

# Health Promoting School Good Practice Catalogue



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# Introduction

The *Health Promoting School: Good Practice Catalogue* has been developed within the ERASMUS+ project; School Health in Europe for Active and Healthy Ageing (SHE4AHA). It builds on knowledge and experiences from 15 pilot schools that the SHE4AHA project partners have worked with. The aim of the collaboration with the schools was, through training and practical implementation of local pilot projects, to build the schools' capacity to work with the health promoting school approach.

Through these 14 diverse local pilot projects — ranging from physically active learning in Denmark and physical activity together with the local community in Slovenia, flexible classroom designs in France, to the integration of mindfulness and nutrition education in Iceland and Portugal — this catalogue demonstrates how schools of varying sizes, settings, and cultural backgrounds can successfully embed health and well-being into everyday school life, by starting to work with challenges that are on the minds of schools right now.

This good practice catalogue is complementary material to the *Health Promotion School Guide*”, which introduces all the important concepts and the ideal methodology for becoming a health promoting school. It may seem overwhelming, but with this good practice catalogue you can be inspired by how other schools have started their journey to becoming a health promoting school - some starting with smaller bottom up projects - others with a more strategic approach from the start. Each example underlines the power of community involvement, pupil's participation, and strong leadership support in fostering sustainable change.

By sharing these good practices, we hope to encourage more schools to embark on or strengthen their journey towards becoming a Health Promoting School — recognizing that pupil well-being is not only a foundation for academic success but also for a fulfilling and healthy (adult) life, and that becoming a health promoting school is not something that happens overnight. From our experience, and close collaboration with schools we know, that it can take years for a school to become a health promoting school, and perhaps it's a never-ending endeavour because there's always room for improvement. Just like in any other innovation and development situation.

You can find the entire collection of material from the SHE4AHA project on [www.healththroughtoutlife.eu](http://www.healththroughtoutlife.eu)

We want to express our gratitude towards the pilot schools that participate in the SHE4AHA project on a voluntary basis. If it hadn't been for your engagement, motivation and willingness to share experiences, we could not have implemented this project and gained the knowledge and learning we have.

# Denmark Good Practices

## Physically active learning (PAL)

*By Line Bregnhøj Mathiesen (Kindergarten Class Leader), Susanne Meldgaard (Teacher) og Heidi Nordstrøm Danielsen (Teacher).*

### About Blåbjerg Children's Universe

Blåbjerg Children's Universe is one of three schools spread across three campuses. Located in a scenic area in a small village within Varde Municipality, Blåbjerg Children's Universe is an integrated children's center, bringing together daycare, kindergarten, and primary school (grades 0–6) under one roof. We have approximately 100 children in total, with 70 in the school section and 30 in daycare. Additionally, there are 13 staff members working in the school, after-school program (SFO), and club, along with 7 employees in the daycare.

The overall leadership across all three campuses consists of a head principal and an assistant principal. At our campus, the daily management is handled by a branch manager and a daycare manager.

The village where Blåbjerg Children's Universe is located also features its own grocery store, public transportation, a thriving community with active associations, and both small and large businesses that contribute to the sustainability of the local community.

Despite being in a lower socioeconomic area, we have passionate individuals dedicated to supporting the village and, above all, the existence of the Children's Universe. While we are a public institution, we also receive support from parent associations in both the school and daycare sections. This support enables shared outings, new playground equipment, and larger local events. The school is an important gathering place for the village and is often used both during the day and in the evenings, on weekdays as well as weekends.

Blåbjerg Children's Universe adheres to the municipality's health policy and actively works toward the following objectives:

- To enhance the health and well-being of all children and young people.
- To ensure that all children and young people have knowledge of health, including physical, social, and mental well-being.
- To teach all children and young people to make healthy choices – and to make the healthy choice the easy choice.
- To incorporate health into all areas where children and young people are present.

### Focus Area

Our focus throughout the project has been on togetherness and physically active learning. These focus areas were chosen based on the shared values of the Blåbjerg Schools, which are "Together We Succeed," with the supporting principles of Togetherness, Motivation, and Development.



The School's Motto "High Five"

We are deeply committed to delivering our teaching in a way that motivates students for learning, allowing them to develop at their own pace and utilize their own motivational resources. This requires us, as educators, to understand when to lead from the front, support from behind, or stand alongside the students in the learning process.

## Health Education Focus Area

Active Student Involvement.

## Students' Age

6-7 years and 10-12 years; a total of 46 students.

## Purpose of Physically active learning (PAL)

The purpose of incorporating physically active learning is to promote students' readiness to learn by enhancing their mental and physical well-being.

## Preparation Phase

### Student Involvement

With the aim of enhancing active student involvement in teaching, we began our project by interviewing the students, conducting focus interviews with both a boys' and a girls' group. Our goal was to gain insight into their perspectives and needs regarding physical activity during the school day, and the interviews were designed to reveal students' experiences with physically active learning based on age and gender.

The interview results showed clear age-related differences in students' perceptions of physical activity. The youngest students felt their school day already included a lot of physical activity, whereas the older students primarily associated physical activity with outdoor activities like football. This insight led us to expand the definition of physically active learning to include both physical and mental activity, with the aim of fostering a more nuanced understanding of what physical activity can be and developing activities that stimulate both body and mind.

As part of the project and to tailor the teaching to students' needs, we created a questionnaire for all students, asking them to indicate when during the day they felt the greatest need for physical activity. Using their responses, we adjusted the structure and activity levels throughout the day to align with students' preferences, and their ideas and activity suggestions were continuously integrated into teaching. This approach created a practice in which students felt both seen and heard in their daily lives.

## Parental Involvement

Parents were also actively involved in both the initial and subsequent implementation phases, as we kept them informed of the project's goals and content through parent meetings and the communication platform AULA. Although parents were not directly involved in the project development, they expressed significant interest and support. During parent meetings, we received positive questions and engagement, confirming the project's value to them.

## Implementation Phase

For the youngest students, we focused on balancing high and low activity levels by implementing mindfulness, children's yoga, and "Learning through Physical activity."

Mindfulness was used at the beginning and in transitions between lessons, aiming to lower students' arousal levels to help them become more receptive to learning. During transitions, we often used mindfulness music to create a calm atmosphere that helped students shift between different activities.

Children's yoga combined stretching and dynamic exercises that balance the nervous system, creating calmness in both body and mind. These exercises were scheduled daily as a fixed part of the school day for the youngest students, giving them a calm and focused start each day.

Learning through Physical activity is a teaching method that combines physical activity with academic content. For example, students might find letters scattered around the playground and then assemble them into words. This approach merges learning with physical activity in a playful way, making teaching more engaging.

To meet students' desire for more activity and social interaction, we also introduced daily group walks across age levels. These walks allowed students to build bonds with each other and with the adults while enjoying fresh air and exercise.



Walk of the day

Furthermore, we introduced weekly shared reading sessions, where older students read aloud to the younger ones. Additionally, we scheduled shared activities for the middle school level, including everything from games and



teamwork exercises to concentration activities. In the middle grades, we also implemented Brain Breaks—short, structured breaks in the lessons designed to help improve students' focus, reduce stress, and enhance readiness to learn.

## A Unified Approach Among ALL Teachers

Creating safe and predictable learning environments for all students has been a priority for us. To support this, we introduced a consistent lesson approach, where all teachers used the same structure and routines at the beginning of each lesson. This standardized start aimed, firstly, to reinforce students' sense of security by providing a clear expectation of what to anticipate when a new lesson begins. Secondly, through these secure and predictable frameworks, it became easier for students to shift focus from one activity to another, mentally preparing them for the upcoming lesson.

## Results and Evaluation

The project has yielded positive results for both students and teachers. For us as teachers, it has led to an increased awareness of the importance of integrating mental and physical activities into the school day. We have become more conscious of how these activities can support students' well-being and learning.

For the students, we see a clear improvement in their readiness to learn and overall well-being across grade levels. Specifically, we observe that students now find it easier to concentrate and engage deeply in lessons, creating a noticeably calmer classroom atmosphere. This change allows students to immerse themselves more fully in learning activities, and we see fewer disruptions during class.

The impact of the project is evident in both academic and social contexts. During recess, we notice that students are more proactive in reaching out to one another, which has strengthened the social community. There is a greater sense of unity and camaraderie among students, who now interact more across different grade levels.

This increased sense of togetherness has also extended to the teachers. We have shifted from an approach focused primarily on “my students” to one of “our students.” This shared mindset has fostered stronger cohesion among colleagues, making it easier to collaborate and support each other in creating a healthy and engaging school environment.

Overall, the project has promoted a healthy and positive learning culture where both teachers and students have strengthened their sense of togetherness and are better equipped to meet the demands of daily school life.

## Challenges

While the project has overall been a success, we faced a few challenges in the planning and implementation stages. The main challenge was that we joined the project a year later than the other participating schools. This meant we had a shorter timeframe from the outset to plan and adapt our initiatives for the students, which placed higher demands on our efforts and flexibility.

Another challenge was that the two other departments at Blåbjerg School withdrew from the project, which meant we lost the opportunity for professional sparring and experience-sharing with colleagues across departments.

To address these challenges, we strengthened our teamwork, which in turn enhanced our collegial collaboration and increased our awareness of the positive changes the project brought to both students and teachers.

## Success Factors

The broad support we received from students, parents, colleagues, and leadership has been a crucial factor behind the project's success.

In the initial phase of the project, the school's leadership actively participated in our meetings. We experienced a high level of understanding that the project would require time and adaptation for both students and colleagues. Leadership recognized that this would be a gradual process, and they did not expect full implementation across all campuses from one day to the next. This flexible approach from leadership has been invaluable in our work.

Since then, our department has welcomed a new branch leader who was not part of the project's early phases. Despite this, he has fully supported our continued efforts with the new initiatives. This trust and backing from leadership have provided a solid foundation for continuing the project with the necessary freedom and flexibility.

Colleagues have shown consistent support and interest in the project. Many have embraced the initiatives, and some have even chosen to implement similar practices in their own classes. This collegial support has fostered a culture of shared learning and collective efforts toward a common health-promoting direction for the school.

Parents have also been very positive from the beginning and have supported our goal of creating a health-promoting school. They understand that we are progressing in small steps to ensure that all students feel included and met where they are. The parents' understanding and engagement have created a sense of security around the project, with everyone working together to support the students' health and well-being.

Finally, the educational principle of active student involvement has been essential to the project's success, allowing students to continually see the purpose behind it and ensuring that their needs and ideas are at the core of the project's design. Students' understanding and participation have been foundational to the project's success, and with the support of colleagues, leadership, and parents, we have established the first building blocks of a sustainable, health-promoting culture in the school.

## Future Perspectives

Since starting this project, the entire Blåbjerg School, across all three campuses, has become part of a municipally funded project. This development has a significant impact on the school's future practices and brings additional focus to our work on becoming a health-promoting school.

At the same time, the new project requires us to balance the two initiatives to ensure that both are accommodated in our daily practices. We view this challenge as an exciting opportunity to expand and strengthen our health-promoting initiatives while integrating new programs.

Navigating between the two projects requires a flexible and coordinated approach, but we look forward to building on the foundation we have already created, where health and well-being are central elements in the school's future development.

## Recommendations

To ensure the sustainable and successful implementation of health-promoting initiatives in the school, we recommend the following:



## Support from the Principal

It is crucial that the principal actively supports the project. An engaged principal provides the foundation for the project's impact and legitimacy. Support from leadership makes it easier to allocate necessary resources and ensures that the project is prioritized both practically and strategically.

## Engaged and Involved Colleagues

The success of the project largely depends on colleagues' willingness to participate and contribute to the development of health-promoting initiatives. When colleagues are on board and actively involved in shaping the initiatives, a sense of shared responsibility and strong collaboration is fostered to enhance student well-being.

These two factors provide the basis for a health-promoting school project to thrive and become an integral part of the school's culture and daily practices.

## Pupil Well-being— From Classroom to School-wide Effort

*By Jeppe Valbjørn (Teacher), Mia Schøler (teacher), Gro Mertner Vind (Teacher) and Sasja Pedersen (Behavior, Contact, and Well-being teacher), Fanø School, Fanø, Denmark*

Editor: Anette Schulz, SHE, Denmark

### About Fanø School



Fanø School

Fanø School is located on the island of Fanø, which has approximately 3,500 residents and is part of Fanø Municipality. As the island's only school, Fanø School serves around 350 pupils from the municipality, who mostly come from resourceful backgrounds. However, a smaller portion of the pupils come from less resourceful families, which contributes to the school's diverse pupil composition.

In 2023, Fanø Municipality's City Council adopted new school policy goals, developed in close collaboration between the Children and Culture Committee and the school board. These goals focus on promoting pupil well-being and developing their social skills, with a strong emphasis on parental collaboration as an essential part of the well-being efforts.

The school's vision emphasizes that learning involves more than just academic subjects. It is built on the belief that well-being – both social and academic – is a fundamental prerequisite for learning. As stated in the goals: 'At Fanø School, we believe that the foundation for learning is pupil well-being—both socially and academically. At Fanø

School, we teach pupils how to learn and strengthen their ability to act in a changing world. They learn from adults who are present and professionally skilled, and from peers who understand what it means to be a good friend – all within a daily life of academic challenges that are varied, expansive, and constructive.'

Fanø School thus works purposefully to create a school environment where pupils can develop on both personal and academic levels, supported by a close-knit community and strong relationships between pupils, teachers, and parents.

The school policy goals for Fanø School can be found [here](#).

## Focus Area

Well-being

## Target Group

All pupils at the school

## Purpose and Goals of the Pupil Well-being Project

The purpose of the pupil well-being project was **to strengthen pupils' well-being** – initially focusing on the transition from 6th to 7th grade, when new classes are formed, and some pupils may find it challenging to adapt to new class environments.

As the project progressed, the initiative was expanded to include the entire school, aiming **to ensure a cohesive approach to the school's well-being efforts**.

The following objectives were established for the school's efforts:

- Develop an annual plan for well-being initiatives across all grade levels, based on evidence-based teaching materials.
- All teachers become familiar with well-being-promoting practices.
- All teachers base their well-being work on each individual pupil and their previous experiences.
- Establish a steering group to support the school's ongoing health-promoting initiatives. Tasks for this group include gathering materials, providing support and courses, and setting an annual well-being focus (e.g., sleep, screen time, physical activity).

For the pupils, the following objective was formulated:

- More pupils should thrive both in and outside of school.

Finally, TOGETHERNESS was introduced as the school's central focus, with the following goals:

- Strengthen the focus on community rather than the individual among pupils, teachers, and parents.
- More pupils should experience being part of safe communities that embrace diversity.

## Pupil Well-being Project – A Project in Progress

The project on shared and preventive well-being efforts at Fanø School has been a long and educational process, evolving through several phases and involving both challenges and successes.

## Starting Point: Class Merging

The project began with the merging of 6th and 7th grades as a first step in preventive efforts. Although the class merging was implemented independently of the project itself, it was a necessary change to create better dynamics among the pupils. Subsequently, the school decided that this structure would be used moving forward in the transition between the intermediate level (6th grade) and secondary level (7th grade). When we entered the project, we were not yet clear about our precise focus, but because the class merging and pupils' well-being were significant daily concerns, it became natural to choose well-being as the starting point for our project.

## Joint Training Days and Consultant Support

As part of the project's development, several training days were organized, where we received instruction on key elements related to health-promoting school initiatives in general. Additionally, we utilized consultant support, with one of the instructors visiting the school to assist us in the development process.

## Jeppes' Presentation Faces Resistance

A milestone in the implementation was Jeppe's presentation at the teacher meeting, where the project was introduced to the entire teaching staff. The project was met with some resistance, as several teachers felt that their daily work on well-being was undervalued. At this point, it also became clear that well-being should be a shared focus across all grade levels.

## Lack of a Playbook and Deputy Principal's Departure

Work began on creating a shared "playbook" for preventive well-being efforts, but there were still many loose ends. In December 2022, the deputy principal resigned, resulting in a loss of leadership support for the project.

## Testing

In the 2022/23 school year, the playbook materials were tested in 1st, 4th, and 7th grades using Perspekt 2.0, developed by DCUM (Danish Center for Learning Environment). The testing was only partially completed, as the day-to-day workload prevented several teachers from fully engaging with the materials. For the same reason, holding a workshop proved challenging. As an alternative, the steering group attempted to gather feedback from the teachers who had managed to work with Perspekt.

The feedback was mostly positive, with several teachers noting that the materials could be implemented as a full program but that the different themes could also be used individually. To support well-being efforts across the school, a "well-being catalog" was created, accessible to all teachers. The idea was to make it easier for teachers to find quality materials on topics they wanted to address. Additionally, teachers could provide feedback and share experiences about the various materials.

However, only a few teachers have used the catalog to find resources, indicating a need for a clearer and more accessible procedure for well-being work at the school.

Fanø School's well-being catalog can be accessed [here](#).

## Experience Sharing in Iceland

At the beginning of the 2023/24 school year, the project group visited Iceland – one of the other partners in SHE4AHA – to observe various approaches to health-promoting school work. These experiences were later presented and discussed at a staff meeting. The discussion included reflections on how our experiences in Iceland

could enhance well-being efforts across primary, intermediate, and secondary levels, as well as how "Study K" could be further developed.

Study K is the school's program for pupils with special needs, staffed with personnel with specialized competencies. The staff is equipped to teach pupils who have difficulty functioning in mainstream classes. Most pupils connected to "Study K" maintain a link to their class and participate in the program only during limited periods or parts of the school day.

In the fall of 2023, a new deputy principal joined, and the project once again received leadership support.

### Dialogue and Structuring

After returning from Iceland, the project's focus on well-being was further expanded, and a cohesive structure was established through the creation of a health-promoting steering group. This group includes teachers from primary, intermediate, and secondary levels to ensure broad representation.

### Support from the School Board

In this phase, the project was presented to the school board, which endorsed the project's vision and goals.

### New Challenges: Deputy Principal's Departure and Resource Shortages

In June 2024, the new deputy principal resigned, and the project lost another key figure. Despite this, the task of health promotion was included in the school's task overview in August 2024 – although no dedicated hours were allocated.

### Focus on Preventive Well-being Efforts

Over the past two years, the project group has worked to promote the idea of a shared, preventive well-being effort to support the school's initiatives in enhancing pupil well-being. Through training days, joint instruction, and the creation of a cross-functional steering group, targeted efforts have been made to establish a common understanding of well-being and health among pupils and teachers.

Going forward, the steering group will work on developing a resource catalog to support the school's staff in their well-being efforts. This work will continue to develop and strengthen a shared well-being culture at Fanø School—for the benefit of both pupils and staff.

## Results and Evaluation

In the 9th grade, we now see clear signs of improved well-being. Positive feedback from pupils, parents, and colleagues indicates a strengthened sense of community and a well-functioning learning environment. The successful practices and initiatives that have contributed to this improvement are also being implemented in the new 7th grade, creating continuity in the school's well-being efforts.

A particularly encouraging sign is that fewer pupils than usual have chosen to leave the school after 8th grade. Only three pupils have opted to attend a boarding school or other programs, while three new pupils from Esbjerg have joined and chosen the grade as their school community. This points to an attractive school environment that both retains current pupils and attracts new ones.

As part of the transition to 9th grade, the three 8th-grade classes were merged and restructured into two 9th-grade classes. This reorganization proceeded smoothly, due to the project's emphasis on viewing the grade as a unified

cohort rather than separate classes. Pupils have had ample time to get to know each other and their teachers, creating a solid foundation for collaboration and camaraderie.

This positive development supports the school's efforts to foster well-being and community, marking a strengthening of the overall school environment.

## Challenges

To ensure continuous leadership support and facilitate the implementation process, the school's deputy principal participated in the project from its start. However, as noted above, the deputy principal took a position elsewhere one year into the project, leaving the project without leadership representation for nine months. When a new deputy principal was hired, she was immediately involved and actively participated in the project. Unfortunately, this individual resigned as of July 1, 2024, leaving the project without leadership support during its final phase. This raises concerns within the project group about the project's long-term sustainability, as leadership support has been crucial to the project's success.

Additionally, it has sometimes been challenging to get all school staff on board. Communicating the project's benefits for the entire school has been difficult. To address this, discussions have focused on the issues the project aims to address over time to make it relevant for the broader school staff. For example, during staff discussions, it became clear that everyone prefers less "firefighting" and more preventive efforts when it comes to well-being and community-building.

## Success Factors

The entire project team has been engaged and motivated to create positive change. Viewing the project from a broader perspective—where the focus on health and well-being can benefit all of Fanø School and future pupils, not just those involved in the initial pilot—has been a major motivational factor.

Another crucial promoting factor has been the team's study visit to Iceland, where we had the opportunity to observe various practical examples of health-promoting schools in practice.

## Training Sessions and Partnership Meetings

The ongoing training sessions and partnership meetings have supported the progress of the project. The other Danish partners have worked with various health-promoting themes, which have been highly inspirational in terms of both content and methods. Additionally, insights into the other partners' projects have contributed to a broader understanding of what health-promoting pedagogy can encompass.

## SHE School Guide

The School Guide has been helpful throughout the project. It has contributed to building a foundational understanding of health-promoting efforts and has also served as a practical playbook, outlining the essential elements for implementing health-promoting initiatives. As the project progressed, the work increasingly mirrored and resonated with the guidance provided in the School Guide.

## A Call for Prioritizing Preventive Well-being Efforts

"How can you afford to do this work? We can't afford not to!" – this was the response from a school leader in Iceland when asked how her school found the budget to prioritize health-promoting initiatives. This statement stands in stark contrast to the situation on Fanø – and in Denmark more broadly – where well-being is frequently



highlighted in speeches and school policy goals but still lacks the dedicated priority needed to make the work binding for schools.

Well-being and preventive initiatives are central topics in the discussion about the future of education, but without specific resources and clear frameworks, creating meaningful change is challenging. Over the past three years, we at Fanø have worked purposefully toward a health-promoting school system. Yet, when the time came to allocate the budget, well-being initiatives were not prioritized, leaving the work without dedicated time or financial resources.

It's a missed opportunity, as we, like the Icelandic school leader, believe this work is essential—not only for pupils' well-being here and now but for the school's overall development and sustainability in the long term. We can't afford not to invest in well-being. Well-being must be elevated from policy goals to practice, supported by the resources necessary to make a genuine impact.

## Recommendations

To enhance pupil well-being and prevent challenges to mental health, several recommendations should be prioritized, both politically and in daily school operations:

### 1. Put the Health-Promoting School on the Political Agenda – with a Long-Term Focus

Health-promoting school initiatives should be elevated as a long-term political priority. By integrating well-being as a core element of educational policy, a sustained effort is ensured – one that doesn't rely solely on temporary projects or short-term budgets.

### 2. Prioritize Health-Promoting Work to Prevent Well-Being Issues

A systematic focus on health-promoting initiatives in schools can serve as a preventive approach to addressing pupil well-being issues. By investing in well-being, many problems that would later require significant resources to address can be prevented.

### 3. Highlight the School's Existing Health-Promoting Initiatives

Schools should make visible the many health-promoting initiatives already in place. By showcasing well-being efforts and communicating about them effectively, a foundation is created for further development and understanding among pupils, parents, and staff.

**These three recommendations outline a holistic approach, where health-promoting initiatives become an integral part of the school's operations, positioning the Health-Promoting School as a central concept for the future of education.**

# Brain Breaks – A path to increased readiness for learning

*By Christina Buch, teacher at Vitaskolen Bohr, Esbjerg, Denmark*

## About Vitaskolen Bohr

Vitaskolen Bohr is a public school for children aged 6-16. The school has a relatively large proportion of pupils with a non-Danish ethnic background, which brings linguistic and cultural diversity to the school. Thus, Vitaskolen Bohr plays an important role in integrating children and youth from different backgrounds and creating cohesive communities. This should also be seen in light of the fact that the school's pupils come from both high- and low-income areas within the municipality.

In Denmark, local authorities are the primary school authorities, and Vitaskolen Bohr operates under Esbjerg Municipality's educational policy, which prioritizes good physical facilities, quality of teaching, and pupil well-being. Social integration is also a key priority, and the municipality supports initiatives such as language support programs and cultural projects to foster inclusive school environments. Esbjerg Municipality actively works to promote collaboration between the school and the local community, including businesses and cultural institutions, to enhance pupils' learning.

Decisions made by Esbjerg City Council directly affect Vitaskolen Bohr, and school leadership as well as parents can influence decision-making processes through participation in local school boards and parents councils and committees.

## Focus Area

Physical Activity and Mindfulness.

## Health Education Focus Area

Active Pupil Involvement

## Pupil Age

80 pupils aged 13-15 years.

## Purpose and Goals of Brain Breaks

The purpose of the pilot project was to improve pupils' readiness for learning by implementing physical activity and mindfulness in the teaching process, with the following goals:

- To increase pupils' focus and concentration.
- To promote pupils' well-being and engagement in the learning process.
- To create a more dynamic and stimulating learning environment.

## Preparation Phase

The initial phase was primarily used to review existing research and theories on physically active learning, including the effects of brain breaks and mindfulness on pupils' learning and well-being. Successful examples and best practices were sought from other schools and educational institutions that had implemented similar initiatives.

Based on the collected information, a series of activities were subsequently planned and developed:

**Brain Breaks:** Development of a set of short, physical activities that could be integrated into teaching. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the exercises were fun and energizing while requiring minimal space or equipment.

**Mindfulness:** Development of mindfulness exercises, including breathing exercises and short guided meditations, to be used at the beginning of each lesson.

**Daily Routines:** Establishment of clear structures for when and how brain breaks and mindfulness would be implemented throughout the school day.

Efforts were also made to integrate the new activities into the daily teaching plan, and a timeline was created for when the various elements would be implemented.

## Implementation and Evaluation Phase

Each day began with a mindfulness session to help pupils find calm and focus. These sessions typically lasted 5-10 minutes.

Throughout the lessons, several short Brain Breaks of 5-10 minutes were included, where pupils participated in light physical activities to regain energy and concentration.

The involved teachers were informed about the pilot project and given the opportunity to try the materials themselves. This created a shared learning experience where teachers could share their experiences and observations. Through discussions and collaborative reflection, they collectively assessed the effectiveness of the materials and discussed any necessary adjustments. This peer collaboration was essential to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the project across classes.

Teachers collected ongoing feedback from pupils about their experiences and the effectiveness of the activities, both formally through questionnaires and informally through conversations. Additionally, pupils' behavior and engagement were observed during and after activities, and these observations were documented, contributing to continuous adjustments in the project.

Based on feedback and observations, adjustments were made to the activity plans. Some activities were modified to increase their effectiveness or make them more engaging for pupils.

## Materials Used

The pilot project involved developing a "Brain Break Wheel" and accompanying Activity Cards, designed to ease the burden on teachers and actively engage pupils in the process.

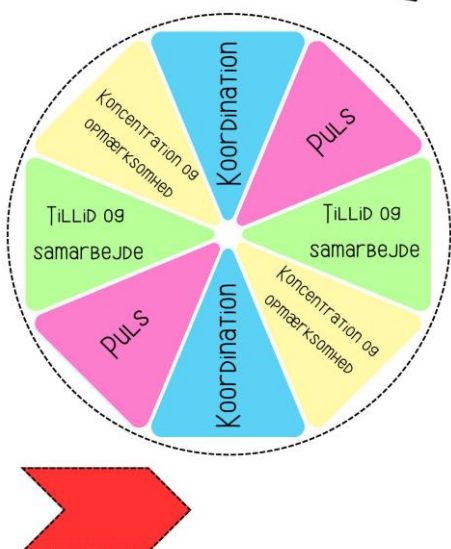
## Brain Break Wheel

The Brain Break Wheel served as an interactive tool in the classroom, allowing pupils to choose and participate in various types of physical activity exercises. The wheel was divided into four main categories, covering different aspects of physical and mental stimulation:

1. Coordination Exercises: Activities designed to improve pupils' motor skills and body awareness.
2. Cardio Exercises: Physical activities that increase heart rate and energy levels to revitalize pupils.
3. Focus and Attention: Exercises aimed at enhancing pupils' ability to concentrate and maintain attention.
4. Trust and Cooperation Exercises: Activities that promote collaboration, trust, and communication among pupils.

The wheel was placed visibly in the classroom so that pupils had easy access to it. As part of the decision-making process for selecting Brain Break activities and to foster a sense of involvement and empowerment among pupils, they took turns spinning the wheel. The wheel also contributed to structure and predictability in the learning environment.

## BrainBreak HJULET

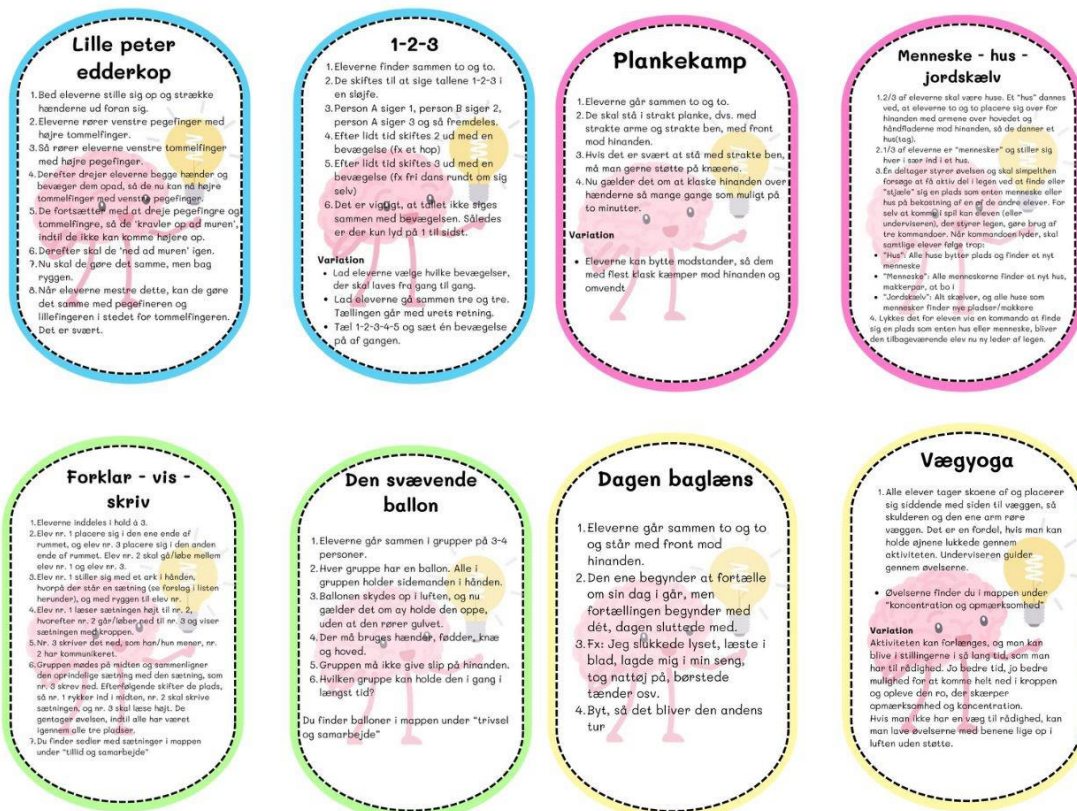


Brain Break Wheel: An interactive tool for the classroom where pupils can spin the wheel to select various physical activity exercises within categories such as Coordination, Cardio, Focus, and Trust.

### Brain Break Activity Cards

Accompanying the Brain Break Wheel are activity cards, specifically designed for each of the four aforementioned categories. These cards provide teachers and pupils with simple, easy-to-understand instructions for each Brain Break activity. Each card includes a description of the activity, detailing its purpose, execution instructions, and recommended duration.

The activity cards are designed to be easily accessible and practical for use in classroom settings. Teachers can select activity cards from the relevant stack based on pupils' needs and the current learning situation. Pupils can also participate in choosing the cards or activities, further enhancing their engagement and active participation in the learning process.



## Aktivitetskort:

Designed for each of the four categories: Coordination, Cardio, Focus, and Trust. These cards provide teachers and pupils with simple, easy-to-understand instructions for each Brain Break activity.

## Project results

The pilot project led to several positive outcomes and observable effects:

### 1. Engagement and Involvement

- Pupil engagement in lessons increased significantly as they were actively involved in selecting Brain Break activities through the wheel.
- Pupils expressed a sense of ownership over their learning process, which boosted their motivation and interest in schoolwork.

### 2. Concentration and Readiness for Learning

- The implementation of Brain Breaks helped enhance pupils' concentration and attention during lessons, supporting their readiness to learn and ability to absorb instructional material.
- Mindfulness exercises at the beginning of each lesson helped pupils find calm and focus, creating a more optimal learning environment.

### 3. Routines

- The routines surrounding the use of both Brain Breaks and mindfulness provided predictability and structure in the lessons, helping pupils adapt and benefit from the planned activities.

- b. Pupils responded positively to the routines, feeling safe and familiar with the daily procedures, which created a more stable learning environment.

#### **4. Teacher Workload**

- a. The Brain Break Wheel and activity cards were well-received by teachers as practical tools for introducing variety into lessons.
- b. The wheel structured the approach to implementing physical activity exercises and mindfulness, easing teachers' planning load and creating more efficient lessons.

### **The Importance of Early Implementation of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness was introduced to pupils as early as 7th grade, which is assumed to be a contributing factor to the project's success, as pupils readily accepted mindfulness as a natural part of their school day from the start. This is in contrast to introducing new methods like mindfulness at later grade levels (e.g., 9th grade), which could potentially face resistance or reluctance from pupils who were not previously familiar with the method as part of their daily routines.

### **Challenges**

The Brain Breaks project encountered several challenges that affected the implementation and acceptance of the method among pupils, colleagues, and parents.

#### **Pupils**

Some pupils were reluctant to incorporate new routines into their daily school schedules. They felt unsure about how to respond to the new activities and preferred the familiar and traditional approaches.

A group of pupils found it difficult to see the value of Brain Breaks, feeling that it interrupted their concentration rather than enhancing it. Some pupils needed more time to adjust and experience the benefits of the new activities. Therefore, it was crucial that pupils understood the purpose and goals of the project from the outset, so they could appreciate the value the activities brought to their learning and well-being.

#### **Teachers**

Some colleagues faced challenges in finding time to implement Brain Breaks within their lesson plans. There was a degree of skepticism among some teachers regarding the effectiveness of Brain Breaks as a tool to improve pupils' readiness for learning. To ensure the project's success, it was essential that teachers had a clear understanding of the purpose and were aware that the project was grounded in theory. This facilitated focused collaboration and strengthened trust in the methods used and the expected outcomes.

#### **Parents**

Some parents found it difficult to understand the purpose of Brain Breaks and were concerned about how it might impact their children's academic results. Communication about the project's purpose and its evidence-based benefits was therefore crucial to addressing parental concerns.

### **Success Factors**

In the pilot project, several facilitating factors contributed to the successful execution of the project:



## Engaged Pupils

The pupils' overall positive reception and active participation in Brain Breaks and mindfulness exercises significantly contributed to the project's success. Their willingness to try new methods and their engagement in the activities created a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

## Support from School Leadership

Support and backing from the school leadership were essential in securing resources, time, and space for implementing the project. Their involvement and support during the planning and implementation phases helped establish a strong framework for the project.

## Well-Defined Structures

The Brain Break wheel and activity cards provided teachers with a clear and structured method for implementing physical activity exercises in the classroom. This clear framework made it easy for teachers to integrate the activities and for pupils to understand how to participate.

## Professional Development and Support

Teachers' access to relevant professional development and support regarding physical activity in teaching and mindfulness was essential. This support helped teachers feel competent and confident in implementing the new methods.

## Positive Communication with Parents

Positive communication with parents about the project's purpose, methods, and benefits contributed to creating a holistic understanding and support around the project.

## Training Sessions and Partnership Meetings

The training sessions and Danish partnership meetings have been crucial to the execution of the pilot project in several ways. The meetings have provided an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other schools implementing similar pilot projects. We have been able to share experiences, challenges, and best practices, which has helped refine our own approach and strategy.

Discussions and collaboration with other schools have also brought new ideas and perspectives on how we at Vitaskolen Bohr can develop and strengthen our health-promoting initiatives.

The consultancy support and targeted guidance have helped us navigate challenges, make strategic decisions, and ensure that our pilot project is developed in an effective and sustainable way.

The meetings have served as a platform for idea generation, where we have been able to brainstorm and evaluate different options and solutions together with other participants and advisors. This has fostered creativity and innovation in our approach to the project.

Overall, the training sessions have been a valuable resource, supporting us in strengthening our pilot project, expanding our network, and obtaining the necessary support to navigate the challenges along the way.

## SHE School Guide

The SHE School Guide has been a valuable resource in the execution of our pilot project in several ways. The guide has helped structure and organize the different phases of the pilot project, including planning, implementation, and

evaluation, ensuring a systematic approach to the project and making sure that all necessary steps were carried out effectively.

The school guide has served as a source of professional knowledge and research in health promotion within school environments. It clarified key concepts and provided up-to-date resources, tools, and examples of best practices, which helped us make informed decisions and develop effective strategies and health-promoting activities.

## Future Perspectives

At Vitaskolen Bohr, we continue to work on implementing health-promoting initiatives in teaching. We are building on the experiences gained from the project and believe that our targeted efforts make a positive difference in pupils' health, well-being, and learning.

## Recommendations

### For Teachers

- Introduce regular and structured Brain Breaks in your teaching to enhance pupils' engagement and readiness to learn.
- Use tools like a Brain Break Wheel and Activity Cards to facilitate implementation and provide pupils with choices.
- Utilize different types of Brain Breaks (coordination, cardio, focus, trust, and cooperation) to cater to various needs and strengthen different skills among pupils.
- Begin implementing mindfulness early in the school experience to establish it as a stable routine that supports pupils' concentration and well-being.

### For School Leaders

- Provide teachers with professional development and resources on physical activity in teaching and mindfulness to enhance their skills and confidence in implementation.
- Create an organizational framework that supports the use of Brain Breaks and mindfulness, including resources, time, and space in the school day.

### For Policymakers

- Invest in resources and support for schools' health promotion initiatives, including teacher training and the provision of necessary materials like Brain Break Wheels and Activity Cards.
- Incorporate health promotion, including physical activity and mindfulness, into school policies and curricula to support pupils' well-being and readiness for learning.

## Possible Slogans

- *Physical activity Paves the Way for Learning: Active Teaching for Active Minds!*
- *From Physical activity to Mastery: Make Every Lesson a Springboard!*
- *Readiness for Learning Starts with Physical activity: Active Body, Sharp Mind!*
- *On the Move Toward Knowledge: Middle Schoolers in Action!*
- *Active Bodies, Active Minds: Physical activity Fuels Learning!*

# France Good Practices

## The flexible classroom: rethinking teaching spaces and practices to improve the well-being of pupils and the school climate

*By Manon Metrat, school head and teacher at the Ecole Primaire Chazeau, Firminy, France*

### About Ecole Primaire du Mas

Ecole Primaire du Mas is a state school, located in the countryside on the outskirts of Firminy, a small town of approximately 17,000 inhabitants close to Saint Etienne. The school is outside the town centre, in a rather rural area, with a high proportion of professionals and little social diversity.

The local education district was very interested in the project, given that the municipality wanted to work more with the national education authorities towards children's health. Strengthening the community around the school was also an important element for the national education inspector.

### Focus Area

Well-being and school climate

### Health Education Focus Area

Conflict management.

Inclusion and respecting differences.

### Pupil Age

Year 1: 6- to 9-year-olds

Year 2: 7- to 10-year-olds

### Purpose of the flexible classroom

As part of the SHE4AHA project and our objective to work on school climate, we set up a flexible classroom. This involves installing equipment and physically organizing the classroom to best meet the needs of the pupils.

## Implementing the flexible classroom

### Layout, materials and space management

There are several types of desks and chairs available: traditional chairs, big balloons, dynamic tumble stools, etc. We also propose other specific pieces of furniture and a layout that allows work to be done in groups, for example in clusters. In this way, each child can choose to work seated, standing up, on a moving seat or on a fixed seat, thereby reducing the disruption in the classroom caused by having to remain seated on a chair. This is not for everyone. The classroom is designed so that the pupils can move around differently depending on learning times. The tables are arranged so that there can be times for independent or group work, as well as group times with a collective area.

The layout of the classroom changes regularly so that the pupils can rediscover their classroom and make suggestions about what layout they prefer. The pupils change places every week; they have a tray with their school material. They are able to choose the place they wish to take during the week. After a while, they are able to see what suits them best, so that they can progress and work. The use of the corridor and the head teacher's office, which are adjacent to the classroom, means that the pupils have access to different areas to do workshops alone or in small groups without disturbing the other pupils. This also allows the pupils to escape the presence of the class group and have quieter times.

A space where the child feels good and wants to take possession of it, helps to keep the pupil motivated and more available for learning.

## Teaching Practice

On the other hand, the aim is to make teaching more flexible by introducing a different way of operating based on differentiation (different timescales, different requirements, etc.), with the introduction of tutorial and group activities, for example: the pupils have a work plan and they follow it. Once they have finished, they have access to the workshops: construction or card games, but also mental arithmetic activities.

As is the case in nursery schools, these workshops can be organized for children up to CM2 (when pupils are in their last year of primary school). It's a way of getting them to work in a different way. It doesn't mean that the children do what they want. Quite the opposite. The rules need to be well set and clear to the whole group for it to work.

The layout of the flexible classroom works, as long as you are precise in the rules you expect pupils to respect, but also in the teaching. It is a space that must be set up for the well-being of the pupils and the teacher, so that it can be used to best effect and to encourage everyone's motivation.

As far as I'm concerned, it's true that I'm much stricter than my colleagues. But that's how I operate. You have to find your own, to explore different avenues about which direction to take, and to know what you're going to be able to accept or not. More broadly, our school has also been involved in other activities as part of the implementation of the health-promoting schools framework, particularly on promoting physical activity and around food. These activities have enabled us to work with other schools that are also involved in this initiative, thereby promoting diversity and inclusion, preparing older children to start at secondary school, and strengthening links and communication with all members of the educational community, as well as with other partners, particularly associations.

## Evaluation

No formal evaluation of the implementation of the health-promoting schools framework has been carried out within the school, but our teaching team have discussed which projects should or should not be renewed, depending on how well they were received by the pupils, how they went with the partners, and funding constraints.

An evaluation was carried out by the local district inspector. We do not know the results.

Finally, a researcher worked with us on the implementation of the flexible classroom. Pupils filled in questionnaires before and after the actual implementation. He looked at what this produced in terms of motivation, well-being and stress. The results have not yet been published, so I can't share them.

## Project results

We observed that the pupils were more responsible and autonomous in their tasks between the beginning and the end of the year. The class as a group communicates a lot and listens more. There are fewer conflicts; there is also more kindness, mutual aid and cooperation. And the children work in a calmer atmosphere. In short, this flexible class layout helps to give pupils a say in what they learn and in their lives at school.

## Challenges

Over the course of the project, we had to face several challenges, which we overcame.

**Challenge 1:** We faced a lack of involvement from some teachers towards the health-promoting school approach: indeed, it was perceived as an additional burden.

**The solution we found:** We refocused our working group on a driving core of motivated teachers to boost others and bring them out of their comfort zone gently, by trying to value the skills implemented in the projects.

**Challenge 2:** We also encountered difficulties in mobilizing all the partners and to coordinate our actions.

**The solution we found:** We relied on the involvement of the district to liaise with the municipality and target actions according to the needs identified.

**Challenge 3:** Certain financial constraints may have limited the implementation of certain elements of the project.

**The solution we found:** We applied for grants from the municipality, Saint Etienne Métropole, and the parents' association. We have also invited parents to contribute financially towards the costs of certain activities.

## Success Factors

The factors that helped our project were:

- the motivation and involvement of the teaching team
- the support from the municipality (premises, staff, subsidies)
- the funding from the parent association.

## Training

The training also provided us with knowledge to improve our understanding of the health-promoting school. It also enabled us to carry out an initial evaluation of our school, thanks to the Rapid Assessment Tool proposed during the training.

## SHE School Guide

We have found this document to be accessible and rich in concepts and information. It is useful, but each member of the school community needs to play their part fully and get involved if it is to have an impact. We relied heavily on the Rapid Assessment Tool provided in this guide for our initial evaluation. It enabled us to realise that we were already doing things towards health promotion. Because sometimes you can get the impression that you're not doing very much, but in fact when you make the list, you see that, in the end, you are already doing things. And that enabled us to target our actions initially, so we didn't spread ourselves too thin: we started with one line first and then, once that was established, we were able to work on something else.

## Recommendations

- Share your experience with other teachers who are interested, by welcoming observers into your classroom, to inspire the implementation of similar layouts.
- Don't hesitate to rely on other members of the school team to find solutions together. Indeed, we don't all have the same skills, and that is precious and enriching.
- It's important to have access to training in line with the team's own needs.
- Every member of the school community must be involved and play their part in the health-promoting school approach.



# The breakfast activity: co-constructing towards establishing a good partnership between families and school.

*By Pascale Rolland, school head and teacher at Ecole maternelle du Mas, Firminy, France*

## About Ecole maternelle du Mas

Ecole maternelle du Mas is a state nursery school which welcomes approximately 110 pupils, aged between 3 to 6 years old. It is situated in Firminy, a small town in the Loire, near Saint Etienne. The town has no schools classified as priority zones, but its population is fragile in some areas, with little social diversity. As the municipality of Firminy had decided to focus particularly on children's health, the SHE4AHA project was proposed to them, and then, to us.

### Focus Area

Education to food and taste

### Health Education Focus Area

Strengthening and promoting the partnership with pupils' families

### Pupil Age

3 to 6 years old

### Purpose of the breakfast activity

We designed our project with the following objectives in mind:

- To enable schoolchildren to enjoy and have access to free breakfasts, so that they don't start the day hungry, stay concentrated throughout the morning and learn in the best possible conditions.
- To acquire good eating habits and develop their taste awareness.
- To prevent obesity.
- To work on strengthening the partnership between the school and pupils' families.

Educating pupils to healthy eating was also one of the aims of our school project. The idea was to bring parents into the school and involve them in the process of promoting healthy eating by offering a free breakfast to all children and parents who wanted to take part, on a regular basis. Parents were able to help us prepare and set up the breakfast, which we all ate together. After that, there were also discussions, with guest speakers on the subject of healthy eating and food. A dietician and the League against Cancer were involved as partners. We also proposed activities to the children on taste, preventing food waste, and the cultural dimension of food. The project brought together the school's teachers, parents, the local council and its staff, the community centre and a number of local associations. It received financial support from the Ministry of Education and the municipality.

## Preparation Phase

At the start of the project, we carried out an evaluation of our school, based on the training courses and the Rapid Assessment tool proposed. In November and December 2022, we worked on building our project. In January 2023, we identified potential partners and thought about how to communicate about the project.

## Implementation

In January 2023, we also started to teach classes about food and taste. At the end of February-March 2023, the breakfasts were launched in the school on the Fridays before the school holidays. Then in 2024, implementation was carried out in 2 stages:

**Stage 1:** during Taste Week, breakfast was offered with the help of the families. Every day a different culinary culture explored based on the families' backgrounds and origins. Taste Week took place from 16 to 20 October 2023 (the week before half-term).

**Stage 2:** the day before each school holiday from December 2023, we also organized a breakfast.

## Results and Evaluation

No internal evaluation was formalized within the school, as the local district inspector had decided to conduct their own evaluation.

### Project results

Feedback from colleagues was generally positive. And we've seen that parents were really getting involved. They have given us some very positive informal feedback, which encourages us to continue with this project.

### Challenges

We had to face one main challenge in the process of our project. Indeed, the educational advisors who were with us from the outset left and were replaced. So, the dynamic changed. The school team had to be the real driving force behind the project.

### Success Factors

The involvement and support of the municipality, the community centre, the local educational advisors and the local district inspector (in the first year) were the main promoting factors. Positive feedback from families was also a driving force. Finally, I would also say that teamwork and the impetus we gave within the school were decisive.

### Training

The training courses were interesting overall. They gave us a better understanding of the issues and the theoretical aspects involved regarding Health promoting schools.

### SHE School Guide

It's a concise document that covers the essentials of the health-promoting schools approach. But it needs to be accompanied by a facilitator, if you're not familiar with this approach. Indeed it's too long and too theoretical. We essentially worked with the Rapid Assessment Tool presented to us in training, to identify what was already being done in the school, and to meet colleagues' needs. This enabled us to focus, to organize and to summarize.

## Recommendations

- It's essential to rally a team around your projects. You need to identify motivated, dynamic people to kickstart your project.
- Partnership between the school and the families is essential. We need to cultivate communication and relationships, and work together.

- Strong institutional will, commitment and support are paramount, both at national education level and at local authority level, to establish creative and fruitful exchanges and dynamics.
- Schools need to be supported in their efforts to become health-promoting schools.  
Future teachers should be trained in this approach.

# Iceland Good Practice

## Implementing Health promoting school approach and integrating to Citta-slow approach

By Þórdís Sævarsdóttir acting principal at Djúpavogsskóli, Múlaþing, Iceland

Editor: Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir and Sólveig Karlsdóttir, DOHI, Iceland

### About Djúpavogsskóli

Djúpavogsskóli is located in the southeastern part of Iceland, in the small town of Djúpivogur, within the Múlaþing municipality. Djúpivogur, with a population of about 400, is a member of the Citta-slow network, which focuses on promoting a slow, peaceful lifestyle that values authentic production, wholesome food, and environmental protection. The school serves approximately 70 students, ages 6 to 15, from both rural and urban areas.

At Djúpavogsskóli, the focus is on co-teaching, collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning. The school utilizes its surroundings for educational and recreational activities. The core values of the school **Courage**, **Respect**, and **Cooperation** are integrated into daily life. Additionally, a music school operates in the same building, providing students with opportunities to explore their musical talents.



### Focus Areas

Djúpavogsskóli is a new participant in the Health Promoting School (HPS) approach, with the primary goal of aligning it with the Citta-slow philosophy. The focus for the pilot project, part of the SHE4AHA initiative, is divided into three themes:

- **Theme 1: Nutrition and Physical Activity**
  - Develop school vegetable gardens and offer fruit subscriptions
  - Review snack and water policies in collaboration with the food canteen
  - Promote physical activity through initiatives such as the "Walk to School" project, cycling to school, the "School Run," and "The Daily Mile"
  - Increase access to the gymnasium and encourage outdoor education as part of the schoolwork
- **Theme 2: Mindfulness and Mental Well-Being**
  - Offer students mindfulness sessions and participate in the "Meditation Day for Young People"
  - Promote the use of meditation music to encourage mindfulness among students and staff
  - Provide education on mental well-being and incorporate these practices into daily school activities
- **Theme 3: Togetherness and Cooperation**
  - Foster empathy, cooperation, and positive communication within the school community
  - Strengthen collaboration with local stakeholders and involve them in school activities

- Address bullying prevention and promote constructive communication with guidance from professionals from an NGO in this field

## Target Group

The target group includes students, staff, and the broader community, ensuring active participation from all stakeholders in creating a healthier and more supportive environment.

## Purpose and Goals of the Project

The goal of implementing the HPS approach is to complement and build upon the Citta-slow approach. Stakeholders are enthusiastic about the project and communication channels are open within the school and with the local community. Positive attitudes from the community and active student participation have facilitated successful project implementation and enhanced dialogue between home and school.

## Results and Evaluation

Surveys were conducted among students, parents, and staff, alongside ongoing seminars and discussions. Cooperation with the student council and leadership council helped create a platform for presenting ideas.

While the school faced challenges as a new HPS participant, the pilot project achieved notable successes:

- Theme 1: The school gardens and fruit subscriptions were well-received, leading to increased engagement in healthy eating. Physical activity initiatives such as the school run, the "Walk to School" project and cycling to school were also successful, sparking conversations about bike accessibility and gym use.
- Theme 2: Mindfulness practices saw increased participation, and staff began incorporating mindfulness into their work. There was a greater focus on mental well-being in both schoolwork and daily life.
- Theme 3: Student participation and cooperation increased, with more collaboration across age groups and stronger communication with parents. The NGO project on bullying prevention also helped engage all stakeholders.

## Challenges

Challenges included the small size of the school community, where minor issues, such as staff sickness, can delay progress. The project was occasionally put on hold due to these setbacks, which affected the continuity of implementation. Staff fatigue also impacted progress, as the introduction of the HPS approach added to existing stressors.

## Success Factors

Djúpavogur's participation in the Citta-slow movement provided a supportive foundation for the school's health promoting initiatives. The school's engagement with the movement enhanced both staff and community interest in the project. The assessment results (checklists baseline) in May 2024 highlighted opportunities for strengthening the HPS approach further.

Staff interest in the project has grown as positive outcomes have been achieved, with increasing participation from students and parents in initiatives like school gardens, mindfulness programs, and physical activity projects.

## Future Perspectives

The school will continue to align its efforts with the Citta-slow approach and integrate it with the HPS framework. The project has inspired both the school and the wider community, and the school is expected to continue its role as a Health Promoting School.

## Recommendations

Health promotion is a broad and complex concept, but it is an essential priority today. It is crucial that the implementation of health promoting initiatives is seen as a service to help interested parties strengthen their efforts, rather than as another imposed project. Focus should be placed on the small steps that create tangible changes on the ground, such as school gardens, fruit subscriptions, and outdoor education. Communication of success stories through traditional channels, including school newsletters and digital media, can also engage stakeholders and sustain momentum.



## Leisure activities during recess, healthy morning snacks and health information to parents

By María Helen Eiðsdóttir, School principal at Fossvogsskóli, Reykjavík, Iceland

Editors: Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir and Sólveig Karlsdóttir, Directorate of Health, Iceland

### About Fossvogsskóli

The Department of Education & Youth (SFS) in Reykjavík city provides comprehensive educational and recreational services to children and their families, with a strong emphasis on primary education. The department oversees 38 public compulsory schools and six private compulsory schools, serving approximately 15,440 students across the capital. These schools operate in alignment with Reykjavík's Education Policy, *"Let Dreams Come True,"* which is guided by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This policy aims to nurture each child's personality, skills, and abilities while preparing them for responsible lives characterized by understanding, peace, and mutual respect.

Among the 38 public schools under the SFS, Fossvogsskóli stands out as an exemplary district compulsory school for children aged 6–12. Located in Reykjavík, Fossvogsskóli serves around 350 students in grades 1–7 and employs over 50 dedicated staff members. The school is recognized for its committed team and active participation in the Green Flag Project/Eco-Schools, managed by the Icelandic Environment Association. It also embraces a health-promoting whole-school approach, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Fossvogsskóli emphasizes literacy development through innovative methods, such as team teaching and close collaboration among educators. The school also places a strong focus on arts and crafts, outdoor activities, and diverse, flexible learning experiences tailored to students' needs. Additionally, it promotes responsible parenting as a cornerstone of community engagement, ensuring a holistic approach to education.



SFS also supports students' diverse needs by offering specialized services, including Icelandic as a second language instruction for nearly 3,000 primary students and providing support or special education to approximately 25% of primary pupils. To enhance learning beyond the classroom, the department manages 37 after-school programs and 25 youth centers.

Through initiatives like these and schools such as Fossvogsskóli, the Department of Education & Youth demonstrates its commitment to creating an inclusive, enriching environment for compulsory school students across Reykjavík. Fossvogsskóli has been participating in the Health Promoting Compulsory school network since 2010 and was one of the first schools to apply.

## Focus Area and the implementing project

### Leisure Activities During Recess

The project manager oversees the organization and management of recess activities, ensuring a well-structured program is in place. This includes assigning staff to monitor various play stations, planning designated areas for leisure and recreation, and ensuring that all necessary resources are available during breaks. The project manager collaborated with the principal to recruit and coordinate staff for supervising these activities, promoting a safe and engaging environment for students during recess.

### Healthy News/Emails

Each month, the project manager sends out health-focused emails to parents and staff, providing practical advice, reminders, and friendly recommendations about healthy behaviours and public health. These communications aim to encourage positive lifestyle choices and foster a shared commitment to health within the school community.

### Morning Snacks

The morning snack initiative started successfully but encountered challenges in gaining full teacher cooperation. To address this, a student team was formed to propose strategies for engaging teachers and promoting the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. One idea was to introduce a monthly "fruit cup" event, coupled with regular surveys to measure the percentage of students bringing fruits or vegetables as snacks. This approach proved effective, with data showing a noticeable increase in the consumption of fresh produce among students.

### Target Group

The primary target group includes students, parents, and staff, encompassing the entire school community. This inclusive approach ensures that all stakeholders are actively engaged in fostering a healthier and more supportive school environment.

### Purpose and Goals of the project

The purpose of this project is to foster a healthier, more supportive school environment that prioritizes the physical, mental, and social well-being of students. The primary goals include reducing instances of bullying, enhancing student well-being, and promoting healthier nutritional habits through increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the project seeks to provide staff and parents with the tools and knowledge necessary to support students' well-being effectively, while creating a framework that ensures the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

## Results and Evaluation

### *Leisure Activities During Recess*

Evaluation tools included:

- Student surveys: Gathered feedback on their experience during recess, including the use of recreational facilities and conflict resolution.
- Teacher surveys: Focused on assessing conflict management during breaks.
- School Pulse survey: A national-level tool used to evaluate student well-being during breaks.
- Usage statistics for poco fields (a popular game) and the bandy field.
- Feedback on the organization of breaks and whether students utilized indoor recess opportunities effectively.

### *Healthy News/Emails*

- Monthly monitoring of students bringing fresh fruits and vegetables, comparing figures across months.

## Morning Snacks

- Parent satisfaction was assessed through informal feedback, as a formal survey was not conducted.

## Results Overview

### 1. Recess Improvements:

- Objectives were largely achieved, with a decrease in bullying reported in the School Pulse survey results.
- A noticeable improvement in the school atmosphere and student well-being was recorded.
- More recreational facilities were introduced, including additional poco fields and a ready-to-use bandy field.
- Indoor recess activities proved highly popular, with registrations filling up quickly and consistent attendance at all stations.

### 2. Healthy Eating Initiatives:

- Surveys on fruit and vegetable consumption showed a significant increase, reflecting positive behaviour changes and heightened awareness of healthy eating among students.

### 3. Health Communication:

- Although no formal survey was conducted, school administrators and teachers received positive feedback from parents about the monthly health-focused emails.

## Key Achievements

- Student well-being increased, as shown by survey results.
- The frequency of bullying decreased, creating a safer and more supportive school environment.
- Students had access to a wider variety of entertainment options during breaks, catering to diverse interests and needs.
- Indoor recess opportunities successfully engaged students, offering alternatives for those who preferred quieter or indoor activities.
- The consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables increased, fostering healthier nutritional habits.
- Parents appreciated the health-focused emails, finding them informative and helpful.

## Challenges

While the project achieved many successes, several challenges were encountered:

- Teacher Engagement:
  - Although most teachers were receptive to the project, some viewed it as an additional burden and were reluctant to invest the effort needed for its success. Attempts to activate and engage these staff members proved challenging and were not always effective.
  - There were difficulties in encouraging staff to effectively present the activity and leisure plans to students, limiting their impact.
- Student Leadership:
  - "Game friends" (students responsible for leading games) struggled to maintain their commitment during the second half of the year. Many preferred participating in the available activities rather than taking on leadership roles.
- Friend Zone Area:
  - The designated friend zone for fostering connections and social interaction was rarely utilized, partly due to a lack of consistent monitoring and oversight.

- **Healthy Eating Encouragement:**
  - Motivating teachers to actively promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among students was a significant challenge.
- **Parental Involvement:**
  - No challenges were encountered with parents, who were generally supportive of the initiatives.

## Lessons Learned

Looking back, several areas for improvement were identified:

- The initial composition of the project team could have been more strategic, ensuring a stronger commitment from key stakeholders from the start.
- Greater effort could have been made to engage and motivate teachers to participate actively in the project.
- Adjusting strategies earlier in response to challenges, such as providing more support to "game friends" or reallocating resources for the friend zone, might have enhanced the outcomes.

## Success factors

The project's results were shared with key stakeholders through presentations and updates. First, the results were presented at a staff meeting, where the impact of the project was discussed in detail. Next, the findings were reviewed during a school council meeting to ensure alignment with school goals. Parents were invited to an open meeting to share their feedback and learn about the project outcomes. Additionally, the results were included in monthly health-focused emails sent to parents, ensuring consistent communication with the wider school community.

A dedicated project manager played a critical role in the success of this initiative, especially during its early stages. It was important to allocate at least 50% of their time to managing the project's activities and ensuring its implementation. After the project became more self-sustainable, the staffing requirements were adjusted. Equally important was the strong support from the school's management, which helped embed the project into the school's culture and foster staff buy-in. Clear communication and goal setting ensured that everyone understood the objectives and their roles in achieving them.

### *Key Outcomes:*

- Student well-being increased, as reflected in survey results.
- Bullying incidents decreased, contributing to a safer school environment.
- Recess activities were enhanced, offering diverse options tailored to different needs and interests.
- Fresh fruit and vegetable consumption rose, promoting healthier eating habits among students.
- Parents expressed general satisfaction with the project and appreciated the monthly health updates.

## Future Perspectives

It is crucial to teach children from an early age the importance of prioritizing their health and making conscious decisions that support a healthy lifestyle. Schools play a pivotal role in this effort, as children come from diverse home environments with varying levels of emphasis on health and well-being.

By embedding health education into their processes, organization, and activities, schools can proactively address the many factors that impact students' well-being. This involves not only promoting physical health but also fostering mental health and well-being. Schools must ensure that they have the resources and strategies in place to respond effectively to students' needs, creating an environment where all children feel supported.

Health is more than just physical exercise; it encompasses emotional resilience, social skills, and the ability to navigate life's challenges. Mental well-being must be prioritized, with schools taking an active role in guiding and

teaching students—particularly those facing specific challenges—how to build skills and adopt habits that enhance their overall well-being.

Looking ahead, schools should continue to innovate and adapt, emphasizing holistic approaches to student health. By doing so, they will not only equip children with the tools they need for a healthier future but also contribute to building healthier communities.

## Recommendations

### 1. Dedicated Project Management

- a. The most critical factor for success is appointing a dedicated project manager to oversee and manage the project effectively.
- b. During the initial stages, it is essential for the project manager to dedicate no less than 50% of their working hours to ensure smooth implementation.
- c. Once the project becomes self-sustainable, the project manager's role can be scaled down, but continuous oversight remains important to maintain momentum and address emerging challenges.

### 2. Thorough Preparation and Clear Goals

- a. Proper planning and preparation are key to success. Ensure that all staff members have a shared understanding of the project's objectives and their roles in achieving them.
- b. Establish clear, measurable goals, and communicate them effectively to all stakeholders.

### 3. Strong Management Support

- a. Active involvement and support from school management are vital. The project must be integrated into the school's overall operations, with management playing a collaborative role in its implementation.

### 4. Embedding Well-Being into School Processes

- a. Schools should establish processes, organizational structures, and a seamless integration of well-being initiatives into daily school activities.
- b. These systems should be designed to address the diverse needs of students and emphasize the importance of their physical, mental, and social well-being.

### 5. Holistic Approach to Health

- a. Health education should extend beyond physical exercise to include emotional resilience and social skills, which are crucial for mental well-being.
- b. Schools must act promptly to guide and support students facing specific challenges, equipping them with strategies to enhance their well-being and thrive in a supportive environment.

By adopting these recommendations, schools can create an environment that prioritizes health and well-being, ensuring that students are not only healthier but also more equipped to succeed in all aspects of life.

## Growth mindset

By Sigurlaug Rúna Guðmundsdóttir, Björg Kristín Ragnarsdóttir and Guðbjörg Pálsdóttir teachers at Hraunvallaskóli, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland

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### About Hraunvallaskóli

Hraunvallaskóli is located in Hafnarfjörður, one of the five municipalities in the capital area. The school is surrounded by old lava and the school name has reference to it "hraun = lava".

The school's guiding principles are:

- Friendship
- Cooperation
- Responsibility

Uniquely, Hraunvallaskóli accommodates both a pre-school and a compulsory school under one roof.



In the beginning of the school year 2024-2025, there were 655 students in the school, ranging from 18 months to 15 years old. In pre-school there were 131 students and in compulsory school there were 524 students. The pre-school and compulsory school, work closely together, particularly through collaboration between pre-school teachers, who supervise the oldest pre-school children, and compulsory schoolteachers in the first grades. Although the two levels cooperate, their management and operations are distinct, with each having its own principal. The health promoting school teams are also separate, one who works as health promoting compulsory school and the other as health promoting pre-school. The Health Promoting Compulsory school team is participating in the project not the team from pre-school.

Hafnarfjörður, the municipality is a Health Promoting Community and follows the structure of the national network approach, that is a support for the schools in the municipality. In Hafnarfjörður are nine public compulsory schools and two private schools, seven public schools are participating in the national network of Health Promoting Compulsory school approach and one private school.

The enabling factors for Hraunvallaskóli to become a Health Promoting Compulsory school are to increase the health of staff and students, to encourage other schools to participate in the approach and to be visible in the community. Hraunvallaskóli has been participating in the Health Promoting Compulsory school network since 2011.

### Focus Area and the implementing project

Hraunvallaskóli has been working on the implementation of Health Promoting Compulsory school since 2011, but the work has been up and down during that time. However, the aim has always been to maintain the original goal, i.e. to work on a whole school approach in collaboration with staff, students, parents and other stakeholders. Checklists have been filled out that show the school's status and then actions have been prioritized based on that. In recent years, we have been concerned about the mental well-being of our staff, and therefore it was decided to implement a project on Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2017) that began in the fall of 2022 and became our pilot project in the SHE4AHA project.

The Growth Mindset implementation program is a four year intervention among all staff and students at the compulsory level of the school. The implementation seeks to use both a growth mindset and mindfulness to create



a learning community that is characterized by trust, a positive mindset, individual self-confidence and good relationships among students and staff. With a strong mindset, everyone will be better equipped to take on their tasks and challenges. All of this is aimed at increased wellbeing and better accomplishment.

The implementation process is based on a holistic approach by Hoare et al. (2017) on how it is feasible to implement what is intended to promote positive mental health and well-being in schooling, i.e. Learn it - Live it - Teach it - Embed it. The arrangement of the implementation is based on devoting one school year to each part of Hoare and colleagues' approach (Learn it – Live it – Teach it – Embed it) so that it is estimated that all the work components of the implementation will take four school years in total. By learning about what is to be implemented, employees get the opportunity to gain a deep and good understanding of the implementation topic. By living it, they can get to experience it first-hand, and through this, a common interest and sharing can be formed. After that, the staff is better equipped to teach the subject, and this leads to further loyalty and follow-up. If the subject is embedded or integrated into all aspects of the school work with follow-up and solid management, there is a greater chance that the implementation will become entrenched.

### Phase 1 – 2022-2023

The first work component of the implementation was the 2022-2023 school year, where all school staff were provided with extensive training on the growth and determination mindset and its impact factors in both life and work. One of the basic implementation tools is the Brock and Hundley Handbook (2016) - The growth mindset coach: A teacher's month by month handbook for empowering students to achieve – which is intended as a guide for teachers and staff to create a school culture that is characterized by a growth mindset. The book is structured as a lesson plan that spans an entire school year or 12 months from August to July and it was followed in substance for the most part in the teaching during the winter. But the plan is to follow the book in the third phase (2024-2025) of the implementation when it is time to disseminate education to students (i.e. teach) and the staff have then experienced the content of the book themselves.

### Phase 2 – 2023-2024

The second work component of the implementation was the school year 2023-2024 and it aimed to give employees the opportunity to live the growth mindset to promote common interest and participation in the implementation. As mentioned above, employees need to be given the opportunity and space to try the growth mindset on their own before they start working to promote the growth mindset among students and to integrate it into their working methods. Increased awareness of one's own inner voice is an effective way to work with one's own mindset according to Brock and Hundley (2016). When people are more aware of their own thoughts and well-being, they notice if they are using their fixed mindset and are therefore better equipped to work on it. In addition, in growth mindset training, it is helpful to spot unhelpful behaviours and situations that can encourage a fixed mindset.

Therefore, it was decided to use mindfulness as a tool for employees to help them apply a growth mindset in their lives and work. Decades of research have demonstrated great physical, psychological, and social benefits from practicing mindfulness, which includes paying close attention to one's thoughts, emotions, and environment. Mindfulness is a powerful training because it allows people to be more present in the moment, which can make them react to external situations and their own thoughts more effectively. Mindfulness practice is a way to cultivate conscious positive qualities. It can lead to increased empathy, both towards oneself and others, and reduce the risk of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Research on teachers who practice mindfulness has found that the teacher-student relationship improved, their teaching became more effective, and students' problematic behaviours and other stressors had less of an impact on them (Zakrzewski, 2013).

The workshops of the school year 2023-2024 did therefore consist of building on the knowledge that staff had received in combination with education about the benefits of mindfulness practice. In addition to participating in both mindfulness exercises and other projects aimed at strengthening the ability to deal with challenges, obstacles



and effort as well as one's own thoughts in such situations and in communication with other people. A collaboration was established with a Mindfulness Center and a member from them did participate in the workshops, with education and implementation of mindfulness exercises. During the school year, six workshops were held for professionals and three for general staff. Unlike the focus of the first phase of implementation, where all employees received the same training, the focus of the workshops of this phase was implemented more based on the working environment and work emphases of each employee group.

### Phase 3 – 2024-2025

Following the first and second work component, there is a greater likelihood that staff will be more willing to teach what is to be implemented, which can lead to greater loyalty and follow-up. In the school year 2024-2025, it is therefore time for the third task of the implementation, or to teach the growth mindset to students. This part of the project consists of teachers using their knowledge and experience in the field and following the year-round lesson plan of Brock and Hundley (2016) in the handbook: *The growth mindset coach in teaching*. Teachers in each year group received a copy of the book. In addition, it was suggested that their general teaching and working methods consider the ideology of a growth mindset with an interface and phrases to make it easier for students to adopt it in life and work. The assignments in the book are being translated into Icelandic and stored in the school's central database for teachers and other professionals. Posters have also been made that aim to cement the emphases and phrases related to the growth mindset among students and staff. The excellence of posters as a reminder is also for other school staff who are more involved in general school activities that take place outside the classrooms in the school's corridors, dining hall, after-school activities and community center. Furthermore, the education that students receive, and experience firsthand will benefit the staff in the school's support services and they can use the ideology of a growth mindset alongside their methods in working with students.

In this school year, the participation of parents and guardians is also added. They have been introduced to the implementation and the education, and the tools that their children are receiving during the school year, with the aim of strengthening the application of a growth mindset both in school and at home. Throughout the school year, parents and guardians have also received regular information on each month's activities and news about what their children have been up to.

### Phase 4 – 2025-2026

The school year 2025-2026 will reach the fourth phase of the implementation, embed it, where the goal is to support the implementation of a growth mindset in all activities within the school so that there is consistency between working methods and what is taught. It involves collecting data related to the growth mindset as well as updating policies and practices in its spirit.

### Target Group

The primary target group includes school staff, students and parents at different stages of the implementation of the project.

### Purpose and Goals of the Growth Mindset project

Hraunvallaskóla is a health-promoting compulsory school and is therefore committed to promoting the health of students and staff. The importance of good mental health in one's overall health is undeniable (Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir and Sveinbjörn Kristjánsson, 2013). Enhancing a growth mindset and practicing mindfulness can be important elements in improving health prospects because both can increase resilience and optimism and reduce stress (Renshaw et al., 2022; Schroder et al., 2017; Waters et al., 2015). With an improved mindset, we see challenges and tasks in brighter colours and therefore it is fundamental in everything people undertake.

The implementation seeks to utilize both a growth mindset and mindfulness to create a learning community characterized by trust, a positive mindset, individual self-confidence, and good relationships among students and staff at Hraunvallarskóli. With a strong mindset, everyone will be better equipped to tackle their tasks and challenges in their studies and work. All of this aims to increase well-being and accomplishment. The project is based on psychologist Carol Dweck's (2017) research on growth and fixed mindsets. Implementing a growth mindset in schools has several benefits for staff and students - better communication, greater motivation, greater well-being, increased courage to tackle their studies, and greater academic success (Brock and Hundley, 2016; Mesler et al., 2021; Nalipay et al., 2022).

## Results and Evaluation

### The evaluation of the project is based on:

- At the beginning of each school year, a mindset survey is administered that measures the growth and fixed mindset of staff (Brock and Hundley, 2017). Measuring students' mindset began in the third phase of the implementation. The survey consists of 10 statements with six response options from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The possible combined number of points is from 0 - 50 where 0 - 12 represents a high determination mentality, 13-25 determination mentality with characteristics of a growth mindset, 26-37 growth mindset with characteristics of a fixed mindset and 38-50 a high growth mindset. A higher value with each claim thus means an increased growth mindset. The results of the mindset survey are the basic measurement of the implementation.
- In October each year during the implementation period, employees will also answer the PERMAH questionnaire (Kern, 2014) in an Icelandic translation by Björg Kristín Ragnarsdóttir et al. (2022), which measures well-being at work based on five factors of positive emotions, engagement, good relationships, meaning and accomplishment. The questionnaire also asks about one's own assessment of health and negative experiences at work. In line with the focus of the implementation, two questions were added that measure relationships with managers. In total, the questionnaire contains 25 statements on an 11-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0-10 where 0 represents never or not at all and 10 always or completely.
- In October 2023 (Phase 2), staff responded to a shorter version of Kristin Neff's Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF). The measurement consists of 12 statements that measure six sub-components: kindness towards oneself, interpersonal factors, mindfulness, self-criticism, isolation and hyper-identity. There are five possible answers: from never to always. The possible composite score is from 1-5 where 1-2.49 represents little empathy for oneself, 2.5-3.5 medium empathy for oneself and 3.51-5 a lot of empathy for oneself. Thus, a higher value with each statement means increased empathy for oneself. Employees will respond to this survey each year during the implementation period.
- In September 2023 and 2024, staff responded to a perceived stress scale (PSS-10) (Cohen, Kamarch, & Mermelstein, 1983). The survey consists of 10 questions about the experience of stress in the past month. The answer options are five from never to very often. The possible composite score is from 0-40 where 0-13 stands for mild stress symptoms, 14-26 moderate stress symptoms and 27-40 severe stress symptoms. Thus, higher values at each question represent an increased experience of stress over the past month. Employees will respond to this survey every year during the implementation period.
- At the end of each school year, the staff answer four open-ended questions about their own experience of the focus points of the implementation at any given time, the advantages and disadvantages, the arrangements that were used and what could have been done better. Employees' responses provide important information on what they think is well done, and where there is room for improvement in refining the methods of implementation over the period.

## The results from the evaluation have shown:

- The Mindset Survey has been administered three times among staff, in August 2022, 2023, and 2024 and the results were comparable. Since the implementation takes four years it is not time to make a final assessment of whether the goal has been achieved or not. The majority of the students answered the measurement in the 3rd phase and the results have not been calculated.
- Until now, the focus has been on increasing knowledge of the growth mindset and its determinants, as well as the ability of employees to apply it in their own lives. Knowledge has been created and people's awareness of their own mindset and the importance of each individual for improved well-being has increased. Staff's awareness and understanding is assumed to be further enhanced as they have now, in the 3rd phase (teach it), started to share their knowledge to students.
- The same applies to the well-being survey, which has been administered three times, in October 2022, 2023, and 2024. Although the results were comparable, a comparison of the results of each year indicated a slight increase in wellbeing in 2024 after decreasing between 2022 and 2023.
- The empathy survey has been administered two times, in August 2023 and October 2024. The results in both years were comparable with the majority having high self-compassion and the minority low self-compassion.
- The stress measurement has been administered two times, in September 2023 and 2024. In both years roughly half of the respondents experienced moderate stress symptoms, around 40% low stress symptoms while around 10% experienced highly perceived stress.
- Staff responses to open-ended questions at the end of each school year have been useful because they have shown project managers what works well for staff and what can be improved. In this way, this measurement is a kind of a collaborative forum for those who are in charge of the implementation and those who will pass it on to students and their guardians.

## Challenges

Since the implementation of the growth mindset is a whole-school approach, every staff member must participate. The disadvantage of this is that some were unhappy about having to do the self-study that must take place in the Learn it and Live it phases. In this light, it is pleasing that the majority of staff are satisfied with the emphasis and arrangement of the implementation and as it has progressed staff has become more positive towards it.

### Other challenges:

- Lack of time. It has been difficult to find time for the implementation in the packed schedule of the school days and few suitable times actually exist, but it has been achieved with good will and solution-orientedness.
- Work and task load. There is a lot of workloads on the staff in school, so it is important it is not increased. Efforts have been made to minimize extra workload, so teachers get lesson plans and teaching material to use with students. The project is intended as a tool in the toolbox of employees that will actually reduce stress in the future and strengthen well-being.
- School authorities, both within municipalities and nationally, need to take steps towards improving the working conditions of school staff that further contribute to their well-being, such as class size and staffing within the schools, and consider how to better accommodate the diverse and ever-changing student population. These are stress factors that can undermine the growth mindset from taking root.

## Success factors

There has always been support from school administrators. We believe that this is a key factor for the project to be part of the school's curriculum. Support from the school management gives security with the project and that we are doing well.

- Positive management and goodwill towards the project. There is also a fairly general consensus among staff towards the implementation.
- The project is part of the Erasmus+ project School health in Europe for active and healthy ageing (SHE4AHA).
- Sponsorship. The project has received two grants from the Public Health fund and a grant from the Start-up Fund.

## Future Perspectives

A Health Promoting School is a program that needs to become sustainable in the school and be a part of the school curriculum, so continuing is likely.

The Growth Mindset Project is a 4-year project, and the third year is 2024-2025 so it will continue and hopefully be well managed after the implementation ends. The subjective outcome of the project is an increased growth mindset among staff and students. With such a mindset, it is expected that communication will improve in the school community between all parties, where criticism is given and received in a constructive and positive manner. Also, all parties will show increased courage, resilience and tolerance towards mistakes. Obstacles and challenges will be better dealt with, and effort will be viewed more positively (Dweck, 2017; Brock and Hundley, 2016; Mesler et al., 2021). In addition, the skills and confidence of employees to communicate and teach growth mindset are enhanced when they have received good training on the topic, which is a prerequisite for a successful implementation process (Hoare et al., 2017; Knoster, 1991).

## Recommendations

National network and website or intranet with checklists are a support and help leading the implementation of Health Promoting School, whole approach.

It is important to use the Health Promoting Schools checklist to start the work. Familiarize yourself with the guidelines and checklists of Health Promoting Schools. Immediately set down meeting times to enhance the likelihood of the project being attended to in the busy schedules of schools. Don't try to change everything right away but fill out the checklists and find where you score lowest and prioritize according to that.

Schools in municipalities implementing health promotion programs are also a support for the schools in the community.

Coordinators in health promotion work in schools need to have time and resources to prepare, work and evaluate the work.

# Portugal Good Practices

## (Re)Building a Healthy School: Students as Catalysts in Wellbeing Promotion

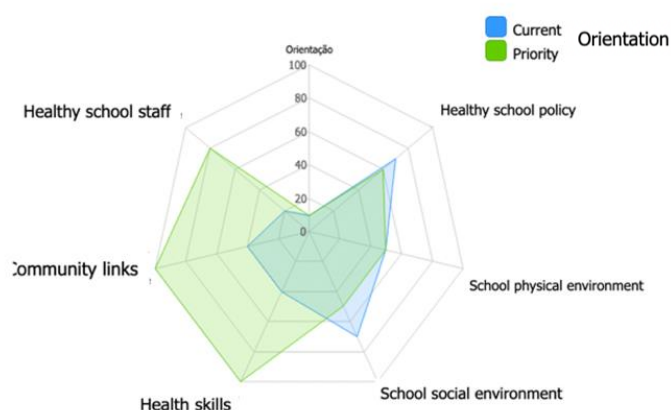
Students as Catalysts in Wellbeing Promotion Project, involved approximately 700 students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grades (10-14 years of age), teachers, non-teaching staff, health professionals and other specialists, and parents/ student tutors with the following objectives: i) to develop healthy and environmentally friendly eating student action-competence; and ii) to promote socio-emotional learning. Throughout the SHE4AHA school project, co-designed inter-class collective actions were developed with the integration of activities from several existing projects at the school. Data collection for monitoring and evaluating the project was done through questionnaires, observations by class tutors and student assemblies. The number of participants in the actions and their motivation also contributed to this assessment. Despite some challenges encountered, SHE4AHA had a great impact on the school community and the involvement of participants and school management will facilitate its sustainability. The Deputy Principal of the Basic School of Gualtar, Isabel Rodrigues, said about the implementation of the SHE4AHA project in the school:

*“This project is fundamental to the development of healthy citizens because it is crucial in both the educational and economic areas, as it promotes healthy lifestyles and sustainability from preschool to adulthood, where students teach parents and parents teach students, achieving a healthier and richer community.”*

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## Implementation

(Re)Building a Healthy School: Students as Catalysts in Wellbeing Promotion Project began at the SHE4AHA in-service teacher training Course at the University of Minho, with the application of the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool (RAT) in the school's daily life by the school team present at the training, four teachers (including the Health Education Teacher Coordinator and the Eco-Schools Teacher Coordinator), the library assistant and a global educator. The evaluation results of the SHE RAT influenced the choice of theme and the objectives of the pilot project, as there are areas that can be worked on and improved more effectively by integrating them into the project. Taking into account the areas with the low/ average score on the current situation of the school and the high/average score on the priority, this evaluation highlights the focus of future action in the process of becoming a more efficient Health Promoting School, and how, and when, the current situation can be changed to the desired one (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The spider diagram of the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool school results

With regard to health skills priority, schools needed to continue implementing in a systematic and intentional way school-class health education based on a whole school approach, which means to encourage classes to work with or share their learning with other classes or the school or broader communities.

Regarding the second priority, community links, this team considered that a priority line of action should be: i) promoting greater proximity with the Parents' Association and, in turn, with areas of various skills/valences and of greater value for students that develop a greater sense of community and belonging; ii) promoting a sense of responsibility and autonomy in seeking help and responses to the needs of students in their school and broader community, making them interventional and autonomous agents; iii) and promoting student volunteering in multidisciplinary teams and projects at the school and the surrounding community.

Regarding the third priority, healthy school staff, the line of action should aim to: i) create activities and workshops that promote the practice of health and wellbeing at school, and accessible and compatible with teaching and non-teaching staff schedules; ii) create volunteer scholarships that involve playful and pedagogical activities to be developed in the Student Space and in the School Library; iii) foster a balance between work and family life, providing moments for discussing work problems and stress; iv) provide resources and strategies that promote the mental health of teaching and non-teaching staff; v) create protocols/references to deal with recurrent absenteeism of teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as reintegration and adaptation after a prolonged period of absence due to illness.

To work on these three priorities, the SHE4AHA team chose two domains of intervention integrated into the School Cluster's Annual Activity Plan: "Healthy and sustainable eating and lifestyles" and "Socio-emotional learning".

To deepen this need, a diagnosis regarding "Healthy and sustainable eating and lifestyles", a survey on eating habits was applied to all classes from the 5th to the 9th year of schooling. Students were also consulted at the Class Delegate Assemblies and the class tutors observed the students' snack options and their food choices in the canteen. In this process of deepening the diagnosis, cases of eating disorders were also identified in students. Based on the results obtained, a whole school approach was co-designed with students and the local community to achieve the following priority objectives: i) to promote healthy



and sustainable eating habits and lifestyles in the educational community; ii) to enhance the development of competences for young people acting as change agents in promoting healthy and environmentally friendly food.

To deepen the initial theme, “socio-emotional learning” needs diagnosis, a survey regarding mental health and wellbeing was also carried out to all classes from the 5th to the 9th grades and this issue was also discussed at the Class Delegate Assemblies. The knowledge gained from exploring the theme of “Mental Health” in the Youth Parliament was also incorporated into the co-design of action strategies for promoting socio-emotional learning in the school and community settings. Therefore, the school education in this domain aims to: i) promote socio-emotional learning in students, teachers and non-teaching staff; ii) enhance the development of student action-competence in the healthy use of free time. The collective actions co-designed to promote socio-emotional learning always started with initial work with some classes, inter-class work and educational sharing with other classes and the local community. Whenever necessary for the change process, experts from outside the school, the Parents' Association and specific technicians and teachers who participated in specific actions with different target audiences, were invited.

## Results: collective actions in the core of school wellbeing promotion

### Actions actually happened to promote healthy and sustainable eating lifestyles and life conditions

With the aim of promoting healthy and environmentally friendly eating habits, the Eco-Schools Project was a co-partner of the SHE4AHA Project. One of the first objectives of this interaction was the production of organic food in the school educational garden, involving students and adults in this common goal (Figure 2).







**Figure 2.** Actions in the educational organic garden to promote healthy and environmentally friendly eating

The educational garden was also used to promote the learning of key content in Sciences subjects in an investigative and playful way, simultaneously promoting students' wellbeing and the development of their action-competence for the conservation of biodiversity.

Other students planted fruit trees in the school garden, the City Hall helped to arrange and beautify these external spaces, and the students also contributed to decorating the tables using recycled material and plants from the garden to make beautiful flower arrangements (Figure 3).





Decorating outdoor spaces with recycled materials



Improvement in external school green spaces

**Figure 3.** *Planting fruit trees in the school garden and beautifying the outdoor spaces*

During the Food Week (Figure 4), several actions were carried out in conjunction with the Eco-Schools Project, Citizenship and Development project and the 2nd and 3rd cycle Natural Sciences subdepartment to promote physical activity and healthy eating habits. Several activities, decided together with the students, were also carried out so that the school community could understand that using a Mediterranean diet contributes not only to peoples wellbeing but also to the prevention of diseases.

First, in each class, students divided into small groups carried out investigations and other activities on healthy and environmentally friendly eating or eating disorders, depending on the problem they initially chose to contribute to solving. They then decided on collective actions that included nature walks, physical exercise, relaxation activities, healthy and environmentally friendly picnics, healthy drinks, zero-waste canteen, peer education and expert talks.



Food Wheel: Playing is also a great way to learn

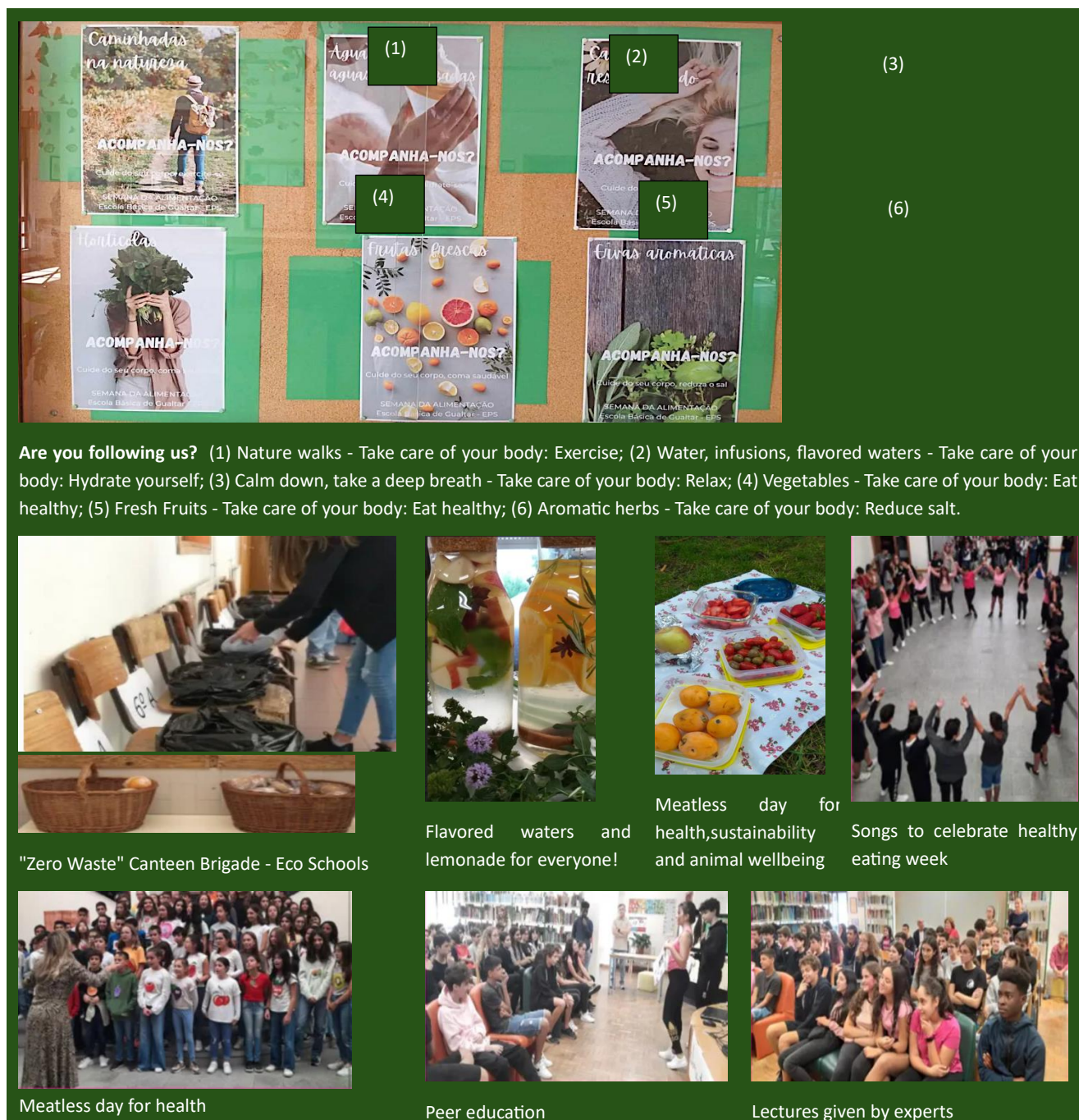


The hidden sugar



Binge eating, anorexia, bulimia





**Figure 4.** Collective actions carried out during the week of healthy and environmentally friendly food

## Action and change: students as social agents of change on socio-emotional learning

To promote socio-emotional learning as a process that helps people to develop skills to manage their emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions, three different subprojects were co-created with students, teachers and families. The first was the “Youth in Action to Promote Mental Health” (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Youth Parliament: Youth in action to promote mental health

In the first year of the SHE4AHA project at the school, the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic decided that the theme for that year's Youth Parliament would be: "Mental Health in Young People: What are the challenges? What are the answers?" The school decided to participate and integrate the activity into the SHE4AHA School Project.

The objectives of this Portuguese Government programme are: "to educate for citizenship, stimulating a taste for civic and political participation; to make known the Assembly of the Republic, the meaning of the parliamentary mandate, the rules of parliamentary debate and the decision-making process of Parliament, as a representative body of all Portuguese citizens; to promote democratic debate, respect for diversity of opinions and the rules for forming decisions; to encourage reflection and debate on a theme, defined annually; to provide the experience of participating in electoral processes; to stimulate the capacity for expression and argumentation in the defence of ideas, with respect for the values of tolerance and the



formation of the will of the majority; and to emphasize the importance of their contribution to the resolution of issues that affect their present and the individual and collective future, making their proposals heard in the various bodies of political power”<sup>1</sup>.

The first phase was carried out at the school. First there was a debate on the theme proposed annually by students (Figure 5 A) and teachers and people from outside the school, such as local entities and experts, were invited to improve the debate. All classes from 5th to 9th grade were involved. Then there was an electoral process (Figure 5 B and C), which included the formation of lists of students running for election as deputies, the campaign, and the election of deputies to the School Session. To conclude this phase, the School Session was held, where the school's Recommendation Project was approved and the respective representatives for the Sessions at district level were elected.

The second phase was the holding of District/Regional Sessions (Figure 5 D), where student deputies representing the schools in each district were brought together to approve the Recommendation Projects to be submitted to the National Session of the Youth Parliament and elect the deputies who would represent them in this Session.

The third phase, the National Session of the Youth Parliament, was held at the Legislative Assembly (Figure 5 E), where young deputies met at a national level, representing each district or autonomous region, in which the final Recommendation on the theme of that edition of the Youth Parliament was approved, after debate in Committees and in Plenary.

The second collective action was the “Creation and Dynamization of the Youth Space” (Espaço J)” (Figure 6). Through the organization of student teams, this student room was made dynamic to occupy the free time of students with music, arts, recreational-educational games, volunteer activities, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> The Assembly of the Republic Resolution No. 42/2006, of 2 June:  
<https://jovens.parlamento.pt/bas/Paginas/apresentacao.aspx>

## YOUNG FACILITATORS

- Music
- Playful-pedagogical games
- Volunteering
- Arts
- Etc.



**SPACE Y**  
**Student room**



## Identification of Young Facilitators

**Figure 6.** *Space Y at the Student Room*

The third interclass collective action was the "Week of affections at School", which included different actions to promote socio-emotional learning (Figure 7).





**Figure 7.** *Week of affections at School*

In this project, students and teachers also suggested other set of actions (Figure 8) to promote socio-affective health that included: sessions of the promotion of the socio-emotional skills program "Slowly we can go far away"; relaxation, walking in pairs, friendship workshop, friendship tree, mail from friends; peer education on "Love is in the decisions we make every day".



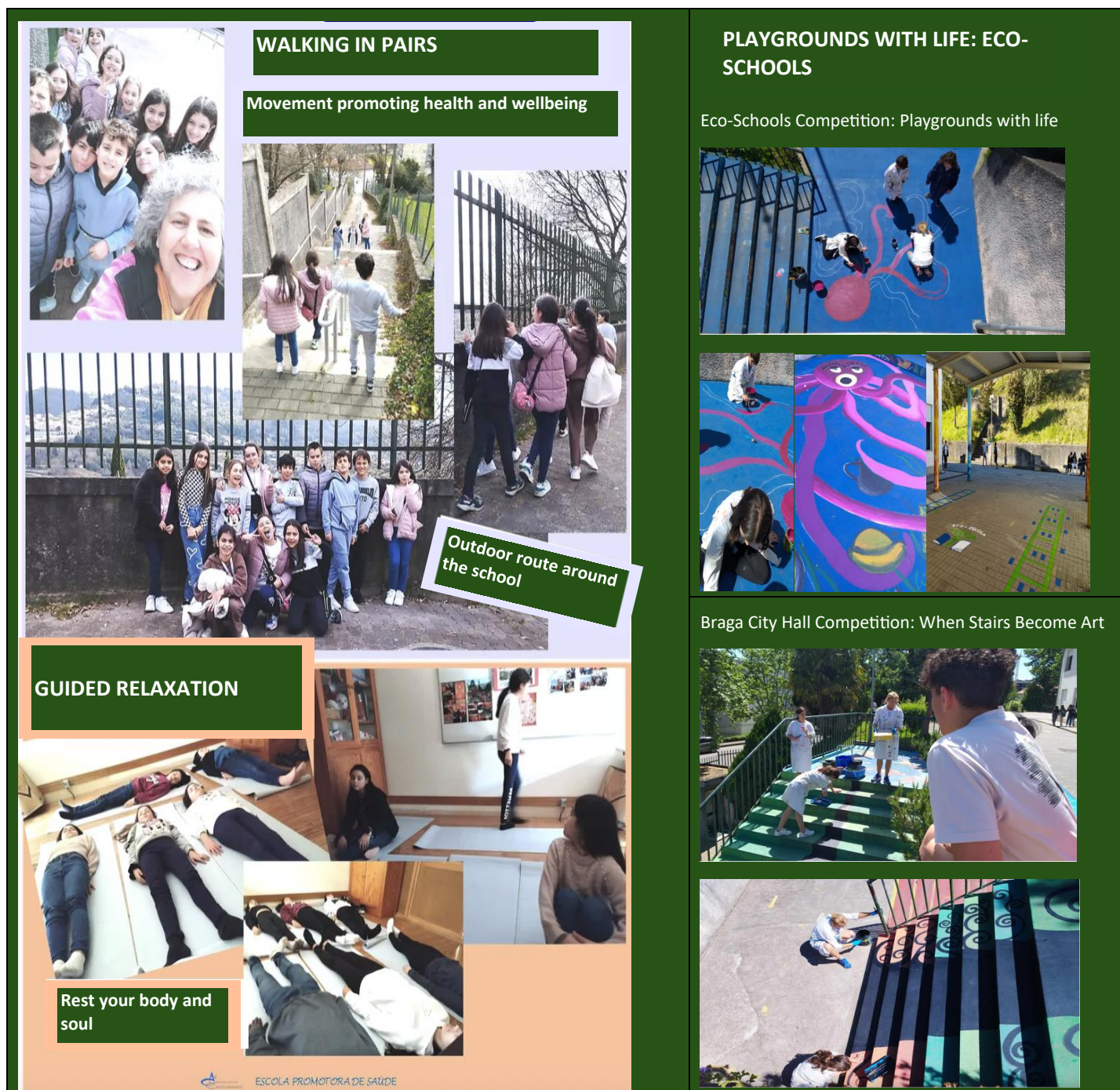


Figure 8. Walking in pairs, relaxation and playgrounds with life

### Project challenges and how they were overcome

During the development of the project, the main challenges encountered were the following: difficulties in meeting with all team members due to schedule incompatibilities; spaces that are not suitable and limited for carrying out activities; reduced participation of those responsible for students; lack of resources and rapid responses to identified problems; reduced time for students to carry out project activities, as well as for teachers; and excessive curricular workload for students and limited provision of free-time activities at school.

Some of these limitations and barriers were overcome with the establishment of partnerships. However, in the future it will still be necessary to improve/increase the degree of involvement and genuine

participation of students, teachers, non-teaching staff and education guardians. Furthermore, the articulation between the different disciplines can still be improved through the planning of activities within the scope of the School Health Promotion and Education Project.

With this project, we also understand the need to organize the following health and wellbeing promotion activities on a regular basis in the future: walks; relaxation sessions; motivation and personal development workshops; monthly flashmob; school picnics; Peddy Paper; photography competitions; healthy tables/snacks; and clubs led by students.

### Success Factors

The first facilitating factor was the creation of a dynamic team at the SHE4AHA school project with different members of the educational community, namely, teachers, two members of the school management, a specialized education technician and school health professionals. The second facilitating factor was the articulation with other projects, namely the Eco-Schools and Citizenship and Development project and various disciplinary areas. The main facilitating factor was the motivation and support of guardians and non-teaching staff.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, was the support of the school management, namely the fact that two members of the school management joined the project.

### Final remarks

#### Contributions of the SHE4AHA Course to the school project

The SHE4AHA Training Course proved to be, overall, an important guiding lever for the project's launch. It was a privileged space for sharing between the participating Portuguese schools, allowing them to be included in the European panorama of Health Promoting Schools, under the motto: Promoting Health in Students Throughout Life. More specifically, this Course contributed significantly to deepening knowledge about the concept of Health Promoting School. Essential topics were covered, such as: the definition of health according to the WHO and the evolution towards a more holistic concept, structured according to the four dimensions, the determinants of health; the principles of health promotion; the importance of competence for action; the IVAC model and the processes of active participation of students. It is also worth highlighting the integrated approach of the school as a whole (whole-school approach), exploring its different components and the way in which they are interconnected in promoting a healthy educational environment. Finally, the introduction and use of the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool, combined with the initial work of each team based on the Project Planning and Assessment framework, were fundamental elements that contributed positively to the success of the SHE4AHA Training Course.

#### Potentials of the “Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School”

The “Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School” proved to be a valuable theoretical tool throughout the development of the “Health Promoting School” project. It proved to be an essential reference that allowed us to continuously study, reflect and evaluate the principles and practices associated with health promotion, focusing on a perspective of active and healthy ageing throughout life.

## Recommendations

The lessons learned from our project, essentially weighing facilitating and barrier factors, allow us to make the following recommendations for health promotion in schools:

- a health promotion team must be created with all elements of the educational community represented, namely, students, teachers, non-teaching staff, guardians, health professionals from the local health unit and specialists related to the selected topics;
- there must be coordination between all school projects to support coherent projects that help students respond to the health and wellbeing issues they consider important;
- those responsible must be involved in the project from the beginning and be continually motivated to participate;
- non-teaching staff have an important role in promoting health in schools and should be involved from the beginning of projects;

support from school management is crucial to the success of health promotion.

## Co-creation in Action for Health Promotion and Local Heritage Sustainability

The project developed by the Basic School Monsenhor Eliseo de Araújo with the collaboration of the Bernardino Machado School Cluster, entitled "Co-creation in Action for Health Promotion and Local Heritage Sustainability", was a project based on the whole-school approach, involving around 700 students from the 1st to the 9th grade (6 to 14 years old), teachers from various subjects and coordinators of other projects at the school, parents/guardians, experts from various universities and key people from the community. The project's organizational basis was the whole-class approach using co-creation tools to implement the S-IVAC methodology (Selection of the problem/theme by students; Investigation of the consequences and causes of the problem; Visions for the future in which they want to live; and Action/Actions to eliminate the causes of the problem(s) identified & Change in lifestyles and/or living conditions, as a consequence of carrying out actions). The main aims of the school project were the following: i) to promote mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts at school; ii) to promote intellectual wellbeing, health and wellbeing social debate and action; iii) to engage students on school sports as a network for a lifelong physical exercise culture; iv) to motivate students to act as catalysts for health promotion in volunteer groups; v) to engage students in healthy cell phone-free breaks; vi) to promote teachers' mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts at school; vii) to provide students, teachers and family opportunities to exercise while getting to know and value the local heritage. The coordinator of SHE4AHA at the school, teacher Eugénia Aragão, said about the project developed at the school:

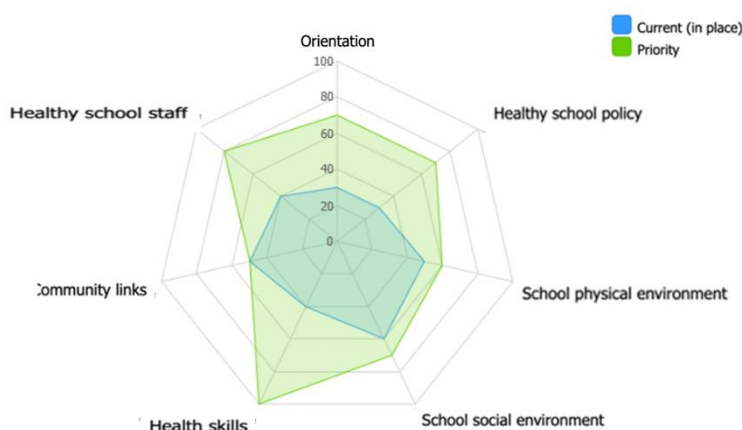
*"This project was of vital importance to the emotional, social, physical, intellectual and environmental wellbeing of each individual involved in the educational environment. We developed an innovative and comprehensive project that aimed to promote the students', teachers' and other members of this community wellbeing. We all face significant challenges in our educational journeys, the increasing demands and pressures can negatively affect our health. Therefore, it is essential to dedicate attention and resources to taking care of our own health and wellbeing, and those of others creating a healthy and positive learning environment for everyone."*

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## Implementation

The school health education team attending the SHE4AHA in-service teacher training at the University of Minho included seven teachers from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades and different subject areas (Visual Education, Physical education, Physics and Chemistry, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Technological Education, Catholic Moral and Religious Education, History). During this Course, this school team completed the SHE rapid assessment tool, allowed a rapid assessment of the school in relation to health and wellbeing aspects, such as food, physical activity, environment, mental health promotion and other relevant aspects, providing an overall assessment of the school and suggested priorities for action which were useful to guide the planning of projects and actions to improve school health and wellbeing (Figure 1).



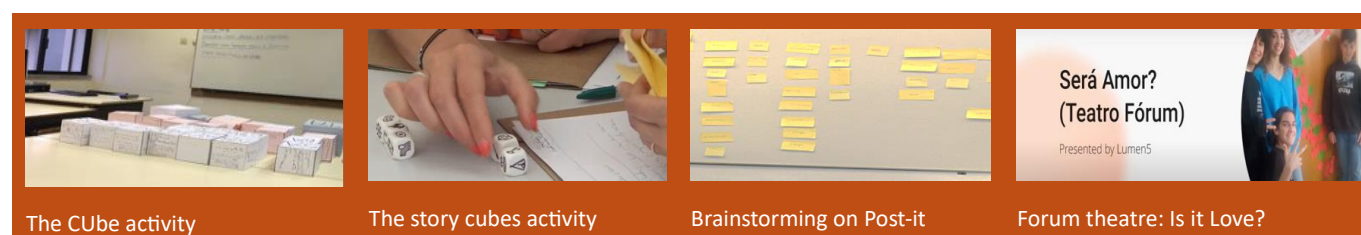


**Figure 9.** Results of the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool

According to these results, the school scored moderately in the areas of orientation, school health policies, physical school environment, community connections, and health of teaching and non-teaching staff. This indicated that there were opportunities for improvement in these areas. However, the school had lower scores in the areas of health competencies and the school's social environment. These results suggested that there was an urgent need to focus efforts in these areas to improve the health and wellbeing of students and staff.

Based on these results, priorities for the school project included improving the health of teaching and non-teaching staff, strengthening health skills, and improving the school's social environment. These included measures such as providing staff training and support, creating health and wellbeing programs for students, teachers and non-teaching staff, and fostering collaboration and support among members of the school community.

To deepen this initial diagnosis, the classes, in which one or more teachers felt motivated by the SHE4AHA project, shared their ideas about: what should be changed to increase students' wellbeing; why these changes were important to them; what could be done to make these changes happen. This discussion was done using four different activities chosen by the teacher: the Coventry University CUBE activity; the story cubes; the brainstorming on Post-it; and the forum theatre (Figure 2).



**Figure 10.** Activities to delve deeper into the topics/ problems that students wanted to solve to increase their wellbeing

The health education team also heard from teachers and non-teaching staff about their wellbeing at school and the action strategies that could be developed to improve it.

After gathering all the data, the health and wellbeing promotion actions were organized into seven action networks (Figure 3).

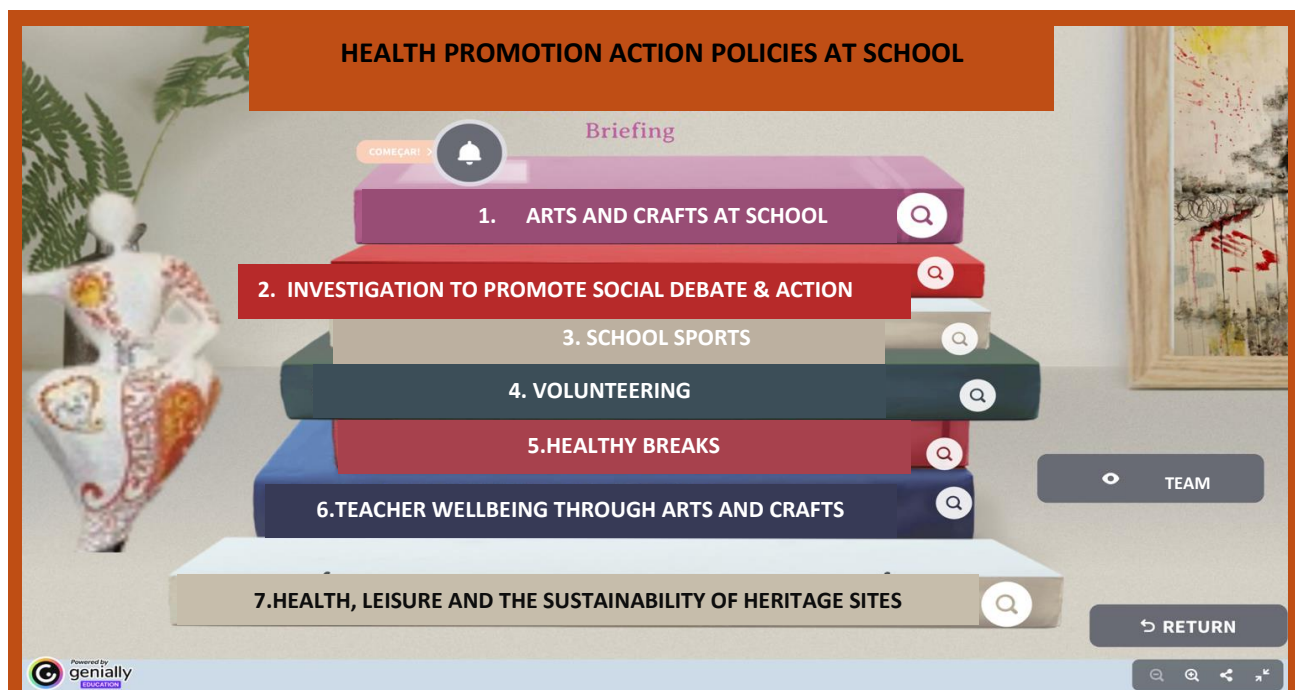


Figure 11. Changes in health promotion action policies at school based on health priorities identified by students and teachers

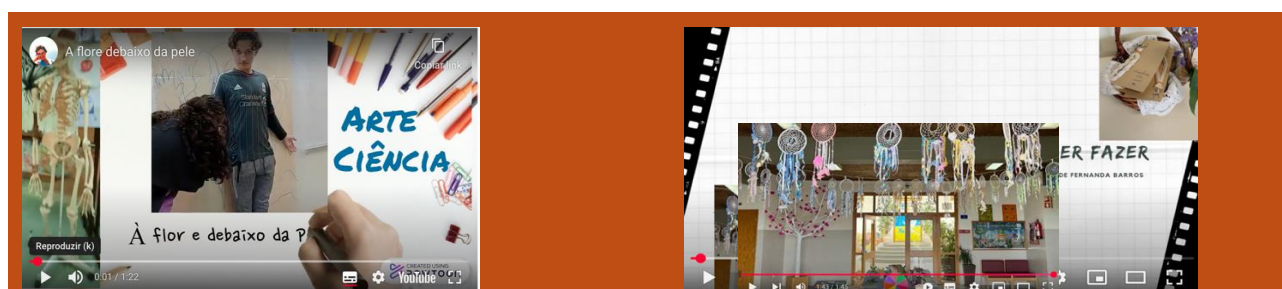
Actions carried out in these networks aimed to achieve the following objectives:

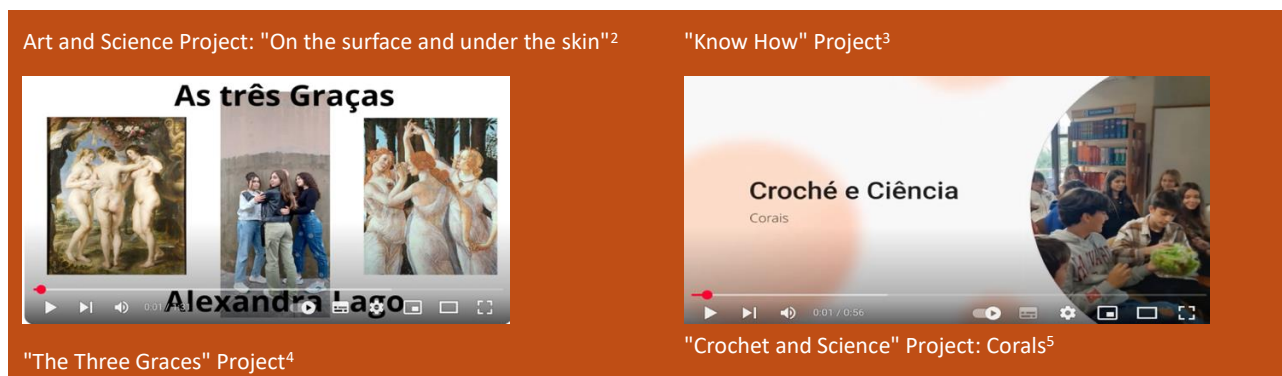
- To promote mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts at school;
- To promote intellectual wellbeing, health and wellbeing social debate and action;
- To engage students on school sports as a network for a lifelong physical exercise culture;
- To motivate students to act as catalysts for health promotion in volunteer groups;
- To engage students in healthy cell phone-free breaks;
- To promote teachers' mental health and wellbeing by socializing through arts and crafts at school;
- To provide students, teachers and family opportunities to exercise while getting to know and value the local heritage.

## Results: co-design of actions to promote school and community health

### Promoting mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts at school

With the aim of promoting mental health and wellbeing by socializing through arts and crafts at school, the Visual and Technological Education teacher co-designed with the students a set of actions in her classes to involve the school and the extended community (Figure 4).





**Figure 12.** Promoting mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts at school

Alexandra Lage, the facilitator teacher of this project, argues that drawing can help building complicity and empathy. By sharing the meaning of drawings with others, the student can establish an emotional connection and better understand the feelings and perspectives of others and his/herself. In this way, she argues that drawing can be used as a tool for building deeper and more meaningful relationships, because it increases complicity and empathy between people. In Alexandra's opinion, when working together on a common artistic project, people are encouraged to collaborate, listen actively, respect each other's opinions and share ideas. These skills are important not only in art, but also in everyday and professional life and can be improved through group artistic practices. Alexandra's argues that body expressions in art have a deep connection with mental health, as body expression is the way emotions are transmitted through the body, and Art is a way to channel and express these emotions. Therefore, Art can be used as a therapy for mental health, helping people express and process their emotions.

### Investigating health topics/issues to promote intellectual wellbeing, social debate & action

These projects involved the Natural Sciences and Arts subjects, the Science Club at School: "At the Peak of Science" and several specialists from different universities (Figure 5).

The first project, "My health footprint at school" (A minha pegada de Saúde na Escola), was carried out by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes under the facilitation of Eugénia Aragão. Organized in small groups, students co-designed and implemented actions to prevent school anxiety, social phobia, bullying, physical, verbal and social aggression, and social isolation. Two groups also carried out actions to teach how to control emotions and another group acted to teach colleagues techniques that show respect for others.

The other projects were more focused on intellectual wellbeing and oriented towards social debate and collaborative action with the community.

<sup>2</sup> Art and Science Project: "On the surface and under the skin" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puk6APOvc7w>

<sup>3</sup> "Know How" Project <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4B5un2-QHM>

<sup>4</sup> "The Three Graces" Project <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YihKo-GcAl0>

<sup>5</sup> "Crochet and Science" Project: Corais: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1AtqSdq3Z0&t=2s>



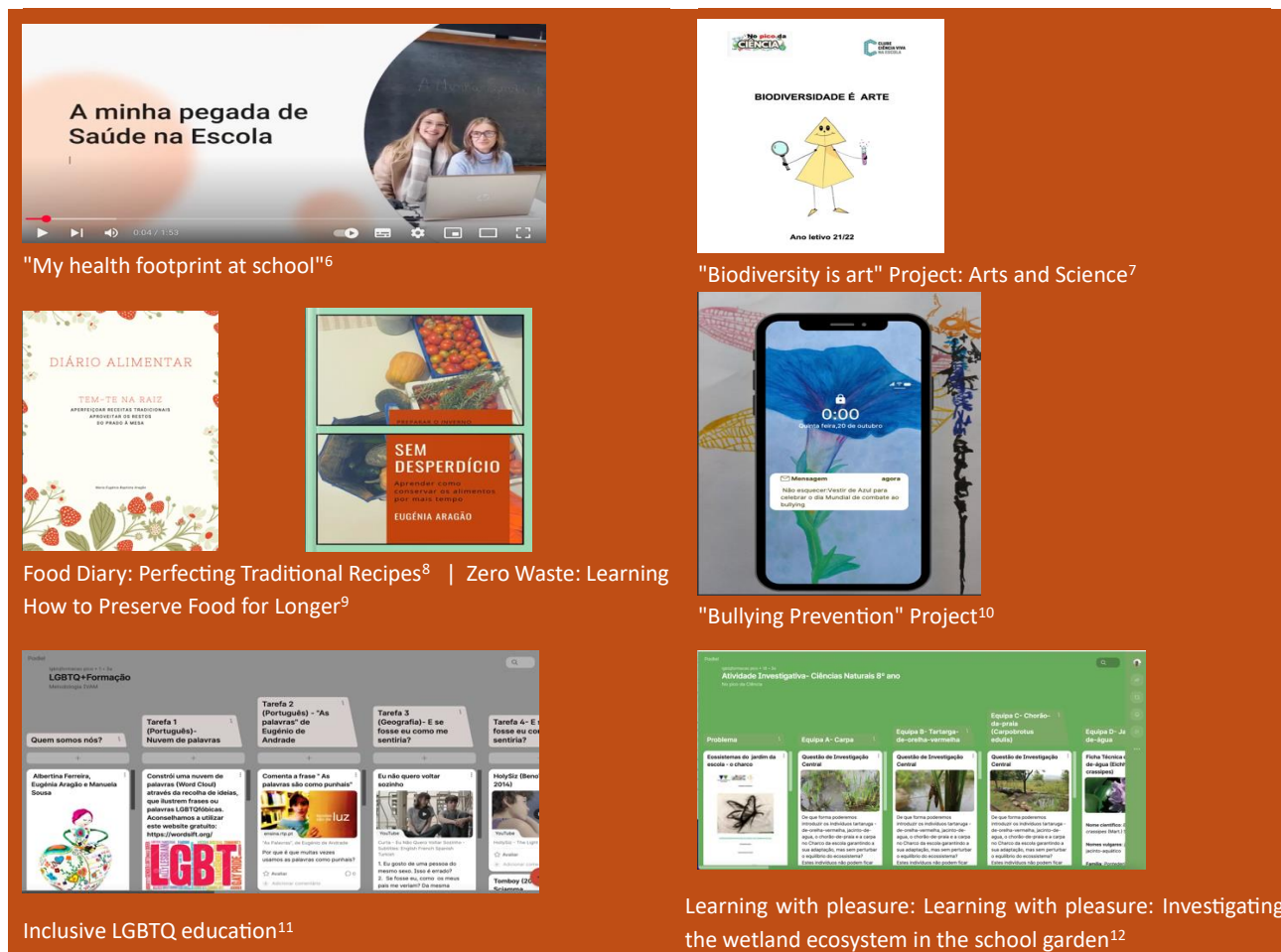


Figure 13. Investigating health topics/issues to promote intellectual wellbeing, social debate & action

## School sports as a network for a lifelong physical exercise culture

Students from two 4th grade classes (9 years old), experienced a different morning on the Cávado River, organized by teacher João Lima, with the action of promoting physical exercise throughout life, valuing local resources, "Baptism in Canoeing" (Figure 6A).

<sup>6</sup> "My health footprint at school" Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udGo4DXuvTo>

<sup>7</sup> "Biodiversity is art" Project - Arts and Science: [https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/biodiversidade\\_arte2](https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/biodiversidade_arte2)

<sup>8</sup> Food Diary: Perfecting Traditional Recipes: [https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/menu\\_do\\_dia\\_restaurante\\_italiano\\_-\\_card\\_pio](https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/menu_do_dia_restaurante_italiano_-_card_pio)

<sup>9</sup> Zero Waste: Learning How to Preserve Food for Longer:

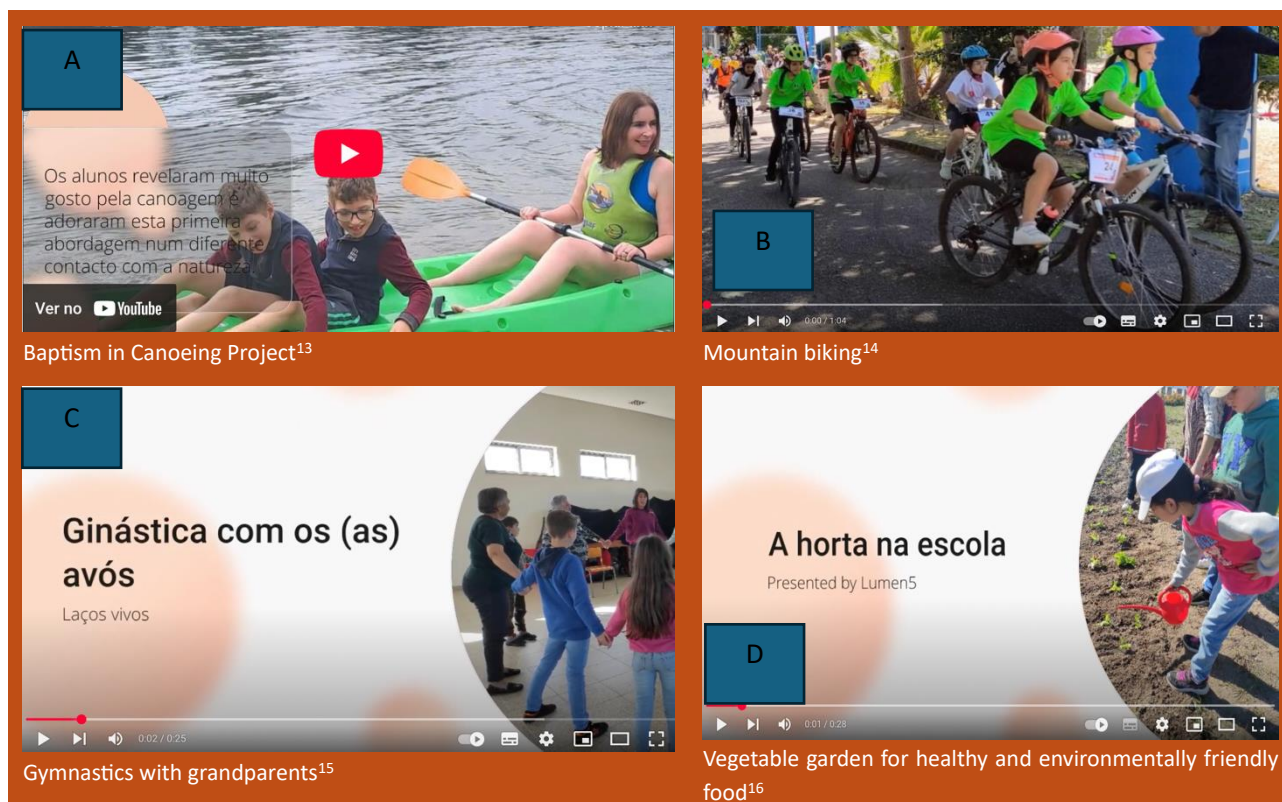
[https://read.bookcreator.com/iFFD6GbsOlG4Dn223jTbGXM4ANo2/dzZYPLW5SE2OCqn\\_JAYTMg/7aUahxF\\_RtgFIVUXgguEAQ](https://read.bookcreator.com/iFFD6GbsOlG4Dn223jTbGXM4ANo2/dzZYPLW5SE2OCqn_JAYTMg/7aUahxF_RtgFIVUXgguEAQ)

<sup>10</sup> "Bullying Prevention" Project: [https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/vestir\\_de\\_azul\\_para\\_celebrar\\_o\\_dia\\_mundial\\_de\\_comb](https://issuu.com/felgueirasaragao/docs/vestir_de_azul_para_celebrar_o_dia_mundial_de_comb)

<sup>11</sup> Inclusive LGBTQ education: <https://padlet.com/lgbtqformacaoa22/lgbtq-forma-o-z0zn278bqgm900f>

<sup>12</sup> Learning with pleasure: Learning with pleasure: Investigating the wetland ecosystem in the school garden

<https://padlet.com/lgbtqformacaoa22/atividade-investigativa-ciencias-naturais-8-ano-s1flvcmsxdsd4wsz>



**Figure 14.** School sports as a network for a lifelong physical exercise culture

In partnership with the Vila Verde City Hall, with the teacher Rui Silva as facilitator of this action, students trained on mountain bikes and participated in inter-school competitions (Figure 6B). The route was well laid out and signposted, with technical sections that entertained the cyclists. The School Cluster involved in the SHE4AHA project participated with around thirty students, being the most represented school among the twelve schools present.

Together with teacher Eduarda Amorim, another very promising action for the future has emerged! The students had the idea of organizing physical exercise sessions with their grandparents and expressed a desire to make them frequent in the future (Figure 6C).

To finish the activities intentionally organized to promote physical exercise throughout life, under the guidance of kindergarten and 1st cycle teachers (4-9 years old), the children worked, had fun and learned about biodiversity and ecosystems in the school vegetable garden to learn about healthy and environmentally friendly food (Figure 6D).

<sup>13</sup> Baptism in Canoeing Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aDSdheliBA>

<sup>14</sup> Mountain biking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYxF2rXVhSA>

<sup>15</sup> Gymnastics with grandparents: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciMxrIoAWb4>

<sup>16</sup> Vegetable garden for healthy and environmentally friendly food: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KJeZGawPL4&t=18s>

## Volunteer network acting as health and wellbeing promoters

In the volunteer network, students can choose to volunteer in catteries, kennels, nursing homes, orphanages, plant trees, collect garbage from oceans and forests, among others, such as holding a charity Christmas and visiting the Senior Citizens Day Centre (Figure 7A).

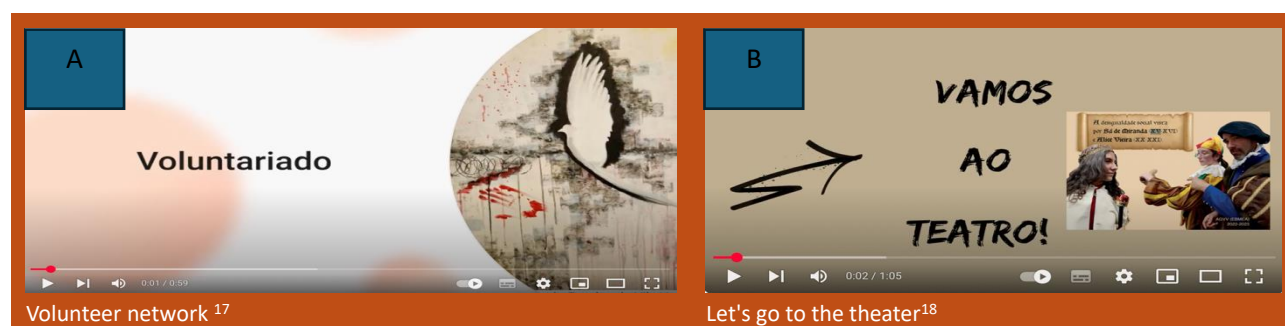


Figure 15. Volunteer network acting as health and wellbeing promoters

To begin to critically discuss the problems of social inequalities, these students also went to street theater that presents a social critique of inequalities (Figure 7B).

## Acting for healthy breaks celebrate

Students were encouraged to organize bike rides with peers in their free time. Students who adopted this new practice were interviewed to find out what impact it had on their lives. "I feel relaxed. I just focus on riding the bike and forget about everything else," says a student. Parents recognize that this initiative only has advantages, as at home they have difficulty controlling the amount of time their children "spend glued to their cell phones." They ask teachers: "Let the school be the one to stop this from happening!" (Figure 8A).



Figure 16. Acting for healthy breaks celebrate

"Playing, thinking and socializing during recess with the Wifi turned off" is the name of another project (Figure 8B). With the facilitation of Marta Chambel, the students prepared traditional games that they designed during recess, as well as other games, like the game of checkers, that they did on a larger scale. Then, they invited their classmates to play and planned the breaks between classes by organizing these games and involving their classmates.

<sup>17</sup> Volunteer network: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqvdadEwUH8&t=8s>

<sup>18</sup> Let's go to the theater: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpi\\_2pSEmgQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpi_2pSEmgQ)

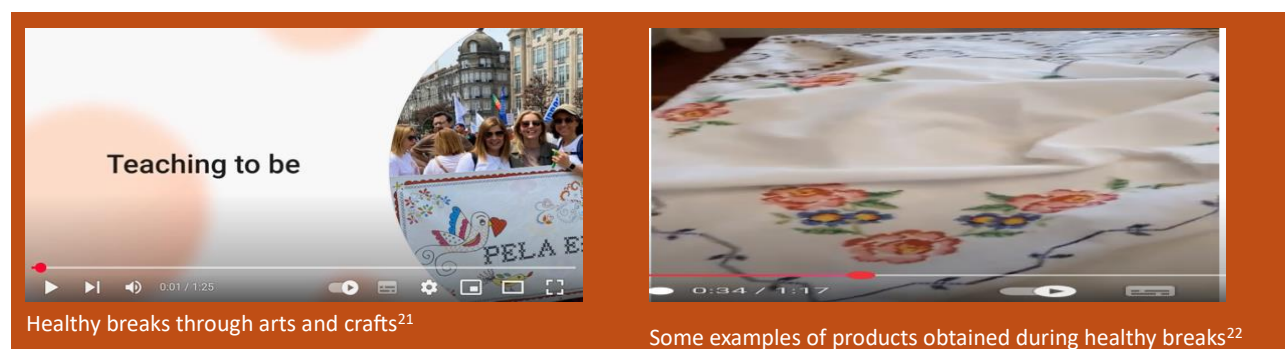
<sup>19</sup> Breaks Away from Social Media: Impact on Mental Health: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdjwBS\\_mb6E&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdjwBS_mb6E&t=3s)

<sup>20</sup> Healthy breaks with games: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqRPgZyqZdM>



## Promoting teachers' mental health and wellbeing by socializing through arts and crafts

In their free time at school, some teachers in order to promote their wellbeing at school, decided to start sharing books from their parents' time and discussing them by comparing them with more recent literature of the same type. They also decided to share arts and crafts and organize moments in their free time to take mental breaks and relax by doing needlework and knitting at school, as they liked to do at home in their free time (Figure 9).

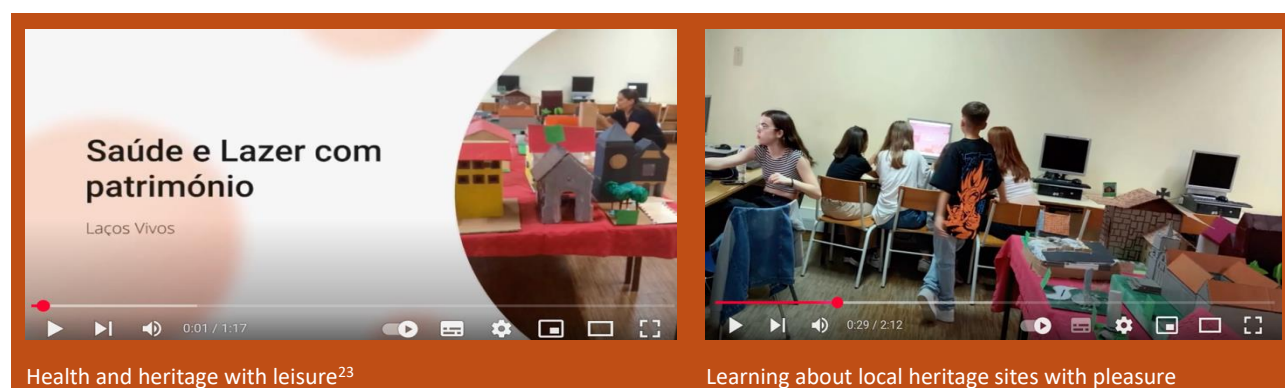


**Figure 17.** Promoting teachers' mental health and wellbeing socializing through arts and crafts

This "thinking outside the box" was a surprise at school. Not everyone joined in. However, the group of teachers who dared to challenge routines created better interactions with colleagues and felt happier and more committed to promoting their well-being in the workplace.

## Taking action to promote student health and the sustainability of heritage sites

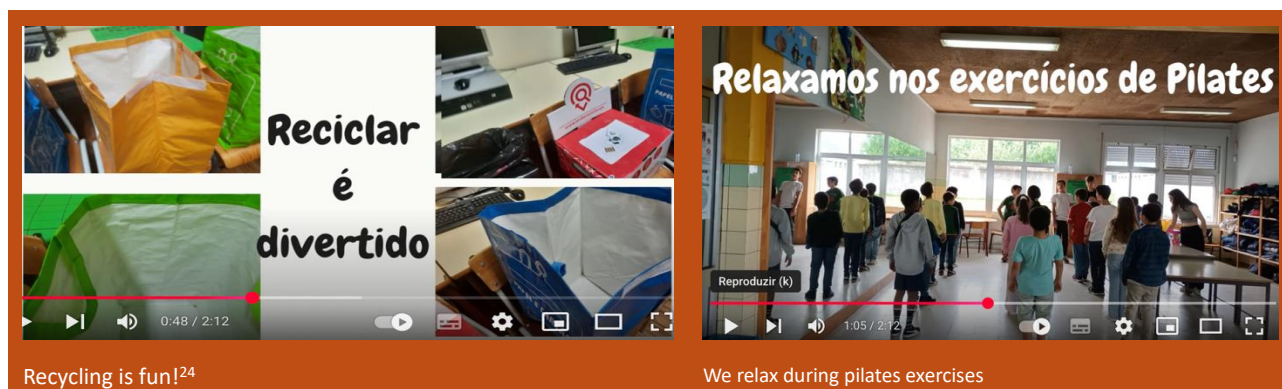
Motivated by the Monsenhor Elíseo de Araújo School, the Bernardino Machado School Cluster began to work in a network on the initial project described above, developing the sub-project "Health and the sustainability of heritage sites" which implemented several actions with great impact on the school and community (Figure 10).



<sup>21</sup> Healthy breaks through arts and crafts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYWcOMnY7KA>

<sup>22</sup> Some examples of products obtained during healthy breaks: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2N9W8djA\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2N9W8djA_s)

<sup>23</sup> Health and heritage with leisure: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3q05FezST8>



**Figure 18.** *Health and the sustainability of heritage sites project*

The project, facilitated by teacher Paula Queiroga, was developed by two 7th grade classes in a joint effort between the Heritage Workshop and the subjects of Citizenship and Development, History and Physical Education. After researching local heritage, the students prepared a set of six interactive stations to teach their colleagues from the 5th grade classes the importance of combining knowledge and appreciation of local heritage with promoting health through physical activity.

The first station was a Kahoot about Local Heritage. Students sat in small groups in front of the computer to test their knowledge. The enthusiasm was visible and a healthy competition between the students was established. The second station consisted of a Heritage Map of the Municipality of Vila Nova de Famalicão, with the students recognizing several monuments and several expressing a desire to visit monuments in their Municipality in the future, that were completely unknown to them. At the third station, with the help of student monitors, the younger students learned about recycling and did some Pilates exercises to become prepared for their future visit to the local heritage sites. The fourth station consisted of the game "What? Where? When?" At this station, students self-assessed what they learned about the Milesian Mark, the Church of Santa Eulália, the Church of Antes, the Monastery of Landim, the Castle of Vermoin and the House of Camilo. The fifth station aimed to consolidate the students' knowledge and, therefore, consisted of assembling a set of Puzzles about local Heritage. Finally, at the last station, students were motivated to cycle, there was a traffic education session, and future plans were prepared for visiting local monuments.

### Project challenges and how they were overcome

The main challenges encountered during the implementation of this project, were related to teachers' time management and students' initial motivation to genuinely participate and think "outside the box".

During the project it was found that teachers had difficulties in meeting with all team members due to schedule incompatibilities, as well as having difficulties in finding adequate time in the school curriculum to work with students. This barrier was overcome with good planning of activities mobilizing the school's various projects and the various subjects suitable for the development of projects based on the S-IVAC methodology.

<sup>24</sup> Recycling is fun!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS2bGonO0>

Another challenge was to motivate students to come up with ideas and make decisions together with adults, since globally they are expecting teachers to decide the entire curriculum. This barrier was overcome by developing students' competences to "think outside the box" collaboratively using co-creation tools and valuing their decision-making to understand that they are taken seriously.

A final challenge was bringing parents to school and doing so at times when they did not have to miss work. Therefore, some actions were carried out on Saturday.

## Success Factors

There were four main facilitating factors in the implementation of the SHE4AHA project in the school. The first was the application of co-creation and co-creation instruments in the various phases of the S-IVAC approach: Selection of the problem/theme by students, Investigation of the consequences and causes of the problem, Visions for the future in which they want to live and Action/Actions to eliminate the causes of the problem(s) identified and Changes in lifestyles and/or living conditions, as a consequence of carrying out actions. This approach valued the active participation of students and the people they and teachers suggested to involve, recognizing that we are all co-responsible for promoting a healthy educational environment.

The second facilitating factor was the integration of various disciplines and projects at the school to respond to the class project developed by the students to involve the school and local community.

The third facilitating factor was the sharing of experiences within the school itself and between the schools involved in SHE4AHA. We understand that by bringing together our experiences and perspectives we can build effective solutions adapted to the specific needs of our educational community.

The fourth facilitating factor was the SHE4AHA material. The information organized to improve ourselves as EPS and the suggested activities allowed us to better understand the emotions and experiences of everyone involved, providing a solid basis for the development of the proposed sub-projects, as a whole articulated with the educational project of the School Cluster.

## Final remarks

### Contributions of the SHE4AHA Course to the school project

The SHE4AHA Training Course played a crucial role in the design and implementation of the school project. The training provided participating teachers with a solid theoretical and practical foundation for applying the S-IVAC methodology, fostering a participatory, student-centered approach. Through the co-creation tools explored in the workshop, students were actively engaged in identifying meaningful problems, investigating causes and consequences, and collaboratively building concrete actions. The workshop also encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration and integration with other school projects, as well as the involvement of external partners, contributing to a holistic vision of health and wellbeing promotion within the school context.

## Potentials of the “Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School”

The “Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School” was a key reference resource in the implementation of the project. It is clear, practical and inspiring, and its structure allowed the team to outline a coherent and comprehensive approach to integrating health promotion into daily school life. Thanks to the principles and examples presented in the guide, the school was able to align its actions with the goals of its educational project, value local resources, promote the educational community wellbeing, and foster the active participation of students, teachers, families, and community members. The guide proved especially useful in organizing the project's phases and in consolidating a school culture oriented toward health promotion, sustainability, and the development of life skills.

## Recommendations

In our school, within the SHE4AHA project, most of the sub-projects were based on a whole-class approach, starting from the concerns of the students with the promotion of their health and wellbeing or those of their community. In some cases, the projects were organized inter-class. All projects aimed to involve other students from the school community and, generally, families in the health and wellbeing promotion actions carried out. Based on these sub-projects, the SHE4AHA school team consider it useful to make the following recommendations:

- organizing a health and wellbeing promotion and education team with teachers from various subject areas and, if possible, representatives of students, non-teaching staff, parents/ guardians and the City Council and/or Parish Council;
- projects should be organized based on the S-IVAC approach, ending with the implementation of collective actions (although there may be individual actions) involving from the beginning the key people in the community that the students together with the teachers consider appropriate;
- there must be coordination between all school projects to support coherent projects based on the S-IVAC approach;
- the motivation of teachers for continuous professional development in health and wellbeing promotion and education, such as participating in the SHE4AHA project, is essential for the success of the school projects;
- SHE and SHE4AHA material should be disseminated to inspire other schools to become health promoting schools.



## It is in DATING that everything BEGINS... and only YOU can decide when IT ENDS!

The “It is in DATING that everything BEGINS... and only YOU can decide when IT ENDS!” Project followed a whole-class approach, and was carried out by a 7<sup>th</sup> grade class. Students applied the S-IVAC methodology to involve almost 120 older and younger students to act against dating violence in two consecutive academic years. Parents/ guardians and teachers were also involved. At the end of the project, a written contract containing a group of behaviours and attitudes to prevent dating violence was elaborated by students and all participants in the actions to commit themselves to act differently to prevent dating violence. Regarding the project developed at the school, the school cluster principal, teacher Martinha Couto, said:

*“We were very pleased with this project (...) The project meets our objectives and our main lines of action as (...) a health promoting school.”*

## Implementation

The SHE Rapid Assessment tool was completed by two school teachers directly linked to health promotion and education.

The analysis of the graph allowed us to conclude that most of the dimensions of the health promoting school are already being implemented in the school. However, there are weaknesses in terms of links to the community and the health of teaching and non-teaching staff. As for priorities, most are high, with the exception of health policies at school, the social environment and the health of teaching and non-teaching staff (Figure 1).

The results of the evaluation influenced the focus of the problem selected by the students. The priority was community connection. Active participation of parents/guardians was also a priority, therefore the creation of strategies that benefit and strengthen the union of parents and guardians existed in the school project, from a perspective of co-responsibility, to encourage school success.



Figure 19. Results of the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool

When the class director presented the SHE4AHA project to the students of a 7th grade class after a brainstorming session in class, the students decided that they wanted to do a sexuality education project. Then the students were asked to think about what worried them most/or what they would most like to know about issues related to sexuality. Several topics were suggested, but the most relevant one for most of the class was helping to reduce dating violence. When students were asked why this issue was important to them, they explained that they knew older colleagues whose boyfriends "yelled at her" or "didn't let her have friends" or "didn't let her wear certain clothes" or "controlled her cell phone messages".

Given this decision, the teacher invited them to divide into small groups and investigate the problem of dating violence, doing research on the Internet or other sources they considered relevant. At the end, they presented to the class not only what they had learned from this investigation and the consequences of dating violence, but also its causes, which were discussed in class.

At a later stage, there was a brainstorming session in class for students to reflect on what should be done to prevent more dating violence. Several actions were proposed, namely: educating older students about dating violence and healthy relationships, organizing a workshop; ii) involving parents in dating violence prevention by holding a parent seminar or sending information home about the signs of dating violence; iii) teaching students to Access the Student and Family Information and Support Office or the Psychology and Guidance Office for counseling and support.

The students decided to organize the first action for older students and parents/ tutors and in the following school year for younger students and parents/tutors.

## Results and evaluation

### Selection and investigation of the problem

After selecting the problem that the students wanted to help solve, "dating violence observed in some older peers", students' research was presented to their classmates with the help of two PowerPoint presentations: "Don't confuse love with abuse" and "Take the stage against dating violence: Close the door against dating violence", showed that dating violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or digital (like controlling someone through their phone or social media) and that it can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender, or background. They also identified consequences and causes of dating violence (Table 1).

	<p><b>Consequences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Emotional and psychological effects</i>, such as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety, feelings of shame, guilt, or helplessness, fear and trust issues in future relationships.</li> <li>• <i>Physical consequences</i>, such as injuries ranging from bruises to broken bones, chronic health problems due to ongoing stress, risk of sexual assault or unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections if abuse includes sexual violence.</li> <li>• <i>Behavioural effects</i>, such as substance abuse (drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism), such as aggressive behaviour or becoming abusive in return, self-harm or suicidal thoughts; interest in hobbies or activities once enjoyed.</li> </ul>
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- *Long-term consequences*, such as difficulty forming healthy future relationships, long-lasting trauma and trust issues, repeated patterns of abusive relationships if not addressed, legal trouble (especially for the abuser).


#### Causes

- *Lack of healthy relationship skills*, because of poor communication, low emotional intelligence, or not knowing how to handle conflict can lead to violence. It is important to emphasize that many people have never been taught what a healthy relationship looks like.
- *Need for control and power*, as the aggressors use violence to control their partner's actions, emotions, or decisions. This aggressive behaviour often comes from insecurity, fear of losing the relationship, or a desire to dominate.
- *Jealousy and possessiveness*, as extreme jealousy can turn into controlling behaviour and verbal or physical abuse.
- *Learned behaviour*, sometimes people raised in violent or abusive homes may think abuse is "normal" in relationships. They may copy what they saw growing up either as the abuser or the victim.
- *Substance abuse* such as alcohol and drugs can lower self-control and increase aggressive behaviour. While they don't cause violence, they can make it worse or more frequent.
- *Peer pressure or social norms*, as in some cultures or toxic behaviours in groups of friends like dominance or "checking" a partner's phone are normalized.
- *Mental health issues*, because unmanaged anger, anxiety, depression, or trauma can contribute to violent behaviour. Mental illness is not an excuse, but it can be a risk factor when untreated.
- *Gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity*, as sometimes beliefs like "men should be dominant" or "girls should obey" fuel unhealthy dynamics. These stereotypes can pressure people into roles that turn relationships toxic.

**Table 1.** *Consequences and causes of dating violence*

## Visions

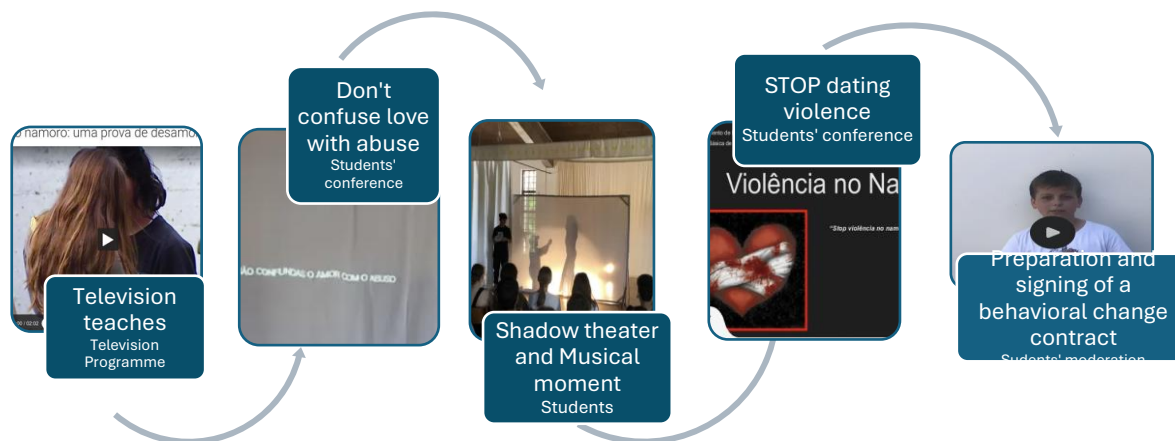
Asking students to envision a better future is a powerful way to inspire them to act to social and individual change. In this project, students' visions for the future regarding dating violence are represented in Table 2.

	<p><b>A world where...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• every romantic relationship is based on mutual respect, trust, and kindness, not control or fear.</li> <li>• everyone will recognize the warning signs and speak up, supporting victims instead of staying silent.</li> <li>• all schools teach about dating violence and healthy relationship skills from an early age</li> <li>• young people will feel confident to say no, ask for help, and stand up for themselves and others.</li> <li>• no one will feel ashamed to report abuse or seek support.</li> <li>• teachers, peers, families are trained to help anyone experiencing dating violence.</li> <li>• gender stereotypes and toxic behaviours will be a thing of the past.</li> <li>• technology won't be used to control, stalk, or harass.</li> <li>• students will know their rights and how to set healthy digital boundaries in online relationships.</li> <li>• students want to be catalysts of social changes raising awareness, and creating a school culture where everyone feels safe and valued.</li> </ul>
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**Table 2.** *Students' visions for the future regarding ending dating violence*

## Action & Change

To achieve these visions in the first year of the SHE4AHA project, students planned an action for older peers and parents/ guardians (Figure 2).



**Figure 20.** First collective action to prevent dating violence

During one afternoon, always moderated by the 7th grade students, the 9th grade students, teachers and parents/guardians participated in a set of actions, each ending with a debate with the participants to promote reflection on what they learned from the activity and what would need to change to end dating violence. The school cluster principal and a nurse from the Health Centre who collaborated with this school also participated.

The session began with the presentation of those involved in the debate sessions, its rules and the project methodology. This presentation was carried out by a student moderator, previously chosen by the 7th students. To frame the topic under analysis, those present watched a short presentation “Violence in dating, proof of lack of love” by a national television<sup>25</sup>. Next, the presentation of the students’ work “Don’t confuse love with abuse”<sup>26</sup>, the shadow theatre “Take the stage against dating violence. Close the door against dating violence”<sup>27</sup>, and the presentation of the students’ work “Stop dating violence”<sup>28</sup> were carried out. After this presentation, there was a short musical performance performed by students playing the cello and flute.

After this enriching moment, the moderator began to present the questions under analysis prepared by the 7th year students to promote the confrontation of points of view and reflection on the theme “dating violence”: 1. What meaning do you attribute to the poster on display? 2. What type of dating violence is in Emma's story? And what about Luísa's? 3. What was the impact of what happened on the victim (in both situations)? 4. What strategies did Eva find to help Luísa? 5. What is the role of a teacher, nurse or psychologist in these situations? 6. What would you do if you were the victim? 7. How have these stories helped you prevent dating violence?

In a final phase, and in light of the topic under study, a written contract containing a group of behaviours and attitudes to prevent dating violence was elaborated by students and all participants in the room to commit themselves to act differently to prevent dating violence and was signed by everyone present (Figure 3).

<sup>25</sup> Television teaches- Dating violence: proof of lack of love: <https://ensina.rtp.pt/artigo/violencia-no-namoro-uma-prova-de-desamor/>

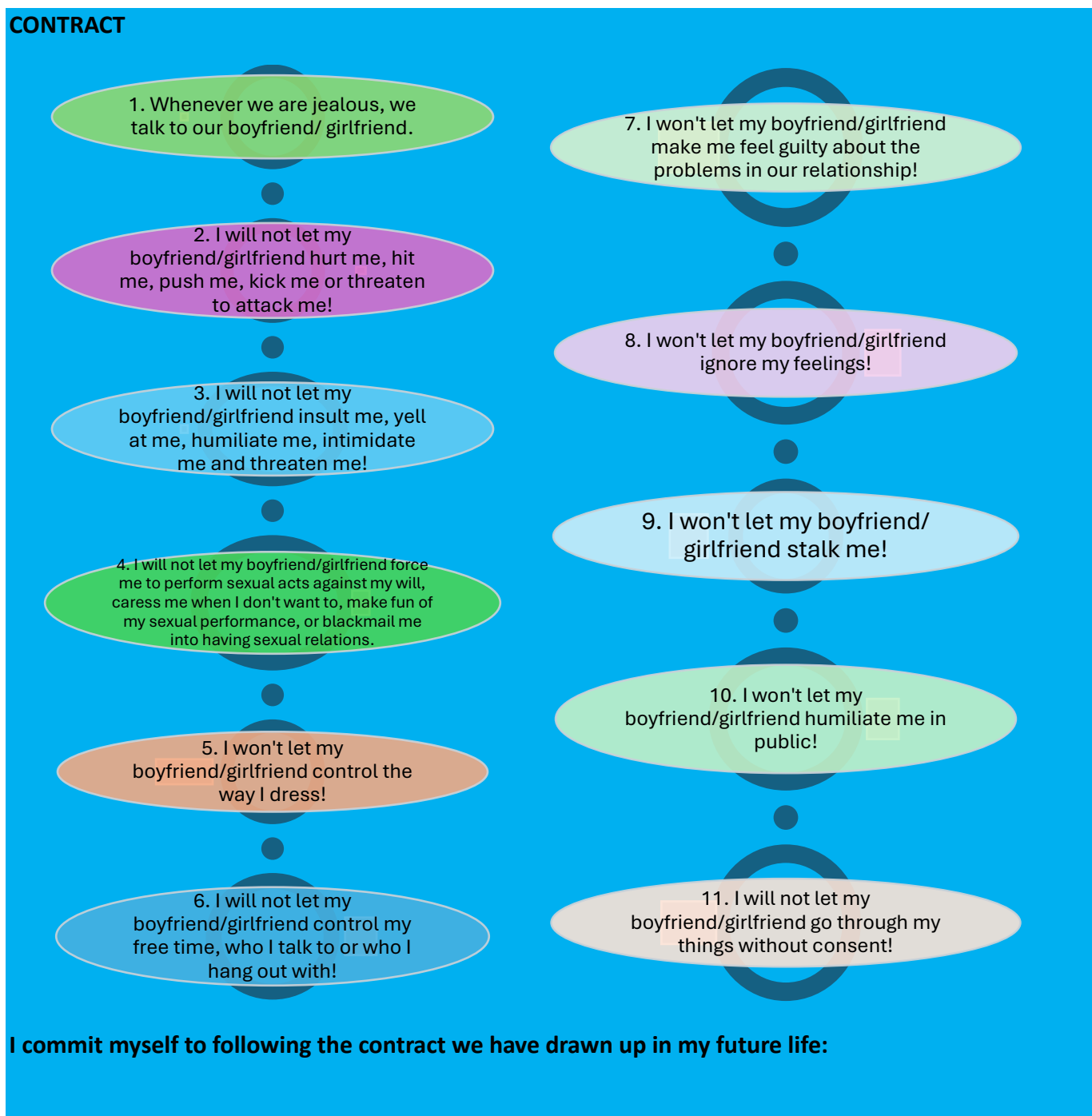
<sup>26</sup> Don't confuse love with abuse - Presentation by 7th grade students: <https://youtu.be/64R1OqAiek4>

<sup>27</sup> Shadow theater and Musical moment: [https://youtu.be/ZgRgd8N\\_R\\_4](https://youtu.be/ZgRgd8N_R_4)

<sup>28</sup> Stop dating violence - Presentation by 7th grade students: <https://padlet.com/manuelasousa9/no-namoro-que-tudo-comes-a-e-s-tu-podes-decidir-quando-acaba-rvgmidssg8b11r4l/wish/1xkVaQjXqxY1Ql0e>

The final phase of the debate resulted in its evaluation. It was mentioned that these actions constituted an added value to identifying the different types of dating violence, increasing students' knowledge about the consequences and causes of dating violence, knowing the change strategies and transmitting acquired knowledge to their peers (9th grade students).

A year later, the same students, now in the 8th grade, aware that dating violence was a current problem, continued the project by repeating the same actions with 7th grade students, teachers and parents/guardians. At the end of these actions, students were asked to evaluate what they learned from the actions and the signed report.



**Figure 21.** Contract about future behaviours to prevent dating violence

## Project challenges and how they were overcome

Teachers' time management and students' time to work on the project after classes were the first challenges encountered. Throughout the project, class teachers had difficulties in meeting due to schedule incompatibilities, as well as having difficulties in finding adequate time in the school curriculum to work with students. Applying the S-IVAC methodology was another challenge, because students wanted to implement the actions without preliminary research on the topic, and it was necessary to promote reflections with the students on what they knew about the topic and what they still needed to learn. Another final challenge was bringing parents to the school, which was more easily achieved because there was active participation on the part of both students and parents who enjoyed participating in activities promoted by their children.

## Success Factors

The SHE4AHA, "Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School" was a facilitating factor to implement the IVAC approach (Investigation of the consequences and causes of the problem, Visions for the future in which they want to live and Actions to eliminate the causes of the problem(s) identified and Change lifestyles and/or living conditions).

The second facilitating factor was to work collaboratively with other teachers of the school to respond to the class project developed by the students.

The third facilitating factor was the motivation of students involved, not only because they were involved in the SHE4AHA project, but also because they were working on a problem selected by themselves.

The SHE4AHA material was the fourth facilitating factor. The SHE Rapid Assessment Tool helped to design the focus and who to involve in the dating violence prevention, namely not forgetting to involve teachers and parents/tutors in the actions carried out.

## Final remarks

### Contributions of the SHE4AHA Course to the school project

The SHE4AHA Course helped teachers to clarify and (re)think the main concepts regarding health promotion and education and the health promoting school approach, which contributed greatly to the improvement of our practices.

Revisiting what a whole-school approach is, was also a strong contribution for our school practices because we understand that education for health promotion centered on the whole-class approach with participatory and action-oriented health and wellbeing projects could contribute for the whole-school approach.

Another important contribution of the Course was to allow the sharing of good practices among the various schools involved, which served as inspiration for our practices in the future.



## Potentials of the “Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School”

Your Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School by SH4AHA was fundamental to the school project, because it allowed us to review teaching methodologies that have shown great potential for developing students' action competence. A new chapter in relation to the SHE Manual 2.0 was added in this pixie version with inspiring strategies to disseminate the project and maintain its sustainability.

## Recommendations

In this project, we collected several pieces of evidence about students' motivation to learn more about dating violence, provide ideas for taking action to prevent this problem and commit themselves to behaviours that they considered healthier. Therefore, we recommend:

- using the whole-class approach based on participatory and action-oriented health and wellbeing promotion projects;
- developing collaborative work among class teachers for the development and monitoring of action-oriented projects;
- involving as many classes as possible in health promotion and education projects following the S-IVAC methodology;
- providing training to all teachers on health promotion and health promoting schools, valuing SHE material and the SHE4AHA project;
- giving the same value to teachers' ongoing training as to their training in the specific subject area they teach.

# Slovenia Good Practices

## Dutomajček in the Healthy School

The main goal was to create a booklet to promote a healthy lifestyle called "Dutomajček in the Healthy School," which introduces children to a healthy lifestyle in entertaining and playful way, with the help of Dutomajček - the bunny from Karst region in Slovenia, called Karst. The booklet contains tasks, interesting facts and puzzles from various areas of health (nutrition, exercise, mindfulness, gratitude, care for nature and people and well-being). The tasks are accompanied by images of Dutomajček the Bunny. It is intended for children from 1st to 5th grade (6 to 10 years old). The children worked on the booklet from February until the end of May. During this time, we organized few charity events at school, allowing pupils to complete some tasks at school. For certain tasks, parents helped the children, or they completed the tasks together.

At the end of May, we invited all participating children and parents to a closing all day event. It took place on Saturday, May 27, 2023. We prepared seven workshops for children and parents, all thematically related to the tasks from the booklet. The workshops were led by teachers, psychologists, and nurses from the local Health Centre in Sežana. The day concluded with exchange of books, board games, and toys, along with the announcement of the results of the physical activity challenge.

*"Dutomajček is a playful bunny from the Karst region. He loves taking care of his health, eating healthy, staying active, and having fun while doing it. He is always ready to help and solves many problems with a cheerful attitude. Together with Dutomajček, you too can take care of your well-being."*

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## Implementation

At the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year, I introduced the SHE4AHA project and the idea for creating a booklet, that would encourage children to adopt a healthier lifestyle to my colleagues from the HPS (Health Promoting School) team. In November 2022, my colleagues and I gathered concrete ideas and planned the booklet. By February, my colleague Iris Gregorčič and I had completed and printed the booklet (including the graphic materials) and I presented it to the parents during parent-teacher meetings (both at the central and branch school) and encouraged them to participate. I also introduced the booklet to all students from 1st to 5th grade and their class teachers. Each interested child received a booklet along with a motivational letter containing additional instructions for parents. The children were completing the tasks from the booklet from the end of February to the end of May. During this time, we had also organized different charity events at the school, which gave students the opportunity to complete some tasks at school. In the pilot project we had also planned to incorporate the activities into the curriculum. So we encouraged some class teachers to intertwine the planned activities into their lessons, further motivating the children to complete them. The majority of children from 1st to 3rd grade participated in the project, while fewer students from 4th and 5th grade joined in.

At the end of May we invited all participating children and parents to the closing event on Saturday, May 27, 2023. We prepared seven workshops for the children and parents, which were divided into mixed groups. All workshops were thematically linked to the tasks from the booklet: Fruit and vegetable smoothies and skewers (preparing a smoothie and skewer from available ingredients), Emotions (making "emotion buddies" – balls from balloons and flour), Yoga (story yoga), Oral health (reviewing sugar content in popular foods, proper oral hygiene...), Mindfulness in nature (lying on the grass and focusing on nature with all senses), Funny games (fun relay races on the playground), a Physical activity challenge (a skill challenge from the booklet), and Screen-free day (drawing ideas on how to creatively spend a day without TV/computer/phone screens). The workshops were led by teachers, psychologists, and nurses from local Health Centre. This event was a result of a year-long project collaboration with health professionals from the local health centre. The day concluded with exchange of used books, board games, and toys, as well as the announcement of the physical activity challenge results. The winners of the physical challenge were rewarded with fruit. At the end of the event, we asked parents to fill out a feedback survey.

I also involved the students from 7th to 9th grade to help with the organization of the event, which encouraged them to take part in the project.

The "free ticket" for the entrance to the event was the booklet, which had to be completed. After the event, I reviewed the submitted booklets, scanned them, stamped them with a bunny motif, and returned them to the students in the following days. I also reviewed the completed surveys. The results showed great satisfaction with the project (both the booklet and the closing event) among parents and students. Many expressed a desire to repeat the project and for more similar initiatives.

After the activities concluded, I published a description and photos of the event on the school's website and wrote a piece for the local newsletter. The planned activity of promoting the project and its results is thus fulfilled.

In the future, we will repeat the project for the lower-grade students (as new generations of children enter). We will once again use the "Dutomajček in Health Promoting School" booklets and organize Dutomajček's Day.

## Results and Evaluation

The project was a great success. We were impressed by the high level of motivation of parents and students to participate in the project during the school year and by the high attendance at the closing event. Through active involvement participants gained valuable insights into healthier lifestyle choices and more fulfilling ways to spend their free time.

## Challenges

We have identified some of the main challenges in the implementation of the project. Namely: how to find "the right" ideas to encourage children to adopt healthy lifestyles; how to make a visually appealing booklet; how to get students and parents to take part in planned activities. And this is, how we overcame that challenges. At the beginning, we had to brainstorm a ton of great ideas to create our booklet. The HPS team members really helped us out. Our colleague Iris drew our bunny mascot, Dutomajček, who

became the face of our project. We learned a lot about computer design and print preparation. Then, we introduced the booklet to parents and pupils, encouraging them to participate in the project. While the students had the booklet at home, we motivated them in different ways to complete the tasks, like organizing charity events or talking about what they learned.

### Success Factors

The project's success can be attributed to several key factors, including the initial motivation of the team members, effective collaboration of all involved throughout the project, and the strong support of the management. The project coordinator played a vital role in maintaining a clear vision, ensuring careful organization, and providing clear instructions to the team members. The active engagement of parents and pupils, as well as the enthusiastic participation of the invited health professionals, contributed significantly to the project's overall success.

### Training sessions

Participating in the project and in training sessions significantly contributed to our understanding of the importance of a whole-school approach and systematic planning of activities. We revisited our knowledge of goal setting, effective planning, proper implementation, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation of activities. We have also learned about different approaches to engaging with different stakeholders from outside the school, as well as in the immediate surroundings of the school.

### SHE School Guide

As a school that has been involved in the network for many years, the manual served more as a summary or a refresher of the knowledge we had already acquired. Nevertheless, this was a welcome addition. However, the manual is particularly suitable for schools that are just starting out on their journey to promote health in the school environment.



*"To foster a positive work environment, teachers should design tasks that are both engaging and motivating. They should build their team with colleagues they have a strong working relationship with."*

## Our goal: to walk the entire 1370 km Slovenian border. Can we do it?

The staff wanted to encourage all students at the school to be more physically active. The school has a well-maintained, safe playground that offers various activity options for pupils, but these were not being utilized. Most pupils were sitting on benches or stairs and chatting. Therefore, the staff began to encourage them to be physically active during their free time (waiting for classes in the morning or afternoon waiting for the bus and during long breaks). They came up with the idea of walking around the school playground for a distance equivalent to the length of the Slovenian border (1370 km). The activity was presented to all pupils, and all staff were involved. Pupils were instructed to walk two laps around the playground track each day in their free time. After completing the task, they could engage in any activity of their choice. The laps completed were recorded daily in a spreadsheet in their classroom. At the end of the month, the class teachers or older pupils counted the number of laps completed, calculated the total distance covered, and submitted the spreadsheet to the physical education teacher, who recorded the total distance covered by all participants that month. The goal set at the beginning of the task was not only achieved, but exceeded. The length of the Slovenian border was covered almost three times. In addition to the students, teachers, school visitors (parents, local community, etc.) also contributed to the kilometer count.

## Implementation

With the emergence of certain problems at school, following the Covid-19 epidemic and distance education, we have assessed that mental health promotion among pupils is very needed. At the same time, we wanted to activate the pupils for being physically active when they are not in school (waiting for classes in the morning or afternoon, waiting for the bus and during long breaks) and during that time to socialise not only with their peers but also with other pupils in the school, younger and older. We had chosen a physical activity ("Let's walk around Slovenia") which, in addition to exercise, also strengthened relationships between pupils of different ages. The project was presented to the whole HPS team (with all external stakeholders) and to all the school's teaching staff at school meeting, to the pupils and to the parents. The class teachers encouraged pupils to participate, and we also had the support of principal throughout. The activity was completed successfully, as shown by the evaluation of the implementation itself. At the end of the project, we realised that pupils' motivation would have been better (and would have required less personal commitment from teachers) if we had included in the planning a competition between pupils to achieve the goal of having walking the length of Slovenia.

## Results and Evaluation

The evaluation showed that students developed a positive attitude towards physical activity. Walking was pleasant and the pace was adjusted to each individual or smaller group of students. There was a noticeable improvement in physical well-being, calmness, and relaxation, while at the same time, walking represented a pleasant social activity. Even after completing the task, they remained connected. There was no shortage of ideas for various conversations among students. While exercising, students also developed and strengthened their mental health. They connected intergenerationally, got to know each other, made new friends, solved many problems, exchanged opinions, shared good and bad experiences. They learned to accept differences, developed empathy, trust, acceptance, cooperation, and belonging.

At the same time, they developed a culture of communication, tolerance, and cooperation. They improved their self-image and strengthened their self-confidence. Due to all of the above, some felt better, more relaxed, and safer in the school environment. Older students became more understanding, empathetic, and caring towards younger students both at school and on the way home. Because of this, younger students were more willing to come to school. During the time when the drivers were waiting, when students from different classes were together, they remained connected to each other through conversation, play, and various outdoor activities.

## Challenges

At the beginning of the project, we had a hard time choosing the right topic to focus on. We had many ideas, some of which we even tried to implement, but were unsuccessful because they did not engage the pupils. We then involved the pupils in the decision-making process, which was a winning decision, because the idea that came from the pupils ("Let's go around Slovenia") was the one that we were able to implement successfully. Also the obstacles we encountered during the implementation of the task did not stop us. In rainy weather, most students were not properly equipped (umbrellas, shoes), as many are brought to the school entrance by the school bus or parents. Similarly, in the case of newly fallen snow, the interest was lower, not due to a lack of appropriate clothing, but due to the activities that the snow offers. In this case, we did not encourage students to walk. However, in almost every grade, there was one or two pupils who, due to a lack of interest, needed a little more encouragement.

## Success Factors

All of the school's staff, who were frequently involved in the project, served as great role models and motivators for the pupils. It was crucial that we provided daily encouragement to help pupils reach their goals. Additionally, we involved parents, the local community, and other school visitors in the project.

Our involvement in the project, including training and experience sharing, allowed us to implement project activities at our school in a more comprehensive way. We became more systematic in our planning and evaluation of these activities. The project served as a valuable reminder of the knowledge and skills we already had but hadn't been fully utilizing.

## SHE School Guide

This manual is written in a clear and concise manner. It is designed for schools that are new to this topic, as well as those looking to refresh their knowledge. The manual can help to foster the further development of a network of HPS.

## Recommendations

It is necessary to start from the needs of the school and the pupils, to involve as many teachers and other employees as possible. It is important that the goals we want to achieve are shared. We should seek activities that connect several different factors (e.g., physical activity and well-being at school).





Figure 1: Pupils were walking two laps around the playground track each day in their free time.

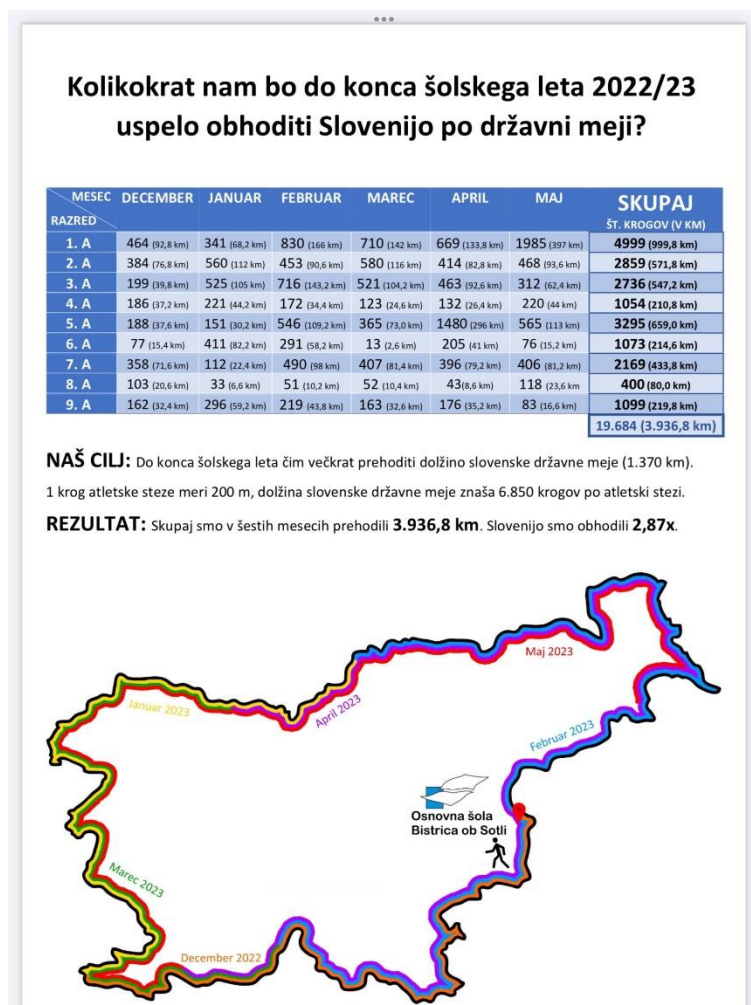


Figure 2: As a group, we managed to circle the Slovenia three times in six months.

## "Let's get active on Friday!"

The school team set itself the main goal of focusing on physical activity, with the aim of involving as many students and employees at the school as possible. That's why we diversified the main break on Fridays with various physical activities for all students and employees. The activities were chosen by the students themselves according to the schedule.

## Implementation

We decided to involve all pupils in the school in the implementation of the project, and occasionally, children from four groups of the kindergarten attached to the school also joined us. We chose the main break on Fridays for the activities. The pupils, together with their class teachers, prepared an activity. Based on a predetermined list, each class prepared a 10-15 minute physical activity that we all performed in the school gym. The oldest pupils started, and we finished with the youngest - first graders. They chose and organized very different physical activities (stretching exercises, strength exercises, breathing exercises, games, and dance...), but based on what we saw, they enjoyed the dance-based active breaks the most. Considering our goal to increase the physical activity of pupils and involve as many or all pupils as possible in this activity, we succeeded, as everyone was active. The pupils were enthusiastic about active Fridays and considered them important for better physical health, increased their productivity in subsequent school hours, and reduced stress.

## Results and Evaluation

Pupils from different classes got to know each other better, worked together, and supported one another in pursuit of a common goal: continuous physical activity that brings together students (and teachers) from across the school. As our school is small and in a rural area, we all know each other well, and our relationships are already quite close and personal. Activities like these help to strengthen these bonds even further and bring us all closer together, knowing that we are united by a common goal: more physical activity for all for better health of all

## Challenges

The main challenge was the organisational part: younger pupils usually spend most of their time on snacks, which left a small part of the break that could be used for exercise. The next challenge was how to motivate the older pupils, who were not so keen to take part in active breaks. Nevertheless, we were able to keep everyone engaged.

## Success Factors

The greatest support comes from our colleagues and school management. It would be difficult for one individual to organize the entire process and implementation, so it is very important in schools that we support each other, help each other, and together achieve our goals. Increasing physical activity was a goal that almost all teachers voted for, so we approached it together.

Great support from the counselors in the SHE4AHA project, mutual consultations and exchange of best practices among teachers from two other schools were main key to participating in this project. It is important to feel supported and aware that someone is always there to advise you.



## SHE School Guide

The manual clearly and precisely describes the importance of health for the future and how schools can contribute to promoting health among pupils and employees. Every school should follow the guidelines of this manual and become a Health promoting school, as we can influence the future with the youngest generations. A school with a whole-school approach contributes to promoting a healthy lifestyle.

## Recommendations

It is necessary to set a common goal. In this way, it is easier and more successful to achieve results. It is important to motivate as many teachers and pupils as possible, as such organizationally demanding tasks cannot be carried out by just one teacher. And such large tasks also give a lot of satisfaction.



Figure 1: Let's go!



Figure 2: Let's dance!

## Conclusion

The implementation of the 14 pilot projects has provided valuable insights into effective strategies for advancing health promotion in schools. Clustered into three main thematic areas - nutrition and physical activity; mindfulness, brain breaks, and mental wellbeing; and togetherness and cooperation - the projects have demonstrated that a comprehensive, needs- (and evidence) based approach is fundamental for creating positive, sustainable changes within school communities.

A key finding across all pilot schools is the crucial importance of leadership support. School leaders must allocate sufficient time and resources to health promotion initiatives and recognize the need for continuous professional development for teachers, treating teacher training in this area with the same priority as training in any other academic subject. Furthermore, establishing a team of motivated and engaged colleagues from the beginning is essential for success, as peer learning and collaboration within and across schools - both nationally and internationally - have proven to be highly effective in addressing common challenges and fostering innovation.

The projects also confirm the necessity of grounding health promotion efforts in a clear understanding of the current school context. Tools such as the SHE Rapid Assessment Tool, the checklists that have been developed by the Icelandic partners, internal surveys among pupils and staff were instrumental in helping schools identify concrete needs and set relevant priorities. Beginning from these expressed needs ensures greater engagement from pupils and staff and enhances the relevance and impact of the interventions.

Another critical lesson is that even small-scale, bottom-up initiatives can catalyze lasting change when guided by a process of co-creation that builds shared values and common goals among all stakeholders. External facilitation significantly enhanced the quality and sustainability of the projects, and an important lesson learned is that national programmes and health-promoting school networks, as they exist in Iceland, Slovenia, and Portugal are important for the creation of health promoting schools and the mainstreaming of the approach on a national level.

Finally, the support provided by the SHE4AHA partners - including training sessions and the *Guide to Becoming a Health Promoting School* - was highly valued by participating schools. These resources were instrumental in structuring the pilot activities and especially the guide will continue to serve as practical references for ongoing and future efforts, because the work to become and stay a health promoting school is an ongoing process.

In conclusion, the pilot projects affirm that investing in health promotion in schools is both necessary to create the best possible learning environments and highly worthwhile. Through committed leadership, collaborative engagement, needs- and evidence-based planning, and a shared vision, schools can successfully embed a health promoting approach and concrete health promoting activities into their teaching, structures and cultures, creating lasting benefits for pupils, staff, and the wider school community.