

## **Social inclusion and social justice: a resilience curriculum for early years and elementary schools in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

– The purpose of this paper is to present the development of a resilience curriculum in early years and primary schools to enhance social inclusion, equity and social justice amongst European communities, particularly amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable ones, through quality education. It defines educational resilience in terms of academic, social and emotional growth in the face of life challenges; discusses the conceptual framework and key principles underpinning the curriculum; and presents the six major content areas of the curriculum. Finally, it presents the preliminary findings of a pilot project on the implementation of the curriculum in more than 200 classrooms in about 80 early and primary schools in six European countries.

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

– The curriculum was first drafted collaboratively amongst the six partners on the basis of the existing literature in the promotion of resilience in early years and primary schools, with a particular focus to European realities. Once it was internally reviewed, it was piloted in 200 early years and primary school classrooms in six European countries, with each of the six partners implementing one theme. Data collection included teacher reflective diaries, classroom checklists, semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus groups with students.

#### **Findings**

– The preliminary results from the pilot evaluation of the curriculum in 199 classrooms totalling 1,935 students across six countries indicate that both the teachers and the learners overwhelmingly found the curriculum highly enjoyable, useful, relevant and easy to use. They looked forward to the possibility of having the programme on a full-time basis as part of the general curriculum in the future. The teachers reported a positive moderate change in learners' behaviour related to the theme implemented and argued that for the implementation to be effective, it needs to take place throughout the whole year. A number of modifications have been on the basis of the teachers' and learners' feedback.

#### **Originality/value**

– This is the first resilience curriculum for early years and primary schools in Europe. While it seeks to address the needs of vulnerable children such as Roma children, immigrant and refugee children and children with individual educational needs, it does so within an assets-based, developmental, inclusive and culturally responsive approach, thus avoiding potential labelling and stigmatising, while promoting positive development and growth. It puts the onus on the classroom teacher, in collaboration with parents and other stakeholders, in implementing the curriculum in the classroom.