



THE SPIRIT FRAMEWORK

COMPREHENSIVE HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

We are living through a truly incredible historical epoch: according to futurist Ray Kurtzweil we are living through an exponential epoch because of the speed of the change we are experiencing, not only technological. This historical epoch requires the school, in order to be a true ‘teacher of Life’, to rethink the knowledge it transmits. Among the fundamental knowledge of our culture, over the last 30 years, alongside the classic technical knowledge (hard skills), the so-called soft skills or transversal skills have made more and more room for themselves: skills linked to self-awareness, communication, relationships, etc., the importance of which we are increasingly realising, in every context of life. Teaching children the skills that will accompany them into this future is an exciting and complex challenge. The SPIRIT project was created with the aim of helping teachers, school leaders and researchers meet this challenge by offering an innovative model for teaching soft skills in primary schools, namely between K1 and K4 level. This handbook, the result of a collaboration between some of Europe’s leading organisations involved in education and research – **Patrizio Paoletti Foundation** (Italy), **Erasmushogeschool Brussel** (Belgium), **Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania** (Romania), **Magyar Digitális Oktatásért Egyesület** (MDOE, Hungary), **VitaComm Education** (Cyprus) and Thinking Skills Development Research Group (ELTE Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education) as the associate partner of MDOE – is a practical and theoretical guide to addressing this educational transformation.

The term ‘Transversal skills’ entered the educational and professional debate around the 1970s, when the US Department of Defence began to distinguish technical skills, necessary to perform a specific task, from relational and transversal skills, which support effectiveness and adaptability in complex contexts. In recent decades, the importance of soft skills has grown exponentially, fuelled by an increasingly fluid, interconnected social and economic reality characterised by rapid technological change.

In a world where robotization, artificial intelligence and global transformations reshape professions and human interactions, skills such as effective communication, empathy, resilience, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration have become crucial for personal and collective success. These are not just skills useful for work: soft skills influence emotional and social well-being, a sense of belonging and the development of active and responsible citizenship.

For today's children, who will be tomorrow's adults, mastering these skills means being better equipped to face an unpredictable future. But how to teach them? How to make them an integral part of education in primary schools? The SPIRIT project sought to answer these questions with a unique approach based on a structured and flexible framework, capable of adapting to the needs of different pupils, teachers and cultural contexts.

At the heart of the handbook is the SPIRIT framework, a three-dimensional structure that organises the teaching of soft skills according to three main axes.

- **The 10 transversal skills** - The SPIRIT research team, after surveying more than 500 teachers across Europe and interviewing developmental psychologists, identified 10 skills that are crucial for children's well-being and resilience in a future scenario dominated by uncertainty and technological innovation.

- **Children's age** - The model takes into account children's cognitive, emotional and social maturation, offering personalised suggestions for each developmental stage.
- **Learning activities** - To make the teaching of transversal skills engaging and effective, the framework proposes the use of traditional games, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) activities and other experiential methodologies.

This cube-like structure allows teachers to navigate between the different dimensions of the model, adapting it to the specificities of their classes and the needs of their pupils, and will serve as a compass to guide them in their choice of activities. Accompanying the handbook is a catalogue of activities, tested in schools, which is intended to be an example-guide for teachers wishing to start incorporating soft skills into their teaching.

The manual is divided into chapters designed to accompany teachers on a path of discovery and application of the SPIRIT framework:

- Introduction - An introduction to the SPIRIT project and its context.
- Transversal skills in primary schools - An overview of the importance of soft skills in primary education.
- Future scenarios - An analysis of the global changes that make transversal skills essential.
- The SPIRIT framework - A detailed presentation of the framework.
- The 10 Skills - In-depth descriptions of the selected skills.
- The Age - How to adapt teaching to the different developmental stages of children.
- How to train Transversal skills in the classroom based on the model - Ideas and practical suggestions for teaching soft skills in the classroom based on Kolb's cycle.
- The centre of the model: teacher self-awareness - A chapter dedicated to teacher self-awareness and its central role in the model.
- Conclusion - Final reflections and future perspectives.

A crucial element of the SPIRIT model is the recognition of the importance of teacher awareness. Educators are not only transmitters of knowledge: they are role models, agents of change and facilitators of meaningful experiences. The chapter 'Teacher self-awareness' explores how teachers' direct experience of soft skills can transform the way they are taught in the classroom.

Experiencing empathy, problem-solving or critical thinking in their daily lives enables teachers to fully understand the value of these skills and translate them into effective teaching practices. In a school context, this awareness generates a more inclusive, stimulating and resilient learning environment where children and adults grow together. Teaching soft skills also means creating a safe space for error, experimentation and dialogue, and who better to guide this process than an aware and trained teacher?

The SPIRIT project is not just a model: it is an invitation to transform education. Thanks to the contributions of the participating organisations and the shared vision of a forward-looking education, this handbook and the accompanying activities manual, aims to inspire teachers and schools to become agents of change to ensure a happier future for the children of today and the children of tomorrow. We hope that each page, each suggestion and each proposed activity will accompany you on an educational journey full of discovery and satisfaction.

2. TRANSVERSAL SKILLS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

2.1. Definitions

Soft skills refer to non-technical interpersonal abilities and attributes that enable individuals to effectively interact, collaborate, and communicate with others. Examples include teamwork, empathy, communication, adaptability, and problem-solving.

Transversal skills are versatile competencies applicable across multiple areas of life and work, transcending specific professions or disciplines. They include critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, and learning-to-learn skills, enabling individuals to adapt to diverse and changing contexts.

Life skills are practical skills and abilities that empower individuals to manage everyday challenges and responsibilities effectively. These include decision-making, self-awareness, financial literacy, emotional management, and health-related practices. Life skills help people navigate personal and social situations.

21st-century skills encompass a set of knowledge, habits, and attitudes critical for success in a modern, interconnected, and fast-evolving world. They are typically categorized into three areas: (i) learning skills: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication; (ii) literacy skills: information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy; (iii) life skills: flexibility, leadership, social skills, and productivity.

Soft skills, transversal skills, life skills, and 21st-century skills share a common emphasis on non-technical abilities that are transferable across various areas of life. They all focus on equipping individuals with the competencies needed to interact effectively with others, adapt to changing environments, and solve problems creatively. These skills overlap in their contributions to personal growth, interpersonal effectiveness, and professional success, highlighting their role in fostering adaptability and lifelong learning.

However, they differ in scope, context, and focus. Soft skills primarily centre on interpersonal traits such as communication, teamwork, and empathy, often applied in professional or social settings. Transversal skills are broader, including cognitive and digital competencies, such as critical thinking and learning to learn, which are relevant across disciplines and sectors. Life skills focus more on practical, emotional, and social abilities necessary for managing everyday challenges, such as decision-making, emotional regulation, and financial literacy. Meanwhile, 21st-century skills are tailored to the demands of the modern, interconnected world, emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and global collaboration. While soft, transversal, and life skills have timeless relevance, 21st-century skills are particularly designed to address contemporary challenges in education, technology, and the workforce.

We summarize the main features in this table:

	Definition	Focus Area	Examples	Context
Soft Skills	Non-technical interpersonal abilities enabling effective interaction, collaboration, and communication	Interpersonal & Social	Teamwork, empathy, communication, adaptability, problem-solving	Mainly professional and social settings
Transversal Skills	Versatile competencies applicable across different areas of life and work, transcending specific professions or disciplines	Cognitive, Digital & Interpersonal	Critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, learning-to-learn	Applicable in education, work, personal life – transferable across domains
Life Skills	Practical and emotional skills that help individuals manage daily personal and social challenges effectively	Personal & Social	Decision-making, self-awareness, financial literacy, emotional regulation, health practices	Primarily personal and social life, but also relevant in education and work
21st-Century Skills	Knowledge, habits, and attitudes crucial for success in a fast-evolving, interconnected world	Learning, Literacy & Life	Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, flexibility, leadership, social skills, productivity	Emphasis on education, digital contexts, and global workforce

Our focus has been on transversal skills because, having a broader meaning, it also includes cognitive skills that are fundamental for the 21st century: from now on, we will use mainly this term.

2.2. Scientific evidence for teaching transversal skills in elementary schools

Scientific research supports the integration of soft skills education in elementary schools, highlighting its positive impact on students' academic performance, social interactions, and future employability. Soft skills encompass interpersonal abilities such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, which are essential for holistic development. Studies indicate that early instruction in soft skills enhances students' social and emotional competencies, leading to improved classroom behaviour and academic outcomes. For instance, a report by Hanover Research (2018) emphasizes that incorporating soft skills into K-12 curricula prepares students for success in post-secondary education and employment. The report highlights the importance of teaching soft skills – such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving – within K-12 education. It provides evidence that early instruction in these skills positively impacts students' academic performance, classroom behaviour, and long-term success in higher education and the workforce. The report also outlines strategies for integrating soft skills development into existing curricula, emphasizing their role in preparing students for real-world challenges and fostering adaptability.

Furthermore, research suggests that high-quality early childhood and elementary school programs that focus on character skills can have lasting and cost-effective benefits. A study from the Institute of Education Sciences (2020) explores how schools promote soft skills and their connection to long-term success. It identifies strategies like embedding social-emotional learning programs, fostering collaboration through group projects, and integrating communication and problem-solving exercises into everyday lessons. The research highlights a strong link between soft skills development during school years and later success in employment and life, emphasizing that traits such as adaptability, teamwork, and self-regulation are highly valued by employers and critical for career advancement.

In practice, various strategies have been employed to teach soft skills in elementary settings. For example, integrating soft skills development into subjects like science, social studies, and health has been shown to help students become critical thinkers and problem solvers, better preparing them for future challenges. Recent studies (see Studies Weekly 2024) emphasize the importance of teaching soft skills – like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving – in elementary schools. The authors suggest integrating these skills into subjects such as social studies, science, and health. For example, hands-on projects and collaborative learning in social studies build empathy and teamwork, while scientific inquiry fosters critical thinking and problem-solving. A dedicated health curriculum helps students regulate behaviour and improve emotional well-being. These strategies prepare students for academic, social, and lifelong success.

Overall, the body of evidence underscores the importance of embedding soft skills education within elementary curricula to foster well-rounded development and equip students with the necessary tools for future success.

2.3. Existing models

There are several established models for developing transversal skills in elementary schools. In what follows, we will discuss three of them: the LifeComp model, the UNICEF model and the CASEL framework. One of the most well-known models for developing transversal skills is LifeComp, the European Commission's framework for personal, social, and learning-to-learn competencies. The LifeComp framework is applied primarily in the context of education to foster the development of key life skills across various stages of learning. It is intended to support educators, policymakers, and institutions in integrating these competencies into curricula at different educational levels.

In primary education LifeComp is used to guide the development of competencies such as self-regulation, communication, and critical thinking in young learners. It encourages educators to embed these skills within existing subjects like social studies, science, and language arts, allowing students to learn life skills alongside academic content. LifeComp encourages a holistic approach to education, where personal, social, and learning competencies are interwoven into everyday learning and activities. The framework is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing educators to tailor it to the specific needs of their students and the context in which they are teaching.

The UNICEF model emphasizes the importance of developing soft skills in children to prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century. These skills include problem-solving, communication, empathy, and adaptability, which are essential for personal development and active citizenship.

In its Global Framework on Transferable Skills, UNICEF identifies these competencies as central to building resilience and enabling young people to navigate personal, academic, social, and economic challenges. The framework highlights that these skills work alongside foundational knowledge and values, connecting and reinforcing other skills to build further knowledge.

By focusing on the development of transferable skills, UNICEF seeks to empower youth, enabling them to become adaptive, resilient, and active participants in their communities and the global society.

The CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) Framework is a widely recognized model that focuses on the development of social and emotional skills in children and adolescents. CASEL's framework is designed to foster students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and overall well-being, which are essential for success in both school and life. Overall, CASEL's framework supports the idea that social and emotional learning is integral to academic success and overall personal development, helping students build the skills they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

3. FUTURE SCENARIOS

The rapid socio-economic changes in the recent years suggest that the pace of change will accelerate further over the next 10-20 years, with the most important factor being the leapfrogging transformation of technology. Forecasts tend to agree on the main points of the expected changes (see e.g. Pérez & González 2024; European Commission 2022) and can be outlined in three main groups; each of them strongly influences the range of skills and competences that will be needed in the future.

Technological changes. Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation will play a central role, will be increasingly widespread and could automate a significant part of jobs, especially repetitive tasks (but also increasingly complex tasks). In this context, the interaction between humans and machines will not only become a key part of work processes but will also be an essential factor in everyday life. Further advances in computing, with the advent of quantum computers, will enable faster modelling and solving of particularly complex problems, revolutionising data processing and encryption. Improved communication technologies (e.g. the expected 6G networks) will enable even faster data transmission, the Internet of Things (IoT) will continue to expand, and basic everyday objects will become "smart". These technologies will ensure the development of additional processes, such as biotechnology, gene editing (genome engineering), medicine, energy and – in response to growing environmental problems – environmental technologies are rapidly changing.

Economic changes. New industries and business models are emerging that rely heavily on AI-based capabilities and services. Environmental challenges are driving the transformation of the economy towards sustainability. Companies need to pay more and more attention to environmental, social and governance (ESG) aspects. Circular economy models may come to the fore. In services, subscription models will become dominant. In finance, decentralisation is expected, and digital currencies may be introduced at government level. Cryptocurrencies and blockchain-based solutions could transform the financial system, requiring individuals to acquire new financial skills.

Social changes. Demographic changes will primarily result in ageing societies, which will face major challenges in transforming pension systems and health care; not least, intergenerational differences and relationships will be the main direction of expansion of social capabilities. Urbanisation will continue to increase and smart cities with digital infrastructure will emerge. Remote working and the extensive digital transformation of the work environment will be key drivers in the transformation of the labour market. The linear career model will be replaced by multiple career changes, which may even lead to radical lifestyle changes. The gig economy may become more and more prevalent: employment contracts are for a single project, with a significant part of the work done online; labour is displayed on online marketplaces. Social inequalities may increase as automation and technological development can widen economic gaps, although digitalisation can help widen access to education and cultural goods. As cultures blend and intercultural relations expand, new challenges and opportunities will arise, which could lead to a reshaping of identity and community belonging.



The transformation of the three areas outlined above will determine what skills will be needed in the future. Today's schools have a responsibility to prepare children for these challenges and to provide them with the skills they will need in the future. To this end, recommendations have been formulated which set out in a systematic way the areas to be developed. The UNESCO recommendations aim to promote an adaptive society and provide a general description of future literacy. Complexity and diversity, due to the complexity of social and technological processes, are primary considerations (Miller, 2018; UNESCO, 2019; 2020). The recommendations are also useful as a framework that offers key concepts and focal points for planning future pedagogical tasks.

Transversal skills are given a prominent place in the set of skills needed for the future. The UNESCO recommendation divides them into six main groups: media literacy, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, critical and innovative thinking, global citizenship, and a group of skills not classified in the former (Care & Luo, 2016). The framework also identifies priority areas for school development.

In 2020, the European Union established the Skills Lab, which continuously assesses the skills needed to enable a rapid response to labour market needs (European Training Foundation 2020). The Skills Lab envisages that in the future, a high level of creativity, innovation, experimentation and innovation will be needed to meet challenges; these skills also rely heavily on collective intelligence. The society of the future will be characterised by a diversity of its members (cultural complexity will be combined with diversity of mindsets and literacies) and the need for cooperative action. The EU has designated 2023 as the European Year of Capacities, declaring that a future-oriented society will foster the development of skills and competences that will be useful for its members in the long term (European Union, 2023; Brandi et al., 2023). To this end, the EU will continue to coordinate research on the study of competences and adapt the recommendations of the framework of competences.

Also in response to the needs of the labour market, the European Commission has developed the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO; European Commission, 2020) framework, which attempts to standardise the conceptual framework of skills required for different occupations and professions by defining skills in a table of equivalence, creating a system of categories for classification and describing the relationships between skills. The system is continuously updated.

In addition to the formal frameworks, several other proposals have been made to define the skills needed for the future. Kotsiou et al (2022), after examining almost 100 frameworks of future skills, classify the skills that need to be focused on in a future-oriented education into nine metacategories: higher-order thinking skills, dialogical skills, digital and STEM literacy, values, self-management, lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, leadership and resilience. It is striking that some of the skills in the meta-categories are more from the soft skills domain and are areas that again focus more on the labour market and personal career development. It is also worth noting the substantial overlap between the frameworks: each considers expected diversity and rapid technological change.

The general focus of the vision for the future is therefore mostly on changes in the labour market, but equally important is the need to develop a range of skills to enable children of school age to develop a mental and emotional balance in adulthood, to form an identity capable of self-actualisation, to gain personal fulfilment, and to lead a balanced and successful life. Some of the hypothesised changes are also relevant in this area.

Given that digitalisation is expected to extend to all aspects of everyday life, digital skills will play an important role in personal life too. Artificial intelligence will be needed in the home, in transport, in administration and in the organisation of everyday life activities. Financial management will require the proper handling of digital currencies and the blockchain economy. The problem of cybersecurity will extend beyond the handling of personal data to all aspects of social and personal life.

The ability to think critically can play a role in the whole range of personal choices, as the sheer volume of information will make it increasingly difficult to filter out misleading information. The expected increase in stressors will require skills of resilience and mindfulness. In this context, the increasing complexity of future societies and the fluidity of change make the development of adaptability an essential objective: the ability to adapt quickly and to acquire new knowledge and skills. It is also necessary to be able to maintain the continuity of the identity, which can become increasingly difficult with frequent career changes and the rise of the gig economy.

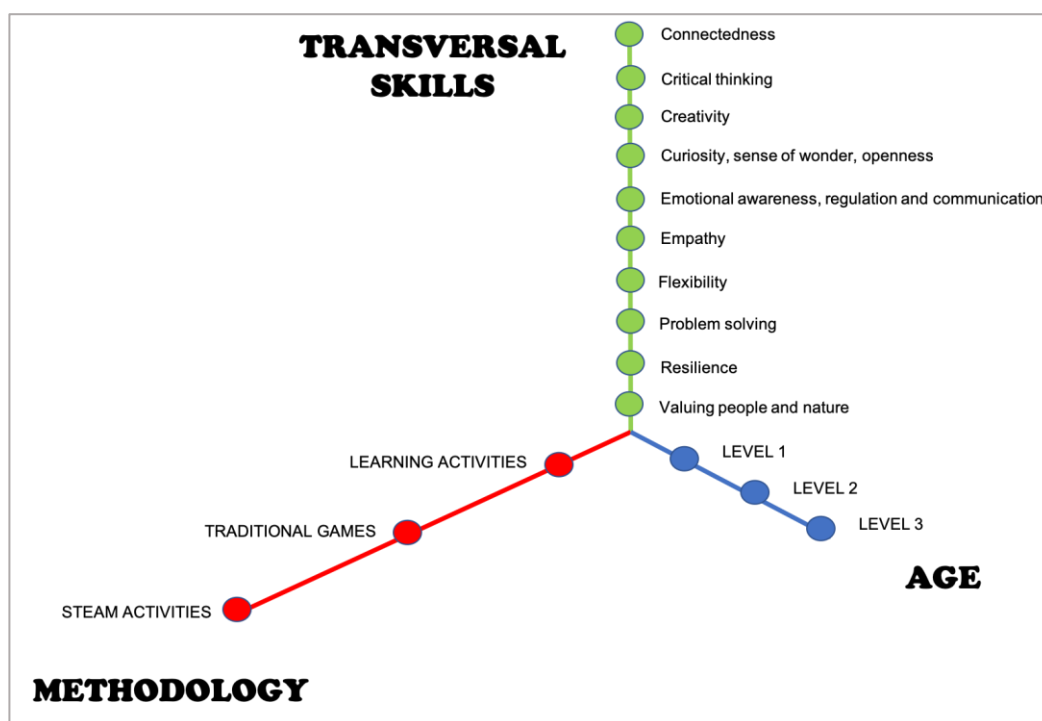
The technological transformation of social relationships and communication also requires the development of individuals' social and communication skills. Advances in artificial intelligence may lead to the emergence of artificial agents, virtual peers, the management of which must be integrated into the social skills. In cooperative work, and even in social interaction, it will be necessary to communicate with both human and artificial peers. This may also require the development of empathic skills and emotional regulation, perhaps in a new form.

All three areas of expected change – technological, economic, social – are therefore relevant to the personal well-being of the individual. Of course, future predictions can never be taken for granted; in most cases, assumptions are based on an extension of current trends. But it is possible to identify with sufficient certainty the skills that will be needed in the future to achieve a balanced, healthy life, in which the individual can fulfil her or his potential.

4. THE SPIRIT FRAMEWORK

The **SPIRIT Framework** was created to provide teachers with a practical and structured model for teaching transversal skills in elementary schools, mainly K1-K4. In a historical context characterized by rapid technological, social, and economic changes, such as robotization and artificial intelligence, soft skills have proven essential for fostering children's well-being and preparing them for an uncertain and complex future. Our approach is based on a **three-dimensional cube structure** that integrates three fundamental dimensions:

1. **The 10 transversal skills selected for children's future well-being.**
2. **Children's age**, with three developmental levels for each skill.
3. **Learning activities**, including integrated and specific methodologies, traditional games, and STEAM activities (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics).



4.1 The ten transversal skills

The 10 skills were chosen after a survey involving 500 teachers, focus groups with teachers and a series of interviews with developmental psychologists. The research team of the SPIRIT project then (laboriously!) selected the most important 10 skills, that are essential for the psychological well-being of young adults and can already be understood and developed in 6-10 year old children:

- **Connectedness:** Encourages bonding with the community and nature, promoting ecological empathy and sustainable behaviours.

- **Critical thinking:** Develops the ability to analyse information, identify problems, and evaluate solutions. It is indispensable in an era of information overload and technological transformation.
- **Creativity:** Encourages divergent thinking and the ability to generate new ideas, a crucial resource for solving complex problems.
- **Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness:** Cultivates the desire to learn and openness to new experiences, essential for fostering creativity and innovation.
- **Emotional awareness, regulation and communication:** Strengthens self-control and the ability to express emotions constructively, improving personal well-being and relationships with others.
- **Empathy:** Promotes the ability to understand and share others' emotions, improving interpersonal relationships and collaboration. In an increasingly interconnected world, it is essential to prevent conflicts and build meaningful bonds.
- **Flexibility:** Develops adaptability to new and unforeseen situations, indispensable in a constantly evolving world.
- **Problem-solving:** Enhances the ability to tackle and resolve complex situations effectively and creatively, a requirement for adapting to new work and social scenarios.
- **Resilience:** Helps children face challenges and difficulties with a positive mindset. Resilience is key for emotional well-being in the context of rapid and unpredictable changes.
- **Valuing people and nature:** Reinforces respect and gratitude, contributing to a more inclusive and responsible society.

4.2 Children's Age and Developmental Levels

For each skill, we have defined three developmental levels based on major theories of cognitive and socio-emotional development (e.g., Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson). These levels enable teachers to tailor activities to children's abilities and needs:

- **Level 1:** Emerging competency. Children begin to explore the soft skill through simple, guided activities.
- **Level 2:** Consolidating competency. Children demonstrate a more advanced understanding and start applying the skill in various situations.
- **Level 3:** Advanced competency. Children use the skill independently and creatively in complex contexts.

Each level is accompanied by observable indicators to help teachers identify students' developmental stages and select appropriate activities. For example:

Empathy:

- Level 1: Recognize others' emotions with adult guidance.
- Level 2: Show spontaneous interest in others' feelings.
- Level 3: Adapt behavior to emotionally support others.

Curiosity and sense of wonder:

- Level 1: Ask simple questions about what they see or hear.
- Level 2: Actively explore new topics or activities.
- Level 3: Connect curiosity and learning to solve problems.

To facilitate the teaching of soft skills, we designed an integrated approach that includes:

1. **Learning activities**

Teachers can develop transversal skills in 2 different ways: they can develop specific activities or use appropriate learning methodologies while teaching core subjects such as math, science, or history (for instance, problem-solving can be incorporated into solving math problems or designing scientific experiment).

2. **Traditional games**

Traditional games were chosen for their educational and social value. They naturally and enjoyably promote collaboration, creativity, and respect for rules.

3. **STEAM (Science - Technology - Engineering - Art - Mathematics) programs**

This interdisciplinary approach combines creativity and technology, preparing children to solve complex problems and collaborate in teams. It stimulates critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration through multidisciplinary projects. For example, an activity combining art and science could involve building an ecological model, fostering a sense of connection and valuing nature.

The SPIRIT Framework, illustrated in this handbook, is the compass for orientation in the choice of teaching activities. Together with the activity book, it makes it possible to plan the most suitable training for the children that teachers actually have in front of them to promote their well-being through the development of soft skills.

4.3 The centre of the model: teacher's self-awareness

In the SPIRIT project, the teacher plays a central and irreplaceable role. While the framework provides a structure and resources for teaching soft skills, its success depends largely on the person delivering it. Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but living examples of the values and competencies they aim to nurture in their students. Teaching soft skills is not just about "knowing"; it is about "being." This dual role of knowledge and embodiment is what makes teachers the beating heart of the SPIRIT model.

Soft skills such as empathy, resilience, and emotional awareness, regulation and communication, are deeply relational. They are best learned through experience and interaction rather than rote instruction. A teacher who embodies these skills creates a classroom environment where they are naturally modelled and practiced. For example, a teacher who demonstrates active listening and empathy sets a powerful example for students, showing how these skills work in real-life interactions.

Key Reasons for the Central Role of the Teacher:

- **Modelling behavior**

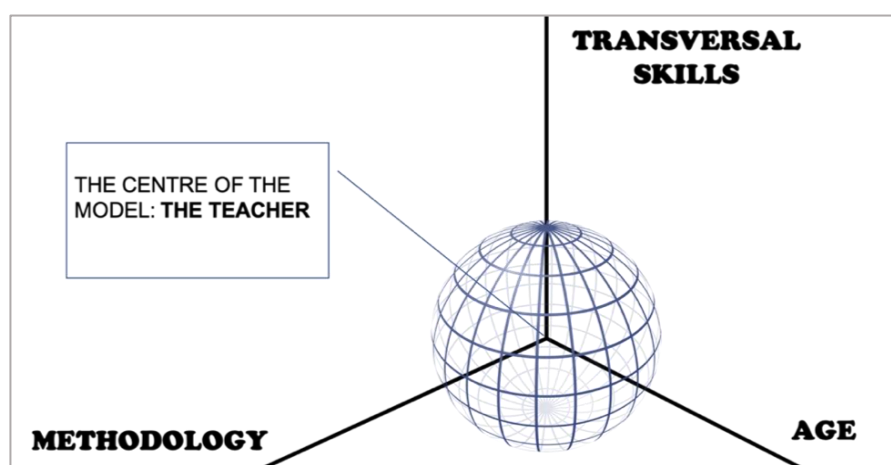
Children are keen observers. They often learn more from what adults do than from what they say. A teacher who approaches challenges with resilience or communicates emotions effectively not only teaches these skills but inspires students to emulate them.

- **Creating a safe environment**

Soft skills flourish in classrooms where students feel safe and valued. A teacher who practices emotional awareness, regulation and communication, flexibility, and connection fosters trust, making it easier for students to explore and develop these competencies.

- **Bridging knowledge and practice**

Teaching soft skills involves integrating them into everyday activities, lessons, and interactions. A teacher's ability to embody these skills ensures that they are not treated as abstract concepts but as practical tools for daily life.



One cannot effectively teach what one has not experienced. To guide students in developing soft skills, teachers must first cultivate and refine these competencies within themselves. This process involves self-awareness, practice, and a commitment to continuous personal growth. These are the reasons why experiencing soft skills matters:

- **Authenticity:** Students are quick to notice when lessons feel disconnected from reality. Teachers who have personally practised soft skills can speak and act from a place of authenticity, making their teaching more impactful.
- **Understanding Challenges:** Developing soft skills is not always straightforward. Teachers who have worked on their own empathy or resilience can better understand the challenges their students might face and provide meaningful guidance.
- **Fostering empathy:** Experiencing soft skills firsthand deepens a teacher's empathy, enabling them to connect with students on a human level and address individual needs.

The SPIRIT project invites teachers to embark on their own journey of learning and self-improvement. Just as students are encouraged to grow, teachers, too, must view themselves as lifelong learners. Developing soft skills is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing process that enriches both personal and professional life. Teachers will be supported in teaching soft skills by a training course, but in the meantime these are some tips for teachers to cultivate soft skills.

- **Self-reflection**

Teachers can begin by assessing their own strengths and areas for growth in the 10 soft skills outlined in the SPIRIT framework. Questions such as “How do I handle challenges?” or “Do I communicate my emotions effectively?” can guide this reflection.

- **Practice in everyday life**

Incorporating soft skills into daily routines can make them second nature. For example, teachers can practice resilience by approaching setbacks as opportunities for growth or foster curiosity by exploring new teaching methods.

- **Peer collaboration**

Engaging with colleagues to share experiences and strategies can provide valuable insights and support. Collaborative exercises, such as role-playing scenarios or discussing case studies, can deepen understanding and application of soft skills.

- **Professional development**

Participating in workshops, training sessions, and ongoing education tailored to the SPIRIT framework can help teachers refine their skills and stay updated on best practices.

Soft skills are not just tools for the classroom; they are transformative competencies that enhance every aspect of a teacher's life. By cultivating these skills, teachers can improve their ability to manage stress, build stronger relationships, and find greater satisfaction in their work.

Examples of how transversal skills benefit teachers:

- **Empathy:** Enables teachers to better understand their students' perspectives, fostering trust and connection.
- **Resilience:** Helps teachers navigate the challenges of the profession, from managing a diverse classroom to addressing unexpected obstacles.
- **Flexibility:** Allows teachers to adapt to changing circumstances, such as new curricula or the diverse needs of students.
- **Creativity:** Inspires innovative lesson plans and solutions to classroom challenges.

5. THE TEN SKILLS

5.1 Emotional awareness, regulation and communication

Definition of the skill

For the past 50 years, it has been evident that developing emotional competence is a cornerstone of promoting the well-being of children and adults. Emotional competences are broad and multifaceted, encompassing three key aspects: emotional awareness, emotion regulation, and communication of emotions. Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and identify one's own emotions and those of others, involving understanding personal feelings and associating them with specific experiences. Emotion regulation refers to managing emotions appropriately and productively, rather than reacting impulsively, teaching children to calm themselves, express frustration constructively, and deal with intense emotions like anger or sadness positively. Communication of emotions involves expressing feelings clearly and respectfully, verbally and non-verbally, enabling children to share what they feel, avoid misunderstandings, and build deeper connections with others. Together, these components form the basis for emotional competence, supporting personal and interpersonal growth.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Emotional awareness, regulation and communication are vital for navigating the challenges of the 21st century, where rapid change and interpersonal collaboration are constants. They are essential for stress management and resilience, as children who can identify and regulate emotions develop stronger coping mechanisms, helping them adapt to challenges and prevent anxiety. Improved social relationships are another outcome, as children who regulate and communicate emotions effectively build trust, collaborate better, and resolve conflicts constructively. These skills are crucial in fostering meaningful connections in school and future work environments. Furthermore, they support decision-making and problem-solving by promoting balanced and clear thinking, even under pressure, ensuring that impulsivity or frustration do not hinder judgement. Emotional competence also contributes to growth in self-esteem and a sense of self, as recognizing and expressing emotions respectfully strengthens self-awareness and confidence, essential for thriving in an ever-changing world.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Children aged 6 to 10 are in a significant developmental phase where emotional awareness, regulation and communication begin to manifest more clearly. At ages 6–7, children start recognizing basic emotions like joy, sadness, and anger in themselves and others, linking these emotions to specific events or circumstances, such as feeling happy when praised or sad when excluded. Their ability to regulate emotions remains basic, relying on external guidance from adults or simple strategies like seeking comfort, while emotional communication is often limited to non-verbal cues or short expressions like saying, "I'm sad," without further elaboration. Between ages 8–9, children develop a deeper understanding of their own emotions and those of others, becoming capable of identifying more complex feelings such as frustration or pride and understanding mixed emotions like being happy yet nervous about a new experience. They begin experimenting with simple regulation strategies, like taking deep breaths or counting to ten when angry and show an increased willingness to talk about their

emotions, while non-verbal communication improves as gestures and tone of voice become more aligned with their feelings. By age 10, children exhibit advanced emotional awareness, recognizing the role of emotions in decision-making and social interactions. They develop more effective regulation strategies, such as reframing negative thoughts or discussing problems to find solutions, and emotional communication becomes nuanced, with children expressing themselves more precisely and adapting their communication to different social contexts, such as speaking calmly during conflicts to avoid escalation. To nurture these skills, teachers and caregivers can use role-playing, storytelling, and reflective discussions, providing consistent opportunities for emotional expression and practicing problem-solving in a supportive environment to foster growth.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: Children recognize basic emotions in themselves and others, linking them to events that caused them. They begin understanding emotional signals, such as associating a smile with happiness.

Level 2: Children develop initial strategies for managing emotions, such as taking deep breaths or stepping away to calm down. They start noticing how their emotional reactions affect others, fostering a sense of responsibility.

Level 3: Children express emotions respectfully and use more complex regulation techniques, like changing perspectives to reframe situations. They exhibit empathy, understanding emotions' roles in relationships, and apply these insights to enhance social interactions.

Interconnections with other skills

Emotional awareness, regulation, and communication intersect with numerous other soft skills:

- **Empathy:** Emotional awareness, regulation, and communication enhances the ability to understand and share others' feelings, fostering stronger relationships.
- **Resilience:** Managing emotions supports bouncing back from challenges and building mental toughness.
- **Assertiveness:** Communicating emotions clearly and respectfully aids in advocating for oneself without aggression.
- **Active listening:** Emotional competence promotes attentive listening, crucial for understanding others deeply.
- **Stress management:** Emotion regulation helps prevent overwhelming stress, ensuring healthier coping strategies.
- **Critical thinking:** Recognizing emotions aids in analysing situations more objectively and making balanced decisions.
- **Collaboration:** Emotional communication strengthens teamwork by promoting trust and openness.
- **Problem-solving:** Regulated emotions support rational thinking and creative solutions in challenging situations.

Didactical tips for teachers

- Encourage the use of emotion words, asking students to label and share their feelings.
- Guide them through simple breathing exercises or relaxation techniques to regain calm.
- Model reflective listening by paraphrasing their emotions and validating their experiences.
- Introduce brief journaling activities, letting them express emotions through words or drawings.
- Role-play challenging conversations and highlight respectful language and tone.
- Celebrate constructive emotional exchanges and acknowledge efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully.



5.2 Creativity

Definition of the skill

Creativity is the capacity to reinterpret, combine, or expand upon existing conventions to generate ideas or approaches that are both novel and valuable. It involves combining existing knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in innovative ways to solve problems, create art, design products, or develop solutions. Creativity is often the result of collaboration, feedback, and iteration.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Developing creativity is essential for the future because it equips individuals and societies to thrive in an increasingly complex, fast-changing world. Here are some key reasons why it is important:

- Creativity enables individuals to approach challenges from different angles, fostering innovative solutions to complex problems in various fields. A creative mindset helps people adjust to new situations, technologies, and changing environments by thinking flexibly and embracing new ideas; it fuels innovation and helps push society forward.
- Creativity allows individuals to express themselves uniquely through art, writing, music, and other forms of personal and cultural expression, contributing to emotional well-being. Creativity enriches our lives by making experiences more enjoyable and fulfilling.
- As knowledge and skills rapidly become obsolete, creativity supports a mindset of lifelong learning and curiosity, ensuring individuals stay relevant and adaptable in their personal and professional lives. In the future, many routine tasks may be automated, making creativity a key differentiator for human workers. Jobs that require creative problem
- solving, critical thinking, and innovation will most probably be in high demand.
- As technology evolves rapidly, creativity will be crucial for navigating emerging challenges and opportunities. Future societies will need to be resilient in the face of uncertainty, whether due to economic shifts, pandemics, or environmental disasters. Creative thinking promotes flexibility and the ability to quickly adapt to unforeseen circumstances.
- Creative thinking often leads to better collaboration, as it encourages sharing diverse ideas and perspectives, fostering teamwork and innovation. Engaging in creative processes also nurtures the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information in novel ways, improving critical thinking skills.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Creativity at this stage often manifests as a mix of imaginative thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to generate original ideas. There are notable differences in how creativity manifests in children aged 6–8 compared to those aged 8–10 which are primarily due to developmental milestones in cognitive, emotional, and social growth.

Children aged 6-8:

- tend to blur the line between reality and fantasy, their creative works are often whimsical, with little concern for realism;
- approach problems with curiosity but may lack systematic thinking, often leading to unexpected and inventive solutions;
- creativity is often expressed through play, such as make-believe scenarios, puppet shows, or role-playing;
- collaborative creativity is limited as they are still learning to work with others and share ideas.

Children aged 8–10:

- consider others' viewpoints, leading to more collaborative and socially aware creative projects;
- engage in structured problem-solving and are better at explaining the reasoning behind their creative decisions;
- their art and stories become more detailed, with attempts to mimic real-world objects, events, or emotions;
- enjoy group projects, value peer feedback, and can adapt their ideas to fit group goals.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

The development of creativity can be understood as progressing through different levels or stages, where individuals move from basic creative thinking to more advanced, refined, and innovative forms of creativity. While there are various models to describe the stages of creativity development, a common framework can include the following levels:

Level 1: At this level, creativity is often about mimicking or replicating existing ideas, forms, or patterns. Students may rely on known methods or examples, making small adjustments, for example painting a picture by closely following a teacher's example or writing a story that is similar to a well-known plotline. This is an important foundational stage where learners practice basic skills and gain exposure to creative processes. This level essentially involves learning through copying, which is crucial for mastering the foundational skills needed to create something original later.

Level 2: At this stage, students begin to experiment and explore different ideas or approaches, combining elements from various sources, testing boundaries and becoming more flexible in their thinking, for example, writing a story inspired by a book they've read but adding their own twists to the plot and characters. This stage is marked by an individual's ability to take something learned and make it their own, adding new elements or altering existing ones.

Level 3: At the highest level, creativity reaches mastery, where individuals are capable of producing highly original, innovative, and sophisticated work. They can generate complex, refined ideas and create new frameworks or fields of knowledge, for example, solving an environmental issue by applying conventional or unconventional methods, such as using a novel material for water purification. Transformational creativity involves creating groundbreaking or disruptive innovations that challenge established norms or perspectives.

Interconnections with other skills

- **Critical thinking:** critical thinking involves analysing and evaluating ideas, while creativity generates novel solutions. Together, they enable individuals to refine their ideas and assess the feasibility of innovative solutions.
- **Problem-solving:** creativity fuels problem-solving by enabling individuals to think from different perspectives, explore novel approaches and generate multiple solutions.
- **Emotional intelligence:** emotional intelligence (EI) complements creativity by helping individuals manage emotions, empathize with others, and draw inspiration from personal and social experiences. It also fosters the resilience needed to persist through creative challenges.
- **Collaboration and cooperation:** creativity thrives in collaborative environments, as diverse perspectives spark new ideas and solutions to achieve shared goals.
- **Adaptability:** adaptability involves being open to change and adjusting to new circumstances, which is essential for creativity. Creative thinkers must adapt their approaches when original ideas don't work or when unexpected challenges arise.
- **Curiosity:** curiosity drives creativity by encouraging exploration, questioning, and the pursuit of new knowledge. It provides the motivation to seek inspiration and experiment with unfamiliar ideas.
- **Resilience:** creativity often involves trial and error, which can lead to frustration or failure. Resilience helps individuals persist through setbacks, refine their ideas, and continue the creative process despite challenges.

Didactical tips for teachers

- Encourage open-ended activities such as drawing, storytelling, or building with blocks that have no single correct answer.
- Create a safe place for expression where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas without fear of judgment.
- Integrate play-based learning, e.g. role-playing, dramatization, or imaginative play.
- Incorporate divergent thinking exercises by using questions/problems that encourage multiple answers or solutions.
- Let students choose topics, activities, or ways to present their work.
- Integrate arts across the curriculum, blend creative arts like music, visual arts drawing, or drama with subjects like maths or science.
- Foster curiosity by encouraging students to ask questions and seek their own answers.
- Use outdoor activities and age-appropriate resources to inspire creative thinking.
- Teach students to view mistakes as learning opportunities which can lead to better ideas.
- Celebrate creativity by displaying students' creative works around the classroom and acknowledging their efforts publicly.

5.3 Problem-solving

Definition of the skill

The problem-solving process involves finding a solution to a problem by following several steps in a systematic way (= procedures or strategies). This is a structured approach to identify a problem, analyse it, and find and implement an effective solution. This skill typically transcends single disciplines and can be applied in different contexts. This skill involves critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to work through obstacles systematically. Problem-solving also requires adaptability, as not all solutions may work as expected, leading to adjustments and further exploration of alternatives.

The problem-solving steps:

- Defining the problem; This stage articulates what the problem is precisely. Ask questions: What is the problem? When and where does it occur? Who or what is affected by it? Why is it a problem?
- Defining criteria for the main solution: when is the problem really resolved?
- Identifying possible subproblems
- Devise many possible solutions to all subproblems (Divergent phase which involves CREATIVITY)
- Solve all subproblems (Convergent phase which involves CRITICAL THINKING):
- Assess the options: Look at the pros and cons of each possible solution. Consider factors such as limitation and feasibility, cost, time and possible risks or obstacles.
- Weigh consequences: Consider the possible short- and long-term consequences of each solution. Which solution offers the most benefits and has the least adverse effects?
- Make a choice: Choose the best solution based on the analysis. This can be a single solution or a combination of several solutions.
- Integrate partial solutions to all subproblems: implement the solution to the main problem
- Testing, evaluating and adjusting/optimising the overall solution. Critical thinking comes into play again in this phase.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Problem-solving is a foundational transferable skill that enhances an individual's ability to succeed in various domains. People with strong problem-solving skills are typically creative, critical thinkers who demonstrate perseverance. These qualities enable them to face future challenges with confidence and resilience.

Additionally, strong problem-solving skills enhance one's ability to collaborate and communicate effectively. This helps in sharing ideas, delegating tasks, and uniting efforts toward a common goal.

In professional settings, employers highly value employees who can identify issues, take initiative, and provide effective solutions, contributing to greater efficiency and innovation within organizations.

The application of problem-solving skills leads to several positive outcomes:

- **Increased efficiency and productivity:** Well-executed problem-solving can streamline processes, reduce unnecessary work, and save time by quickly addressing obstacles.
- **Innovation and growth:** Creative solutions to problems can lead to new opportunities for growth, whether it's in business, education, or personal development.
- **Reduced conflict and better decision making:** Problem-solving skills help manage conflicts or complex decisions by identifying root causes and facilitating rational discussions based on facts and solutions rather than emotions.
- **Continuous improvement:** Regular application of problem-solving leads to personal and professional development. Individuals improve their abilities by learning from each problem they tackle, leading to better performance over time.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

At the age of 6-10, the ability to problem-solve begins to develop. Children in this age group can already identify and solve simple problems independently, especially when they have concrete and visual tools. For example, they can solve a puzzle.

While children of this age often still use concrete, practical approaches, they are beginning to think more abstractly and may start planning simple solutions for more complex issues. Problem-solving at this age is therefore already recognizable, but it continues to develop. This process can be further stimulated through activities that challenge them to think about different solution strategies and encourage them to think creatively and flexibly. This could be different levels in the development of the skill:

Children between 6- 8 years

- simply recognize a problem and find a simple solution.
They learn what a problem is and that trial and error is allowed (without the fear of making mistakes). They learn to collaborate and share ideas with others.
- learn to use different strategies to find solutions.

Children between 8-10 years

- work more independently, follow multiple steps to reach a solution, stimulate critical thinking, and understand why one solution works and another does not.
- approach problems more creatively.
Solve problems that do not always have just one single answer.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1 (Beginner): Problem Identification: Needs help identifying problems. Generating Solutions (creativity): Suggests one simple solution. Use of strategies: Random approach, needs help. Perseverance and resilience: Gives up quickly, gets frustrated. Reflection and evaluation: Rarely reflects, struggles with evaluation. Independence: Highly dependent on guidance.

Level 2 (Semi-advanced): Problem Identification: Independently identifies simple problems, sometimes with help. Generating Solutions (creativity): Generates multiple solutions. Use of strategies: Uses strategies, sometimes with guidance. Perseverance and resilience: Shows perseverance, sometimes discouraged. Reflection and evaluation: Sometimes reflects, makes suggestions for improvement. Independence: Increasing independence, seeks confirmation.

Level 3 (Expert): Problem Identification: Independently identifies all problems. Generating Solutions (creativity): Offers creative and logical solutions. Use of strategies: Uses advanced strategies independently. Perseverance and resilience: Strong resilience, adjusts approach when facing setbacks. Reflection and evaluation: Regularly reflects, conducts in-depth analysis. Independence: Fully independent, initiates and adapts without help.

Interconnections with other skills

- **Critical thinking:** Both skills involve the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information. Problem-solving is often the practical application of critical thinking in decision-making and action-taking.
- **Creativity:** Problem-solving relies on creativity to generate novel and innovative solutions. The ability to think outside the box enhances one's ability to resolve issues effectively.
- **Collaboration:** Many problems are solved through teamwork. Effective problem solvers often work well with others, leveraging diverse perspectives to arrive at the best solution. Strong communication skills are essential in collaborative problem-solving.
- **Decision-making:** Problem-solving is a precursor to making decisions. After evaluating solutions, the ability to choose the best option and commit to an action is vital.
- **Resilience and flexibility:** The iterative process of problem-solving often involves trial and error, requiring individuals to adapt when initial solutions fail. Resilience is crucial in persisting through challenges and finding success.

Didactical tips for teachers

Teachers support children by encouraging them to think about the consequences of their actions, consider multiple solutions, and motivate them not to give up in the face of setbacks.

Here are some concrete tips for teachers to help develop problem-solving skills in children:

- Ask open-ended questions instead of closed questions (this encourages students to think more deeply and consider various aspects of the problem).
- Use games, puzzles, and concrete problem situations where students need to think and come up with solutions.
- Support the problem visually (use diagrams, charts, or mind maps to help students organize their thoughts).
- Encourage students to think creatively and experiment with different approaches to problems.
- Promote collaboration among students ($1 + 1 = 3$) to show how teamwork can lead to better solutions.
- Regularly practice problem-solving skills to build confidence and fluency.
- Integrate problem-solving activities across subjects such as math, language, or sciences (e.g., "How can we create a garden that attracts bees?").

These strategies help children not only solve problems but also develop a mindset that allows them to approach challenges with creativity and resilience.



5.4 Critical thinking

Definition of the skill

Critical thinking is the ability to reason objectively and logically, analyse and evaluate information, consider different perspectives and draw conclusions based on evidence and logic. It enables us to evaluate and assess information in an objective and systematic way.

Critical thinking is thus a dual skill:

- It includes both 1. the ability to critically examine and evaluate information, and 2. the ability to think independently and creatively about complex problems and issues.
- Critical thinking also helps form well-reasoned opinions and positions and ensures that we do not simply believe everything we hear, see, feel or read.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

- Critical thinking is an essential skill in almost every aspect of life, requiring the ability to think independently and logically. It goes beyond simply having an opinion or point of view; it includes the ability to substantiate and defend that perspective.
- Critical thinking is therefore essential in our increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. It is the ability to think in an active and reflective way, to analyse and evaluate problems in a systematic way and thus to arrive at informed decisions and opinions.
- So critical thinking is a fundamental and overarching skill that should be promoted in all aspects of life. It helps people make more informed and responsible choices and contributes to a critical and tolerant society. Developing critical thinking as a cross-cutting skill is thus crucial for individuals and society: critical thinking is becoming increasingly important because our world is full of data and we have to know how to distinguish and work properly with them.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

For children aged 6-7:

- Asking questions: Children ask a lot of ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’ questions. This shows their curiosity and desire to understand things. For example, they may ask, ‘Why is the sky blue?’.
- Active participation: They are often actively involved in conversations, asking curious questions and wanting to provide their own answers.
- Spontaneous thinking: Children can make surprising connections while playing or telling stories. For example, when reading a story, they can immediately explain what they think happens next.
- Concrete thinking: They tend to think in concrete terms and struggle with abstract concepts. Their critical skills often focus on what they can observe directly.
- Cause-and-effect: They begin to understand that actions have consequences. For example, they may come up with an example such as: ‘If I don’t clean up my toys, I won’t be able to play with them anymore.’

- Story comprehension and analysis: They can retell simple stories and ask questions about characters' choices. For example, 'Why did the hero decide to run away?'
- Simple statements: They can express their thoughts, but often in simple ways. For example, 'I like this book because the pictures are beautiful.'
- Personal preferences: Opinions are strongly based on personal experiences and preferences, without much argumentation. They can say what they like or dislike, but do not yet explain many reasons.
- Creative thinking: While playing, they often invent new game rules or ways to solve a problem, such as how to overcome an obstacle in a game. This promotes their ability to think creatively and explore alternatives.

For children aged 8-10:

- Active discussion: They participate more often in group discussions and debates, not only expressing but also defending their ideas and opinions.
- Collaboration: They work better together on projects, learn to listen to each other and develop respect for different points of view.
- Complex questions: They start asking deeper questions about topics, such as 'What if...?' This shows their ability to consider scenarios and analyse possible outcomes.
- Forming opinions and arguing: Children can support their opinions about books, films or events with reasons. For example, when describing a book, they can explain which aspects they liked best and why.
- Logical reasoning: Children begin to make more logical connections and understand more abstract concepts. For example, they can think about how certain choices have long-term consequences.
- Hypothetical thinking: They are able to fantasise about 'what if' scenarios, which helps them explore possible outcomes and solutions.
- Problem-solving thinking: They can think of multiple solutions to a problem, such as how to resolve a conflict with a friend, and can weigh up the pros and cons of each solution before deciding what to do.
- Information analysis: They learn to compare and evaluate information, such as using different sources for a school project. They can ask questions such as 'Is this correct?' or 'How do we know this is correct?'.
- Critical evaluation: Children begin to look at information more critically. They may ask questions like, 'Is this even true?' or 'What could someone else say about this?' This shows that they are considering different perspectives.
- Simple reflection and evaluation: After group activities or projects, they can reflect on what went well and what could be improved. They can formulate answers like, 'I liked that we worked together, but we should have started our task earlier.'

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1 (Beginner): Children ask simple questions such as ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’. They understand basic concepts of cause and effect and can express personal preferences, but without deep argumentation. Asking questions and Research: Asks simple questions. Analysis and Interpretation: Identifies basic facts. Evaluation of Arguments: Difficulty distinguishing between opinion and fact. Reasoning and Problem-Solving: Proposes basic solutions. Reflects on Thinking Process: Reflects rarely.

Level 2 (Semi-advanced): Children begin to ask more complex questions and can support their opinions with reasons. They are able to see problems from different perspectives and collaborate on group projects, actively participating in discussions.

Asking questions and Research: Asks relevant and complex questions. Analysis and Interpretation: Analyses information, makes connections. Evaluation of Arguments: Evaluates simple arguments. Reasoning and Problem-Solving: Proposes multiple solutions with rationale. Reflects on Thinking Process: Reflects occasionally.

Level 3 (Expert): Children can reason logically and consider hypothetical scenarios. They formulate well-reasoned opinions and critically evaluate information, effectively using arguments and counterarguments in a discussion.

Asking questions and Research: Formulates in-depth, open-ended questions. Analysis and Interpretation: Critically analyses complex information. Evaluation of Arguments: Critically evaluates complex arguments. Reasoning and Problem-Solving: Formulates well-reasoned, innovative solutions. Reflects on Thinking Process: Reflects consistently on thinking process.

Interconnections with other skills

- Curiosity: Drives critical thinking by encouraging questions, exploration, and the search for explanations.
- Openness: Supports critical thinking by welcoming new ideas and different perspectives.
- Self-awareness: Helps identify personal biases, leading to more objective analysis.
- Questioning: Encourages deeper inquiry, clarification, and testing of information.
- Analysis and evaluation: Breaks down, compares, and assesses information to separate facts from opinions.
- Reasoning: Links ideas logically and helps draw consistent conclusions.
- Reflection: Promotes reviewing and improving one’s own reasoning process.
- Problem-solving: Applies critical thinking to analyse problems and evaluate possible solutions.
- Decision-making: Uses critical thinking to make thoughtful, well-informed choices.
- Creativity: Generates original ideas, which critical thinking evaluates and refines.

Didactical tips for teachers

- Ask open-ended questions: e.g. ‘Why do you think that?’
- Use thinking schemes: “what, why, how?” or “advantage and disadvantage”
- Have students work on problem-solving activities: individually or in small/large groups?
- Organise discussions on recognisable topics including both for and against arguments
- Encourage reflection on choices and outcomes
- Analyse stories and choices of characters
- Learn to look critically at media and information, current events
- Use games to practice logical and critical thinking: e.g. Puzzles and riddles
- Provide a safe environment for mistakes: “Mistakes are allowed!”
- Give room for autonomy in choices: multiple solutions to one problem
- Link lesson material to real-life situations: cross-curricular working.



5.5 Resilience

Definition of the skill

Resilience is the ability to adapt to challenges through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility. It is not just a personal trait but arises from the interaction between individuals and their environment, like family, community, and society. Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, including the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, the availability and quality of social resources, and specific coping strategies.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Resilience is vital in nearly every aspect of adult life, as challenges arise in various areas. In the workplace:

- It helps manage stress.
- Adapt to changes like new technologies or roles.
- Avoid burnout by balancing work and personal life.

In family life:

- Resilience supports effective parenting.
- Navigating relationship difficulties.
- Overcoming hardships such as financial issues or health crises.

It also plays a key role in maintaining physical and mental health during illnesses or emotional struggles, while fostering strong social relationships and coping with isolation or community conflicts. Resilience is critical during crises, from natural disasters and wars to economic instability, as it aids in processing trauma and rebuilding life. In education and personal growth, it helps individuals overcome learning challenges, adapt to career uncertainties, achieve goals, and build self-confidence through adversity. Essential resilience factors include optimism, acceptance, problem-solving skills, self-control, responsibility, relationship-building, and a future-oriented mindset, which can all be cultivated from childhood.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Resilience is already present in children aged 6-10, as it is part of a developmental process that often starts earlier, during preschool years. The level of resilience they exhibit depends largely on their temperament, family background, and the support provided by their environment.

At this age, resilience can appear in various ways, such as:

- Emotional regulation: children can calm themselves after experiencing frustration or failure (e.g., losing a game or resolving a conflict).
- Self-control: in order to overcome failure and emotional pitfalls, the children must be able to establish a vision for the future (future-orientated mindset), control their thoughts and actions in order to achieve their goals, and be able to block out factors that might disturb them from reaching their goals. This requires a high degree of perseverance, self-control and goal-orientation.
- Problem-solving: they look for ways to overcome obstacles, like completing homework independently.
- Maintaining supportive social relationship: they build and nurture supportive friendships or family bonds to help them through tough situations.
- Future-oriented mindset and optimistic outlook: they remain hopeful for a positive outcome even when facing difficulties.
- Optimistic outlook: they remain hopeful for a positive outcome even when facing difficulties.
- Flexibility: they adapt quickly to changes, such as a new teacher or classmates.

Developing resilience at this age lays a foundation for children to successfully adapt to life's challenges as they grow into adulthood.

Children aged 6-10 with developed resilience are able to handle challenges and adapt to various situations confidently.

- They can regulate their emotions, calming themselves after setbacks such as losing a game or facing disappointment, which helps them avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- They are able to solve problems independently, using critical thinking to complete tasks or resolve conflicts with peers.
- These children can build and maintain supportive relationships, relying on social connections for emotional support during tough times and resolving disagreements constructively.
- With an optimistic outlook, they are able to stay motivated and hopeful, even when facing challenges or experiencing failure. They see setbacks as opportunities to learn, rather than obstacles.
- They can also adapt to changes, such as adjusting to new routines, environments, or meeting new classmates. Their flexibility helps them remain calm in unfamiliar situations. They approach challenges with confidence, persistence, and the ability to seek help when needed, balancing independence with support.

Overall, these children use their emotional, social, and cognitive skills to navigate life's difficulties. Their resilience enables them to manage current challenges and prepare for future ones, allowing them to grow and achieve their goals.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: Children with low resilience often react with frustration or emotional outbursts to minor challenges. They tend to avoid difficult tasks, lacking confidence in their problem-solving abilities, and may struggle to ask for help. Social relationships can be fragile, with difficulty recovering from conflicts. For example, they might avoid group work or quit tasks after making mistakes.

Level 2: Children with moderate resilience manage frustration with support and are willing to face challenges, though they often need encouragement. They seek help but may rely on adults for reassurance. Their confidence varies by situation, and they may struggle with complex tasks or resolving conflicts independently. For example, they may need assistance to complete new or difficult tasks.

Level 3: Children with high resilience handle frustration well, learning from mistakes without distress. They take on challenges eagerly, find solutions independently, and adapt easily to change. They show confidence, persist through difficulties, and maintain stable relationships, resolving conflicts constructively. For example, they correct mistakes independently and approach tasks with enthusiasm.

Interconnections with other skills

- Emotional regulation: managing emotional responses to challenges, helping maintain focus and calm during setbacks.
- Problem-solving: finding solutions to obstacles, directly supporting the ability to overcome challenges.
- Self-confidence: believing in one's abilities, allowing persistence and a positive approach to challenges.
- Optimism: staying hopeful and motivated in adversity, fostering perseverance and a positive outlook.
- Adaptability: adjusting to changes and new situations, helping to thrive in unpredictable environments.
- Growth mindset: viewing challenges as opportunities to learn, which enhances resilience through continuous self-improvement.
- Self-awareness: understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, helping manage stress and adapt effectively.
- Stress management: using techniques to manage stress, preventing burnout and enhancing overall resilience.
- Perseverance: continuing to pursue goals despite setbacks, indirectly supporting long-term resilience.

Communication skills: resolving conflicts and building strong relationships, which help provide support during tough times.

Didactical tips for teachers

- Use an emotion wheel to help students identify and understand their feelings, promoting emotional awareness, regulation and communication.
- Encourage students to view mistakes as learning opportunities, fostering a growth mindset.
- Have students regularly reflect on their achievements to build self-confidence ("What I Did Well" Journal).
- Create opportunities for students to share experiences and practice empathy (Empathy Circle).
- Incorporate brief mindfulness or breathing exercises to help students manage stress.
- Promote resilience by encouraging students to persist after setbacks.
- Use storytelling to help students understand and overcome challenges creatively.
- Model resilience by showing students how to handle challenges constructively.
- Create a praise-based classroom culture and systematically praise the process, not the results. Teach children how to give and receive process praise.
- Integrate growth mindset activities into the lesson.



5.6 Flexibility

Definition of the skill

Flexibility is the ability to adapt to new situations and changes. It is the willingness to change. It involves being open to different ideas, adjusting to unexpected events, and finding new ways to solve problems. Flexibility is important because life is constantly changing, and being flexible allows us to cope with challenges in a calm and effective way. It's not just about accepting change, but also being able to adjust our thoughts, emotions, and actions to meet new demands or circumstances, whether they are in our personal life, work or social environment. Flexibility helps us move forward and make the best of difficult situations. There are three skills that are very close in meaning. Sometimes they are used interchangeably, but the difference between them should be clear. These three skills are: resiliency, adaptability and flexibility.

Resiliency is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.

Flexibility is willingness to change, ability to easily modify thinking and behavioural strategies while keeping core values in mind.

Adaptability is being able to adjust our thinking and behaviour to new conditions.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Flexibility is crucial in every aspect of adult life, as it enables individuals to adjust effectively to life's constant changes and challenges. In the workplace:

- Flexibility helps adults embrace new roles, technologies, and work environments, making it easier to adapt to shifting expectations or unforeseen circumstances.
- It also allows for better problem-solving in the face of unexpected challenges, whether it's a change in workload or organizational restructuring.

In family life:

- Flexibility supports the ability to navigate relationship dynamics.
- Balance parenting demands.
- And cope with life transitions like moving or changes in family structure.

It plays a vital role in managing personal well-being, as it helps cope with challenges, reduce stress, and build resilience. In social interactions, it supports strong relationships by facilitating adaptability in communication and conflict resolution. During crises, flexibility allows individuals to adapt, process emotions, and find new paths. It also fosters personal growth by encouraging learning from mistakes, trying new things, and pursuing goals despite obstacles. Developing flexibility enhances the ability to navigate life's complexities and maintain balance.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Flexibility in children aged 6-10 begins to develop as part of their ongoing growth process. At this age, children become more capable of adapting to new situations and changes, although the extent of their flexibility is influenced by factors such as their temperament, family support, and environmental influences.

At this age, flexibility can manifest in various ways, such as:

- Adapting to change: children are able to quickly adjust to new situations, like a new teacher, a change in class activities, or a different daily routine.
- Shifting strategies: when faced with difficulties, such as struggling with a task, children show flexibility by trying different approaches to solve problems, rather than giving up.
- Handling new environments: they are able to adapt to unfamiliar situations, such as going to a new place or meeting new people, without becoming overly anxious or upset.
- Adjusting social behaviour: children can adapt their behaviour to suit different social situations, understanding how to interact with peers or adults based on context and social norms.
- Growth mindset and creative thinking: Flexible children are able to think in a divergent way, seeking many different, novel/unusual solutions to a situation rather than thinking in terms of one 'good' answer. In other words, they use their fantasy to discover new and unexpected connections and apply unconventional approaches.
- Managing emotion and disappointment: if things don't go as expected, children show flexibility by coping with the situation, adjusting their expectations, and continuing to engage with the task or situation.

Developing flexibility helps children remain open-minded, adapt to social changes, and navigate friendships and conflicts with ease. They approach new challenges with curiosity, understanding that change can lead to growth. Flexible children handle life's uncertainties with confidence, staying positive and focused, which supports their emotional well-being, problem-solving skills, and social success, preparing them for future challenges.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: Children with low flexibility struggle to adapt to changes in routine, tasks, or environment. They may react with frustration or distress when faced with unexpected situations, like a new class schedule or unfamiliar activities. They often resist change, find it hard to shift strategies, and need significant support to cope with transitions.

Level 2: Children with moderate flexibility can handle some changes but may need support to adjust. They might feel frustrated or reluctant initially but can adapt with encouragement. They manage routine changes better than complex ones and may require guidance to fully engage with new tasks or environments.

Level 3: Children with high flexibility adapt quickly to new situations, changes in routine, and unexpected challenges. They approach new tasks positively, try different strategies, and adjust easily

to changes in their environment. They handle transitions with minimal stress and remain motivated, showing resilience in the face of challenges.

Interconnections with other skills

- Emotional regulation: the ability to adjust emotional responses to changing circumstances, helping to stay calm and composed when facing new situations.
- Adaptability: a direct connection to flexibility, as being flexible means adjusting to new information, environments, or changes in expectations.
- Problem-solving: flexibility allows individuals to find new strategies or alternative solutions when things don't go as planned.
- Open-mindedness: willingness to consider different perspectives or approaches, which supports flexible thinking and actions in dynamic situations.
- Self-confidence: believing in one's ability to handle change, which encourages a positive approach and willingness to adjust.
- Growth mindset: viewing challenges as opportunities for learning, which supports flexibility by encouraging a willingness to try different approaches or strategies.
- Stress management: managing stress effectively allows one to stay flexible in difficult situations by preventing overwhelm.
- Perseverance: continued effort in the face of change or uncertainty is supported by a flexible mindset, enabling people to adapt and keep moving forward.
- Resilience: flexibility supports resilience by helping individuals bounce back and adapt to new or unexpected situations.
- Collaboration skills: the ability to work with others and adapt to group dynamics enhances flexibility in team-based tasks or situations.

Didactical tips for teachers

- Emphasize the importance of effort and learning from experiences rather than just the final result.
- Use role-playing exercises where students must adapt to changing situations, promoting flexibility in thinking.
- Encourage students to come up with different solutions for a single problem, highlighting that there are various ways to achieve success.
- Have students explore and discuss different viewpoints to understand and appreciate diverse ideas.
- Present incomplete stories or problems and ask students to brainstorm possible endings or solutions, helping them become comfortable with uncertainty.
- Teach students to use phrases like "I can try another way" to foster a resilient and adaptable mindset.
- Assign group tasks where students must collaborate and adjust their approaches based on team input and evolving situations.
- Demonstrate flexibility by showing students how you adapt to unexpected changes or challenges in the classroom.

5.7 Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness

Definition of the skill

Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness form a foundational skill that drives a desire to explore, learn, and understand the world. This skill represents a mindset of active interest and enthusiasm in experiencing new things, asking questions, and staying open to diverse perspectives. It is the inclination to approach situations with eagerness to learn rather than judgement, paired with an open heart and mind. This skill enables children to discover, appreciate, and reflect upon the uniqueness and complexity around them, fostering a lasting love for learning and discovery.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

- In a fast-evolving world, curiosity, wonder, and openness are crucial for adaptability and mental agility. Cultivating these qualities early contributes to: resilience and continuous learning; enhanced emotional satisfaction and well-being; improved problem-solving, empathy, and adaptability. Adults who embrace curiosity and openness thrive in a world of expanding knowledge and shifting career paths. These traits nurture joy in learning, innovation, and positive relationships.
- Studies further underscore that encouraging these traits in childhood contributes to improved long-term outcomes. Adults with a strong foundation of curiosity and openness report greater satisfaction in navigating life's challenges and show higher levels of adaptability and empathy in their personal and professional relationships.
- Research highlights the long-term benefits of nurturing curiosity, wonder, and openness in children. Studies show that children encouraged in these areas tend to develop stronger problem-solving skills, higher emotional intelligence, and a positive attitude toward challenges. For example, classroom environments that support this skill see students who are more engaged, ask more questions, and show greater interest in learning. Longitudinal studies also suggest that adults who were encouraged to be curious as children are better able to adapt to complex life changes, tend to experience lower stress levels, and demonstrate stronger relational skills due to their openness and empathy.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Between the ages of 6-10, curiosity, wonder and openness are already natural inclinations, often displayed through spontaneous questions, exploration, and a fascination with the world. This skill is readily observable in children's interactions such as their delight in learning about animals, space, history, or technology and their natural interest in peers' perspectives. At this age, children can develop this skill further by being encouraged to:

- Encouraging open-ended questions: inviting children to ask questions without fear of judgment helps them explore different viewpoints.

- Promoting explorative play and activities: storytelling, hands-on experiments, and guided nature walks teach children to view the world with wonder.
- Practice perspective-taking: exposing children to different cultures, ideas, or historical events builds openness and understanding of diverse perspectives.

The benefits of these activities manifest in children's growing engagement in learning. Research shows that students supported in developing curiosity, wonder, and openness are more likely to ask thought-provoking questions and engage fully in learning activities. They exhibit greater enthusiasm for exploring diverse topics and show an enhanced ability to understand complex ideas.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: The child occasionally shows interest in new topics or asks questions but is hesitant to engage in exploratory activities or express opinions.

Level 2: The child regularly shows curiosity, frequently asking questions, and engages in new activities with minimal encouragement. They are open to others' perspectives.

Level 3: The child actively seeks out new information, shows excitement in learning across a wide range of topics, and exhibits a high degree of openness to different ideas. They ask thought-provoking questions, contribute insights in discussions, and engage fully in activities with an eagerness to explore and learn.

Interconnections with other skills

- Creativity: curiosity drives the desire to explore new ideas, which fuels creative thinking and problem-solving.
- Problem-solving: a curious mindset enables children to approach challenges with an open mind, asking questions and testing solutions.
- Critical thinking: openness allows children to question assumptions, consider alternative perspectives, and think critically about information.
- Resilience: a sense of wonder and openness builds emotional resilience, as children learn to face unknowns with curiosity rather than fear.
- Empathy: openness toward others' experiences and ideas cultivates empathy and helps children connect with those who may have different perspectives.
- These interconnections underline the importance of fostering curiosity and wonder as a foundation for other critical life skills, resulting in a well-rounded individual capable of adapting and thriving in a complex world.

Didactical tips for teachers

To nurture curiosity, sense of wonder and openness in children:

- Create “wonder walls”: allow children to post questions or topics they are curious about and discuss them regularly.
- Plan nature and science exploration days: facilitate outdoor activities or experiments that inspire observation and inquiry.
- Introduce cultural exchange projects: share stories, food, or art from various cultures to celebrate diversity and foster openness.
- Encourage journaling: have children document their questions, observations, and reflections to deepen their engagement with the world.
- Model curiosity: demonstrate inquisitiveness by asking questions and exploring answers alongside children.



5.8 Empathy

Definition of the skill

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the emotions and viewpoints of others, putting oneself in their shoes both emotionally and cognitively. This skill is at the heart of interpersonal relationships and lays the foundation for creating a more harmonious and cooperative society.

Empathy has two key dimensions:

- Emotional empathy, which refers to the capacity to feel what others feel and respond with appropriate emotions.
- Cognitive empathy, which involves understanding another person's perspective or mental state without necessarily sharing their emotions.

Both aspects are essential for children as they navigate complex social interactions in their personal and academic lives.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Teaching empathy to children is crucial to prepare them for life in an increasingly fast-paced and changing society, where social and work interactions require strong interpersonal skills and adaptability. Below are the main benefits of cultivating empathy in children:

- **Improves Social Skills:** empathy equips children with the ability to understand others, handle conflicts constructively, and build positive relationships. In a globalized and interconnected society, collaborating with diverse groups is essential for success.
- **Fosters Inclusion and Tolerance:** an empathic approach nurtures respect for cultural, ethnic, social, and ideological differences. This skill becomes vital as children grow into adults navigating increasingly multicultural and diverse environments.
- **Stimulates Critical Thinking and Adaptability:** understanding others' perspectives fosters open-mindedness, helping children adapt to new situations and approach challenges with innovative solutions. This cognitive flexibility also enables them to make ethical decisions in complex situations.
- **Promotes Resilience and Emotional Well-Being:** Empathy helps children connect with their own emotions and those of others, equipping them with tools to cope with stress, frustration, and challenges. This emotional awareness serves as a foundation for lifelong mental health.
- **Builds Responsible Leaders and Citizens:** Empathy shapes future leaders who lead with sensitivity, considering the needs of their community. It also fosters active citizenship, with individuals committed to contributing to a more equitable society.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Children aged 6 to 10 are in a crucial developmental phase where empathy begins to emerge in both emotional and cognitive forms. At ages 6–7, children show a basic understanding of others' feelings but remain largely focused on concrete and visible emotions; for instance, they may respond with concern if they see a peer crying but might struggle to grasp more subtle emotional cues, often mimicking compassionate behaviours modelled by adults or peers. At ages 8–9, they begin to grasp that others can have feelings and experiences different from their own, developing the ability to infer emotions from less overt cues such as body language or tone of voice, and might start showing genuine acts of kindness, like comforting a friend without being prompted. By age 10, children exhibit a more advanced form of empathy that incorporates both emotional and cognitive elements; they understand complex emotional scenarios, such as conflicting emotions, and can anticipate how their actions affect others, consciously avoiding saying something hurtful due to understanding its emotional impact.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: At this level, children begin to distinguish their own emotions from those of others and can respond to obvious emotional signals (such as crying or sadness). However, their ability to put themselves in the shoes of others is limited to visible and concrete situations. They follow simple empathic behaviour patterns, responding with care and concern when they see another child in pain, but tend to react only if the pain is explicit.

Level 2: At this stage, children develop a greater ability to 'take the perspective' of others, i.e. to understand that even without overt emotional expressions, other people may have different emotions and may be influenced by external factors. This is the stage at which they begin to understand that actions can influence the emotions of others, even in contexts that cannot be directly observed.

Level 3: Around the age of 10, children are able to display a more mature form of empathy, involving both emotional and cognitive understanding. They can perceive another person's emotions even if they are not expressed overtly and can engage in empathic behaviour by anticipating how their actions may affect the emotions of others. This is also the age at which children begin to develop the ability to emotionally support others, offering advice or seeking solutions to others' problems.

Interconnections with other skills

- **Active Listening:** Empathy enhances the ability to truly listen and understand others, creating a foundation for meaningful communication.
- **Effective Communication:** Empathetic individuals can express themselves in ways that resonate with others' emotions and perspectives, fostering clarity and connection.
- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Empathy promotes mutual understanding, crucial for working effectively in teams and building strong, cooperative relationships.
- **Conflict Management:** An empathic approach helps resolve conflicts by addressing underlying emotional needs and finding solutions acceptable to all parties.

- **Leadership:** Empathy enables leaders to motivate and inspire by understanding the emotions and needs of their team members.
- **Adaptability:** Understanding diverse perspectives allows empathic individuals to adapt more easily to new environments and challenges.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Empathy is a core component of emotional intelligence, enabling better self-awareness and interpersonal relationships.
- **Respect and Inclusiveness:** Empathy fosters an environment of respect and inclusion by valuing others' experiences and viewpoints.

Didactical tips for teachers

To foster empathy during these stages, adults can:

- Encourage perspective-taking through role-playing or storytelling.
- Discuss moral dilemmas that require considering others' feelings.
- Provide opportunities for cooperative learning and group activities.
- Model empathic behaviour consistently.
- Use role-play scenarios where children act out different emotions and discuss their feelings.
- Read stories highlighting characters' emotions, then invite students to consider those perspectives.
- Encourage “emotion journals” where students reflect on daily interactions and identify others' feelings.
- Praise empathetic responses and acknowledge when students support each other.
- Organize small-group activities that promote cooperation, mutual understanding, and listening.
- Introduce a “feelings corner” where children can safely express emotions and receive supportive feedback.

5.9 Valuing people and nature

Definition of the skill

Valuing People and Nature is the skill of recognising the intrinsic worth of both human beings and the natural environment. This involves understanding the interconnectedness between human well-being and the health of the planet. It includes a conceptual and procedural grasp of sustainable development as essential for a thriving future. This skill promotes respect for ecosystems, responsible resource use, and a balanced relationship between people and nature, which are crucial for long-term sustainability and societal well-being. Beyond awareness, valuing people and nature requires taking responsibility and transforming values into concrete actions that nurture and protect both humanity and the planet, ensuring a sustainable legacy for future generations.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Valuing people and nature is a foundational 21st-century skill essential for fostering a sustainable and equitable future. This skill prepares adults to navigate a rapidly evolving, interconnected world by aligning personal well-being with environmental health.

In Environmental Contexts:

- Promotes sustainable living and resilience in response to challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss.
- Encourages eco-friendly habits and supports policies that protect natural resources.

In Social Contexts:

- Strengthens empathy, respect, and meaningful relationships, fostering community cohesion and individual emotional well-being.
- Cultivates responsible citizenship and ethical leadership, inspiring others to make sustainable and ethical choices.

In Broader Life Contexts:

- Enhances adaptability and innovation, enabling individuals to address complex problems creatively and collaboratively.
- Provides a sense of purpose, aligning personal actions with values for meaningful contributions to a better world.

By teaching this skill, adults are empowered to act as proactive stewards of both communities and the environment, essential for building a sustainable and resilient future.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

Children aged 6–10 are at an ideal developmental stage for cultivating the skill of valuing people and nature. Through guided learning and activities, they can progress through the LifeComp stages: Awareness, Understanding, and Action.

Awareness and Curiosity:

- Children begin to notice differences and similarities among people and the natural world.
- Concepts like kindness, fairness, and care for living things resonate strongly.

Understanding and Respect:

- Stories, outdoor exploration, and role-playing help children grasp the importance of respecting others and nature.
- They start to internalise the value of compassion toward others and the environment.

Action and Responsibility:

- Practical activities such as recycling, gardening, or caring for animals teach sustainability and responsibility.
- Children begin to see the impact of their behaviour on the world, fostering a proactive mindset.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Educators can use these parameters to assess how children demonstrate the skill, categorised into three levels of development:

Level 1: Awareness and Curiosity: Shows interest in discussions about people and nature but may need reminders to respect peers and the environment. Understanding and Respect: Demonstrates occasional kindness and requires guidance to recognise the value of natural resources. Action and Responsibility: Needs encouragement to engage in pro-environmental actions and rarely initiates them independently.

Level 2: Awareness and Curiosity: Actively participates in discussions, showing a growing understanding of the interconnectedness between actions and their impacts. Understanding and Respect: Exhibits increased empathy and respect for classmates and nature, often expressing concern for others. Action and Responsibility: Begins to take initiative in simple sustainable actions, though still requiring occasional reminders.

Level 3: Awareness and Curiosity: Articulates the importance of valuing people and nature, offering thoughtful insights. Understanding and Respect: Consistently shows empathy and respect, inclusivity, and concern for the environment. Action and Responsibility: Independently initiates and leads pro-environmental actions, encouraging peers to participate.

Interconnections with other skills

- **Teamwork & Collaboration:** Working effectively with others, fostering support networks and shared efforts to achieve common goals.
- **Communication Skills:** Expressing ideas clearly and listening actively, enhancing teamwork and understanding in group settings.
- **Empathy & Compassion:** Understanding and sharing others' feelings, offering emotional support and building trust in relationships.
- **Sociability & Collegiality:** Engaging with others in a friendly and professional manner, contributing to a positive and supportive work environment.
- **Reasoned Decision-Making:** Using logic and careful consideration to make choices, ensuring decisions are well-thought-out and beneficial.
- **Reflective Thinking:** Looking back on experiences to learn from them, improving future decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- **Creativity:** Thinking outside the box and generating innovative solutions, helping to address challenges with new perspectives.
- **Resourcefulness:** Utilizing available resources effectively, adapting to constraints and overcoming obstacles through creative solutions.

Didactical tips for teachers

- **Engage Curiosity:** Use storytelling and nature walks to foster interest in people and the environment.
- **Promote Responsibility:** Assign tasks like recycling or caring for classroom plants to develop accountability.
- **Encourage Reflection:** Facilitate discussions on how actions impact others and the planet.
- **Model Behaviour:** Demonstrate sustainable habits and empathy in daily interactions.
- **Create Collaborative Projects:** Encourage group activities like tree planting or clean-up drives to build teamwork and empathy.
- **Celebrate Efforts:** Acknowledge and reward pro-environmental actions to reinforce positive behaviour.

5.10 Connectedness

Definition of the skill

Connectedness is the ability to recognize and engage with the broader community, both locally and globally. It goes beyond sociability and collegiality, embracing a sense of shared humanity and responsibility. This interconnectedness is shaped by relationships through communication, travel, migration, trade, and political systems. On a cognitive level, connectedness involves understanding global, regional, national, and local issues, while recognizing the interdependence of different countries and populations. Socio-emotionally, it involves empathy, solidarity, and respect for diversity. Behaviourally, it means taking actions that promote peace, sustainability, and social cohesion, fostering environments where people care for one another.

Importance of the skill for lifelong well-being

Connectedness is essential for adults to thrive in an interconnected world. As globalization increases, individuals who value connectedness are better equipped to contribute to social harmony, sustainability, and ethical leadership. Key benefits include:

- Promoting sustainability: Adults who recognize their interconnectedness will address global challenges like climate change by making sustainable choices, helping ensure a resilient future for communities and the planet.
- Strengthening social bonds: Connectedness enhances emotional intelligence, enabling individuals to form strong relationships, which benefit both their mental health and the well-being of others.
- Encouraging responsible citizenship: Adults with a sense of connectedness make decisions that promote equity and sustainability, leading by example to create a collective, better future.
- Fostering adaptability and problem-solving: Understanding the interconnectedness of global issues equips individuals with the skills needed to face complex challenges with creativity and critical thinking.
- Providing purpose and fulfilment: Those connected to a larger community find deeper meaning in their actions, aligning them with values that contribute to personal fulfilment.

Manifestation and development of this skill in ages 6-10

At ages 6-10, children are in an ideal stage to develop connectedness. Through hands-on experiences and guidance, they can cultivate the awareness, understanding, and behaviours that reflect interconnectedness:

- Awareness and Curiosity: Children begin to notice differences in people, cultures, and the environment. They grasp concepts of fairness, kindness, and responsibility toward others and nature.
- Developing Respect: Through activities like role-playing and group work, children learn to respect others' feelings, backgrounds, and the environment. This respect often shows in actions like sharing and helping.



- **Taking Responsibility:** Children practice responsibility in small ways, such as recycling or caring for pets or plants. These actions nurture a sense of duty toward their community and the environment.

Observation parameters for establishing class level

Level 1: Children may show interest in people and the environment but need prompting to think about their impact. They require guidance to demonstrate kindness and responsibility, such as helping with recycling or taking care of classroom plants.

Level 2: Children actively engage with global and environmental issues and demonstrate empathy. They begin taking initiative in sustainability actions like sorting recyclables and helping care for class pets, though they may need occasional reminders.

Level 3: Children articulate the importance of valuing both people and nature. They consistently demonstrate empathy and responsibility, independently initiating pro-environmental actions and suggesting community improvement projects.

Interconnections with other skills

- **Teamwork & Collaboration:** Working together to solve problems and achieve common goals.
- **Empathy & Compassion:** Understanding and caring for others' feelings and well-being.
- **Communication Skills:** Effectively sharing ideas and building relationships.
- **Reasoned Decision Making:** Making informed choices based on understanding and analysis.
- **Reflective Thinking:** Analysing experiences to improve future actions.
- **Creativity:** Finding innovative solutions to challenges in a global context.

Didactical tips for teachers

- **Promote global awareness:** Use books, videos, and discussions that highlight different cultures, global issues, and environmental challenges.
- **Encourage empathy:** Create opportunities for children to practice empathy through group work, discussions, and helping others.
- **Incorporate sustainability activities:** Engage students in age-appropriate environmental activities like recycling, tree planting, or community service projects.
- **Model connectedness:** Teachers can demonstrate empathy, respect for diversity, and responsibility in their actions, serving as role models for students.
- **Foster reflection:** Use journals or class discussions to help students reflect on how their actions affect others and the environment.

6. THE AGE

This manual is designed to help teachers select the most suitable activities to support the development of the 10 selected transversal competencies in their pupils. When choosing which activity to propose, it is essential for teachers to start by carefully observing their students to understand their current level of cognitive, emotional, and motor development.

Since each child has their own pace of development and unique starting point, teachers need to choose activities that match the children's needs and abilities. Careful observation — one of the core skills of any teacher — is key to making these decisions. By understanding how each child approaches learning, interacts with others, and responds to different types of challenges, teachers can select activities that provide the right level of stimulation and support for all pupils.

As we have already seen, in order to facilitate the choice of the most suitable activities, within the sheets of each soft skill it is possible to find some descriptive parameters to understand how the specific competence evolves over time in the age group considered. We have called these competence levels by the generic name: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3.

Instead, in this section of the handbook we wish to provide teachers with a brief summary to guide them in observing their pupils on the three main levels of development: cognitive, emotional and physical/motor development. Far from presenting a comprehensive analysis of children's psycho-affective development, we wish instead to provide here some theoretical and observational elements drawn from some important developmental theories. We also consider it useful to supplement the theories and observational elements with the most recent discoveries in neuroscience in order to gain an even better understanding of the structural limits and potential of each developmental stage. In the next few paragraphs you will therefore encounter brief summaries of the developmental milestones between the ages of 6 and 10.

6.1 Cognitive development

Between ages 6 and 10, children's cognitive skills expand significantly, moving toward greater independence, curiosity, and logical reasoning.

Logical thinking and concrete operations (Piaget)

- Before age 6 (Preoperational stage, 2-7 years):
Thinking is largely egocentric and symbolic. Children use symbols in play but cannot grasp logical principles like the conservation of quantity.
- Ages 6-10 (Concrete operations, 7-11 years):
Children begin to think logically about concrete objects and events. They understand simple cause-and-effect relationships, can classify and order objects, and grasp reversibility and conservation.
- After age 10 (Formal operations, from about 12 years):
Children transition toward abstract thinking, formulating hypotheses, reasoning beyond the concrete, and developing more advanced critical thinking skills.

Memory and learning

- **Working memory:**
Around age 6, children can hold sequential instructions in mind. By age 10, they manage multiple pieces of information simultaneously, aiding tasks like multi-step math problems.
- **Long-term memory:**
From age 6, memory becomes more organized, allowing recall of events and learned concepts. By age 10, they easily retain academic knowledge over weeks or months.
- **Mnemonic strategies:**
Early on, repetition is used to remember information. By 9–10, children employ strategies like mental images or categorization to improve recall.

Attention and inhibitory control

Between 6 and 10, children increase their ability to focus for extended periods, ignore distractions, and inhibit impulsive responses. This supports goal-directed behaviour and academic tasks.

Language and reflective thinking (Vygotsky)

- **Vocabulary and abstract concepts:**
Vocabulary grows rapidly, including more technical and abstract terms. By about 8, children understand concepts like empathy and justice.
- **Syntax and grammar:**
Between 6 and 10, children master more complex grammatical structures, creating longer, more coherent sentences and narratives.
- **From egocentric to reflective thinking:**
Around 8–9, children recognize others' perspectives, fostering empathy. By 9–10, they self-correct language mistakes and form opinions, supporting the rise of critical thinking.

Problem-solving and self-regulation

- **Planning and strategy (6-7 years):**
Children start basic planning, often using trial-and-error approaches.
- **Cognitive flexibility (7-8 years):**
They adapt more easily to changing rules or unexpected situations.
- **Problem analysis (8-9 years):**
They break down tasks into steps, use help effectively, and think more systematically.
- **Emotional self-regulation (9-10 years):**
Children stay calmer when facing difficulties, consider alternative solutions, and self-monitor their progress.
- **Perseverance and resilience (9-10 years):**
They persist longer, understand effort leads to success, and cooperate better with peers to solve problems.

6.2 Emotional development

Social-emotional skills mature greatly between 6 and 10, influencing how children understand and regulate emotions, build relationships, and respond to others.

Understanding emotions

- By age 6-7, children identify basic emotions in themselves and others.
- By 8-9, they discern more complex emotions and underlying reasons.
- By 9-10, they show empathy, predict others' feelings, and adjust their behaviour.

Emotional control and self-regulation

- Early in this period, children manage emotions by seeking adult help.
- By 8, they use basic strategies (counting, focusing on positives).
- By 9-10, they prepare emotionally for challenging situations and self-regulate more independently.

Building self-esteem

- At 6-7, children rely heavily on adult approval.
- By 8-9, they compare themselves to peers, leading to more balanced self-assessments.
- By 9-10, self-esteem becomes more stable, with children setting personal standards and improving through effort.

Expanding social relationships

- Friendships become more meaningful, based on shared values like trust and honesty.
- By 8, children choose friends not only for common activities but also for reliability.
- By 9-10, they handle conflicts more maturely, listen to others, and value deeper connections.

Conflict resolution and social skills

- Younger children still depend on adults to resolve conflicts.
- By 8, they propose compromises.
- By 9-10, they can solve disputes independently, sometimes mediating among peers.

Social responsibility

- Initially, children just follow simple rules.
- By 8-9, they collaborate in groups, taking on roles for collective goals.
- By 9-10, they understand their impact on the community and respect broader social norms.

Social self-awareness

- From 6-7, children notice how others react to them.
- By 8, they reflect on their social role and adjust to fit in.
- By 9-10, they are more attuned to how others perceive them, influencing their social behaviour to gain acceptance and respect.

6.3 Physical development

Physical growth and improved motor skills at this age support cognitive, emotional, and relational development.

Main stages

- Body growth: Steady increases in height and weight; improved proportions.
- Fine motor skills: Enhanced precision in writing, drawing, and tool use.
- Gross motor skills: Better coordination, strength, balance, and abilities like running or jumping.
- Body control: Greater spatial awareness, enabling participation in sports and team games.

Impact on other areas

- Emotional: Success in physical tasks boosts self-esteem; exercise helps manage stress.
- Relational: Group sports encourage cooperation, empathy, and social integration.
- Cognitive: Activities requiring coordination and planning improve memory, attention, and problem-solving skills, reinforcing the mind-body connection.

6.4 The point of view of neuroscience

During the period between the ages of 6 and 10, children's brains undergo profound and important changes. Here are the fundamental elements to keep in mind in order to help build educational activities useful for the development of transversal skills.

Maturation of the prefrontal cortex

The prefrontal cortex is one of the last areas of the brain to mature and is essential for executive functions such as planning, emotional control, behaviour regulation, and strategic thinking. Between the ages of 6 and 10, the prefrontal cortex develops stronger connections with other areas of the brain, allowing significant progress in:

- Action planning.
- Impulse control and emotional regulation.
- Monitoring and correcting errors.
- Flexible adaptation to new situations (cognitive flexibility).

Development of the limbic system

The limbic system, which includes the amygdala (involved in processing emotions), is highly active during childhood. Emotional regulation improves thanks to the increase in connections between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system.

Effects observed between the ages of 6 and 10:

- Greater ability to identify and understand one's own and others' emotions.
- Progress in managing frustration and emotional stress.

- Ability to react more rationally to stressful or conflictual situations.

Strengthening of neuronal connections

During this age group, neuronal connections become more efficient thanks to myelination and the strengthening of frequently used synapses (a process known as synaptic pruning). These changes promote:

- Faster and deeper learning of new skills.
- The development of working memory, necessary for solving complex problems.
- The ability to analyse problems systematically.

Activation of the parietal system

The parietal system, involved in spatial representation and solving logical problems, collaborates more and more closely with the prefrontal cortex.

This supports

- The ability to break down complex problems into manageable steps.
- The understanding of numerical relationships and abstract mathematical concepts.

Learning mediated by experience and brain plasticity

The brain between the ages of 6 and 10 is highly plastic, meaning it can adapt to new experiences and environments. Social and school experiences directly influence the development of neural connections, consolidating skills such as:

- The ability to collaborate in groups.
- Controlling emotions in conflict situations.
- Building self-efficacy and resilience.

Motivation circuits

The reward system, which involves the dopamine circuit, is active in reinforcing behaviours associated with positive experiences. In children between the ages of 6 and 10, positive feedback (from teachers or parents) and the achievement of small goals activate these circuits, motivating them to learn and persevere.

Cognitive flexibility and the role of the hippocampus

The hippocampus, essential for memory and learning, develops further during this stage. It contributes to cognitive flexibility, allowing children to:

- Modify learning or problem-solving strategies.
- Use past experiences to solve new problems.

7. HOW TO TRAIN TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

Teaching transversal skills in primary schools is essential to help children develop social and emotional competencies that will serve them throughout their lives. Yet teaching transversal skills is certainly different from teaching curriculum subjects: the development of transversal skills involves an understanding of the competence itself, (observing and naming it) and the development of functional behavioural habits. To ensure an effective learning experience, teachers can structure their approach using Kolb's Learning Cycle, which consists of four key stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Each stage plays a crucial role in developing behavioural competencies in young learners and can be used in different periods of the learning process: anyway, we believe that, for a complete transversal skills learning experience, each stage should be used.



Concrete Experience

This stage involves engaging children in activities where they can experience transversal skills firsthand. Since young students learn best through direct engagement, teachers should create practical scenarios that encourage behaviours like teamwork, empathy, problem-solving, and resilience. Activities such as role-playing, collaborative games, and storytelling exercises can provide meaningful experiences where students naturally encounter challenges that require soft skills to navigate. For example, to foster teamwork and problem-solving, the teacher can propose a hands-on group task where students need to cooperate to achieve a common goal using limited materials.

This type of collaborative challenge encourages communication, negotiation, and shared decision-making. Similarly, to help develop empathy, students could be guided to imagine and discuss how others might feel in various situations, encouraging perspective-taking and emotional awareness.

Reflective Observation

After participating in an activity, children need to reflect on what happened. At this stage, teachers should guide students in discussing their experiences by asking questions like: *How did you feel during the activity? What worked well? What was difficult?* This process helps students recognize the impact

of their behaviour and emotions, fostering self-awareness and a deeper understanding of interpersonal dynamics. Teachers can use group discussions, drawing exercises, or personal storytelling to help students process their experiences in a way that suits their developmental level.

After the collaborative group task, the teacher can facilitate a reflection session, inviting students to share what strategies they used to work together, how they felt during moments of disagreement, and what they could do differently next time. To support younger students, teachers could also introduce simple visual tools where students place markers to indicate how they felt at different points, helping them connect emotions to specific experiences.

Abstract Conceptualization

Once students have reflected on their experiences, they need to connect these insights to broader concepts and principles of transversal skills. At this stage, teachers should introduce structured explanations, models, and real-life examples to deepen understanding. For instance, if a child struggled with teamwork, a teacher might explain the importance of communication and listening skills and illustrate these with a relatable story or a simple diagram. This step ensures that students not only recognize soft skills in action but also understand their value in daily life. Teachers could consolidate these reflections by creating a visual class chart where students contribute ideas on what helps good teamwork, communication, and empathy. Linking their personal experiences to broader principles helps children see patterns across different situations and develop strategies they can apply in the future. To further support this process, it is important to nominalize key concepts related to soft skills – for example, explicitly naming the steps involved in problem-solving (identifying the problem, brainstorming possible solutions, evaluating options, choosing a solution, and reviewing the outcome). This practice helps students develop a clear, shared language to describe the skills they are using, so that they can master them better in all the contexts in which they will come across.

Active Experimentation

The final stage involves applying newly learned concepts in different situations. Teachers should create opportunities for students to practice transversal skills in real-life classroom interactions. Group projects, peer mentoring, or classroom responsibilities can provide spaces for students to test and refine their interpersonal skills. Encouraging students to set small goals, such as sharing more with classmates or resolving conflicts calmly, helps them integrate soft skills into their everyday behaviour. For example, teachers could assign small group tasks or rotating classroom responsibilities where students need to work together and make decisions as a team. Regular check-ins can help students reflect on their progress and identify what helps them collaborate more effectively. In cases where conflicts arise, students can be supported with structured conversation prompts to guide them through resolving disagreements constructively.

By following Kolb's Learning Cycle, teachers can ensure that students experience, reflect on, understand, and apply transversal skills effectively. This structured approach allows children to develop crucial behavioural competencies in a natural and engaging way, fostering social-emotional growth that will benefit them throughout their lives.

8. CONCLUSION

The SPIRIT project is not just about teaching children; it is about empowering teachers to grow alongside their students. The journey of cultivating transversal skills is deeply rewarding, offering opportunities for personal fulfilment and professional excellence.

This handbook has offered a comprehensive exploration of why and how to foster transversal skills in elementary school children, grounding its approach in both scientific evidence and practical strategies. Through the SPIRIT framework, we have highlighted not only the importance of nurturing key transversal skills – from emotional awareness, regulation and communication to resilience, from critical thinking to empathy – but also how these competencies are interconnected and evolve within the broader context of children’s cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

We have also emphasized that transversal skills do not develop in isolation. They emerge and strengthen through meaningful experiences, playful exploration, and the relationships children build with their peers, their teachers, and the world around them. By understanding the developmental stages of children and applying insights from neuroscience, teachers can design activities that are both engaging and developmentally appropriate, fostering curiosity, collaboration, and personal growth.

At the heart of this approach is the teacher – not just as a facilitator of activities, but as a model of lifelong learning. The self-awareness of the teacher plays a central role: by understanding their own emotions, biases, and strengths, teachers can create learning environments where empathy, respect, and curiosity thrive.

More broadly, nurturing transversal skills in today’s children means preparing them not only to succeed in school but to face the challenges of a rapidly changing world with confidence, adaptability, and resilience. These competencies are foundational to their future well-being, helping them build the emotional balance, critical thinking, and collaborative mindset they will need as adults to thrive in both their personal and professional lives.

We invite you, as a teacher, to embrace this journey of self-discovery and growth. By actively engaging with the SPIRIT framework, you not only enhance your ability to teach but also enrich your own life. Remember, the classroom is not just a space for children to learn – it is a shared environment where everyone, including the teacher, grows.

As you progress in your journey, consider the value of connecting with other educators committed to fostering transversal skills. Sharing experiences, celebrating successes, and supporting one another can amplify the transformative power of the SPIRIT framework and build a community of practice where innovative ideas and reflective practices flourish.

In the SPIRIT model, the teacher is not just a facilitator of knowledge but the living embodiment of the values and competencies we wish to instil in our students. By embracing this dual role of "knowing" and "being," you become the heart of the framework – a guide, a model, and a lifelong learner.

Let this journey be a source of inspiration, both for your students and for yourself. Together, we can create classrooms that are not only places of learning but spaces of growth, connection, and transformation – preparing children to thrive in life and in a world that is evolving faster than ever before.



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