

# EXPLORING TEACHER COMPETENCES FOR RELATIONAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on new professional competences that teachers are developing as they conjoin with music/arts therapists in face of young people who experience post-traumatic stress disorder or developmental trauma from earlier adverse childhood experiences. Data have been collected through the common use of a semi structured interview schedule across the interventions of the LINK Project. Responses from teachers of three schools in three different countries explore how educational pursuits are theorised/supported in order to promote relational health in schools. Findings point to a need to reassert social models of learning for teachers and young people alike. The consequences of reducing the range of disciplines that influence teacher education become apparent. It is noted that the disciplines of psychology and philosophy of education are necessary to address the current demands of inclusive education and inter-professional collaboration. Respondents are interested in new psychological knowledge that helps them reconceptualise educational rationales as professional teachers with a difference. These emergent perspectives arise from a re-engagement at classroom level with significant cultural resources that are already being used by music and arts-based therapeutic health practitioners.

**Keywords:** teacher competences, inter-professional, arts experiences, relational health

## EXPLORANDO COMPETÊNCIAS DOCENTES PARA A SAÚDE RELACIONAL NAS ESCOLAS

**Resumo:** Este artigo foca novas competências profissionais que os docentes desenvolvem em conjunto com terapeutas de música/arte face a jovens que sofrem de transtorno pós-traumático ou trauma de desenvolvimento devido a experiências adversas desde a infância. Os dados foram recolhidos através do uso frequente de entrevistas semiestruturadas ao longo de todo o projeto de intervenção. Participaram na investigação docentes de três escolas, em três países diferentes, o que

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levanta questões sobre como as teorias educativas são teorizadas/apoiadas, a fim de promover a saúde relacional nas escolas. Os resultados apontam para a necessidade de reafirmar os modelos sociais de aprendizagem tanto para docentes como para jovens. Evidenciaram-se as consequências da redução do leque de disciplinas na formação docente e que a psicologia e a filosofia da educação são disciplinas necessárias para atender às reclamações atuais de uma educação inclusiva e de colaboração interprofissional. Os docentes afirmam a sua confiança na aquisição de novos conhecimentos do âmbito da psicologia que os apoiam na reconceptualização de racionalidades educacionais que podem reforçar o seu papel como docentes profissionais com diferença. Essas perspectivas emergentes surgem do reinvestimento na sala de aula com recursos culturais significativos baseados na música e nas artes que já são usados por profissionais ligados à saúde terapêutica.

**Palavras-chave:** competências docentes, interprofissional, artes criativas, saúde relacional

#### **EXPLORER LES COMPÉTENCES DES ENSEIGNANTS POUR LA SANTÉ RELATIONNELLE DANS LES ÉCOLES**

**Résumé:** Cet article se focalise sur les nouvelles compétences professionnelles que les enseignants développent lorsqu'ils collaborent avec les thérapeutes de la musique et des arts face à des jeunes souffrent d'un syndrome de stress post-traumatique ou d'un traumatisme du développement provenant d'expériences défavorables au cours de l'enfance. Les données ont été recueillies grâce à l'utilisation répétée d'entretiens semi-structuré dans le cadre du projet d'intervention. Des enseignants de trois écoles dans trois pays différents ont participé à cette recherche qui s'interroge sur la manière dont les activités éducatives sont théorisées/soutenues afin de promouvoir la santé relationnelle dans les écoles. Les résultats soulignent la nécessité de réaffirmer les modèles sociaux d'apprentissage tant pour les enseignants que pour les jeunes. Les conséquences de la réduction de la gamme des disciplines qui influent sur la formation des enseignants deviennent évidentes et il est à noter que les disciplines de la psychologie et de la philosophie de l'éducation sont nécessaires pour répondre aux exigences actuelles de l'éducation inclusive et de la collaboration interprofessionnelle. Les enseignants affirment leur confiance dans l'acquisition de nouvelles connaissances psychologiques. Celles-ci constituent un soutien dans la reconceptualisation de rationalités pédagogiques qui peuvent renforcer leur rôle d'enseignants professionnels différentes. Ces perspectives émergentes découlent d'un réengagement au niveau de la classe avec des ressources culturelles importantes basés sur les arts et la musique qui sont déjà utilisées par les praticiens de la santé thérapeutique.

**Mots-clés:** compétences des enseignants, interprofessionnel, arts créatifs, santé relationnelle

## **Introduction**

The research that is presented arises within an action enquiry phase of a trans-European school-based project funded through an ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnerships for School Education Project. The project title is «Learning in a New Key (LINK): Engaging Vulnerable Young People

in School Education»<sup>1</sup>. The partner organisations (from Poland, UK, Italy and Portugal) comprise two mainstream schools, two special schools, three HEIs providing education and therapy training and two centres providing music/arts based therapeutic services.

The LINK Project action enquiry training programme brings teachers and music and arts-based therapists together to explore synergies between their professional activities that can be of benefit for young people with adverse childhood experiences including those who suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome or developmental trauma. They have been working together in classroom-based music and arts activities and in related enquiries about the impact of these interventions.

The arguments in this paper will critically explore: (1) relevant emerging policy/practice contexts across the partnership and emerging possibilities for multi-professional/inter-professional interventions; (2) the LINK Project's Framework of Competences for therapeutic teaching practice that promotes relational health in schools; (3) the research process into teachers' developing levels of professional competence; (4) findings from teachers about their inter-professional learning during inclusive music and arts-based experiences in their classrooms; (5) indicative findings and recommendations that are generalizable.

### **Emerging policy and practice contexts for multi/inter-professional interventions**

The LINK Project activities addresses a European-wide issue for schools – the continuing risks to the inclusion within educational settings of young people with challenging emotional states that result from their trauma histories. These young people require additional support from education, health and social services because of their emotional, social and developmental needs. Such needs originate from adverse childhood experiences arising from circumstances such as abuse or neglect within the family, abandonment due to parents' economic migrations or experience of warfare, forced migration or human trafficking. While this applies in extremes for a relatively small percentage, there is evidence across the LINK Project of high levels of psychological distress within schools.

There is evidence that in the UK 15% of the school aged population is adversely affected in this way (House of Commons Health Committee, 2014). 1:10 children aged 5-16 are reported suffer from a diagnosable mental health illness including anxiety, depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), and it is recommended that teachers should be part of the multi professional team to address these needs (Public Health England, 2016). The UK

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement No. 2015-1-UK01-KA201-013752.

Prime Minister May has recommended new support for schools in mental health first aid training and building stronger links between schools and NHS mental health staff (Gov.UK, 2017). Subsequent recommendations include the need for further evidence-based joint training opportunities and closer collaborative working for teachers and mental health staff including music therapists (Day, Blades, Spence, & Ronicle, 2017).

This target group of young people are often absent from schools and thus LINK interventions also resonate with European-wide recommendations for reducing early school leaving (ESL), as follows: (1) improvements in the quality of teaching and the competences of the teachers are a determining factor in the contribution teachers can make to reducing ESL; (2) teachers need the skills and ability to work with other professions and partners to prevent ESL; (3) cooperation should be centered on schools. Their boundaries should be opened up to enable them to include other professionals working as teams in efforts to reduce ESL (European Commission, 2013).

The educational contexts in which the LINK Project has been operating are various: a mainstream urban middle school in Poland, with a significant school population of young people who have been «orphaned» as a result of their parents' long term economic migrations; a residential special school in the UK for young people with developmental trauma referred by different local authorities usually after a series of placement breakdowns; an inclusive cross phase urban school in Italy which receives many students with additional resource requirements; a second chance school for young people in Portugal which provides for 15-25 year olds referred through care and custodial systems (findings from teachers in this school have been processed using a different methodology and are presented elsewhere).

The learning pathway adopted in the LINK Project has been to develop participatory enquiry-based training programmes for practising teachers through the agency of music and arts-based therapists. The enquiry process has been inductive, synthesising imports of knowledge from both educational and health (therapeutic) frameworks with the effect that a key result, a framework of competences, is itself an inter-professional product. This framework has emerged from close observation of/and reflection on the emerging inter-professional classroom practices in the four LINK Project schools. These practices have been routinised as frequent experiences for the young people in the schools. They include listening to music, art and movement activities and collaborative music making. These experiences have provided opportunities for young people and teachers to share periods of relaxation and non-verbal communication within classrooms where social/emotional anxieties have been impeding the learning of some groups.

An important feature of the LINK Project professional development process is that it has been organised around participatory action enquiry principles. These are consistent with:

- i. ideas about reflective teaching and learning including reflection in action, open-mindedness

and culture (Shon, 1983; Pollard & Black-Hawkins, 2014; Freire, 1974); ii. earlier notions of art in human experience (Dewey, 1980).

Consequently the trainings offered have been based on reflective and social models of learning as exemplified by these authors that were favoured in previous decades by the Schools' Council (previously operating in the UK in the 1970s and early 1980s). The Schools' Council established professional learning groups of teachers who were committed to address identified issues through continuing discussions and reflections on their evolving practices.

Thus, the decision was made to establish learning pathways that are inclusive and open ended and lodged within a social and arts-based model of learning that maximises opportunities for inter-professional exchanges. Theoretical insights from the fields of trauma informed and attachment focussed practice coupled with those from music and arts-based therapy interventions have extended the teachers' learning about the psychological needs of the children and young people that they are supporting as learners in classrooms. Such professional discourse may have been more commonplace in previous decades when the disciplines of psychology of education and philosophy of education were strong features of teacher education programmes. Currently in the UK such discussion of inter-professional learning can be connected to recommendations found in the UK SEN Code of Practice (January 2015) to develop expertise among teachers/other professionals at an «enhanced» level, so that they are able to adapt teaching/learning to meet the particular needs of children/young people with social/emotional challenges. Although other UK policy drives referred to above seem to support such interventions by multi-professional teams, the focus in the LINK Project has been to encourage inter-disciplinary learning (between arts-based therapists and teachers) that enables each group to build on each others expertise to achieve common shared goals (Ferguson, 2014). Thus, the framework of competences that is the focus of this paper has the subtitle «Competences for therapeutic teaching practice» denoting that teachers will be developing their teaching practice through association with accessible/applicable insights from therapists.

### **The framework of competences that underpin therapeutic teaching practices for relational health in schools**

This framework of competences (Table 1) has been developed during the LINK Project to support the identification of enhanced skills and knowledge following shared reflections with teachers and trainers across the programme. Many of the competence statements presented below have emerged from discussions about developing practices during the ongoing LINK Project in the UK with support from Cathy Warner and Leslie Bunt as music therapy trainers. These

statements have been shared at regular intervals with the trainers/teachers in the other participating partner schools who themselves have added competences to the framework. The statements support ongoing discussions with teachers across the project about their learning during the innovative classroom experiences of the LINK Project music/arts-based sessions. They are a product of the LINK Project social and arts- based model of professional development for teachers.

TABLE 1

**The framework of competences**

Theme	Learning how to know	Learning how to do	Learning how to be	Learning how to live alongside others
Trauma informed teaching practice	<p>Understanding the impact of early trauma/neglect on the development of the brain</p> <p>Recognising that some brain functions can be restored/ repaired through engagement in activities that are multi-sensory and relational</p>	<p>Including select therapeutic processes alongside educational processes to support young people's engagement as learners</p> <p>Capacity to use musical resources as a sensory experience in the classroom supporting sensory integration</p>	<p>Recognising the need to be able to centre oneself in the challenging environment of the classroom</p>	<p>Recognising the opportunities that music and arts-based experiences provide for non-verbal expression and recognition</p>
Attachment-focussed and relationship-based teaching	<p>Recognising the significance of the processes of sensory integration, relational engagement and self-regulation in the learning process</p> <p>Emotional competence</p>	<p>Creating professional rationales that legitimate multi-sensory and relational classroom activities</p> <p>Observing and engaging with young people's responses and moods while listening to music</p> <p>Listening</p>	<p>Recognising the process of heart/mind integration</p> <p>Being present</p>	<p>Enabling care staff to participate in shared quiet listening periods with young people</p> <p>Recognise the functions of synchronous and antiphonal play</p> <p>Recognise the power of sitting in circle and participating in music making together</p> <p>Respecting, valuing, being flexible</p>

<p>Different elements of safety: emotional, social, physical, moral, spiritual, psychological</p>	<p>Recognising how music/arts-based activities provide a safe environment for some young people</p>	<p>An ability to select and use music effectively to support safe transitions into shared learning spaces</p>	<p>Using music and arts-based experiences as media to support one's own feelings of well being</p>	<p>Learning about cultural humility in practice as a base for supporting feelings of safety for others</p>
<p>Music-centred and arts-based experiences and emotional content</p>	<p>Understanding how different musical elements impact on the emotional experience of listening</p> <p>Engaging in critical evaluation of classroom experiences synthesising ideas from education, arts and psychology</p>	<p>An ability to use music and arts as a resource to develop the sensory experience in the classroom and to sustain young people's engagement in learning and relationships with each other</p> <p>Recognising how educational and therapeutic processes for young people can be synthesised through arts and music activities</p>	<p>Developing self-awareness as a teacher and a capacity to use musical resources to calm oneself in the classroom</p> <p>Engaging critically in communicative music making as an attunement process</p>	<p>Understanding how controlling the loudness of music and voice can impact on the classroom atmosphere and relationships</p> <p>Recognising the processes of mirroring and matching</p> <p>Recognising collaborative/communicative music making as a restorative process</p> <p>Exploring/valuing diverse music/arts traditions</p>
<p>Understanding vulnerable young people's emotional responses to learning and change and their capacity for resilience and self-regulation</p>	<p>Recognising the significance of sensory integration, relational engagement and self-regulation in the learning process</p> <p>Recognising and understanding students' difficulties</p>	<p>Developing skills in observation – recognising and assessing young people's emotional states as they engage with music</p> <p>An ability to introduce music in a way that encourages young people's self-regulation as part of an experiential music and art routines</p> <p>Encouraging high expectations</p>	<p>Recognising whole hearted/whole minded engagement in collaborative/communicative music making</p>	<p>Understanding the power of the teachers' own participation alongside young people in arts and music-based activities for supporting their self-regulation</p> <p>Co-constructing the learning and teaching process</p> <p>Listening and seeking agreement</p> <p>Acceptance of diversity</p> <p>Relational competence</p>

Ethical protocols required in sharing case studies of therapeutic teaching practice involving young people	Recognising protections afforded young people through UNCRC	Designing/implementing agreed permission protocols	Recognising feelings of safety from agreed ethical protocols	Developing ethical approaches in partnership with all stakeholders
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It is important at the start to distinguish between what can be referred to as «teaching competences» and «teacher competences». Teaching competences can be identified as those that are focused on the role of the teacher in action in the classroom, therefore directly linked with the craft of teaching. Teacher competences, which imply a wider view of teacher professionalism, can be said to consider the multi-faceted roles of the teacher on multiple levels – of the individual, of the school, of the local community, of professional networks (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). The statements found in Table 1 reflect both teaching competences *and* teacher competences. Put simply the framework of competences includes two types of professional questions that emerge for teachers: teaching competences support the development of a relevant repertoire of skills (the «how» of classroom life), while teacher competences support the development of educational rationales that are relevant to the educational predicament (the «why» of classroom life).

FIGURE 1

**A framework to support teachers' reflection on LINK activities (Fincher, 1991)**

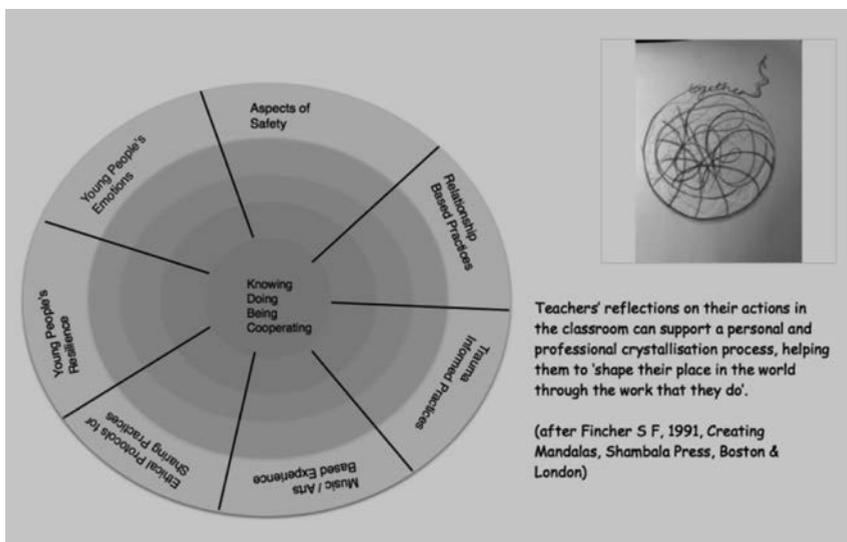


Figure 1 is a visual stimulus that was used in the early stages of the professional development programme based on the shape of a mandala that teachers had begun to use during training and during classroom activities with young people as part of receptive music experiences. The themes that were identified at the outset of the LINK Project are represented holistically within the seven segments of the circle. At that stage there were no competences identified – only guidance for teachers to use their own reflections on their new classroom practices as a basis for identifying new knowledge, skills and values, as part of a social learning process with the other participating teachers. These reflections were shared during group discussions with therapists and trainers immediately after the end of the school days when LINK activities had been run. In this way, the 48 statements of competence identified in Table 1 emerged from shared notes and oral feedback that resonated with the realities of the classroom context into which new cultural and psychological resources were being introduced.

### **The research process into teachers' developing levels of professional competence**

The process of identifying competences and exemplification material as part of the training process has been complemented by a research process involving interviews with 12 teachers from three of the participating schools in the UK, Poland and Italy. Data about teachers' competences in Portugal were collected through a separate methodology. The outcomes from the 12 interviews are reported in this paper. The overarching research question is this: what new practices and professional competences have been recognised by the teachers as relevant to inclusive practice with young people who have had adverse childhood experiences and suffer post-traumatic stress disorder or developmental trauma?

The interview schedule has been agreed and applied consistently across the project in each of the partner schools. The schedule has been translated into each of the project languages to facilitate the chosen teachers' engagement. Thus, the discussion of the new competences and the moments that exemplify them are shared by the individual teachers in their own language. All the researchers are fluent in English so that they have translated their findings and analyses into English.

The qualitative interviews have been designed to: i) explore how the participating teachers are understanding their professional selves in the states of change/stasis; and ii) provide an in depth evaluation of the framework of competences in the broader context of the project interventions. The interview schedule is supported by other relevant data that are collected systematically through the completion of a template that documents contextual data relevant to the enquiry. The interviews themselves build on discussions that the teachers have shared during regular shared reflective meetings. Thus, each teacher's own account of her/his engagement

with the framework of competences has been a basic reference point for the interview. The interviews also explore the professional identities of the respondents and their progress towards being professional teachers with a difference. The questions put to the respondents support discussions through the five phases of questioning are arranged under these headings: (1) first awareness that your set of competences need to be enhanced to work with these cohorts of young people; (2) engagement in thinking about therapeutic teaching practice as a legitimate pursuit; (3) relevance for all teachers of therapeutic practices referred to as trauma-informed, relationship-based, attachment focused; (4) relevance of music and arts-based approaches for trauma-informed, relationship-based and attachment-focussed approaches in the classroom; (5) identification of new competences that you have developed which are relevant to your teaching work with young people who have had adverse childhood experiences and suffered post-traumatic stress disorder or developmental trauma.

### **Teachers' understandings about their inter-professional learning during the LINK Project**

Despite differences between the schools, the common LINK Project professional development strategy was seen by teachers in each context as relevant to their needs. The starting point for all of them was similar. Many of the group had never before experienced formal training related to young people with adverse childhood experiences. Nonetheless, in their jobs they were being expected as teachers to work with this target group of young people after a basic initial teacher training experience that had focussed primarily on behaviourist approaches to subject teaching and the assessment of young peoples' attainment.

These responses from LINK Project teachers represent their feeling that they had not had formal training in the effects of trauma prior to the interventions of the project.

I was thrown in the deep end. I had no experience of this kind of environment at all. I was PE teacher for 11 years and doing supply for 3 years. I worked on supply in an Special School in Bristol for 3 months. The approach there was very different – basically to scare the students into doing what you wanted them to do – a military style approach. (LINK Project teacher, UK: 24 February 2017)

Before I engaged in the project I could see the differences in the behaving of some students, but I didn't explore this theme. I wasn't looking for causes or possible solutions to those problems. I was not aware that the impact of trauma and neglect at an early age can impair the development of many of the brain functions. During my studies at the university, with a specialisation in teaching in my curriculum there were no basics of general psychology or developmental psychology, so I didn't have any psychological knowledge. (Link Project teacher, Poland: 8 March 2017)

From my very first teaching experiences I have had to face situations where, in the group class, there were one or more vulnerable pupils. This situation required me to deploy all possible resources, not only professional, but also more personal, to be able to include these pupils in classroom work. Despite having tried and used different resources, despite working in collaboration with support teachers. I had been left with the feeling that I would need to have had more training/preparation of «psychological» type or concrete practices to be use so that I could have a better chance of intervention in situations of distress in the classroom. (LINK Project teacher, Italy: 10 March 2017)

These responses are selected/presented here as typical across the representative sample of interviews. Teachers are reporting that they were working with vulnerable young people but without prior training in the initial stages or as part of continuous professional development about the lasting impact of early experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect on young people's emotional, social and cognitive states. Thus, the question being posed in this paper about the quality of professional development for relational health is timely. Where these teachers comment on this experience, they point to a lack of psychological knowledge in their initial teacher training courses. It must be recognised that the field of developmental trauma is relatively new and still developing but that knowledge about neuroplasticity with its implications for the possibility of repair/restoration of executive brain functions (Gaskill & Perry, 2014) has not yet found its way into standard teacher training programmes. The introduction of such material into training programmes is now problematic given the demoting of psychology of education as an essential subject discipline for teachers. What is poignant in these responses is that the teacher used all her personal resources to address a issue that requires the application of subject/professional knowledge that is available in the public domain.

It took time for the LINK teachers to adapt to the methods being introduced during the training sessions and classroom based interventions working alongside music and arts-based therapists working as trainers. The process through which the teachers engaged with the practices and approaches was gradual but, as referred to above, within a social model that was supportive (regular shared reflection sessions after classroom-based trainings), cultural (Stige, 2002) (opportunities to participate in music listening and music making activities) and inter-professional (involving teachers and therapists exchanging knowledge together). The training was informed by classic texts in music and arts-based therapeutic methods (Bunt & Stige, 2014; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Rickson & McFerran; 2014). The following extracts from the interviews with the teachers identify that they needed time to adapt to the new music and arts-based methods that they were being introduced to, but that they soon realised that it could make a difference.

When I first met the therapists I was willing to give it a try. I learned quickly that it was about trying to keep young people calm and to set them up for the day. This is one of the most difficult parts of the day. I felt a bit self conscious listening to pieces of music during the training and talking about my feelings – it is not the music

I normally listen to – so I was picking up new vocabulary and ways of listening to music. I suppose it matured my tastes, I don't know. I learned very quickly how good it was a creating a nice start to the day. So this is how I became open to it all. I have become more confident through doing it alongside the young people. Before I would have felt like a fish out of water. Now it has become more natural although new to me. And I am staying calm with it all. That has definitely helped. It is all rubbing off on me. I am different kind of teacher now. (LINK Project teacher UK: 24 February 2017)

When I took part in the meetings with music therapists and engaged in various activities introduced by them I was surprised at first. Of course I really liked all the ideas but I was a bit sceptical about using them in school reality. Firstly because I am not a therapist and I didn't know how to introduce them in my lessons and secondly how to make my students get actively involved so that the therapeutic element is effective. But later I became more and more convinced that the entire idea makes sense and my students should engage in this kind of activity. (...) What I soon realised is that my students want to listen to music and think about their emotions, draw their feelings or even show them through movement. Words very often are too harsh, hurtful and might be sometimes misunderstood or they just are not the best vehicles to convey emotions. Those practices helped us change our moods and improve the atmosphere in the classroom. We started to feel more united and feel better which helped us engage better in activities and learn the subject. (LINK Project teacher, Poland: 8 March 2017)

I was sceptical/cynical at the beginning, I was not sure how it would be applicable to the classroom when you are coming at it from a teacher's perspective. The more we got involved in doing the activities yourself – this was the more important aspect – actually taking part in the listening activities – the journeys and guided listening – and seeing how powerful they can be for yourself. It was important to do it yourself and understand it for yourself before doing it in the classroom. (LINK Project teacher UK: 24 February 2017)

The investment of time for this new purpose results in a more relaxed atmosphere in class and in a greater empathy between teacher and pupils. The classroom environment becomes more collaborative and creative. (LINK Project teacher, Italy: 10 March 2017)

I have valued musical listening to encourage relaxation, listening to oneself and others, sharing our experiences within the class group. The physical activities using the body to contain and modify emotional anxiety were new to me. (LINK Project teacher, Italy: 10 March 2017)

These responses reflect different aspects of the social model of learning at work. The first three statements indicate how a social process – interaction with significant other professionals – has brought about a shift in aspiration and action. In the last two statements the teachers are commenting on the significance of a new social and physical atmosphere for young people's capacity for collaboration and self-control. The process of introducing classroom methodologies that draw on music and the arts has been through a social process involving both receptive (listening) and active approaches – including collaborative music making and movement. These social experiences provided opportunity for them to be playful in a non-verbal way alongside the young people facilitating new kinds of relationships with them. These interventions are recognised as relaxing, empathetic and mood changing and atmosphere creating.

These innovations correspond to those statements included in the Framework of Competences within the row entitled «Music-centred and arts-based experiences and emotional content». The teachers' statements above provide indication that the competence identified as «an ability to use music and arts as a resource to develop the sensory experience in the classroom and to sustain young people's engagement in learning and relationships with each other» has become a reality for them in their classrooms.

The subsequent discussions about these competences during shared reflection sessions and during training sessions validated the statements and began to evidence examples of practice related to them. The interviews with the teachers have provided further opportunity to populate the Framework of Competences with exemplification material as evidenced below.

Discussion of competence: *an ability to introduce music in a way that encourages young people's self regulation as part of an experiential music and art routine.*

I am not musical but it is very interesting to learn about ways to introduce music to young people who often struggle to regulate their emotions. It can really help in the morning to set the tone for the first couple of hours. It certainly helps the transitions at the end of the morning. I feel I have been learning about how to structure all these activities. I am less afraid now of the idea of running a session than I was 6 months ago. I have seen how it can be made to work. It really worked last week. B had had a really torrid morning. But she likes LINK activities and she was fine for that session. We had to keep her back to talk about the rest of the morning. Normally it can take 15-20 minutes to get some sense awareness from her. But she knew straight away after talking with you and talking about the music and how it makes her feel. That was like a magic trick. That was the most constructive chat we have ever had with her. Oh yes we asked her what the music did for her. She said she thinks at about a thousand miles an hour and the music slows her head down. She said that she can appear frenetic in the music session but in fact it is slowing her down. (LINK Project teacher UK: 24 February 2017)

There is evidence here of continuing professional learning. The teacher is reappraising the value of the music activities for a particular young person and has entered a new kind conversation with her as a result of the experience. The young person (12 years old) is trying to describe how she imagines her brain works. This will be a next step that the teacher can explore – what is known theoretically about the impact of music on the brain of young people who have suffered developmental trauma.

Discussion of competence: *recognising the power of sitting in a circle and participating in music making together.*

Students in our class are in their own little worlds and it is the only time in the week when they are sitting in a circle looking at each other and not sitting at their desks and facing the front. They are looking at each other and doing something together. It was really once to have A and M facing each other and having their musical conversation. They were doing it together and not with a member of staff. They did it really playfully – not

mechanically. They were enjoying the interaction. This is something that you don't see very often. (LINK Project Teacher UK: 1 March 2017)

There are significant pedagogical questions that arise from this pertinent observation. An accepted low arousal approach for young people who display the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and developmental trauma is to provide each young person with a safe space that they can call their own – their own separate desk in the classroom. However, this idea of providing safety is extended when it is recognised that the music experience was doing the work (Bunt & Stige, 2014) through providing opportunity for non-verbal playful interaction that can meet the young people's needs for positive attachments which lie at the root of the educational challenges they face. The teacher has found an effective strategy for enhancing the social and relational dimensions of classroom life through pedagogical steps that for her have been derived from music therapy approaches.

What is interesting is that contrasting perspectives on this competence emerge from the diverse classroom experiences of the LINK Project.

I was just thinking that while it works for some of them, it is vulnerable place to be in a circle and and that some choose not to be there. There are some in my class who get a lot out of it. A lot of social experience and feeling better together. But because some choose not to be there it almost works against it. There is safety when you are in your own space and sharing space with other people is more challenging if you are feeling vulnerable at that moment. (LINK Project teacher UK: 1 March 2017)

This astute comment raises underlies the need for open-minded and critical approaches to such interventions.

Feelings of safety for some are a first and necessary prelude to learning. What has been noted during the LINK Project activities is that some might not join the circle at first or on every occasion, but that this does not necessarily signify a lack of engagement. Thus, a young person sitting on the floor outside of the main group, but still participating through gentle handling of a small and almost inaudible egg shaker, *is engaged her own way*. Another young person first began to engage through sitting beside her teacher but outside of the circle and entering into quiet playful verbal dialogue with her. She allowed the teacher to participate in the music making and appeared to enjoy the opportunity for light playfulness with her in this new kind of social environment.

These extracts are chosen because the teachers have observed and begun to talk about the responses and behaviours of the young people within the framework of the LINK Project activities. The extracts provide examples of the psychological dimensions of classroom learning from the LINK Project that need to be further explored during the later stages of the project. This was noted in the responses of the Italian teachers.

I have valued learning about the use music as a resource to develop sensory experiences in the classroom, to support the involvement of young people in the process learning. I have valued the ability to use music as a sensory experience that supports integration in the classroom. (LINK Project teacher Italy: 8 March 2017)

This succinct summary from a teacher can be further explored in relation to new findings from neuroscience that link sensory integration and positive relational experience to the processes of self-regulation. Enhancing vulnerable young people's capacity for self-regulation has been seen as an essential aim of this intervention so as to include them as learners in the school environment. Concurrent quantitative enquiries within the LINK Project are focussing on the significance of the impact of music and arts-based activities on the young people's sensory and relational engagement for their self-regulation. These findings are also being used to stimulate discussion between the teachers and therapists around the Framework of Competences.

The teachers' responses indicated that philosophical questions were emerging about how to judge about what is educationally worthwhile.

I would not have done this before. I was coming from a mainstream environment where I was wanting them to do what I was asking them to do. It is a fundamental difference. There is a pressure that things have to get done. Now I take a step back – a few steps back. We can make some space and room and then we will come back and revisit it in another way. Initially you feel that you are abandoning the objectives. But really it is about avoiding conflicts which can put up huge barriers and which do not achieve anything because it damages relationships – and all the rest of the things that have made learning impossible. You learn that taking a few steps back from the situation you will actually make more progress. You are not abandoning the objectives for me it has not just been about the LINK sessions themselves – it is more of a cultural change or an outlook. You can't be therapeutic for 10 minutes and then go back to teaching in the same way as before – it is more of an overall outlook. It is not just a new routine it is about a cultural shift. (LINK Project teacher, UK: 24 February 2017)

I now have a better understanding of the psychological background of what my students are going through and what I as a teacher can do in my classroom. I am trying to disprove beliefs which students have about safety and the trustworthiness of adults. One of the main goals for me is working on building relationships with traumatised students because they need a strong relational attachment with their teacher, that helps them feel secure and safe at school. Learning about how trauma works and how a teacher's interactions with students can reinforce their view of the world, has helped me to focus on what I can control – my own reactions. Now I am more aware of my own triggers and why student behaviour worsens when I react the way that they expect. So when the difficult situations appear I am able handle them in more adequately. I have better control of myself and can more quickly calm down. (LINK Project teacher, Poland: 8 March 2017)

These two statements suggest that competences related to «Learning how to be» and «Learning how to live alongside others» are becoming significant signposts for these two teachers. Although learning how to introduce music and arts-based experiences has involved real shift in practices, the shift in professional understanding and valuing has been even more funda-

mental. It appears that the teachers' immersion alongside the young people in the sensory and relational experiences of listening to music and playing music has made them more open to the possibility of re-orienting educational aims to include aspects of relational health.

### **Summary conclusions and recommendations**

These complex discussions arise from teachers' reflections on their engagement in an inter-professional endeavour in face of risks to the inclusion within educational settings of young people with challenging emotional states that result from their trauma histories.

The indicative findings from this small scale enquiry suggest that:

- The provision in schools for this vulnerable group are various, but the starting points for teachers are similar. The demise of the discipline psychology of education within some European teacher training systems leaves teachers without the baseline from which to build their understandings of the impact of post-traumatic stress syndrome/developmental trauma on the capacities/potential for growth of young people in this target group.
- The multi-professional approach advocated through emerging policy discourses may not challenge teachers to acquire the psychological knowledge and skills that are necessary. However, the inter-professional approach adopted in the LINK Project has opened up discussions about how knowledge, skills and values can be shared across the professional boundaries of therapy and teaching with the effect that teachers extend their levels of competence.
- It has proved possible for teachers, therapists and young people working together to explore sensory and relational experiences through non-verbal art forms in the classroom setting where the changes are needed. This can be seen as a social and cultural resource that can be accessed through appropriate professional training.
- Psychological explanations, e.g., related to neuroplasticity and the capacity of the brain to be restored, are available to support teachers' developing understandings about the positive relational shifts they witness during music and arts-based activities. This is a psychological resource that both health and education professionals can draw on in educational settings.
- Teachers exposed to such experiences begin to re-conceptualise their educational rationales to include more relational dimensions in their routine classroom work that could contribute to the attainment agendas of schools.
- Music/arts-based therapists engaged in the work see new professional possibilities for themselves as trainers in music making for health in the social settings of schools.

- The agenda for schools in meeting the needs of the identified target group of young people shifts from a deficit «mental illness» perspective towards a conviction that inter-professional collaboration can promote mental health for all.

The recommendations from these findings that can be generalisable beyond the remit of the LINK Project are as follows:

- Engage the teachers and therapists together in simple classroom-based enquiries about the impact of music and arts-based experiences on young people's sensory and relational engagement and their confidence in becoming learners.
- Further develop a quantitative evidence base in each school related to the sensory and relational engagement of young people to justify the re-orientation of educational aims to include a relational health agenda.
- Share the findings with policy makers who are already encouraging change to support the relational health of young people in the target group.

In summary the experience of the LINK Project begins to illustrate how significant cultural and psychological resources can be used to support the professional development of teachers in ways that can support the relational health of young people who otherwise are struggling to participate on the fast trackways of our European learning institutions.

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