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Literature Review on Early Childhood Teachers' Careers and Professional Development, Teachers' Well-Being (PERMA) and Children's Socio-emotional Support (SWPBS)

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Executive Summary

This literature review provides an up-to-date critical overview of early childhood teacher's careers, well-being, and professional development supports. It provides a summary of current views on early childhood education and care (ECEC) informed by Positive Psychology interventions focusing on teacher well-being (PERMA) and School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) frameworks, defines key concepts, and builds on empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

Part 1 starts with an overview based on empirical research about ECEC workforce in Europe. It provides evidence suggesting that, while ECEC professionals are one of the most important drivers of high-quality ECEC, most countries face issues related to staff shortages, turnover, and an overall low status of the profession (OECD, 2020, ET2020 Working group, 2021). The working conditions and career prospects offered to ECEC professionals have been shown to either facilitate or undermine high-quality practices, with research evidence showing how facets such as positive organizational climate, job autonomy, and job satisfaction are associated with high-quality provision and teachers' satisfaction (Aboagye et al., 2020; Penttinen et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2017; Shim et al., 2017). Relatedly, continued support for staff training and development is receiving increasing empirical support as one key strategy for the continuous upgrade of a high-quality teaching workforce (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert et al., 2018, 2020; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Werner et al., 2015). Still, the literature has also shown that the relevance and effectiveness of professional development are dependent upon contextual factors, namely features of the workplace. This part ends up by suggesting that professional development opportunities can be a powerful tool to increase the quality of ECEC practices and raise the status of the ECEC profession, but attention to the overall ECEC system of a particular country, and to features of the workplace, is needed so that professional development is effective.

Part 2 presents recent research evidence and intervention programmes with a clear focus on teacher's wellbeing. This section provides research evidence showing that whereas well-being is clearly important for a strong, motivated, and satisfied workforce, it has received little attention from the literature, which calls for more research and intervention studies. A summary of studies on positive psychology approaches is provided, and the PERMA model is briefly presented giving an overview of its five pillars, namely, Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Based on the current scientific body of knowledge, it seems that the PERMA model is promising in promoting teacher's wellbeing.

Part 3 introduces the School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), explaining its main principles and summarizing empirical studies showing its effectiveness and usefulness in promoting prosocial skills and reducing disruptive behavior problems in schools (e.g., Bloomquist & Schnell, 2005, Bradshaw et al., 2009, 2012). Through a careful review of the most recent findings, it points out several key features that need to be taken into account for effective implementation. For a start, teachers need to be provided with continuous training, feedback, and coaching (Lau, Moore, & Anderson, 2019; Mahon, Gunning, Holloway & Lydon, 2020). Also, attention to contextual features such as type of leadership or group-level features

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is needed for successful implementation
(Hemmeter, Fox, & Broyles, 2007; Mahon, et al., 2020). At last, ensuring that a considerable amount of time is provided is crucial to fully develop and implement the model. Thus, key lessons from the past literature are provided, helping to shed light on how the model can be successfully implemented with effective outcomes.

Part 4 provides key information on the ECEC systems of the four participating countries in the ProW project: Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania. The four countries share several similarities, but there are also specificities important to acknowledge. Differences can be found in workforce features, such as initial education requirements for both teachers and assistants and career progression, which needs to be considered for successful program implementations. Still, there are important similarities, namely the emphasis in the countries' educational guidelines on socio-emotional aspects, learning, and well-being. Considering the specificities of each ECEC system, Part 5 provides specific information about each of the participating countries on the workforce. Overall, while the research is relatively scarce for each country on intervention studies supporting teachers' well-being and children's socio-emotional support, findings are promising. It overall appears that, for each country, intervention studies designed to put teachers' well-being at the core of the intervention while adopting a whole-school approach can be relevant and useful.

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Introduction

It is widely believed that one of the most important factors of the success of education systems is the quality of teaching. However, recruiting and retaining quality teachers is a known challenge for education systems. In particular, currently there is a large gap in EU member states concerning teacher career guidance for teachers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). According to Eurydice (2021) teachers' career, development and wellbeing is considered a major focus since based on data from the Eurydice (2018), Europe is facing several challenges with respect to teacher demand and supply, particularly teacher shortages and ageing (Eurydice, 2018). These challenges are associated with the attractiveness of the profession, its incentives, and the availability of alternative pathways to a teaching qualification. Recent calls have emphasized the need to develop and support attractive and sustainable teachers' careers by building on their competences; offering ongoing professional development and by focusing on their well-being.

The current report was prepared in the scope of the ERASMUS + Action ProW ("Promoting Teachers Well-being through Positive Behaviour Support in Early Childhood Education"; 2021-2024). The ProW action aims to develop evidence-based policies and practices that will promote the early childhood teaching profession. The project is informed by (1) Positive Psychology interventions focusing on teacher well-being (PERMA) and (2) School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) framework. It draws from a large body of research arguing that building teachers' overall wellbeing and supporting them teaching children social skills and managing their behaviour, will have a positive impact on their professional competencies, self-efficacy, motivation and career prospects (McCarty et al. 2014; PBIS Leadership Forum, 2019; OECD, 2020; Seligman, 2011; Soini et al. 2010; Stalikas et al. 2019). Early childhood educators from four European countries – Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania – will be supported through training to manage children's challenging social behaviours and will also be supported in ways to enhance their own career and well-being. The ultimate goal is that as a consequence of such support, early childhood teachers will have a greater sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction, as well as lower burnout levels.

The current report aims to present a critical review of current research evidence on early childhood teacher's careers, well being and professional development supports. It also intends to provide a useful theoretical framework and relevant resources and information for every partner during the action planning process.

Key terminology

Subjective Well Being: The scientific term (equivalent of happiness), which refers to how individuals experience their quality of life. The concept includes three different components: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Life satisfaction is defined as "an individual's cognitive evaluation of his or her life as a whole, or satisfaction with some aspects of his or her life, such as family, friendships, and work" (Diener et al., 2009). Both positive and negative moods refer to the emotional experiences of life that result in pleasant emotions (e.g., excitement, joy, passion) or stressful experiences (e.g., anger, guilt, despair, fear, disgust) (Diener et al., 2009).

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Positive Psychology: Positive Psychology is a new and rapidly developing field in the science of psychology that focuses on the positive dimensions of human existence. Its purpose is to uncover, understand, and enhance the factors that help people thrive and function optimally as individuals, groups, and societies (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Positive Psychology Interventions: Strategies or brief actions designed to enhance well-being and other positive behaviors. Each intervention derives from an individual theorem and concept in Positive Psychology, such as character strengths, positive emotions, mindfulness, optimism, gratitude, etc. The use of positive interventions can be seen as a complementary strategy in the treatment and promotion of mental health (Dreer, 2020).

PERMA theory of well-being: A multi-dimensional approach in order to define what it means to flourish in life. The PERMA constructs include Positive emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). The developed PERMA-Profiler is a brief measure of PERMA (Butler & Kern , 2014).

Resilience: The ability to "bounce back" from hardships or trauma to flourishing, or the ability to resist trauma deforming the individual or resist the destructive forces that might have a negative impact on one's life (Dreer, 2018).

Organization of the current report

- Part 1 summarizes recent empirical research and European guidelines about early childhood teacher's careers and professional development in Europe. More specifically, the current state of the ECEC workforce, teacher's views on how society values their profession, teacher's satisfaction with their profession and working environment and opportunities for lifelong learning are outlined.
- Part 2 summarizes recent research evidence and intervention programmes conducted to promote early childhood teacher's wellbeing, highlighting positive psychology approaches and the PERMA model.
- Part 3 summarizes recent research evidence on ways to better support children's socio - emotional development, with a special focus on the SWPBS approach.
- Part 4 gives an overview of the ECEC system in the four participating countries of the ProW project: Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania. Key system features, such as jurisdiction and curriculum guidelines, and workforce features, such as initial education and career progression, are summarized in tables, followed by a detailed description on the specificities of each ECEC system.
- Part 5 is comprised by country reports, in which specific information about each of the participating countries is given concerning early childhood teachers' careers and professional development, early childhood teachers' well-being, children's socio-emotional support (SWPBS), and adaptations/ possible barriers.

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Part 1. Early childhood teachers' careers and professional development in Europe

It is now widely acknowledged around Europe and the world that high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services can give all children a solid start by supporting their development, learning, and well-being, with profound effects on later school success and quality of life (European Commission, 2014; ET2020 Working group, 2021). There is robust research evidence demonstrating that the daily staff-child interactions – known as process quality – are powerful predictors of child development and learning (Perlman et al., 2016; Vandell et al., 2010). Process quality covers both social-emotional aspects, such as emotional climate and teachers' sensitivity towards child interests and educational aspects, such as stimulating interactions that scaffold child learning and thinking. Several studies indicate that observed high-quality interactions are associated with improvements in academic, social, and emotional skills (Bartlett, 2013; Burchinal et al., 2011; Cadima et al., 2016; Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Mashburn et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2015). Studies have shown that emotionally close, sensitive, and thought-provoking supportive interactions are crucial for child development and learning, and can be particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Loeb et al., 2004; Magnuson et al., 2004; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001 Vandenbroeck et al., 2008). Other key aspects of quality provision include universal access to ECEC, curriculum guidelines, adequate adult-child ratios and group sizes, integrated public policies, appropriate monitoring systems, and a well-trained and motivated workforce (European Commission, 2014). All of these features support high-quality interactions in ECEC and require interconnection across system levels. However, the professional competence of the workforce is considered to be one of the most salient indicators of ECEC quality in supporting high-quality interactions (European Commission, 2014).

1.1. The ECEC workforce

The ECEC workforce is one the most important drivers of the quality of an ECEC system (OECD, 2020, ET2020 Working group, 2021). Research has shown that well-qualified ECEC staff is key for high-quality interactions and pedagogical practices that foster children's learning, development, and well-being (e.g. Ansari, & Pianta, 2019; Barros et al., 2018; Cadima et al., 2018). Aligned with the research evidence, the European Union (EU) has recently emphasized the importance of providing continued support for staff training and development, as well as good working conditions and career prospects so that the ECEC workforce receives the recognition it deserves (ET2020 Working Group, 2021).

Teachers' initial qualification is one of the most researched indicators, with robust evidence pointing to positive links between higher qualifications and enriched and stimulating learning environments for children (Manning, Wong, Fleming, & Garvis, 2019). A recent meta-analysis has shown that higher initial education levels were significantly correlated with higher quality ECEC environments, including program structure, and stimulation of child language and reasoning (Manning et al., 2019). Positive associations between initial education and high-quality interactions have been recently found in centre-based ECEC settings for children under 3 (Barros et al., 2018; Bjørnestad and Os, 2018; Castle et al., 2016; Degotardi, Torr and Han, 2018). In addition, several recent studies in preschool, both in home-based and centre-based settings, further support the importance of initial education in fostering and sustaining high-

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quality practices (Ansari, & Pianta, 2019;
Cadima et al., 2018; Eadie et al., 2019; Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Kook & Greenfield, 2020; Raikes et al., 2020; Romo-Escudero et al., 2021; Schaack et al., 2017; Slot et al., 2018).

Initial education can help teachers to develop a child-centred approach, through which children's specific and unique needs are at the core of teachers' practices. Teacher sensitivity and the ability to read children's cues in authentic contexts have long been emphasized as crucial in high-quality practices. A recent study has shown the relevance of preparing teachers to notice child development markers to enact high-quality practices (Romo-Escudero et al., 2021). Besides education levels, research has pointed to the importance of preparing teachers to specifically work in ECEC settings, by providing specific knowledge on early childhood education and by incorporating work-based learning opportunities that help to build bridges between theory and practice (Arlemalm-Hagser, 2017; Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2015; Flämig & Spiekermann, 2015; Lohmander, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2015). In sum, there is increasing consensus that underlying high-quality practices are knowledgeable and skilled teachers that take advantage of everyday opportunities through critical reflection of their practice and sensitivity towards children's ongoing interests and skills (Arlemalm-Hagser, 2017; Lohmander, 2015; Oberhuemer, 2015; ET2020 Working group, 2021).

The ECEC workforce includes not only teachers, the core practitioners who lead practice for a group of children, but also other staff members who work directly with children, such as assistants. Research regarding the role of assistants in sustaining high-quality practices is, however, much scarcer. The few studies available suggest that all staff members in a classroom are important (Bjørnestad, Broekhuizen, Os, & Baustad, 2019; Barros, et al., 2018), with assistants considered as most useful to teachers when they shared release hours for planning (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011). There have been recent calls for greater attention to the preparation of assistants (ET2020 Working group, 2021).

1.2. Early childhood teachers' views of how society values their profession

Recent calls have highlighted that the quality of ECEC provision is not only enhanced by well-trained professionals, but also by professionals who are motivated and committed, which is linked with the value society places on the ECEC sector (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). Despite the increasing research evidence of the crucial role of ECEC for child development and well-being, and the increased investments from European governments on ECEC, for many years, ECEC provision has been traditionally seen as a service that supports parents' participation in the labour market (ET2020 Working group, 2021). The recent OECD TALIS Starting Strong survey asked professionals the extent they perceived they were valued in their profession, with results showing that teachers did not feel valued by society. In contrast, teachers reported enjoying working with young children and considered that both parents and children valued their work (OECD, 2019). The contrast between the perceived value by society and by parents and children has led the European Commission expert group on ECEC to state the current need for greater recognition of the ECEC value (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). This recognition encompasses not only general appreciation from society but also the entry-level required qualifications, the working conditions, and the career progression prospects offered to ECEC professionals.

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1.3. Early childhood teachers' satisfaction with their profession and current working environment

Several European and OECD reports have long highlighted the challenge of recruiting and retaining highly skilled staff in ECEC (Clarke, & Miho, 2019; ET2020 Working Group, 2021; OECD, 2019, 2020). In many countries, the ECEC workforce receives lower salaries compared to staff with equal qualifications in similar sectors and faces a general low status of the profession. For example, careers in ECEC offer no or few opportunities for progression (Clarke, & Miho, 2019; ET2020 Working Group, 2021; OECD, 2019, 2020). Additionally, high staff turnover rates and subsequent staff shortages in ECEC have been reported as very frequent in the sector across countries (Clarke, & Miho, 2019; ET2021; OECD, 2019, 2020). In most European countries, ECEC provision is led by settings in the public sector. However, there are also private and third sector providers where salaries and career prospects are not regulated and rather determined by market forces (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). Thus, it is common to find different salaries and career pathways across teachers who have similar qualifications and similar responsibilities in their work. Low satisfaction with salaries, limited opportunities for career progression, and limited human and material resources in ECEC centres are associated with staff disengagement with work and higher levels of stress (OECD, 2020). Also, another study has showed that a substantial number of ECEC teachers reported physical and psychological challenges and suboptimal working conditions for well-being. Teachers with higher educational levels had greater resources for work and provided higher quality of care, however, they also reported poorer physical and professional well-being than teachers with less education (Won, et al., 2020).
Recommendations have recently highlighted the importance of developing the range of career pathways that facilitates ECEC professionals to gain positions of greater responsibility and correspondent salaries, to gain expertise, or to take on different roles in an ECEC setting (ET2020 Working Group, 2021).

Other features of working conditions, including a positive organizational climate, job autonomy, and job satisfaction, have also been associated with high-quality practices (Aboagye et al., 2020; Penttinen et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2017; Shim et al., 2017). These features are often tied at the level of the organization (Bayly et al., 2020), with several studies unraveling a variety of working conditions to affect professionals' well-being, which relates to better pedagogical practices and ultimately reflect on children's development and well-being.

For example, in one recent study (Ansari et al., 2020) more emotionally exhausted teachers demonstrated lower-quality interactions with children. The authors concluded that positive working conditions that support staff in carrying out their multiple ongoing tasks improve teachers' responsiveness and emotional availability toward children and ultimately lead to higher quality practices (Ansari et al., 2020).

Studies have also shown that positive work environments, such as teachers' feeling a sense of collegiality, with regular opportunities for professional exchange (team meetings, collaboration between teachers), support high process quality levels (Eckhardt, & Egert, 2020; Resa et al., 2017; Shim, & Lim, 2017). Relatedly, job autonomy has been shown to be associated with teacher-child interaction quality (Aboagye et al., 2020). Teachers' ability to

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make decisions at the centre has been positively linked with their emotional supportive practices with children (Cassidy et al, 2016).

In contrast, occupation stressors that demand persistent physical, psychological, or emotional efforts can lead to less engagement and commitment, with detrimental effects on classroom practices (Ansari et al., 2020). Indeed, there is empirical evidence suggesting that excessive demands and work overload (i.e. high demand, not enough time, shortage of assistance) are negatively associated with process quality (Aboagye et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2018). A considerable number of studies has found negative associations between the quality of teaching practices and depressive symptoms (Decker-Woodrow, 2018; Eckhardt & Egert, 2020), emotional exhaustion (Ansari et al., 2020; Aboagye et al., 2020; Fukkink et al., 2019), burnout (Sandilos et al., 2020), and teaching-related stress (Penttinen et al., 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that supporting teachers' well-being may be a beneficial strategy to foster a higher quality classroom environment. Research findings additionally stress the complex interplay between multiple aspects of working conditions and the need to consider this interplay while attempting to understand the role of each one on process quality.

1.4. Early childhood teachers' opportunities for lifelong learning

In addition to initial education, professional development opportunities have been shown to be crucial for the continuous upgrade of a high-quality teaching workforce (Hamre et al., 2017). Several studies have shown that participation in professional development improves the quality of teacher's interactions with children (Bayly et al., 2020; Biringen et al., 2012; Eadie et al., 2019; Early et al., 2017; Jilink et al., 2018; Kara et al., 2017; Landry et al., 2014; Slot et al., 2015, 2018; Tveit et al., 2019; Williford et al., 2017; Wolf et al., 2019). Recent meta-analyses provide further and robust evidence of the role of professional development to enact teacher's ability to create close, warm and stimulating relationships with children (Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Egert et al., 2018, 2020; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Werner et al., 2015).

In ECEC, professional development programs are widely diverse and may include, among others, courses, workshops, or coaching. The theoretical models underlying the programs can be also diverse, as well as their intensity or content, making it difficult to identify the most effective components of professional development. Still, recent studies have suggested that centre-embedded professional development, with clear links with teachers' everyday practices and opportunities for teacher's self-reflection, are among the key features for relevant and effective professional development (Bove, et al., 2018; Peleman, et al., 2018; Jensen & Iannone, 2018). In addition, the inclusion of individual coaching has been found to be effective, pointing to the importance of providing individual feedback at the workplace (Egert et al., 2018). Also, the intensity of the program has been shown to affect the efficacy of the program, suggesting that a substantial number of hours of professional development are important to ensure quality improvement (Egert et al., 2018). Additional features that research has pointed out relate to more informal processes of collaboration among staff, that support team building, sharing experiences and resources, and communities of practice (Bove, et al., 2018; Resa et al., 2018).

In addition to quality improvement, professional development has also been shown to be related to improved professional well-being, self-efficacy, sense of autonomy, reduced

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burnout, and reduction in the odds of midyear job turnover (e.g., Davis et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2018). A recent study also suggests that professional development opportunities can be particularly important for teachers with lower levels of pre-service education (e.g., Early et al. 2017). Moreover, participating in professional development programmes has been shown to attenuate the negative impacts of stress and burnout on teachers' interactions with children in the classroom (e.g., Sandilos et al., 2020). Professional development opportunities can additionally be a lever that supports ECEC staff in accessing and benefiting from career pathways (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). As such, professional development can be an important means for improving and maintaining a high-quality workforce, while also improving the attractiveness and potentially contributing to the sustainability of staff careers.

Contextual factors can impact the responsiveness and effectiveness of professional development interventions. For example, the workplace climate appears to affect professionals' ability to make the most out of professional development opportunities (Bayly et al., 2020). A recent study showed that teachers who reported higher levels of positive school climate benefitted the most from professional development in terms of its effects on quality practices (Bayly et al., 2020). In addition, providing teachers with the necessary financial support and incentives has been linked with higher engagement in both formal and informal professional development opportunities (Mowrey & King, 2019). Opportunities involving all staff at the setting can be particularly beneficial to increase the relevance of the professional development, by better aligning it with staff needs and interests, and by fostering the interconnections with their current practices (Bove et al., 2018; Peleman et al., 2018).

The CARE project (Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC) has examined the conditions for sustainable workforce development. After careful consultation of several sources and experts, the project found vast differences across countries in terms of resources and regulation of professional development (Jensen et al., 2015). In some countries, professional development is mandatory, with a specified minimum time requirement, while in others, it is optional (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). Moreover, monitoring systems that systematically assess professional development needs, obstacles to participation, or the effectiveness of the intervention are not well developed in most countries, which is considered crucial to design efficient measures and incentives and facilitate participation in professional development (ET2020 Working Group, 2021). Indeed, the European Commission on ECEC highlights the importance of monitoring needs, obstacles to participation, attendance, and the impact of training in order to strengthen the quality of professional development offers (ET2020 Working Group, 2021).

In sum, investing in staff professionalization through professional development can be a powerful tool to increase the quality of education and care practices in ECEC, and to contribute to raising the status of the ECEC profession. However, important challenges related to ECEC career status and paths remain, which affects the relevance and effectiveness of professional development opportunities.

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Part 2. Teacher's well-being and the PERMA model

The European Commission (EACEA/Eurydice, 2021) stated that the profession of teachers is undergoing a vocational crisis not only due to the pandemic crisis but also based on the need to improve key challenges of the ECEC sector such as the working conditions of both the teachers and the school's staff (OECD, 2017). Thus, there is a large need to provide opportunities for teachers to learn resilience skills, to ensure the teaching profession sustainability. Spurgeon and Thompson (2018) compiled a framework for the integration of wellbeing in teacher education programs and suggest that the key to prevent burnout and to cultivate students who flourish is through their teachers. They also posit that research shows that the teachers who are taught, practice, and implement wellbeing skills are more likely to adapt. As stated by Charalambous, Stalikas, and Vrasidas (2021) PERMA offers an important collection of interventions. So far, no research or intervention aiming at enhancing the well-being of teachers has been conducted based on the PERMA model and the principles of Positive Psychology. Although most research conducted on enhancing the well-being in schools has focused on meeting the needs and enhancing the wellbeing of students (Roffey, 2012; Broadbent, 2014; Waters, 2017), there are increasing calls to prioritise monitoring and empowering teachers' wellbeing (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018).

2.1. Important role of teachers

Falecki and Mann (2020), report that teachers make learning happen and this makes them the greatest asset in the schools since evidence shows that how teachers feel about their lives and to the extent that they feel satisfied with their quality of everyday experience, is associated with their teaching practice, retention decisions and the learning, achievement and wellbeing of students (Mansfield, 2020). The reason is that in order for teachers to be able to teach and foster happiness and well-being in their students, they first and foremost need to be happy themselves (McCallum & Price, 2010). Research shows that the effects of positive emotions are evident through increased academic achievement, satisfaction levels, and active participation in school (Valiente et al., 2012) while positive climate in the classroom has been linked to increases in personal resources, such as adaptive coping skills (Reschly et al., 2008) and resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2006). Despite a growing body of research on teacher characteristics that contribute to student academic achievement, less attention has been paid to the predictors of teacher health and well-being (Day & Gu, 2013).

2.2. Early childhood teachers' wellbeing and resilience

Mansfield (2020) and Finánncz et al. (2020) underline that even with some enrichment of the research on teacher's resilience, the wellbeing of teachers has only been researched sporadically and in fragments. Additionally, Cumming, Logan, and Wong (2020) critique the invisibility of research on teachers on wellbeing and resilience and is not acknowledged in policies and curricular documents. The study of Finánncz et al. (2020) is one of the few studies on the topic. The authors conducted a cross-sectional, quantitative, descriptive research to survey the characteristics of professional well-being among Hungarian early childhood educators (kindergarten teachers, teaching assistants, and nurses, *n* = 1010), with a primary

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emphasis on mental health. The measuring tool included questions referring to the teaching career, as well as standardized questionnaires applied in international surveys. Their results showed significant differences in the workplace atmosphere between professionals working in nurseries and kindergartens: the climate indicators of teachers working in nurseries proved to be less favorable. In the sample, burnout was at a low level, but three-quarters of the respondents showed mild depressive symptoms. The value measured on the depression scale showed a positive, close correlation with time spent in the career. A negative and significant correlation was proved between job satisfaction, the social appreciation of workplace activity, and the occurrence of depression. These findings draw attention to the need for interventions.

Regarding policies of wellbeing for early childhood teachers, except for Australia, there appears to be no recorded attention to teacher's wellbeing in policy documents and curricular guides across the globe (Cumming, Logan & Wong, 2020). In a similar trend, it appears that there are few reported studies focusing on early childhood teachers' wellbeing, and furthermore it appears that there is no report for a program aiming to enhance early childhood teachers' wellbeing through the PERMA model of Positive Psychology. Examining teacher wellbeing in general though reveals that early childhood teachers consider themselves as undervalued by society. Their job requires social and emotional competencies and, thus, is challenging and demanding, with direct impact on their health and wellbeing, despite their high intrinsic rewards and the acknowledgment they receive from children's parents (Corr et al., 2015). Other elements that impact ECEs wellbeing are salary, work-related satisfaction, stress and the role of qualifications (Cumming, 2017). Drawing from research so far there is a narrow but important body of research tracing the impact of teachers' wellbeing (as we have defined it) on the teachers' subjective experience of wellbeing and on their students.

A literature review conducted by McCallum, Price, Graham and Morrison (2017) aimed among others to identify the factors that impact teachers' wellbeing. The literature review selected a range of qualitative and quantitative studies (191 studies) conducted between 2001 and 2017, which focused primarily on teacher wellbeing. They also conducted a thematic analysis and found factors that impact teachers wellbeing. The authors note that teachers' wellbeing is impacted by a large number of factors which can be grouped into 3 main categories - individual, relational and external factors -, highlighting the necessity for holistic approaches which include personal strategies for teachers to be effective. The 4 most significant factors that impact teachers' wellbeing are:

- Resilience and self-efficacy: Self-efficacy includes the teachers' judgments about how they can affect their students' outcomes, even in challenging contexts. It consists of personal skills/ competencies and contextual factors (resources, effective teaching, and student support). The lack of perceived support from the school context results in lower academic engagement and in a rise of non-academic behaviors. In contrast, teachers' self-efficacy relates positively both with their instructional behavior and their students' outcomes.
- Social-emotional competence/ emotional intelligence: Emotional Intelligence is also known as the Four-Branch Model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Based on this theory, EI consists of the following four branches: 1) managing emotions so as to attain specific

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goals, 2) understanding emotions,
emotional language, and the signals conveyed by emotions, 3) using emotions to facilitate thinking, 4) perceiving emotions accurately in oneself and others. In the school setting, EI refers to the social and emotional skills, dispositions, and knowledge necessary to contribute productively to the educational setting and to broader society since it contributes to better teacher–student relationships and better classroom climate. Additionally, emotional intelligence refers to an array of emotional competencies such as identifying, processing, and regulating emotions (including stress).

- Subjective experience: Research shows that how teachers perceive and respond to their work difficulties (e.g. fatigue) has an impact on their wellbeing.
- Relational factors: Relationships with parents, children misbehavior, support or lack of it from the leadership and challenging situations with their colleagues. In addition, a negative judgment about their students' behavior may lead to further unpleasant emotions creating a negative pattern leading to burnout. In contrast, teachers who experience positive relationships with the other school members report higher levels of wellbeing.

2.2.1 The approach of positive psychology about teacher's well being

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living, focusing on both individual and societal wellbeing (Peterson, 2008). Positive psychology is a scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behavior, with a focus on strengths instead of weaknesses, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of average people up to "great" instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to "normal" (Peterson et al., 2008; Selignman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The majority of research studies are concentrated on the negative aspects of wellbeing such as burnout and not on fostering wellbeing. This has started to change with the rise of the field of Positive Psychology which focuses on exploring what makes people, communities, and groups of people thrive (Waters and White, 2015). Falecki and Mann (2020) note that teachers who learn practical strategies for wellbeing can have a positive effect on their self-confidence, sense of personal agency, and resilience (Le Cornu, 2013).

2.3. The PERMA Model

At the same time, there has been evidently a rise in the application of positive psychology strategies in professional contexts for improving wellbeing. According to Turner and Thielking (2019) PERMA is one such strategy which was designed for human flourishing and wellbeing. They also state that there is no research examining the effect on teaching practice and on student learning when teachers implement consciously positive psychological strategies from PERMA.

In this project, the PERMA wellbeing model will be utilized as a possible model for teachers' wellbeing since it has strong empirical evidence of effectiveness (Kent et al, 2014; Lai et al., 2018, Tansey et al., 2018). Seligman (2012), the lead researcher in positive psychology defines wellbeing as a construct that includes 5 elements: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA). In the PERMA theory, Seligman notes that each element of wellbeing should meet the following 3 properties: a) Contribution to

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wellbeing, b) Persuasion for personal and intrinsic purposes, and c) Independent definition and measurement.

The five pillars of the PERMA model are equally important individually but in combination with each other, they form the foundation for achieving high levels of wellbeing. These components, with appropriate actions through the educational process, can be nurtured and developed. Also noteworthy is the fact that although the PERMA model, a relatively new model, has demonstrated a high correlation with Diener's (1984) widely used theory of Subjective Well-Being (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdam and Kauffman, 2017), they are not identical in their constituent characteristics.

2.3.1. Positive Emotions

Positive Emotions are the first and key substance for wellbeing according to PERMA, referring to hedonic feelings such as happiness, pleasure, and comfort. Positive emotions are a marker of flourishing (Kaw & Kern, 2015) since they can broaden a person's thinking process and build long-lasting and enduring supporting relationships for the individual. They also have multiple benefits on the physical and mental health of people since evidence shows them to be causally related to social relationships, with positive effects on work (e.g. productivity, reduced absenteeism), physical health, and mental health (e.g. mental resilience, self-confidence, and self-management) (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005).

Within limits, we can increase our positive feeling about the past (e.g., by cultivating gratitude and forgiveness), the present (e.g., by enjoying physical pleasure and positive mood), and about the future (by cultivating hope and optimism). According to Seligman (2011), this component of wellbeing is a subjective variable as it is determined by what the individual thinks and feels. Unlike the other components of wellbeing, this pathway is limited by how much a person can experience positive emotions since positive emotional moods and feelings tend to fall within a range. In addition, traditional conceptions of happiness tend to be based on positive emotion so that the person can begin to release. According to positive psychology, however, experiencing positive emotions is not in itself a positive condition for achieving well-being. There are other pathways to achieving well-being, as described below.

The Broaden-and-Build theory of Positive Emotions was first described by Frederickson (2009), suggesting that positive emotions frequently experienced in everyday life (enjoyment/happiness, joy, interest/anticipation) broaden one's awareness and encourages novel, varied and exploratory thoughts, and actions. Over time, this broadened behavioral repertoire builds skills and resources. Through positive emotions, a person builds resources around them to draw upon and these lead to life satisfaction and increased resilience. This path is much more effective compared to a path aiming to go straight to life satisfaction through positive emotions, a process called a "hedonic treadmill". For example, a person who draws upon resources turns curiosity about the forest into valuable navigation knowledge and aimless physical activity becomes physical excellence. In contrast, negative emotions prompt narrowing of focus, attention, and consequently growth since they trigger a survival response.

2.3.2. Engagement

Engagement refers to the experience of a deep psychological connection for something, e.g. an activity, an organization, or a specific cause. The state where engagement is presented at

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high levels is defined as flow which is often also described as a state of deep and effortless concentration on a task that is automatic and from within reinforcing to the individual. In this state of experience, time awareness may differentiate and positive thoughts and feelings may not be present during a state of 'flow' (Kaw & Kern, 2015). The concept of flow was proposed by Csikszentmihalyi describing a conscious process in which a person is engaged through concentration, absorption, and focus, operating in the highest dynamic capacity, doing something they love (Bowling III, 2010), balancing their skills, actions, and the wider social environment and having a sense of control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Engagement can include the psychological dimension, for example when individuals are absorbed and fully concentrate on an activity (Schaufeli et al. 2006). It can also be cognitive and involve the appreciation of different activities, targeting, and self-regulation (Bandura 2008). Lastly, engagement can be behavioral and involve community participation and citizenship (Appleton et al. 2006) which can unfold at school, in the family, or at work.

Engagement in the workplace has been defined in terms of employee commitment and intellectual absorption and is linked to activities that meet the actual needs of the individual. During the state of engagement, the hormones secreted increase the sense of satisfaction and joy and generally enhance subjective well-being. There is successive evidence that teachers who experience flow and engagement influence their students' experiences, so teachers who are enthusiastic, authentic and inspiring can generate engagement and interest in learning in their students (Bakker, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997).

2.3.3. Relationships

Relationships characterized by warmth and trust refer to the sense of belonging into a group, society and/or community, feeling valued and/or loved for who you are, and being satisfied with your social network. All types of positive relationships are undeniable forces that facilitate individuals to create and maintain high levels of well-being (Boehm & Lyubomirsky 2009; Gordoy et al. 2009). It requires adaptation to the environment in which the individual operates as a unit, whether professional or social in general, to promote positive outcomes. Support that is perceived by other members of the ensemble is valued as more valuable and more therapeutic since positive social relationships/ connections with others can give life and meaning and lead to a greater sense of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014).

Research also shows that performing acts of kindness for others, caring, cooperation and positive social interaction contribute, in addition to enhancing well-being, to better levels of physical health (Eisenberger et al. 2007), mental health (Schwartz et al. 2003), self-esteem (Kuipers et al. 2007) and social integration (Post, 2005). This highlights the importance of the role of teachers in understanding and promoting positive relationships in the classroom environment from an early age, and is extremely important in the case of vulnerable children since the positive effects of relationships on well-being begin in early childhood and continue throughout an individual's life (Umberson & Montez, 2010).

Research also shows that supportive relationships in school, such as those between teachers and students and between peers, increase motivation, active participation, and achievement (Hill, Yu, Barrow & Hattie, 2009; Rooda et al., 2011). However, the quality of relationships in school, especially relationships with children, also affects teachers' well-being (Roffey, 2012).

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In addition, De Nobile (2008) summarizes the importance of a supportive communication for teachers' job satisfaction, both among colleagues and from school administrators (Dinham & Scott, 2000; De Nobile & McCormick, 2008).

An important strategy for promoting positive relationships is through the development of emotional and social intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001) since they have been associated with wellbeing (Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008). Emotional and social intelligence consists of four domains: a) the ability to perceive personal and others' emotions, b) understanding how emotions affect thinking and decision making, c) understanding personal and others' emotions, and d) managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2001). The development of social intelligence includes the cultivation of communication, conflict management, empathy, and listening skills (Elbertson Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). In addition, there are 24 character strengths that have been empirically related to supporting people in creating a stronger personality through developing them (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). The most evident in relationships are relationship development (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008), empathy (Breen, Kashdan, Lenser, & Fincham, 2010), trust, helping behavior (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006), and forgiveness (Bono, McCullough & Root, 2008).

2.3.4. Meaning

Meaning describes the state where a person feels having a higher life purpose and a direction in life. People who report high levels of meaning in their lives tend to also report being happy and satisfied with their life, although having a meaningful life doesn't necessarily lead to a happy life (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013). Synonymous with meaning in life is a sense of direction, feeling connected to something higher, that one's life is valuable and worthwhile, and that there is a purpose to everything one does (Steger, 2012). For example, religion and spirituality provide many people with meaning and faith.

Meaning implies the use of character strengths not only for personal satisfaction but for the fulfillment of a higher purpose that is considered important (Steger 2012). Research has shown that when our lives have meaning and purpose, we are more likely to experience increased levels of well-being, better physical health, and reduced distress (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch 2009; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Steger, 2012). There is also a significant relationship between purpose and psychological resilience. When people have a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, they are better able to handle the adversities they face and experience lower levels of stress and anxiety (Ishida & Okada, 2006; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Park & Baumeister, 2017).

Finally, research on meaning-making has shown that people who are able to make sense of traumatic or adverse experiences adjust better than those who fail to make sense of them (Silver & Updegraff, 2013; Updegraff, Silver, & Holman, 2008). It is worth noting that strategies for achieving meaning in life include acting in accordance with one's values (Waterman, Shwartz, & Conti, 2008) and using one's character strengths for the common good (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005).

2.3.5. Accomplishment

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Accomplishment refers to the combination of objectively meeting one's goals that match the person's personal ambition, inner drive, and personality (Butler & Kern, 2014) through the path of self-actualization. This step includes the ability towards achieving goals, the motivation to persevere despite challenges or failures, and achievement and success in various areas of life (Seligman, 2011).

Abraham Maslow (1943) and Carl Rogers (1947), the fathers of Humanistic Psychology, talked about man's spiritual need for continuous improvement and the quest for self-actualization. Maslow ranked the basic human needs and placed self-actualization, the need to achieve a sense of fulfillment, at the top. He argued that the need for self-actualization is man's strongest motivation (Maslow, 1943). Rogers also spoke of the tendency of the human personality to evolve from a simple to a complex entity, leading to the achievement of self-actualization (Rogers, 1947).

The existence of goals is considered an important motivational factor because they encourage self-management, effective planning, and resource activation (Covington, 2000). The characteristics of effective goals that achieve motivation are represented by the SMART model, according to which goals should be specific, measurable, attractive, realistic, and in a specific time frame (Hassed, 2008) and lead to even higher motivation especially if they are self-determined (Sheldon & Elliot,1999). There is considerable evidence that working towards defined goals is important for both well-being and success (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). People pursue success and experience a sense of self-actualization in a variety of areas, including the workplace, sports, games, and hobbies.

These five elements of Seligman's PERMA model delineate a set that functions as a tool aimed at transferring the theoretical background of Positive Psychology to a practical level, leading to the pursuit and achievement of well-being. There is much empirical evidence confirming the effectiveness of the PERMA well-being model (Kern et al., 2014; Lai et al., 2018; Tansey et al., 2018), which could be a potentially useful model aimed at enhancing teachers' well-being. As a tool in the hands of teachers, the PERMA model can act as a guide for both their own personal happiness and effectiveness in implementing it within their work.

2.4. Positive psychology interventions for teachers wellbeing

Shankland and Rosset in 2016 published a review aiming to present and review Brief Positive Psychology Interventions (BPPIs) to encourage the involvement in such interventions at schools. They presented 4 sections based on research in positive psychology, a) mindfulness, b) gratitude, c) character strengths, and d) positive relationships along with examples of previous successful practices and implementations. The authors posit that research studies looking into the effects of positive psychology interventions (PPIs) implemented in classrooms have yielded promising results on students' well-being and academic outcomes, school climate, and teacher well-being. However, the relatively high levels of commitment required from school administrators and teachers may result in many teachers dismissing them as too complicated to implement on a whole-school basis.

In addition, Dreer (2020) in his article describes that even though there is increasing evidence that shows the effectiveness of BPPIs for teachers, the existing studies have significant limitations such as small sample sizes and design limitations. Dreer (2020) documents a placebo-control field experiment that tested the effects of an online-based BPPIs program in

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which 309 German school teachers participated in 3 surveys (pre-, post-intervention, and follow-up). The intervention consisted of a series of 6 previously established BPPIs. The duration was 2 weeks and the post-intervention and follow-up were conducted with a two-week interval. The results show the effects of the intervention lasting for two weeks in the post-intervention survey which increased job satisfaction and teacher engagement. Long-term decreases were observed in the emotional exhaustion of teachers but both effects were of small size. Noteworthy, there were no significant mean changes under the placebo conditions.

2.5. PERMA interventions in schools to promote teachers' wellbeing

The paper of Turner and Thielking (2019), reports a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore a literature gap on the subjective experience of teachers, specifically on how consciously using strategies of positive psychology have affected their teaching practice and student learning. The authors implemented 3 in-depth interviews with 5 teacher participants. A first interview was conducted for screening (teachers shouldn't have knowledge of positive psychology strategies). The second interview was focused on teachers describing how they implement strategies that fall into the four PERMA strategies (character strengths, finding meaning, offering social support, and looking for positive aspects). Then, a 15-day implementation followed at work with self-observation, reflection, and search for more opportunities to apply them. The third interview acted as a post-intervention assessment.

Findings have shown impacts in both teaching practice and student learning, providing support for more research focusing on the relationship of teachers using positive strategies, teacher's wellbeing, teaching practice along with student learning. The results reported on teacher-student relationships using positive strategies where that teachers spend more one-on-one time with their students which led to better relationships and a better understanding of them, looking more at the positive attributes of their students, giving them more positive feedback, and allowing them more breaks and time to finish their work as an effort to meet their needs.

About teachers' wellbeing, they stated that they felt the classroom as a partnership and their lessons were deeper, more meaningful, engaging, and enjoyable. About the students, the teachers reported noticing more confidence in them, their work improved, they worked more autonomously, they took more initiatives in their learning, they were more independent, and surprised their teachers with their work. Students also became calmer, engaged, and completed more work. These findings may be applicable in other similar contexts, on a national and/ or international level (Turner & Thielking, 2019).

Charalambous, Stalikas, and Vrasidas (2021) present a 2-year pilot intervention implemented in Cyprus based on the PERMA model to promote teachers' wellbeing. In year-1 a series of 12 sessions (duration of each session = 80 minutes) was implemented in 3 primary schools to the teachers and school staff (n = 27). The authors used the PERMA Profiler measurement and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD Risc). The results showed a statistically significant increase in wellbeing and resilience. In year-2, a shorter version of 5 sessions with a longer duration (session time = 2,5 hours) was implemented with results showing both a statistically significant decrease of anxiety and an increase in wellbeing. Thus, based on these findings

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and the current scientific body of knowledge, implementing the PERMA model to promote teacher's wellbeing to ECEs is promising.

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Part 3. Children's socio-emotional support and the SWPBS

School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS), is an implementation framework for the entire school system that efficiently promotes social and behavioral skills for students and teachers. SWPBS, which is also known as "Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports" (PBIS), is not just a specific model, intervention, curriculum or teaching program, as it aims towards systemic change and school climate reform (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Similar terms are the "Program-Wide Positive Behavior Support" (PW-PBS), which refers to changes on all levels of a preschool program across an area larger than a school (Fox, Jack, & Broyles, 2005), and the "Response to Intervention" (RTI) which refers to a system monitoring the students' progress and take instructional decisions based on this progress (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The main principle of SWPBS is to enhance positive behavior through the reduction of challenging behaviors by increasing expected and appropriate behaviors. The strategies for increasing the manifestation of positive behaviors are achieved through proactive support of social skills, provision of positive consequences (reinforcements) and teaching and modeling desirable social behaviors. Such strategies are based on a pedagogical philosophy shared by all school members and derived from the particular needs of each school. Prominent aspects of this framework is establishing all school decisions on systematic data gathering and on implementation of evidence-based practices (Fox et al., 2005). A number of studies have shown that school-wide positive behavior support interventions are effective to promote prosocial skills and emotional regulation, reduce bully/victim and disruptive behavior problems in schools, improved school climate, decreased acting out and anger, positive effects on academic self-esteem and sense of efficacy (e.g., Bloomquist & Schnell, 2005, Bradshaw et al., 2009, 2012). Some of the most prominent studies implemented in early childhood settings or studies that included kindergarten as part of the elementary school are presented below to document further the value of SW-PBS framework as an effective intervention framework for enhancing positive behavior of preschoolers and improving school climate.

3.1. Research studies of Positive Behavior Support effects on early childhood settings

In a recent study Lau, Moore and Anderson (2019), highlight the need for educators to state the increased behavioral and emotional difficulties of preschool children in Singapore; authors also emphasize on the detection of problems in early years (and the prevention of academic failure in adolescence and adulthood) through practices such as Program-Wide Positive Behavior Support (PW-PBS). More specifically, the purpose of this research study was threefold: a) to explore the PW-PBS practices used by teachers, b) to evaluate disruptive behavior, and the level of academic engagement, and c) to explore possible relationships between disruptive behavior and teachers' use of praise and reprimands. Participants were 32 teachers and 428 preschool children from four kindergartens and five care centers run by two operators responsible for preschool age. All - but one - of the teachers were women (19 from kindergartens and the rest from care centers), with the majority having less than five

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years of teaching experience. Data collection was based on observation. In particular, the following were utilized: 1. Classroom Ecology Checklist (Consultation Version, Reinke et al., 2011) that consists of 25 items of which 19 were exploited and represent the following areas: classroom structure, behavioral expectations, instructional management, interacting positively, and responding to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. With two exceptions (teacher actively teaching classroom rules and amount of class time allocated to academic instruction) data were obtained through direct observation. 2. The Classroom Check-Up 10-Minute Classroom Observation Form (Reinke et al., 2011) which records the number of opportunities to respond (OTRs) provided by the teacher to a student or group of students, correct academic responses from students, teacher use of general praise, behavior-specific praise, explicit reprimands, harsh reprimands, and student disruptive behaviors, during a 10-min academic instruction period and 3. The Classroom Check-Up 5-Minute Academic Engagement Observation Form (Reinke et al., 2011) which measures the amount of time the students in the classrooms are engaged over a 5-min period during an academic instruction period. Observations for each classroom were carried out on four separate days over 2 weeks during large group academic instruction time and each observation lasted between 30 and 40 min. With the Classroom Ecology Checklist researchers determined the extent to which teachers were using PW-PBS class-wide practices. This was also followed by addressing the behaviors on the CCU 10-Minute Observation Form and the level of academic engagement, as well as the correlation between disruptive behavior and praises/reprimands. Results revealed that some practices of the PW-PBS were apparent, such as teaching of rules and expectations to children, effective error corrections and academic instructions; one third of teachers did not provide children with at least OTRs per min. Moreover, there were high rates of disruptive behavior, which was correlated with high rates of reprimands. One third of classrooms had low academic engagement levels, and also praise was low. It is worth noticing that none of the teachers had a model for documenting and rewarding positive behavior, or to evaluate behavioral violations. In sum, teachers seem to need more training, feedback and coaching in order to be more sufficient. PW-PBS was not systematically implemented, however teachers had gained some general knowledge about PW-PBS and the practices it uses. In sum, preschools in Singapore appear to have benefited from the implementation of the PW-PBS, however it would be important to further empower teachers with relevant training to implement and benefit systematically from these practices, as many key practices were not apparent.

In another study, Floress and Jacoby (2017) pointed out that reduction but also prevention of behavior problems can be encountered under the SW-PBIS framework; this could be achieved through targeting in four directions: school, classroom, other environments and students. Teacher can manage the classroom by teaching for example students what appropriate behaviors are and how to demonstrate them, by using praise to improve student behavior, by utilizing tools that are in line with SW-PBIS standards (e.g. Good Behavior Game, Caught Being Good Game, The Level System, The Caterpillar Game). The purpose of the present article was to implement the Caterpillar Game and value and detect possible reduction of disruptive behaviors and possible increase in teachers' praise. Participants were three teachers and the students in their classroom from three different schools in the Midwest. The Classroom 1 had 18 students from 7-9 years (second grade), the Classroom 2 had 9 students with special educational needs from 4-6 years (preschool) and in the Classroom 3 there were 22 kindergarten students, 5-6 years (kindergarten). Material for the teacher included 1. The

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Caterpillar game, 2. Reward cards and 3.
Teacher satisfaction measure (Floress, Boyle, & Hailemariam, 2017) which included 15 items and two additional questions. Material for the observer included: 1. The adapted edition of the School Observation Coding System (Jacobs et al., 2000), in order to measure the disruptive behaviors in 10 observational minutes, 2. The Teacher behavior Observation Form, which measured the BSP in 10 minutes and 3. The Treatment Integrity Form, relating to the implementation of the Caterpillar Game. Teachers' training took place before or after the school program (from researcher); implementation of the Caterpillar Game and observations in the classroom (disruptive behaviors/teachers' praise) were enrolled during the school process (from researcher and four assistants). In the baseline data collection phase teachers were suggested to use their typical strategies in order to manage their classroom. Afterwards, each teacher was trained in her classroom by using five steps: goals of intervention, instructions for praise, teaching acceptable behavior, utilization of the Caterpillar Game and implementation of reward activity. The intervention phase followed and the researcher observed and provided feedback to the teachers. A maintenance two to four weeks phase took place, during which the researcher provided no longer support.
Results indicated that The Caterpillar Game is an effective tool for reducing disruptive behavior and increasing teachers' BSP, especially for teachers who work under the SW-PBIS framework and in different settings (preschool, kindergarten, second grade/general and special education classrooms). Moreover, the Caterpillar Game showed teachers' satisfaction and its utilization also after the maintenance phase. With the Caterpillar Game disruptive behavior decreased and specific praise of teachers increased and this study supports further the existing studies regarding the success of the Caterpillar Game as a tool for effective classroom management and teachers' satisfaction.
Steed, Pomerleau, Muscott and Rohde (2013) presented the findings from a three years' program-wide positive behavioral intervention and support in three rural inclusive preschool programs in the northeast. Some of the main targets were the building of trustful relationships between all parties, designing problem solving and documentation procedures, leadership from consultants, observed teachers implementing strategies, feedback and guidance to strengthen all parties (children, teachers, administrators). Participants were teachers, administrators and children from three rural inclusive preschool programs (Children Unlimited, Newport Community Preschool and Timberlane Learning Center). Regarding the first one, it included 48 children with and without disabilities and 22 personnel; the second one included 40 children with and without disabilities and 10 personnel and the last one 72 children (3 classrooms with children with disabilities and 1 with and without disabilities) and 20 personnel. The three preschool rural programs were involved in a three-year implementation. Three measures were used to evaluate implementation of PBIS in each program: 1. The Preschool-wide Evaluation Tool (Steed, Pomerleau, & Horner, 2012) which is a research-validated instrument that is designed to evaluate PBIS implementation in early childhood programs. 2. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System Pre-K (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2007) is an evidence-based observational instrument that assesses classroom quality in preschool classrooms and 3. Response to Intervention Preschool Leadership Team Checklist (Rohde & Pomerleau, 2010) which is a 42-item progress monitoring and action-planning tool that measures program-wide PBIS and evidence-based emergent literacy strategies. Implementation included on-site training, technical assistance, and coaching

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support in universal tier PBIS from two consultants and participating preschools were also involved in a Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative.

Results indicated that PreSET scores increased for all subscales (except Program Support) and also in Class Pre-K scores increased in subscales during the 3 years; regarding Rtl-Plt scores increased (except Establishment of the Commitment). Regarding universal PBIS there were greater differences between the first two years. Teachers improved during the three -year PBIS practices and followed a sustained use of them.

An early study by Hemmeter, Fox and Broyles (2007) presented preliminary indications of evidence from the implementation of a program-wide model of positive behavior support involving 14 early childhood centers for 5 years in the rural Southeast Kansas Head Start (SEK-CAP). The program under study was directed by a leadership team and a University-based consultant who developed the model, provided resources and support to teachers and classrooms, and conducted monitoring and evaluation. The SWPBS model implemented in a variety of early childhood settings (i.e. public schools, Head Start, child care, etc.) that served children with challenging behaviors or emotional problems and it was based on a three-tier approach for prevention (primary and secondary practices) and individualized interventions (tertiary strategies). All staff were extensively trained and agreed to adhere and promote the established program-wide behavior expectations. The leadership team facilitated the process through support and collaborative work when needed (i.e. persistent challenging behaviors). The study summarized findings from focus group discussions conducted during the third implementation year with 7 lead teachers and 6 teaching assistants from all centers. Emergent themes pointed to certain program components that were considered effective (owning the program, analyzing behavior, developing program culture, reforming teaching, supporting families). Study authors emphasize critical factors for effective program implementation: strong and effective leadership as well as knowledgeable and experienced consulting are essential. Special guidance should also be provided when needed (i.e., by mental health professionals/special educators). Positive support and feedback is necessary not only to children but also to adults as they work with children with challenging behavior. Finally, it requires a considerable amount of time to fully develop and implement a PBS program.

Jolstead, Caldarella, Hansen, Korth, Williams and Kamps (2017) investigated for first time the effectiveness of a Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT) (Wills et al., 2010) multi-tiered intervention implemented in preschool classrooms using Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) practices. The intervention was the Tier 1 portion of CW-FIT, which consisted of teaching social skills through repetition, discussion, and role plays to all children and utilizing a group contingency whereby children earned points as teams to earn rewards. The study was conducted in two Title I elementary schools in suburban Utah involving 5 preschool teachers and 55 preschoolers (4:3-4:9 months) from low SES backgrounds. A single-subject delayed multiple baseline design with embedded withdrawals that lasted 1-2 weeks was used to evaluate the impact of the program. After collecting baseline data teachers were individually trained and then coached by the study authors for 1-2 weeks until they were able to implement the program independently. During the withdrawal phase, teachers stopped reviewing the CW-FIT social skills taught to students and returned to their baseline classroom management procedures. Study findings supported program effectiveness for improving behaviors of preschool teachers and children indicating

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that a) preschool teachers were able to implement CW-FIT Tier 1 with a high level of fidelity, b) praise statements generally increased, though the number of reprimands remained fairly constant across study phases, c) on-task classroom behavior increased when CW-FIT Tier 1 was implemented, and d) teachers and children reacted positively to the intervention.

Finally, a similar investigation by Mahon, Gunning, Holloway & Lydon, (2020) extended the previous findings by examining the effectiveness of Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT) (Wills et al., 2010) within Irish preschool settings. Specifically, this study utilized a group functional assessment (GFA) pre-intervention, identifying reinforcers through preference assessment and gathering data on the acquisition of the social skills and on the generalization of the effects of CW-FIT Tier 1. The study was conducted in three community preschool classrooms, located within urban areas of low socioeconomic status using a multiple baseline design across groups. All teachers participated in individual Behavioral Skills Training and were provided with scripted lessons of the social skills direct instruction comprising four steps and a scripted procedure for the group contingency. Functionally equivalent social skills for each group were identified, from the GFA. Then, teachers delivered social skills instruction to the children through 10-min scripted lessons using Direct Instruction. Lessons included definitions of each skill and accompanying cues/hand gestures for each skill, modeling, role-plays, and feedback. Visual aids in poster boards and booster sessions were also included to ensure maintenance of skills taught. Function-based CW-FIT was found to be effective in reducing class wide problem behavior and increasing preschool children's on-task behavior and the use of appropriate social skills. However, group-wide levels of social skills were variable and did not generalize, which indicates the children's behavior may have been under the control of the group contingency.

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Part 4. An overview of ECEC in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania

In the following sections, we provide an overview of the ECEC systems and workforce in the four participating countries in the current project: Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania. The four countries share several similarities, but there are also specificities important to acknowledge. As it will be detailed, Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal have been characterized as split systems, as the ECEC system is organized differently for children under and above 3/4. Differences appear in several areas, namely, the offer of separate settings for each age group, different ministries responsible for younger and older children, and the existence of educational guidelines only for the group of older children. However, the three countries require teachers to be highly qualified across the entire ECEC phase, which according to the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019) report, places them as "somewhat mixed". In contrast, in Romania, the ECEC system is considered mid-way, as a single ministry is responsible for the entire phase of ECEC, and education guidelines apply to all settings.

4.1. ECEC system features in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania

A brief overview of the main characteristics of each country's ECEC system is presented in Table 1. Next, a more detailed description is provided on topics such as jurisdiction, system and policy integration, affordability, place guarantee, educational guidelines, and external evaluation of ECEC settings.

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Table 1. Selected Features of the ECEC Systems of Participating Countries.

Structural features	Cyprus	Greece	Portugal	Romania
Jurisdiction	Education authority only for children aged 3 and over	Education authority only for children aged 4 and over	Education authority only for children aged 3 and over	Education authority for the whole age range
Top-level authority	Ministry of Education and Culture	Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (age 4-6)	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education
Degree of system and policy integration	Somewhat split	Somewhat split	Somewhat split	Mid-way
Starting age of ECEC free of charge	4.8 (26h)	4 (25-50h)	3 (25h)	0.3 (40h)
Compulsory/legal entitlement Age a place in ECEC is guaranteed	Compulsory 4.8	Compulsory age 4	Entitlement 4	No guaranteed places
Weekly ECEC hours free of charge	26 (or 35 x 40 min)	25	25	-
Average number of weekly hours in ECEC for children aged > 3	32.8 hours	25.6 hours	38.5 hours	23.3 hours
Participation rate in ECEC aged 3 and over	86.5%	65.3%	90.9%	82.6%
Participation rate in ECEC aged 4 and over	92%	81.5%	94.2%	89.6%
Educational Guidelines (age groups)	> 3	>4 (National curriculum)	>3	Integrated guidelines for entire ECEC

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Focus on transition to primary school	Mix of sites	Mix of sites	Last year of ECEC on a separate site	Mix of sites
Maximum group size in classrooms serving for children for children aged > 3	25	25	25	20
Maximum child-adult ratio in classrooms for children aged > 3	25	13-25	13	20
Focus of external evaluations for settings serving children aged > 3	Structural features	No external evaluation	Structural and process features	Structural and process features

Note. Based on European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019).

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4.1.1. Jurisdiction and top-level authority

In Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal, for children aged 3 and over, the authority responsible for education is responsible for ECEC provision, while in Romania, the authority in charge of education has the main responsibility for all centre-based ECEC provision (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

More specifically, in Cyprus, ECEC is offered from birth to age 6 years and a half (MoECSY, 2021). Two ministries are responsible for the education of children, according to their age: a) the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLSI, 2014) is responsible for the infant/child care centers (public, community, and private) serving children under the age of three, under the 1196 Law on Centers for the Protection and Occupation of Children in Cyprus and following Article 52 of Cyprus Constitution (N.2(|)/96); b) the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MoOECSY, 2021) is responsible for the infant/child care centers (nipiagogeia) for children from the age of 3 up to the age of 4.7 years-old (public, community, and private schools). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MoOECSY, 2021) is also responsible for pre-primary education (starting at the age of 4.8 until 6 years old), which is provided in kindergarten schools (prodimotiki) with compulsory attendance. All three types of pre-primary schools function on a voluntary basis as all-day schools.

In Greece, mainly care services are provided to children from the age of 2 months up to the age of 4 years old in infant/child care centers (paidikoi stathmoi). On the other hand, mainly education services are provided to older children (starting at the age of 4 up to the age of 6 years old) in kindergarten schools (nipiagogeia), which are integrated with the Greek primary educational system with compulsory attendance. More specifically, the infant/child care centers (ICCCs) fall under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Eurydice, 2021). Enrollment and attendance in ICCCs are not mandatory and children's care programs are focused mainly on their social development. Children aged 4-6 years attend kindergarten schools in half- and all-day classrooms, which constitute the first primary grade of the Greek educational system and operate under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Enrollment and attendance in kindergartens are mandatory for both years (Eurydice, 2021; Oikonomidis, 2014). Local agencies, mainly municipalities, have a more active presence concerning ICCCs, which operate under their supervision, by hiring staff and receiving tuition fees from the children's parents for the nutrition services they provide. As for the Kindergartens, the municipalities are responsible for the construction, and maintenance of the buildings and for their energy supplies to provide heating.

In Portugal, similarly to the two previous countries, for children up to three years old ECEC is not part of the education system and is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. Children from 3 years old up to the age of compulsory schooling (six years old) attend pre-primary education, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

Early education in Romania consists of ante-preschool level (3 months - 3 years) and preschool level (3 years - 6 years), according to the National Education Law no.1/2011 (art.23, alin. 1).

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Early education can take place in nurseries,
kindergartens, and day centers, state or private, according to the same educational content and the same national standards.

The Romanian system of early childhood is multisectoral, as follows (Ciolan et al., 2017):

- nurseries/ crèches and children's centers for children up to 3 years old. These are under the jurisdiction of different ministries: the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice, and the Ministry of Public Health. Nurseries are organized as follows: junior group (0-1 years), middle group (1-2 years), and senior group (2-3 years).
- kindergartens for children aged between 3 and 6 years fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education and are part of the pre-university education system. Kindergartens are organized in the same way as nurseries, in three groups: the junior group (3-4 years), the middle group (4-5 years), and the senior group (5-6 years). Kindergartens can have a normal, extended, or weekly schedule (Law no.1/2011, art.27, alin. 1).

4.1.2. Degree of system and policy integration

In Greece, Cyprus, and Portugal, educational guidelines are not available in settings for younger children (Greece <4), but core practitioners must be highly qualified across the entire ECEC phase. In the three countries, centre-based ECEC is provided in two separate types of age-dependent settings, although in Portugal and Greece, in the private sector, unitary settings also exist.

Romania has separate settings for the different age groups, but the governance of the entire ECEC phase falls under a single authority. However, highly qualified core practitioners (at ISCED level 6) are not employed across the entire phase.

4.1.3. Affordability

In Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal, there is a large discrepancy in the affordability of settings for children under 3/4 years-old and older children and the fees are not regulated. In Cyprus, in 2018/19, 23% of children between the ages of 3 years and 4 years and 8 months attended self-financing private kindergartens (drawing their funds from private sources, usually from enrolment fees/tuition charges). Pre-primary classes (prodimotiki) for children of 4 years and 8 months is a publicly funded free-of-charge service and compulsory. According to MoECSY (2021), there are three types of private pre-primary schools in Cyprus: a) the schools of “the same type”, which follow the curriculum of public Pre-Primary Schools, b) schools of a “similar type”, which follow at least ⅔ of public Pre-Primary Schools curriculum and c) schools of a “different type”, which are the schools who don’t fall into the other two categories. In Cyprus, local authorities establish local nurseries and pre-primary schools to cover the needs of their community. Community pre-primary schools are considered private but are funded annually by the Government and are under the MoECSY educationally. The local authorities have the responsibility of coordination, usually in the form of leading the School Council (MoECSY, 2021; Eurydice, 2020).

In Greece, the private self-financing sector is significant especially for children aged under 4. Settings can be public-owned by the state and local municipalities or they can be privately

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owned by individuals (Eurydice, 2021). For
children above 4 years-old, kindergartens are mainly public and free of charge, while there are also private kindergartens, which require fees (Eleftherakis & Oikonomidis, 2015). Ninety three percent of the kindergartens are public, while 7% are private (ELSTAT, 2011).

Similarly, in Portugal, in 2016, 17.5% of children aged under 3 and 16.9% of children aged 3 and over attended private self-financing settings (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017) .

In Romania, the private self-financing sector is of minor importance. No fees are charged and there is funding for free full-time places. Nevertheless, the number of private self-financing settings is increasing, from 387 institutions in 2017 to 495 in 2021.

4.1.4. Place guarantee

In Greece and Cyprus, ECEC attendance is compulsory from age 4 and age 4.8 respectively. The Council of Ministers (2018) decision No. 84.078 established the compulsory age for pre-primary education at the age of 4 years and 8 months old and the compulsory pre-primary class at the age of 5. For younger children, attending school is optional and the decision relies on the parents to choose the type of school their child will attend (public, community, or private). In Portugal, the legal entitlement starts at age 4, which means that, even though it is not compulsory, a free of charge teaching component of 25 hours a week must be guaranteed for all children of 4- and 5-years olds. Romania has no legal framework to ensure a place in ECEC (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

In Greece, 25 weekly hours are compulsory for 4-6-year-olds. There is an optional all-day programme with an extended timetable until late afternoon. Moreover, classes for children arriving before the start of regular activities are available (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). In Cyprus, all-day optional public pre-primary schools function on a voluntary basis from October until May with four daily additional afternoon periods for rest, play and activities, five times a week until 3:05 or 4:00 p.m. The morning curriculum and school subjects remain the same according to the regulations of public pre-primary schools (Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018).

During the last year before the start of primary education, demand is met in Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal but demand is higher than supply in Romania (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

In Romania, since the fall of 2020, the last year of kindergarten/or the senior group has become mandatory, to ensure the inclusion of all children aged 5 (Law no.1/2011, art. 16, alin. 1). In public kindergartens, the enrollment of children is done within the available places, as a result of the approval of the number of places provided by the schooling plan, respecting the general access criteria from the legislation in force. Public spending on education is insufficient to cover the needs of this sector (European Commission, 2019). In private education, the enrollment of children in kindergarten is done within the available places of the educational units. The selection procedure of the children to be enrolled in the private educational units is carried out on the basis of non-discriminatory criteria, established by the educational unit and made public to the beneficiaries of education.

4.1.5. Educational guidelines

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In Portugal, Cyprus, and Greece, educational curriculum guidelines apply only to settings for children aged 3/4 and over, whereas in Romania, educational objectives are set for the whole age range (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

In Greece, the curriculum of kindergartens is national and determined by the state and is focused mainly on the academic development of children. For children aged under 4 years who attend ICCCs, there is no nationally established curriculum or educational guidelines for children and the municipalities have the authority to shape educational guidelines. In Portugal, the top-level educational guidelines serve as a basis for the setting to develop more detailed guidance plans. ECEC settings must draw up their pedagogical plan. In Romania, the most recent national curriculum for early childhood education was adopted in 2019 (Annex to the Order the Minister of National Education no. 4694/2.08.2019). The document set the pedagogical framework for the holistic development of children from 0 to 6 years. According to this document, coherent early childhood education and care is the foundation of all education and training systems. Coherent early education presupposes the effective balance between socio-emotional aspects, learning, and well-being. The fundamental values assumed in the official curriculum state the student-centered education process, children's rights, active learning, holistic and intercultural approach, equity, and non-discrimination.

The educational guidelines from the four countries share similarities, namely an emphasis on learning through play, including both free and structured play, and an emphasis on adults listening to children and encouraging their thinking. In terms of learning areas, educational guidelines from all the participating countries include areas such as civic and democratic competencies, cooperation skills, and emotional, personal, and social development.

4.1.6. Focus of external evaluations

In all participating countries – Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania –, there are top-level regulations that set a framework for external evaluations of ECEC settings, which can focus on structural and/or process quality features of centre-based ECEC settings. External evaluations that focus on structural quality usually check for compliance regarding guidelines about staff qualifications, number of children per group and per staff member, as well as on safety orientations. When evaluations consider process quality, the focus is also on the activities and experiences children have in the ECEC setting and on the quality of interactions between children and between staff and children (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

For older children, Cyprus focuses external evaluations of ECEC settings on structural quality while Portugal and Romania focus not only on structural but also process quality. Greece does not have an external evaluation of ECEC settings in place for children in this age range, but only for younger children (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

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4.2. ECEC workforce features in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, and Romania

Regarding the ECEC workforce, Table 2 shows a summary of each country's main characteristics. Next, a brief overview of ECEC teacher's initial education, continuous professional development (CPD), and career progression is presented.

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Table 2. Selected Features of the ECEC Workforce of Participating Countries

Workforce features	Cyprus	Greece	Portugal	Romania
Minimum qualification requirement for teachers	Bachelor (for both < 3 & > 3)	Bachelor (for both < 4 & > 4)	Master (for both < 3 & > 3)	Bachelor /Upper secondary vocational (for both < 3 & > 3)
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	Mandatory for all staff > 3	Mandatory for all staff	Mandatory for core practitioners > 3	Mandatory for all staff for both < and > 3
Assistants	No Assistants	>4: No assistants <4: ISCED 4 post-secondary non-tertiary education qualification	ISCED 3 qualification level (do not need to be related to education)	No Assistants

Note. Based on European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019).

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4.2.1. Initial education

Regarding core practitioners, the minimum is at Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) in Greece and Cyprus, while it is at Master's level (ISCED 7) in Portugal. Romania has a lower qualification requirement.

In Greece, although core practitioners in both age groups are required to hold a four-year University level programme, the programmes are delivered by different academic departments and thus the paths of training preparation are different, in terms of content, length, and types of work-based learning.

4.2.2. Continuous professional development (CPD)

In Cyprus and Greece CPD is mandatory for all staff, whereas in Portugal, CPD is mandatory only for teachers. In Romania, where no assistants are available in ECEC settings, the minimum duration of CPD for core practitioners is different for those working in settings for younger children (90 hours per year) from those working with older children (90 ECTS over five years).

4.2.3. Career progression

In Greece and Cyprus, career progression opportunities are available in the sense that teachers can start with a specialist degree and progress by taking a master's and doctoral degree. However, there is no clear progression route, since there is only one entry point in the career, and there is not a previously defined career path with different entry points at different career levels.

In Portugal, preschool teachers' progression in the public system is regulated in a decree-law that establishes that teachers can move on in their career based on indicators such as length of service, performance assessment, and CPD investment. Also, teachers' progression is dependent upon available posts in public settings. However, the career progression system has been stagnated since 2011 as a result of austerity measures. Teachers' progression in ECEC private settings depends on the employers' policies and is not regulated as for the public sector (Araújo, 2018).

In Romania, teachers can accumulate credits, which impacts their salaries and career advancement. This is a mandatory requirement in the Romanian educational system at all levels. Teachers have to accumulate these credits to prove their continuous professional development, but they contribute to their salaries or career advancement only if they decide to apply for a "merit award" which is a sort of a competition for teachers. Teachers can win this "award" (an extra 25% of the initial salary) if they are engaged in a lot of activities/ courses and if they have great results with their pupils.

According to ET (2020), in Greece, Portugal, and Romania, salary and entry requirements of teachers in pre-primary are identical to primary and secondary teachers and can increase substantially as teachers gain more experience, but it will depend on several conditions.

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Part 5. Country profiles

EEC teachers' careers and professional development, well-being (e.g. PERMA), and issues relating to schoolwide discipline prevention and children's socio-emotional supports (e.g. SWPBS) differ across the participating countries, as outlined in the following sections.

5.1. Cyprus

5.1.1. Early childhood teachers' careers and professional development

The Cyprus Government Gazette (2018), states that all pre-primary school level teachers in the public sector in Cyprus should hold as a minimum qualification a university degree in pre-primary education. Community and private schools that wish to run under the MoECSY accreditation should align with these qualifications.

The University of Cyprus (2021) and many other private universities offer a bachelor's degree (4 years in full-time attendance) in pre-primary education, which runs under the Department of Education in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Education. Degrees of other Universities are accepted if recognized by the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS, 2021) as equivalent and corresponding to those offered by the University of Cyprus.

In Cyprus there are a total of 273 public, 74 community, and 1 pre-primary schools, reaching a total of 348 pre-primary schools. The total number of teachers is 910, with 801 working in the public sector (MoECSY, 2021). Based on official announcements of the Cyprus Education Service (2021), from 2017 to 2020 there was a total of 30 promotions to vice-principal and a total of 22 promotions to principal in the public pre-primary education sector, showing a minuscule window for a pre-primary teacher to advance their career via a promotion. In many cases, pre-primary teachers are transferred to schools with 1 or 2 teacher positions to undertake the responsibilities of a principal without getting a formal promotion or a salary raise. However, there is a reduction of the teaching hours so the teachers are able to respond to the administrative duties. This role is entitled as "acting headteacher" and once undertaking this role, a pre-primary teacher can be allocated in another school to resume their duties as a pre-primary teacher.

Pre-primary teachers in the public sector in Cyprus are appointed. Until recently they were appointed based on the date of application by an independent body. Since 2018 and through the legislation number 10/1969 (CYLAW, 2021), an opportunity is given for people to be appointed via examination (exams test teaching approach of the specific subject, pedagogy, and Greek language), additional academic qualifications, teaching experience, grade of bachelor's degree, and year of application. The new system of appointment is gradually replacing the old system (MoECSY, 2021).

The ECEC systems and processes in Cyprus are reported to be under development (Bouget et al., 2015; Mills et al., 2013), with preschool programs facing issues, e.g. high number of children in a classroom, minimum emphasis on free play, teachers failing to work towards a holistic approach, etc. (Childhood Education International, 2017). Professionalization of the ECEC sector emerges as a need in the Cypriot educational system, since ECEC professionals, workers and carers have different qualifications, from two- and three-year diplomas to four

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years university degrees, especially those working in the public sector (Childhood Education International, 2017; Rentzou, 2016). The need to improve ECEC services quality on the island of Cyprus emerges and actions taken towards this direction are reported necessary (Peeters et al., 2016 and Rentzou, 2015).

The issue of early childhood teachers' careers and professional development is not officially on the agenda with governmental initiatives, being limited to few actions taken by the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus (2021) such as New/ Revised Curriculum and professional development training on Curriculum implementations. Contrary to governmental actions, a few initiatives on the topic may be found in the private sector, mainly in the form of EU funded actions and activities, e.g. projects, training the trainers programmes, LTTAs and study visits, workshops, conferences, etc.).

Though there are minimal attempts to approach early childhood teacher's well-being in Cyprus, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2018) reports on primary teachers' job satisfaction in Cyprus, and states that about 91% of the teachers in Cyprus express their satisfaction with their jobs and their salaries, with no similar data existing on early childhood teachers in Cyprus.

Although the early years' teachers have the same qualification as other teachers in all levels of education (primary, high school), their work is undervalued. The status of early childhood teachers in Cyprus is low, and their contribution and professionalism are often undervalued (TALIS, 2018).

5.1.2. Early childhood teachers' well-being

There is research in the field of ECEC in Cyprus documenting various aspects including professional development, play, policies, family engagement, and reform (e.g. Loizou, 2009, 2013; Rentzou, 2028, 2021; Tsangaridou, 2017). All pre-school teachers have the opportunity to participate voluntarily at professional development seminars provided free of charge by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI). More specifically, the CPI offers school-based seminars and afternoon seminars for the early years' teachers. There are different options for the teachers regarding school-based seminars namely informative seminars, workshops as well as action research projects.

For example, in February 2019, two Pancyprian conferences were held: a)"Play in preschool: a basic pedagogical principle, a form of learning and key instrument for child development" and b) "teaching music through storytelling: practices for materializing the music curriculum" (the conference was repeated in April 2019 due to high demand from preschool teachers). Pre-primary headteachers and assistant headteachers participated in a training program on topics related to the curriculum for pre-primary education (3-6 years old). In September 2019 pre-school teachers posted in single-teacher schools participated in a full-day training session on topics concerning the pre-school curriculum philosophy as well as school administration issues (CPI, Internal Communication).

In June 2018, a Pancyprian conference addressed to private sector pre-primary teachers was held at the Pedagogical Institute in Nicosia following the conference held in June 2019. The conference covered topics concerning the curriculum for pre-primary education (3-6 years old). The aim of the conference was to inform the participants about the curriculum and its philosophy. During the conference, workshops were organized through which the

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participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with practical ways to apply the basic principles of the curriculum.

Research in the area of positive psychology interventions as it relates to teachers' careers is very limited in Cyprus. Until today, no reported relevant research, intervention studies, successful practices, and policies are documented in Cyprus connecting self-efficacy, burnout levels, and PERMA model and/ or directly or indirectly studying, to support or promote teachers' wellbeing.

The literature is limited to one study implemented by Papanastasiou and Zembylas (2006) in Cyprus on job satisfaction variance among public and private kindergarten school staff (teachers, principals, and vice-principals), with a random sample of 347 kindergarten teachers (48% employed in the public sector and 52% in the private sector). The results show that most early childhood teachers reported becoming a kindergarten teacher was one of their dreams, but teachers from the public sector reported less satisfaction with the way promotion occurs, since this is a process that tends to be solely based on the teachers' years of experience. On the other hand, kindergarten teachers in the private sector are less satisfied with their salary and longer working hours, while they also report having fewer holidays compared to their public school colleagues. Nonetheless, private school kindergarten teachers tend to be more satisfied with their physical working environment (Papanastasiou & Zembylas, 2006).

A relevant initiative currently coordinated by the CPI and the Institute of Development is the Resilient Preschools (Resilience and Wellbeing in Preschool Education to Prevent Emotional, Social and Behavioral Problems). Resilient Preschools is the only ERASMUS+ Key Action 2 project in Cyprus implementing the PERMA Model to create practical material and application guidance for Preschool Teachers to cultivate children's resilience and wellbeing. Through the material created the project aims to develop personal and social awareness in preschools, emotional empowerment, and psychological improvement. In addition, through the concepts and methodologies of Positive Psychology, the project aims to develop preschoolers' creative expression and thinking, prepare them for primary school maximizing their potential for school success, and develop attributes to their personality. However, this promising program is focusing only on children's, and not teachers', wellbeing.

5.1.3. Children's socio-emotional support (SWPBS)

In Cyprus, the implementation of SWPBS is fairly new. During the last decade, there have been several interventions led by various research groups. Two such programs were implemented with the Support of the Erasmus+ funding mechanism of the European Commission. Both programs are examples of successful practices which aim to promote the notion of children's socio-emotional skills in primary schools: a) the ERASMUS+ Key Action 2 project titled "Tackling School Discipline Issues with Positive Behavior Support" (TaSDi-PBS) and b) the ERASMUS+ Key Action 3 Project titled "Building School-Wide Inclusive, Positive and Equitable Learning Environments Through A Systems-Change Approach" (SWPBS). Both projects target primary schools. There is no relevant research nor programs in Cyprus targeting ECEC settings (CARDET, 2021).

TaSDi-PBS examined the feasibility of the SWPBS in 5 countries of the EU (Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Spain, Netherlands). TASDi-PBS is based on the model developed in the United States of America which consists of a three-tiered preventive approach to school violence and

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discipline. The aim of the project was to
implement elements in a culturally responsive manner across elementary schools with emphasis on 3 key aspects: a) training the school-based teams to deliver key elements of SWPBS to school staff and students, b) Produce teacher-training manuals to teach students social expectation in the school settings and managing problematic behaviors, and c) develop a web-based platform to disseminate project activities for effective communication, use and support sustainability among consortium partners and others. The above aims were met through systematic professional development, direct behavioral instruction based on classroom-based assessments, and continuous progress and monitoring of student outcomes and implementation procedures. The project ran through 2016-2018 as a pilot in Cyprus schools. The findings show the very promising potential of applying the SWPBS approach for developing inclusive schools and early prevention (CARDET, 2021).

Building on the TASDi-PBS, the research team at CARDET developed the large-scale policy experiment project, "SWPBS Building School-Wide Inclusive, Positive and Equitable Learning Environments Through A Systems-Change Approach". The project is an ERASMUS+ Key Action 3 Policy Experimentation Program currently being implemented in Cyprus, Finland, Greece, and Romania. The aims of the program were to establish an inclusive non-discriminatory social culture and the necessary socio-emotional and behavioral supports for all children in schools across EU countries (CARDET, 2021).

The project is being implemented from 2018 and it is anticipated to end in 2022 in a total of 100 schools in Europe, with 31 of them in Cyprus. Preliminary results show the strong potential of the framework, and the need of schools and teachers to gain access to tools, resources, and professional development that will support them to better face the challenges of everyday teaching and managing student behaviour. At the same time, the many challenges are documented with regards to the need for systemic reform and ongoing professional development of teachers and school leaders (Vrasidas, et al. 2021).

5.1.4. Adaptation and possible barriers

The literature review documents several issues concerning ECEC on the island of Cyprus. There have been considerable changes in the context of reforming the education system, referring to the appointment of pre-primary teachers via criteria and other qualifications. This is expected to bring a new era in the education system which will be evident in the future. In addition, pre-primary teachers in Cyprus have opportunities to learn through voluntarily participating in seminars and workshops offered by the CPI.

Taking the above into consideration, the Cypriot education system follows a single-level career structure, as defined by the absence of a predetermined career structure that can give the necessary flexibility to the teachers to evolve in different directions. This system is highly supported by teachers' intrinsic values (wishes, talents) and by the school needs. On the other hand, as noted, the risk of these educational systems is the limited variety of roles and responsibilities, which subsequently lead to the absence of formal recognition (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

There is enough space for improvements with regards to a number of practices and contexts. There is a need to fully understand the concepts of education and care together and place emphasis on the early childhood education teachers' professionalism. Background studies

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and continuing professional development
programmes should not only place emphasis on teachers' job satisfaction with regards to salaries but also take into account further teachers' well-being issues. Along with the private sector's relevant actions, governmental teachers' well-being and PERMA model initiatives should be prevalent and teachers should be given the opportunity for continuing professional development programmes that will enhance their knowledge and skills on their well-being.

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5.2. Greece

5.2.1. Early childhood teachers' careers and professional development

Early childhood professionals in Greece are distinguished by the type of the ECEC institution they are working for: a) the infant-toddler pedagogues and care providers (vrefonipiokomoi), which are dealing with infants and toddlers (usually under 4 years old) and b) the kindergarten teachers (nipiagogoi), which are dealing with children over 4 years of age up to 6 years old. ECEC staff working in ICCCs are trained mainly in a four-year higher education programme (as infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers) and in some cases in vocational training centers or vocational high schools (as assistant infant-toddler care takers). According to their training programme they follow a consecutive model of training, which provides a general component of courses in the first 7 semesters (3 years and a half) and follows a professional component by one additional semester of practicum, which takes the form of paid placement in a centre-based day care institution. The expansion of infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers training and their integration into university education in Greece has been completed during the last two years. These university departments belong to Schools of Social Sciences in 3 Universities of Greece. ECEC staff working as teachers in kindergarten schools, are trained in Universities following a 4-year Bachelor programme since 1983. They follow a concurrent model of initial teacher education, which provides at the same time a general component and a professional component accompanied with practicum. These university departments belong to Schools of Education in 9 Universities of Greece. Thus, the training of infant - toddler pedagogues and care providers and kindergarten teachers in Greece differ from each other as regards the academic and professional identity. There are also differences in employment rights, working hours, and salary between these two ECEC staff workers. Both kindergarten teachers and infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers may attend postgraduate studies.

More than 95% of kindergarten teachers and almost all of the infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers in Greece are women. The social status of kindergarten teachers and especially of infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers in Greece is low, as in other countries. Research on kindergarten teachers in Greece showed that although they consider their contribution to the development of their students as very important, they agree that their social status is lower than that of other teachers but higher than that of infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers (Oikonomidis & Eleftherakis 2013). As incentives for their profession, the kindergarten teachers have mainly their love for the children and for the profession, as well as the satisfaction that results from this, and as disincentives the unemployment, the low salary, and the difficult conditions of its practice (Eleftherakis, Oikonomidis et. al., 2018; Eleftherakis & Oikonomidis, 2020).

Professional development opportunities for infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers who hold a university bachelor's degree are to become day-care center directors. Kindergarten teachers have the opportunity to become kindergarten directors or education officers at the local and national levels if they pursue postgraduate studies. Interestingly, directors of day-care centers have more demanding financial and personnel management tasks than the respective managerial tasks for directors in kindergarten schools.

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5.2.2. Early childhood teachers' well-being

Teachers are more prone to burnout, among other professionals who offer social services (Rentzou, 2015). Burnout has been investigated in Greece regarding primary and secondary teachers (e.g., Antoniou, Ploumpi, & Ntalla, 2013; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachaki, 2006; Aventisian-Pagoropoulou, Koubias, & Giavrimis, 2002; Kokkinos 2005, 2006, 2007; Kokkinos & Davazoglou 2006; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou 2005; Kouli, Kourtessis, Tzatsis, Karkaletsi, Skordilis, & Banti, 2015; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001; Panagopoulos, Anastasiou, & Galani, 2014; Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009), as well as special educators (Platsidou 2010; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). There are only a few research efforts regarding burnout in early childhood teachers.

Rentzou (2012) investigated burnout in early childhood teachers and the factors associated with it. In particular, the study aimed to detect whether early childhood educators experience burnout and to what extent, and whether their working conditions are related to it and they are affected by whether their personal and professional needs are met. The research sample was comprised of 108 early childhood teachers (46 teachers from kindergartens). Participants were administered the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) and the Parents and Staff subscale of the Environment Rating Scale Self-assessment Readiness Checklist, to investigate burnout and whether their needs were being met. According to the results of the research, participants experienced more emotional exhaustion and less negative emotions, and feelings of inadequacy. Further analysis between the two scales showed that co-operation with colleagues plays an important role and predicts emotional exhaustion and negative emotions, while this second dimension seems to be predicted by whether or not the supervisor evaluates the teacher's performance. The third dimension of burnout (personal accomplishment) seems to be predicted by the materials, the sources that strengthen the teacher, and the orientation for the new staff.

Tsigilis, Zachopoulou, and Grammatikopoulos (2006) investigated burnout and job satisfaction levels of early childhood teachers working in public and private kindergartens. One of the study purposes was focused on investigating which combinations (if any) of job satisfaction facets were more prominent to early professionals' emotional exhaustion. The sample of the survey consisted of 178 teachers (108 from the public sector) and measures were the Employees Satisfaction Inventory (ESI, Koustelios & Bagiatis, 1997) and the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Results of the study showed that preschool teachers experience moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, with teachers from public kindergartens being more satisfied with their salary and their school supervisors than those in the private sector. In particular, the nature of the work and the conditions in it contributed to the prediction of emotional exhaustion for early childhood teachers in public kindergartens, while the nature of work and the relationship with the school supervisor were important for the emotional exhaustion of teachers in private kindergartens. In fact, job satisfaction was a predictor of emotional exhaustion.

Rentzou's (2015) research on kindergarten teachers (n=46) and child care workers (n=62) attempted to investigate how they experience the syndrome of emotional exhaustion and to detect possible differences between the two groups, but also to search the demographic

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factors that are possibly involved in it.
Participants were administered the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey adapted in Greek (MBI-ES, Kokkinos 2002). In particular, three aspects were explored: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment. Results showed that kindergarten teachers experience slightly higher levels of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment than the other group, and child care workers reported more negative emotions and negative attitudes towards others. It was also found that only reduced job satisfaction and feelings of inadequacy are associated with demographic characteristics, such as age, marital status, and years of professional experience. Early childhood teachers experienced moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and low levels of depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

In their research, Platsidou and Tarasiadou (2010) studied the motives of professional development of early childhood teachers and the factors that affect them, as well as whether these motives predict their job satisfaction. Participants were 167 kindergarten teachers and the measures were the scale of professional motives (Everard & Morris, 1999) and the Job Satisfaction teachers' Scale (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001). Results showed that the main motive for early childhood teachers is personal development (e.g. learning opportunities) followed by job interest, achievement, development, recognition, and responsibility. As regards to job satisfaction, it was found that job interest is the strongest motive across all dimensions of the profession. In addition, it was found, among others, that factors such as age, marital status, and years of experience significantly determine the motive for recognition.

Fotopoulou (2013) examined issues and parameters related to professionalism, professional identity, and professional development of kindergarten and primary education teachers in Greece. The results of this study showed that the parameters of professionalism, professional identity, and professional development are considered as important by both primary school and kindergarten teachers and affect their professional status and their work at school.

Kamtsios and Lolis (2016) studied the burnout of kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers and whether it was related to demographic factors and conditions that may cause stress to teachers (e.g. impending teacher evaluation, disciplinary cases). The sample consisted of 1447 teachers, of which 124 were kindergarten teachers. Participants completed a questionnaire with demographic data, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter,1996), and the Sources of Teachers' Professional Stress Questionnaire (Mouzoura, 2005). Results showed - among others - that teachers experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and moderate or even high levels of depersonalization and low levels of personal accomplishment. Differences in burnout were found concerning demographic characteristics, such as education level, years of service and age of teachers, gender, and marital status. In fact, regarding the educational level there were no differences in terms of emotional exhaustion, but kindergarten teachers showed the highest rates in personal accomplishment and the lowest in depersonalization, while they are distinguished by a higher sense of personal accomplishment among all the teachers.

In addition, several postgraduate theses on burnout and job satisfaction of early childhood teachers were also identified (Karagiamba, 2020; Liakou, 2015; Papantoniou, 2018;

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Sotiropoulou, 2020; Stremmenou, 2019;
Tzanaka, 2016) highlighting a growing interest in this research area.

Regarding the good practices in early childhood education and Greek teachers' perspectives, Gregoriadis and colleagues (2014) developed the Early Change Project. Specifically, they developed a tool covering a variety of areas (Health & Safety, Activities / Play, Interactions, Classroom Management, and Diversity / Inclusion), the 'Good Practices Inventory Form' to collect and use important elements concerning early childhood education. The Early Change Project lasted 30 months and involved academic staff, early childhood teachers, and caregivers from six European countries (including Greece). The purpose of this project was the training of early childhood teachers, the collection and evaluation of observed good practices in the classroom, and their exchange, with the ultimate goal of evaluating the educational context (environment) and professional development of early childhood teachers. The Greek participants were university staff from three different institutes, early childhood teachers, and caregivers from 12 public kindergartens and 8 child care centers. Early childhood teachers were trained in using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-R (ECERS-R). Also, they trained to implement the Good Practices Inventory Form, which is an instrument that was developed for the collection of good practices in early childhood. They were given theoretical support/training, and had the opportunity to get valuable information through their observation in the classroom about the good practices applied. One hundred and twenty-six classes in public kindergartens and early child care centers were visited and evaluated. Thirty-two good practices which reflect the reality in the educational environment were recorded based on the Good Practice Inventory Form manual. Through the Early Change Project, the Greek ECEC professionals improved their skills regarding self-assessment, quality in the classroom, identified good practices that will enhance their teaching effectiveness, and had the opportunity to share and exchange experiences, ideas, practices with early childhood teachers from other European countries (Georgiadis et al., 2014; Gregoriadis, Zachopoulou, & Grammatikopoulos, 2018; Grammatikopoulos, Gregoriadis, & Zachopoulou, 2015).

5.2.3. Children's socio-emotional support (SWPBS)

Children's problems in socio-emotional functioning are attracting considerable interest due to their high incidence in the general school population with important social and educational repercussions. Social-emotional learning has become a major goal in schools as it ensures the positive adjustment and well-being of the school community members and it reduces aggression, bullying, and antisocial behavior.

In Greece, efforts to promote psychosocial competence among public school students from kindergarten to junior high school were materialized during the last two decades through several nation-wide programs developed and coordinated mainly by the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology (CRPSP) based at the University of Athens (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016; Hatzichristou, Adamopoulou, & Lampropoulou, 2014). These programs responded not only to student needs (until very recently there was no provision of mental health services in the Greek public system) but also to the distressing effects of the economic recession that affected the whole Greek population and young children in schools and family settings.

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Initially, a prevention program for the Promotion of Mental Health and Learning (PPMHL)[1] was developed by the CRPSP team aiming at students of three age groups (preschool, primary and secondary education). The first preventive program (PPMHL) was carried out during the years 2006-2009 in 245 public mainstream schools through three distinct projects: a) Development of prevention programs in the school community, b) Linking the future of school psychology conference and the data-based model of alternative school psychological services, and c) Community outreach: provision of alternative services in the community. A large number of teachers (N=557) was involved in program activities that engaged a total of 8815 students. The first project involved the development and wide dissemination of educational materials for school guidance and practice activities tailored to the three distinct student groups (preschool, primary, and secondary education). Program activities tackling negative experiences and adversities in children's lives were implemented on a one-on-one basis following comprehensive psycho-emotional assessment and parental counseling. According to research coordinators, program implementation yielded valuable outcomes for all members of the school community. Especially significant changes were noted in the acknowledgment and expression of unpleasant feelings especially for children with particular sociometric characteristics or from different cultural groups (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, Lykitsakou, & Dimitropoulou, 2010). The second project aimed at training graduate students in school psychology and applying the problem-solving model with proper consultation and supervision through students' internship settings that involved also the participating teachers. Finally, project three initiated several outreach actions involving open seminars for teachers and parents on issues related to children's development, adjustment and well-being, workshops on crisis prevention and intervention, an international symposium, an alumni network, several publications, and social activities (Hatzichristou et al., 2010).

After this prevention program for PPMHL, the CRPSP, in cooperation with the Society for School and Family Consultation and Research, implemented next a series of programs under the title "Connecting For Caring" (C4C): a) the Supporting in Crisis program (2012), b) the E.M.E.I.Σ [Ενδιαφερόμαστε (Care) - Μοιραζόμαστε (Share) - Ενθαρρύνουμε (Encourage) – Ισχυροποιούμαστε (Empower) – Συμμετέχουμε (Participate)] program (2012-2013), and c) the International Program WeCARE (2015-2016) (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016). The series of programs C4C aimed to provide school services with enhanced psychological and behavioral coping strategies, building resilience, and to promote children's wellbeing.

Specifically, the program "ΕΜΕΙΣ'' involved 39 schools in the broader Athens area (125 teachers and 3200 students) succeeding to a nation-wide program "We.C.A.R.E'', that encompassed 79 schools, 128 teachers and 1838 students. The implementation of these programs coincided with the Greek financial crisis and austerity measures that provoked a broader mental health emergency with effects upon the student population (Oikonomou & Tountas, 2011). As it has been pointed out, the main negative outcomes of such crises are most evident on the most vulnerable members of society, such as children, with long term

[1] "Building upon the principles of positive psychology and systemic theory, and incorporating the conceptual framework of social and emotional learning, the program addresses the basic theoretic concepts of social and emotional learning in promoting resilience, well-being, academic achievement and positive climate in the school setting" (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016, pp.107).

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consequences on their micro-level system by affecting their well-being and growth in general (Sigurdsen, Berger, & Heymann, 2011). The existing deficits of the insufficient and non-organized network for providing relevant interventions within the public school system led to continuous and growing problems in schools that were further intensified by the financial crisis. According to relevant literature, however, apart from its negative impact, the economic crisis in Greece constituted also an opportunity for reforming major institutions, such as education, since it may have a significant effect on a country's long-run growth (Meghir, Vayanos, & Vettas, 2010). Goals of the program "ΕΜΕΙΣ'' were the promotion of a positive climate in school communities, the development of resilience, and the enhancement of internal strengths, motivation, and skills. To achieve these goals, a wide array of successful practices were employed not only at the individual student and classroom levels, but also at the school unit level. Such practices included specialized teacher training seminars, structured classroom activities, use of educational materials and booklets, promotion of school networking through an electronic platform, and needs assessment and evaluation of program effectiveness (Hatzichristou, Lianos & Lampropoulou, 2017). Thematic units that were presented, explored and implemented through experiential activities in the classrooms every week, included: (a) practical model of resilience and positive school climate promotion identifying values and goal setting, (b) crisis management in the school community, (c) coping with stress, (d) social skills, conflict resolution, and bullying, and (e) teachers' burnout (Hatzichristou, Lianos, & Lampropoulou, 2017).

Findings from "ΕΜΕΙΣ'' program evaluation revealed that the most vulnerable students gained the most benefits from the intervention. Students expressing positive outcomes showed significant improvements in their ability to cope with their difficult emotions, handling stress, and achieving personal objectives set at the beginning of the program. Similar positive outcomes were found for students with poor academic achievement who exhibited improvement in their self-confidence and an increase in group participation. Also, medium performing students experienced improvements in coping with their difficult emotions and achieving their goals. Finally, significant differences were observed in relation to important dimensions of the school climate while teachers recognized the value of the "ΕΜΕΙΣ'' program by expressing increased feelings of perceived support and professional effectiveness (Hatzichristou et al., 2017).

The international program "We.C.A.R.E'' was an online classroom intervention program aiming to enhance the students' psychological wellbeing, build resilience, foster team spirit, and create a global support network of teachers, school psychologists, and students. According to Hatzichristou and Lianos (2016), teacher training was completed through an online platform and focused on: a) identifying values and goal setting and building resilience, b) emotion recognition, expression, and management, c) coping with stress, and d) understanding diversity. Program evaluation highlighted significant improvements in most dimensions concerning class climate and school relationships (increased student cooperation and interpersonal relationships, identification and expression of feelings, improvement of social and intercultural skills) (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

Student and school outcomes described in the above studies substantiated the positive outcomes of intervention programs focusing on children's socio-emotional well-being and

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implemented through university and school-community partnerships. Such programs applied mostly a paradigm of learning through modeling where university specialists, coordinators etc. work in partnership with participating teachers and students (i.e., observing, training, implementing, consulting, and supervising).

Even though the lasting effects of relevant programs upon the school community are expected to appear after longer periods of implementation (i.e., 2 to 5 years) it seems that tangible positive results were evident even after shorter implementation periods. Moreover, reported findings revealed the selective response that different children had towards the intervention that matched their specific needs and enabled them to benefit from the program accordingly.

5.2.4. Adaptation and possible barriers

ECEC in Greece is a split system, which distinguishes the early care and education services for young children based on specific age criteria. Accordingly, professionals who work as staff in these two separate early childhood settings follow a different path of training preparation, which is for both groups a four-year University level programme, but from different academic departments and schools. The education background for these two professional groups is directed towards the main aims of the early childhood setting that is intended to work later. ECEC staff careers are varied according to the specific type of setting they work for. It seems that career opportunities in Greece are more open and challenging for kindergarten teachers than for infant-toddlers pedagogues and care providers. Also, both groups of professionals seem to share a low self-perception for their social status as staff workers in education. Although both groups of ECEC professionals seem to have positive feelings for their work with young children, they experience emotional exhaustion. However, it is hopeful that both ECEC professionals seem to share that personal development would be an effective motivator for more intense engagement in their work and job satisfaction. Therefore, it seems that enhancement of learning opportunities to support ECEC professionals' personal development would be to multiply motivation in order to work effectively with young children in their classrooms.

Another strand of this literature review regarding the socio-emotional support of young children indicated that much of the intervention research implemented in Greece for examining the impact on the social-emotional development of children targeted a broad age range of children. Most of this research evidence showed that interventions, which aim to build resilience and to promote children's wellbeing, have a positive impact on children's socio-emotional development and this effect is more evident for the most vulnerable children. However, these findings have focused on children's outcomes broadly and not specifically in young children and they have neglected the younger (under age 4). In addition, it has not examined thoroughly how the professional empowerment of ECEC staff would affect children's socio-emotional outcomes beyond the impact of the targeted interventions towards children themselves.

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5.3. Portugal

5.3.1. Early childhood teachers' careers and professional development

The career statute of preschool, basic and secondary teachers is established by a decree-law that grants preschool teachers working in the public sector with the same echelons, remuneration rates, career progression requirements, and formal opportunities for moving up as teachers of older children in compulsory school (up to secondary school) (Araújo, 2018). Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education to provide identical professional conditions for ECEC teachers working in the private sector, through a salary supplement, there are still large remuneration differences between the public and private ECEC settings. Also, working hours are likely to differ between the public and private sectors. While in the private sector teachers' working hours vary, they usually work more hours than teachers in the public sector, who work 35 hours per week, from which 10 hours are devoted to planning, meetings, cooperation with parents and the community, CPD activities, and additional activities other than being in the classroom with children (Araújo, 2018).

Continuous professional development (CPD) and in-service training is held essential by The Portuguese Education Act and it is currently legally framed (Araújo, 2018). ECEC teachers working with preschoolers in public settings are obliged to attend professional development (PD) activities, and attendance influences teachers' assessment and career progression. Therefore, preschool teachers are granted leaves to attend continuous development activities offered by their school or by central and regional services. The teachers are also allowed leaves to attend professional development programs of their preference but should comply with imposed restrictions regarding the number of absence days. Attending these activities may prove difficult nowadays given the shortage of staff and the fact that temporary replacement teachers are not always timely available. Teachers can also ask for a year of special leave to participate in continuing education activities, complete specialized courses or develop applied research. Continuous PD activities accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of In-Service Training are free of charge, while other professional development activities, namely master and doctoral studies, are usually subjected to a fee covered by teachers. For ECEC settings serving children under the age of 3, leave entitlements depend on the employers' permission.

CPD for ECEC teachers in Portugal is currently facing criticism because professional development activities available frequently lack specificity and do not match the real needs of the professionals and institutions. Moreover, since attending continuous professional development activities increases the possibility of career progression, it is possible that in some cases teachers attend such activities merely for the sake of career progression, and not professional development per se. Additionally, there is a marked scarcity of professional development opportunities for teachers working with children under the age of 3 (Araújo, 2018).

At the local level, there have been some innovative initiatives. One example is the Early Change project. Portugal participated, among other five European countries, including Greece, in the Early Change Project, developed by Gregoriadis and colleagues (2014). As previously mentioned (see 4.2.), this project aimed to train early childhood teachers in the use of an observational measure of ECEC quality, the ECERS-R, collect and evaluate good

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practices in the classroom through observations, and promote the exchange of good practices. Participants in Portugal were 21 teachers from two public schools (Gamelas et al., 2018). The ECERS-R was perceived as a valuable tool in helping teachers link classroom practices to curriculum guidelines. Moreover, participation in this project enhanced teacher collaboration among themselves, which was considered by participants valuable to their classroom practices. Also, training with ECERS-R helped teachers to come up with strengths and weaknesses of their programs and to design an intervention plan aimed at developing specific practices (Gamelas et al., 2018).

Despite the promising results of this project, it is not common for ECEC teachers to participate in this type of peer support. As a recent survey has shown, professionals had few opportunities to engage in professional activities such as being observed in the classroom to receive feedback and coaching, as well as exchanging experiences and reflecting upon practices through an online learning community/platform. Moreover, observing colleagues to give them feedback was considered one of the least effective PD activities (Slot et al., 2018). In contrast, the most frequent and effective professional development activities indicated by Portuguese professionals were the exchange of experiences, reflection with colleagues about practices, and discussion with colleagues about individual children in need of extra care. Still, currently, and despite the initiatives and recommendations of professional associations, ECEC teachers are not provided with on-site mentoring or regional networking, which can impair the quality of their work (Araújo, 2018).

5.3.2. Early childhood teachers' well-being

In the past decades, some studies conducted in Portugal have focused on teachers' job satisfaction, stress, burnout, motivation to leave the sector, and self-efficacy, although mainly in primary school. Indeed, there is a lack of studies examining teachers' well-being in Portuguese ECEC settings.

In one exception, in the scope of a European research project, the ISOTIS, Portugal took part in a staff survey with other 9 European countries (Slot et al., 2018). This survey focused on teachers' practices and organizational policies, staff's work environment, cultural and linguistic beliefs, and relations with parents and other stakeholders. In Portugal, participants were ECEC and primary teachers, and professionals of social work organizations (e.g., community centers, youth care organizations). Generally, Portuguese participants reported high levels of job satisfaction and were relatively satisfied with their organizational climate. Nonetheless, Portuguese professionals showed significantly lower scores compared to countries such as Czech Republic, England, Greece, the Netherlands, and Norway (Slot et al., 2018). Also, in a national survey conducted with 225 ECEC teachers as a part of an external evaluation protocol of private and public schools, about 70% of the teachers claimed to be motivated to keep their profession in education and approximately 60% felt the society valued their professional activity (Azevedo et al., 2016). When asked about what features of their work were most responsible for their job satisfaction, preschool teachers valued the acknowledgment of their profession's importance and value and the acknowledgment of their good performance as teachers. On the other hand, colleagues' recognition of one's good performance and colleagues' affection and support during difficult times were indicated as less important for ECEC teachers' job satisfaction. Nonetheless, a large part of this sample considered that their autonomy and independent decision-making have decreased in the past

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years. When asked about what problems were harder to deal with, preschool teachers indicated children's behavior problems and the update of the curriculum guidelines (Azevedo et al., 2016). Moreover, results from the ISOTIS project indicate several needs named by Portuguese professionals: to work with fewer children per group, to have guidelines for dealing with cultural tensions, to have more assistants, and to have more time to support individual children and adapt work to diverse groups (Slot et al., 2018).

5.3.3. Children's socio-emotional support (SWPBS)

Children's socio-emotional skills are fundamental for their development and future adjustment to different settings. In Portugal preschool-aged children spend on average 39 hours per week in preschool, making preschool a valuable context to put in place preventive actions to promote children's socio-emotional skills (Pinto & Raimundo, 2016). The Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education issued by the Ministry of Education advocate for the importance of children's social development, namely their self-esteem, sense of belonging, self-awareness, respect for their peers, responsible decision making through negotiation, perspective taking, awareness, and sensitivity to others' feelings and thoughts, joint problem resolution of common challenges, among other examples (Silva et al., 2016).

Policymakers have recently emphasized the importance of socioemotional development through official guidelines. For example, in a joint venture to guide teachers in the implementation of practices that promote children's mental health, namely social and emotional skills, from preschool to secondary school, the Ministries of Education and of Health published The Guidelines for Health Education (Carvalho et al., 2017). These guidelines highlight the importance of a preventive instead of a corrective approach to socio-emotional skills, emphasizing the importance of taking advantage of natural settings such as schools. This document suggests broad benchmarks that branch in specific behaviors according to children's age for a wide range of ages across five main themes related to child and youth health (mental health and violence prevention; food education; physical activity; addictive behaviours and dependencies; affections and sexuality education). On the topic of mental health and violence prevention, preschoolers are expected to become progressively more independent, develop self-awareness (including emotional self-awareness) and emotional literacy, learn how to communicate positively, to build positive relationships, and to be tolerant and respectful (Carvalho et al., 2017). In addition to these guidelines issued by the government, several programs implemented in preschool have been designed to promote children's socioemotional skills, with research showing positive effects on children's social and emotional development (e.g., Seabra-Santos et al., 2016).

At the grass-rooted level, programs on children's socioemotional skills in Portugal started first in the 90s and were mainly small-scale programs delivered at the local level by entities such as schools and municipalities. More recently, some of the programs have been implemented more systematically, and some efficacy studies evaluating socioemotional skills enhancement programs are starting to emerge. Two examples of recent socioemotional promotion programs designed for Portuguese preschoolers, with available studies on efficacy, are the Incredible Years (Seabra-Santos et al., 2016) and the Giant Leap (Correia & Pinto, 2016).

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The "Incredible Years" (Anos Incríveis) programme was created by Carolyn Webster-Satratton to reduce problem behavior and promote socio-emotional skills in children aged 2 to 8 years old (Seabra-Santos et al., 2016). In Portugal, The Incredible Years program has been implemented with parents and teachers by Maria João Seabra-Santos and Filomena Gaspar (Seabra-Santos et al., 2016). The version of the program that is delivered to teachers aims to enhance teachers' behavior management skills and ability to promote children's social, emotional, and academic skills. The program is delivered by facilitators with specific training in 6 monthly (or 3 weeks apart) workshops. Each workshop is a group session that lasts for a day and participants are 14 or 15 early childhood or primary school teachers. The training focuses on helping teachers to have better classroom management skills, and to put in place strategies that improve children's social, emotional, and academic skills, namely problem solving, negative emotions' regulation, and positive peer interactions. The cooperation between school and families is assured through a bulletin where teachers share strategies with parents so they can use a consistent approach at home, and where parents share with teachers their attempts to put those strategies in place and how it worked out. For particularly challenging children, an individualized behavior plan is designed and implemented by the teacher in cooperation with the family (Seabra-Santos et al., 2016).

A quasi-experimental study aiming to analyze the efficacy of the Incredible Years version for teachers was conducted in Coimbra (a region located in the center of Portugal) in the scope of a Ph.D. study (Vale, 2012). Participants were 16 ECEC teachers, from which 8 were assigned to the intervention group and 8 to the control group. A total of 144 children participated in the intervention, and 152 were part of the control group. Children's age ranged from 3 to 6. Results showed that children who benefited from the intervention had a significant decrease in externalizing behaviors and an increase in prosocial behavior, in comparison to children from the control group (Vale, 2012). These effects seem to last at least for a year (Vale, 2012). On top of children's socioemotional gains, teachers used more positive classroom practices to promote socio-emotional development (Vale, 2012).

Recently, a study with an experimental randomized control between-group design was conducted with 1030 preschoolers, aiming to analyze the impact of an evidence-based teacher-training program, the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management for Teachers, on the behavior of economically disadvantaged Portuguese children (Seabra-Santos et al., 2018). Teachers in the intervention group attended six workshops and four coaching sessions on-site. Children attending classrooms where teachers were assigned to the intervention group showed greater improvements in their social skills and decreases in behavior problems (Seabra-Santos et al., 2018).

The "Giant Leap" (Salto Gigante) is a program developed by Karla Correia to facilitate children's transition from preschool to 1st grade and adjustment to school while promoting their socioemotional skills (Correia & Pinto, 2016). The program has two versions – one for preschool and one for 1st grade. The preschool version is comprised of 15 sessions of 45-60 minutes each. It addresses children's expectations regarding transitioning from preschool to 1st grade, and 5 key socioemotional learning domains: a) self-knowledge, body awareness, recognition and communication of emotions, b) social knowledge, perspective taking, similarities, and differences, c) emotional regulation, self-management, d) interpersonal

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relations, communication, cooperation, and conflict management skills, and e) responsible decision-making (Correia & Pinto, 2016).

A quasi-experimental study was conducted in Lisbon, aiming to test the effects of this intervention on children's socioemotional skills and school adjustment. Participants were 109 children attending the last year of preschool, with ages ranging from 4 to 6 years old. From the eleven participating classrooms, seven teachers (67 children) were part of the intervention group and four of the control group (42 children). Results revealed that children from the intervention group had a larger increase in their emotional knowledge when compared to children from the control group (Correia & Pinto, 2016).

On top of these two efficacy studies, it is worth mentioning that there are other programs in place aiming to promote preschoolers' social and emotional skills. However, these intervention programs are mostly part of master studies and small-scale projects not yet translated to peer-reviewed papers, but sometimes already presented at conferences. For instance, Zippy's friends is a program designed for preschool children that was implemented as part of a master study, that reported a lack of effects of this intervention on children's social and emotional outcomes (Leite, 2018).

5.3.4. Adaptation and possible barriers

Despite the recent advances in the implementation and evaluation of prevention and promotion programs designed to enhance children's socioemotional skills in Portugal, several challenges remain (Pinto & Raimundo, 2016). Firstly, there are several small-scale initiatives, namely pilot and short-length interventions that are not scientifically documented. Second, some programs lack a strong theoretical background and in some cases, the program design is not properly aligned with the school, community, and family values. Third, there is still a great lack of studies using robust research designs to examine specifically the efficacy of implemented programs. In addition, Portugal does not have an agency that gathers current knowledge and work on progress, namely prevention and promotion intervention programs, and provides guidance to enhance children's socioemotional skills (contrasting with the USA – CASEL). At last, there is a lack of systematic attention, both in terms of research and policy intervention, on teachers' well-being and career progression.

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5.4. Romania

5.4.1. Early childhood teachers' careers and professional development

In Romania, the reform of the ECEC system began in 2006 (Matei & Ghența, 2017) and focused on the professional development of teachers and the awareness of their importance in supporting children in the first years of life.

Teachers working in the ECEC field have the following qualifications: graduates of Pedagogical High School, graduates of a short-term Higher Education of University College of Elementary Teachers or graduates of Higher Education with double specialization (Bachelor's degree - Pedagogy of primary and preschool education) (Ciolan et al., 2017).

Currently, the official requirements for a position within ECEC provide only two routes (Ciolan et al., 2017):

- Pedagogical High School upper secondary professional route or post-secondary professional studies for graduates of non-pedagogical high schools – for staff from nurseries/ crèches.
- Higher education route with double specialization (Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education) - for staff from nurseries, kindergartens, and primary schools.

According to Kitchen et al. (2017), Romanian teachers receive less initial training than teachers from other European Union countries. This significantly influences the quality of the ECEC system of Romania.

The continuous professional development of nursery specialists is not regulated at the national level but is achieved at the institution level. For the most part, CPD consists of participating in projects (Ciolan et al., 2017). According to Lucian Ciolan (2014), the participation of nursery specialists is unequal in courses for professional development.

Unlike nursery specialists, teachers from kindergartens and primary schools benefit from professional development organized and coordinated at the national level by the Ministry of National Education. Unfortunately, they do not always benefit from a range of courses that develop the teaching skills needed by today's society. Many teachers consider that the contents and delivery of the courses were not adequate for their needs (ISE, 2018; OECD 2019b). According to the OECD (2019a), the most important needs of teachers are digital skills, individualized teaching, teaching students with special educational needs, and transversal skills.

Teachers from pre-university education are required to accumulate at least 90 transferable credits every 5 years, by participating in continuing education programs (Law 1/2011, art. 145). Accumulated transferable credits influence salary and career advancement. Thus, teachers who have important professional achievements in the last 5 years can receive a salary supplement (merit gradation), which represents 25% of the salary.

5.4.2. Early childhood teachers' well-being

Teachers are the most important component of the educational process, as the success of a school and the performance of students depend to a large extent on their physical and mental health (McLean et al. 2017). These characteristics and how they cope with stress (Ângelo, &

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Chambel, 2012) influence the quality of life and the level of happiness of a teacher, and are known in the literature as well-being.

The lack of well-being and effective coping strategies can lead to burnout. Burnout is a physical, emotional, and cognitive exhaustion that develops due to the constant presence of stressful situations (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Burnout can translate into emotional fatigue, irritation, depersonalization and lack of professional and personal fulfillment.

This syndrome is increasingly present in the teaching profession because teachers find that their needs and expectations have not been met in a temporary period and that they cannot have a significant impact on students' lives (Colomeischim, 2015).

In Romania, the well-being of teachers in early education is not well known. Most research or wellness programs have been dedicated to students. One thing to keep in mind is that teachers 'well-being continuously influences students' well-being, so teachers cannot develop well-being among students if they don't experience well-being themselves (Puiu & Moga, 2021). Instead, a lot of research has been conducted on the stress experienced by teachers in the teaching profession, which can influence well-being.

Among the most important factors that influence the well-being of teachers are:

- Overloading - Teachers have to complete a multitude of tasks in a short time and with few resources. Most of them do not know how to properly control and adapt their emotions and experience acute stress and lack of professional satisfaction (Baranovska & Doktorova, 2014). According to TALIS (2018), in Romania, 94% of teachers say they are satisfied with their job. A study conducted on Romanian middle school teachers (Zoller & Bacskai, 2020) shows that professional development, interpersonal relationships (between teachers and students and between teachers and management), and the school atmosphere are the factors that influence job satisfaction and self-efficacy.
- Lack of control - Most teachers are limited due to school policies that they must follow and monitor. Thus, they cannot permanently manifest their creativity and decision-making power. This influences the motivation, performance, and intention to stay in education.
- Energy-consuming - In addition to administrative activities, classroom management, and responsibilities regarding student performance, teachers are also responsible for developing and maintaining healthy relationships with students' parents, colleagues, and the school principal. These interpersonal factors can cause tension and can increase stress levels (Sulea, Filipescu, Horga, Orțan, & Fischmann, 2012). About 5% of Romanian teachers claim to experience stress in their work (TALIS, 2018).
- Lack of social recognition - According to the OECD (2017), the teaching profession is not very attractive. Many teachers feel devalued by society. This feeling is also influenced by the inappropriate behavior of the students (Albulescu, Tușer, & Sulea, 2018).
- Lack of financial rewards - In Romania, only 23% of teachers consider themselves satisfied with the salary received for the work performed (TALIS, 2018). It can be seen that there is a lack of balance between the volume of work and the salary received. This imbalance also influences the desire of some people to work in education.

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To measure the burnout syndrome of primary teachers in Romania, Colomeischi (2015) conducted a study aiming to identify the relationship between the burnout experienced by teachers and internal factors (emotional intelligence, emotional traits, and the degree of satisfaction of life lived). A standardized measuring instrument was used for each factor. According to the results, teachers who have a high level of emotional intelligence are less likely to experience physical and mental exhaustion, depersonalization, or failure at work.

Albulescu and Tușer (2018) conducted research on primary, secondary, and high school teachers in Romania to investigate the relationship between teachers' professional requirements and burnout, and also the mediating role of two coping strategies (seeking proactive support and emotional support). The results of this study showed that the inappropriate behavior of students leads to the exhaustion of Romanian teachers. Also, inappropriate student behavior over long periods of time makes teachers feel unfulfilled, lacking in energy, and indifferent to students (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). In this case, the proactive coping strategy has a mediating effect between disrespect for students and burnout. Thus, teachers who use proactive coping strategies consider students' inappropriate behavior to be a challenge to be faced, thus preventing them from experiencing negative emotional states. Coping strategies help romanian teachers to change the way they see their problems, in those cases where the environment cannot change (Albulescu, Tușer & Sulea, 2018).

Puiu and Moga (2021) conducted a study on Romanian primary teachers and principals that aimed to examine the level of happiness of a school and the elements that make it up. The results of the study illustrated that principals play an important role in creating a school in which teachers and students are happy. Puiu and Moga (2021) also argue that there is no clear understanding of the concept of happiness in school and the consequences of their lack on teachers, principals, and children.

Other projects aimed at increasing the well-being of teachers were: The Wellness Skills for True Wellbeing Program (2013-2014), funded by Lifelong Learning, and aimed at increasing the well-being of adult education professionals, and which ended with the elaboration of a guide. The Program "Happy Teachers for Romania" (2020) developed by the Transylvania College Foundation dedicated to teachers who wanted to develop mentalities of care and compassion, increase motivation, resilience and reduce stress.

As can be seen, in Romania, the level of well-being of teachers is not sufficiently known, as it is the level of professional burnout. Following the evolution of research studies, there is an urgent need to develop strategies to proactively address stressful and anxious situations and increase emotional intelligence among teachers.

5.4.3. Children's socio-emotional support (SWPBS)

Starting with 2012, the official curriculum in Romanian pre university education has registered significant changes. One of the most important has referred to children's socio-emotional well-being. In the school year 2012-2013, the former preparatory group has been transferred from kindergarten to primary school education. A new subject area has been introduced: *Personal Development*. This new discipline is studied in one or two sessions weekly by students from 6 to 9 years old and provides a contemporary approach to emotions, empathy,

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cooperation, self-assessment, and self-regulated learning. After this period, from 9 to 11 years, the competencies are taken over by *Civic Education* and from 11 to 15 years by *Social Education*. Nevertheless, all subject areas in compulsory education should form the transversal competencies especially provided by the above-mentioned disciplines.

The curriculum for early education adopted in 2019 introduces some new pedagogical tools: development areas. These are conventional divisions necessary for a pedagogical setting of a holistic and complex evolution of toddlers and children. The new curriculum for early education recognizes the importance of socio-emotional development and establishes the socio-emotional development as the second division, after physical development, health, and personal hygiene, and before capacities and attitudes towards learning, development of language and communication and reading and writing premises and, in the end, cognitive development and knowledge of the world. The domain of socio-emotional development aims at the beginning of children's social life, their capacity to establish and maintain interactions and relationships with adults and other children. Emotional development targets children's capacity to perceive and express emotions and the development of the concept of self and also the image of self, crucial in the learning process (Curriculum for Early Education, pp. 16 – 17).

At the same time with the curricular changes, there were other concerns for the well-being of children. For example, *SELF KIT Program* provides strategies for improving children's socio-emotional competencies (Opre*et. al*, 2011). *Social Emotional Learning Facilitator Kit* (SELF KIT) was designed by a team of cognitive-behavioral psychologists, pedagogues, and teachers with practical experience in kindergartens and schools. As the authors outline, the program respects the ontogenetic stages of development and the psychological features of children, follows the national curriculum, and reflects the dimensions of Romanian culture (p. 679). The need assessment revealed some negative emotions that complicate the lives and school activities of children: depression, anxiety, fear of emotional injury of being hurt, anger, guilt, shame, jealousy, and envy. Each of those emotions is subject to a story or a game saturated in rational emotive behavioural therapy (REBT) theory or principles and benefits from the help of SELF, a friendly character who has the features of an elf and the power of magic. He assists children in all 8 stories that could represent counseling or therapy sessions. Each story deals with one negative emotion and the irrational beliefs activated. Another story character shows how to think rationally and introduces cognitive change. The activities invite children to identify the relation between emotion and cognition and to re-invent their negative experiences. The stories, the poems, the games, and all the activities proposed in the kit use the ABC cognitive model of REBT, constantly enhancing the benefits of rational thinking (p. 680). The study shows that the children enrolled in public kindergarten who used the SELF Kit Program and had a teacher with rational emotive expertise (REE) were more efficient in improving their socio-emotional abilities and behavioural skills. The statistical analysis showed no significant difference between non-systematic REE intervention groups, regardless of the teacher's expertise. The analysis enhanced a significant difference between the non-systematic REE intervention group with an expert teacher and the no intervention group with no teacher expertise (p. 681). Thus, the results highlight the effectiveness of the SELF Kit Program in reducing internalized and externalized issues in children aged 4 to 6. At this level, the first step is to help children identify and name emotions using activities

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addressed to their specificity and interests (p. 682). The program was adapted for primary school education (Buzgar & Opre, 2011). The pilot study showed that teacher's expertise was an important factor that has contributed to the efficiency of the program. In the no intervention group and in the groups with no teacher REE expertise they focused only on the behavioural ABC model, therefore they used rewards and penalties to change children's behaviour, instead of making connections between beliefs and consequences (p. 5794). According to the authors, a curriculum-based program helps to increase preschoolers' social and emotional skills at a proper age.

Another project regarding children's well-being in formal education was implemented in 2016 by the University of Bucharest, through the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences in partnership with VIA University College from Denmark (Nedelcu, A., Ulrich Hygum, C., Ciolan, L., Țibu, F., 2018). The authors enhance that well-being in education is a complex and multidimensional concept related to the quality of school life (p. 8). The sources of students' well-being are psychological and emotional development, social behaviour, relationships, or capacity of the learning environment to be supportive and available for growing. Aspects like trust, initiative, resilience, empathy, civic involvement, friendship, equity support the learning process, provide school success and social inclusion. *The Rodawell Model (Rodawell - The Romanian – Danish Centre for Children's Well-being)* is a project and a suggestion for intervention in education, implemented in three years, and received support from the Romanian Ministry of Education and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre University Education. The mission of this project was to increase the inclusion rate and learning performance through well-being as psychological dimension in kindergartens in schools. The Rodawell target consisted of school units with a large number of beneficiaries, in relation to the average of the school network, vulnerable to some risk situation like special educational needs, poverty, migration, negligence, abuse, or health problems. Rodawell vision states that every child could and should be supported in his learning and development processes. The fundamental pillars of the intervention and the leading directions of Rodawell model are: autonomy, learning environment, interactions, inclusion (p. 9). Children and students autonomy develops from setting own objectives, choosing types of activities, working place and time or team mates. The teacher should carefully configure the learning situation and adjust the learning opportunities according to every child's interests and potential. Efficient learning occurs in a positive classroom atmosphere, by cultivating quality relationships with adults and peers. Generally, positive relationships are based on trust and respect, but promoting friendly relationships contributes to the soft transfer of acquisitions from school to life. The learning environment exceeds the classroom walls. A qualitative learning environment includes the school yard, the marketplace, the park, the museum, the library, local or larger communities. The Rodawell vision is supported by the results registered in practices of Danish teachers. In the Danish teaching practice the child is seen as competent and able to have an active role in his school and social life. Nevertheless, well-being refers to the quality of a person's life in terms of health, income, and access to education and quality social services, issues to be considered in any intervention or study. In parallel with the intervention, it has been developed a longitudinal study regarding the socio-emotional evolution of 448 children enrolled in Romanian kindergartens and schools.

5.4.4. Adaptation and possible barriers

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Currently, in Romania, attempts are being made to equip nurseries and kindergartens with qualified staff through a bachelor's or master's program. The aims of this are to increase the quality of education provided to children and to facilitate the transition to school.

ECEC staff are provided with a variety of professional development programs, but most often these do not meet the needs of teachers and the contexts they experience in the classroom. Teachers' participation in training programs is conditioned by the accumulation of 90 transferable credits every five years and the obtaining of the ''merit award''. This highlights that the motivation of some teachers to develop professionally and provide students a quality education is more extrinsic than intrinsic.

One problem that teachers face and that is a major source of stress is bureaucracy. This often limits their freedom and creativity to create activities appropriate to the needs of students and gradually leads to decreased job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Stress, lack of professional satisfaction and self-efficacy, experiencing negative emotional situations at work lead to a decreased well-being of teachers and implicitly of students. The quality of life that a teacher has directly influences the performance, motivation and involvement of students in the learning activities. To have an efficient education process that meets the needs of 21st century students, we need programs that develop the socio-emotional side of teachers. Thus, they will be able to identify, express and manage negative emotions without reaching burnout.

In addition to these programs, teachers must experience in school a series of positive emotions that can be produced or accentuated by principals and other colleagues, by showing gratitude, understanding, empathy and offering help. The principal must pay significant attention to the relationship between him and teachers and between teachers, especially since they provide a relational model for students. Thus, for the relations between the members of the school to be positive, the principal can periodically organize team building or community projects in which to promote equality, empathy, and cooperation.

To sum up, we can say that students are the mirror of teachers. And as long as teachers will be more motivated, enthusiastic, and eager for professional development and increasing the quality of the education system, students will also be happier and more academically successful.

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