Promoting Resilience in Early Years & Primary School

A European Perspective
RESCUR Project

• Three year EU LLP Comenius Multilateral Project (2012-2015)

• 6 research partners:
  – University of Malta, Malta (Coordinator)-Carmel Cefai, Paul Bartolo
  – University of Crete, Greece - Anastassios Matsopoulos, Mariza Gavogiannaki
  – University of Pavia, Italy - Maria Assunta Zanetti, Roberta Renati, Valeria Cavioni
  – University of Zagreb, Croatia - Renata Miljevic-Ridicki, Tea Pavin Ivanec, Marija Saric
  – Orebro University, Sweden- Birgitta Kimber, Charli Eriksson
  – University of Lisbon, Portugal - Celeste Simoes, Paula Lebre
Objectives

• RESCUR is aimed at developing a resilience curriculum for early and primary education in Europe through the intercultural and transnational collaboration among the partner institutions, tapping into the resources and expertise of the various partners involved.
First Year

- In the first year the consortium will develop a universal resilience curriculum for the early years and primary school education.
- The curriculum will be also integrated within the mainstream curriculum and taught by the teachers, who will be trained, mentored and provided with the necessary resources.
Curriculum Principles

- European identity and diversity
- Spiral approach, with identified key themes spilling across the early primary school years
- Infused in the other content areas of the curriculum as well as in pedagogy, relationships and classroom management
- Formatively assessed by both the classroom teacher and the students themselves
- Developmental and inclusive, being flexible and responsive to the needs of the individual learner differences, underlining the right of all learners for a quality resilience education and a commitment towards social justice with awareness of the risk for discriminatory practices due to individual educational needs, minority statuses, and poverty
- Search for state-of-the-art service arrangements reflecting the EU agenda for excellence and competitiveness at the global level
- Evidence based
Manuals

• The curriculum will consist of three manuals for teachers complete with resources and activities centred around 6 major themes (spiral)

• Manual 1: Early Years (3-5 years)

• Manual 2: Early Primary Years (6-8 years)

• Manual 3: Late Primary Years (9-11 years)

• There will also be 3 complementary manuals for Parents
Second and Third Years

• In the second year, the curriculum will be piloted in a number of schools in each partner country

• In the third year the curriculum will be revised and published in soft and hard copies in the seven languages of the consortium.
Symposium presentations

- The Curriculum Framework
- The Curriculum Themes
- The Structure and Design of the Activities
- Examples of the Activities
- The Early Years Curriculum
- Specific Target Populations
The RESCUR Curriculum Framework

Carmel Cefai and Paul Bartolo
RESCUR Framework

STORYLINE

BEING

DOING

BECOMING

Developmental & Situational Challenges

RESILIENCE CURRICULUM

DIRECT-Skills (Taught)

INDIRECT-Processes (Caught)

Child Wellbeing & Resilience
RESILIENCE CURRICULUM
(Increasing Protective & Enabling Factors/ Reducing Risk Factors)

DIRECT-Skills
(Taught)

INDIRECT-Processes
(Caught)
DIRECT-Skills (Taught)

Resilience as Specific Curriculum Area

Resilience as Cross-Curricular Area
RESILIENCE CURRICULUM
(Increasing Protective & Enabling Factors/Reducing Risk Factors)

DIRECT-Skills (Taught)

Resilience Curriculum (specific curriculum)
Cross-Curricular (Curriculum)

Teacher Training

INSET

Teacher Resilience

INDIRECT-Processes (Caught)

Classroom Climate & Relationships, Teacher Behaviour, Attitudes & Creativity

Whole School Policy

Whole School

Inset

Engagement

Family

Family Resilience

Teacher Resilience

Child Wellbeing & Resilience

Resilience Curriculum (specific curriculum)
Cross-Curricular (Curriculum)

Teacher Training

INSET

Teacher Resilience

Child Wellbeing & Resilience

Resilience Curriculum (specific curriculum)
Cross-Curricular (Curriculum)

Teacher Training

INSET

Teacher Resilience

Child Wellbeing & Resilience
Six Themes of Resilience Curriculum

- Developing a positive mindset
- Building on strengths
- Developing self-determination
- Enhancing communication skills
- Building healthy relationships
- Turning challenges into opportunities (tough mindedness)
Themes of Resilience Curriculum

- Established in the literature
- Connected to our theoretical model of Resilience emphasizing the development of Resilience Skills but also promoting processes (especially in classroom/school and family) which support children’s development of resilience
Theme 1: Developing of Positive Mindset Malta

• Optimistic thinking and positive mindset when facing life’s adversities
  – Dispositional optimism—good things will happen, confidence to persevere in adversity (Scheiner & Curver, 1992)
  – Positive thinking/self-talk (promotes health, well-being & longevity (Seligman, 2011)
Theme 1: Developing of Positive Mindset Malta

• Using emotions to promote growth and wellbeing:
  – Appreciating & enjoying one’s positive emotions (positive emotions & adaptive coping strategies important to satisfying life, protects against development of psychological problems (Compton, 2005)
  – Humour (positive appraisal of life events----less stress, adds to psychological well-being, life satisfaction & self-esteem (Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park & Seligman, 2007)
Theme 2: Building on Strengths-Sweden

Building and developing strengths helps child to face challenging situations & adversity


• Awareness and use of strengths in academic and social engagement (promotes positive mindset, which is important protective factor)
Theme 3: Developing Self-determination—Portugal

Self determination & components are protective factors (Bernard, 2004) & some moderate the effect of adversity on well being (Simoes, 2012)

- Creative problem-solving and decision making (important skill to deal with adversity, moderator of impact of negative life events on well-being (Simoes, 2012)

- Empowerment: (resilient children high in autonomy, self-efficacy, internal locus of control Garmezy, 1991; resilient children characterized by feelings of confidence and belief that things will work out (Werner, 1992, 2004)
Theme 4: Enhancing communication skills - Croatia

- **Interpersonal communication** (effective listening skills) promote positive interactions and basis for asking help in the future; **giving feedback** has a positive effect on people, connection w others and increased resilience due to strong relationships (Luthar, 2006); **communicating ideas** promotes trust, develops awareness, identity, satisfies internal needs for power & appreciation (Glasser, 2000)

- **Assertive behaviour** (relates to healthy self-esteem, healthy social development)
Theme 5: Building healthy relationships-Italy

- Establishing & maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships (resilience relates to positive healthy social relationships w adults and peers (Werner, 1990); positive teacher-student relationship protective factor for children (Hamre & Pianta, 2005); benefits of relationships=social skills, self-awareness, awareness of others, recruit of emotional support in times of stress (Hartup, 1992, Doll, Zucker & Brehm, 2004)
Theme 5: Building & Maintaining healthy relationships-Italy

- Engaging in ethical and responsible behavior


Caring and supportive communities in schools-----benefit the child
Theme 6: Turning challenges into opportunities (tough mindedness)-Greece

- Reframing adversity is cardinal skill to become resilient.
- Turn developmental challenges & life’ stressors (losses, transitions, obstacles) into opportunities for growth
- Key quality to increase resilience is capacity to re-frame adversities through development of positive coping styles (Newman, 2002)
- Enhancing mental toughness, using strengths and fostering relationships are core competencies for overcoming obstacles (Seligman, 2011)
Theme 6: Turning challenges into opportunities (tough mindedness)-Greece

- Developing courage in adversity and persistence in the face of failure, injustice, overcoming difficulties and setbacks (e.g. disability, sickness, discrimination)
  - Hardy attitudes (tough mindedness) amount to the courage & motivation to face stressors accurately (rather than deny or exaggerate them) Bonnano, 2004, positive mindset=confidence to persevere in adversity (Scheiner & Curver, 1992)
  - Finding positive meaning in adversity or obstacles in life important predictive factor of resilience (Hildon, Smith, Netuvelli and Blane, 2008)

- Dealing with rejection by teachers, peers, family members and managing related negative emotions (e.g. stress, anger, disappointment, frustration, sadness, sense of helplessness)
  - Rejection and isolation from peers associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, poor interpersonal skills, emotional & psychological pathology
Theme 6: Turning challenges into opportunities (tough mindedness) - Greece

- Rejection from teachers = significant stressor for child (teacher warmth, encouragement and acceptance significant resilient factor - Coyle et al. 2009)

- Rejection from parents puts child in vulnerable situation (Rohner, 2000)
  - Parent Acceptance-Rejection theory
  - Dealing with rejection emotionally & learning to take appropriate action for prevention
Theme 6: Turning challenges into opportunities (tough mindedness)-Greece

• Dealing with bullying behaviours in school & managing related negative emotions
  – Learning how to deal emotionally and take appropriate action to avoid it (previous themes connect here-how to resolve conflicts, problem solving, being assertive, learning how to be mentally tough, courageous and determined)
  – Especially important for at-risk students

• Dealing with obstacles such as family conflicts, divorce, poverty & parental unrealistic expectations and related negative emotions
  – Handle and thrive in toxic environments (Garbarino, 2008)

• Dealing with change, loss & transitions in life and managing negative emotions
Structure and design of the activities

Birgitta Kimber
Structure

• Three manuals: early years, early primary and late primary

• Spiral curriculum, the same themes for all ages

• Developmental/inclusive rather than age determined

• In each group three different levels:
  – Basic
  – Intermediate
  – Advanced (teacher decides which level)
Activity

• Theme (eg. Building on Strengths)
• Overall objective (eg. discovering the self, positive self-concept and self esteem)
• Activity connected to the overall object (eg. my name)
• Learning outcomes (eg. During this activity I will learn the meaning of my name)
Manual

• Objective
• Materials needed
• Specific learning outcomes
• Activity in detail (eg. I, II, III)
• Homework
Principles

- Eg. SAFE Approach
  - Sequenced step-by-step training approach
  - Active forms of learning
  - Focus sufficient time on skill development
  - Explicit learning goals
Parents’ Manual

• Complementary to teachers’ manual
• Homework activities connected to the 6 themes to be completed by the child and the parent together
• Underlines the role of teachers and parents collaborating together in delivering and reinforcing the curriculum
Examples of Manual Activities

Maria Assunta Zanetti, Roberta Renati, Valeria Cavioni
Theme: Developing Healthy Relationships

The focus of this theme is the development of attitudes and skills which enable children to:

• establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships
• resolve interpersonal conflict constructively
• engage in ethical and responsible behavior
• seek and provide help and support
• deal with peer pressure
Developing healthy relationships: Rationale

• The resilience literature underlines
  – the protective benefits of having positive and healthy social relationships with adults and peers for children facing risk in their lives
  – the risks of not having such relationships: children without functional support systems are more vulnerable to stress and less likely to cope with adversity (Lee et al, 2012)
Rationale

- **Healthy family relationships** provide a protective environment which promotes the healthy development of children, even in the face of stress and other risk factors (Morrison Gutman et al, 2010).

- **Peer relationships** are a very important source of resilience and wellbeing for children; children who are able to build and maintain positive relationships with friends and peers, are more able to acquire social skills, develop self- and social awareness, and recruit emotional support in times of stress (Doll, Zucker and Brehm, 2004)

- **Healthy teacher –student relationships** are particularly protective for vulnerable children who lack such relationships at home (Hamre and Pianta, 2005)
  - increase students’ ability to cope with stressful experiences and their positive prosocial behaviour with peers and adults (Klem and Connell, 2004).
Activity: Making and having Friends

- **Topic**: Making and having friends
- **Objective**: Appreciating the value of having friends
- **Level**: Intermediate
- **Learning outcome**: During this activity, I will learn to identify the benefits of having friends
- **Resources**: Manual, sheet of paper
Activity: Making and Having Friends

Setting: children together in a circle

I. introduce the importance of friendship asking children to think about a friend or friends they have within or outside their class and things they used to do together.

II. Ask children to think of, and draw an event of their life they shared with a friend.

III. Children share their papers with their classmates and discuss how they felt sharing that experience.

IV. Teacher writes down on a poster the children’s experiences and feelings and help them to understand the importance to have a friend to better appreciate moments of life.

V. Homework: children ask parents to tell them one important experience of their life they shared with a friend. Parents describe to children how they felt. Together they write down the parents’ story.
The Early Years Curriculum

Renata Miljevic-Ridicki, Tea Pavin Ivanec and Marija Saric
The Early Years Curriculum Manual

1.1. Brief theoretical overview of resilience
1.2. Importance of developing resilience at an early age
1.3. Risk and protective factors
1.4. Prerequisites of developing child resilience
   - family environment
   - quality of parent-child relationship
   - characteristics of “resilient family”
   - role of early years teachers in child resilience development
1.5. Model of resilience development

- strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors
- teaching resilience by direct action
- creating secure and supportive environment
Goals of the Early years curriculum

Implementation of basic skills
Planning Early Years prerequisites

1. Support of the principle
2. Support of Early Years expert team
3. Parental involvement
4. Cooperation with local community
5. Addresses needs of ALL children
Precurriculum activities

Focus groups with:

- parents
- kindergarten teachers
- children
A Resilience Curriculum for ALL

Celeste Simoes and Paula Lebre
Specific target populations

Disavantaged background

ROMA

Early school leaving

MIGRANTS

SEN
Specific target populations

- MIGRANTS
- ROMA
- SEN
- GRANTS

Protective factors:
- Lack

Risk factors:
- Weaker Family Support
- Discrimination
- Limited Learning Opportunities

Limited Learning Opportunities
Discrimination on the basis of ... (Widespread)

- Being under 30 years old: 18%
- Gender: 31%
- Religion or beliefs: 39%
- Being over 55 years old: 45%
- Gender Identity: 45%
- Sexual Orientation: 46%
- Disability: 46%
- Ethnic origin: 46%

In http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_393_380_en.htm#393
Main Areas

Risk
Social disadvantage & Diversity

Special Educational Needs
Minorities & Immigrants

Disability
Gifted Children
Roma
Refugees
ROMA: Why a Resilience Program?

Largest, most impoverished, most vulnerable minority in C&E Europe

- Stereotypes (e.g. Inferior and Dangerous)
- Discrimination/Exclusion (Social, Political, Economic, Geographic)
- Limited access to health care services
- Heavily dependent on state welfare
- Limited education
- Low levels of skills for labour market

In www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/sowc06_fullreport.pdf
How citizens would feel about their children having Roma schoolmates?

ROMA: Focus on...

- Promote educational equality
- Promote resilience assets for positive development and active citizenship
- Reduce school absenteeism and early leaving (Dimakos & Papakonstantinopolou)

"We feel that one of the main problems that we, as Gypsy women, face, is low self-esteem. There is an urgent need to strengthen our awareness of our own value and of our ability to resolve our problems.

There is no doubt that self-awareness would lift our social, educational, political and cultural awareness. It would also lead to our undertaking social and educational action ourselves."

Romnea/Gypsy women's manifesto, Seville, May, 1994
Internal resources are one of the major contribution to refugee resilience
- Optimism, adaptability, perseverance, belief in inner strength, positive attitude, hope in the future, locus of control, sense of coherence and purpose, high academic expectations (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012; Førde, 2007)

External resources
- Friends, parents, school (extracurricular activities, sports, teachers) (McEwen, 2007)

Children stressed the need for more information to enable them to protect themselves, especially since many do not come from violent environments and have developed few coping mechanisms (UNHRC, 2007)
Disability: Why a Resilience Program?

- Attitudinal and structural barriers
- Discrimination, compromised participation, social exclusion
- Disability-related risks and experiences that increases the likelihood of negative outcomes (King et al. 2003)
- Refer more frequently, suffer negative life events, compared to their mainstream peers (Simões, Matos, Tomé, et al., 2009)
  - victims of bullying or being rejected by classmates
  - Perceive their school performance to be lower than average
  - More pressed with homework
  - Feel more frequently unhappy, lonelier and sadder
Disability: Focus on...

Promote internal and external assets to cope with challenges and adversities (Benard, 1999; Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001; Simões et al., 2009)

Self-determination
- Self-awareness
- Cooperation and communication
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Self-efficacy
- Goals and aspirations

Caring relationships, high expectations, meaningful participation
- Home, school, peers & community
Gifted: Why a Resilience Program?

Resilience

Vulnerability

• Depends on:
  – Type of giftedness
  – Educational fit
  – Personal characteristics

Disorganization, lack of concentration, perfectionism, low self-esteem, unwillingness to conform, anxiety, vulnerability to peer pressure, external locus of control

Ford, 1993, Kline & Short, 1999

Higher academic expectations and outcomes

Many cases of underachievement

(Neihart, 1999)
Gifted: Focus on...

- Reduce risk of maladjustment strengthening factors that enhance positive outcomes (Reis, Colbert, Hébert, 2005)
  - Believe in self
  - Personal characteristics (sensitivity, independence, determination to succeed, appreciation of cultural diversity, inner will)
  - Problem solving skills
  - Support systems
  - Participation in special programs

- Set and adjust learning goals (King, 2004)
Thanks from RESCUR team

contact: carmel.cefai@um.edu.mt