



UPSKILLING FOR WELLBEING IN
A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM



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#teacherswellbeing

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FIELD RESEARCH

Survey instruments

The UPWELL project is now well underway and is progressing at a fast pace. The work package dedicated to researching the existing literature on the topic and fieldwork has recently been concluded.

Since the beginning of the project to date, the partners involved - Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Croatia and Spain - have engaged in the investigation through three investigative tools: questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

The aim? To probe the skills already acquired and the desires of teachers who have to deal with such a complex field as multicultural classrooms on a daily basis.

Each partner in its own country submitted questionnaires on skills and wishes to teachers of all levels of education for a total of 870 questionnaires. Similarly, twenty interviews were sent out for both survey fields including students, school heads, counsellors, language facilitators, university teachers and school experts at European level. Finally, each country organised two focus groups on the topics described above.

What is evident from the willingness of the teachers themselves to participate and from their responses is that they, themselves, had long felt the need to address the issue of well-being in multicultural classroom management.

It emerged that the issue to be examined is not simply and only related to the amount of



cultures present in the classroom but also to the language levels of the students, the difficulties present of various kinds and, more importantly, the need to make them feel welcome and included. The lack of tools to be able to better deal with such environments, which include various difficulties, is what makes our teachers uncomfortable and creates a state of unease, affecting the students themselves.

As it should be, the issues of inclusion of students with a migrant background and their integration in the host country are very important, but the objective becomes more complicated to achieve if the trainers in the first place fail to work in a state of well-being.

The UPWELL project is aimed precisely at teachers, so that they can feel at ease, having all the necessary skills, and supported in classroom management.

ICOMPARISON INTERVIEWS

Students and teachers speak

Teacher

In your opinion, what is the state of well-being of teachers in multicultural classes?

The schools in which I work have all had multicultural classes for several years and teachers report a fluctuating state of well-being during the school year, caused by increasingly incessant organisational/bureaucratic demands from the school and increasingly complex relationships with and between pupils.

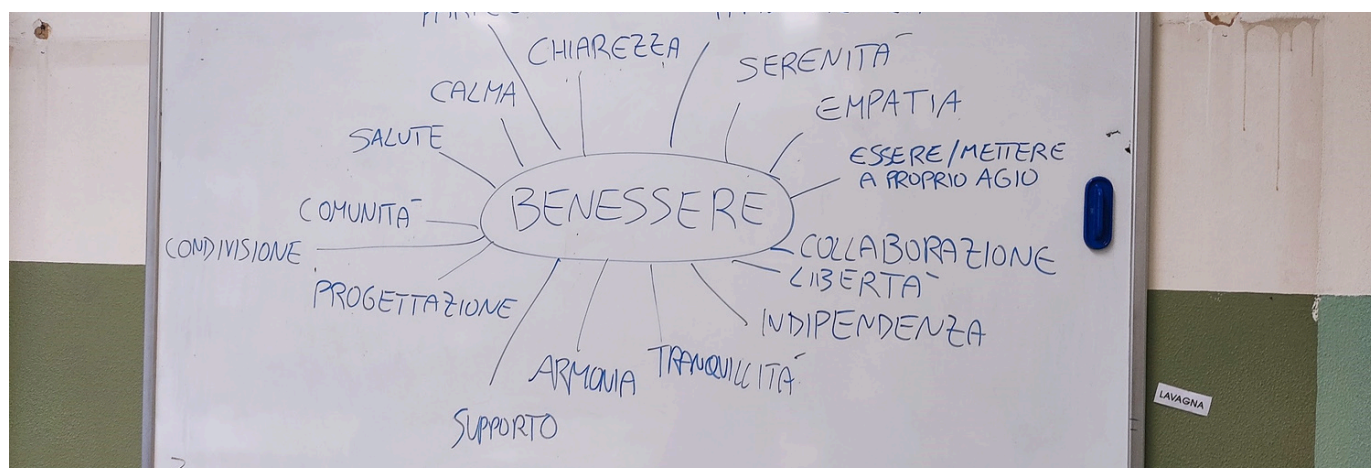
The well-being of teachers in multicultural classrooms includes cultural and linguistic diversity, training and support, available resources and also the inclusive school environment. Some teachers may derive great satisfaction from teaching in multicultural contexts, feeling enriched by diversity, while others may struggle with the challenges such diversity can present.

What are the critical elements and challenges you face in managing the multicultural classroom?

The biggest challenge is the empowerment of the individual, managing to make all children participate and feel included. In this regard, one of the critical issues to be overcome lies in the way of relating and behaving, communicating with pupils from different cultures, hence the need to change the mode of communication depending on who I have in front of me, to move towards intercultural communication.

What could help teachers in classroom management?

I think there are three courses of action that could help teachers manage with more serenity with the multilingual and multicultural classroom: 1) necessary all-round basic training that is the same for everyone, but not only theoretical, above all practical; 2) a network for sharing good teaching practices and for comparison and support between teachers (e.g. of the same subject areas); 3) collaboration with families.



Student



Thinking about your school experience, how welcome did you feel?

I have been in Italy for three years. I came here from Sri Lanka to visit my dad who was already here, then Covid arrived and my family decided to stay.

I have been attending school for a year and a half.

At the beginning, I didn't feel welcome because 'I didn't understand anything'. Luckily there was Simu, who is Indian, who spoke to me in English and helped me with my Italian. My teachers helped me, first I was with the Italian teacher and then you arrived (language facilitator, ed).

In your opinion, how could your teachers have involved you more in the classroom?

In my opinion they did what they could. Sometimes I feel that the teachers don't know how to do it because there are so many of us and they can't translate for all of us to make us understand.

Surely making me work more with my classmates, with group or pair work, because then I would feel freer to say my thoughts, to ask for help, to make friends. You could get a teacher who is always here to help with Italian alone.

Tell an episode in which you felt valued within your class group.

I always felt valued in class. «Wait teacher, which class? The Italian L2 class? Because I've always felt happy there». The Art teacher values me a lot, he's nice and never shouts. The others do. At primary school they always told me I was good, here at secondary school less so. Here I feel wrong sometimes, especially when I speak in Italian and don't say things well. At primary school the teacher asked me to tell what they eat in Sri Lanka and I felt good and she was happy.

THE RESULTS

The school that teachers would like

As the above-mentioned interviews and the results obtained in no less than 5 different countries testify, the state of unease among teachers, but also among pupils, is general, often due to a lack of communication and understanding that not only does not foster inclusion but also normal relationships between peers or between pupils and teachers.

What emerges from the analysis of the data of the three instruments used for the field surveys, in fact, is the willingness to undertake 360-degree training courses that address inclusion issues on a broad scale. If the foundations for good integration seem to be established in most cases, such as knowledge of the reception protocol or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), others are less so. For example, CARAP, the reference framework for plural approaches to languages and cultures, or second language teaching methods and good practices for creating an inclusive and multilingual environment, seem to be unknown to most.

Not all are aware of or, if they are, do not all apply teaching techniques that aim at the integration of other cultures in the school environment and the inclusion of all by facilitating multi-level understanding.

Most respondents have

emphasised how, for better management of the multicultural classroom .

it is important to learn to value not only the languages present in the classroom but also the cultures through a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on and enhances the students' own soft skills and individuality. It would therefore seem necessary to focus on training teachers to learn techniques such as layering of material and simplification of texts, to give everyone the opportunity to achieve good levels of knowledge according to their skills.

Or again, the use of constant multilingual teaching or language biography, to enhance the value of class members as belonging to other cultures, giving importance to dedicated days (such as Mother Language Day) or the sharing of experiences and customs of the country of origin.

Not least, it would be essential to focus on the use of inclusive educational systems such as games, the use of flashcards or visual material so that everyone is able to participate regardless of their linguistic knowledge, but also on working groups, peer to peer and all the mutual aid systems between classmates that also help integration into the class group.

More specifically, these latter methodologies are also appreciated by the students themselves, as shown by the interviews, because they allow them to learn basic communication skills but above all make them feel less isolated and more part of a group.

Lastly, among the needs highlighted by European students and teachers, the fundamental presence of cultural mediators and language facilitators was emphasised, who, in their opinion, should become a presence that accompanies pupils and their families, throughout the annual school term, so that collaboration becomes long-lasting and therefore more effective.



THE NEXT STEP

Next work package kicks off

On 16 May, the second Transnational Partner meeting was held online, during which the state of play of the completed surveys was reviewed and the next steps were decided upon. Each partner presented the results of the research by means of a power point in which they gave a summary of the answers, what they felt should be focused on in order to bring about improvements in teachers' well-being, and finally some suggestions on how to do this.

The next step is to develop a curriculum for the teachers, which will be created precisely on the basis of the information they themselves gave us by participating in the surveys. In this way, we will be able to adapt the training to their needs and requirements, trying to go and develop those competences that they themselves have admitted they do not have or need to fill, and to satisfy the training desires they have expressed.

In addition, three specialisation courses, support guides and even a flat e-learning form accessible in several languages will be realised.

We just have to wait and see the developments.



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