Analysing your practice within a structured framework allows you to take a step back, appreciate what already works, and set specific goals for improvement. The “6 ingredients of classroom management” offer a clear compass for enriching your teaching and promoting student success. Using Gaudreau's model, identify the practices already in place in your classroom and those that need further development, defining concrete actions to integrate them.

How to do it

Based on Gaudreau's model, make a list of the elements you already apply in your teaching practice. Then identify those that you think are important to reinforce or introduce.

And now?

For each element, write down one or two concrete ideas for putting it into practice in your classroom. Try proposing the same reflection to your colleagues and compare your ideas.

Now you know all you need to dive into the practical part of the book and start thinking about how to introduce wellbeing practices into your classes. We offer some examples in the practical part.

Part 2

How to build wellbeing in your classroom and school

Hello! We're glad you're here. This book is designed to be practical and flexible—you can start wherever makes the most sense for you. It has two main entry points, reflecting two key questions: *What* is wellbeing in schools, and *why* does it matter? And then: *How* can we actually promote it, in real classrooms, with real students? In the first part of the book, we explore the “what”—what do we mean when we talk about wellbeing in an educational setting? What is positive education? We then move into the “why”: Why should we prioritise wellbeing and personal development in schools? Why does it matter—not only for students' mental health, but also for their learning, relationships, and long-term life outcomes? Here we explain some very interesting and key theoretical foundations and definitions. You will also find several exercises (Take action!) and tests to help you get a better knowledge of yourself, and a better understanding of what is happening in terms of wellbeing, for you, your students, and your whole school. Before we go any further, let's remind ourselves why developing psychosocial competences in children and adolescents is so important—especially in the school context. Recent research shows that these skills improve wellbeing and mental health; boost academic achievement; and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and behavioural difficulties (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2022; Greenberg, 2023). School is the ideal place to nurture these competences. Not only do students spend a significant portion of their lives at school, but school is also uniquely positioned to support social-emotional learning, mental health, and character development in a structured and supportive environment.

In Switzerland, for example, the national curriculum already promotes a wide range of transversal competences—such as cooperation, self-regulation, and empathy—which align beautifully with the principles of positive education. And honestly, who doesn't want to see their students, children, or grandchildren grow up to be not just academically competent, but also resilient, kind, confident, and mentally healthy? Positive education brings precisely these elements into the classroom, builds and strengthens positive assets, makes pupils feel good, promotes their adaptation and positive development (also in the long term), as well as their academic performance.

As discussed in chapter 2 at p. 62 *Yes, you should!*, we can no longer afford to neglect mental health in schools. In the next section of this book, we'll dive into the *how*—practical strategies, tools, and ideas for implementing positive education in your school or classroom.

Whether you're a teacher, a school leader, or a school psychologist, this part is designed to help you translate theory into action.

So, wherever you're starting from, welcome to the journey. Let's explore how to bring wellbeing to life in education.

ACTIONS:

Positive Education toolbox for your classroom and school

3

The ACTIONS framework

Positive Psychology interventions can be classified in different ways (Carr et al., 2024; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2023; Seligman, 2012; Waters & Lotton, 2019). We chose to use Boniwell's ACTIONS framework (2017). In 2017, Ilona Boniwell conducted a review of meta-analyses on Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) aimed at enhancing wellbeing. Analysing 12 meta-analyses, she identified over 60 PPIs. She categorised these interventions into seven themes: activity, calming, thinking, identity, optimism, nourishing, and social. From these categories, she developed the ACTIONS framework and created a toolbox of short PPIs for daily use. This ACTIONS framework has also been used by Lucciarini et al. (2025) when, in a scoping review of meta-analyses, they looked at the best interventions for teenagers at school.

What's inside the toolbox?

In this book, we will use the ACTIONS framework to classify the activities proposed in the "toolbox" for the educational context: this should also help you choose the right intervention at the right moment for

the right length of time or adapt activities. For an overview of which activities are best suited to your students’ needs, please refer to the summary table below (Table 3).

TABLE 3 Summary overview of the ACTIONS activities best suited to your students’ needs.

Name		Your students... (of course you know them best! so these are only suggestions)	Key elements
A	Activity	• are too calm	Movement Physical activity Indoor and outdoor sport Nature
		• need to move	
		• are unmotivated and need to increase energy	
C	Calming	• are (too) energetic	Stillness Mindfulness Breathing Meditation
		• might need to refocus before class, an exercise, a test, ...	
T	Thinking	• might benefit from making sense of past events	Interventions about the past Assimilating past events or behaviours Reflecting, making sense of the past Adopting a kind attitude towards our past Acceptance of what happened
		• need to process a painful event (to be done at the right time)	
		• need to notice more positive aspects in each day	
I	Identity	• need to reflect on their skills	Character strengths Competences Values Needs
		• need to better understand who they are	
O	Optimising	• might benefit from setting goals to move forward	Interventions about future Fixing goals Looking positively towards the future Developing optimism Eudaimonic wellbeing
		• work on their creativity and optimism	
		• need to cultivate a more optimistic outlook	
N	Nourishing	• might benefit from celebrating their successes and progress	Savouring Arts and crafts Reading Taking care of ourselves Soothing
		• might need to take a moment for themselves	
S	Social	• need to manage tensions among themselves	Positive relationships (friends, family) Prosocial behaviour Teamwork Communication Enhancing social competences Developing self-compassion and kindness
		• might optimise their relationships, teamwork, communication	

All the interventions presented here are evidence-based. We have explored the different positive psychology interventions to find those that can be adapted for the school and the classroom. Some are designed for younger children, some for older ones. You are the professional and we are sure you will know best how to adapt them to your students and context. For example, when the activity specifies writing something down, you can ask younger pupils to draw it. We have also provided short and long interventions, but we are sure you can stretch some and shorten others. Some short activities can also be done in a whole-school approach. The idea behind the proposed activities, in line with the toolbox approach, is that, by orienting yourself to the reference framework, you can explore the interventions and choose those that you think best meet the momentary need of the class or phase of the lesson in which you wish to introduce the intervention. Depending on the school level you teach, there are some activities that you might already practice. However, it is possible that you may find interesting variations or even just confirmation that what you are applying does indeed have an effect on the aspects reported in the framework. This allows you to become more aware when proposing the various positive practices in the classroom, placing them within a broader and more structured approach. In this way, these practices become conscious implicit and/or explicit positive education practices, aimed at promoting the wellbeing of the students (as well as your own wellbeing) and developing and reinforcing the students' psychosocial competences.

Take action 16

Collect your ACTIONS

Concretely identifying what nourishes our wellbeing across its different dimensions makes it possible to cultivate these aspects more effectively in everyday life. This process of becoming aware fosters autonomy, resilience, and better management of challenging moments.

How to do it

Below, we invite you to take a brief inventory of the activities related to the ACTIONS model that already form part of your daily life and routines, whether to support your personal and/

or professional wellbeing. For each letter, write down at least one activity, habit, or experience that makes you feel good or helps you feel better. Don't worry if nothing comes to mind or if you feel you are not currently doing any of them: you'll have the opportunity—and a valuable one—to discover them all (even together with your students!).

- **A for Activity:** think about all the physical and movement-based activities you do to promote your wellbeing.
- **C for Calm:** think about all the calming and breathing exercises that help you to focus and centre yourself.
- **T for Transformation:** think about all the reflection and reminiscence activities you engage in to make sense of past events.
- **I for Identity:** think about all the activities that bring out your identity and align with your resources (or help you to identify them).
- **O for Optimism:** think about all the activities you do to increase your optimism and develop a more positive perception of your future.
- **N for Nourishing:** think about all the activities that nourish your soul and help you feel at ease with yourself and your environment.
- **S for Social:** think about all the activities you engage in to cultivate relationships.

Some important indications before you go into "ACTIONS"

We would like to draw your attention to a couple of important aspects or guiding principles for implementing ACTIONS in the classroom.

Not everything has to be new!

There are many exercises you are already familiar with or are doing in your classroom, and this is great! We hope the framework helps you better understand the science of psychosocial skills in the classroom and gives you new ideas.

Flexibility is key

Think of these activities as a buffet of options rather than a fixed menu. You're not expected to serve every dish; instead, select the ones that best suit your students' tastes and needs and your own teaching style.

Let them choose, let them be free!

Giving students autonomy in selecting activities or how they participate is a simple yet powerful way to respect their individuality and promote engagement. Autonomy supports their sense of control and helps them feel safe while exploring new skills. Here are some tips to keep their choices open:

- Offer alternatives: present multiple activities and let them pick the one they feel most comfortable with. For instance, if practising mindfulness feels overwhelming for some, suggest journaling or a creative exercise instead.
- Flexible participation: encourage students to engage in a way that suits them. They can follow along with eyes open or closed, remain seated or lie down—whatever feels right.
- Normalise opting out: let students know it's okay to sit out or take a break if they're not ready to participate. This reduces pressure and makes the environment more inclusive.
- Invite feedback: ask them how they felt after the activity. Knowing their preferences can guide future choices and ensure activities remain student-centred.

Empowering students with options helps create a supportive, trusting atmosphere where they can explore psychosocial skills at their own pace. After all, learning is most effective when it feels safe and enjoyable.

Participation is voluntary

It is important to create an environment where students feel safe and unpressured. Participation in these activities should be voluntary, and students should not be graded on their involvement. This encourages genuine engagement without the fear of assessment. Some students need a moment to observe before jumping into something new.

Lead by example

Your involvement can significantly influence students. Participating alongside them demonstrates commitment and can strengthen the teacher-student relationship. It also provides an opportunity for shared experiences and mutual growth. It should also not be forgotten that it is difficult to propose these activities if you have not tried them yourself first.

Customisation is encouraged

Feel free to modify the activities to better fit your classroom dynamics and your students' ages. Adjust instructions, language, or formats to align with your students' needs and your teaching objectives. The goal is to make these activities as effective and relevant as possible, and if you would like to share your adaptations and experiences, you can upload them to the PEAS platform. We would be grateful to hear about them.



Group dynamics

Depending on the activity and your classroom setup, you can choose to conduct these exercises individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. This flexibility allows you to cater to different learning styles and group dynamics.

Prepare a safety net!

The interventions we propose here are very safe. But let's keep in mind that we never know what can happen because of someone's personal history and past trauma. Some interventions may evoke strong emotions or trigger disagreeable feelings. For example, when certain people dive into attentional practices, they can feel overwhelmed. First of all, it is important that you as a teacher are aware of this possibility

and do not feel intimidated or uncomfortable with your emotions or those of your students. It's essential to create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. You should make sure that children, preadolescents, and adolescents know who they can talk to if this happens. Let them know they can open their eyes whenever they feel like, and know who they can go to if they want to talk to an adult. In general, if a student exhibits signs of distress or if you're uncertain about how to proceed, don't hesitate to consult with your school's mental health professionals, such as school psychologists or counsellors. They can provide guidance and support to ensure the wellbeing of all students.

Important disclaimer: Attentional practice vs. mindfulness meditation!

Attentional practices and meditation are powerful tools, but understanding the difference between them is essential—especially in the classroom. Attentional practice focuses on training the mind to zoom in on a specific object, like breathing, a sound, a thought, an emotion, or a task. The goal is straightforward and practical: help students improve concentration, reduce distractions, and feel more present. These practices fit seamlessly into educational and therapeutic settings because they're accessible, secular, neutral, and widely accepted. Mindfulness meditation, however, is a broader concept that can carry spiritual or philosophical undertones depending on its origins. While meditation often includes attentional exercises, mindfulness meditation goes further, seeking deeper states of awareness—like inner peace, self-reflection, or even transcendence. For teachers, understanding this distinction is more than semantics; it's about clarity and intention. In some contexts, meditation can face pushback or even outright bans. For example, certain Swiss cantons have phased out meditation in classrooms but still allow attentional practices. Why? Because attentional practices are seen as practical and secular, aligning closely with educational goals.

The teacher's role: mindful implementation: If you're thinking about introducing attentional practices to your students, it's essential to approach them with care and purpose. Here's why:

1. **quality matters:** The materials you use should be evidence-based, age-appropriate, and designed to genuinely support student wellbeing. This isn't the time for trendy apps or unverified techniques. Choose resources that have a proven track record, like the ones we present you, they may seem simple or even trivial, but what matters is that they are effective.
2. **preparation matters:** If you're leading these practices yourself, make sure you're equipped with the right knowledge and training. Prepare yourself thoroughly, study the texts you will recite to the students. You don't have to know them by heart, but you must master them and know them well, just as you must know the objectives of the activities you propose. Students deserve guidance from someone who understands the "why" and "how" behind the practice.

When done well, attentional practices can be an amazing tool. They can help students build focus, manage emotions, and develop resilience—skills that extend far beyond the classroom. Incorporating attentional practices isn't just about improving attention spans; it's about equipping young minds with tools for life. When students learn to pause, focus, and reset, they become better learners and, ultimately, more grounded individuals. But as teachers, we hold the responsibility for ensuring these practices are thoughtfully chosen and professionally delivered. So, the next time you guide a classroom through a moment of focused breathing or quiet reflection, know this: you're not just teaching them to pay attention—you're helping them build a foundation for success, one mindful breath at a time.

4 | The ACTIONS

Welcome to the realm of ACTIONS—a space where wellbeing meets learning, and where your professional intuition is the guiding star.

Let us summarise and remind you of a couple of guiding principles for the implementation of ACTIONS into your classroom (see some important indications before you go into *ACTIONS* in Chapter 3):

- Not everything has to be new!
- Flexibility is key
- Let them choose, let them be free!
- Participation is voluntary
- Lead by example
- Customisation is encouraged
- Group dynamics
- Prepare a safety net!

Remember, the aim is to integrate wellbeing into the learning process in a way that feels natural and beneficial for both you and your students.

Happy teaching—and have fun!

Quick overview of the ACTIONS

TABLE 5 Overview of the ACTIONS.

ACTION	Title	
ACTIVITY	Improv (5–10 min) Only paper and tape (5–10 min) Something I like (5–10 min, can be longer) Move! (5–10 min) Sneaky squats (5–10 min) Let’s debate (5–10 min, can be longer) Walking outside (5–10 min, can be longer) Let’s dive into nature! (a few hours/all day long)	
CALMING	Mind games (2–5 min) Biofeedback (2–5 min) Three breaths (1 min) Self-compassion (5–7 min) Let’s get classical (3–5 min) Clap your hands (5–7 min) Shhhhh! (5–7 min) Colouring (5 min) Face-body scan (5–7 min)	
THINKING	Sweet memory (5–7 min) Look at when... (5–7 min) Best jokes... (5–7 min) Let me tell you (5–7 min) What do you mean? (5–7 min) Can you label it? (5–10 min) The power of mindset (5–7 min) Counting my thanks (5–10 min) Three good things (3–5 min)	
IDENTITY	Letter to my body (10–20 min) My qualities! (10 min) Heart to head strengths 1/4 (10 min) Daily strengths use 2/4 (10 min) Strengths 360° 3/4 (10 min) Identifying my signature strengths 4/4 (10 min)	

	Problem solving with strengths (10–15 min) My identity map (10 min) Using my strengths (10 min) Strengths' detective (10 min/whole day) Overuse-underuse (10 min each option) Strengths collage (45 min) Strengths teacher's break (5 min/all year long)	
OPTIMISM	Five pillars 1/3 (5–7 min) Five pillars 2/3 (5–7 min) Five pillars 3/3 (5–7 min) Five pillars - extras (5–7 min each exercise) My perfect day (5–7 min) Love life (5–7 min) Tomorrow is bright! (5–7 min) Positive events for tomorrow! (5–7 min) Best possible self (5–7 min) One door closes, one door opens (5–7 min) Letter from the future (5–7 min) Let's plan (5–7 min)	
NOURISHING	Mindful bite (10–15 min) Haiku (5–10 min, can be extended) Just listen (5 min, duration of the song) Happiness 1/2 (5–7 min) Happiness 2/2 (5–7 min) Photo (10–15 min) Wonder (3–5 min)	
SOCIAL	One nice note (5–10 min) Responsibility pie (5–10 min) Active-listening-responding (3x5 min) Kindness feedback (5–7 min) Counting kindness (5–10 min) Kind is the new cool! (5–10 min) Gratitude notes (5–10min) Kindness missions (5–10 min) "If I were you ..." (5–10 min) "Entsanterrig" Enchantment (5–10 min for each step)	

ACTIVITY

The body and mind are intimately connected, and this relationship proves particularly powerful within the educational context. Research shows that physical activity does not merely improve students' physical condition: it represents a genuine catalyst for psychological wellbeing and learning (Ratey, 2008; Donnelly et al., 2016). When we move, the brain releases endorphins and other neurotransmitters that promote a positive mood, reduce stress, and enhance executive functions (Hillman et al., 2008; Fedewa & Ahn, 2011). Studies indicate that regular physical practice significantly improves young people's mental health and strengthens their sense of self-efficacy (Biddle & Batterham, 2015; Lubans et al., 2016). Integrating movement into teaching practice helps students regulate their emotions more effectively, develop self-confidence, and experience states of flow, which foster optimal engagement. Physical activity also provides a privileged space to cultivate perseverance in the face of challenges, celebrate progress, and strengthen social bonds (Tomporowski et al., 2008). These positive bodily experiences create lasting roots that nourish resilience and contribute to an optimistic view of oneself and one's abilities. Through movement, students discover that their bodies can be a source of joy, exploration, and self-transcendence, thereby developing essential character strengths for their full development. If you are familiar with yoga or Tai Chi and think they might appeal to your students, give them a try! There is substantial evidence supporting the benefits of both of these practices (Carr et al., 2024).

Improv (5–10 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

- + Creativity
- + Fluency
- + Flexibility
- + Originality

(Byrge & Hansen, 2013; Byrge & Tang, 2015)

Materials Nothing

Instructions This exercise fosters divergent thinking and verbal fluency. It helps students express themselves without fear of making mistakes and develop an open attitude towards the unexpected.
All students stand up and form a circle (if possible). Taking turns, one person at a time (you can participate too!), they will create a sentence. However, only one word may be spoken at a time (or two or three, you set the rules!). Once students have understood the mechanism, the activity can also be proposed in pairs (without your involvement) or in progressively larger groups.

Only paper and tape (5–10 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

- + Self-efficacy
 - + Academic achievement
 - Externalising problems
 - Internalising problems
- (Ray et al., 2015)

Materials Paper, tape, or whatever is in your pencil case

Instructions This activity develops creativity, practical skills, and a sense of cooperation. It also allows students to experience success and strengthen confidence in their own abilities.
There are two possible options.

Option 1

Tell your students that in teams they need to build a tower that can hold a book with only paper and tape.

Option 2

You can also ask students to make the highest possible tower using whatever is in their pencil case.

Something I like (5–10 min, can be longer)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Quality of life + Positive affect + Life satisfaction - Stress - Anxiety (Carr et al., 2021; Schutte & Malouff, 2019)	
Materials	Paper and pencil, music or timer (optional)
Instructions	This activity helps to strengthen self-esteem and group cohesion. It encourages students to recognise and value positive qualities in themselves and in others. Each student writes their name at the top of a sheet of paper and leaves it on the table where they were sitting. Then everyone moves freely around the classroom with a pencil in hand. You can play some music or simply use a timer. When the music stops, the timer sounds, or the teacher gives a signal, each person stops in front of the closest sheet and writes a kind word: a quality, a strength,⁴ a compliment, or a nice detail (even about clothing, if desired!). The word is written at the bottom of the sheet, which is then folded so that the next person cannot read what has been written. Students can also write something on the teacher's sheet! At the end, each student returns to their seat and discovers what others have written about them. Instructions for younger students Each child receives a sheet with their name already written on it. Then everyone moves freely around the classroom. When the music stops (or at the teacher's signal), each child stops in front of the closest sheet. Those who can draw may add a positive symbol (heart, sun, star, flower, smile...). Those who prefer can quietly tell the teacher or a classmate something they like about the corresponding child. The adult (or an older pupil) can then write a short message. At the end, each child takes back their sheet and discovers the drawings or words that others have dedicated to them. The teacher may also suggest a collective moment in which each child shares aloud a compliment they have received.

⁴ If you have already worked on character strengths, encourage students to reuse them in this activity!

Move! (5–10 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

- + Wellbeing
- + Quality of life
- + Cognitive skills
- + Resilience
- Depression
- Anxiety

(Costigan et al., 2016)

Materials	Music or timer
Instructions	This activity reactivates the group's energy and improves concentration. It also contributes to regulating emotions through physical involvement. Choose one of these exercises and tell the students to do it for the duration of the music, time: running, jumping jacks, push-ups, squats, jumping squats, burpees, dancing, walking lunges, ...

Sneaky squats (5–10 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

- + Subjective wellbeing
- + Positive emotions
- + Academic achievement
- + Happiness
- Rumination

(Buecker et al., 2021; Haverkamp et al., 2020)

Materials	Stopwatch
Instructions	This activity brings a dose of energy and surprise. It promotes good humour, stimulates concentration, and allows you to integrate a brief moment of physical movement into the classroom. You have two options for proposing this activity: Option 1 Do not tell the students what is going to happen. Ask the students to stand up... and sit down. Do this as many times as you want! This way, they'll do sneaky squats... Option 2 Let them know what is going to happen. Set your stopwatch and do as many as possible in 1, 2, or 3 minutes! Each pupil can compete on his or her own or they can team up and add their squats.

Let's debate (5–10 min, can be longer)	
Wellbeing outcome + Subjective wellbeing + Positive emotions (Buecker et al., 2021; Haverkamp et al., 2020)	
Materials	Questions on the board or projected on a screen
Instructions	This activity stimulates critical reflection, personal expression, and the ability to listen to different points of view. It also adds a playful, physical dimension to debate. It is an activating activity that can be combined with the content of your lessons or with broader educational themes. Instructions for the students "Now I am going to present some questions that can be debated [e.g. <i>Should the consumption of fast food be banned?</i>]. If your answer is 'yes', move all the way to the left side of the classroom; if your answer is 'no', go all the way to the right." The activity can also be carried out outdoors and even while running. Examples of debate questions (adolescents / adults) • Should junk food be banned at school? • Should homework be abolished? • Would a world without social networks be better? • Should students be allowed to choose part of their school timetable? • Should cars be completely banned from city centres? • Does money really make people happy? • Are grades essential for learning? Examples for younger children • Is it better to have a dog or a cat? • Should we eat chocolate every day? • Is it better to play outdoors or indoors? • Should we go to bed late or early? • Do superheroes really exist? • Is it better to share your toys or keep them for yourself? • Should school start later in the morning?

Walking outside (5–10 min, can be longer)	
Wellbeing outcome + Psychological wellbeing + Positive emotions + Subjective wellbeing + Vitality + Life satisfaction + Happiness – Depression (Buecker et al., 2021; Capaldi et al., 2014; Hanson & Jones, 2015)	
Materials	Nothing
Instructions	Spending time outdoors is restorative, stimulates vitality, and creates a more spontaneous space for exchange among students. Walking also helps to reduce mental load and improve the classroom climate. Through this activity, students are activated by going outside, giving them the opportunity to take a moment to breathe, move, and perhaps see things from a different perspective. You have two options for this activity: Option 1 For the duration of this activity, go outside and take a walk around the building, chatting freely about any topic. Option 2 Let students choose whether they prefer to walk on their own. <i>Note</i> Remember to adapt this activity to your institution's rules. If students struggle to find ideas to start the discussion, you can suggest a few prompts or hand out cards with wellbeing-related themes. Examples: Gratitude: share one thing you feel grateful for today. Character strengths: talk about a moment when you used one of your strengths (courage, humour, creativity...) and it helped you. Positive memories: share a memory that still makes you smile or gives you energy when you think about it. Kindness: describe an episode when someone was kind to you (or when you were kind to someone else). Optimism: mention something you are looking forward to in the coming days. Learning: what is the last thing you learned that made you feel good or gave you confidence? Vitality: what small gesture helps you regain energy when you are tired? Dreams and projects: imagine your ideal school or a project that motivates you for the future. Savouring: describe a recent moment when you felt truly well (a taste, a smell, a sensation, an atmosphere...). Relationships: who is the person in your life who makes you laugh the most, and why?

Let's dive into nature! (a few hours/all day long)	
Wellbeing outcome + Psychological wellbeing + Positive emotions + Subjective wellbeing + Vitality + Life satisfaction + Happiness - Depression (Buecker et al., 2021; Capaldi et al., 2014; Hanson & Jones, 2015; Pritchard et al., 2020)	
Materials	Depends on what you are doing
Instructions	A school excursion combined with an exploration of the beauty and resources of nature can also help students and teachers bond in a different way than in the classroom. Many studies show the impact of nature on wellbeing. For example, you could: 1. Do little mindful stops in nature. 2. Have students close their eyes and listen to nature sounds. 3. Organise a "texture walk" where they touch different natural materials. 4. Encourage them to smell various plants (safely) and describe the scents. 5. Have students share what they're grateful for in nature. 6. Ask them to take photos of beautiful things around them. 7. Create temporary mandalas using found natural objects. 8. Build small structures using sticks, stones, and leaves.

CALMING

There are many simple activities that can be introduced: listening to relaxing music, colouring, practising a few minutes of mindful breathing, offering stretching exercises, biofeedback, or guided relaxation. And for the latter, there is no need for complicated postures, “mystical” settings, or incense! The practices presented here are secular, simple, and fully suited to the school context. Many meta-analyses show that mindfulness in schools has a significant effect on several aspects related to learning. The most recent one we read examined 46 studies ranging from nursery school to university and confirms that mindfulness, understood as an attentional practice in the classroom, has an impact on academic performance, attention, self-control, social skills, student behaviour, and school adjustment (Mettler et al., 2023). This can be explained by the effect that mindfulness training has on students’ awareness of the present moment, helping them to distance themselves from automatic reactions and to respond in a calmer, more thoughtful way. As recent evidence in the field of neuroscience shows,

attentional practices can support emotional regulation by engaging brain regions involved in self-awareness and executive functions. Mindfulness, therefore, is by no means a vague or spiritual concept: mindfulness, as attention training, activates the parasympathetic nervous system, slows heart rate and breathing, and helps prepare the brain for learning, concentration, and creativity (Braver & Lazar, 2025). In schools, this is particularly important. Students are constantly exposed to a range of stimuli—social, academic, and emotional—that can easily overwhelm their regulatory systems. Offering brief, structured calming activities in the classroom helps to create a buffer zone: a space to pause, breathe, and reconnect with oneself. These moments of calm do not mean doing nothing, but rather preparing to engage fully, with clarity, presence, and self-control. In a fast-paced and demanding school environment, this kind of reset is not a luxury but a neuroscience-based strategy that supports better learning, healthier relationships, and a greater capacity to cope with everyday stress.

However, although attentional practices may help some students feel calmer and more focused, research shows that their effects are often modest and not always significant. Some studies report emotional benefits, but also cognitive fatigue or no meaningful change (Keng et al., 2013; O’Leary & Dockray, 2015). A meta-analysis by Dunning and colleagues found only small effects on wellbeing and no improvement in mindfulness skills (Dunning et al., 2019). Large-scale studies such as MYRIAD (Kuyken et al., 2022) and INSPIRE (Deighton et al., 2025) confirm that mindfulness in schools is not an effective tool for everyone. What can we conclude? Mindfulness can be useful, but it is not suitable for all students. It must be introduced thoughtfully, adapted to age and context, and never imposed.

Mind games (2–5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome +Attention + Wellbeing + Resistance to stress + Subjective wellbeing – Fatigue – Stress (Bennett et al., 2019; McKeering & Hwang, 2019; Shields et al., 2020)	
Materials	Nothing
Instructions	Here is a list of mind games you can use whenever you or your students feel anxious or trapped in rumination. It is a fun and easy way to distract our minds from anxious thoughts, allowing us to refocus our attention, after a short exercise, on the activities, exercises or tasks that await us. Choose one or two and try them now! 1. Counting backwards from 144 as quickly as possible. 2. Naming the records of your favourite band, or the players of your favourite sports team. 3. Listing 5 things you see, 5 things you hear, 5 things you touch. Then 4, then 3, then 2 then 1. 4. Naming a movie, song, actor's or actress's name for every letter of the alphabet (A, B, C, ...) 5. Choose an object in the classroom (e.g., PENCIL) and find three words for each letter of the word (P: pencil, pea, pepper; C: cat, crab, crab; I: ice cream, iceberg, idea; etc.). The most creative students can then invent a story using all the words they have found. Instructions for younger students • Reduce the difficulty (for example: count down from 20, name 3 animals or 3 colours). • Turn the exercise into a group game: one student says a word and the next one continues. • Use pictures or concrete objects to help them come up with ideas.

Biofeedback (2–5 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

- Anxiety
- Stress

(Lehrer et al., 2020)

Materials	Nothing or an app for biofeedback (example: Petit BamBou or Breathly)
Instructions	Biofeedback helps regulate heart rhythm through calm, regular breathing. This practice improves attention, reduces stress, and promotes a rapid state of relaxation, even after just a few minutes. The exercise consists of guiding students to breathe in and out while following a rhythm. Instructions for the students • Ask students to inhale while counting to 4, then exhale while counting to 6. • Invite them to repeat a simple, positive phrase silently (e.g. "I feel calm" or "I can do this"). Instructions for younger students • Turn the exercise into an imaginative game: "Breathe in as if you were inflating a balloon... then breathe out slowly to deflate it." • Invite them to imagine blowing on a candle without blowing it out. • Use a visual object (a feather, a pinwheel, a soap bubble) to make the breathing more concrete. <i>Note</i> If 5 minutes feels too long, start with 2 minutes. Counting helps students focus on the exercise and brings a wandering mind back to the present moment. You can also find videos or apps to practise biofeedback.

Three breaths (1 min)**Wellbeing outcome**

+ Attention

(Ma et al., 2017)

Materials	Nothing or an app for biofeedback (example: Petit Bambou or Breathly)
Instructions	Sharing three deep, mindful breaths in the classroom helps to re-centre attention and fosters a calm, relaxed atmosphere. This micro-pause acts as a "mental reset" for both you and your students. During a transition, or when you sense attention beginning to drift, guide the class through three deep breaths. What matters most is to lengthen the exhalation as much as possible. Instructions for the students In front of an exam paper, or in a moment of stress, sometimes three breaths are enough to calm down. • First breath: "Bring your attention to your breathing. Where do you feel it most clearly? In your belly, your throat, your nose, or your ribs?" • Second breath: "As you breathe out, let go of tension. Relax your shoulders, your belly, your whole body." • Third breath: "Follow your breath all the way to the end, as if you were gently blowing on a candle. Return to the present moment." <i>Note:</i> This activity is drawn from the BIG programme.

Self-compassion (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Immune system + Wellbeing + Socio-emotional competences + Emotional regulation + Empathy + Social connectedness + Resilience + Self-compassion + Compassion + Mindfulness + Body image - Eating pathologies - Distress - Depression - Anxiety - Guilt (Bolier et al., 2013; Marsh et al., 2018; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009a; Turk & Waller, 2020)	
Materials	Nothing
Instructions	Read the following text to the students. Don't forget to pause. Let the students hide their faces with their jackets if they feel like, and even though they are not sitting in a "Buddhist-monk-way," let them choose. Invite them, never force them. If they are not keen on meditating, let them just rest in silence. Introduction "I am going to guide you through a short mindfulness practice. There is nothing else to do, nowhere else to go, no way to do it wrong. This is a tool you can use whenever you feel an unpleasant emotion. When you are ready, and if you want to, you can close your eyes. It is often easier to focus with your eyes closed. Text to be read to students Think about something that makes you feel bad. Please, for this exercise, do not take something too hard to deal with. Choose an event that you can deal with. Let this moment come into your memory. Whenever you feel it becomes too hard, you can always open your eyes. Here are some sentences to use when unpleasant emotions try to take over: "This is a painful time for me / It's a difficult time. It hurts / Suffering is part of life / Everyone suffers at some point in their life / I am not the only one / I try to treat myself kindly / I try to be understanding towards myself, just as a good friend would be if they were in my place." <i>Note:</i> This intervention was tested as a part of the Mindfulness Self-Compassion programme (self-compassion.org).

Let's get classical (3–5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Social skills + Health - Behavioural difficulties - Psychopathology - Pessimism - Internalisation symptoms - Stress (Bieleninik et al., 2016; Hendriks et al., 2017; Pelletier, 2004)	
Materials	A classical piece of music from an orchestra (many instruments playing together)
Instructions	Listening to classical music promotes relaxation, stimulates auditory attention, and improves emotional regulation. Following a single instrument helps develop concentration and creates an aesthetic experience that enriches the classroom atmosphere. Instructions for the students "We are going to listen to a piece of classical music. First, listen to it normally. Then choose an instrument or sound and try to follow it from beginning to end. You can change it if you want. Try to guess or name the instruments you hear." Instructions for younger students Simplify by asking: "Try to follow a sound that you like." You can also suggest that they draw what the music makes them feel, using colours, shapes, or characters.

Clap your hands (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Attention + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing + Immune system - Fatigue - Stress (McKeering & Hwang, 2019; Mettler et al., 2023)	
Materials	Nothing
Instructions	This activity combines a simple gesture (clapping hands) with a sensory and attentional exploration. It allows students to experience mindfulness through their bodily sensations, while at the same time encouraging a return to calm and improved concentration. Instructions for the students Explain: "We are going to play with our attention. Stand up. I will count 3–2–1, then 1–2–3, and on my count of three you will clap your hands as loudly as you can." Then: "Stretch your hands out in front of you as if you were holding a ball. Close your eyes if you wish. What do you feel? Warmth? Cold? Tingling? Focus on your thumbs... then on your little fingers. What sensations appear?" Afterwards: "Place your hands on your legs and bring your attention to your breathing. Where do you feel it most? In your nose? In your belly? Stay with your breath for a few moments. Now you can slowly open your eyes and return to your seat." Instructions for younger students Simplify the activity into three steps: 1. clap your hands loudly, 2. feel the tingling in your fingers, 3. place your hands on your tummy to feel your breathing. Encourage them to describe the sensations in their own words: "It tickles," "It's warm," "My tummy is moving." Note: This intervention was tested as a part of the Mindfulness Dotbe programme (https://mindfulnessinschools.org/teach-dot-b/dot-b-curriculum/).

Shhhhh! (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Social skills + Health - Behavioural difficulties - Psychopathology - Pessimism - Internalisation symptoms (Carr et al., 2021; Durlak et al., 2011; Hendriks et al., 2017)	
Materials	Nothing
Instructions	Shared silence allows students to slow down, become more aware of their thoughts and sensations, and cultivate a form of collective calm. This experience supports emotional regulation, self-awareness, and can help improve the classroom climate. Instructions for the students "For 5 minutes we will remain in complete silence. If this feels too difficult, you may stand up, stretch, or quietly doodle on a sheet of paper." Allow students to experience the silence. At the end, open a moment of voluntary sharing: those who wish may describe where their thoughts went and how they felt: "Where did your mind wander during the activity? What emotions or ideas did you have?" Instructions for younger students Propose a shorter duration (from 1 to 2 minutes). Offer an imaginative prompt: "Pretend the classroom has become a big magical library where everyone must stay silent." Then invite them to share a word or a drawing about what they experienced during the silence.

Colouring (5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Memory + Self-efficacy + Academic achievement + Better communication about one's feelings + Wellbeing + Externalising problems - Internalising problems (Cromley et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2015)	
Materials	Mandala (you can find them easily online) and colouring pencils (or crayons or pens)
Instructions	Colouring supports concentration, reduces stress, and offers a form of emotional expression that is accessible to everyone. It allows students to re-centre, develop creativity, and experience a state of calm that is conducive to learning. Hand out mandalas to the students (you can print different types) and let them choose the one they prefer. Instructions for the students Tell them they should not think too much about the choice of colours; it is not about performing or colouring the perfect, most beautiful mandala. They should just start colouring and choose the colour they like the most in that moment (or even randomly) and start. It will come to them while doing it. Explain to them that what matters most is staying in the present moment, noticing the colours, the sensations of the pencils rubbing on the paper, the movement of the hand, etc. If the mind wanders, gently bring it back to the activity. The drawing is not being evaluated, the goal is to be fully present while doing it. For 5 minutes, have students colour the mandala. For some variation, you can offer different colouring options: • Use only one colour and create different shades by varying the pressure. • Use only one colour but make many different patterns. • Use only the different shades of the same colour (e.g., light, dark, electric blue) • Have students draw the mandala before colouring it. <i>Note:</i> You can do this activity over several classes or students can finish it at home.

Face-body scan (5–7 min)

Wellbeing outcome

- + Positive emotions
 - + Psychological Capital
 - + Immune system
 - + Self-regulation
 - + Attention
 - + Health
 - + Wellbeing
 - + Socio-emotional competences
 - + Emotional regulation
- + Empathy
 - + Social connectedness
 - + Resilience
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Cortisol
 - Fatigue
 - Stress

(Bolier et al., 2013; Dunning et al., 2019; Shields et al., 2020; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; van Agteren et al., 2021)

Materials	Nothing
Instructions	The face-body scan is a classic mindfulness exercise. It helps students develop body awareness, release tension, and better regulate their emotions. Practised regularly, it promotes resilience and a return to calm, which is useful for learning processes. Read the following text to the students. Don't forget to pause. Let the students hide their faces with their jackets if they feel like. Invite them, never force them. If they are not keen on meditating, let them just rest in silence. Explain that the activity is called "scan" because you will imagine illuminating different parts of the body with a flashlight, just like a scanner illuminates documents. Text to be read to students "Remember: there is nothing wrong or right in this exercise. The idea is to figure out when your attention is gone and bring it back so that you train your attention the same way you do with your muscles. Find the best position for you. Often, body scans are done lying down with your eyes closed. Now breathe gently and deeply through your nose. While breathing quietly, feel the weight of your body on the floor or chair. Then, as if you had a flashlight, bring your attention to your <i>face</i>. What do you feel? Observe the forehead: is it smooth? tense? If your eyes are closed: does the contact of the two eyelids burn? sting? soothe? Observe the breath coming in and out of the nose. Sometimes you can feel that the air coming out is warmer than the air going in. If you don't feel it, it doesn't matter. Observe the breath through the right and left nostrils. Observe the cheeks, the outside, the inside of the cheeks. Is your jaw tight? ajar? if you relax your jaw, you can feel the teeth loosening, and a loosening near your ears. Release your tongue. Feel what there is to feel in the teeth, in the gums. Come back to your whole face. Breathe in and out. Observe how the breathing goes. On the next exhale, if your eyes are closed, gently open them again. Then take a moment to stretch, yawn. Return to your seats." Instructions for younger students Offer a simplified scan: "Close your eyes. Is your forehead soft? Is your mouth relaxed? Are your shoulders light as feathers? Breathe as if you were blowing on a candle without extinguishing it." <i>Note:</i> the first few times you do this exercise, the students might giggle or laugh. Let them, help them focus, but acknowledge, by telling them, that in the beginning it might be difficult, embarrassing, even strange to do a body scan (or in general attentional exercise), but that it will become easier with time and exercise.

THINKING

How we feel about our past can affect how we feel and function in the present (Fox Eades, 2008). It's important for students to reflect on past events and behaviours. Helping students make sense of past experiences, adopt a kind attitude towards themselves, and accept what has happened can foster resilience. Encouraging students to think critically and compassionately about their past enhances emotional intelligence and promotes overall wellbeing. Past events can be both negative and positive, and it is important to work on the latter as well, integrating them into the present, to encourage pleasant memories, help students notice the positive aspects of each day, and reframe "failure as a necessary and positive part of learning" (Fox Eades, 2008, p. 24). In positive education, reminiscence activities can be a really powerful way to help students reflect on meaningful moments from their past—like times they felt proud, connected, or overcame a challenge. These kinds of exercises might include sharing personal stories, looking at old photos, or talking about favourite memories (van Agteren et al., 2021).

Sweet memory (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Life satisfaction + Emotional Wellbeing + Wellbeing – Depression – Anxiety (Bohlmeijer et al., 2007; Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2016)	
Materials	Paper and pen, optional list of emotions (Appendix 2)
Instructions	Revisiting positive memories allows you to relive pleasant emotions and boost your mood. This practice also helps you develop awareness of the happy moments you have already experienced and identify and mobilise emotional resources to cope with stress. Here are the instructions to be given to the students, you have two options: Option 1 "Draw or write down one specific amazing, intensely positive memory you have. Recall the memory as clearly as you can and be as specific as you can, make it detailed and colourful: what was the context? Who were you with? What were you feeling? Where was it? What was particularly amazing?" Option 2 "Write down a specific memory for age 0–5, 5–10, 10–15, 15–20." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask the students to draw a happy or sweet memory. It could be a birthday, a moment with their family, an outing or an activity that made them happy. Encourage them to add details: colours, people present, what they were doing. Option 2 Ask them to share their memory aloud with a classmate or the group. You can guide them with simple questions: "Where were you?", "Who was there?", "How did you feel?". You can also show them a list of illustrated emotions (joy, pride, tenderness, surprise, etc.) to help them better describe their feelings. <i>Note:</i> To help students identify how they were feeling or find a positive memory you can provide the list of emotions if students need it. After the exercise ask the students if they notice any changes in their energy or mood levels. They can keep the drawing or the text, their record of a sweet memory, in their binder or on their desk. Glancing at it will bring back some of those positive feelings.

Look at when... (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Emotional wellbeing + Life satisfaction + Physiological health – Depression – Anxiety – Trauma (Bohlmeijer et al., 2007; Carr et al., 2021; Koydemir et al., 2021)	
Materials	Photograph of student as a child during a happy time, optional list of emotions (Appendix 2), pen and paper
Instructions	Returning to happy childhood memories through photography allows deeply rooted positive emotions to be reactivated. This activity nurtures self-esteem, strengthens the sense of continuity of identity, and develops a rich autobiographical memory, which acts as a resource in the face of stress and difficulties. Preparation: Ask students to bring a photo of themselves as children during a happy time or event to school. Instructions for the students Have students look at their photo. Ask them to write down all the happy emotions related to that event. How many can they find? Have them write down what made them feel each particular emotion about that event. Instructions for younger students Encourage them to describe their memory aloud using simple sentences, guiding them with questions such as: "Where were you?", "Who was with you?", "How did you feel?". You can also show them pictograms of emotions (joy, pride, tenderness, surprise, etc.) to help them better describe what they felt. <i>Note:</i> This intervention was tested as a part of the MAPEG programme (Ramirez et al., 2014).
Best jokes... (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Cheerfulness + Wellbeing (Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Jokes
Instructions	Laughing promotes the release of positive emotions, reduces stress, and improves social cohesion. Sharing jokes is a simple and effective way to create a relaxed atmosphere and strengthen bonds between students. You have 3 options for this activity to propose to your students: 1. Exchange jokes with a classmate. 2. Exchange jokes with a classmate and score them from 0 to 10. 3. Look at your classmate in the eyes and try not to laugh. <i>Note:</i> This activity is also well suited to the SOCIAL dimension (see the social section in Chapter 4)

Let me tell you (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Happiness – Depression (Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Optional: paper and pen, list of emotions (Appendix 2)
Instructions	Sharing a funny or joyful memory allows you to bring back positive emotions, boost your mood, and share a moment of complicity. This activity encourages emotional expression, develops narrative skills, and creates a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere. You have 4 options for this activity to propose to your students: 1. Tell your classmate in detail about one of the funniest things that has ever happened to you. 2. You can write or draw what happened if you prefer. 3. You can share it with someone else too, later today. 4. You can use the list of emotions if you need it. Ideas for teenagers/adults • A moment when you couldn't stop laughing with a friend. • An embarrassing situation that has become funny over time. • A childhood prank that makes you laugh today. • A joke or imitation that made you burst out laughing. • A particularly funny memory from a trip • A situation that went completely wrong, but now makes you smile. • A funny costume, photo, or video you saw or experienced. Ideas for younger students • A game that made you laugh a lot during break time. • A funny face or grimace someone made. • A funny story you heard at home or at school. • An animal that did something funny (a dog, a cat, a horse, etc.). • A moment when you laughed with your parents, brothers, sisters, or friends. • A joke or riddle that made you laugh.

What do you mean? (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Social skills + Resilience + Wellbeing + Mental health - Behavioural difficulties - Psychopathology - Internalisation symptoms - Aggression - Depression - Pessimism (Hendriks et al., 2017; Mikolajczak, 2020; Skeen et al., 2019)	
Materials	Emotions function sheet (Appendix 1)
Instructions	This exercise helps students to understand that emotions always serve a function. Understanding the role of emotions helps students to better perceive, accept, and regulate them. This awareness promotes better management of behaviours and reactions and contributes to a more balanced and robust mental health. Instructions for the students Ask your students to reflect and then answer the following questions: • Why do we have feelings? • What are emotions for? • Can you guess their functions? Instructions for younger students Ask the students to associate each emotion with a short story or a simple situation (for example: fear helps us protect ourselves, joy helps us share, anger helps us say we disagree). You can use cards illustrated with drawings of emotions to make the activity more fun and engaging. <i>Note:</i> You can introduce the topic, and then construct different degrees of difficulty with this exercise by photocopying the emotions function sheet (Appendix 1) and hiding different columns to adapt to your students' skills. <i>This intervention was tested as a part of the CorStone's Youth First programme (https://www.worldbeing.org/).</i>

Can you label it? (5–10 min)

Wellbeing outcome

- + Social skills
 - + Wellbeing
 - + Health
 - Pessimism
 - Behavioural difficulties
 - Psychopathology
 - Internalisation symptoms
- (Durlak et al., 2011; Hendriks et al., 2017; Hodzic et al., 2018; Skeen et al., 2019; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020)

Materials	Paper and pen, optional list of emotions (Appendix 2)
Instructions	Naming your emotions increases self-awareness and enriches your emotional vocabulary. This allows you to better understand what you are feeling, regulate your reactions, and improve your social interactions. Recognising an emotion is the first step towards learning how to manage it. Instructions for the students • You will have __ (1, 2, 3) minutes. Write down all the emotions you have felt in the last 24 hours. • After (1, 2, 3) minutes ask the students: "How many did you find?" • Then, hand your students a list of emotions (Appendix 2). Ask them to underline the emotions they were not aware of, that fit the assignment. • Ask them how many they have in total now. How many pleasant. How many unpleasant. Explain that it is normal to note more negative emotions than positive ones. This is how our brain works: unpleasant emotions require more analysis and reflection. This phenomenon is called negativity bias (see <i>What about happiness?</i> in Chapter 1). Instructions for younger students Ask the students to choose cards with faces or pictograms of emotions and place them in front of them to represent what they felt during the day. Then ask: "Which one did you feel the most? Which one was the most pleasant?" Finally, talk together about negativity bias, explaining that it is normal to remember unpleasant emotions more easily. <i>Note:</i> You can repeat the exercise several times over time, asking students if they have managed to come up with a more specific and varied list of emotions (richer vocabulary) and a more balanced list of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. <i>This intervention was tested as a part of the CorStone's Youth First programme (https://www.worldbeing.org/).</i>

The power of mindset (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome +Motivation +Achievement +Reading +Maths + Brain activity (Sarrasin et al., 2018)	
Materials	Mindset worksheet (see Appendix 3 for level 1 and Appendix 4 for level 2)
Instructions	With this activity, we're going to explore and practice what's called a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 1986). What's a mindset? It's basically the way you think about yourself and your abilities—like a pair of glasses you wear to look at the world. Everyone has one! According to Carol Dweck (1986), there are two main types: fixed and growth. If you have a <i>fixed</i> mindset, you might believe that your intelligence or talents are just "<i>what they are</i>" and can't really change. For example, you might think: "<i>I'm just not a math person</i>" or "<i>I'll never be good at this, so why try?</i>" With a <i>growth</i> mindset, on the other hand, you believe you can improve with effort, training, and time. Someone with this mindset might say: "<i>I'm not good at this yet, but I can get better if I keep practicing.</i>" The good news? You can shift from a fixed to a growth mindset—like changing your glasses! And research shows that students with a growth mindset tend to be happier, more motivated, more resilient, and do better in school. Let's dive in and start building that growth mindset together! You have two "levels" for this activity: an easier one with suggested solutions to match with the sentences and another one in which students are first asked to reflect and formulate their own hypotheses of possible phrases in terms of a growth mindset. Depending on the level and knowledge of your students, you can use one level or the other (see sheets of Appendix 3 and 4). Instructions for the students <i>Make the following premise:</i> A fundamental principle of growth mindset is the plasticity of our abilities and skills. So, first of all, when you cannot do something, tell yourself that you are not yet able to do it. In fact, the brain changes and learns continuously! Level 1 (suggested solutions) Try and pair each sentence (1–8) with one of these possible answers (a–h): 1. I'm not good at this. 2. I give up. 3. It's good enough. 4. I can't make this any better. 5. This is too hard. 6. I made a mistake. 7. My friend can do it, but I cannot. I'll never be as smart. 8. I'm awesome at this! a) I need more time. b) Is it really the best I can do? c) Thanks to mistakes, I can learn. d) I need to learn from this person and try it. e) I can always improve. I'll keep trying. f) I am on the right track. g) What am I missing? What strategies could I use? Who could help me now? h) I'll use a different strategy and see what happens

Level 2

Try to find a new way for saying these sentences in a growth mindset way. You can think of any sentence that comes to mind.

1. I'm not good at this.
2. I give up.
3. It's good enough.
4. I can't make this any better.
5. This is too hard.
6. I made a mistake.
7. My friend can do it, but I cannot. I'll never be as smart.
8. I'm awesome at this!

Instructions for younger students

Present simple situations with pictures or short stories:

- "I can't do my puzzle" → "I'll try again"
- "I can't read it" → "I'll learn little by little"
- "My drawing isn't very good" → "If I practise, I'll get better"

You can use puppets or cards with the words '*fixed*' and '*growth*' written on them to help children visualise the difference between the two types of mindset.

Note: suggested solutions (1g, 2h, 3b, 4e, 5a, 6c, 7d, 8f).

Within the THINKING activities, gratitude is a simple yet powerful habit that includes the capacity to notice and appreciate the good things we have and to take nothing for granted. By regularly acknowledging what we're thankful for, we can greatly enrich the classroom experience and personal wellbeing. These practices not only strengthen relationships between teachers and students but also help reduce stress and boost overall happiness. When gratitude becomes a part of daily life (for example through gratitude note taking, but also journaling), it builds resilience and opens the door to greater satisfaction and a deeper sense of fulfilment, both in school and beyond. You could have a gratitude wall in your classroom, in the teachers' office or in the school for everyone to write! It could also be a jar or a box. You can motivate students to write gratitude notes at the end of the week, month, semester, ... Below are some examples of activities for practising gratitude.

Counting my thanks (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing + Quality of life + Positive emotions + Grateful mood – Depression – Stress – Anxiety (Bennett et al., 2019; Carr et al., 2021; Dickens, 2017; Fischer et al., 2020; Hendriks et al., 2020a; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper. Option 2: post-it notes. Option 3: a jar.
Instructions	As mentioned before, THINKING activities are about taking stock of past events and integrating them into our present situation. This activity is a tangible way for our students to practice gratitude, helping them to focus on positive events, facts, and people in their lives. It allows us to practice appreciation and reflection with the students and can help shift their outlook and improve their mood. You have three options for this activity. Instructions for the students Option 1 "Write down on a paper as many things you are grateful for. Try to be as specific as possible. If you don't have any idea, here is to help you: Name a person, an object, a memory, a place, a skill, anything you are grateful for." Option 2 "On every post-it I gave you, write down something you are grateful for. Go and stick it there [<i>choose a specific place or make them choose a place</i>]. Have a look at some of the things your classmates are grateful for." Option 3 "Fill the gratitude jar with little notes on why you are thankful today." [<i>Every student can have their personal jar, and keep it at school or at home, they can look at it from time to time or when they need a mood booster in stressful or difficult times.</i>] Instructions for younger students • Option 1: Ask them to draw things or people they are grateful for. • Option 2: Use stickers or pictures to stick on a "wall of gratitude." • Option 3: Create a "shared jar" in which each child puts a drawing or a word dictated to the teacher.

Three good things (3–5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Subjective wellbeing + Gratitude + Optimism – Stress (Seligman et al., 2009)	
Materials	Pen and paper.
Instructions	Recognising and enjoying small, pleasant experiences strengthens the ability to focus on what is going well. In a school setting, this ritual helps students end the day (or take a break) on a positive note, reminding them that they also experience pleasant and successful moments at school. It promotes resilience, good mood, and confidence in the future, while helping to create a welcoming and benevolent classroom atmosphere. Instructions for the students At the end of the day, ask your students to write down or say their “three good things.” They can share them in pairs or turn the activity into a weekly group ritual. “Take a few minutes to identify three things that made you feel good. They can be very simple: a smile you received, a tasty meal, a joke among friends, a pleasant sensation. Write them down (<i>or share them aloud</i>). Try to vary them each day to hone your ability to notice the positive things around you.” <i>Note:</i> If you are working with teenagers, you don’t have to ask them to share, but simply invite them to raise their hands when they have found their three positive things.

IDENTITY

Activities and short interventions related to identity are concerned with personal strengths and one’s representation of oneself. Understanding and embracing one’s character strengths, competences, and values is crucial for student wellbeing (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). Helping students identify and cultivate their unique strengths can boost self-esteem and sense of purpose. Exploring values leads to greater self-awareness and a more authentic sense of self. When students know their strengths, they can use them better, develop them, and understand that they have something unique to offer the group. It is a gift that will stay with them well beyond school.

What makes us who we are? Strengths interventions in the school context have many advantages: fewer depressive symptoms, increased levels of happiness, greater life satisfaction. Even one session can already have a positive effect. You can easily find the 24 character strengths test free online



If you work with younger students, the 24 strengths model is fine. There are also more comprehensive classifications (e.g. 50 character strengths), which can be used with older students, for example, and are also based on scientific evidence, such as those from Positran®, which are equally interesting.

Letter to my body (for adolescents) (10–20 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Body image – Beauty ideal internalisation – Social comparison tendency – Depression (Alleva et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper, envelopes (optional)
Instructions	Teenagers often find themselves struggling with issues related to their physical appearance, fuelled by the media and unrealistic beauty standards. This activity allows them to take a step back, deconstruct these standards and develop a more positive relationship with their bodies and self-image. Instructions for the students <i>Make the following premise:</i> “Most adolescents (and adults!) have complexes and do not fully accept their bodies. We tend to compare ourselves to celebrities or unhealthy models. For example: If shop mannequins were real people, their proportions would be physiologically impossible — too extreme to support normal bodily functions or long-term health. For example, if they were women, they would be too thin to menstruate or bear children. I therefore invite you to write a very short letter to your younger self instructing yourself on how to avoid developing body image concerns.” Encourage them to write kindly and sincerely. <i>Note:</i> After the exercise you can collect the letters, keep them, and give them back to the students a couple of months later. You’ll need envelopes if you chose this option. They can also finish it at home. This intervention was tested as a part of the Body Project (Stice et al., 2009)

My qualities! (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Body image + Self esteem + Resilience - Social comparison tendency (Alleva et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Remembering that one's value does not depend solely on physical appearance helps to strengthen a more complete and balanced identity. Instructions for the students Ask the students to list five qualities, strengths, or skills that they possess that have nothing to do with their physical appearance (e.g. humour, creativity, perseverance, friendship skills). Then invite them to share one quality with a classmate. Instructions for younger students Explain in simple terms: "Today we are going to think about what makes each of you special, beyond your body." Give some concrete examples: "Being funny", "Being able to sing well", "Helping friends", "Having lots of ideas". Ask the children to name a quality they think they have. You can write their answers on the board or represent them with a drawing. Group variation: ask the students to work in pairs. Each child must name a positive quality they recognise in their partner (e.g. "you're good at ball games", "you're kind", "you tell great stories").

The following activities (1–4) are included in various programmes on character strengths. You can find supplementary activities on the worksheet in Appendix 6 and on the PEAS online platform.



These activities can be carried out in the suggested order in several lessons or, if possible, all at once during a special lesson dedicated to this topic. They take about 45 minutes in total. Keep the same worksheet for all activities.

Heart to head strengths 1/4 (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Prosocial behaviour development + Optimising communication + Seeing others with fresh eyes + Classroom climate - Depression symptoms (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	Research shows us that recognising and utilising one's character strengths allows us to develop a better understanding of ourselves, strengthen our confidence in our abilities, and cultivate positive relationships with others, as well as promoting wellbeing and, last but not least, learning. Let's start with the first activity. Instructions for the students "We are going to learn more about our strengths and how to develop them. Strengths are inner capacities. When we use them, we feel energised, authentic, we perform well. Research shows how they can really help us be happier and also perform better. They also help us to know ourselves better and see the others around us in a different way. To discover these strengths, we are going to use this list (<i>or cards</i>). Don't think too much about it, just read them through and choose which ones you believe or feel are your top 5 strengths. Put a check in the heart column in your worksheet." Instructions for younger students Simplify by using cards with pictures and simple words (e.g. courage, kindness, sense of humour). You can find a set of cards on the PEAS platform  Ask them to choose three cards that they feel are most representative and stick them on a sheet of paper with their name on it. Then suggest a moment of collective sharing: "Which strength did you choose?"; "When in your life have you used it?" <i>Note:</i> If you have the time, you can replace this activity and have your students fill out the Via character strengths test online 

Daily strengths use 2/4 (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Prosocial behaviour development, + Optimising communication, (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	Let's carry on with the strengths activities. Now tell your students to: Instructions for the students Ask the students to reread the descriptions of the character strengths. Tell them to choose the five they use most often and that energise them. Once they have identified them, ask them to mark them with a cross in the column with the head on their worksheet. Invite them to reflect: "Do the strengths you identified match your heart strengths (the ones you chose earlier)? What similarities or differences do you notice?" Instructions for younger students Use cards with simple pictures. Ask them to choose three cards that represent what they often do (e.g. helping, drawing, playing with others). Ask: "Do you feel that these cards show who you are inside?"
Strengths 360° 3/4 (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Prosocial behaviour development, + Optimising communication, (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	This is an activity that involves the entire class. This group exercise allows you to observe and better understand the strengths of others, while discovering how your own strengths are perceived by your peers. Instructions for the students "Find someone in the classroom that you feel good with. Give them your strengths sheet. Ask them to choose what they think your 5 top strengths are, indicating it on the sheet with a check on the 360° column. At the same time, do the same for this person. Once you have done the activity take turns explaining why these strengths represent them, using concrete examples." <i>Before ending the activity invite them to reflect:</i> "Finally, take a moment to read the strengths you have received and reflect on what they say about you. Compare the columns. Do their choices match your heart and head character strengths?"

Identifying my signature strengths 4/4 (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Prosocial behaviour development, + Optimising communication, + Seeing others with fresh eyes, + Classroom climate. - Depression symptoms (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	With this activity your students will find out what their signature strengths are. Identifying one's signature strengths—those that recur most often in self-perception, daily life, and the eyes of others—allows students to get to know themselves better and develop a positive and consistent image of themselves. These strengths form a solid foundation for self-esteem and social relationships. Instructions for the students "Which ones are your 3–5 signature strengths, i.e. those that have most matches within the three columns? If there are too many differences, just pick the 3–5 you decide fit best with you!" <i>Invite them to reflect:</i> "How do you feel about it? How do you know they are your signature strengths? Can you think of concrete examples of times or situations where you used these strengths?" Instructions for younger students Ask them to choose two cards or images of the character strengths they like best and to describe a time when they put them into practice (e.g., "I was brave when I tried the slide," "I was kind when I helped a friend"). You can also create a collective panel of the class's distinctive character strengths, with a photo or drawing of each child accompanied by their main strengths.

Problem solving with strengths (10–15 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Positive affect + Life satisfaction + Use of character strengths + Wellbeing - Depression (Quinlan et al., 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2019; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	Once we have found out what our strengths are, it is important to reflect and think of new ways or contexts to use them. Strengths can be really helpful to solve problems. For example, someone who is very scared to go back home after school might use his/her competition strength to run home as quickly as possible. Instructions for the students <i>Ask the students to reflect on possible ways to use their strengths to solve a problem or challenge they have: "Now that you know your character strengths, try to use them to solve a challenging or difficult situation. Think of a problem or difficulty you are currently facing. How can you use your signature character strengths to deal with the problem? Try to think of as many ways as possible, even creative ones, to use your strengths in a challenging situation, and then choose the one you like best, the one that convinces you the most."</i> You can give examples: "perseverance to finish a task, creativity to find a new way of learning, a sense of humour to reduce tension." Instructions for younger students Suggest a simple, collective problem: "If we lose a ball in the playground, what strength can help us?" Use stories or puppets: a character encounters a small difficulty and the children have to suggest a strength (kindness, courage, imagination) to help him.

My identity map (10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; Rashid & Seligman, 2018; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), worksheet (Appendix 6)
Instructions	On the blackboard, draw a simple diagram that starts from a central point and expands outward. You can create any clear structure that allows ideas to branch out from the centre. Instructions for the students "Create a personal strengths map to explore the qualities of the people who are important in your life. Begin by writing your own name in the centre of the page. From there, draw lines extending outward. At the end of each line, write the name of a person who plays a meaningful role in your life (for example, a friend, a teacher, a coach, or another significant person). You may add as many lines as you wish." <i>Once they are done:</i> "Next to each name, write the quality or strength you most associate with that person. For instance, if someone inspires you through their imagination, you might write 'creativity'." <i>When they are finished:</i> "Once you have completed your map, take a moment to reflect. What do you notice? Are some strengths repeated? Do you recognise strengths that you also see in yourself?" <i>Note:</i> This activity is inspired by Positive Psychotherapy (Rashid & Seligman, 2018) and encourages reflection on shared strengths, personal identity, and meaningful relationships. A similar activity can also be carried out at class level, by placing the class at the centre and adding each student as a contributor to a shared strengths map.

Using my strengths (10 min)		
Wellbeing outcome + Positive affect + Life satisfaction + Use of character strengths + Wellbeing - Depression (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; van Agteren et al., 2021)		
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5)	
Instructions	Being aware of and above all using our strengths has many positive impacts in school too, like better grades and enhanced wellbeing. This is an exercise to help students focus on their strengths and get used to assuming a strengths perspective.	
	Instructions for the students "Think of this week. Pick out three moments when you have used your strengths. When was it? What did you feel? You can copy this table and complete it on your piece of paper."	
	Strength	How/when/what
		Emotions
Then invite the students to share an example with a classmate or in a small group to reinforce mutual recognition.		
Instructions for younger students Ask them to draw a moment during the week when they used a strength (e.g. helping a classmate, persevering in a game, showing creativity). Then ask, "How did you feel?" and guide them with pictograms (joy, pride, calm, surprise).		

Strengths detective (10 min/whole day)	
Wellbeing outcome + Positive affect + Life satisfaction + Use of character strengths + Wellbeing - Depression (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5)
Instructions	When we talk and think about our strengths and others' strengths, it is important to identify concrete examples of strengths use. The objective of this activity, therefore, is to spot strengths in action. Instructions for the students <i>Explain to the pupils that they will become "character strengths detectives" for the day. Tell them: "Today, you are detectives of character strengths. Throughout the day, keep your eyes open and try to spot moments when your classmates use a strength. For example: kindness, when someone helps a friend, or perseverance, when someone tries again after making a mistake."</i> At the end of the day, share observations and discuss how strengths make the classroom a better place. Instructions for younger students Simplify by suggesting that they draw a tick (✓) or put a token in a box every time they notice a strength during the day (you can also write it down on the board or stick a sticker on a poster). Use pictograms or illustrated cards to represent the strengths observed. At the end of the day, read the "collection of strengths" together and praise the class for their positive behaviour.
Overuse–underuse (10 min each option)	
Wellbeing outcome + Prosocial behaviour development + Seeing others with fresh eyes (Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), overuse/underuse activity sheet (Annex 7).

Instructions

When we work with strengths, it is important to know what we are talking about. We should know the definitions, the vocabulary and what it means, to use (or not use) a strength. If we use a strength too much or too little, it can sometimes turn into a flaw. Overuse and underuse focus on "something that is positive yet imbalanced or problematic in a situation" (Niemiec, 2019, p.10). For example, too much creativity can come across as eccentric or bizarre, while a lack of curiosity might lead to boredom or apathy. You have several options for getting students to reflect on the overuse and underuse of character strengths:

1. *The strength thermometer*

Ask students to imagine their strength like a volume knob or a thermostat:

- What happens if you turn your strength up to 10/10?
- What about if it's only at 1/10?
- What would be the "just right" level of that strength in situations like... working in a group? Having a conflict? Taking a test? Etc.

2. *Roleplay: too much/too little/Just Right*

In small groups, have students act out short scenes showing:

- Too much of a strength (e.g., too much humour = annoying or hurtful),
- Too little (e.g., not enough humour = tense and serious),
- Just right (balanced and helpful).

Then ask: Which version felt best? Why?

This helps students see how strengths impact relationships and mood.

3. *Character sketch: the unbalanced strength*

Students create a fictional character who overuses or underuses a strength. For example:

- "Captain Courage" who takes big risks without thinking.
- "Miss Caution" who never tries anything new.

Then reflect: What could this character do to use the strength in a more balanced way?

4. *Real-Life reflection*

Invite personal reflection with simple questions:

- Have you ever used one of your strengths too much? Or too little?
- How did that affect the situation or the people around you?
- What could you do differently next time to keep that strength in balance?

5. *Strength use detective*

Give students anonymous scenarios where a strength is used too much or too little. Ask:

- What strength is being used here?
- Is it overused or underused?
- How could it be used in a better way?

Note: In Appendix 7 you find a table illustrating how overuse and underuse of certain strengths can have negative effects. You can give the table to the students, if you see that they need it for the activities. You can also use it for an activity itself, by hiding columns and having them find the words corresponding to underuse or overuse. This helps the students develop a language for understanding the overuse and underuse of character strengths.

Strengths collage (45 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Prosocial behaviour development + Optimising communication + Seeing others with fresh eyes, + Classroom climate + positive affect + happiness + life satisfaction + use of signature character strengths - Depression (Quinlan et al., 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2019)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), magazines, newspapers, printed images
Instruction	Like with learning other disciplines and contents, it is also helpful with character strengths to work using different senses. Therefore, the objective of this activity is to represent strengths visually. Preparation Provide magazines, newspapers, or printed images. Instructions for the students Ask students to cut out pictures and words that represent their strengths and create a collage of who they are. Students can explain their collage to the class and how these strengths reflect who they are. Instructions for younger students • Provide simple images representing character qualities or strengths (e.g. a heart = kindness, a sun = joy, a star = courage). • Help them stick the images onto a large sheet of paper with their name in the centre. • Ask them to say a short sentence to explain their choice (e.g. "I put a star because I am brave").

Strengths teacher's break (5 min/all year long)	
Wellbeing outcome + Prosocial behaviour development + Optimising communication + Seeing others with fresh eyes, + Classroom climate + positive affect	
+ happiness + life satisfaction + use of signature character strengths - Depression	
(Quinlan et al., 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2019)	
Materials	Character strengths list (Appendix 5), magazines, newspapers, printed images
Instruction	Teachers play a key role in how students perceive their own qualities. This micro-activity allows you to cultivate a benevolent and attentive view of the strengths present in the classroom. It encourages you to value your students, but also to recognise your own resources as adults. It is a simple but powerful activity that you can introduce in your school, more specifically in the staff room. How to do it You can leave a deck of character strength cards in the staff room with a note next to it that says: <i>"Take a card and think of one of your students who possesses this strength. When did you notice it? How can you let them know?"</i> You can also ask other questions such as: <i>"What strengths do you often observe in your students?"; "How could you encourage these strengths in the classroom?"; "What strengths do you recognise in yourself today?"</i> Encourage teachers to repeat this ritual regularly, either alone or with colleagues.

OPTIMISM

Seligman (1991) argues that optimistic thinking is a skill that can be learned. This discovery changes everything for our students. Instead of letting them suffer from their negative thoughts, we can provide them with concrete tools to develop a more positive and realistic view of the world. These activities incorporate this insight by focusing on how to best think about what can happen in the future, planning and organising in order to be the most efficient and happy possible. These activities enable the students to set goals and potentially, if needed, improve the current situation. These competences are also central for pupils. More optimism leads to more persistence in tasks and better results, in mathematics and reading, for example (Boonen et al., 2014). This difference in perspective completely changes the way we approach academic challenges. Optimism activities develop fundamental skills such as looking to the future, planning, resilience, and self-efficacy. The aim is not to create naively positive students, but to provide them with the tools to face challenges with confidence, creativity, and determination.

Five pillars 1/3 (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome - Anxiety - Stress - Depression - Psychological distress (Conley et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper, blackboard (optional)
Instructions	The Five Pillars intervention helps students reflect on five essential dimensions of wellbeing: 1) physical activity, 2) healthy sleep, 3) nutrition, 4) social connection, and 5) self-regulation. By evaluating their own habits and exploring concrete ways to improve them, students develop a stronger sense of personal agency—an essential component of optimism in positive psychology. Rather than seeing wellbeing as something passive or fixed, they begin to understand that it is built through small, daily actions. This perspective is key to cultivating a more optimistic outlook: the belief that positive change is possible, and that one can influence their future. Over time, these practices help students link optimism not just to positive thinking, but to concrete, health-promoting behaviours grounded in everyday life. The Five Pillars series of activities invite students to set a simple, realistic goal in one of the five areas, imagine what their life might feel like after a few weeks of progress, or track their habits over a short period of time. Sharing ideas or small victories with classmates can also strengthen motivation and create a supportive atmosphere. So, let's start with the exercises. Instructions for the students "According to a famous psychologist, Ryan Niemiec, good health is determined by 5 factors. What do you think these five factors are? I'm going to give you 2 minutes to try and guess which ones they are." <i>You can let them work in small groups if you want.</i> <i>After 2 minutes:</i> "Here are the answers: Exercise, healthy sleep, healthy eating, social activity, and self-regulation. We'll work on them next time!" Instructions for younger students Option 1: Show pictures (a ball, a bed, a plate, friends, a heart) and ask the children to guess what each picture represents in terms of health. Option 2: Turn the activity into a charades game (pretend to sleep, run, eat, play with friends, breathe deeply). <i>Note:</i> Here are some more information about each category: 1. <u>Exercise</u>: 10,000 steps per day or 60 minutes per day of sports is recommended for 5–17-year-old people; 30 minutes for 18–64-year-old people. 2. <u>Healthy sleep</u>: from 7 to 9 hours of uninterrupted sleep. 3. <u>Healthy eating</u>: plenty of water + a balanced diet high in fruits and vegetables. Avoiding food with a lot of sugar, trans fat, fast foods, alcohol, drugs, (...) 4. <u>Social activity</u>: having a social life, getting support from friends or family, participating in a sports club, music, volunteering, (...) 5. <u>Self-regulation</u>: regular practice of calming, mindfulness, relaxation...

Five pillars 2/3 (5–7 min)

Wellbeing outcome

- Anxiety
 - Stress
 - Depression
 - Psychological distress
- (Conley et al., 2015)

Materials

Pen and paper

Instructions

This exercise helps students become aware of the fundamental pillars of good mental and physical health. Through self-assessment, they develop a better understanding of their lifestyle habits and identify concrete strategies for improvement.

Instructions for the students

"According to a famous psychologist, Ryan Niemiec, good health is determined by 5 factors: exercise, healthy sleep, healthy eating, social activity, and self-regulation. For each category, on a scale from 0 to 5 estimate how you are currently doing (0: I'm doing very badly, 5: I'm doing great).

- 1.Exercise:
- 2.Healthy sleep:
- 3.Healthy eating:
- 4.Social activity:
- 5.Self-regulation:

"Keep your results for next class!"

Instructions for younger students

- **Option 1:** Replace the ratings with emoticons (sad, neutral, happy) that the children colour in for each pillar.
- **Option 2:** Use picture cards (ball, bed, plate, friends, heart) and ask the children to use their fingers to show how good they feel in each area.

Five pillars 3/3 (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome - Anxiety - Stress - Depression - Psychological distress (Conley et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper, blackboard, results from five pillars 1 and 2
Instructions	This activity encourages students to move from awareness to action. After assessing their personal situation, they explore practical ways to improve their wellbeing in each of the five areas. Sharing ideas promotes creativity, cooperation, and optimism, reinforcing the idea that small daily changes can have a big impact on health and morale. Premise This is the final activity in the cycle on the five pillars of wellbeing. You can choose between 3 options for concluding the "five pillars" series. For all options you start by saying: "According to a famous psychologist, Ryan Niemiec, good health is determined by 5 factors: exercise, healthy sleep, healthy eating, social activity, and self-regulation. Last time you had to evaluate how you were feeling for each field, on a scale from 0 to 5." Then you give the chosen option. Instructions for the students Option 1 "For the next 5 minutes, decide what you can easily do in your daily routines, to enhance each section." Option 2 You can imagine this activity as a whole-class activity. Draw 5 columns on the blackboard. Ask the students: "For each category, write down as many ideas as you can of everyday routines, habits, or activities that can help enhance health and wellbeing. These can be simple actions, things you already do, or ideas you would like to try. The goal is not to find the 'right' answers, but to explore a wide range of possibilities." This can help students find ideas they had not thought of before. Option 3 You can make 5 groups, one for each category. Each group has to find as many ideas as possible to optimise the assigned field. You may want to do groups of 3–4 students and have several groups work on the same topic. <i>Note:</i> To go further, you can find more exercises for each pillar in the next section.

Five pillars, extras (5–7 min each exercise)	
Wellbeing outcome - Anxiety - Stress - Depression - Psychological distress (Conley et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper, blackboard, results from five pillars 2 and 3
Instructions	Here are some exercises for each pillar and further below in general for the Five Pillars to deepen knowledge and practice in this area. Activities for each pillar: 1. Exercise – “Movement break challenge” Do a short, energising movement break together in class. Let students lead simple moves (e.g., jumping jacks, stretches, a short dance). Then, challenge them to include one extra movement moment in their day (e.g., taking the stairs, walking during breaks). Purpose: Activating the body improves focus, mood, and energy. 2. Sleep – “Sleep hygiene brainstorm” Discuss common habits that support or harm sleep. Have students brainstorm sleep-friendly routines (like reducing screens before bed or having a calming ritual). Create a class poster of “Top 5 Tips for Better Sleep.” Purpose: Raises awareness and encourages healthy evening habits. 3. Nutrition – “My energy plate” Ask students to draw or list some foods that give them lasting energy—not just what tastes good, but what helps them feel focused, calm, or active. Share examples and explore how food impacts mood and learning. Purpose: Builds the link between eating and emotional/mental wellbeing. 4. Social Activity – “Who’s on my team?” Students make a simple support circle: in the centre, they write their name; around it, people who help them feel connected, safe, or inspired (friends, family, teammates, teachers...). Then they reflect: What can I do to strengthen one of these relationships? Purpose: Highlights social support and strengthens connection. 5. Self-Regulation – “1-minute reset” Guide the class through a one-minute breathing or grounding activity (e.g., hand on heart, counting five deep breaths, focusing on sounds). Ask how it felt, and when they might use it again (before a test, after a conflict, etc.). Purpose: Introduces a simple tool for calming down and regaining focus. And here are some exercises to deepen the ideas around the Five Pillars: My weekly wellbeing plan Ask students to choose one small, realistic goal for each of the five pillars that they will try over the next seven days (e.g., going to bed 30 minutes earlier, walking an extra 10 minutes, drinking more water after school). At the end of the week, they reflect on what worked, what was challenging, and what they would like to keep doing. This supports self-regulation and a sense of personal progress.

The class pillar challenge

Each week, the class focuses collectively on one pillar (for example, “get enough sleep”). Students take on the challenge individually while sharing tips, experiences, and encouragement in class. This builds a supportive atmosphere and strengthens group cohesion through shared goals.

The wellbeing idea wall

Create a visual space in the classroom with five sections—one for each pillar. Throughout the week, students can post simple ideas and strategies they've tried or want to recommend, such as “listen to calm music before bed” or “ask a friend to go for a walk.” This turns wellbeing into something visible, creative, and shared.

Strengths and the five pillars

Encourage students to think about which of their character strengths help them take care of each pillar. For example, perseverance might support exercise, self-regulation can help with sleep, and kindness or gratitude may strengthen social connections. This helps students connect external behaviours with internal resources and increases their sense of capability.

My perfect day (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing – Anxiety – Stress – Depression (Bennett et al., 2019; Boehm et al., 2011; Fischer et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper.
Instructions	With this activity we are helping the students to exercise (as you probably remember, we can exercise our mind just as we do with our muscles) a positive outlook. Martin Seligman (1995) argues that we can cultivate a positive perspective and that with a more joyful outlook on life we can better enhance our wellbeing. For this activity you can choose between 3 options. Instructions for the students Option 1 "Draw the perfect day! Where would it be? What would you do? Who with? What would you feel like?" Option 2 "If you don't want to draw, you can also write about it! Try and write down what the perfect day for you would look like, include all the little things that would make you feel good." Option 3 "If you are not into drawing or writing, you can also build your perfect day with the material you have around you! Make sure you include all the little things that would make you feel good." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask the children to draw three happy moments from their perfect day (e.g. playing, laughing with a friend, eating a meal they love). Option 2 Use picture cards (sun, ball, house, bed, friends) and ask them to choose the ones that would be part of their ideal day. Option 3 Organise a little game of charades: each child mimes an activity they would like to include in their perfect day, and the others have to guess what it is. <i>Note:</i> To draw, write or build one's perfect day is a rather broad, open-ended question, so it is normal for some students to struggle with getting started. To help those students you can offer some support, first by normalising that imagining a perfect day can be difficult. Then you can provide some structure with prompts (e.g., What time do you wake up? Where are you? Who's with you? What are you doing? What makes you feel accomplished or happy? How do you relax? What are you grateful for at the end of the day?) or examples to reduce uncertainty. If necessary, you can also let students brainstorm in pairs or small groups about elements of a perfect day (e.g., favourite foods, ideal weather, ideal place). This can prime their thinking.

Love life (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Psychological Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing – Anxiety – Stress – Depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Fischer et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	This is another activity that helps students develop a positive outlook on the future. By imagining a fulfilling love life, they develop the ability to anticipate the future positively and to link wellbeing to emotional relationships. Instructions for the students "Close your eyes for a moment and think about yourself in about 10 years. Everything has gone as you wanted: your love life is exactly as you dreamed it would be. Now try writing for 5 minutes about what this life is like. Write as if it were already true, using the present tense (for example: "I live with...", "Every day we go...")." If you need help getting started, here are some questions that may help: • Who are you with? (You can describe the type of person, not just their name.) • Where do you live? (In what city or type of house? In the mountains? By the sea?) • What is your typical day like? • What do you like to do together? • What makes you happy in this relationship? • (...) There are no right or wrong answers. Write however you like, even in a simple or creative way.

Tomorrow is bright! (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Self-esteem + Life satisfaction + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing – Anxiety – Stress – Depression (Fischer et al., 2020; Schutte & Malouff, 2019; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	This too, is an activity that focuses on a positive future perspective. Imagining pleasant moments that are yet to come allows you to fuel positive emotions, anticipate pleasure, and strengthen your confidence in your ability to enjoy happy experiences. Instructions for the students Option 1 Write down 3 things you are really looking forward to. These can be things happening soon or far in the future—like a trip, a celebration, a hobby, time with someone you love, or even something you dream of doing one day. Then pick one of the three that feels especially exciting or meaningful to you and take a few minutes to close your eyes and imagine it happening—as if it were happening right now. Then write as many positive emotions related to the event and details you can think of. You can write in full sentences or bullet points. Here are some questions to help you imagine it: • How will you feel? (happy, proud, relaxed, loved...?) • Who will be with you? • What will you do? • Where will it take place? • What can you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch? Option 2 "Can't find 3? Just focus on one!" Option 3 "3 is too easy? Find some more!" Instructions for younger students Option 1 Invite them to draw a moment they are looking forward to (a birthday, a trip, a game, a visit from a loved one). Option 2 Use picture cards (gift, sun, ball, house, friends) and ask them to choose one that represents something positive that is about to happen. Option 3 Suggest a short round-table discussion in which everyone says, "Tomorrow I will..." and adds a pleasant activity.

Positive events for tomorrow! (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Happiness (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Quoidbach et al., 2009)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Sometimes thinking about tomorrow in a positive way helps us feel more hopeful and motivated today. Here is an activity to exercise this positive outlook for tomorrow. Instructions for the students "Try to imagine, as clearly and realistically as you can, 3 to 4 positive things that could actually happen tomorrow. They don't have to be huge — they just need to be things that would make you feel good. Try to be specific: the more details you imagine, the better! You can write in sentences, short notes." Examples mentioned by other students: • "Before going to bed, I could receive a message from my crush asking me out on a date." • "I can see myself enjoying a delicious lunch with my best friends in the school cafeteria, laughing and chatting about our favourite TV show." • "After a challenging math test, my teacher will announce that I got the highest score in the class." • "I will have a heart-to-heart conversation with my parents, and they will express how proud they are of my personal growth and achievements." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw something pleasant they would like to experience tomorrow (a game, a hug, a dish they love). Option 2 Use picture cards (sun, ball, house, friends, gift) to help them express what they are looking forward to. Option 3 Go around the table and ask everyone to complete the sentence: "Tomorrow I will..." adding a positive activity. <i>Note:</i> This activity helps our brain notice and expect positive things—even small ones. That's a superpower called realistic optimism. It makes us more motivated, resilient, and emotionally balanced.

Best possible self (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Subjective wellbeing + Psychological wellbeing + Wellbeing + Quality of life - Anxiety - Stress - Depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2020; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Skeen et al., 2019; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper, optional list of emotions (Appendix 2)
Instructions	Research has shown that visualising and writing about your best possible self can have positive outcomes. This exercise requires students to envision themselves in an imaginary future in which everything has turned out optimally. Instructions for the students "Close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself about 10 years from now. Things have gone really well—better than you even hoped. You've worked hard, made good choices, and become the person you dreamed of being. Now, open your eyes and start writing. Don't worry about being perfect—this is just for you. You can write a little or a lot. Let your imagination go! You can write in full sentences, make a list, or even draw your best possible self if you prefer!" Here are some questions to help you: • What do you look like? (How do you move and interact with others? How do you feel?) • Who's in your life? (Friends, partner, family...) • Where do you live? (City? Countryside? Apartment? Beach house?) • What do you do during the day? (Job? Studies? Hobbies? Passion projects?) • How do you feel most days? (Excited? Calm? Confident?) • What have you achieved that you're proud of? • What kind of person have you become? <i>Note:</i> After the exercise you can tell the students to re-read their text slowly, noticing the parts that make them feel excited or proud. These are clues about what really matters to them. If they highlight the things that feel most meaningful for them, those might become their goals. They can put their paper in a folder or notebook, so that they can look at it later on to remind themselves what they're working toward.

One door closes, one door opens (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Subjective wellbeing + Psychological wellbeing - Anxiety - Stress - Depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Fischer et al., 2020; Hendriks et al., 2020; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper, optional list of emotions (Appendix 1)

Instructions

Reflecting on moments of rejection or failure and the opportunities that followed as well as the resources one can activate helps students change their perspective. This exercise nurtures resilience, values what has been learned from difficulties, and introduces the idea that trials can become springboards for growth.

Instructions for the students

"Take a moment to think about a time when: Someone said "no" to you, or you didn't succeed at something that really mattered to you. Choose a moment from the past that you feel ready to work with today, without it being too painful.

Yeah, it probably didn't feel great. But now reflect on:

What happened next?

What new opportunities arose?

What skills were you able to develop thanks to this experience?"

Did anything good come out of it, even if it took a while?

What did you learn?

Did you grow stronger, wiser, more confident?

Did you discover a new path, a new idea, or a new skill?

You can write about it, sketch it, or just think it through—this is your reflection.

After students have completed their reflections, you can (it is not mandatory) consider the following steps to deepen their experience:

1. **Strengths spotting:** if you have already introduced character strengths, you can ask students to look back at their story and identify one or two strengths they used to get through the situation.
2. **Optional sharing:** offer students the chance to share what they learned from the experience—not the story itself, but what came after: the new insight, skill, or opportunity (you can give them some prompts to start the discussion: "something I learned from that moment was..."; "one way I grew after that experience was..." Emphasise that sharing is voluntary and that listening respectfully is equally valuable.
3. **Grounding activity:** Lead a short breathing, grounding, or body-awareness exercise to help regulate any lingering emotions after the reflection ("Take three slow breaths. Feel your feet on the ground. Think of something that makes you feel safe or calm.")

Note: Be mindful that recalling experiences of rejection or failure can evoke strong emotions. To support students:

- *Normalise emotions:* Acknowledge that feelings of sadness, frustration, or disappointment are natural responses to setbacks.
- *Encourage self-compassion:* Remind students to treat themselves with the same kindness they would offer a friend in a similar situation.
- *Provide resources:* Let students know about available support systems, such as school counsellors or trusted adults, and encourage them to seek help if needed.

By guiding students through this reflective process, you help them recognise the potential for growth in challenging experiences and foster a supportive classroom environment. You can wrap-up the activity telling the students:

"We all go through hard moments—but those moments don't define us. How we respond, what we learn, and how we grow... that's what shapes who we become."

Letter from the future (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing - Anxiety - Stress - Depression (Fischer et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Here is another activity to guide students through a process of reflection that helps them recognise the potential for growth in difficult experiences, while looking to the future, implicitly signalling that even the most difficult situations evolve, and that we must focus on the resources at our disposal to overcome them. Instructions for the students "Imagine this: it's 10 years from now, and you've made it. One of the biggest problems you're dealing with today is behind you—you've faced it, and you've come out stronger. Now, write a letter from the future you (10 years older) to the present you. In the letter tell yourself you did it—that you got through it. Explain how you did it: what strengths, qualities, or support helped you along the way. Be encouraging and convincing—like a friend who believes in you 100%. You can start with something like: <i>'Hey, I know things feel tough right now, but I'm writing to tell you—you're going to get through this. Here's how...'</i>" Instructions for younger students Ask them to draw a picture of themselves in the future, after overcoming a challenge (for example: succeeding at a challenging game, making a friend, learning something new).

Let's plan (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Emotional regulation + Wellbeing + Quality of life – Depression – Anxiety – Stress (Bai et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2019; Fang & Ding, 2020; French et al., 2017; Geerling et al., 2020; Han et al., 2021; Quoidbach et al., 2009; van Agteren et al., 2021; van Genugten et al., 2017; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Optimism activities are also about planning and organising in order to be as efficient and happy as possible. Planning can also really help in performing at school. Putting their goals into words and breaking them down into concrete steps helps students build confidence, anticipate obstacles, and develop self-efficacy. Planning can also greatly help with academic performance. Instructions for the students "Write down one goal you want to achieve. Be as specific as you can and use action verbs (read, run, plan, invent, learn...). Then, copy the table and fill it on your piece of paper." "You can do the same exercise for the next test you have to study for!" Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw a five-pointed star and write (or draw) a step towards achieving a small goal in each point (e.g. learning a song, completing a puzzle). Option 2 Use a simplified timeline (today → tomorrow → next week) to help them project themselves into the future. <i>Note:</i> This exercise was tested as a part of ACT therapy (e.g., Hayes, 2005).

NOURISHING

In our constantly accelerating world, we have lost the art of “savouring.” Yet this ability to slow down and fully appreciate pleasant moments is essential to wellbeing. Fred Bryant, a pioneer in research on savouring, defines this skill as our capacity to generate, intensify, and prolong pleasure by being consciously attentive to positive experiences (2003). Savouring, therefore, is not wasted time: it is a skill that functions as a natural amplifier of positive emotions. For our students, learning to savour and celebrate means discovering that they can influence their own mood and wellbeing. It means understanding that a ray of sunshine, a laugh shared with a friend, or the pride of a job well done can become valuable resources for coping with difficult moments.

Activities related to savouring are often organised around three temporal dimensions:

- **Anticipating:** taking joy in advance of a pleasant event to come
- **Being present:** fully enjoying a positive moment in the here and now
- **Remembering:** mentally revisiting happy memories

Simple everyday actions fall within this perspective: pausing to admire a sunset, enjoying a warm drink, creating something with one's hands, reading for pleasure, or simply taking care of oneself. These activities allow students to:

- slow down in a world that moves too fast,
- express what they feel and give value to their emotions,
- find joy in ordinary experiences,
- develop a sense of wonder,
- and build a reservoir of positive memories.

These activities are not about achieving or performing—they're about feeling good and taking care of one's wellbeing. They feed the soul (they are like emotional vitamins) by helping you to feel calm, happy, inspired, or connected to yourself.

Mindful bite (10–15 min)	
Wellbeing outcome +Wellbeing – Stress – Fatigue (McKeering & Hwang, 2019; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020)	
Materials	Something to eat for all students (you can also ask them to bring it)
Instructions	This activity is about slowing down, being present in the moment, and focusing fully and with all senses on the food. It promotes awareness in everyday life and helps transform a simple act such as eating into a rich sensory and emotional experience. Instructions for the students "I'm going to give you something to eat and would like you to eat it really slowly so that you grasp every little detail given by your five senses that make you savour it." Eyes "I'm going to put something on your desk. Look at it as if you had never seen it before. What does it look like? What is its surface? What colour is it? Can you see how the light reflects on it? Imagine you were a little ant; how would you perceive this object?" Hands "When you are ready, you can pick it up. What can you say about its weight? What does it feel like in your hand? You can touch it with your fingers. What does it feel like? Smooth? Rough?" Mouth "Very slowly, take it to your lips. What does it feel like on your lips? Then put it in your mouth. Can you identify a first taste? What does it feel like on your tongue? You can now choose to bite or continue to explore how it is in your mouth. See how it tastes and changes all the time. What consistency is it when you chew it? And when you swallow it?" Mind "And when you're finished, can you tell where your mind is going? What did you notice? Do you like eating slowly? Did you enjoy it more? Where was your mind when you were eating?" Instructions for younger students Option 1 Simplify the language and ask them to close their eyes to guess the shape, taste, or texture of what they are eating. Option 2 Turn the activity into a little game: "Find three words to describe what you hear, touch and taste." <i>Note:</i> This intervention was tested as a part of the Mindfulness Dotbe programme.

Haiku (5–10 min, can be longer)	
Wellbeing outcome + Meaning, + Creative process + Social connection + Openness + Tolerance + Wellbeing + Skills (Hansen et al., 2001)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Writing a haiku invites you to observe everyday life with an attentive and poetic eye. This exercise stimulates creativity, encourages personal expression, and can strengthen bonds through the sharing of moments of beauty or joy experienced. Instructions for the students "Haiku is a short form of poetry originally from Japan. It should be three lines and a total of 17 syllables (first line: 5 syllables, second line: 7 syllables, third line: 5 syllables). You don't need to follow that exactly! First, think of something funny or beautiful that happened to you recently or that you witnessed lately. Then, imagine and write a haiku about that." <i>Here is an example:</i> The sun is shining I dip my bare toe in water Just sky, just blue light There is no right or wrong haiku, just a moment to observe, feel, and create! Instructions for younger students Option 1 Suggest that they create a haiku with pictures, making three drawings that together form a short poem. Option 2 Guide them with simple opening phrases, such as: "Today I saw...", "This made me smile...", "I felt..."

Just listen (5 min, duration of the song)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing - Pain - Anxiety (Bennett et al., 2019; Koydemir et al., 2021; Panteleeva et al., 2018; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Song playlist (could be created together with your students)
Instructions	Listening to a song attentively and together creates a moment of calm and serenity. This simple activity promotes emotional regulation, improves the classroom atmosphere, and strengthens the collective bond through a shared aesthetic experience. Instructions With your students, choose a motivating or relaxing song and play it for the class. During the entire song, tell them to listen to it while doing nothing/doodling. You could also tell them to pay attention to the sounds, words, or emotions that the music evokes in them.

Happiness 1/2 (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing – Depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Researcher Martin Seligman proposes the PERMA model to describe the five pillars of happiness (see the optimism section in Chapter 4). This activity invites students to connect these dimensions to their own lives, to become aware of the concrete sources of wellbeing that already surround them. Instructions for the students "According to one of the biggest positive psychologists, Martin Seligman, happiness is made up of five elements. For each of them, find an example from your life." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw five boxes (or five bubbles), each with a concrete example: a happy moment, a favourite activity, a loved one, something important to them, a personal achievement. Option 2 Guide them verbally with simple questions, such as: "When are you happy, joyful?", "When do you have so much fun that you forget the time?", "When do you feel close to someone?"

Happiness 2/2 (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing – Depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	After reflecting on the five elements underlying wellbeing and happiness, students can be guided in exploring the actions and reflections related to each of these elements. Instructions for the students "Over the next five days, you'll focus on one element of the PERMA model each day. At the end of the day, take a few minutes to reflect and write about your experiences related to that day's element in a journal. Here's how you can structure your reflections: • Day 1 – Positive emotions: What moments today brought you joy, gratitude, or amusement? How did these emotions affect your day? • Day 2 – Engagement: When did you feel completely absorbed in an activity? What were you doing, and what made it engaging? • Day 3 – Relationships: Who did you connect with today? Describe any meaningful interactions and how they impacted your mood. • Day 4 – Meaning: Did you engage in any activities that felt purposeful or contributed to something bigger than yourself? Reflect on these moments. • Day 5 – Accomplishment: What did you achieve today, big, or small? How did accomplishing this make you feel?" Teachers' guide: After the five-day journaling period, facilitate a group discussion where students can share insights from their reflections. Encourage them to consider questions such as: • Which PERMA element did you find most prevalent in your daily life? • Were there any surprises in your reflections? • How can you incorporate more of these positive experiences into your routine? <i>Note:</i> If you see the students every day you can do it 5 days in a row, one element of PERMA each day, otherwise you can focus on one element each lesson, 5 lessons in a row. You can also ask students to do the activity independently, keeping a journal of their experiences, and then plan a group discussion for the next lesson.

Photo (10–15 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Eudaimonic wellbeing + Vitality + Positive affect + Life satisfaction + Happiness (Capaldi et al., 2014; Pritchard et al., 2020)	
Materials	Sheets of paper with a neat rectangle cut in the middle (as if it was a frame), camera or smartphone
Instructions	Nourishing activities are about lingering in good moments, savouring them. Here is an activity for appreciating beauty and positivity. Instructions for the students “Find three beautiful things, people, shapes around you and take a picture of them. Try to think about these different aspects: • Which angle is the best? • Shall I stay closer? • How can I ameliorate the background? • How can I handle the lights? • What do I feel like when I look carefully at what I want to photograph? • What do I want people to feel when they see my photo?” Instructions for younger students Option 1 Suggest that they use a “frame” made from an A4 sheet of paper to look at something beautiful in the classroom or outside, without necessarily taking a photo. Option 2 Invite them to draw what they would have photographed, adding a small box around the drawing as if it were a frame. <i>Note:</i> If possible, go outside for this exercise. You can ask your students to share these pictures with the whole class and/or print some. You can also think of preparing a picture exhibition for your school, with short description or also a quiz, to find out who the authors of the pictures are.

Wonder (3–5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Social skills + Compassion + Generosity (Piff et al., 2015)	
Materials	None
Instructions	Wonder is a powerful positive emotion that broadens perspective and nourishes curiosity. This activity helps develop the ability to find beauty in the ordinary and stimulates mindful attention to the environment. Instructions for the students "Go outside or look out of the window. Find a detail you have never noticed before: the shape of a cloud, the texture of a wall, the movement of a leaf, reflections on a surface... Observe it carefully for 30 seconds, then describe it enthusiastically to a classmate." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Guide them with questions: "Look at the sky, the trees, the ground... What new things do you see? What colour are they? What shape are they?" Option 2 Suggest that they play "beauty detectives" and tell the class about their "discovery."

SOCIAL

The social dimension of the ACTIONS model highlights something we all know deep down: relationships matter. Our sense of wellbeing is deeply influenced by how connected, supported, and valued we feel by the people around us. Being part of a group, having someone to talk to, and feeling safe enough to express our emotions are not just “nice-to-haves”—they’re essential for building resilience, confidence, and emotional stability. This dimension isn’t only about receiving support; it’s also about being there for others. When we show kindness, listen with empathy, and work together, we build stronger relationships and a deeper sense of belonging. For young people especially, feeling socially connected can make a real difference: it helps them handle stress, stay engaged in school, and feel more secure in who they are. In schools and learning environments, paying attention to the social dimension helps create a climate of trust, inclusion, and psychological safety. It opens up space for meaningful conversations, respectful collaboration, and mutual care. As Ilona Boniwell reminds us, wellbeing isn’t just an individual journey—it also grows through the relationships we build and the ways we support one another. The social dimension is a powerful reminder that we thrive together, not alone.

One nice note (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing + Life satisfaction + Grateful mood + Positive emotions + Happiness - Depression - Anxiety - Stress (Chakhssi et al., 2018; Dickens, 2017; Fischer et al., 2020; Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper, smartphone for texts or email (optional), list of emotions (Appendix 2), character strengths list (Appendix 5)
Instructions	Writing a positive message to someone in your circle reinforces pleasant emotions, nurtures gratitude, and improves relationships. It is a simple and accessible way to spread wellbeing, both to yourself and others. Instructions for the students "Write a positive message (email, text, face-to-face) to someone you know. You can tell this person what you like about him or her, why you are thankful for them... and any other ideas you might have! If you prefer, you can always draw your message!" If you wish, send or deliver the message to the person it has been addressed to. Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw a heart or a star, or write a simple word ("thank you", "you're kind") to give to a friend or loved one. Option 2 Organise a circle exchange: each child says a compliment or a kind word to the person next to them.

Responsibility pie (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Positive relationships – Shame (Carr et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper.
Instructions	This activity helps students reflect on the distribution of responsibility in a given situation. By assigning a percentage of responsibility to each protagonist, they learn to nuance their judgement, manage conflicts constructively, and develop a sense of fairness. SOCIAL activities help students optimise their relationships, teamwork, and/or communication. They can be helpful for managing interpersonal tensions. Here is an activity that stimulates discussion in the groups, so that students also learn how to interact and debate respectfully while having fun. Here are the instructions to give the students: Instructions for the students "Read the following story and then answer the questions. You are asked to reflect on each character's share of responsibility. Assign a percentage to each of them." <i>Story:</i> Sam's mother saw him pack his best sunglasses for the school camp. They were a very expensive pair that he had bought with the money he earned from his part-time job. His mum suggested that he leave them at home in case they got stolen or broken at the camp. Sam insisted on taking them. When he returned from camp, his mother was waiting for him in the '5 minutes only' parking zone because it was raining. As soon as Sam got off the bus, she signalled to him to hurry so she wouldn't be fined. He hurried over with all his stuff. As he ran up to the door of the car, his sunglasses fell out of his jacket pocket and dropped into the stormwater drain by the side of the road. Sam was devastated. His mother said, "I told you not to take them." <i>Questions</i> "Answer adding a percentage." • Sam's percentage of responsibility: • Mum percentage of responsibility: • Bad luck/circumstances percentage or responsibility: <i>Note:</i> you can find more exercises or build up examples so that students work in groups on the problem example. It is very interesting to have them debate on the percentages of the blames.

Active-listening-responding (3x5 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective Wellbeing + Quality of life + Positive emotions + Grateful mood (Bennett et al., 2019; Carr et al., 2021; Dickens, 2017; Fischer et al., 2020; Hendriks et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Active listening and responding are essential for building strong bonds with others. They strengthen the quality of relationships, increase shared positive emotions, and provide emotional support, while reducing feelings of isolation. There are three options for this activity. Instructions for the students "Active listening, active responding are very important for creating strong bonds with others. It is also very important for us when we need to talk. When one listens (and reacts) actively and constructively, one responds in a visibly positive and enthusiastic manner to what others tell us." Option 1 – general "At least once a day try to react in an active, constructive way to someone you know, a fellow student or teacher, a friend or family member. Demonstrate enthusiasm, excitement, ask interested questions, positively reinforce the conversation, smile, and maintain eye contact. You can say phrases like: What?! This is great! Tell me more about it... What happened next? Sure, it makes you feel fantastic! How do you plan to celebrate?" Option 2 – active listening exercise "For two minutes, listen carefully to what your neighbour tells you. You cannot say anything! You can only show him or her that you are truly listening. Then switch roles." <i>After the activity ask:</i> "How did you feel? How do you know when someone is really listening? What signs do you notice? What body language do they show?" <i>Note:</i> if you have the feeling that your students are uncomfortable finding something to talk about to each other, give them conversation ideas. Option 3 – active responding exercise "For two minutes, listen carefully to what your neighbour tells you. Try and show enthusiasm, ask questions, with words like: What! This is great! Tell me more about it... Then switch roles." <i>After the activity ask:</i> "How did you feel?" Instructions for younger students Option 1 Have them mime attentive listening (turning towards the other person, smiling, nodding) and repeat simple phrases together such as: "Well done!", "Fantastic!", "Tell me more!". Option 2 Suggest a role-playing game with "listen" and "respond" cards, so that they can visualise and understand the two stages.

Kindness is a strength of character that is a human virtue that focuses on what we are doing for others and how we can show that we care about them. Research shows that reflecting on kindness can boost wellbeing and reduce stress, anxiety, and even sadness (Curry et al., 2018; Fischer et al., 2020; Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021). In class, it works perfectly as a short pause between lessons, a journaling prompt, or a way to start or end the day on a gentle note. Students can write, draw, or even share their stories in pairs. It's a small activity that helps build a big sense of connection, calm, and kindness in the classroom. This applies both when we reflect on our own kind gestures and those we receive or witness from others.

Kindness feedback (5–7 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing – Anxiety – Stress – Depression (Curry et al., 2018; Fischer et al., 2020; Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Paper and pen, optional list of emotions (Appendix 2)
Instructions	The kindness feedback activity is a simple and feel-good moment where students take a few minutes to think about a kind act—either something they did for someone or something someone did for them. It's a great way to bring their attention to the good stuff and reconnect with warm, positive emotions. You have two options for this activity. Instructions for the students Option 1 "First, answer this question: What is the kindest thing <u>you have ever</u> done for someone? Then think further about it and answer all or some of the following questions: • How did it make you feel? • Why did you want to help this person? • Did you plan it or was it decided at the spur of the moment? • How did the person react? Try and use as much detail as possible to describe your feelings and body reactions. If you need it, use the list of emotions. If you prefer, please draw!" Option 2 "First, answer this question: What is the kindest thing <u>someone has ever</u> done for you? Then think further about it, and answer the following questions: • How did it make you feel? • Why did they help you? • How did you react? Try and use as much detail as possible to describe your feelings and body reactions. If you need it, use the list of emotions. If you prefer, please draw!" Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw a situation in which they were kind to someone. Option 2 Suggest that they draw or describe a time when someone was kind to them. Option 3 Organise a short round-table discussion, in which each child says one kind thing they have done or received.

Counting kindness (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Wellbeing + Subjective wellbeing - Stress - Anxiety - Depression (Fischer et al., 2020; Koydemir et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Noticing and counting acts of kindness around you increases wellbeing and nurtures a feeling of gratitude. This activity helps students focus their attention on the positive, strengthen relationships, and create a more welcoming and warmer classroom environment. Instructions for the students "Take a moment to keep track of, count, and write down all the acts of kindness you have seen today. They may have happened in class or elsewhere. For example: someone holding the door open, sharing their snack, or helping a classmate." Instructions for younger students Option 1 Ask them to draw a situation in which they saw someone being kind. Option 2 Go around the table and have each child describe a small act of kindness they noticed during the day. Option 3 Create a class poster together where you write down or draw the acts of kindness you observe each day.

Kind is the new cool! (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Happiness – Depressive symptoms (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Gander, 2012)	
Materials	Pen and paper
Instructions	Kindness is not just a grand heroic gesture: it is often the small everyday gestures that make a difference. This exercise helps students become aware of their prosocial behaviours, perceive their positive effects, and strengthen their relationships. Instructions for the students "How about becoming more aware of your own kind behaviour towards other people? Kindness isn't just about grand gestures; even small, everyday actions can make a significant difference. Take a moment to reflect on today, yesterday, or the past week. Can you recall instances where <u>you</u>: • Helped a friend or classmate understand a difficult topic? • Offered your seat to someone on public transport? • Volunteered your time or assisted someone in need? • Listened to someone without judgment? Write down as many acts of kindness as you can remember." <i>Note:</i> Here are some ideas if you want to carry the activity a little bit further. What to do after the activity: 1. Optional sharing: Invite students to share one or two of their kind acts with the class. Emphasise that sharing is voluntary and that listening respectfully is equally valuable. 2. Group discussion: Facilitate a discussion on how performing these acts made students feel. Highlight the positive emotions associated with kindness and how such actions can impact both the giver and the receiver. 3. Kindness challenge: Encourage students to set a personal goal for the upcoming week, aiming to perform a specific number of kind acts. Consider creating a class chart to track collective progress, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. 4. Reflection: At the end of the week, have students reflect on their experiences. Discuss any challenges they faced and the impact of their actions on themselves and others. By engaging in this activity, students can develop greater self-awareness and recognise the profound impact of kindness in their daily lives.

Gratitude notes (5–10 min)

Wellbeing outcome

- + Happiness and life satisfaction
- + Physical health (better sleep, stronger immune system)
- + Relationships and social connections
- + Resilience in facing adversity
- + Emotional regulation
- + Sense of meaning in life
- + Decision-making and productivity
- + Empathy and prosocial behaviour
- + Communal strength (capacity to care for others)
- + Ability to appreciate life's positives
- Depression symptoms

(Armenta, 2017; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lambert et al., 2010)

Materials	Pen, paper, dedicated space in your classroom (wall, poster, etc.), small block of notes
Instructions	Writing a message of gratitude reinforces positive emotions, nurtures relationships, and builds resilience. Whether it is addressed to a partner, a teacher, a loved one, or someone else, taking the time to express your gratitude in a specific and sincere way has a lasting impact on personal and collective wellbeing. There are many things in our lives that we might be grateful for. Ask your students to think about someone for whom they are grateful and to write them a note. It could also be a letter or a post-it, depending on the time and the aim of the activity. It doesn't necessarily have to be someone from the class, but if it were, it would certainly have a great impact in terms of cohesion and relationships between the students. Instructions for the students "Go the extra mile to show your gratitude/express thanks to a friend, teacher, or family member. Do something you don't normally do to say thank you, either in words or in writing. Write a message, a kind word, to tell them how much you appreciate something they do and how it helps you. Try to be specific and detailed. Make concrete examples. Tips for effective gratitude notes Here are some tips you can share with your students to help them write gratitude notes that are as effective as possible. 1. Be specific: Instead of a generic 'Thank you,' mention <u>exactly</u> what the person did and how it affected you. Specificity shows that you have put thought into your gratitude. a) <u>Generic</u>: 'Thank you for your help.' b) <u>Specific</u>: 'Thank you for helping me with my math homework. Your clear explanations made it much easier for me to understand the concepts.' 2. Personalise the message: make the note relevant to the individual by mentioning something unique about them or your relationship. a) <u>Generic</u>: 'Thank you for the gift.' b) <u>Personalised</u>: 'Thank you for the beautiful scarf, Sara. You always know my favourite colours and styles, and it means a lot to me.'

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- 3. Share the impact:** explain how the person's actions made a difference to you. This helps them understand the significance of their actions.
- a) Generic: 'Thanks for your support.'
 - b) Impactful: 'Thanks for your support during my job search. Your advice and encouragement really boosted my confidence and helped me land the job I wanted.'
- 4. Express genuine emotion:** write from the heart and let your emotions show. Sincerity is key to a meaningful note.
- a) Generic: 'I appreciate it.'
 - b) Emotional: 'I am deeply grateful for your kindness. Your words of encouragement during my tough times brought me immense comfort and strength.'
- 5. Use their name:** Using the recipient's name adds a personal touch and can make the note feel more direct and sincere.
- a) Generic: 'Thanks for everything.'
 - b) Personalised: 'Thank you for everything, Jenny. Your friendship and support mean the world to me.'
- 6. Include a memory or anecdote:** sharing a specific memory or story related to their kindness can add depth and context to your gratitude.
- a) Generic: 'Thank you for being there for me.'
 - b) Anecdotal: 'Thank you for being there for me when I moved to the new city. I'll never forget how you spent the entire weekend helping me unpack and settle in. It made the transition so much easier.'
- 7. Look forward:** end the note with a positive note about the future, reinforcing the bond between you.
- a) Generic: 'Thanks again.'
 - b) Forward-Looking: 'Thanks again, Elena. I look forward to our next coffee catch-up and more wonderful moments together.'"

Teacher's treat: One of the authors also has a gratitude book that she has her students write in (if they want to) at the end of the year. We love it! And when she feels low, she has a look in it and think how much she loves her job.

Note: If they write a letter, you can tell them that they can give it or send it to the dedicated person. If you choose the post-it option, you can ask them to write down small gestures, things, for which they are grateful to their classmates (who they can name, but don't have to) and then tell them to stick the post-its in a designated place (or let them choose an ideal place). Then have a look the others' notes.

Kindness missions (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Subjective wellbeing + Positive emotions (Otake et al., 2006)	
Materials	Notes with act of kindness
Instructions	This activity encourages students to perform concrete and accessible prosocial actions in their daily lives. By carrying out small acts of kindness, they nurture positive emotions, strengthen bonds with others, and contribute to creating a benevolent and welcoming classroom environment. Preparation Write several acts of kindness on little notes (missions) to distribute to the students. Examples: • say thank you to three people, • help someone tidy up, • invite a classmate to play, • write a discreet compliment to a friend. Instructions Give each student a card with an act of kindness to perform during the day or week. At the end of the day (or week), suggest a moment of sharing: everyone can talk about how they felt when carrying out their mission and what effect they noticed on others. Instructions for younger students Option 1 Give them illustrated cards (heart = say a kind word, hand = help someone, sun = smile at a classmate) and ask them to carry out the associated mission. Option 2 Suggest a group game: every time a pupil carries out a mission of kindness, they stick a sticker on a large class poster.

"If I were you ..." (5–10 min)	
Wellbeing outcome + Prosocial behaviour + Wellbeing – Psychological distress (Van Agteren, 2021)	
Materials	None
Instructions	This activity develops students' ability to put themselves in other people's shoes. By imagining another person's emotions and needs, they strengthen their empathy, mutual understanding, and sense of cooperation. Instructions for the students Present a simple situation and ask the question: "If you were this person, how would you feel? What would you want others to do?" <i>Examples of situations:</i> • A new pupil arrives in class. • A classmate makes a mistake while reading aloud. • A child plays alone during break time. • A classmate falls and hurts themselves. Then discuss together what prosocial behaviours could be used to support that person. Instructions for younger students Option 1 Use pictures or puppets to represent situations (e.g., a sad child playing alone). Ask: "How does he feel? What could you do to help him?" Option 2 Suggest a charades game: one pupil acts out a situation (e.g. someone who has lost their pencil) and the others think of what they could do to help.

"Entsanterrig" Enchantment (5–10 min for each step)	
Wellbeing outcome + Self-efficacy + Academic achievement – Externalising problems – Internalising problems (Curry et al., 2018; Otake et al., 2006; Ray et al., 2015)	
Materials	Pen and paper, notes, cards, envelopes, ribbons.
Instructions	Inspired by a tradition from Valais (in the canton of Valais, Switzerland), this activity combines creativity, kindness and sharing. By writing and spreading positive messages, students nurture their own pleasant emotions and help to create a welcoming and supportive school environment. Instructions for the students <i>Premise:</i> "Entsanterrig" is a very sweet Swiss regional word for "enchantment," "delight," or "charm." People from a very small mountain village in the Valais write blessings on little notes and put them in a small self-made envelope. Then, they hide these envelopes wherever they go. We will do the same but in our school." <i>How to do it</i> Step 1 (5 min) "Write some blessings, positive thoughts, or statements on little pieces of paper and then put each in an envelope. Decorate the envelope as you prefer. Write in a readable way." Step 2 (5–10 min) "Take the envelopes: you now have 5 minutes to go and hide them wherever you want in the school." <i>Note:</i> You can add one step to this activity by having your students make the envelopes. If you don't have that much time in a lesson, you can do Steps 1 and 2 in separate lessons. In that case collect the envelopes after Step 1 and the next lesson distribute them to the pupils to go and hide them.

Do you want to measure whether what you do has an impact?
Would you like to know? We can help if you need it! Just contact us!
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Appendices

Appendix 1

Emotions function sheet

Emotions play a fundamental role in our daily lives. On the one hand, they help us to read and interpret our environment, signalling opportunities or dangers (for example, fear prepares us to protect ourselves). On the other hand, they influence our thoughts and behaviours, guiding our decisions and motivation. Finally, they play a central role in communication and social relationships, allowing us to express internal states, foster empathy, and strengthen bonds with others.

Event	Thought	Feeling	Behaviour	Objective
Threat	Danger	Fear	Escape	Safety
Obstacle	Enemy	Anger	Attack	Change, Destroy obstacle
Gain of something valued	Possess	Joy	Keep	Get more
Loss of something valued	Abandon	Sadness	Cry	Grief, Reattach with lost object
Member of one's group	Friend	Acceptance	Groom	Mutual support
Unpalatable object	Poison	Disgust	Vomit	Eject poison
New territory	Examine	Expectation	Map	Knowledge of territory
Unexpected event	What is it?	Surprise	Stop	Gain time to know what to do

Appendix 2

List of emotions

There are various classifications and lists of emotions. Below is a list adapted from Plutchik's wheel of emotions (1980).

Pleasant (positive) emotions

Joy, serenity, happiness, curiosity, gratitude, ecstasy, love, acceptance, connection, trust, admiration, interest, expectation, alertness, amazement, surprise, distraction, pride, inspiration, hope, tranquillity, relief, enthusiasm

Unpleasant (negative) emotions

Anger, rage, irritation, humiliation, disgust, boredom, hatred, sadness, anguish, melancholy, disappointment, awe, terror, fear, apprehension, remorse, shame, envy, insecurity, fragility, despair, isolation, abandonment

Appendix 3

Mindset – LEVEL 1

There are two types of mindsets: growth and fixed. We can go from a fixed mindset to a growth one. Mindsets are a way to see the world, like glasses really. We all wear them. Research tells us that if you have a growth mindset, you are happier and do better in school!

How many times have you felt discouraged and said the following phrases? Try rephrasing them from a growth mindset perspective. Now, try to find a new way for saying these sentences in a growth mindset way. You can use the suggested phrases below to help you. Match the ones you think are correct.

1. I'm not good at this.	c) I need more time.
2. I give up.	d) Is it really the best I can do?
3. It's good enough.	e) Thanks to mistakes, I can learn.
4. I can't make this any better.	f) I need to learn from this person and try it.
5. This is too hard.	g) I can always improve. I'll keep trying.
6. I made a mistake.	h) I am on the right track.
7. My friend can do it, but I cannot. I'll never be as smart.	i) What am I missing? What strategies could I use? Who could help me now?
8. I'm awesome at this!	j) I'll use a different strategy and see what happens.

Appendix 4

Mindset – LEVEL 2

There are two types of mindsets: growth and fixed. We can go from a fixed mindset to a growth one. Mindsets are a way to see the world, like glasses really. We all wear them. Research tells us that if you have a growth mindset, you are happier and do better in school!

Now, try to find a new way for saying these sentences in a growth mindset way.

Fixed mindset sentences	My proposed growth mindset sentences
1. I'm not good at this.	
2. I give up.	
3. It's good enough.	
4. I can't make this any better.	
5. This is too hard.	
6. I made a mistake.	
7. My friend can do it, but I cannot. I'll never be as smart.	
8. I'm awesome at this!	

Suggestions key:
a. I need more time.
b. Is it really the best I can do?
c. Thanks to mistakes, I can learn.
d. I need to learn from this person and try it.
e. I can always improve. I'll keep trying.
f. I am on the right track.
g. What am I missing? What strategies could I use? Who could help me now?
h. I'll use a different strategy and see what happens.

Appendix 5

Character strengths list

Below is a list of character strengths with a brief description suitable for children and young people.

Character strengths	Description
Curiosity	Everything around me interests me; I am almost never bored. I find many topics fascinating and I ask lots of questions.
Love of learning	I enjoy learning new things and I try to understand them deeply. When I have free time, I read books or look for information about topics that interest me (e.g. documentary, podcasts, article, etc.).
Creativity	I always have lots of ideas. I do things in an original way and I always find a solution to the problems I encounter. I invent stories, crafts, and games.
Judgement (open-mindedness)	When I have to do something, I take a moment to think before starting. I usually analyse the situation from different perspectives in order to have a complete view.
Wisdom	I know what the truly important things in life are. Adults often tell me that I am mature for my age. I am able to give good advice to those who need it.
Courage	I am courageous. I am able to overcome obstacles and face challenges, even when they scare me. I stand up for the things I believe are important.
Perseverance	I like being effective. When I work on something, I do not let myself get distracted. I feel satisfied when I finish what I have started.
Honesty	I find it easy to tell the truth to people. I do not like pretending when I am asked something, and I try to always be myself.
Enthusiasm	I love life; I have a lot of energy and passion. I look forward to facing each new day. I never do things halfway, and my life is a constant adventure.
Love	Friends and family are important to me, and I value relationships with others. I trust them, and they can count on me as well.
Kindness	I am kind and generous. I am always willing to help others, even when they do not ask. I enjoy doing favours for people, even when I do not know them.
Social intelligence	It is easy for me to recognise other people's emotions. I understand what they need and I like making them feel comfortable. I also feel comfortable with people myself, and I find it easy to make new friends.
Citizenship and teamwork	I enjoy being part of a group. When we work in groups, I am motivated and I commit myself to ensuring the whole group succeeds.
Fairness	Injustice bothers me or even makes me angry. I try to treat everyone with respect and fairness, even those I do not particularly like or do not know well.

Leadership (ability to be a leader)	I am good at organising activities. When I am in a group, I make sure that everyone feels included and that there is harmony. I enjoy guiding others and encouraging everyone to do their best.
Forgiveness	When someone wrongs me, I do not seek revenge. I am able to forgive easily and I always give people a second chance.
Humility	I do not like to show off, even when I achieve great things. Rather than talking about myself, I prefer to let others talk about themselves first.
Prudence	When I do something, I think before acting and I do nothing that I might regret. I avoid situations that could cause me trouble.
Self-regulation (ability to control oneself)	When I feel great anger or great excitement, I am able to control myself. I do not let my emotions or desires overwhelm me. For example, I can easily stop playing a video game or watching television if I have something else to do.
Gratitude	When something good happens to me, I feel happy and grateful. For example, I always thank my family members or my friends. I say “thank you” sincerely, not just out of politeness.
Hope	When I grow up, I believe I will be happy. I am willing to make an effort to ensure that this happens. When something goes wrong, I always think that next time it will go better.
Humour	I like to laugh and joke and to spread good humour. When someone is sad, I say or do something funny to make the situation more joyful.
Spirituality	I believe that things happen for a reason. I feel that life has meaning and purpose.
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	I observe the world carefully, and beautiful and special things make me happy—whether in nature, art, sport, or at school.

Appendix 6

Strengths activities

Welcome, young adventurers! ✨ Let’s embark on a journey to explore the superpowers hidden within you! These are your character strengths—the amazing traits that make you unique and awesome. Let’s find out how special you truly are! 🧑🧑

	Activity 1 heart	Activity 2 head	Activity 3 360°
1. Creativity			
2. Curiosity			
3. Open-mindedness (Wisdom)			
4. Love of learning			
5. Perspective			
6. Bravery			
7. Persistence			
8. Honesty			
9. Vitality and zest			
10. Love			
11. Kindness			
12. Social intelligence			
13. Citizenship and teamwork			
14. Fairness and justice			
15. Leadership			
16. Forgiveness			
17. Humility and modesty			
18. Prudence			
19. Self-regulation			
20. Appreciation of beauty and excellence			
21. Gratitude			
22. Hope and optimism			
23. Humour and playfulness			
24. Spirituality			

Activity 1 (heart):

Step 1: Set up your cards

Lay out all the cards with the pictures facing up on a table, the floor, or another flat surface so you can see all of them clearly.

Step 2: Choose your top 3 heart strengths

Pick 3 cards that you feel show the best parts of your personality. These cards represent your biggest strengths. Write your choices in the table above by putting a check next to each one.

Step 3: Check your choices

Turn the cards over and read the descriptions on the back. Make sure they match how you feel about yourself. If not, adjust your choices.

Step 4: Share your strengths with the group

Tell the group about your strengths by giving a real-life example. Use this simple format:

- **S for Strength:** What is your strength?
- **A for Action:** How do you use it?
- **B for Benefit:** What does it help you or others achieve?

Example

“My strength is creativity (S). For example, when I plan games for my friends, I always come up with fun ideas to make it exciting (A). This makes everyone have a great time and enjoy themselves (B).”

Activity 2 (head):

“Read the following descriptions of character strengths.

Choose the 5 that you use most often and that energise you.

Once you’ve chosen, put a check in the head column on your worksheet. Let’s get started!

Do they match your heart strengths?”

1. I am good at finding original ideas and proposing new ways of doing things.
2. I love to explore and ask questions. I am open to new experiences.
3. I think a lot before deciding, looking at all sides and not jumping to conclusions.
4. I love learning new skills and gaining knowledge at school or on my own.
5. When they have something important to discuss, my friends or family ask me for advice. They think I am wise beyond my age.
6. Even though I'm scared, I do not give up when it's hard or challenging. I speak up for what is right.
7. When I start something, I will do everything I can to finish it. I don't give up easily.
8. I think I am honest and trustworthy. I am sincere and authentic. My actions and my thoughts are aligned.
9. I am very enthusiastic, full of life, and cheerful.
10. I genuinely love others and cherish warm relationships. I naturally give and receive love.
11. I am generous and enjoy doing stuff for others even if I am not asked to do it.
12. I am aware of the feelings of others and my own feelings and know how to react. I am good at communicating and listening.
13. I love working in groups and put efforts in it, I am loyal to my team.
14. I hate it when people are treated unfairly. I can stand up for them.
15. When we work in groups, I am often the leader and give tasks to the team.
16. I can easily forgive. I easily give second chances.
17. I am modest and don't like to talk about my achievements. I don't like being the centre of attention.
18. I'm cautious; I don't like taking risks. I can anticipate my problems and plan solutions accordingly.
19. I have self-control. I can manage my feelings even when I'm very angry, scared, or very sad in challenging situations.
20. I am moved by beauty in nature or arts, and others' performances or skills. (Examples: landscape, flowers, a great goal)
21. I feel thankful and thank people easily. I can see and express myself through words and actions when I feel blessed.
22. I often see what is right in my life and not what is wrong. I feel optimistic about my future.
23. I love to laugh and bring smiles to others. I often see things with a light heart. I use humour.
24. I deeply believe in a higher power, or I have faith, or I am a religious person.

Activity 3 (360°):

This activity helps you notice the strengths of others and see how your friends see your strengths too.

Step 1: pick a person in the group to start with.

Step 2: choose 1–3 cards that show their strengths. Explain why you think these cards match them. Use real examples from what you’ve seen. Follow the same format:

- **S (Strength):** What is their strength?
- **A (Action):** What did they do that showed this strength?
- **B (Benefit):** How did this help others or the group?

Example

“I think your strength is perseverance (S). I saw this when you kept working on that tough project and didn’t give up (A). Because of your hard work, the whole group succeeded (B).”

Step 3: continue until everyone in the group has received an equal number of cards for their strengths.

Step 4: write down the strengths your friends gave you in the table above (360°)

Activity 4:

Let’s summarise: which ones are your 3–5 signature strengths (those that have most matches within the three columns)? If there are too many differences, just pick the 3–5 you decide fit best with you! How do you feel about it? How do you know they are your signature strengths? Can you think of examples?

My three to five signature strengths:

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Activity 5:

Strengths can be really helpful to solve problems. For example, someone who is very scared to go back home after school might use his/her competition force to run home as quickly as possible.

What about you? Can you think of a problem you have at the moment? How can you use your signature strengths in order to help you out?

Imagine a student feels very nervous about speaking in front of the class for a presentation. They could use their **strength of curiosity** to focus on learning something interesting about their topic. By channelling their energy into exploring their subject and sharing it, they might feel more excited than scared.

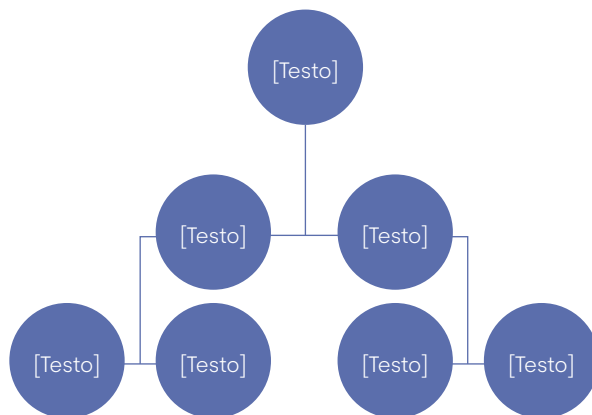
Another example: a student struggling to make friends might use their kindness strength by helping someone in class or sharing a snack during lunch. Acts of kindness often open the door to new friendships.

Activity 6:

Once you have identified your strengths, draw a family tree on a large sheet of paper. Invite each family member to choose their own colour, and write their top three character strengths under their name.

Once your family tree is complete, take some time to explore the following questions together:

1. Do you notice any strengths that seem to "run in the family"? What might explain these patterns?
2. Which strengths appear only once in your family tree? How does that unique quality enrich your family life?
3. Are there any strengths that seem absent from your family? Does that create any difficulties, and how do you work around it together?



4. Think of a recent moment when someone in the family used one of their strengths to help or support others. What happened?
5. Is there a strength in your family tree that you hadn't previously noticed or appreciated in that person? Share it with them.
6. How could you combine two or three different strengths from different family members to face a challenge or achieve something together?
7. Which strength would you most like to develop yourself, and who in your family could help you grow it?
8. What does this family tree tell you about what makes your family unique?

Appendix 7

Character strengths: Overuse and underuse

If we use a strength too much or too little, it can sometimes turn into a flaw. For example, too much creativity can come across as being eccentric or bizarre, while a lack of curiosity might lead to boredom or apathy. Below is a table illustrating how overuse and underuse of certain strengths can have negative effects:

Character strength	underuse	overuse
Creativity	Compliant	Eccentric
Curiosity	Disinterested	Intrusive
Judgement	Non-reflective	Narrow-minded
Love of knowledge	Self-indulgent	"I know it all"
Perspective	Superficial	Excessive intellectualism
Courage	Cowardly	Fearless
Perseverance	Impotent	Obsessive
Honesty	False	Rhetorical/Rigid
Enthusiasm	Sedentary	Hyperactive
Love	Isolated	Promiscuous
Kindness	Indifferent	Intrusive
Social intelligence	Obtuse	Hyper-analytical
Team spirit	Selfish	Dependent
Fairness	Detached	Partisan
Leadership	Compliant	Despotic
Forgiving	Ruthless	Permissive
Humility	Arrogant	Self-despising
Prudence	Reckless	Stifling
Self-regulation	Self-indulgent	Inhibited
Appreciative of beauty and excellence	Non-caring	Perfectionist
Gratitude	Ungrateful	Adulatory
Hope	Pessimist, negative	Overoptimistic, unrealistic
Humour	Severe, serious	Frivolous
Spirituality	Not spiritual	Fanatical

Examples:

- If someone is overly curious, they might ask intrusive questions that make others uncomfortable.
- On the other hand, someone who lacks curiosity might seem indifferent or disconnected from discussions or learning opportunities.
- Excessive kindness might be perceived as being overbearing, while too little kindness might come across as being selfish.

Finding a balance is essential so that our strengths remain assets and do not become obstacles!

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