

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING WHEN SCHOOLS ARE LOCKED DOWN



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COVID-19 and school-aged children

- 1.3 billion children globally were affected by the COVID-19 lock-down and closing of the schools
- Globally more than 400.000 people lost their lives. So, many children lost their loved ones – parents, grandparents, relatives...
- The consequences, both short-term and long-term, are yet to be researched in-depth
- What is undeniable is that the negative effects are more probable for disadvantaged and vulnerable children (there are exceptions)

Outline

- What do we (I) talk about when we (I) talk about wellbeing in school – briefly
- What do we know about effects of school closure on children and young people's wellbeing?
- What could the response from HPS look like – Resilient HPS
- Take home Action Points

The concept of wellbeing in schools



Being Well

An optimal psycho-social experience and functioning related to schooling

Engagement

Learning

School achievement

Being Unwell

Less than optimal [or worse] psycho-social experience and functioning related to schooling

Disengagement

Indifference

Resistance (violence)

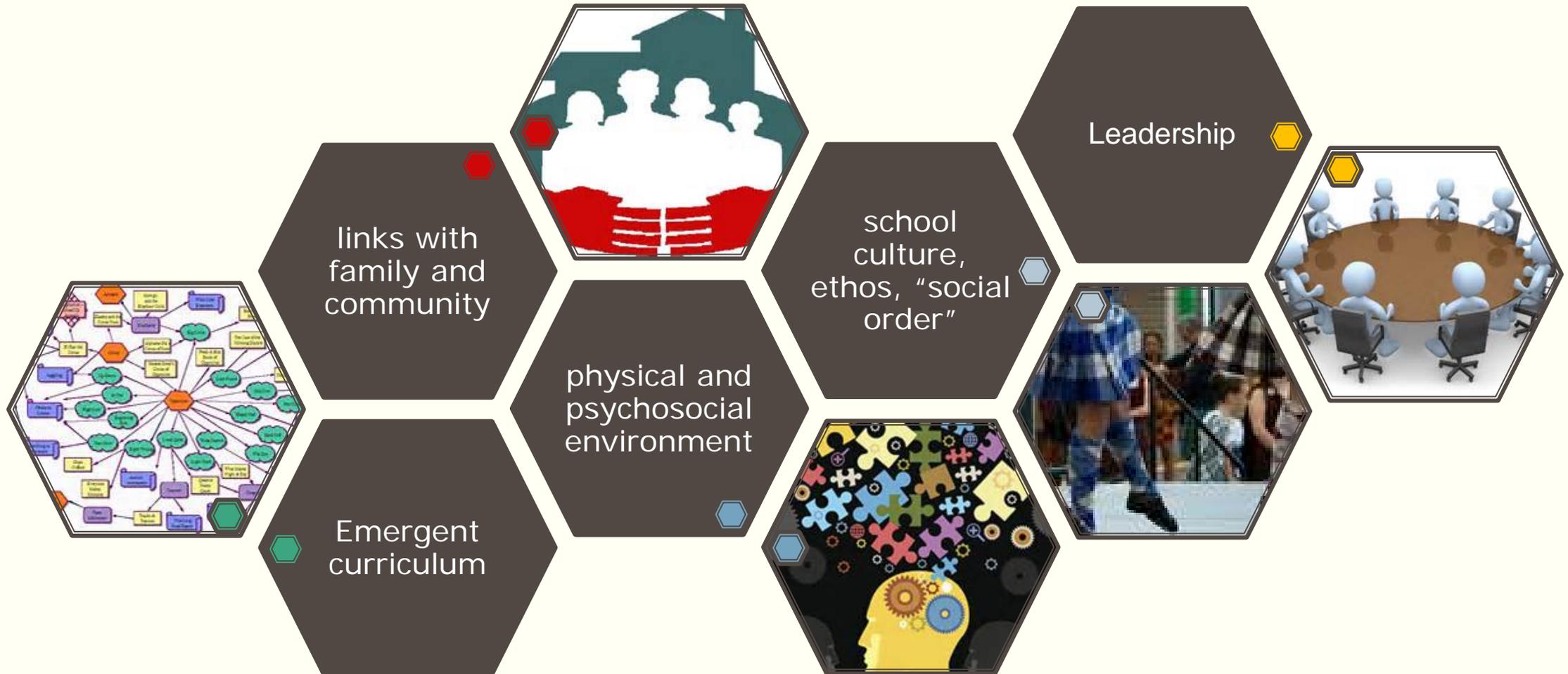
Quality of life through meaning, purpose and virtue

A degree to which an individual feels that she or he has influence over the determinants of the three domains...

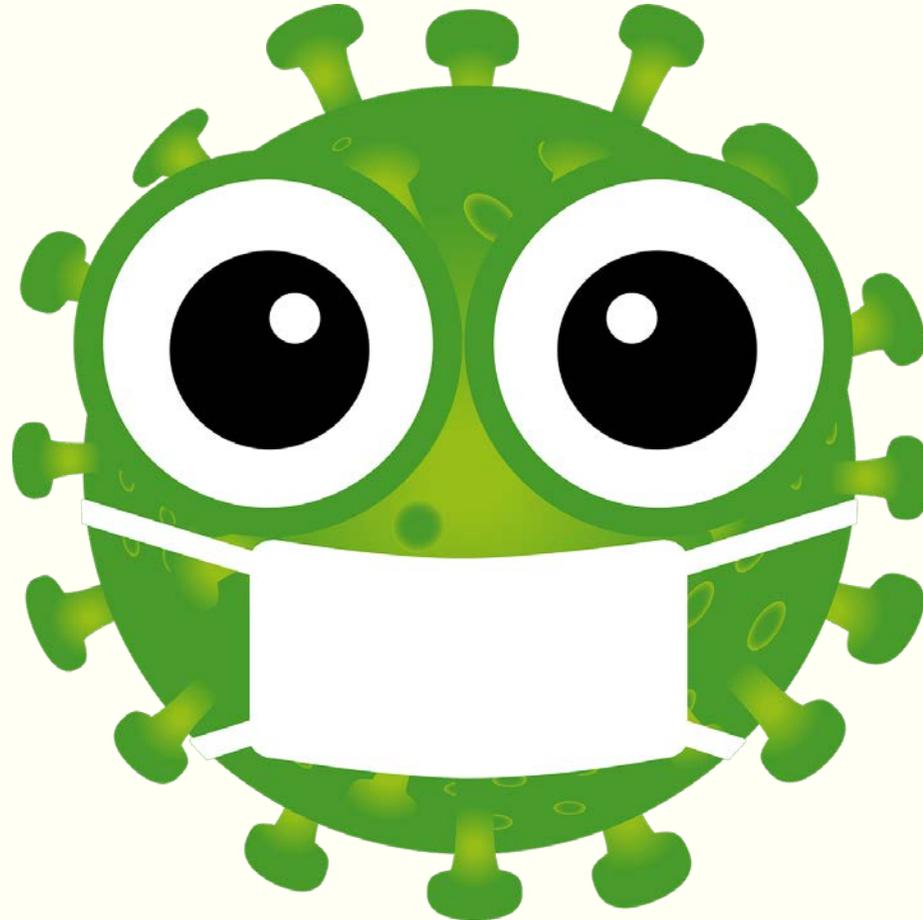
after Raeburn and Rootman 1998



Wellbeing in school is NOT only an individual matter



The effects of COVID-19 are not only bio-medical



Wider COVID-19 related issues affecting wellbeing of children

- Many parents are typically more stressed during the crisis
- Some parents struggle with illnesses, addictions, or other conditions which worsen during lockdown
- Family dynamics may become (more) difficult and tense during lockdown
- Some parents may be traumatized (e.g. medical staff working in hospitals and other critical societal functions), or grieving
- Many parents lost income, in some cases this results in dramatic changes in the lives of the children and young people
- Lack of intergenerational social contact – grandparents, elderly relatives etc.
- Lack of opportunities for socializing with peers
- Lack of outdoor activities, disruption in the everyday life rhythms

When schools were forced to close...

- In Australia research related to aftereffects of the bush fires in 2009 showed that although children catch up with their capacity to learn, the **academic pathway** is changed and may have life-long implications (Gibbs et al, 2019)
- In Argentina, students who missed up to 90 days of school in the 1980s and 90s due to teacher strikes were **less likely to earn a degree, more likely to be unemployed, and earned 2-3 per cent less on average** than those from areas less impacted by the strikes (Jaume and Willen 2019)
- In US, during the polio epidemic in 1916, some schools remained closed for over a month at the beginning of the school year. The teenagers in places affected by the school closures tended to **leave school earlier** than older students who had finished school before the epidemic (Meyers and Thomasson, 2017)

COVID-19 survey by Save the Children in US and Europe

- In the US, nearly half (49 per cent) of interviewed children said they were **worried**, while 34 percent reported feeling **scared**, and 27 percent felt **anxious**
- In Finland, 70 percent of participating children reported experiencing feelings of **anxiety**, over 55 percent said they were **fatigued**
- In the UK, 20 percent of the interviewed children **worried about the future** due to school closures, and almost 60 percent **worried that a relative might fall sick**
- In Germany, 33 per cent of children said they were **worried they would not be able to finish school year**
- In Spain, over a quarter of parents with lower income reported higher levels of **distress** than normal, and many reported their children were struggling with **fear, anguish** and **concern** about their family's situation

Health literacy and COVID-19 - SHE research Group

- Infodemic (Orkan Okan) – overload with information concerning the virus, including fake news - difficulties of children and young people to follow, critically assess and use
- Organizational health literacy and HPS
- Health literacy and COVID-19 in Finland (data with 2055 students shows concerning results) (Leena Paakkari)

Response of the HPS



Resilient HPS Schools?

- Resilient HPS can be places of response and recovery, of social togetherness: this is as important as the preventive bio-medical measures or general health promotion as we know it
- Resilience is a characteristic of the school rather than an individual feature
- Resilience is NOT equal to prevention, or health promotion

School Resilience

- Capacity of school as an organization to react promptly and efficiently in emergencies and crisis situations, with a view of engaging, coping and acting to transform the extraordinary difficult circumstances, or (when transformation is impossible) to sustain its core tasks within these circumstances in safe sensitive, equitable and socially responsible ways



Resilience

The Courage to Come Back

Possible action points

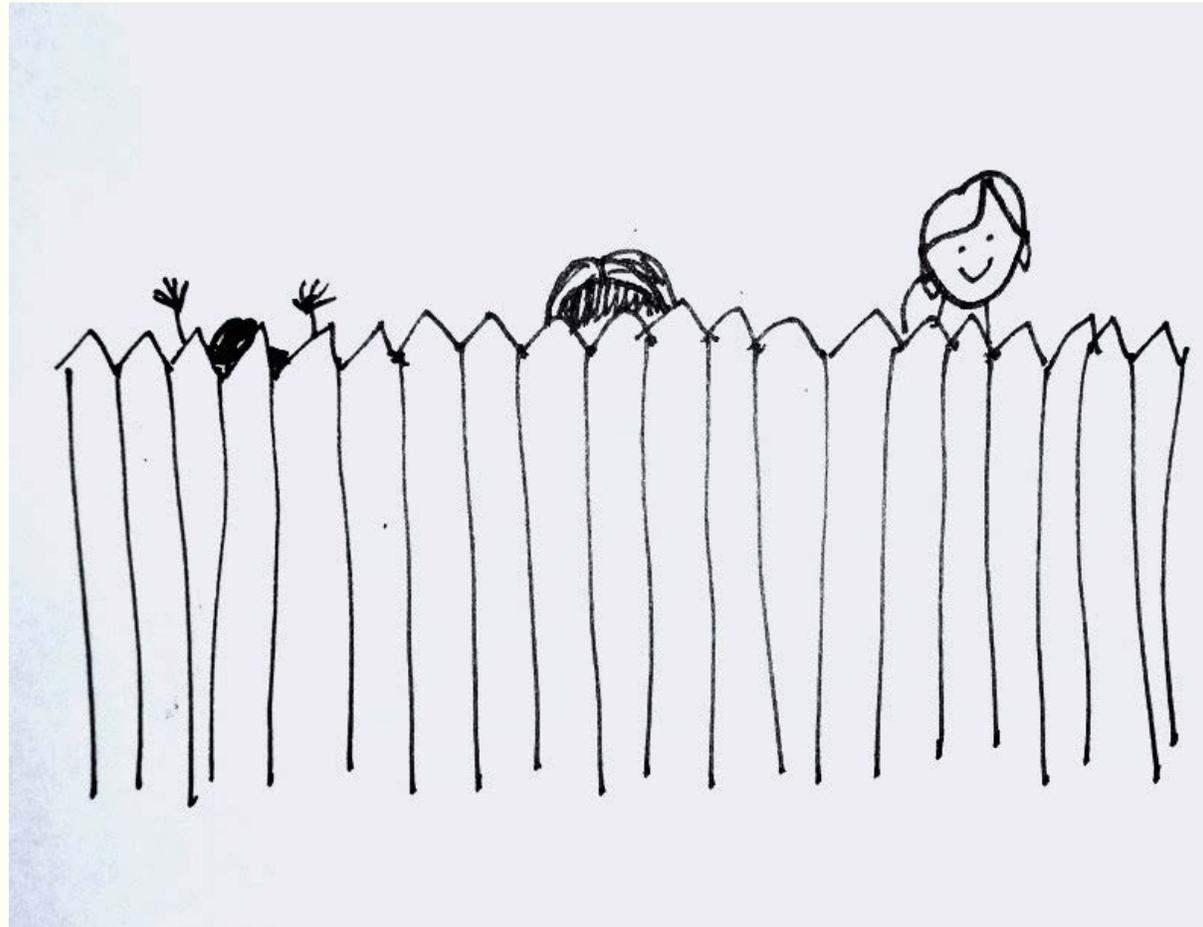
- Allow for transition time. Do NOT rush to go back to routine as if nothing happened
- Focus on the whole-school environment - changed norms, safe behaviour (physical distance, increased hygiene etc.) embedded in the everyday school life
- Pay attention to socio-ecological aspects of health protection in pandemics – social connection, sense of community and connectedness, care for others, consideration of vulnerable people in this specific pandemic, social responsibility
- Integrate knowledge about COVID 19 (pandemics, epidemics) in all subjects; focus on development of critical health literacy

Possible action points cont.

- Increase, refine, specify the social support within and between school, families and local community
- Improve the collaboration between the school and local services (health, welfare, social services etc.) specifically in relation to epidemics and similar emergencies
- Develop a clear communication plan related to COVID-19, also plan for unexpected
- Plan an differentiated approach with students with difficulties when needed. Focus on support for subjects in which you know parents have less capacity when home schooling
- Attention to play, outdoor learning, body movement

Remember to address inequity: Who needs more support?

What kind of support? When? How?



Useful (selected) resources **in addition to the SHE material**

- New Zealand <https://www.teritotoi.org/advice-for-teachers-and-principals/>
- Save the Children <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/save-childrens-covid-19-program-framework-and-guidance-and-companion-pieces>
- FRESH Network: <https://www.fresh-partners.org/fresh-webinarsweb-meetings.html>

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Schools for Health in Europe

Thank you for your invitation and attention

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