Chapter 18
Promoting Resilience: A European Curriculum for Students, Teachers and Families

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Abstract This chapter presents the development of an early years and primary school curriculum for the promotion of resilience in schools in Europe called RESCUR. The curriculum is developed on the basis of the current social, economic and technological needs and challenges and seeks to develop in learners the requisite competences needed to overcome such challenges in their lives to achieve academic success and social and emotional wellbeing as young citizens. It takes a developmental, inclusive and culturally-responsive perspective, with activities reflecting the diversity of learners, particularly vulnerable children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first part of the chapter discusses the conceptual framework underpinning the curriculum and the content areas of the activities. The second part describes the findings of the pilot implementation carried out in Italy that involved 84 teachers from kindergarten up to secondary school with a total of 738 students.

The Commission Communication "Early Childhood Education and Care" underlines the need of quality and effective early education systems across the European Union (EU) as a key foundation for fruitful lifelong learning, social inclusion, personal development and later employability (European Commission 2011). Access to good-quality early childhood education includes building resilience skills as core outcome indicators for quality education which promotes social inclusion and educational success and prevents school failure and early school leaving. Therefore, it is essential to develop supportive educational contexts to help children, from an

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early age, face the challenges in their lives, overcome difficulties, and develop healthily and successfully. Developing resilience in early childhood is a foundation for healthy development and educational success and a sound preparation for the challenges of adult life.

Promoting Resilience at Schools

Although the conceptualisation of resilience may vary, and the skills and qualities embedded in the definition are broad (Shaikh and Kauppi 2010), resilience can be defined as successful adaptation and growth in the face of adversity and environmental stressors, including life transitions, socio-economic disadvantage, or times of personal or family cumulative stress (Masten 2011). Mental health problems may occur in children due to stressful events, and these difficulties can have negative outcomes both during childhood and adulthood (Kim-Cohen et al. 2003).

Resilience represents a strong protective factor to support positive mental health, especially in children (Dray et al. 2015; Hazel 2018, Chap. 13, this volume; Hjemdal et al. 2011; Kessler et al. 2008).

A large body of existing research identified factors linked with resilience on three levels, namely, personal, family and community, with each level contributing to an individual's overall ability to adapt to, or manage, significant sources of stress or trauma (Werner and Smith 1992; Resnick et al. 1997). The personal resilience level is associated with the individual's psychological, cognitive and emotional processes as internal resources, whilst family- and community-level (e.g. schools) protective factors are the main external resources in the healthy development of children and young people. Researchers have emphasised children who have higher levels of these protective factors showed lower levels of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety disorders (Hjemdal et al. 2007, 2011).

Although educational settings, such as schools, play a critical role in promoting the resilience (Lohbeck 2018, Chap. 6; Theron 2018, Chap. 12 – both this volume), wellbeing and health of children facing or experiencing risks in their development, and research has increasingly underlined this role in the past decades (Benard 2004; Rutter 1993, 2015; Ungar 2005), there is still a limited number of school-based programmes focused on resilience. Healthy school contexts with close relationships with caring adults, meaningful engagement as well as opportunity to learn and practise social and emotional skills, help young children facing adversity to cope and thrive academically, socially and emotionally (Castro Silva et al. 2018, Chap. 15; Noble and McGrath 2018 Chap. 17 – both this volume; Doll et al. 2004; Rutter 2006).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to describe findings of a pilot resilience programme named *RESCUR Surfing the Waves*.

RESCUR Surfing the Waves is a school-based programme for early years and primary schools, which has been developed to help young children facing adversity, disadvantage and significant challenges in their lives, to grow, thrive and develop healthily and successfully. The following section describes the conceptual framework underpinning the programme, the content areas and the activities. The second section describes the findings of a pilot implementation of the programme carried out in Italian schools.

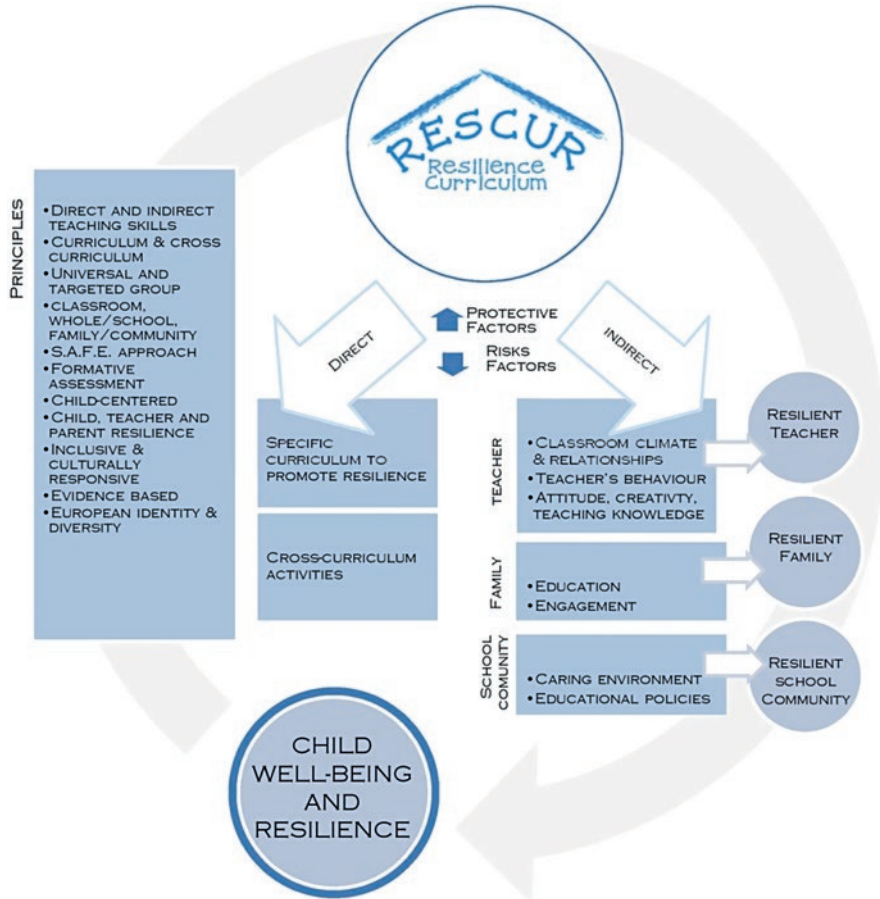# RESCUR Surfing the Waves Curriculum

RESCUR Surfing the Waves is a multi-year, universal prevention programme for the promotion of resilience as well as social and emotional competence in students 4–11 years of age. It is a universal programme, and it contains activities targeted to promote inclusion of vulnerable children such as children coming from ethnic minorities, for example, Roma, immigrant and refugee children, other children coming from socially disadvantaged families and communities and children with special educational needs. These children may be more vulnerable to challenges including poverty, mobility, unemployment, family stress, discrimination, bullying, violence, social exclusion, early school leaving, absenteeism, school failure and mental health problems amongst others. The programme seeks to provide these children with the key tools to overcome the disadvantages and obstacles in their development whilst making use of their strengths. It aims to enhance children's social and emotional skills as well as resilience, promote their positive mental health and wellbeing, and improve their academic learning and engagement.

Framework

RESCUR Surfing the Waves consists of a resilience curriculum for early and primary education in Europe, developed through the intercultural and transnational collaboration amongst six European universities, tapping into the resources and expertise of the various partners involved.[1] The curriculum has been built on the following key principles (see Fig. 18.1):

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[1] RESCUR was a Comenius Lifelong Learning Programme project (2012–2015).

Fig. 18.1 Framework underpinning RESCUR Surfing the Waves. (Adapted from Cefai et al. 2016)

- The curriculum will be embedded within the mainstream curriculum taught by the classroom teachers, who will be trained, mentored and provided with the necessary resources.
- It is developmental and inclusive, being flexible and responsive to the needs of individual learning differences. The curriculum underlines the right of all learners for a quality resilience education, including a commitment towards social justice with an awareness of the risk for discriminatory practices due to individual educational needs, minority statuses and poverty amongst others.
- It adopts a spiral approach, with six major themes stretching across the early and primary school years at higher levels of complexity.

- It will be infused in the other content areas of the curriculum as well as in pedagogy, relationships and classroom management.
- It is based on the existing evidence of good practice in promoting resilience in school children.
- Assessment of learning outcomes is formative rather than summative, undertaken by both the classroom teacher and the students themselves.
- It is built on the reality and needs of the European context whilst appreciating the diversity of it at the same time.

Structure and Activities

RESCUR Surfing the Waves consists of six themes and 16 subthemes. Table 18.1 summarises the six themes and subthemes that are featured across the three age stages: early years (4–5 years), early primary (6–8 years) and late primary (9–11 years). Each theme consists of two subthemes which include three topics each, and the topics contain three activities at increasing levels of complexity (basic, intermediate and advanced levels). Theme 6, *Turning Challenges into Opportunities*, consists of six subthemes.

The classroom activities are designed to be used and applied by the classroom teachers in the standard mainstream curriculum. Each activity includes a mindfulness exercise, storytelling, discussion and processing of the story, practical activi-

Table 18.1 RESCUR themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Developing communication skills	Effective communication
	Assertiveness
Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships	Healthy relationships
	Cooperative skills, empathy and moral reasoning
Developing a growth mindset	Positive and optimistic thinking
	Positive emotions
Developing self determination	Problem-solving
	Empowerment and autonomy
Building on strengths	Positive self-concept and self-esteem
	Using strengths in academic and social engagement
Turning challenges into opportunities	Dealing with adversity and setbacks
	Dealing with rejection
	Dealing with family conflict
	Dealing with loss
	Dealing with bullying
	Dealing with change and transition

Fig. 18.2 Sample of the mascots by Italian primary school students

ties (such as puppetry, singing, drawing, colouring, role play and drama) and take-home activities. A Parents' Guide with information and practical activities is also included for use with the parents (see Cefai et al. 2016). The activities are designed to be implemented regularly by the teacher in class, one or more times per week, with each session lasting around 30–45 min. The activity (with clearly set learning goals and learning outcomes) starts with a brief mindfulness exercise, followed by a story. In the early years and early primary years, the stories are built around two specially created mascots, Sherlock the purple, bespectacled squirrel and Zelda the hedgehog with the broken spikes. In the late primary years, the stories make use of legends and real-life stories related to resilience (see Fig. 18.2). The story is then followed with a discussion, bringing out the successful resolution of the challenge or difficulty faced in the story. Students then engage in a practical activity on the topic, making use of drawing, role play, drama, crafts, singing and others. A take-home activity worksheet will then be completed by the student and his or her parents at home to reinforce the skill learnt at school. During the week, the classroom teacher will also refer to the topic in the other activities of the classroom to give the students the opportunity to transfer the resilience skills to the other content areas of the curriculum as well as during play. At the end of each theme, both teachers and students complete an individual checklist, assessing the level of competence achieved by the students in the various learning goals and learning outcomes within that theme.[2]

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[2] The programme consists of five manuals as follows: A Teachers' Guide, A Parents' Guide, Early Years Manual of Activities (4–5 years), Early Primary School Years Manual of Activities (6–8 years) and Late Primary School Years Manual of Activities (9–11 years).

Establishing and Maintaining Healthy Relationships: A Pilot Study in Italian Schools

Theme

The Italian theme was the theme 2 titled "Building healthy relationships". It seeks to enable learners to develop healthy relationships and deal successfully with the challenges they face in building and maintaining such relationships. Various studies have underlined the relationship between resilience and positive, healthy social relationships with adults and peers (Benard 2004; Masten 2011; Rutter 1990). Children who do not have a functional social support system are more vulnerable to stress and difficulties and less likely to cope effectively with adversity (Doll et al. 2004). High-quality social relationships offer opportunities for children to feel socially accepted and loved; conversely, when the quality of the social relationships is poor, it might foster a sense of vulnerability and obstruct healthy social and emotional development (Ruzek et al. 2016). This theme seeks to enable vulnerable children to develop high-quality/healthy relationships with both peers and adults such as teachers and to overcome and resolve difficulties in these relationships. Table 18.2 provides an overview of the subthemes, topics and learning goals of the theme, according to the programme's age stages.

The activities of the first subtheme, *Healthy relationships*, are designed to support the development of the skills required to create a strong network of positive relationships. They focus on key areas such as making and sustaining friendships, prosocial behaviour, nurturing relationships and a supportive and inclusive school climate.

The activities in the first topic help children to reflect on the value of friendship and allow them to develop strategies to build, maintain and protect positive relationships with friends and deal successfully with situations which put friendship at risk.

The second set of activities focuses on the development of skills to seek and provide support to others facing difficulties. Researchers have linked resilience to active prosocial strategies that include positive social interactions and support (Hobfoll et al. 2009). Social support leads a person to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and/or that he or she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation (Hupcey 1998). An important aspect of this social support system is the ability to ask for help from others in an appropriate manner. This is an important communication skill which enables the child to recruit physical, social and emotional support from others that protect the child from the impact of negative events. Nurturing relationships are a crucial foundation for both academic and socio-emotional development.

The third topic focuses on the creation of a classroom and school climate built on trust and sense of belonging. School climate is considered as a product of the beliefs, values and attitudes in the social interactions amongst students and with teachers, defining the parameters of acceptable behaviours within the school's context (Koth et al. 2008).

Table 18.2 Subthemes, topics and learning goals in the theme "Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships"

Subthemes	Topics	Learning goals		
		Early years	Early primary	Late primary
Healthy relationships	Making and having friends	Share experiences of being with friends	Identify strategies to maintain positive relationships with peers	Increase trust in one another
				Recognise the importance of trust in friendship
		Understand the experience of missing a friend		Identify ways of coping with betrayal, including forgiving others
			List strategies to get along with others	
		Understand and overcome the difficulties that can arise in making new friends who may be different	Identify situations where friendship is put at risk	
	Prosocial behaviour	Identify their needs to feel safe and happy with friends	Identify friends from whom they can seek support	Describe how to help someone in difficulty
		Experience ways to thank people	Listen carefully to what other people say to recognise their needs	Identify strategies to help others who are discriminated
				Identify ways how to support friends
		Understand the importance of asking for support from an adult	Pay attention to the needs of others	
	Nurturing relationships and school climate	Feel confident in trusting adults	Understand and respect individual differences	Identify ways to show care and concern for others
				Identify the positive qualities of the classroom climate
		Be able to say what makes them feel safe and protected	Identify behaviours that reflect one's prejudices	Express caring behaviours towards classroom peers
		Understand that they can get warmth and security from relationships with adults	Identify and value cultural differences in friendship	

Cooperative skills, empathy and moral reasoning			
Sharing, cooperation and teamwork	Take turns during play activities	Work with another peer on a common task	Make collective decisions with everyone participating
		Work together with others towards a common goal	Work collaboratively towards a common purpose, identifying individual tasks and roles
	Describe the importance of sharing	Recognise the importance of working in collaborative group work	Encourage and support each other during play
	Participate collaboratively in a group artwork that involves playing and working with others		
Empathy	Consider others' point of view	Understand how others feel	Recognise the emotional needs of others
	Enquire how another person is feeling	Recognise how others' emotions can affect their own emotions and behaviours	Recognise that empathy is a key quality for building and maintaining friendship
	Be open to change perspective and opinions	Identify the feelings and needs of learners who were forced to emigrate and/or became refugees	Identify ways to empathise with, and offer support to others in difficulty
Ethical, responsible and moral behaviour	Engage in positive behaviours towards animals	Identify the reasons why it is important to obey rules	Identify alternative solutions to a moral problem
		Describe why it is important to forgive others for their mistakes	Identify ways of looking after other people
	Engage positive and responsible actions that benefit others		Evaluate ethical behaviours
		Apologise for mistakes and take responsibility for one's own actions	
	Engage in responsible and positive actions towards peers who are disadvantaged or with a disability		

The second subtheme, *Cooperative skills, empathy and moral reasoning*, is composed of activities to enhance cooperative skills, empathy and moral reasoning. Activities are organised for children to work together and cooperate to achieve the same goal, discussing the best way to undertake a task and ensuring that everyone actively participates. With the help of these activities, students will also learn how to take others' perspectives into consideration through social interactions with peers and critically reflect on their own moral arguments and ethics.

The first set of activities provides materials to strengthen skills, ranging from the ability to take turns and share, to cooperation and teambuilding activities, such as making artwork, making collective decisions or playing games in teams. Collaboration amongst peers fosters children's social and emotional development (Slavin 1980), including positive attitudes towards others. Furthermore, working with peers, both in academic and leisure activities, helps children be more cooperative and respectful and exhibit higher self-esteem (Gensemer 2000). Activities are organised for children to work together collaboratively to achieve the same goal, discussing the best way to undertake a task and ensuring that everyone actively participates.

The second set illustrates activities to support the ability to recognise and appreciate the motives, behaviours, desires and feelings of others. Empathy is an essential building block for successful interpersonal relationships (Reid et al. 2013). The term refers to having an affective response that corresponds with the emotional state of another person as well as the ability to mentally understand another person's perspective (Davis 1983). Considered a necessary prerequisite for social and prosocial behaviour, empathy also influences the individual's acceptance by peers and contributes to the development of morality (Belacchi and Farina 2012; Coplan 2011; Eisenberg 2000).

The third set of activities helps students, with the teacher's guidance, to critically reflect on, discuss and elaborate co-constructed solutions to moral and ethical dilemmas (Gasser and Malti 2012). Children learn how to take others' perspectives into consideration through social interactions with peers and critically reflect on their own moral arguments and ethics. Practising ethical and responsible behaviours requires children to focus beyond self and develop intellectual and emotional honesty and a willingness to confront and articulate their vulnerabilities in order to make necessary changes in their personal lives (Staub and Vollhardt 2008).

Method

Study Design and Sample

The implementation of the pilot project started with 10 h of teacher training sessions within a 1-month period with 84 teachers from 17 kindergarten, primary and secondary schools from the areas of Milan and Pavia in the Northern part of Italy. Teachers' training focused on enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills on helping

students to establish and maintain healthy relationships and adopting a skill-based workshop approach (using puppets, videotapes, role plays and discussions). The topics covered included developing friendship and positive relationships at school, both with peers and adults, sharing, cooperation, empathy, teamwork and prosocial and ethical behaviours. Teachers were encouraged to discuss challenges and difficulties they faced in their professional life to give them the opportunity to discuss resilience building from their own practical experiences. They were also trained in storytelling and use of puppets, using mindfulness exercises with the students and in completing the assessment checklists and the implementation index. Each teacher was provided with a set of materials to implement the theme, including the activities' manual, take-home worksheets for parents, assessment checklists, visual aids (e.g. pictures to describe the main character of the stories), original music – to introduce the sessions – and additional resources, such as mindfulness activities and theme posters. The teachers implemented the programme theme over a 6-week period as part of their classroom activities. A monthly classroom supervision session was conducted by the researchers with the assistance of two trained psychologists with each group of teachers coming from the same school.

Figure 18.3 shows an example of an activity taken from the early years manual for children aged 6–8 years.

Instruments

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme theme was conducted at the end of the implementation in 35 classes from kindergarten through secondary schools (first level), involving a total of 738 pupils (348 males and 390 females). The following instruments were used:

1. *Classroom behaviour questionnaire.* Teachers completed a whole classroom checklist on students' improvement in the areas covered by the six topics (Making and having friends; Prosocial behaviour; Nurturing relationships and school climate; Sharing, cooperation and teamwork; Empathy; Ethical, responsible and moral behaviour).
2. *Focus group.* Discussions were led in classes to explore students' own experiences of the activities, including what they liked, did not like and found useful. Data were collected by two methods: notes were taken by the facilitator and later transcribed and drawings of mascots or significant stories were made by the children. The average time for discussion and drawings was between 40 and 90 min for each group. The discussion was set to encourage conversation on main topics of the theme; students were asked their opinions and reflections on activities, materials and home activities. Photos of posters and students' worksheets were also taken at the end of the focus groups.
3. *Reflective diary.* Teachers were required to keep a narrative diary which they completed weekly during the implementation period. At the end of each of the

ACTIVITY 4: Friends are precious

Learning goal
- Identify strategies to keep positive relationships with peers.

Learning outcome
By the end of this activity, I will be able to:
- Identify ways hot to keep positive relationships with my friends.

Level: Basic

Materials needed: Hand or finger puppets, sheets of papers, posters, activity sheet 'Special friends of mum & dad'.

Activity steps

1. Start with a mindfulness activity
2. Read the following story "An old friend"

That day was a special day for Sherlock as his family was organizing a big surprise party for his grandfather's birthday. There were lots of decorations in the house and Sherlock's mother prepared many cakes and sweets for everybody. When Sherlock's grandfather came back home he found all the family singing "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you!!!".

Grandfather was really moved by this unexpected party, partly because he met some of his old childhood friends again. He was happy at the beginning but then suddenly he got upset when he noticed that his best friend when he was a child was not at the party.

"How are you? Do you feel ok, grandpa? You look sad," Sherlock said. "I wanted to see my old friend Robert," whispered the grandfather, "but I am afraid he forgot about me because some years ago we argued and he did not want to be my friend anymore."

"What happened with Robert?" asked Sherlock. "You know, my dear, friends are really precious but I didn't realize that until I was missing him. We were very close friends when we were children, but one day we had an argument. He was not very tall and I made fun of him in front of the children because of this. He was very hurt, he did not want to speak to me anymore and I had no opportunity to apologize for it. I would really like to meet him again. I'm so sorry for what I did. I made a very big mistake!". As soon as he finished this story, Robert came out from behind a door, he had heard everything. He hugged the grandfather and he said he was happy to have rediscovered an old friend.

3. First help the learners to process the story by asking the following questions
- What do you think about the story? How did the grandfather feel at the party?
- What happened between the grandfather and Robert?
- In your opinion, why did the grandfather want to see Robert again?
4. Ask learners to first reflect individually on following questions:
- Who are your friends? What do you like about them? What things do you do with your friends?
5. Let them write their own answers on sheets of papers.
6. Divide learners in small groups, let the learners discuss the following questions :
- What are friends? Why are friends important? What characteristics do you think friends should have?
7. After the discussion, ask each group to make a list of behaviours of how they can value friends and keep positive relationships with them.
8. At the end, collect all raised ideas on a poster.

Take home activity

The learners can ask their parents to talk about a special friend they have and explain why this person is special. They can fill the "Special friends of mum/dad" activity sheet and/or make a drawing of a nice event that parents shared with him/her.

Fig. 18.3 Example of an activity for primary school students

six sessions with the students, teachers wrote their own reflections based on the statement "Looking back on today's session, think about one aspect/incident that you think was very successful and engaging for students or unsuccessful and uninteresting for students. Describe it and reflect on why it was or was not successful and possibly what you would change about it".

4. *Individual interview*. In-depth interviews were conducted to ask teachers about their experiences of implementing the programme, including strengths, weaknesses and usefulness.

Ethics

Ethical approval was given by the Department of Brain and Behavioural Sciences Committee of the University of Pavia. Written informed consent was obtained from all teachers. As students' evaluation involved observations of the whole class rather than individual children, the ethics committee did not require parental consent. Parental consent was obtained for the students taking part in the focus groups.

Results

Classroom Behaviour Questionnaire

Thirty-three classroom behaviour questionnaires were collected from 23 schools for a total of 693 children (see Table 18.3).

The vast majority of the 33 classroom teachers, who completed the questionnaires, reported that the piloting of the activities had positive effects on the students' positive behaviours. Improvements in all the areas covered by the six topics were observed. Figure 18.4 shows the frequencies of the students' behaviour change expressed by the classroom teachers in the six areas explored in the behaviour questionnaires. Substantial improvements were noticed in sharing, cooperation and teamwork in 31 classes out of 33 (93.9%).

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in all classes ($N = 33$) involved in the implementation. When analysing the data by age groups, the early years children liked the opportunity to play new games in the classroom most, the adventure stories of Sherlock and Zelda as well as role plays and story dramatisation. Furthermore, they liked their parents' involvement and the opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions with their parents. The early primary years students said that they learned to follow rules and

Table 18.3 Total number of students by class, age and gender represented in the classroom behaviour questionnaire

Grade	Age (years)	Total	Male	Female
Kindergarten	4 and 5	64	22	20
1° Grade primary school	6	74	33	37
2° Grade primary school	7	215	87	118
3° Grade primary school	8	158	80	70
4° Grade primary school	9	96	36	51
5° Grade primary school	10	86	44	40
1° Grade secondary school 1° level	11	64	22	20
Total		693	324	356
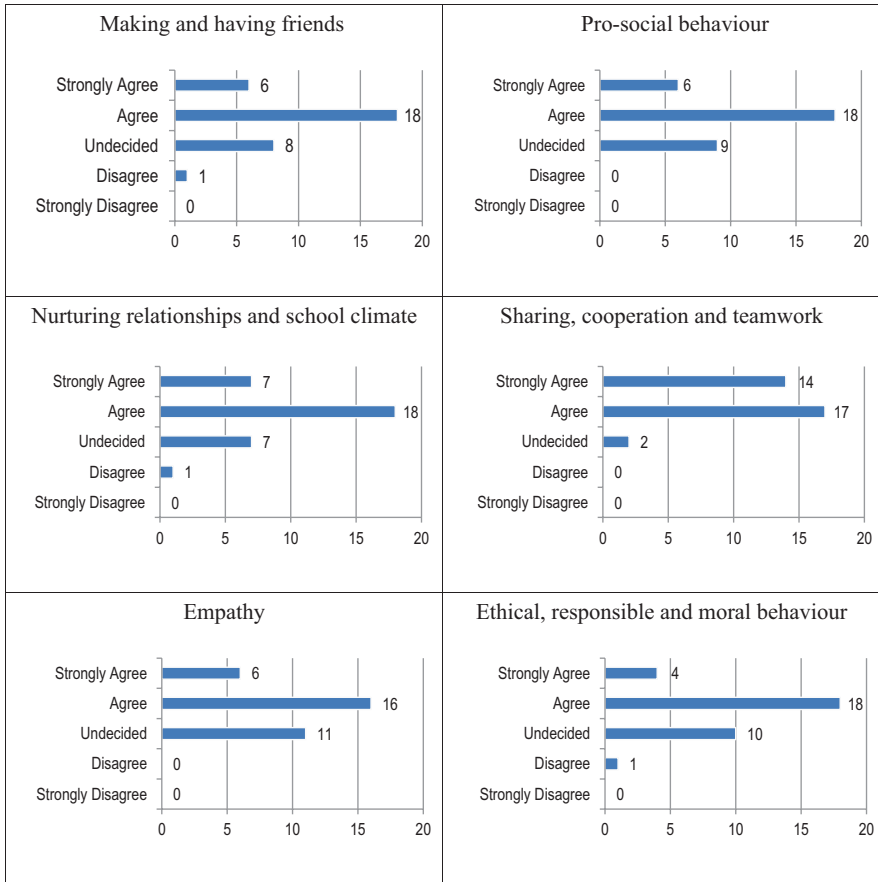
Fig. 18.4 Results of the classroom behaviour questionnaires over the 6 weeks' intervention period

help each other because everything becomes "easier and nicer", which indicates the benefits of collaboration and friendship. The older students (late primary school) mentioned empathy and helping others as the most beneficial aspect of the activities. They said they learned to trust their peers, to use these skills in their everyday life, to share emotions with others and to find support and encouragement from their group and the teachers. They also underlined their satisfaction in working in teams which is not usually practised in their everyday classroom life. They suggested that the take-home tasks could be less personal (e.g. reflecting with parents) and more fun.

Reflective Diaries

All participating teachers completed their reflective diary for each activity they did over the 6-week period. Some of the most common comments by the teachers were that students appreciated the stories and practical activities and that the activities helped them to build a sort of "pact of cooperation" with the students. They mentioned that the students were especially excited about working in groups and the take-home activities with their parents. The take-home worksheets gave them the opportunity to work closely with their parents and discuss personal issues, concerns and stories with them. One issue mentioned by the teachers was the time required for the activities: the allotted time of 30–45 min was insufficient most of the time, and they suggested more time for the completion of the activity. All teachers recommended the programme for the future.

A selection of teachers' quotes on the impact of the programme on children, as well as on their own personal and professional development, is provided in Fig. 18.5.

Teacher's Interview

An individual interview was held with a primary school teacher. The teacher explained that the whole project, specifically the teachers' training and the implementation, was a valuable tool used to get to know her students better and address their educational and emotional needs. She found the activities useful to give students the opportunity to "give a name to their feelings" and, in general, to talk about themselves. She reported that it was not common to use school time to listen to children's relational and emotional needs and concerns, and this project provided the time for it. She also mentioned it was a great idea to present the two main characters for all stories; they became a sort of friend for the students, and they were able to create connections between Sherlock and Zelda's adventures and their own life events. The teacher stated the parents liked the homework, because they enjoyed doing something of the sort together with their children, and they were disappointed when the project was over. The teacher said she planned to make use of this programme in the future.

Teachers' training and the implementation was a precious tool to know more about my students. I also completed, through the activities, the annual formative unit on "The self and the others", according to the Italian guideline for kindergarten teachers.

Kindergarten school teacher

RESCUR activities represent a real and useful source of personal and professional enrichment to develop resilience not only for children and teachers, but also for families and the whole school community.

Primary school teacher

It's not common to use school time to listen to children's relational and emotional needs and worries. This project provided the time for it. It was a great idea to present the 2 main characters (Sherlock and Zelda) for all stories. They became sort of friends for pupils and children were able to create connections between Sherlock and Zelda's adventures and their own life's events.

Primary school teacher

Parents liked home tasks. They said it was really nice to do something together with their children and they were really disappointed when the project was over. I'm going to keep this method also in the future.

Secondary school teacher

Fig. 18.5 Teachers' quotes from the reflective journals

Conclusion

This study represents the first pilot project exploring the effects of a resilience programme aimed both at universal and target level in Italian schools.

The overall results from the focus groups with students, teachers' reflective diaries and the teacher's interview all showed that both teachers and students greatly appreciated the activities of the Italian theme and found them useful, relevant as well as enjoyable. According to teachers' feedback, findings showed the Italian pilot

programme helped students to increase sharing, cooperation and teamwork skills over the intervention period.

Building healthy relationships provides safety and protection; it's an important foundation for both academic and socio-emotional development and represents a source of wellbeing and resilience for children (Doll et al. 2004).

Although these results are encouraging and promising, the study design had several methodological limitations. No control group was used as a pre- and post-design was not possible due to the limited time to complete the project. Furthermore, the project piloted only one of the six themes of the programme, and the intervention was limited to 6 weeks with one lesson per week. Finally, another limitation may be teachers' bias, because teachers that implemented RESCUR were the same that assessed the programme itself.

Therefore, a more long-term, comprehensive intervention is needed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of *RESCUR Surfing the Waves* in bringing about a positive change in behaviour, particularly amongst vulnerable students.

A particular strength of *RESCUR Surfing the Waves* is the attention to contextual and cultural diversity as the activities were designed by partners coming from several European countries. The RESCUR programme is currently the only European programme on the promotion of resilience in schools, and the indications so far are that this is a promising tool for early years and primary schools to protect vulnerable children from the risks of school failure and social exclusion whilst promoting their health and wellbeing. Researchers in Italy and other partner countries are currently implementing the programme with a larger sample of students using pre-post design and control groups.

Although various national initiatives to promote student wellbeing in schools have been organised in Europe and across the world, Italy does not yet have a national curriculum to support mental health in educational contexts (Cavioni and Zanetti 2015). With this study and other studies on the programme, we intend to increase the awareness of policymakers in Italy on the importance of promoting social and emotional skills as well as resilience in education, taking a holistic approach that encompasses students, teachers and families (Cavioni et al. 2015; Cefai et al. 2015).

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