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CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WELL-BEING IN THE CONTEXT OF GREEN LESSONS PROJECT IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Konceptualizacja dobrostanu w kontekście projektu zielone lekcje w edukacji outdoorowej

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Abstract

As a result of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the school education sector underwent numerous abrupt changes, leading many teachers and students to experience isolation, exhaustion, or even burnout, and also requiring them to confront the necessity of learning new digital tools. The aim of the study is to demonstrate how teachers conceptualise well-being concerning the acquisition of tools and the implementation of outdoor education, using the example of a project funded under the Erasmus+ program titled *Green lessons – outdoor education as a key to student and teacher well-being. Promoting the knowledge of cultural heritage and learning of foreign languages in wall-less classrooms*. In this article, we attempt to show how teachers of the Janusz Korczak Community Primary School No. 1 in Wejherowo understand well-being, using in the action research mixed methods; surveys and interviews. During the analysis, key categories emerged for understanding well-being as the resultant value of lifelong learning, co-regulation, change, as well as the role of nature and outdoor activities in the fresh air.

Keywords: nature, well-being, outdoor education, burn out effect, project method.

Streszczenie

W wyniku pandemii SARS-CoV-2 sektor edukacji szkolnej doświadczył gwałtownych zmian, w wyniku których wielu nauczycieli i uczniów doświadczyło izolacji, wyczerpania, czy nawet wypalenia, ale i musiało zmierzyć się z koniecznością nauki nowych narzędzi cyfrowych. Celem badania jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób nauczyciele konceptualizują dobrostan w odniesieniu do nabywania narzędzi oraz implementacji edukacji outdoorowej na przykładzie projektu finansowanego w ramach programu Erasmus+ "Zielone lekcje – edukacja outdoorowa jako klucz do dobrostanu ucznia i nauczyciela. Promowanie wiedzy o dziedzictwie

kulturowym i nauka języków obcych poza klasą szkolną". W tym artykule podejmujemy próbę ukazania, jak nauczyciele Społecznej Szkoły Podstawowej nr 1 w Wejherowie im. Janusza Korczaka postrzegają dobrostan, korzystając w badaniu w działaniu z metod mieszanych, ankietowania i wywiadów. W toku analizy wyłoniły się kategorie kluczowe dla rozumienia dobrostanu jako wypadkowej wartości całożyciowego uczenia się, koregulacji, zmiany oraz roli natury i aktywności na świeżym powietrzu.

Słowa kluczowe: natura, dobrostan, edukacja outdoorowa, wypalenie zawodowe, metoda projektu.

Introduction

In recent years, the prevalence of burnout among educators has gained significant attention due to its adverse effects on both teacher well-being and student learning outcomes. Educators, particularly those in modern educational settings, face numerous stressors, including heavy workloads, administrative demands, and the perpetual quest to meet academic standards and student needs. The SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, long-term quarantine and remote education have significantly affected the social functioning of many people. Anxiety, high stress levels, and depression are noted as the most prevalent psychological effects of the pandemic (Baranowska et.al, 2023, p. 96).

The need for isolation and many hours spent in front of a computer screen had a negative impact on mental health, motivation to work and well-being of students and teachers. Research data indicates that; although, over 63% of teachers feel a high or very high sense of purpose in their work, not everyone is aware that in order to benefit from what motivates and brings them joy, the ratio of positive to negative emotions should be 3:1, and not the reported ratio of 1:1 (Paliga, 2023, p. 20). As teachers returned to the classroom for the 2020–2021 school year, many encountered significantly transformed environments, routines, and instructional methods. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous schools adopted alternative teaching strategies, such as socially distanced classrooms or hybrid teaching models. Educators faced new requirements regarding instruction, updated job expectations, and modified classroom settings. Teachers had to familiarize themselves with new online teaching pedagogy and platforms, becoming the primary resource for parents navigating district-provided instructional technology. These additional demands further compounded teachers' already substantial workloads, which had been contributing to teacher burnout and anxiety, even before the pandemic (Pressley, 2021).

Teacher burnout and its ramifications

Teacher burnout is a pervasive issue in the educational landscape, affecting not only individual educators but also the educational system at large. Defined by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, burnout impacts the physical, emotional, and mental health of teachers, subsequently impeding their capacity to deliver quality education (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Exhaustion is characterised by a feeling of being strained and tired at work, a lack of emotional energy and cynicism

(or depersonalization) consisting of detachment particularly from colleagues or even pupils, and a sense of professional inadequacy consisting of a reduced sense of personal accomplishments at work (Pietarinen et al., 2021).

A study by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) revealed that teacher stress not only hampers their well-being but also has a direct influence on the classroom environment and student outcomes. Burnout diminishes teacher effectiveness, resulting in decreased instructional quality and weakened student engagement. This so-called "distress" triggers the body's defence reaction. Its effects – health consequences, fatigue, symptoms of chronic tension, or occupational burnout, are everyday realities for many teachers (Paliga, 2023, pp. 13–19).

There are certain active and future-oriented strategies which are said to support teachers' well-being when experiencing burnout. Those strategies can focus on either regulation of one's own thoughts and behaviours, that is, self-regulation, or on inter-individual activities, that is, co-regulation. Proactive self-regulation evokes regulation of one's own behaviour for instance by reducing work pace, whereas proactive co-regulation refers to intentional modification and build of social resources by asking for, providing, and receiving help from colleagues when coping with a potential stressor (Pietarinen et.al., 2021). The integration of outdoor education not only offers a potential remedy for teacher burnout but also serves as a catalyst for student engagement and motivation. The subsequent sections of this article will delve into the empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of outdoor education in revitalising teachers and invigorating student learning experiences. The issue of mental health should be further discussed, as research indicates that being in the natural environment more often positively affects well-being, regulates tension, and students with special educational needs learn self-regulation more easily (Louv, 2016). One promising approach to address the aforementioned issues and revitalise both teachers and students is the incorporation of outdoor education methodologies. According to the *Stressed Poland* report from 2011, 88% of respondents declared that they need more time in the forest. Therefore, it is worth considering a broader use of the forest as a pedagogical space. Educators should consider societal needs and follow them in a pedagogical context. (Baranowska, et.al, 2023, p. 101–102). Outdoor education, or the pedagogy of experiences, aims to disrupt the current state and established rhythm. This emotional change leads to additional consequences. As Śliwerski (2022, p. 57) notes, these consequences serve as "an external impulse that impacts the intellectual level (acquiring knowledge), physical level (developing new skills), and social level (shaping a new attitude towards others)". The research indicates that increased contact with nature can assist teachers in enhancing their well-being, reducing stress and tension, and thereby mitigating the risk of burnout.

This article delves into the multifaceted benefits of enhancing engagement with nature (including outdoor education) in mitigating teacher burnout and fostering en-

hanced teachers motivation and engagement, understanding of well-being and corresponds with the effects of Erasmus+ project *Green lessons - outdoor education as a key to the well-being of students and teachers. Promoting the knowledge of cultural heritage and learning of foreign languages in wall less classrooms* 2022/2023.[1]

Outdoor education as a restorative practice for teachers

Outdoor education, often characterised by learning experiences conducted in natural settings, offers a holistic approach to rejuvenating educators and seems to be an alternative for those seeking nature-smart schools. Engaging in nature-based activities, such as hiking, gardening, and experiential learning in natural environments, has been shown to significantly reduce stress levels and alleviate symptoms of burnout (Barton & Pretty, 2010). Moreover, outdoor education serves as a platform for professional development, fostering collaborative relationships among teachers and offering opportunities for reflection and self-care. Hinds and Sparks (2008) found that the natural environment provides a conducive setting for mindfulness practices, enabling teachers to recalibrate and regain a sense of purpose and motivation in their profession. Additionally, collaborative outdoor activities foster social support among educators, providing opportunities for shared experiences, problem-solving, and mutual encouragement (Waite et al., 2017). These social interactions serve as a protective factor against burnout by fostering a sense of community and support, thereby enhancing the overall mental health resilience of teachers. Nature-deficit disorder (Louv, 2016) understood as the alienation of children from nature and the consequences of social isolation caused by SARS-CoV-2 should provoke educators to outline the benefits of a strong nature connection, also including time spent outdoors during school. The advantages range from promoting health and wellness to reducing obesity and depression, from boosting mental acuity and creativity to simply having fun. Likewise, the aforementioned outdoor teaching could serve as means to facilitate an environment that fosters intrinsic motivation through supporting areas of competence of individual teachers in contexts promoting autonomy. Having the option to apply one's potential ideas after undergoing teacher-centred training on proper application of wall-less classrooms and sharing one's ideas with like-minded educators is bound to lead to a more profound sense of ownership of the learning process. The empowerment not only increases engagement but also fosters a deeper connection be-

[1] *Green lessons – outdoor education as a key to the well-being of students and teachers. Promoting the knowledge of cultural heritage and learning of foreign languages in wall less classrooms*, funded as a part of the Erasmus+ Program, FRSE, Applicant organisation: Społeczna Szkoła Podstawowa nr 1 im. Janusza Korczaka in Wejherowo, 2022 Round 1, Learning Mobility of Individuals, KA122-SCH Short-term projects for mobility of learners and staff in school education, Form ID 2022-1-PL01-KA122-SCH-000069060, Grant awarded: 37 931,00 €. Project Manager: Aleksandra Kurowska-Susdorf.

tween educators and students, ultimately creating a more dynamic and adaptable educational environment. By cultivating a space where creativity and collaboration thrive, outdoor teaching can contribute to sustained motivation and long-term academic and personal growth. As stated by Ryan and Deci (2000, p.76) such contexts enhance internalization and integration and result in greater motivation, improved well-being, and enhanced performance.

Enhancing student motivation and engagement through outdoor education

The benefits of outdoor education extend beyond the realm of teacher well-being, profoundly impacting student motivation and engagement (Louv, 2016). The aforementioned literature on the subject indicates that the organisation of classes outside the classroom has a positive effect on the affirmation of nature, interdisciplinary activity in the open air, and thus care for the well-being of students and teachers (Louv, 2016). Learning outside the classroom can be carried out in the form of an expedition to a museum or a joint tour of the city. Such a change in approach to education positively affects the promotion of mental health care for young people and staff. Nature-based learning experiences have been shown to stimulate curiosity, creativity, and a sense of wonder among students (Kuo & Faber Taylor, 2004).

Lessons in the field additionally affect the formation of mutual trust in the group (and students to the teacher), effective communication, negotiation skills, search for non-standard solutions, and effective management of students' resources. As a consequence, a student who is more aware of the place where he/she lives may feel co-responsible for its shape. The incorporation of outdoor activities in the curriculum offers a dynamic and experiential approach that aligns with diverse learning styles, thereby enhancing student motivation and academic achievement (Rickinson et al., 2004). Moreover, the connection between teacher mental health and the quality of instruction is an essential aspect to consider. Research has shown that teachers experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion are less effective in their instructional practices, directly impacting student engagement and academic achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, exposure to the natural environment fosters a deeper connection with learning, promoting pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours among students (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998). Furthermore, Dyment and Bell (2008) suggest that students engaged in outdoor education exhibit increased self-confidence, improved social skills, and higher levels of intrinsic motivation.

Recognizing the significant impact of our environment, often referred to as the "third educator" in shaping identities, underscores the importance of nurturing historical and cultural awareness within the educational setting (Mendel, 2006; Winkler, 2001). Sensitivity towards our learning and living environments remains a pivotal aspect of

educational philosophy. The place where we live, learn or work is profoundly pedagogical hence the subject and the place interact with each other, remaining in a dialectical relation (Gruenewald, 2003, p.621). Therefore the basic developmental needs of students should be met in close contact with nature, including the natural need for movement, action, experimentation and learning in action. Conscious embedment in the place where we live, educational activity in the fresh air seem to benefit both students and teachers. The "Green lessons" project aims to develop students' soft competences and sensitivity to the natural, social and cultural world around them.

Green lessons project's objectives

The main focus in the project, *Green lessons – outdoor education as a key to the well-being of students and teachers. Promoting the knowledge of cultural heritage and learning of foreign languages in wall less classrooms* carried out between June 2022 and November 2023 and funded as a part of the Erasmus+ Program, revolves around adopting innovative teaching approaches for the sake of well-being of both students and teachers using a broadly understood natural environment context in education. The project comprised several stages: the selection process, research, training, and implementation. One promising approach to address the aforementioned issues and revitalise both teachers and students is the incorporation of outdoor education methodologies. The primary objective is to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the diverse European heritage among students, first by building awareness of the place of origin – locality. As the place where we live or work is profoundly pedagogical (Mendel, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003). Michael Winkler emphasises that "place consolidates the most important functions, shapes the basic structures of thinking, feeling and acting and further, our interpersonal relations and moral action" (2011, p. 34). In the projects conducted between the Erasmus+ teacher training courses, the focus was placed on the implementation of the core curriculum outside the walls of the school ("Wall-less Classroom"), with the primary aim being learning through real experience. The field classes were aligned with the vision of developing the school as an institution open to the identity of the place where it is located, considering its history (Wejherowo as a 17th-century private city, in the heart of Kashubia, with the famous Calvary from 1649), culture (cultural and religious diversity of the inhabitants in the 20th century), and traditions (Kashubian customs).

The assumptions of the project are in line with the priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme that is

> offering opportunities for people's participation in democratic life through formal or non-formal learning activities. The focus is put on raising awareness of and understanding the European Union context, [...] the principles of unity and diversity [...] their social, cultural and historical heritage (Erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu).

Other objectives of the projects included: caring for the mental health of students and teachers, increasing the amount of time spent outdoors, learning about pedagogical innovations, implementing activating methods (e.g. interdisciplinary projects), counteracting professional burnout among teachers, promoting knowledge about cultural heritage (kashubian), learning foreign and regional languages outside the classroom, and using innovative methods. These methods included: field workshops, problem tasks, projects, field experiments and intensification of peer-to-peer relations. Teachers participating in the projects employed a variety of tools which they learn during abroad Erasmus outdoor courses, including interactive lessons, team building and teamwork exercises, best practice case studies, project-based work, practical laboratory work, brainstorming and focus group discussions, role-playing, group and self-assessment. The project served as an inspiration for further activities aimed at promoting outdoor activities. These initiatives further underscored the project's commitment to outdoor education and its benefits. The project activity concerns the issue of caring for the well-being of students and teachers, among others, by organising the didactic process in the natural environment and the city space. The thematic areas of the project concern cultural heritage and learning about new methods and approaches in teaching and learning. A group of teachers declaring their willingness to introduce pedagogical innovations, after a transparent selection process, took part in the project and in the research. They were offered outdoor courses abroad and then implemented new gained knowledge and skills in their everyday work.

Methodology

The well-being of teachers is of paramount importance and still remains a complex issue, requiring the research methods to allow for generalisation of findings to a larger population, as well as for a space for deeper understanding of the participants' experience. As mixed methods research combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 2006, pp. 97–113) and can "expand and strengthen the conclusions and contributions of a study" (Kajamaa, 2020, p. 267), it was chosen to provide a more complete picture for the research problem. The research focuses on defining and understanding well-being of participants who took part in outdoor abroad courses. The research subject centers on the components of well-being of outdoor education participants. Main research questions revolve around the issues: How do outdoor education training participants perceive well-being? What impact does learning in natural environments have on them? How does personal development, skill enhancement, and adopting the role of a student influence the well-being of educators? Is there a relationship between outdoor education and well-being? What effects can outdoor classes have on the mental health of both teachers and students? What proactive co-regulation strategies (intentional modification) could they notice? This study adopted a mixed-

method approach integrating, both closed-ended and open-ended survey and interviews techniques to investigate the experiences of educators before and after their participation in Erasmus+ projects. The well-being of teachers is of paramount importance and still remains a complex issue, requiring the research methods to allow for generalisation of findings to a larger population, as well as for a space for deeper understanding of the participants' experience. As mixed methods research combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 2006, pp. 97–113) and can "expand and strengthen the conclusions and contributions of a study" (Kajamaa, 2020, p. 267), it was chosen to provide a more complete picture for the research problem. The study employed the diagnostic survey method, characterised by a statistical approach to gathering facts and data regarding structural, functional, and developmental dynamics of phenomena (Apanowicz, 2002, pp. 86–88). The research techniques in this method involved interviews and surveys as this process contributed the most to finding novel solutions. The quantitative data were subjected to statistical analysis and the qualitative data were analysed thematically, and presented in categories. The study also incorporated an action research approach (AR) which centres on "doing with" rather than "doing for" and endorses democratic social change (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, pp. 1–2). This approach ensured that the value of the reflections provided by the participants was not undermined, thereby fostering a more inclusive research environment.

Research details

The selection of the group of teachers participating in the outdoor education mobilities and courses abroad was transparent and intentional. Of the 50 teachers employed at Community Primary School in Wejherowo, 30 indicated their willingness to participate in the project. This selection was primarily based on the results of an initial interview and a survey conducted by a school psychologist, designed to identify individuals at risk of burnout. Subsequently, they completed an English language proficiency exam, and 22 teachers ultimately qualified to participate in the Erasmus+ project *Green lessons – outdoor education as a key to the well-being of students and teachers. Promoting the knowledge of cultural heritage and learning of foreign languages in wall less classrooms*, between June 2022 and November 2023. The selected teachers typically possessed between 15 and 30 years of experience, specializing in subjects such as English, German and Polish language, history, chemistry, maths, early childhood education, and artistic disciplines, including music and art. At the last minute, two teachers withdrew from the mobility and were replaced by supporting teachers who volunteered (in this case with less than 10 years of experience). All teachers successfully completed a screening examination to assess their English proficiency at a minimum level of B1. Each group of teachers during a single mobility course included at least one English teacher to enhance the comfort of the journey and the training experience for the other teachers.

In the project, a 3-stage evaluation (*ex-ante, on-going, ex-post*) was assumed, engaging teachers, pupils and parents. For the purpose of this article, teachers' attitudes are meant to be analysed. The annex at the entrance was filled in by teachers, which allowed us to determine the most important objectives of the project and ways of implementation. The database was comprised of data sets intended to assess the participants' previous experiences related to: participation in training/workshops, the impact of professional work on their well-being, preferred methods to reduce stress during leisure time, observations or beliefs concerning breaks and lessons outside the school premises, and expectations associated with participation in an Erasmus+ program course. The survey consisted of 14 closed-ended questions, with single-choice and multiple choice questions. Upon project completion, the participants were interviewed and surveyed for the second time regarding their experiences related to training sessions held in 5 countries: Germany, Cyprus, Portugal, Turkey, and Belgium. Each teacher filled out a questionnaire after the training, additionally preparing a report and designing the training for members of their subject team. The questions concerned: participants' primary concerns before the training sessions, main source of discomfort at the beginning of the course, learned content, main source of happiness, expanding individual opportunities for development, ways of effectively "recharging the batteries", post-participation realisations, insights after being placed in the role of a student, the effect outdoor lessons may have on well-being of students, and ideas for future outdoor lessons.

Selected research results

The group of teachers who participated in the project underwent evaluation both at the project's outset (*ex ante*) and upon its completion (*ex post*). The questions aimed at understanding the influence of their professional work on their well-being, preferred methods to reduce stress during leisure time, observations, and beliefs related to breaks and lessons outside the school premises, outdoor education, and its impact on teachers and students. The *ex ante* evaluation revealed that 56% of respondents occasionally find their work with students as excessively burdensome. Additionally, 24% of participants expressed concerns that their work induces a state of indifference within them. More than half (56%) of teachers responding to the survey sometimes feel exhausted and tired after work. Meanwhile, 12% feel this way frequently and 28% rarely. Among the most commonly reported forms of relaxation by the surveyed employees of the Community Primary School No. 1 in Wejherowo were: contact with nature through spending time in parks or forests (64%), pursuing interests (44%), physical activity (40%), and social gatherings (40%). For 60% of respondents spending breaks between classes outside the school building on the school grounds positively impacted their well-being.

The surveyed group of teachers had already declared conducting outdoor lessons before participating in the educational project. 76% of respondents had conducted a lesson outside the school building within the last 12 months. Teachers indicated in the survey that, in their opinion, outdoor classes primarily contributed to increased student satisfaction (72%), better class integration (68%), greater creativity (45%), higher trust levels within the group (27%), more effective self-regulation of students, more effective self-regulation of students, more effective communication among students, and increased work efficiency (27%). Teachers conducting lessons outdoors also observed a positive impact on themselves associated with spending more time implementing the curriculum outside the school premises. The surveyed group of teachers indicated that conducting outdoor activities led them to experience satisfaction with regards to their work (60%), increased creativity (50%), higher efficiency, relaxation, better self-regulation (36%), and increased focus on tasks (20%). A significant majority, 89% of surveyed teachers who had experience in conducting outdoor lessons in the past year, expressed the desire to do so more frequently.

In summary, the *ex ante* evaluation revealed that the surveyed teachers are at risk of burnout, as three distinctive symptoms, i.e. exhaustion, cynicism, and inadequacy, were detected. Respondents stated that to regain well-being after work, they prefer contact with nature and physical activity which, in their opinion, most effectively helps them relax after work. Corresponding with this data is the high percentage of individuals who conducted lessons outdoors during the last school year. According to the respondents, outdoor lessons not only contribute to the teachers' increased well-being, understood as higher satisfaction levels, greater creativity, relaxation, higher efficiency, better self-regulation, and increased focus on tasks, but almost 89% of them also wish to conduct such activities on a more frequent basis. The surveyed teachers also highlighted an extremely significant aspect related to the well-being of students, understood as student satisfaction, better class integration, greater creativity, higher trust within the group, more effective self-regulation of children, increased effectiveness of their work, and more effective communication among them.

After the project conclusion, a post-project evaluation interview was conducted, involving the 22 teachers who participated in the project. Its aim was to examine the participants' attitudes toward outdoor education following professional training organised in five countries: Germany, Cyprus, Portugal, Turkey, and Belgium from July 2022 to August 2023. The empirical analysis of respondents' statements revealed categories indicating how teachers actively involved in the project conceptualise outdoor education and its connection to well-being, specifically the phenomenon of work-life balance. The surveyed teachers attribute significance to their experiences directly related to participating in the foreign training, emphasising the importance of their learning experience in the context of a different culture, challenges associated with the necessity of stepping out of their comfort zone, placing themselves in a learner's position and the amount of

time spent in the presence of nature during outdoor educational training. This correlates with previous statements by respondents, indicating deficiencies in these areas, a sense of purposelessness, lack of challenges, self-satisfaction, and possibilities for actively reducing stress.

The categories identified in the analysis of the research material demonstrate how teachers' participation in Erasmus foreign outdoor courses influenced their conceptualizations of well-being.

Lifelong learning as an antidote to professional burnout

In the spirit of progress and the need for digital education, contemporary educators face the challenge of engaging, activating, and involving their students in democratic life. The lack of tools and theoretical background often prevents them from achieving these goals, leading to stress which, in the long term, contributes to the phenomenon of professional burnout. A highly effective way to prevent this is lifelong learning, developing digital competence that enables rapid adaptation in a dynamically changing world. As indicated by the respondents in their statements, outdoor courses provided them with necessary tools: "I got to know widely-known online tools useful in education and new ones like an application where you can create comics. I gained new motivation for further learning of the English language", "I learned to use new ICT applications supporting non-formal education processes". A joy and motivation found in learning during outdoor Erasmus courses could be one of the triggers of a future proactive co-regulation strategy (Pietarinen et.al., 2021).

The respondents also pointed out the acquisition of soft skills, learning from each other, learning to set boundaries, and self-care: "I learned a lot about cultural heritage, utilising others' experiences in my own work, how to use cultural institutions, museums, places of memory for outdoor teaching, and integrative play".

The respondents also emphasised the aspect related to positive feelings accompanying them during the training but also respect for their own limitations and the need for work-life balance: "I learned to relax, have fun, and enjoy that I don't have to teach now but am being taught […] I learned that relieving myself of responsibility is comforting". As research indicates, it is worth exploring proactive strategies in buffering teacher burnout both at the school community and individual level (Pietarinen et al., 2021).

Change as a condition for development

Respondents highlighted that the mere change of environment, climate, and being in an international group significantly impacted their well-being and thus their need for development: "The training in Cyprus was relaxing; for a few days you could forget about domestic duties and focus solely on yourself and your needs", "Finally, I started enjoying

simple things again, like good food, new views, meeting new people…". Recent burnout studies show that a poor sense of community and negative social interactions, whether with colleagues or students, increase the risk of teacher burnout (Pietarinen et al., 2021).

Reflections of the respondents indicate that the need for a change in the environment and the attempt to build new relationships can act as a soothing factor: "Now, I think that for one's well-being, it's essential to spend time together in a new environment and experience new things", "Freedom, detachment from duties, unleashed some other layers of enthusiasm, hope, the desire for a walk, conversation, action", "I even learned a few phrases in Romanian!". Detachment from daily obligations and social roles had a positive significance for the respondents. The experience of novelty during the training allowed some to understand that "I am still a student who can unexpectedly perform in this role" and "challenges are necessary for a person to be proud of themselves, to feel satisfaction with what they do".

Nature as a remedy for stagnation

Living in rhythm with nature, being in contact with it, and engaging in outdoor physical activities are forms of relaxation that effectively reduce tension, alleviate stress, but also provide space for exploration, which is antagonistic to the state of stagnation, indicating a lack of action and discouragement (Bratman et al., 2015). Pedagogy of Forest incorporates the term "biophilic orientation" which is an orientation directed towards life. It expands the margin of freedom and fosters conditions that promote biophilia. Outdoor education facilitates the transfer of educational processes to the natural environment, thereby awakening "an attitude of energy towards life" in both the teacher and the student (Paluch, 2022, p. 27). The respondents indicate that an increased amount of time spent outdoors was soothing for them: "Presence in a warm country, the sun [...] I was in a very low mood due to constant illnesses of mine and my children, [...]. I was happy that I could go for a walk, run on the beach in the morning [...]". "I enjoyed walks, the number of steps taken, new views, new people, and beach activities", "Throughout the trip, I was delighted with the warm air, sun, beach, beautiful landscapes, and a fantastic atmosphere. Morning walks and jogging at sunrise". Contact with nature also allowed the respondents to detach from daily responsibilities, take a break from the daily routine, and change their way of thinking. Nature-based learning stimulates creativity, curiosity, and a sense of wonder (Kuo & Faber Taylor, 2004). "Being by the ocean, the sun, and the sound of waves made me not think for a moment about what awaited me upon return to Poland and what others thought of me", "Most of all, my batteries were charged by beautiful weather, the sun, being in beautiful and interesting places, the contact with nature, and getting away from the daily routine". The pandemic situation, characterized by prolonged isolation, quarantines, restrictions on forest access, challenging travel conditions, and limitations on social interactions, has highlighted the adverse effects of such

measures on mental health. Concurrently, it has enabled educators to recognize the value of freedom associated with nature, travel, and engagement with diverse cultures. This experience has underscored the importance of these elements in fostering teacher well-being, particularly the unrestricted and accessible interaction with the natural environment. Research has shown that engaging with nature, both during your free time and at work, can decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression, relieve stress, and enhance both concentration and vitality. Spending time in nature supports social connections. There is an association between reduced blood serum levels of cortisol, dopamine, and norepinephrine and significant time spent in natural environments (Baranowska, et.al, 2023, p. 93).

Interpersonal contacts in the service of well-being

The need for interaction with other colleagues, establishing relationships with them, and involvement in teacher communities is a determinant of well-being understood as an individual's subjective satisfaction with their current functioning in the physical, psychological, and social spheres. Co-regulation strategies, which help when facing burnout effects, refer to deliberately building and modifying social resources (Pietarinen et al., 2021). The pandemic undermined this area of social development for both students and teachers. Respondents indicate the difficulties they faced during the implementation of outdoor education concepts, caused by concerns about health and prolonged isolation: "At the beginning, group activities and dancing were a real challenge. Touching others, especially after a long isolation due to Covid was difficult for me", "face-to-face socialisation, not through a computer, was challenging. I felt like I should wash my hands constantly".

Respondents, when discussing what was essential during the training, emphasise interpersonal contacts, satisfaction with breaking barriers and stereotypes, and the joy of integration: "It was beautiful that strangers were open, friendly, and helpful; that we could get along, and we weren't a burden of limitation to each other in the group", "I liked the integration with other teachers and sharing experiences, spending time together, and interacting among us". It is worth noting that one aspect of burnout syndrome is depersonalisation, particularly detachment from colleagues (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Respondents indicate that during outdoor sessions in training, they experienced a kind of breakthrough in relationships with others, rediscovering the pleasure that comes with socialising. Being with like-minded teachers from other places brings a positive effect on teachers and relates to Ryan & Deci (2000) notion of autonomy and community.

Changing roles: Teacher to student as a new educational perspective

During the training, the teacher participants had the opportunity to gain a new perspective by taking on the role of students, which was an additional challenge due to possible language barriers. Outdoor education encourages teachers to shift from traditional teaching roles to more engaging, mentorship roles: "I realised through my own example that embracing outdoor teaching is worthwhile because it activates students, even the shy and reluctant ones". Changing the role from a teacher to a student is associated with some discomfort: feelings of fear, lack of control, and self-doubt: "Sometimes I felt uncertain, with a sense of fear about whether I was doing the task correctly, but there was also a feeling of joy and satisfaction when it was done well", "At first, I felt uncomfortable; I didn't fully understand all the instructions and analysed their purpose [...] but after some time, it just flowed out of me; I let go of the teacher's sense of control and organisation and surrendered to the ideas of others. It was healing". "Changing roles initially is associated with discomfort, but in the long run, it allows us to put ourselves in the role of a student and understand that just like on the beach, you prefer to hide quietly behind others". "It opens our eyes that we, like our students, use similar techniques to escape discomfort", "Taking on the role of a student during the course was a good opportunity to change perspective", "I realised that I am still a student who can unexpectedly perform in this role and I am ready for it". Teachers mentioned their own fears associated with taking on the role of a student, stepping out of their comfort zone, and breaking interpersonal barriers that had accumulated due to the pandemic. The respondents reported an increase in their well-being due to the restoration of a sense of agency and autonomy in their actions by the ability to design your own lessons, and the experience of becoming a learner yourself for a change (Ryan & Deci 2000).

The selected categories pertain to the enhancement of well-being among teachers. While these categories may not always have a direct connection to outdoor education, they suggest that the training teachers received in this area likely influenced their perceptions of personal well-being, heightened their awareness of their needs, and helped them recognize the positive outcomes of learning outside the classroom. The experience of outdoor education in this study can be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, teachers participating in foreign courses in countries such as Germany, Cyprus, Portugal, Turkey, and Belgium actively engaged in outdoor education. They attended classes held in diverse settings, including forests, parks, urban areas, beaches, and rivers, allowing them to witness first-hand the benefits of organizing educational processes outside the classroom. As the study shows, even a passive contact with the natural environment reduces stress and fosters positive emotions (Baranowska, et.al, 2023, p. 97). Secondly, upon returning to their schools, these educators became advocates for outdoor learning, effectively implementing the core curriculum through active teaching methods. This included the introduction of additional foreign language classes in outdoor settings, the

incorporation of educational tools: movement games utilizing the Total Physical Response method, and an increase in practical science experiments conducted near a local river, museum lessons, bike tournaments, tour in the cities, class barbecue meetings, scouting, etc. Additionally, teachers of artistic subjects facilitated concerts and outdoor events. The improved collaboration among teachers, fostered by joint foreign training, also contributed to a rise in interdisciplinary projects at the school, exemplified by the project *Fiddler on the Roof of Wejherowo* (*Fiddler on the Roof of Wejherowo – making off*), which was entirely conducted as part of outdoor education. This initiative successfully integrated musical, creative, paratheatrical, regional elements (Kashubian patterns) and historical elements alongside English, engaging numerous students and teachers from various disciplines. More outdoor projects presented on school tube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@SSP1Wejherowo.

Conclusions

The significance of nature for human health and well-being is clear. Research in Forest Pedagogy indicates that spending time in nature lowers cortisol, dopamine, and noradrenaline levels. The benefits that individuals gain from their connection with outdoor include reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower stress levels, enhanced vitality and attention, improved immunity against infections, and a decreased risk of cancers and cardiovascular diseases (Baranowska et.al, 2023, p. 97). Outdoor education training has revealed that the studied group of teachers perceives well-being as a state characterized by a sense of community, autonomy, and agency. This understanding is supported by the opportunity to learn and work outdoors. Described by Paluch (2022) openness to nature – "biophilic orientation" – is an orientation towards life, by expanding the margin of freedom it allows better self-awareness and self-orientation. Teachers emphasize the advantages of outdoor courses, lifelong learning concept, adopting the role of students, fostering social connections, sharing knowledge, and learning from others. Research stating that being outdoors in nature has a restorative effect on mental well-being, however it cannot be simply interpreted as doing outdoor education is restorative for teachers who show signs of burn out.

Teachers who took part in the outdoor courses shared their impressions and acquired knowledge among other teachers or staff members and implemented new solutions in their home institution. Observations made abroad, new tools and methods of work or competences gained during the activities were disseminated to the maximum extent. During the project, many teachers demonstrated the implementation of interdisciplinary outdoor projects in the field, the effects of which in the form of films, photo reports, newspaper articles, school newsletters, posters, etc. can be seen, among others, on the school's social media profile. The projects were often interdisciplinary, engaging

teachers from various disciplines, as a side effect fostering new friendships, also international. Pietarinen and others (2021) show that the socially embedded nature of teaching should be captured and the socio-contextual measures of teacher burnout should not be neglected. The implementation of the core curriculum outside the walls of the school has a positive impact on the well-being of students and teachers, which was expressed in the evaluation survey. The teachers were inspired by the work of teachers from other cultural circles and learned about innovations in education such as Forest Pedagogy and wall-less classroom concept. Study visits to foreign educational institutions positively influenced the enrichment of the school's teaching facilities. Actions that were taken to make the educational process take place more often outdoors were extremely necessary, as evidenced by the positive reactions of children, greater motivation to cooperate, work in groups, and interpersonal interactions. In addition, parents and pupils expressed their willingness to have green lessons permanently included in the school's offer. Feedback from the evaluation indicates a great need to improve the quality of school work by implementing the core curriculum in the field, taking into account various activating methods, using multimedia and IT tools. There is a real need for continuous training in the field of museum education, theatre education and work in memorial sites.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that more emphasis should be placed on awakening the internal motivation of teachers to stay open to new teaching and learning perspectives and incorporate proactive strategies when experiencing burnout (Pietarinen et al., 2021). There are numerous benefits from incorporating outdoor education methods. Forest therapy programs have positive effects on sociality, depression, anxiety, aggression, anger, self-esteem, stress, and school adjustment (Baranowska, et.al, 2023, p. 103). As the interpretation of the research material indicates, participation in outdoor training, which involves spending more time in nature, had a positive impact on teachers' reception of the educational experience of a foreign course. The categories selected during the analyses are consistent with the priorities of the Erasmus+ program, which support ethics in lifelong learning and active citizenship; it fosters the development of intercultural and social competences, media literacy and critical thinking. The conceptualization of the notion of well-being presented in this article includes aspects such as co-regulation through new and good interpersonal relationships, openness to change, lifelong learning, and, last but not least, the basic need to commune with nature not only in in their free time, but also at work and during educational experiences. Engaging with nature also during work can help teachers prevent burn-out effect, support their students' mental health, especially after pandemics. The significance of the natural environment in reducing long-term consequences of COVID-19 is undeniable. The Forest Pedagogy research shows that interacting with nature helps alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression, reduces stress, enhances concentration and energy levels, boosts immune system functionality, decreases blood levels of cortisol, dopamine, and nora-

drenaline, and lowers the risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and obesity. Additionally, spending time in nature encourages pro-social behavior, strengthens social connections, and can even diminish instances of violence (Baranowska et.al, 2023, p. 103).

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