

WELLBEING – AN IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF TEACHING-LEARNING*

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Abstract

One of the most important tasks of the teacher is to build positive interpersonal relationships and thus generate a positive socio-emotional climate. The study aims to emphasize the importance of the emotional dimension of teaching-learning. Starting from the premise that wellbeing is a conditional factor of academic success, we focused, in this material, both on theoretical aspects related to wellbeing as an axis of teaching-learning, as well as on the results of an investigative approach regarding the state wellbeing of students in teaching-learning activities.

The questions that stood out to us were the following: How much importance do students attach to wellbeing? To what extent are teachers concerned about the wellbeing of students? To what extent does the school teach students to focus on positive experiences and overlook negative ones? What are the students' suggestions regarding the main directions of action that can lead to student wellbeing in the classroom?

Based on the processing and interpretation of the data collected through the application of a questionnaire, the recorded conclusions allowed the identification of some aspects regarding the importance of students' wellbeing in teaching activities, but also their suggestions with reference to building an educational climate focused on wellbeing. The research data demonstrated that the emotional, affective-motivational dimension is as important as the (meta)cognitive one. Wellbeing is essential in the didactic activity. Students' negative thoughts and emotions can be shaped, restructured, by building an environment focused on wellbeing that allows optimal and balanced adaptation to diverse situations.

Key words: *Wellbeing, Socio-emotional intelligence, Empathy, Positive learning environment, Constructive feedback.*

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1. Introduction

One of the most important tasks of the teacher is to build positive interpersonal relationships and thus generate a positive socio-emotional climate. (Gómez, Cilleros, Marcos, 2022).

General wellbeing is more than happiness, although people commonly use the term happiness for both concepts. "Subjective" wellbeing is the best term to define the cognitive and "emotional" qualities of happiness and is the unit of measure for positive emotion (Style, 2015, p. 7).

Happiness is a simple concept. It's about the fact that people, in order to be able to learn and achieve results through learning, need to have a wellbeing, to be satisfied, happy and comfortable. None of us can to learn if we have a lot of worries and stress.

Various research groups, including positive psychology, have made efforts to apply a scientific method to answering questions about what "happiness" is and how we might achieve it. Seen from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, happiness is "the state of intense and complete soul contentment" (Style, 2015).

Alongside the notion of happiness, equivalent concepts are introduced, such as life satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing.

Subjective wellbeing, also known as hedonic wellbeing, can be defined as the set of evaluations of pleasure, carried out by one's own person, regarding past or present events. This concept includes two dimensions:

- *Emotional* - which refers to feelings of happiness and positive (for example joy) and negative (for example sadness) affective states;
- *Cognitive* - which refers to the satisfaction derived from living life and its various domains (eg work, family, entertainment).

Thus, subjective wellbeing involves high levels of positive emotions, low levels of negative emotions and high levels of happiness and wellbeing

Wellbeing is a complex, multifaceted, elusive concept that continues to elude researchers' attempts to define and measure it.

At community and societal level, cultures differ not only in their level of wellbeing, but also to some extent in the types of subjective wellbeing they value most (Diener, Oishi & Tay, 2018). Subjective wellbeing is made up of three interdependent components: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant states and emotions, while life satisfaction refers to a cognitive sense of satisfaction with life.

Other contributors (Ryff, 2013) have identified aspects that constitute wellbeing: autonomy, knowledge of the environment and the ability to adapt to it, positive relationships with others, the ability to formulate a purpose in life, the realization of potential and self-acceptance. His later research put a different emphasis on what wellbeing is, identifying the ability to fulfill one's goals as one of the most important. Some authors use wellbeing as a term for general happiness, some as a general term that encompasses physical and mental health (Hascher, 2010). Seligman (2012; 2018) proposed that wellbeing is made up of five measurable elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement –

PERMA. This particular theory of wellbeing has been shown to be relevant for measuring adolescent, school-age youth wellbeing, albeit with slightly reformulated factors of engagement, persistence, optimism, connectedness and happiness – EPOCH (Kern *et al.*, 2015).

An interesting definition of the concept of wellbeing is one that focuses on three key areas: the idea of a reference point for wellbeing, the inevitability of balance/homeostasis, and the fluctuating state between challenges and resources. A new definition of wellbeing is proposed (Dodge *et al.*, 2012) as the balance point between an individual's resources and the challenges they face:



Figure 1. The definition of wellbeing according to Dodge *et al.* (2012)

2. Ways to stimulate wellbeing within the teaching-learning process

Wellbeing in the context of the teaching-learning process is an essential aspect for achieving an effective and healthy educational environment. It refers to the general wellbeing of students and teachers during learning and teaching activities. Promoting wellbeing in education can have a positive impact on students' academic performance, motivation and personal development. Here are some ways in which wellbeing can be encouraged in the teaching-learning process:

Positive learning environment: Creating a positive and supportive learning environment can contribute to student wellbeing. Teachers can create environments where students feel safe, accepted, and encouraged to actively participate.

Effective communication: Open and effective communication between teachers and students can help solve problems and maintain a positive relationship.

Diversity and Inclusion: Ensuring that every student feels included and respected in the classroom can help increase overall wellbeing.

Balance between work and leisure: It is important to promote a balance between academic tasks and leisure time. Too much pressure and stress can negatively affect students' wellbeing.

Varied Pedagogical Approaches: Using varied and interactive teaching methods can keep students engaged and interested, thus contributing to a more enjoyable learning experience.

Stress Management Resources: Providing resources and techniques for managing stress and anxiety can help students cope better with academic demands.

Constructive Feedback: Teachers can provide constructive and encouraging feedback to support students' continued development.

Extracurricular and social activities: Promoting extracurricular activities and social interactions can help create a more balanced and enjoyable environment for

students. Training for teachers: Teachers can receive training in managing student welfare so that they can better address their needs.

How can wellbeing be measured? According to the PERMA Model, called the 5 Pillars of Wellbeing Model – there are five different positive characteristics that together support higher levels of wellbeing or wellbeing: Commitment, Perseverance, Optimism, Connection, and Happiness.

E = Commitment

Commitment refers to being absorbed, interested, and involved in an activity or the world itself. Very high levels of engagement are known as a state called "flow", where you are so completely absorbed in an activity that you lose track of time.

P = Perseverance

Perseverance is about having the tenacity to stay focused, not abandon what you've started, and pursue a goal despite any challenges that arise. The ability to finish things you start, even if it takes a while. When the going gets tough, some of us give up, while others stubbornly push through.

O = Optimism

Optimism refers to having a sense of hope and confidence in the future. It generally implies a favorable view of the world. Negative events are seen as temporary and specific to the situation, there is a belief that things will work out in a good way.

C = Connection

Connection is about feeling loved, supported and valued by others. It's more than having people in your life. It is about feeling close to others.

H = Happiness

Happiness is a general feeling of joy and contentment with oneself or with the life one is leading. No one feels happy all the time, but you tend to feel generally satisfied with life.

Promoting wellbeing in the teaching-learning process involves a holistic approach that takes into account the emotional, social and cognitive needs of students. By creating a healthy and supportive learning environment, one can contribute to academic success and the harmonious development of students.

As teachers, in order to develop socio-emotional skills in students, we believe that we ourselves need to focus on wellbeing. Wellbeing, the ability to be happy is influenced by a number of factors (Stein, Book, 2003, p. 207):

- Reality testing (evaluation of the environment, positive/negative reporting on everything that happens);
- Self respect;
- Self-fulfillment;
- Expectations, desires (by testing reality we can change our goals to make them easier to achieve and more appropriate).

How can we achieve wellness? Here are some suggestions:

- Let's be active, keep fit from a physical and mental point of view;
- Having social contacts helps to feel good, to be happy;
- Let's set realistic goals (pay attention to the demands on one's own person!);

- Let's enjoy what we do, avoid the thought that we always have to achieve more;
- Let's try to be satisfied with the life we have and not envy others.

In a wider study by the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) regarding the significance of school in students' lives, a study published in 2018, four major contributing factors to students' wellbeing in school are identified (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/acd78851-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/acd78851-en>):

- psychological factors: life satisfaction, meaning of life (purpose, sense of the possibility of achieving goals), self-awareness and absence of emotional problems;
- physical factors: adoption of a healthy lifestyle, general state of health;
- cognitive factors: students' skills in applying what they know to solve various problems;
- social factors: students' relationships with family, peers and teachers, their feelings about their social life

Given the multitude of factors contributing to wellbeing, promoting the wellbeing of young people in school is a real challenge, all the more so because of the very nature of the concept, the many facets of wellbeing, because there are different types of wellbeing and they all need to be promoted in -some measure to create a general sense of wellbeing in a particular person. So, it is not possible to improve the wellbeing of students at school through single interventions or activities. Rather, it is necessary to develop a 'culture' of wellbeing throughout the school and the active involvement of all teaching and non-teaching staff, which can be difficult to achieve.

On the other hand, promoting wellbeing can sometimes appear to conflict with other school priorities, such as academic standards. Unreasonably high expectations, a regime of constant testing, or an overemphasis on the importance of academic performance can actually undermine student wellbeing.

Finally, developing a sense of wellbeing in students becomes all the more difficult when school staff themselves do not have a positive sense of wellbeing. Wellbeing at work is closely related to stress. Stress at work is related to workload, quality of professional relationships, level of autonomy, clarity about role and job duties, availability of support and opportunity to be involved in changes affecting work life. High levels of stress can lead to demotivation, job dissatisfaction and poor physical and mental health, which also has an effect on student wellbeing.

3. Wellbeing of students in teaching-learning activities – investigative approach

3.1. Research methodology

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the wellbeing of students in teaching-learning activities, to emphasize the importance of the emotional, affective-motivational dimension in the didactic activity.

We started from the premise that wellbeing is an important factor for students in appreciating an effective teacher.

The questions that stood out to us were the following: How much importance do students attach to wellbeing? To what extent are teachers concerned about the wellbeing of students? To what extent does the school teach students to focus on positive experiences and overlook negative ones? What are the students' suggestions regarding the main directions of action that can lead to student wellbeing in the classroom?

The micro-research was carried out within the University of Craiova, and the sample included a number of 253 students, enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical module. The activities with the students took place both synchronously and asynchronously on the Google Classroom digital platform. The student groups physically participated in the psycho-pedagogical courses and benefited from various theoretical and applied materials, posted/uploaded on Classroom: PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, tests, applications, reflection tasks, etc.

The questionnaire, as a research method that I used in this research, was built on 3 dimensions: a) the importance given by students to wellbeing in learning; b) the concern of teachers to build the state of wellbeing; c) directions of action regarding the development of wellbeing in teaching-learning.

We present the recorded results below.

3.2. Results and discussion

In the following, we will present some of the results recorded following the application of the questionnaire.

Regarding the degree of importance given by students to wellbeing in academic success, the majority of surveyed students appreciate that wellbeing in teaching activities is important to a very high extent (45%) and to a great extent (29%).

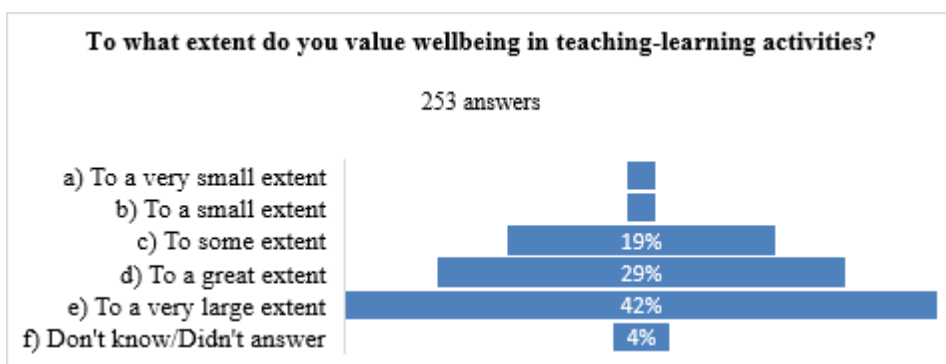


Figure 2. The measure of importance given by students to wellbeing

To the question Do you consider that academic results depend on an educational environment centered on your wellbeing?, the answers were as follows:

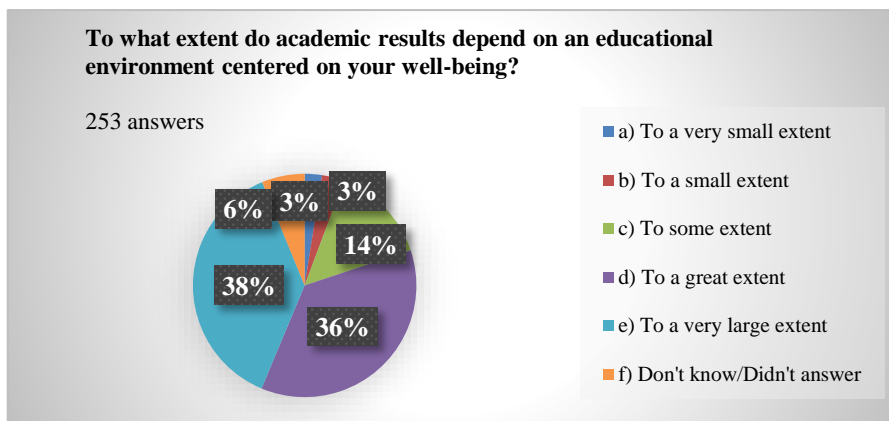


Figure 3. The relationship between academic results and wellbeing, as seen by students

The data show that in the view of the investigated subjects, academic results depend on an educational environment centered on your wellbeing to a very large extent (37.5%) and to a large extent (36.4%).

Regarding the teachers' concern with the subjects' needs as pupils/students, most of the surveyed students appreciated that most of the teachers were concerned with taking care of the pupils, really listening to them and finding out their current needs/problems as much as possible. moderately (32%) and to a small extent (24.5%). Only 20.6% of teachers were concerned about the needs of the subjects) to a great extent (20.6%), and 11.1% to a very great extent, which denotes the need for a "culture" of wellbeing throughout the school, active involvement of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in continuous professional development programs focused on the development of skills from which to contribute to the formation of socio-emotional learning skills in pupils/students.

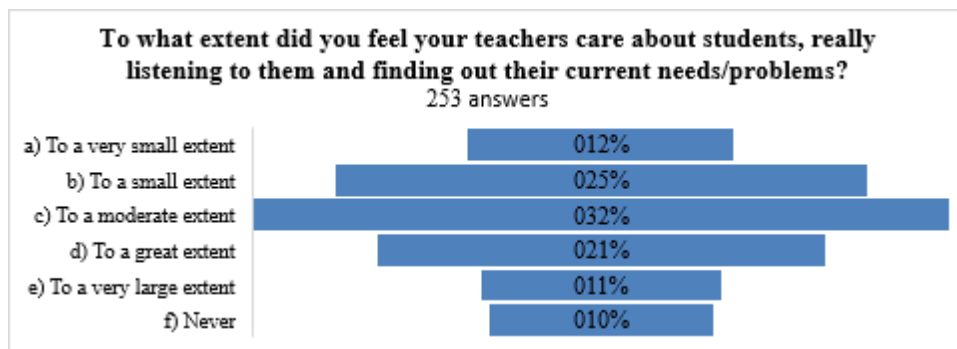


Figure 4. Teachers' concern for pupils'/students' needs

The need for continuous professional development programs focused on the emotional dimension of teaching-learning is underlined by the responses recorded to

the next item, which was even related to the role of the school in socio-emotional education (Figure 4). The highest percentage of students (28.3%) shows that at school the subjects were taught to put first/prioritize the positive experiences that occur during the day and ignore the negative ones, to some extent and to a small extent (26.9%).

Another item focused on teachers' attitudes/concerns, which are considered to be important, in the subjects' view, for increasing wellbeing in the classroom. For this item, subjects had the opportunity to choose several answers.

As can be seen in figure 6, students value the teacher's permanent effort to instill in students the desire for knowledge (83.4%), followed, in second place, by the open attitude towards communication with students (58.1%), and in 3rd place, the concern to train students for life (50.2%).

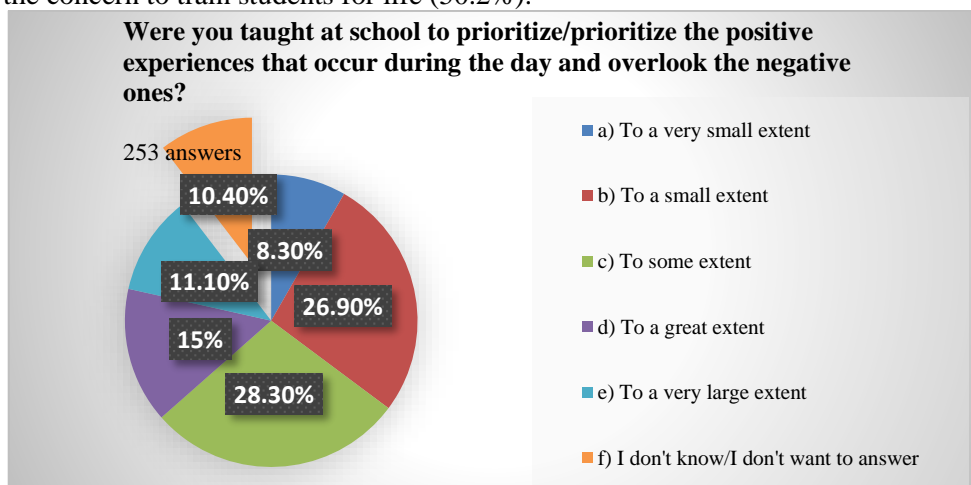


Figure 5. The role of the school in socio-emotional education

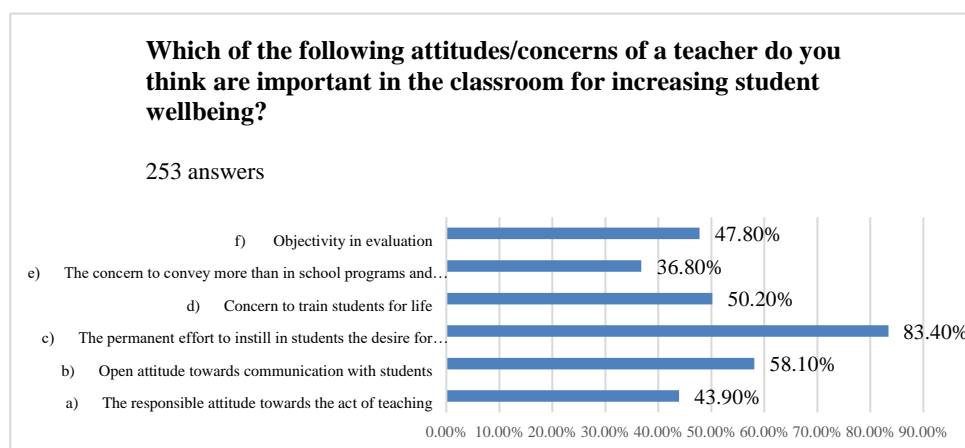


Figure 6. Teacher attitudes important to students in increasing wellbeing

The third dimension of the questionnaire followed the directions of action related to the development of wellbeing in teaching-learning. In this sense, the teacher's empathy is very important in the students' view, as shown by their choices in figure 7):

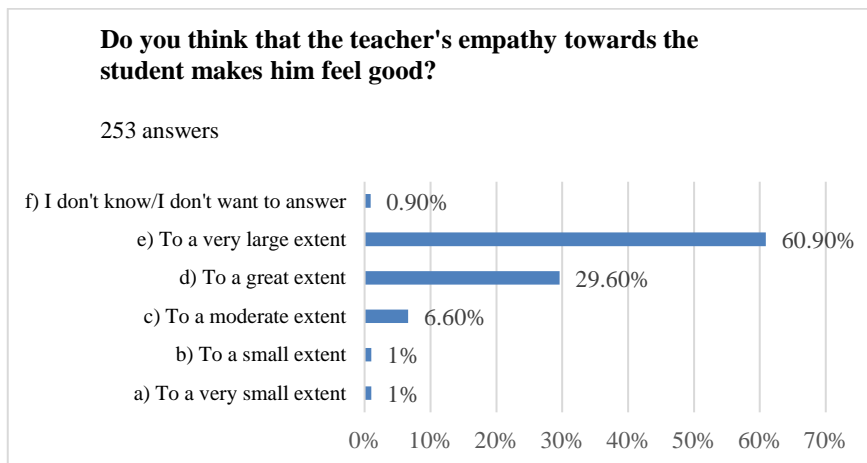


Figure 7. The role of empathy in pupil/student wellbeing

Ways to increase the wellbeing of pupils/students represented another direction pursued in the investigation. Subjects' responses indicated that most appreciated the passionate delivery of the lesson (74.7%). A cheerful appearance, smiling face, conciliatory attitude (70.4%) and providing positive feedback to students are two other sure ways to build a climate focused on wellbeing (figure 8).

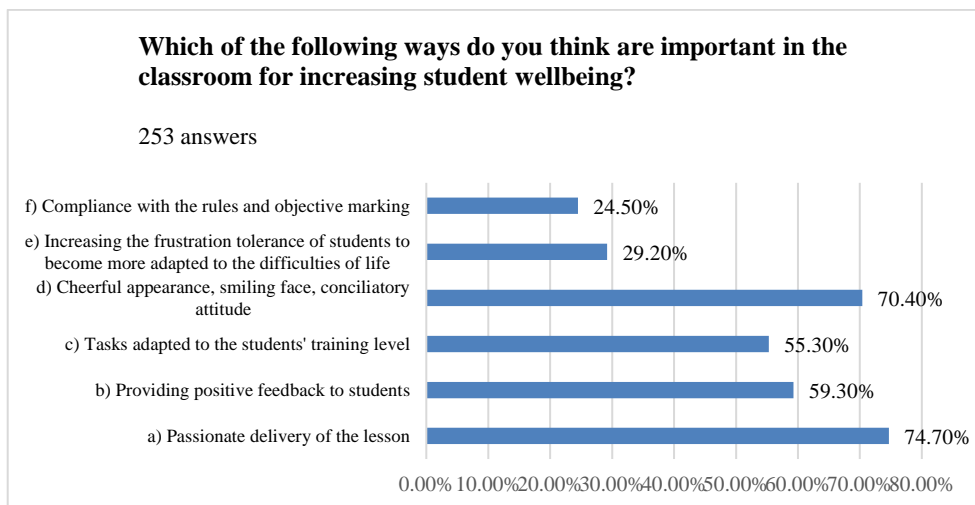


Figure 8. Ways to increase the wellbeing of pupils/students

As prospective teachers, students declare that they will be concerned about the students' wellbeing (97.2%).

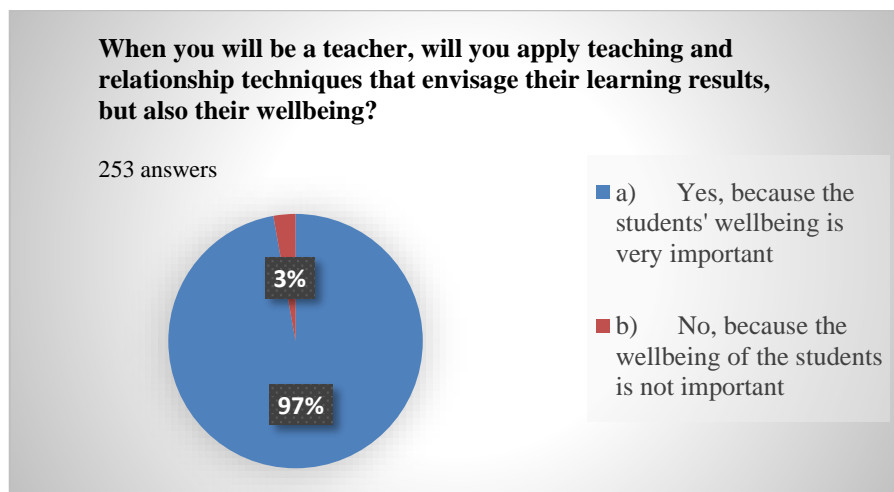


Figure 9. The attitude of prospective teachers towards the wellbeing in the classroom

Highlights from the subjects' answers:

- As a teacher, I will focus on the students' needs, I will try to become as much as I can, a reliable person who will listen to all their problems and I will advise them on any impasse that may arise.
- I will try to understand each one individually when they have a personal problem or even help them with advice.
- I will focus on group projects to develop students' ability to communicate and interact with others.
- I will try to have free discussions with them on various topics, but I will also make them understand the subject I am teaching, in such a way that they learn as easily as possible and make them feel as comfortable as possible.
- I believe that a positive attitude is contagious, so to a very large extent I will focus on ensuring the students' wellbeing, I will give them the right to their opinion whenever they feel the need, I will encourage them to discover essential ideas from some alone, I will create a friendly learning environment.
- I, as a teacher, want the students to be relaxed during class. To be understanding with them. To come up with new things to make them pay attention, not to get bored. To put yourself in their place as a teacher so that you can understand the pupils/students better.
- I would focus on creating as safe an environment as possible where students can express their opinions and be judged as little as possible.
- I would focus on dialogues, interactive activities.

- to focus on increasing self-esteem in students. To teach them not to be afraid to ask questions and speak their mind. I want to be the teacher that students turn to without hesitation and help as much as possible.
- Lessons taught through role-play, with questions to keep students focused.
- I would focus on building a friendly, uninhibited space where students can express their opinions without being judged too harshly by peers or the teacher.
- The connection between teacher and student - In the relationship with the students, I would focus not only on the things we have to study/learn in class, but also on the things they propose for the respective subject. I think it is extremely important to attract attention and involve students in different games/activities/research etc...
- I will emphasize communication, I will try as much as possible to make him feel safe. It is very important, from my point of view, that the student feels understood and involved in all the activities of the class.
- I will focus on their needs and curiosities, which I will adapt to the school curriculum through various teaching-learning-evaluation activities in different forms of organization in order to have the most pleasant educational climate.
- I will apply methods that attract the students, I will listen to them, I will always be there for them, I will not make them frustrated.
- I will focus on the integration of each student in the class group and on carrying out the activities and approaching the lessons in a manner accessible to all.
- Providing positive feed-back, encouraging students and dialogues as open as possible both about the lesson and about their condition.
- I want to have an open communication with the students. The condition of the students, as well as their results, are directly influenced by the way of being of the teacher. In this context, I will focus on understanding the needs of each student and try to teach the lessons in a fun way so that my students learn something, but also feel good.
- The student's wellbeing is closely related to his performance in school activities.
- I will rely on empathy and understanding and I will try to make the students feel listened to and included in all activities.

4. Conclusions

Academic learning involves the permanent overcoming of some obstacles, cognitive conflicts, involves active involvement, integration and accommodation of cognitive, affective-attitudinal and action structures. The emotional, affective-motivational dimension is as important as the (meta)cognitive one. The range of emotional experiences is essential both in the didactic activity and in personal activities.

Following the collection, analysis and interpretation, we found that the majority of the surveyed students appreciate that wellbeing is important in teaching activities. When the inner state is positive, the student is active, open, flexible, confident and bold; when this is negative, the student becomes anxious, complex, suspicious, passive.

It is important for the teacher to be concerned with the wellbeing of the students, with the development of the skills to cope with stress. We support the opinion of Kaslow (2020), that stress management programs must support the management and reactions to stressors caused by the situation, determine the finding of resources for emotional support interventions and healthy behavior. Cultivating the socio-emotional component is an essential task of the online educator; when a student can trust their teacher and classmates, their self-efficacy and motivation increase and generally increase achievement and progress (Hursen, 2019; Johnston *et al.*, 2014; Jones, 2015; Mallya *et al.*, 2019).

There is a strong international evidence base to support the claim that approaches to promoting whole-school wellbeing can have an effect on academic outcomes.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that whole-school approaches to promoting wellbeing can have positive effects on a wide range of student outcomes, including mental health, self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, behavior and reduced dropout.

"To survive in supermodern societies, people need major personal and social changes (...) An emotional revolution states that emotions are essential for (...) personal and professional success, for our health, wellbeing and happiness, but also for the progress of society" (Fernández-Berrocal, 2022).

It takes an enormous amount of energy and resources to run stimulating programs that speak honestly to curriculum content, that allow for individual learning needs, and that are mindful of students' social-emotional well-being. The responsibilities and conditions of an online educator are well prepared for the effort (Caprara, Caprara, 2022).

Recorded data show the need for a "culture" of wellbeing in the entire school, the active involvement of all teaching and non-teaching staff in continuous professional development programs focused on the emotional dimension of teaching-learning, on the development of skills that contribute to the formation of social-emotional learning in pupils/students.

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