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LIFE COACHING AS A REMEDY IN BUILDING TEACHERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Coaching is a motivational approach, facilitating behavioral changes that consequently lead to enhanced well-being and better personal functioning (Grant & O'Hara, 2006; Green et al., 2006; Newnham-Kanas et al., 2010). Coaching has separated itself from a traditional therapeutic domain in a sense that: it is focused on future outcomes, not past issues; a coach is a "thought partner" in a coaching relationship, not an expert; and a coach perceives coachees as healthy and perfectly capable of generating their own solutions (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2011; ICF, 2018). There is growing scientific evidence that coaching is an efficient approach to facilitate behavior/personality change and enhance the quality of life (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2010). Coaching can be broadly defined as a collaborative solution-focused, result-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, nonclinical clients. Research indicates that stress and burnout are growing and pervasive problems among employees, with teachers being especially vulnerable to feeling frequent stress from their jobs. Teachers usually think about their students and how they cope with difficulties but they rarely think about their own well-being whereas there is a close correlation between the effectiveness of teaching and the level of teachers' stress. Research shows that many teachers are at crisis point. Most of them are under increasing pressure and they often say that their workload is "unmanageable". Recently we have been talking a lot about personal resilience which is an ability to cope with stress and adversity. It is a "bouncing back" effect which is a very individual skill developed and correlated with many other factors. Research shows that resilience results among other factors from individual skills in communication and problem solving, ability to build positive relationships, self-esteem and self-efficacy and locus of control. Life coaching is a tool which promotes development of social and meta skills and can be effectively used to stimulate psychological hardness not only among pupils but also among teachers. Different coaching techniques were used to develop teachers' well-being and equip them with some strategies of stress management. The presentation will focus on discussing the findings of the empirical studies taken this year which is a continuation of the project taken last year on using different interventions on dealing and helps to understand the necessity of dealing with teachers emotional exhaustion

Keywords: Life coaching, teachers' stress, resilience, well-being.

1 INTRODUCTION

Work-related stress is common among teachers. It was identified in the education sector during 1930s (Smith & Milstein, 1984). Numerous demands that teachers face in their job on an ongoing basis trigger work-related stress and result in reduced productivity (Trendall, 1989; Hepburn & Brown, 2001). In a study by Johnson *et al.* (2005) 26 occupations were chosen for stress-related analysis. The results revealed that teaching is associated with second highest level of stress amongst analyzed occupations, proceeded only by ambulance car drivers.

Kyriacou (2001) defined teacher stress as "*an unpleasant experience that leads to negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression resulting from some aspect of their work*". Teacher stress has been associated with the role expectations and how teachers are supposed to perform in their work environment. The following stressors have been mentioned in the literature: tight or unattainable deadlines, unrealistic time frames, complex and excessive bureaucracy, or frequent and stressful inspections (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Working environment plays a huge role in generating stress. Issues like: noise levels, organizational problems, administrative pressure, uncomfortable working conditions, no resources, lack of support from managers or excessive workload (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Individual characteristics of each of the teachers also affect the overall experienced level of stress. Factors like: age, personality, gender, internal coping ability, work satisfaction, having some support amongst work colleagues, or type of

teaching position all affect the subjectively perceived level of stress (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

The fact that teachers' working environment is highly demanding has been widely recognized in the field of psychology and education research (Kyriacou, 2011). After all, generations of pupils are affected on a daily basis by the magnitude of teachers' reactions to stress-generating behavior (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Teachers and educators with high levels of resilience recognize the importance of it and will frequently promote resilience among their pupils, unlike their work colleagues with insufficient levels of resilience (Gu & Day, 2007). A good and productive education environment for both teachers and pupils requires in-depth understanding and appreciation of resilience (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007; Kyriacou, 2011).

1.1 The definition and understanding of resilience

There are numerous conceptualizations of resilience in scientific literature. The concept of resilience has been documented through studies focused on different participant groups (children, elderly, military, or athletes) and described from many different perspectives (by physics, religion, psychology to name a few disciplines). Early research indicated that resilience can be described by fixed personality traits, which would then determine how an individual behaves when facing adverse events (Rutter, 1979; Garmezy *et al.*, 1984). Later on, researchers have acknowledged that resilience can only be determined by a complex set of psychological factors, such as - for example - positive personality, motivation, confidence, and social support (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Such psychological factors have been recognized to help moderate the impact of negative stressors, facilitate the achievement of developmental tasks, support the ability for positive adaptation, and help cope with adversity and trauma (Surzykiewicz *et al.*, 2018). Resilience is perceived by some authors as the product of multiple components characterizing the interaction between an individual and their environment. According to Windle (2011) the concept of resilience captures three components: (1) the presence of *significant* stress, (2) existence of resources that allow for positive adaptation, and (3) the process of positive adaptation or adjustment. Some researchers define resilience solely as the ability to *adapt* to challenges. Others emphasize the importance of *maintaining* a stable level of well-being in spite of stressful events occurring (Luthar *et al.*, 2000; Joyce *et al.* 2018). Across scientific literature on resilience, the common denominator captured by numerous studies is the "bounce-back" feature of resilience, which often is being highlighted as a central characteristic defining the essence of resilience (Luthar *et al.*, 2000). Resilience has been shown to bring many benefits, one of which is higher psychological well-being. Higher level of individual resilience lowers anxiety, distress or depression levels (Sood *et al.*, 2011). Due to positive impact of resilience on individual psychological state and psychological well-being, it has been suggested that resilience may capture measurable components responsible for psychologically healthy or beneficial response to challenges and stress (Luthar *et al.*, 2000). For this reason, resilience has been included in the characteristic-based definition of well-being (Huppert & So, 2009; Leach *et al.*, 2011; Linley *et al.*, 2010).

Well-being is an important individual, social and economic variable, which is reflected in social and psychological research. The World Health Organization defines well-being as the presence of 'a state in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community' (WHO, 2004). Ryan & Deci (2001) relate well-being to 'optimal psychological functioning and experience'. Various categories of well-being exist in the scientific literature: subjective well-being, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2001). None of them have a clearly stated definition and they may all include different sub-categories or concepts. Subjective well-being, for example, has been related to happiness, life satisfaction, presence of positive mood and absence of negative mood (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychological well-being - which refers to positive mental health (Edwards, 2005) - may encompass six aspects: personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, life purpose, positive relatedness and mastery (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Dodge *et al.* (2012) described well-being as the balance between resources and challenges. In that approach, well-being is a dynamic variable. An individual achieves stable well-being when they have the psychological, social and physical resources to meet the psychological, social and/or physical challenge they're facing (Galazka, 2018)

1.2 Resilience as a remedy for teacher's stress

Work may be inherently stressful (Chandola, 2010). In every work environment and for every individual, there is a point when stress begins to have a negative effect. The scale of this effect may

be determined by the stressors themselves and by individual resilience to them. Absence from work is more likely if individual resilience is eroded or heavily weakened by an impactful negative event; and so is the occurrence of mistakes - with decreased resilience, the probability of making more mistakes at work increases (Jeffcott et al., 2009; NPSF, 2013).

Stress and burnout are both serious problems among employees. Teachers are especially exposed to frequent stress at work. Over 80% of teachers state that their workload is unmanageable, according to survey by the Guardian Teacher Network. The same survey identified that many teachers are reaching a point of crisis - 75% of teachers admitted that their work is negatively impacting their physical and mental health. Another survey conducted in the UK revealed that teachers are at breaking point due to excessive workload and pressure. Many of them are considering or already planning to leave the teaching profession (Lightfoot, 2016).

Employees in an environment where change of demands is common are more likely to experience stressors that consequently decrease their resilience (Chandola, 2010). In such an environment, stress related absence from work is more common. The main causes for stress-related absence are: work pressure, work-related violence, bullying and lack of managerial support (Kerr, et al, 2009). There are also tensions that affect the emotional side of work that may reduce individual resilience to workplace stressors (Hochschild, 1983; Zapf, 2002; Smith, et al, 2009). Over time such tensions may lead to disengagement from work and lower performance (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; West & Dawson, 2012). Creating a safe, positive work environment and engaging workforce results in better wellbeing at work and less absenteeism (Dromey, 2014).

Theory-based literature on teacher resilience and well-being does not name a single framework that would be most useful for understanding teacher resilience. Typically however, the focus of scientific research is around the following aspects of resilience: (1) individual factors, (2) contextual factors and (3) teachers' views on their own work. Beltman *et al.* (2011) point out that what literature is lacking is research on how teachers themselves understand the concept of teacher resilience.

Autonomously oriented individuals are perceived to be more aware of their needs and feelings, and therefore also more resilient even when situated in controlling environments. They tend to be very conservative about how they use their time and energy, which serves as a good protection for individual resilience (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Other characteristics that enhance or mediate resilience, which have been mentioned in the theory-based literature are: motivation, self-efficacy, commitment and confidence (Sinclair, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2012).

Motivation, self-efficacy and confidence have been shown to increase resilience. Motivation strengthens commitment to teaching (Sinclair, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2012). Self-efficacy and confidence help face challenging situations and keep balanced, positive outlook even throughout difficult adverse events (Castro *et al.*, 2009; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Tsoloupas *et al.*, 2010). Other protective factors recognized in scientific studies are: mentors, personal agency and collaboration, and supportive relationships with colleagues (Sammons *et al.*, 2007; Edwards, 2007).

Mentors help teachers overcome even most difficult professional challenges (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Shank, 2005). Having a trusted colleague, a confidant, acting as a shield in a difficult situation helps manage difficult situation and interactions with difficult pupils. Such supportive relationship strengthens teacher resilience as a consequence and helps teachers overcome recurring setbacks at work (Jarzabkowski, 2002; Schlichte *et al.*, 2005). Evidence-based literature mentions a few successful approaches to build resilience: interventions based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), interventions based on mindfulness, and mixed (Joyce *et al.*, 2018). One of the approaches that has not been widely researched up to date is life coaching.

1.3 Life coaching

Life coaching is a relatively new industry - it emerged in the 1990s and has grown substantially since (Williams, 2003) Global Coaching Study conducted by the International Coach Federation (ICF, 2016) reported that there are over 50,000 coaches worldwide. Annually, the industry generates a revenue of nearly \$2.4 billion globally (ICF, 2016). Life coaching is a multi-disciplinary and integrative approach that has been widely recognized as helpful for people who want to discover their core values and act on them, learn how to balance work-life balance by sorting out their priorities, and experience better quality of life (Green et al., 2007; McIntosh, 2003).

Within the coaching literature the following types of coaching have been distinguished: business coaching, executive coaching, workplace coaching (which all focus on work goals or work team goals)

and life coaching (occurs outside of work environment and its focus is the individual's whole life). In general, the term "life coaching" refers to sustained process of cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes facilitating improved performance and goal attainment - either in one's professional or personal life (Douglas & McCauley, 1999).

Although its rapid growth, the definition of life coaching is not unified and many sources define it differently (Williams & Davis, 2007). Grant (2003) defines life coaching as "a collaborative solution-focused, result-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, nonclinical clients". Hudson (1999) defines a life coach as a "person who facilitates experiential learning that results in future-oriented abilities. [A coach] refers to a person who is a trusted role model, adviser, wise person, friend, mensch, steward, or guide – a person who works with emerging human and organizational forces to tap new energy and purpose, to shape new vision and plans, and to generate desired results. A coach is someone trained in and devoted to guiding others into increased competence, commitment, and confidence". ICF (2018) gives the following definition: life coaching is "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."

Life coaches are employed to assist with many issues. Some examples are: relationship issues, life transitions (retirement, for example), career transitions (promotion). Each time, people ask to be coached in order to achieve goals they were not able to attain on their own, to make a behavioral change, or to make a lifestyle change (Green, 2004). Life coaching can be undertaken face-to-face, via the phone, remotely via a video call. It can be conducted both individually as well as in a group setting.

Life coaching developed from helping professions (like psychotherapy or counseling), consulting and personal development training (Williams, 2003). However, it has separated itself as an industry from traditional therapeutic approaches – a life coach is a "thought partner", not an expert (Newnham-Kanas *et al.*, 2011). The most quoted difference between therapy and coaching is that the focus of therapy is resolving illness or trauma, while coaching focuses on improving performance, achievement and fulfilment by individuals who are already healthy and well-functioning (Auerbach, 2001). According to Williams (2002), there are three differences between therapy and coaching: 1) therapy focuses on the past, coaching focuses on the future; 2) therapy involves "healing" an individual whereas coaching works towards co-creating a future life; and 3) the therapist is an expert in a therapeutic relationship, while a coaching relationship is a partnership.

Coaching clients are therefore considered healthy and capable of coming up with their own solutions (ICF, 2018). The focus is on future outcomes, not past issues, and coaches work with their clients to make sure those outcomes are successfully achieved (ICF, 2018). As a behavioral change approach, life coaching motivates people, improves well-being and helps people set better goals for themselves and attain them (Grant & O'Hara, 2006; Green *et al.*, 2006; Newnham-Kanas *et al.*, 2010).

Scientific literature mentions many benefits of life coaching. In general, it has been suggested that supportive relationship can relieve stress and anxiety - as it creates space to confidentially discuss professional and personal issues (Myers, 1999). The process of setting highly valued goals and working towards achieving them has been shown to enhance well-being and build self-efficacy (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). As individuals gradually and persistently engage in such process and are also supported while dealing with adverse events, they build resilience and strengthen self-regulation (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006). Such process takes place during and in between life coaching sessions, and as a result individuals experience higher confidence, increased job satisfaction and well-being. But most importantly, their resilience strengthens as well and they become better equipped to face change and stressors in their workplace.

Limited but positive evidence has been described in scientific literature indicating that life coaching enhances resilience (Brown & Yates, 2018; Grant, 2003; Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007). Participants of various studies report feeling higher levels of resilience and having a better sense of being equipped with better tools to shift their perceptions about their professional and personal life. Life coaching sessions help them increase future-related hopefulness, raise self-confidence, self-acceptance, and positivity alongside with their levels of resilience. Gyllensten & Palmer (2005) suggest that as individuals work towards their goals, they face various challenges (for example: negative self-talk or self-defeating behaviors) and learn how to overcome them. Life coaching helps individuals stay focused on their goals and overcome challenges which consequently strengthens resilience (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005).

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the investigation was to find the impact coaching may have on participants level of well-being and resilience. The more specific aims can be specified as:

- To learn coaching strategies which can be useful with stress management
- To increase positive relationships with others
- To develop stress management techniques
- To develop a better feeling of purpose and sense in life
- To increase self-acceptance of teachers
- To promote knowledge about well-being and resilience

2.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 80 teachers of English who are members of IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language). They come from different cities and teach English at different level of education. Statistically, 80% were female and 20% were male. Participants are aged from 25 to 55.

2.2 Method

The project included two stages. At the first stage teachers' level of well-being was diagnosed. The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB) was used. It is a model which determines six factors contributing to an individual's psychological well-being, contentment, and happiness. Psychological well-being consists of positive relationships with others, personal mastery, autonomy, a feeling of purpose and meaning in life, and personal growth and development.

Next, teachers first participated in a 6 hour group coaching sessions (4 groups of 20 participants) and then took part in a 10 hour individual coaching sessions which was carried out by ICI coaches and the PWB scale was used again as a post test. Participants were also interviewed after the coaching sessions. Coaching interventions incorporated different coaching tools and frameworks. Some of the examples are: the GROW model, the KASH model and metaphoric language that were actively used in the coaching sessions with teachers.

The GROW Model is a process consisting of four steps: Goal, Current Reality, Options, and Will. All the steps are designed to help structure the coaching session. The "Goal" step allows the coach and the coachee set the goals. Very often a methodology called SMART is used for setting the right goals (where SMART stands for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-limited). The following questions can be used in this stage: "How will you know when this goal is achieved?" or "Does this goal fit your short term objective?". In the next stage, "Current Reality", the present situation is being examined. The following questions may be asked for clarification: "What is happening at the moment?" or "How will this affect your other goals?". Next stage ("Options") involves exploring the options. Some example questions to ask may include: "What else could you do?" or "What obstacles can come up?". Last stage, "Will", is all about establishing the commitment. The coach may use questions like: "What could stop you from moving forward?" or "What will you do to stay motivated?".

Another coaching tool used was the KASH (Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Habits) model. It is a great framework to facilitate change and growth and can be used to analyze a certain situation or behavior together with the coachee. Question around knowledge may be used to explore the coachee's awareness of the facts, concepts, people involved in a situation etc. When exploring the coachee's attitude, the coach wants to uncover his or her emotions or beliefs about the situation. Skills say a lot about the coachee's ability to perform certain actions or tasks, and which of those skills may be helpful and used to coachee's advantage in the future. The analysis of habits is very helpful to identify repeated behaviour. The next step is to work within each section to identify gaps in knowledge, attitude, skills, or habits that the coachee would like to work on to facilitate change and growth.

Metaphoric language is often used to emphasize certain aspects of the situation in order to shift the coachee's perspective and help him or her think differently. Metaphors are often being chosen from the coachee's language. Staying close to the coachee's language allows coaches to relate to coachee on a deeper level and allows coachees to not only hear themselves better, but also to be heard on a more profound level. Some of the examples of metaphors used in coaching sessions with teachers

were: “peeling an onion” (when talking about the complexity of the classroom environment and interactions with pupils), “juggling” (when discussing how many hats teachers need to wear in order to meet the school requirements, perform great in their role as a teacher, support their pupils as growing individuals and create learning in a classroom environment).

3 RESULTS

As the figures present all aspects evaluated in the PWB scale increased after coaching sessions. Fig 1 level of dependent variables – pretest and posttest

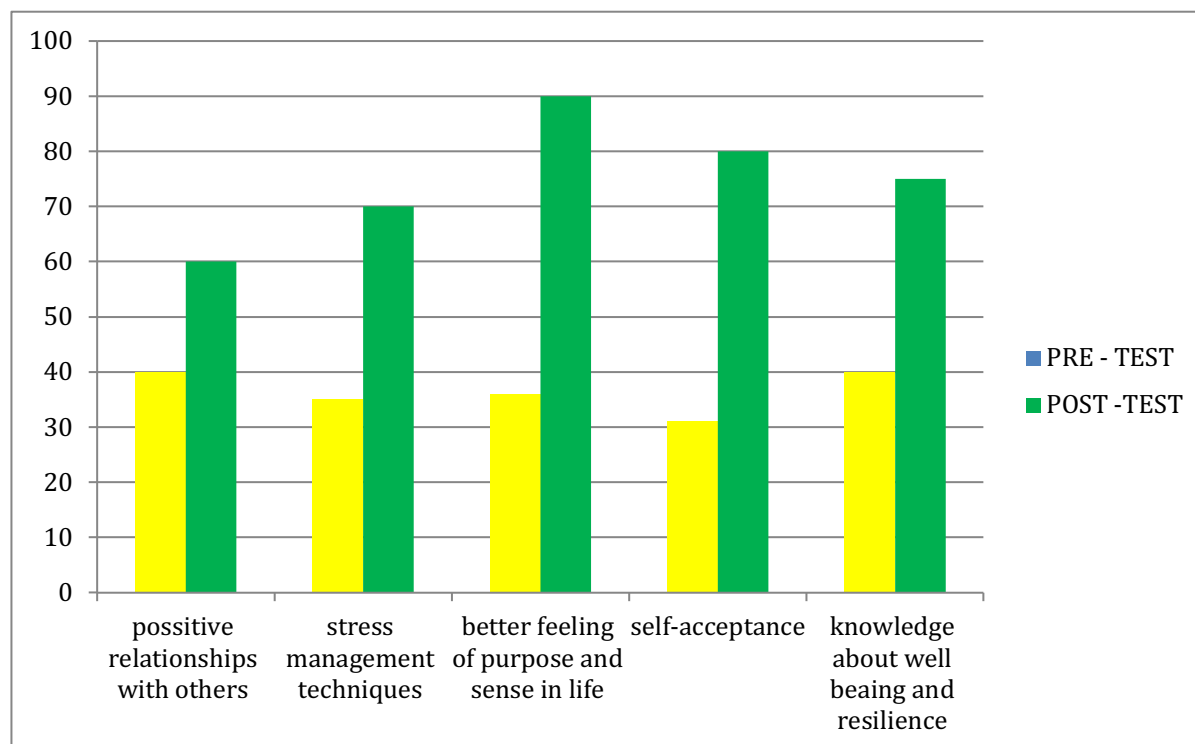


Fig 1 level of dependent variables – pretest and posttest

After group coaching workshops and individual sessions teachers were interviewed and asked about their reflections on participating in coaching.

Teachers who participated in the study found these coaching tools very helpful and supportive in growing their level of resilience. One of the teachers shared the following recipe of success based on KASH approach:

“In between the coaching sessions I worked on strengthening resilience by observing others in a situation and then analyzing the situation with one question in mind: What would I do if I were this person? So in each situation that I witnessed, I would ask myself: Why did my colleague get so upset? Would I get that upset? Would I want to get that upset? If not, how would I want to react if it ever happened to me? Asking myself these questions allowed me to gain deeper awareness of knowledge, attitude, skills and habits I have at the moment and what knowledge, attitude, skills and habits would I really want to have. From there, I knew what changes I needed to apply and I worked hard to apply them.”

Many participants appreciated in particular that they were being listened to on a deep level and the use of metaphors to help them detach from a given situation and see it from a different perspective.

“One day I was sharing with the coach that I’m being strongly affected by the noise in the classroom and one group of pupils in particular that never seemed to be paying attention to what I’m saying. When my coach asked me: “Imagine you’re a student in that class - where would you sit? Would you take the front seat, the window seat, the back seat?” I thought she was joking! But she wasn’t. I imagined myself sitting in the back of the classroom by the window. I realized that the window is always open and the draft doesn’t allow my pupils to hear properly. Then I imagined looking at the

room and saw that the group of pupils I look at from the teacher's perspective is not a happy, well integrated group at all! They're all new to this school and trying to fit in, find their place, and find out where they belong. Then I imagined myself talking AT them. It gave me a great insight into how I may be perceived as a teacher and help me build resilience by designing changes I wanted to introduce to place myself closer to my pupils. But most of all, I think what really helped is admitting to myself that I may not be always 100% right... and it's OK."

4 CONCLUSIONS

The field of psychology and education research agree that teachers have always experienced many demands but nowadays the requirements seem to be higher and higher. Students are different and they have different expectations and problems. Teachers usually think about their students' ability to cope with difficulties rather than their own well-being but there is a close correlation between the effectiveness of teaching and the level of teachers' stress. The way teachers respond to challenging behaviour is highly important as it affects their learners. Teachers who have high levels of resilience more often promote resilience and mental health among their pupils. Emotionally exhausted teachers may use reactive and punitive responses that contribute to negative classroom environment. Life coaching is getting more and more popular but is not widely researched. It can improve the quality of life (more satisfaction, to create more balance, more fulfilment, more peace of mind, more happiness, less stress, less pressure, resolving old issues) and change attitude to problems. The conducted research showed a big impact of coaching on teachers who had no experience with this sort of intervention and they were nicely surprised how much they gained. They gained a better insight into themselves and managed to put themselves into meta position and gain a different perspective of their own problems. The coaching sessions had also a significant impact on teachers' level of well-being measured by The Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB). First of all their knowledge about well-being and resilience increased and they acquired a better self-acceptance. It is important to encourage teachers to take care of their mental health and well-being and show them that there are many tools and methods they can take advantage of and work on their emotional and mental state.

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