



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

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ATEE Spring Conference 2024

## ATEE Spring Conference 2024

### Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29<sup>th</sup> – June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024  
S. Agostino, Bergamo



Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni





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# BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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**S. Agostino, 2 - Bergamo, Italy**

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# Teacher training and well-being best practices: the 3H project<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The 3H Project (Head-Heart-Hand) - Erasmus+ - promotes a holistic approach to Vocational Education and Training (VET), integrating cognitive, socio-emotional, and practical skills. Focused on innovative teacher training, it addresses challenges like disengagement and school dropout by fostering well-being and inclusivity. Through Learning Teaching Training Activities (LTTA) visits in the Netherlands, Spain and Finland, a Compendium of best practices was developed, including activities like *Lego® Art* and *Walk of Life*. These practices enhance socio-emotional competencies, highlighting the transformative role of teachers. The project offers tools to foster empathy, creativity, and holistic growth, contributing to a more inclusive educational context.

**Keywords:** socio emotional skills; well-being; teacher training; good practices; 3H project.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors shared the structure and content of the article. Specifically, Paola Zini wrote paragraphs 1 and 2, while Dalila Raccagni wrote paragraphs 3 and 4.

## 1. Social-emotional skills at school

For a long time, pedagogical thought has highlighted the essential connection between affective, cognitive, and motor aspects that characterise human development, knowledge, growth, maturation, and learning. Consider, for instance, the reflections of J.H. Pestalozzi (1801), who emphasised the necessity of linking the head, heart, and hands for the integral development of the person. Numerous other scholars, including J. Dewey (1938), have embraced a similar line of thought, recognising the risks inherent in educational approaches that focus exclusively on one of these three dimensions. Such approaches often underpin educational methods that are, respectively, sensationalist, intellectualist, or unreflectively practical. Equally well-established in pedagogical discourse is the call to acknowledge the social dimension of education, an arena where human beings live and develop, which cannot be disregarded in learning processes or educational aims. Indeed, it is within the social dimension that the interplay of action, intellect, and emotion, activated by education, takes place. The contemporary strand of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)<sup>2</sup>, continuing this long-standing tradition, has brought to light a significant deficit in the attention paid to the socio-emotional dimensions of teaching, learning, and education in modern school systems. Through theoretical models and empirical research, SEL as a field of inquiry has accumulated irrefutable evidence. On the one hand, this evidence reaffirms the centrality of the socio-emotional sphere as a fundamental dimension of education; on the other, it offers guidelines for improving existing educational systems and shaping those of the future. This approach places students' well-being and active engagement at the heart of the educational process. It promotes not only academic success but also personal and relational growth among learners. Such a perspective marks a significant advance in teacher training, integrating human and educational dimensions that are crucial for navigating the complexities of an increasingly interconnected society.

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of universal school-based (USB) social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions for K-12 students (2008–2020) revealed that participation in these programs was associated with significant improvements in students' skills, attitudes, behaviors, school climate and safety, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement. However, variability in the content, features, contextual factors, and implementation quality of USB SEL interventions was found to moderate the observed outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023).

In recent years, various documents and measures issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have underscored the pressing need for a holistic approach to education, framed in terms of "socio-emotional education" and "socio-emotional competencies". Among these, the publication *Embedding Values and Attitudes in Curriculum: Shaping a Better Future* (OECD, 2021a) is noteworthy, following closely on the heels of *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (OECD, 2021b). These documents highlight the necessity of broadening the spectrum of learning outcomes and assert that schools must adopt a bold and ambitious educational vision. The metaphor employed to convey this vision is that of a compass: the *Learning Compass* (OECD, 2018). This framework emphasises the need for students to learn how to navigate independently along the longitude of personal growth and the latitude of unfamiliar challenges and contexts.

These recommendations are particularly pertinent to Vocational Education and Training (VET), which is called upon to provide a holistic education that equally integrates intellectual-cognitive, socio-emotional, and technical-practical components (CEDEFOP, 2023). One rationale for this perspective lies in the professional profiles cultivated within VET institutions – namely, practitioners and specialised technicians in various economic sectors. As D. Schön observed, practitioners must be capable of managing uncertainty and drawing upon established knowledge to devise innovative solutions and methods of working (1987).

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<sup>2</sup> Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) as an educational process that enables individuals to acquire and effectively apply a set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. These abilities are essential for understanding and managing one's emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, developing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining constructive interpersonal relationships, as well as making responsible decisions in both social and personal contexts (<https://casel.org/>, accessed on 02.01.2025).

Additionally, VET often grapples with challenges such as educational inefficacy, student disengagement, and dropout rates, making the call for a comprehensive and balanced educational approach even more critical.

## 2. The 3 H Project – Head Heart Hand

In light of these considerations, the “3-H” project, inspired by Pestalozzi’s pedagogy, seeks to explore how to introduce the socio-emotional perspective into schools’ daily work with students, addressing issues such as demotivation and discomfort. In various European countries – particularly in Northern Europe – there are noteworthy examples of schools that explicitly and purposefully integrate socio-emotional aspects into their training courses. These schools employ a range of methodologies, some of which are adapted, with appropriate adjustments, from non-formal or informal education practices. The 3-H project aims to study some of these experiences and the approaches underpinning them, with the goal of replicating them in Italy and Spain. In these countries, socio-emotional competencies are typically taught in an implicit and transversal manner, while teachers and trainers often lack the skills needed to address issues such as motivation, demotivation, and socio-emotional development. Building on this premise, the 3-H project seeks to reduce the number of VET learners who feel unmotivated or uncomfortable within the school environment.

Developing socio-emotional competencies in students also requires robust educational competencies on the part of teachers and trainers. Promoting socio-emotional skills necessitates equipping educators with methodologies derived from community education practices, such as educational dialogue, animation, play, personalised planning, and more. The “3-H” project (Head, Heart, Hand) focuses on the following key aspects: promoting the development of knowledge and methodologies that enable teachers to address socio-emotional aspects in their practice; designing a robust reception model to support students during the initial months of their VET pathways; developing and adopting best practices that enhance student well-being at school (starting from the reception phase) and foster student motivation; implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) experiences to develop socio-emotional competencies while enabling students to acquire knowledge in an authentic and contextualised manner.

The 3-H project aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Encouraging educational organisations to allocate explicit time to personal and social education through methodologies rooted in socio-educational animation. This initiative could be particularly impactful at the beginning of an educational pathway but requires continuous integration throughout the entire training programme. The project seeks to promote activities that foster a sense of well-being and belonging among students, broadening the purposes of education beyond mere academic growth to address a wider range of existential needs.
- Promoting active learning within cultural disciplines, where student agency, problem-/project-based approaches, and collaborative/cooperative dimensions serve as drivers of personal growth, extending beyond the scope of individual disciplinary learning.
- Incorporating personal and social skills into assessment processes, ensuring these competencies are valued as integral outcomes of the educational experience.
- Contributing to the renewal of the teacher’s professional identity, emphasising the importance of socio-emotional competencies as a key aspect of teaching.

The 3-H project has been developed through several phases:

- a. Collection of best practices for the development of socio-emotional skills in VET students (LTTA visits in the Netherlands, Spain and Finland);

- b. Creation of a compendium, which gathers some good practices of activities to be carried out with students. Each practice has a focal point, among Welcoming and Orientation; Well-being and Motivation; Self-directed Learning, and Problem-based Learning<sup>3</sup>;
- c. Creation of a toolkit with activities that were used in experimentation in some Italian VET schools: Collection of Practices to Activities that Can Be Experimented and Tested<sup>4</sup>;
- d. Creation of guidelines, which were verified in a consensus conference. These guidelines are intended to support schools by providing useful indications for building a social-emotional curriculum, while providing the organisational elements to facilitate its implementation<sup>5</sup>.
- e. Write policy recommendations from the guidelines and with input from various agencies that are working on social emotional learning and skills (figure 1)<sup>6</sup>.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The socio-emotional dimension is always a fundamental pillar of learning; it must therefore necessarily play a key role in teaching, didactics, training and education.**
2. **Teachers and school leaders, with their socio-emotional competence, are the essential link that makes socio-emotional care of students possible, in different forms and methodologies depending on their age, as well as through example and indirect teaching.**
3. **The development of socio-emotional competence among teachers and school leaders should be a central pillar of initial training and Continuing Professional Development. The socio-emotional training of teachers and school leaders can only occur through the logic of transformative and experiential learning.**
4. **The crucial role played by teachers in social-emotional learning must be supported by school, social and professional policies at all levels, as well as by appropriate organizational forms, in terms of educational spaces, timing, grouping methods, pedagogical and didactic resources.**
5. **Leadership and governance – in terms of personal qualities and management solutions – are a fundamental element to enable organizational transformations capable of supporting social-emotional learning in the school community.**
6. **Social-emotional care requires the systematic and systemic exercise of the logic of community building, at every level: within the classroom, in teacher-students and teacher-teacher relations, in school-family and school-territory cooperation, and, where appropriate, also at the broader scales of district, city, region, state and international and global community.**
7. **Social-emotional care requires that students play a leading role: organizational flexibility must therefore allow the consideration of their voice and their operational proposals in guiding the teaching-learning process in relation to the context.**
8. **The adoption of a reference framework (curriculum) of Socio-Emotional Skills (SES) is useful for an educational design that makes the socio-emotional aspect a goal and a detectable outcome of the educational work; on the other hand, the assessment of SES should be introduced with caution and attention, allowing it to be interpreted as exquisitely formative assessment, stimulating dialogue and self-evaluation.**
9. **Focusing the curriculum on social-emotional skills is also essential to enhance the potential of technology and attenuate its risks; the use of learning technologies, including emerging ones based on Artificial Intelligence, is not only a necessity dictated by the context but a source of educational opportunities.**
10. **Social-emotional learning, in addition to being a transversal attention to the entire curriculum, should be the subject of explicit practices and dedicated time, some involving the whole school community, others directed to subgroups of students and/or phases of the path that require particular attention to re-elaboration and growth.**

*Figure 1: policy recommendations*

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-02-03-COMPENDIUM\\_V04\\_ENG\\_Final.pdf](https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-02-03-COMPENDIUM_V04_ENG_Final.pdf) (accessed on 02.01.2025).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/TOOLKITEN-1.pdf> (accessed on 02.01.2025).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/GUIDELINES-and-TOOL-KITS\\_EN-DEF-1.pdf](https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/GUIDELINES-and-TOOL-KITS_EN-DEF-1.pdf) (accessed on 02.01.2025).

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/PR3-POLICY-RECOMMENDATIONS\\_EN\\_v2.pdf](https://www.enac.org/wp-content/uploads/PR3-POLICY-RECOMMENDATIONS_EN_v2.pdf) (accessed on 02.01.2025).

The guidelines intend to support schools by providing useful indications for building a social-emotional curriculum, while providing the organisational elements to facilitate its implementation. We decide to divide into four sections. Each section contains 6 guidelines; each guideline provides a certain number of “practical suggestions” to put the guidelines into practice. This structure allows each school, according to its existing constraints, to apply and realize a version of the model suited for the local context.

- a) *Pedagogical*: this section of the guidelines concerns reflections on the school’s educational task, on social impact of school, on the empowering of students as protagonists of their own learning and of the construction of their future.
- b) *Organisational*: this section concerning the organisation of school time and spaces, with a diversification of learning situations, with the possibility of differentiated and customised course. Other key drivers are the relationships with local stakeholders and the definition of a continuous quality improvement system.
- c) *Didactic*: it is the section of the guidelines that deals with teaching, and particularly its socio-emotional dimensions. It explores the important role of teamworking and “project and problem-based learning”, as well as the possibility of teaching activities specifically aimed at socio-emotional learning.
- d) *Staff*: the guidelines in this section are addressed to the role of the teacher and their improvement of the socio-emotional dimensions, for the role and in action. From selection to the provisions of adequate organisational support, from training to continuing professional development, the school must deal with many aspects to enhance the value of teachers, protect them, stimulate collaboration among them and boost their creativity, to achieve an educational care that is not limited to intellectual and practical learning but is also dedicated to human development.

### 3. Beyond teaching: socio-emotional skills and teacher training

The 3-H project engaged various stakeholders from the educational context, including students and school leaders, while assigning a pivotal role to teachers, regarded as the cornerstone of pedagogical transformation. The “Head-Heart-Hand” approach was promoted as an innovative educational paradigm, aimed at enhancing not only teachers’ cognitive competencies but also their socio-emotional (OECD, 2022) and practical skills<sup>7</sup>. This integrated model effectively addresses the growing demands of an educational system that seeks not only to transmit knowledge but also to develop professionals equipped with empathy, creativity, and adaptability (OECD, 2021a; 2021b).

The current educational landscape, characterised by increasingly diverse classrooms and a variety of individual needs, presents significant challenges for teachers. Their professionalism, which involves the demanding emotional work referred to in the literature as “emotional labour” (Zembylas, 2002; Winograd, 2003), has gained new layers of complexity (Fiorucci & Zizoli, 2022) that go beyond the mere transmission of disciplinary content. It has become essential for teachers to develop skills and knowledge that support inclusive educational practices, enabling them to value diversity and respond flexibly and thoughtfully to ongoing social and cultural transformations (Baldacci et al., 2020; Fabbri et al., 2014).

The training proposed by the 3-H project stands out for its multidimensional nature, addressing themes that transcend the boundaries of traditional teaching and promoting a holistic approach to education. Central to this vision is socio-emotional education (Chiosso et al., 2021; Dato, 2019), which seeks to develop crucial intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. According to J.E. Zins, R.P. Weissberg, M.C. Wang, and H. Walberg, these competencies are organised into five key areas: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (2004).

<sup>7</sup> In accordance with Bill No. 2943, Article 2, Teacher Training for the Development of Non-Cognitive Skills in School Pathways, approved by the Italian Senate on November 20, 2024, <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/440476.pdf> (accessed on 10.01.2025).

Through innovative methodologies and experiential activities, compiled in the project's *Compendium - Collection of Good Practices (2023)*, teachers were guided in developing essential competencies for creating inclusive and stimulating learning environments. These good practices are instrumental in fostering the skills needed to address contemporary educational challenges<sup>8</sup>.

In this contribution, we present two examples of "good practices" drawn from the *Compendium (2023) - Lego® Art* (pp. 49–50) and *Walk of Life* (pp. 96–98) – both of which we experienced firsthand during the Learning Teaching Training Activity (LTTA) (Raccagni, 2023).

One of the practices explored is *Lego® Art*, an innovative activity that has garnered attention for its impact on students' well-being and motivation. Trialled during the LTTA in Oulu, Finland, this activity is part of an orientation and welcoming framework, fostering meaningful connections among participants. Student groups are invited to create a piece of art using Lego® bricks, stimulating creativity while developing transversal skills such as concentration, problem-solving, and patience. Each group is assigned a proverb as the theme for their creation, such as "*Actions speak louder than words*" or "*A friend in need is a friend indeed*". Teams collaborate to represent the proverb visually using Lego® bricks. At the end of the activity, each group presents their creation, explaining how it connects to the assigned proverb.

The activity encourages creativity and dialogue, creating a positive environment that promotes active participation. A key factor in the success of *Lego® Art* is establishing an initial climate of safety, enabling participants to express themselves freely. Positive feedback at the conclusion of the activity reinforces students' efforts, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration within the group.

The second example of good practice is the *Walk of Life*, an activity designed to encourage students to reflect on their career choices while walking along a route of up to 5 km, either in an urban setting or a natural environment. The activity unfolds across various stages, with students pausing at designated points to reflect on themes related to professional competencies. These reflections are inspired by the five areas identified by Kuijpers and Scheerens (2006): self-reflection on one's qualities, motivation, networking, career orientation, and exploration of work activities. Accompanied by teachers and tutors, students use the act of walking as a metaphor for their professional journey, exploring their career aspirations through shared reflection. Lasting approximately two hours, the activity promotes not only individual contemplation but also team building and interpersonal connections. The value of the *Walk of Life* lies in the synergy between physical movement and mental reflection: walking stimulates the mind and fosters an environment conducive to sharing and dialogue. A key element of the activity's success is its adaptability; the route and themes can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the group. At the conclusion, students provide feedback and are guided to recognize the importance of reflection in an informal, outdoor context.

Activities such as *Lego® Art* and *Walk of Life*, designed and facilitated by teachers, exemplify how social-emotional competencies can be seamlessly integrated into educational settings. These initiatives offer students opportunities to engage practically with key group dynamics, fostering cohesion, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. Through active participation in these activities, students develop critical skills such as interpersonal communication, creativity, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. In these educational experiences, teachers play a central role as facilitators of learning and co-designers of activities aimed at promoting students' holistic development. From this perspective, co-design becomes a reflective and collaborative practice, involving ongoing dialogue between teachers and students to create educational pathways that address learners' specific needs and interests (De Vivo et al., 2022; Schön, 2016; Mortari, 2003).

Additionally, these practices provide teachers with a valuable opportunity to assess the sustainability of the proposed activities. This involves a systematic analysis not only of the effectiveness of these experiences in fostering social-emotional skill development but also of their capacity to remain adaptable and relevant over time. Continuous assessment of educational sustainability requires teachers to evaluate whether practices can be repeated, modified, or expanded in the future,

<sup>8</sup> These good practices, collected in the compendium, were produced from series of six Learning Teaching Training Activities (LTTA) organized among the partners of the 3H-project. To get to the point, hosting institutes and presenters at LTTAs were asked to share examples of methodologies, practices, projects, programs explicitly aimed at developing their student's socio-emotional competences. They were guided in selecting and organizing the practices by the four themes anticipated above in the Introduction: (1) Welcoming/guidance, (2) Well-being and motivation, (3) Self-directed learning, and (4) Problem-based learning. For more details see *Compendium*, pp. 10-12.

responding to evolving educational contexts, changing student dynamics, and the shifting needs of learners (Hadji, 2022). Thus, evaluative capacity becomes a fundamental aspect of the teaching profession, ensuring that activities not only engage students in stimulating ways but also remain sustainable in the long term, creating a lasting and meaningful educational impact (Montalbetti, 2024).

This process of continuous analysis fosters the development of a resilient school community capable of adapting and evolving. Teachers are encouraged not only to design but also to monitor and refine their practices continually, ensuring their efficacy and relevance in an ever-changing educational landscape.

#### 4. Conclusions and Future Challenges

This contribution, focused on the 3H project, has highlighted the urgency of an educational approach that integrates socio-emotional competencies with cognitive and practical skills, placing teacher training at the heart of pedagogical transformation. In an educational context marked by growing complexity, the role of the teacher extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, evolving into that of a facilitator of emotional processes and a promoter of students' well-being and holistic development (WHO, 2021).

In light of these challenges, teacher training must be dynamic, evolving, and prioritize the development of skills related to emotional awareness and management, recognizing them as fundamental elements of pedagogical practice. The integration of these dimensions into educational pathways not only enhances students' active engagement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) but also enables teachers to respond sensitively (D'Emidio-Caston, 2019) and flexibly to the needs of a diverse and constantly evolving school community (Mitchell, 2018).

Looking ahead, teacher training will need to strike a balance between disciplinary, socio-emotional, and practical competencies, preparing professionals who can combine academic rigor with empathy, resilience, and critical self-reflection (Mortari, 2019). In this sense, the 3H project serves as a promising model, yet the creation of an education system genuinely focused on well-being requires sustained efforts to redefine pedagogical practices and to value the role of teachers as drivers of change and innovation.

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