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FRIENDS

Fostering Resilience-Inclusive Education and Non-Discrimination in Schools



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ABSTRACT	The main goal of the analysis provided in this document is (a) to establish how well-being of students is an essential ingredient for inclusive education, (b) to establish how Quiet Time based on Transcendental Meditation can contribute to well-being of students and teachers, and (c) to present relevant existing evidence and how evidence can be provided in the FRIENDS project.





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1 What is inclusive education?

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE - 2018) has defined inclusive education as:

“the provision of high-quality education in schools that value the rights, equality, access and participation of all learners.”

This definition builds on comment Nr. 4 (CRPD, 2016, page 20). In this definition of inclusive education, ‘all learners’ means the full spectrum from highly talented youth to pupils with fewer opportunities. What **fewer opportunities** means in this context is nicely elaborated by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DGEAC) of the Commission. DGEAC (2014, page 7) describes a number of situations preventing young people from taking part in employment, *formal and non-formal education*, trans-national mobility, democratic process and society at large, as follows:

- *Disability (i.e. participants with special needs): young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities etc.*
- *Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions etc.*
- *Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school leavers, lower qualified persons, young people with poor school performance etc.*
- *Cultural differences: immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties etc.*
- *Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt or with financial problems etc.*
- *Social obstacles: young people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc., young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers, young and/or single parents, orphans etc.*
- *Geographical obstacles: young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or in peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) etc.*

Today, an inclusive learning environment seeks to include the full spectrum of pupils, from highly talented youth to those with fewer opportunities, in a single learning environment in order to provide equal opportunities and to foster social inclusion in the school, the community, and adult life. Researchers point to the

need for inclusive education as a means of preventing school failure (early school leaving, low levels academic achievement, and poor transition to adulthood) and as a means of achieving a higher degree of well-being for all.

2 Inclusive education values all learners' well-being

Over the past decades, many researchers and policy makers have highlighted the two-fold relationship between inclusive education and well-being. Firstly, one of the goals of inclusive education is to create well-being for students, teachers, and staff and thereby provide the basis for social inclusion and general well-being in society. The latter is, for example, illustrated by the above-mentioned comment Nr. 4 on Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2016, page 20). In particular, this General comment claims that inclusive education is to be understood as a human right, a principle that values all learners' *well-being*, a means for realising other human rights and a process for eliminating barriers. Secondly, well-being of students, teachers and staff is instrumental to inclusive education and a properly functioning inclusive learning environment.

In this document we explore this background further, leading to concrete research questions concerning the novel approach implemented in the FRIENDS project, known as Quiet Time based on Transcendental Meditation (QT/TM).

3 Students' well-being: a required ingredient of an inclusive learning environment.

Whereas many conceptions about well-being in general exist, our work pertains to an education context and therefore, the definition for students' well-being adopted in this document, refers to *the psychological, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need in order to live a happy and fulfilling life* (See also OECD, 2017, page 78). This definition recognizes the right of children to have proper education, acquiring the skills to improve their well-being during their school days as well as in the future. Indeed, different authors state that students' well-being is a goal in itself. Heyder et al. (2020) and the European Commission (2012) refer to it as one of the *educational* goals. The OECD calls on policy makers and educators to pay attention to students' well-being *now*, while they are students (OECD, 2017, page 8). Huebner et al. (2004) call on teachers and educators to take preventative measures in order to enhance the well-being of students, rather than having to remedy problems after they arise. Eurochild (2014, page 6) advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking.

However, more importantly for realising inclusive education successfully, is that well-being is *a required ingredient* for inclusive education. While lack of well-being and involvement can lead to educational difficulties even for highly talented children (Van Sanden & Joly, 2003), well-being of children is more at risk for children with fewer opportunities, leading to a vicious circle as highlighted by Lawson (2002, page viii, own underlining).

When well-being is low, vicious cycles develop, and they are self-reinforcing. Indices of vicious cycles include ineffective schools, unhealthy children and youth, unsafe neighborhoods, toxic social and physical environments, destabilized family systems, high level of unemployment, and clusters of co-occurring social problems, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, delinquency, and child abuse and neglect.

This can be understood when we have a closer look at the general definition of well-being as developed by Dodge et al. (2012) that sees well-being as a balance between physical, psychological, and social *challenges* on the one hand and physical, psychological, and social *resources* to meet those challenges on the other hand (see figure 1.1).



Figure 1. Defining well-being as a balance.

From this definition follows also that effective learning involves balancing educational challenges with educational resources. Taking Bloom’s (and followers) taxonomy (Kratwohl, 2002) as an example, the challenges and resources of figure 1.1 translate to cognitive, affective, and psycho-motoric *challenges* with cognitive, affective, and psycho-motoric *resources and skills* acquired during education. Over the course of the education trajectory, challenges and skills increase.

However, given that learners have limited resources, learning will suffer when learners are faced with too many additional challenges, which must be addressed in inclusive education, such as disability, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, economic obstacles, social obstacles, and/or geographical obstacles (see the overview of fewer opportunities earlier in

this chapter). The effects of the loss of well-being are, for example, illustrated by the OECD report (2017) on “Students’ Well-Being”.

- This OECD report states that students’ motivation to achieve and personal ambition is related to their socio-economic status, while students who are among the most motivated score 38 points higher in science (the equivalent of more than one year of schooling) than students who are among the least motivated.
- Students across OECD countries who reported that they feel like an outsider at school score 22 points lower in science, on average, than those who did not report so.
- Across OECD countries, low performers were more likely to report exposure to physical, verbal and relational bullying.
- Anxiety about schoolwork, homework and tests is negatively related to performance in science, mathematics and reading.

As a general conclusion we can say that whereas (lack of) well-being has very significant effects on regular education, *students’ well-being is essential for inclusive education to succeed* and measures to restore a well-being balance are required. See also Van Sanden and Joly (2003) outlining the good conditions for inclusive education.

Today, in order to combat the deleterious effects of the loss of well-being, meditation is being widely used in educational settings around the world as a simple means to help combat stress and increase coherence in the prefrontal cortex. There are many types of meditation involving very different techniques. These have been classified into three divisions—focused attention, open monitoring, and automatic self-transcending (Travis & Shear, 2010).

For the FRIENDS project we selected Transcendental Meditation (TM), which belongs to the category of automatic self-transcending, as the meditation of choice to be practiced during the Quiet Time period. Transcendental Meditation is easy to learn, enjoyable to practice, taught in a systematic manner by trained teachers all over the world, and is supported by a large volume of published research.

4 Existing evidence on Realising students’ well-being through Quiet Time based on Transcendental Meditation (QT/TM)

Following the above well-being model (see figure 1), realising students’ well-being—i.e. restoring the well-being balance—is achieved by influencing environmental factors on the one hand and making the students more resilient to well-being imbalances on the other hand.

Firstly, QT/TM *decreases social and mental challenges* such as bullying, violence, ADHD, disadvantaged background, etc. For example, QT/TM was found

to produce a significant improvement in the QT/TM group compared to controls in social-emotional competencies after four months (Valosek, Nidich, Wendt, Grant & Nidich 2019), thereby decreasing well-being challenges that hamper inclusive education.

ADHD students showed greater cognitive flexibility (improved letter fluency and reduced EEG patterns characterizing ADHD (reduced theta/beta ratio) and significant improvements in ability to focus, organizational abilities, ability to work independently, happiness and quality of sleep on the Likert Scale of parents' observations (Travis, Grosswald & Stixrud, 2011).

Colbert and Nidich (2013) report that in a study of at-risk high school students in Connecticut, United States, those that learned Transcendental Meditation had a significantly higher rate of graduation from secondary school and a significantly lower drop-out rate than the matched controls (5.1% of the meditating students and 20.5% of the non-meditating group were dropouts).

Positive results have also been reported with children suffering from autism spectrum disorder (Black & Rosenthal, 2015). They conducted interviews with six people with Aspergers Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who had practiced Transcendental Meditation for between four months and seven years. They report that they observed “persuasive improvements in all six patients studied”. Other case studies have also been reported¹. These preliminary findings on autism are relevant because in the United Kingdom the charity Ambitious about Autism reports that nearly half of families claim that their autistic child has been unlawfully excluded from school²

Secondly, QT/TM *provides improved well-being resources* from teachers, parents, and the school community as a whole. Teachers and parents will be able to provide support more effectively when they experience a high level of well-being in terms of psychological dimensions, such as connection with others, job satisfaction, balance between positive and negative affects, intrinsic motivation, emotional exhaustion, perceived stress and anxiety. Existing research shows improvements on several of these dimensions.

Elder, Nidich, Moriarty and Nidich (2014) report decreased symptoms of burnout in teachers, with significantly reduced perceived stress, depression, and overall teacher burnout. Valosek et al. (2018) report a significant increase in emotional intelligence and a significant decrease in perceived stress among school administrators and staff who were instructed in Transcendental Meditation compared with controls.

1 For example at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8LdpWLnRHE>

2 <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/we-need-an-education>

While it is essential that teachers in an inclusive learning environment have a high level of well-being, it has a great intrinsic value for the teachers themselves. Therefore, the well-being of teachers and staff is part of the FRIENDS project objectives. Teachers and staff and even parents can participate in the QT/TM programme because QT/TM has no age restriction and can be used as a self-balancing technique for all ages. Such a *whole-school approach* has been shown to be beneficial, not only by changing the whole school climate but also by facilitating the institutionalisation of the QT/TM programme.

Thirdly, perhaps even more important is the effectiveness of QT/TM as a *self-balancing technique* for the students themselves. A statistical meta-analysis of 146 independent study results found that the Transcendental Meditation technique is significantly more effective in reducing trait anxiety than procedures of concentration or contemplation, or other techniques (Eppley, Abrams & Shear, 1989).

Significant improvement in anxiety has also been reported in young adults by Nidich et al. (2009), along with decreases in psychological distress, depression, anger/hostility and increased coping ability. Elder et al. (2011) have reported decreased psychological distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in minority students in the USA.

Students have also shown greater self-concept (Turnbull & Norris, 1982), increased self-development (ego development, principled moral reasoning, and intimacy (Chandler, Alexander & Heaton, 2005), and psychological differentiation (an aspect of self-development) in young children (Dixon et al., 2005).

Wendt et al. (2015) reported that students who participated in Quiet Time with Transcendental Meditation scored significantly lower on anxiety and higher on resilience at follow-up than comparison group students, with those who spent more time meditating showing higher resilience. Students also self-reported increases in their sleep, happiness, and self-confidence.

As long ago as 1974, Childs (1974) reported that after learning Transcendental Meditation, juvenile offenders, who had been referred to juvenile court for a legal offense, showed a significant improvement in social behaviour as assessed by parents and a reduction in anxiety and an increase in self-regard.

5 Setting the stage for the implementation and research

The general goal of the FRIENDS project was:

- to adapt, replicate on a wider scale, and transfer the chosen good practice on inclusive learning (i.e. QT/TM) to various European countries, targeting secondary schools and adult education, as well as non-formal educational institutions with minority students, or those with disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds, and

- to demonstrate on a wider European scale that the QT/TM, implemented in a school/educational environment, is a most effective whole-school approach to promote inclusive education. This is accomplished by training and supporting teachers, educators and leaders to deal with diversity, and foster the education of disadvantaged learners through promoting social inclusion, tolerance, resilience, improved academic achievement, non-discrimination and respect for diversity. Taken together this programme provides the basis for developing inter-cultural understanding and dialogue, combating discrimination on all grounds, and preventing bullying and violence.

In this context, the basic research questions are: (a) does QT/TM work, (b) can it be scaled up, and (c) what are the policy considerations? These research questions can be answered using different branches of science such as medicine, neuroscience, criminology, etc. However, the most efficient way, in the educational context of our project, is by using psychological tests that can measure dimensions centred around well-being as a common denominator for implementing inclusive education for students. For teachers and staff, dimensions related to the challenges that come with providing inclusive education have been chosen.

Deliverables D5.1 through D5.5 elaborate on this by (a) providing an insight in and reporting on the practical implementation in schools, (b) reporting on the results of our own research, and (c) investigating the potential of scaling up the QT/TM practice with an implementation framework for policy makers.

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