



## Media Literacy and for The Net Generation

*Marianna Kosic*<sup>1</sup>

*Scientific-Cultural Institute Mandàla, Italy.*

The paper explores the opportunities and challenges of combining media literacy and social-emotional literacy to promote mental health and wellbeing in school curricula. It describes the implementation of an experimental module within the program *Crescere insieme What's Up* (Growing up together What's Up). This upstream prevention and health promotion program, from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (north-eastern Italy) is designed to harness the protective effects of developing and strengthening life skills to move beyond risk factors to prevent youth suicide, fostering connections and support between school and mental health institutions, peers and adults. The program activities involved role plays and reflection activities, collaborating in project group work, consulting and producing media (such as articles, Youtube videos and Powerpoint presentations) for peer-to-peer education. It adopted an experiential approach enabling active engagement of high school students, their parents and teachers, and 'learning by doing' with agency and responsibility. Qualitative feedback from students and teachers, study limitations and further implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** technology, life-skills, health promotion, upstream prevention, adolescence

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### Introduction

Suicide is a complex multi-layered public health problem with protective and risk factors operating across many levels of interaction: the physical or biological-somatic level (i.e. health, healthy lifestyle); the psychological (i.e. mental health, self-confidence and ability to cope with challenges); the cultural and overall political, economic, environmental level; the social level of relationships with others in wider communities; and the spiritual level (Kalmar, 2013). Despite many ongoing prevention programs, suicide and associated

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Email address: [marianna.kosic@gmail.com](mailto:marianna.kosic@gmail.com)

mental ill-health is still a persistent phenomenon (Pompili, Innamorati, Girardi, Tatarelli & Lester 2011) and suicide remains the second highest cause of unnatural premature death in people aged 15 to 19 years (WHO, 2014).

Among risk factors there are: relational conflicts; (cyber) bullying; aggressive tendencies; substance abuse; discrimination and isolation; the presence of mental health disorders; and difficulties in accessing health care. Protective factors include: perceived school safety; connectedness to supportive peers and adults with clear expectations; opportunities for meaningful contribution; life skills (such as self-regulation, coping, problem-solving, critical and creative thinking skills to assertively resist peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours, effective communication, empathy, and taking responsibility), and availability of and easy access to (mental) health care (Goldsmith, Pellmar, Kleinman, & Bunney, 2002).

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) not only as the absence of a mental disorder, but as a state of wellbeing in which individuals realise their potential, learn to cope with the daily stresses of life and are able to sail proactively through all the challenges (WHO, 2001), making a positive contribution as resilient citizens to their communities and their lives (Sancassiani et al., 2015). To this end, there is “no health without mental health” (WHO, 2013). Unfortunately, according to an estimation by WHO, every fourth European citizen is affected by a mental disorder at least once in their lifetime. Hence, mental health promotion is among the top priorities of the public health agenda in Europe.

### *Mental Health in Italian Adolescents*

Over half of all mental disorders have their onset before adulthood: in childhood and adolescence (Kessler, Amminger, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Alonso, Lee & Ustün, 2005; Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Merikangas & Walters, 2007), negatively affecting life quality, health, social, educational and occupational opportunities. In Europe, the EUROSTAT research carried out in 2003 revealed that many adolescents have experienced mental distress at one point in life, with female adolescents being at a higher risk (Wasserman et al., 2015).

In Italy, the national PrISMA study (Frigerio et al., 2007) evaluated the presence of mental disorders in preadolescents aged 10-14 years, showing that about 8% of participants exhibited at least a mental disorder at the time of evaluation, while another 10% were probable cases of emotional (anxious and depressive disorders) and behavioural disorders, with the internalizing disorders being more common than the externalizing ones. This major threat to youth health and wellbeing needs to be addressed as mental disorders

can increase the rates of self-injuries, unhealthy risky behaviors (such as smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, poor diet, physical inactivity), and anti-social and suicidal behaviors (Campion, Bhui, & Bhugra, 2012).

On the other hand, strengthening internal and external assets, together with perceived social support has been shown to be related to social competence; and a sense of positive identity is a significant protective factor for healthy youth development. (Kosic, Wium, & Dimitrova, under review; Wium, Dost-Gözkán, & Kosic, 2018).

### *Suicide Prevention and Health Promotion Programs*

Every suicide inevitably impacts on the family members, friends, school and community members (Rihmer & Rutz, 2009). Hence, prevention of internalizing or externalizing disorders, and identifying other factors that may in time lead to suicide, together with the promotion of mental health in youth through education are two of the five priority areas of the European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing launched by the European Commission in 2008. In response to the alarming youth suicide data at the European and (Italian) national level, numerous programmes have been established to promote mental wellbeing, with the aim of subsequently preventing suicides among school-aged adolescents (Wasserman et al., 2015). These initiatives have the potential to be life-saving, as well as to improve life quality (Knapp, Parsonage & McDaid, 2011) and are thus critically important. Since the interaction between protective and risk factors determines the vulnerability of an individual, it is of utmost importance to reduce the occurrence of risk factors and foster the development and strengthening of protective ones (Wasserman et al., 2012).

### *School Responsibilities and Education as Protective Factors*

School is the place where children and adolescents spend a considerable amount of their time. Moreover, it is during childhood and adolescence that social-emotional skills develop significantly. It is therefore crucial to provide early interventions during these critical developmental phases, in which experiences lay foundations for building good mental health and supporting quality of life in adulthood. For mental health promotion in schools to be effective, both promoting positive mental health for all and early identification and treatment for those who suffer from poor mental health are needed to safely diminish any mental or relational distress (Weare & Nind, 2011). Indeed, evidence-based research also highlights that promoting mental health is most effective when it is introduced at an early age through the school setting (Sancassini et al., 2015). Integrating

emotional literacy in school curricula effectively and efficiently thus serves to prepare young minds to deal with future challenges they will encounter within the classroom and outside in the world (Young Minds, 2017).

In the Italian PrISMA study, however, psychological difficulties were correlated with school difficulties such as: failure; and the need for a support teacher (Frigerio et al., 2007; Frigerio et al. 2009). These difficulties affect school performance, result in increased days of absence from school, and eventually limit career opportunities. On the other hand, schools and education are also important protective factors for mental health and wellbeing. They can buffer school drop-out and reduce risk factors, emotional and behavioral problems through socio-emotional learning interventions (Currie et al, 2012; WHO, 2004) The Italian Ministry of Education and Research aims to develop psychosocial skills through the ordinary, vertical development of the school curriculum: from childhood to upper secondary level (Possamai, 2013). The implementation of national strategies for the prevention and promotion of mental health is the responsibility of Regions, Local Health Units and mental health professionals in collaboration with education institutes and NGOs. These programs and projects are included in the school *Plan for the Educational Offer* (Piano dell'Offerta Formativa Triennale – POFT) chosen by the different members of the school community who sign a *Joint Responsibility Agreement*, i.e. the Teachers Assembly, the School Council (Consiglio d'istituto), and the parents' and students' representatives (at the upper secondary school level).

Among the projects launched, most aim to equip youth with social-emotional skills. These include: psychosocial stress identification; formulation of appropriate prevention measures; and commitment to life skills development. These projects recognise that social-emotional learning improves behaviour and attitude towards peers and adults, and instils cooperation, teamwork and other social skills enabling students to learn and work together well. Through such skills, students also improve communication skills which help them to process information and appropriately solve academic and life problems (Flecha, 2014).

In the last decade, there has been increasing attention in Central Northern Italy, moving from prevention to promotion policies which engage youth participation in social-emotional education (Mesa, 2010; Bertozzi, 2015). Preventive approaches, whilst aiming to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors, through focusing on building competencies, often however, tend to be deficit-oriented: emphasizing youth problems and what they lack (Benson, 1997; Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006). On the other hand, the strength-based *Positive Youth Development framework* sees youth as active and engaged

contributors in their communities, when equipped with developmental assets, i.e. internal and external resources (e.g. The 5C's: Competences, Confidence, Character, (Self) Compassion, Connections to Caring people). These assets can help a person to thrive in life, predicting positive outcomes which include overall health and mental health in particular (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 2004; Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000; Lerner, Lerner, von Eye, Bowers & Lewin-Bizan, 2011).

### *Social-emotional Education and Media Intervention*

According to the Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE) research carried out in eleven European countries, increasing awareness of youth about mental health and providing them with social-emotional education opportunities, would act to decrease suicide occurrences and risk, and help young people to improve their internal assets and external resources, hence containing their problems and preventing them from escalating (Wasserman et al., 2015). Importantly, the study also recommended *media intervention* to provide adolescents with additional, relevant psycho-educational information about mental health (Wasserman et al., 2015).

Social-emotional literacy, is concerned with the possession of the social and emotional skills that promote positive behaviour, which in turn foster positive social, behavioural, emotional and academic outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). It involves the understanding of self-feelings and those of others who influence the relationship, and the ability of learners to live in peace with other members of the society through self-regulation and peaceful conflict resolution (Ferrari, 2013).

Media literacy, on the other hand, is concerned with being literate in a digital age, and possessing the skills required to successfully navigate digital media and technologies. It is also, however, considered a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning approach which enables learners to access, evaluate, analyze, and create media, in different forms. This is particularly relevant for the so-called Net Generation, who have grown up surrounded by the Internet, and more recently, digital and social media. Research emphasizes the need for having innovative classrooms which are embedded in, and surrounded by increasingly mobile and digital information and communication technology (ICT), to foster modernized, inclusive learning practices which are centred on innovative teaching, and creative learning: where students are able to develop their thinking abilities and practice new skills (Bocconi, Kampylis, & Punie, 2012). These approaches to learning will allow this Net

Generation of students to be critical and to interpret what is right and what is not, when they, for instance, engage in/with social networking platforms (Livingstone, 2014).

There is a need therefore, for strategies to ensure young people are well-informed and literate about media and socio-emotional learning, to prevent adverse effects from exposure and misinformation, or lack of access to important protective resources or assets. It has been observed that when regularly implemented, media literacy and socio-emotional literacy approaches can harness positive life skills, and promote positive thinking and behaviours, which are crucial in promoting mental health among adolescents, and preventing antisocial behaviours, mental ill-health or suicide. According to Martens and Hobbs (2015), media literacy is also important for developing youth skills needed to harness democracy and civic engagement has been found to be an essential aspect of a healthy and well youth. It is vital, especially for young people, to critique, understand and interpret the constant stream of information conveyed to them and to make critical decisions concerning the messages delivered digitally.

Kleemans and Eggink (2016) note that media literacy is a promising means of developing well-informed, reflective and engaged youth who are important for a functioning democracy. Teachers and other stakeholders consequently need to understand how to motivate students so that they can engage in learning and behave positively in a changing society. Socio-emotional literacy acts as a basis for safe and positive learning and promotes the ability of students to succeed in school and life (Bradshaw et al., 2014). Together they can act as a buffer to school failure and potentially intervene in mental ill-health. According to Geraee, Kaveh, Shojaeizadeh & Tabatabaee (2015), media literacy is crucial for non-performance in the school system. Others indicate that the introduction of media literacy in classrooms improves the overall interest and engagement of students in a class (Donohue, 2014; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013). Youth who are marginalized can become more excited and concentrate on their studies after experiencing media and social-emotional literacy in school (Geraee et al., 2015). According to Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich & Gullotta (2016), socio-emotional literacy promotes social awareness, responsible decision making and pro-social skills such as sharing, empathy and kindness. It helps in improving the attitudes of students towards school and helps in reducing stress and depression , also serving as a source of engagement between the parents and their children as they discuss the program, process outcomes, and related information (Livingstone, Wijnen, Papaioannou, Costa, & del Mar Grandío, 2013). Media literacy also assists teachers to build a stronger

relationship with their students since it provides the teacher with a wide variety of approaches that can be used in the teaching process (Livingstone et al., 2013).

With the above insight into the benefits of explicitly employing social-emotional literacy and media literacy approaches, new technologies appear to have the potential to significantly complement existing suicide prevention programs in several ways (Muñoz-Sánchez, Delgado, Sánchez-Prada, Pérez-López & Franco-Martín, 2017).

### *The Current Study*

The present paper seeks to outline some of the opportunities and challenges that rest with combining attributes of new technologies and media literacies, with active learning of life skills, in order to foster wellbeing and prevent or contain mental health difficulties amongst the Net Generation. In the broadest sense, the Net Generation is generally considered to be the cohort of young people, born between 1980 and the mid- 2000s who have grown up constantly surrounded by computer-based and Internet technology, and as such, their learning styles are considered different to those of previous generations: they are image-based learners who employ technology effortlessly. This cohort can also be known as Millennials, or Gen Y, and are recognised as having increased use and familiarity with digital media and communications, which bring new challenges in terms of preparing them for their futures

### *What's Up? Growing Together*

The work referred to here is executed within a broader project: the regional Program *Crescere insieme* (*Growing together*) – *What's up*. The Program follows the international network of Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) and has been implemented in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region since 2014 as a long-term multi-level program, as part of the WHO's Health Promoting Schools initiative (WHO, 1998). It is based on a model of good practice developed to improve mental health of children and adolescents. Drawn from the 2005/2009 national program, which introduced the use of a self-help manual, named *Definizione di obiettivi e soluzione di problemi* (Setting goals and problem solving), for the promotion of mental health, psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence in Italian schools, it aims to foster theoretical and practical knowledge and competencies to: achieve goals, solve daily challenges, communicate and relate with others effectively and assertively, learning how to recognize and regulate emotions.

The Program is supported by the theoretical assumption that fostering life skills can be particularly effective if active and experiential forms of learning are engaged and that it can contribute to positive youth development (Catalano et al., 2004; Weare & Nind, 2011), improving health and preventing disease (Stewart-Brown, 2006), enhancing school engagement and participation, (emotional) intentional self-regulation, and hope (Geldorf et al., 2014). Learning experiences can significantly contribute to the development and growth of declarative knowledge on selected topics (*savoirs*), attitudes (*savoir être*), and behaviours (*savoir apprendre/faire*) to be used in one's personal, social, civic, and professional life.

School curricula are being challenged by the very nature of contemporary online culture, to accommodate the advantages derived from combining media and social-emotional literacy strategies. Research indicates that holistic learning, in which all visual, auditory and kynesthetic approaches to learning are used, is the most effective type of learning (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013). All enhance learning through repetition which is the key to skills mastery, confidence and self-esteem among other qualities which are healthy for mind development (Marsh, Hannon, Lewis & Ritchie, 2017). Integrating social-emotional and media literacy has the potential to promote a generation of young adolescents who can function socially, emotionally, and cognitively, in a media-saturated century.

## **Methodology**

### *Youth Sample and Data Collection Procedure*

The Program is implemented from kindergarten to high schools in the Gorizia Province of Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (north-eastern Italy) by both school psychologists connected to the Health Service as external experts and internal curriculum teachers during regular school hours throughout the school year. Parental permissions were obtained through the Educational Offer. Students undertook about ten hours per class in regular school hours and additional project work was completed individually or in groups at home. Each class focused on one or more topics at a time (e.g., stress management, (cyber)bullying, conflict mediation, stress management, assertiveness, personal strengths and weaknesses) combined with general life skills development sessions (WHO, 1993) such as: self-awareness, emotional regulation, decision making, problem solving, coping with stress, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, empathy). In addition, different techniques aimed at facilitating the learning process, such as brainstorming, role-playing, use of media and movie screening were adopted. Following the production of

goal-directed media, plenary discussions and reflections were held, providing feedback and enabling self-evaluation of their own outputs and products.

Overall 15 classes were engaged in the Project, and 51 males and 100 female students aged 14 to 20 years were involved in the academic year 2017/18. Thirty three (33) teachers from the Classical, Scientific and Human Sciences Lyceums participated, where the psychologist (author) and teachers extensively employed specific Youtube videos (e.g. the What's up FVG Youtube channel; along with with thematic videos created by other schools in the Program) and explicitly taught media competencies (e.g., Internet netiquette, cloud tags, discerning reliability and trustworthiness of media sources).

The partial results presented here are drawn from the action-research component of the evaluation and analyzed according to a SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Qualitative data from the evaluations provided by students and teachers, and collected by the psychologist in the program concerned: the provision of the service; and reflections, opinions, thoughts and perceptions regarding the Program implementation and methodology. Responses were collected in the context of face-to-face interactions during collective meetings and semi-structured (partly oral and written) post-activity evaluations. These evaluations were conducted once with 4 actively involved teachers who worked across these domains: Psychology/Philosophy/History, Social Sciences, Italian and Slovenian Language, and ICT) and three times with the students in plenary discussions with all the classes when attending the monthly school assembly: once for each topic, i.e. cyberbullying, assertiveness, stress management and personal strengths/weaknesses. Each collective evaluation lasted about half an hour. To collate the data, salient emergent and a-priori themes were extracted and put into a SWOT framework as a simple diagnostic tool to improve ongoing and future implementation decisions. Quotes presented represent the major responses of the participants overall, and are not one person's sole view, as participants worked in subgroups. They were collected under workshop circumstances where they were truly anonymous, and individual quotes cannot be identified to specific individuals.

## **Findings**

### *Strengths and Opportunities*

Equal opportunities for active participation and growth to all. The Program goal aimed to involve up to 100% of the classes as a measurable outcome and encouraged students to actively participate as co-creators of

materials rather than as passive recipients of information. Engaging students for life skills development, combined with media education in school assemblies, was found to be a helpful strategy by most participants. The Program allowed students as peer-educators to have real experiences, to have their voices heard and to have opportunities to practice their life skills development, through: taking responsibility, creativity (i.e., in role plays or simulations), critical thinking, experimenting with new (flipped) roles and points of view, public speaking, team work and preparing their presentation outcomes (i.e., PPTs, video discussions, articles). Teachers' skills as facilitators of inter-curricula competencies with these active pedagogies/methodologies also grew, helping the school to become more self-sustained, requiring the assistance of external experts less, while still making productive use of collaborations with external partners. Some quotes from students' feedback:

... liked the interactivity, the availability of the psychologist, the Powerpoint presentation... the themes were interesting even if sometimes not well presented.

I am usually shy to speak in public, so now I am proud I have succeeded and happy that the younger students were satisfied about our work, to receive their overall positive feedback.

It is nice that all the classes collaborate, students teach students, and it is useful that we get aware about the danger of words and behaviours.

The themes we suggest for next time are: friendships at school, relationships with teachers, solving problems and conflicts in classroom, addiction, exercises for relaxation, improving self-esteem. About the methodology: more (long) movies and less powerpoints, more discussions about real cases, actual topics.

Alliances to challenge traditional learning for students, with students. Forming an interdisciplinary curriculum alliance comprised of several subject teachers and the psychologist who were committed to program implementation, and willing and ready to devote some of their pedagogical time to engaging in delivering student-friendly life-skills activities and also to finding ways of connecting with students creatively, helped to achieve Program objectives. Obtaining teachers' and students' cooperation as co-

designers and co-creators of creative material rather than delegating to external experts/school psychologists is fundamental to the vision of the Program and requires particular attention to develop effectively. The school community is used to relying on the psychologist/expert or seeking school counsellors when examining problematic issues with certain students, rather than supporting the facilitation of activities for all students and supervising or supporting teachers to adopt active learning methods which support transferable skills/competencies.

Unlike traditional, formal approaches to teaching/learning, which are largely didactic in orientation, teachers involved in the Program implementation adopted the role of tutors, facilitators and guides of the process, assessing the initial situation and student needs, scaffolding their students or other colleagues who were new to the experience, and giving feedback while the students were engaged in active, experiential learning. All were assisted by the psychologist who managed the main responsibilities delegated at the beginning, gradually transferring them back, as and when appropriate, to the teaching staff and students themselves, empowering them through the process. This transfer is a significant shift from traditional pedagogies/attitudes, toward more flexible teaching/learning approaches, and recognizes those teachers who spend more time with their students on a daily basis, who co-create positive classroom/school climate by listening and supporting them, not only in academic achievement but also in building social-emotional competencies as well.

The meeting of generations and different roles is really important, ... continuous exchange... and the school has this function. We have to create, grow, develop, emancipate, but without refusing entirely the past, remaining mindful of humanistic values, the values of (not only virtual) experiences, of what might not be found in technological means... the idea of the collectivity, team/group work, face to face relationships, not only the school as provider of information and knowledge, but competencies... to accompany them, to help them grow and see things in a historical perspective of regressions and innovations, bridging the gap between past and present, to learn the good and the bad in both, how to better see in themselves and others, to be on the other side, to mature new perspectives (teacher's feedback)

Learning by doing, reflecting and building on experiences. The active learning approach through employing different media allowed all types of students to work on building competencies in a more dynamic,

creative, personalized, inspiring and motivating way. The learning process entailed visual, auditory and kinaesthetic processes necessary to support effective and efficient learning. In the words of some students' feedbacks:

Watching the movie *Cyberbully – Pettegolezzi* online, we've learned how hard it is to be excluded from all others. (...) We learned and practiced that we should help each other, to respect others. (...) About friendship. (...) We have realised that sometimes it is good to tell our parents or teachers what is happening and not hide things. It cannot go on too long.

The students who facilitated the workshop were good and well prepared. The learning process was interesting. When they were speaking they were informative, clear and understanding.

(...) especially liked the role-playing and pantomimes on non-verbal signs of passive, aggressive, manipulative and assertive behaviours.

During the process it was observed that students felt engaged with the activities and being given a more active role in the Program, not being just at the receptive end of it. Their choices and responsibilities were considered in the selection of topics for planning the activities and the outcome production or performance realization. This way they were made more aware of their responsibilities, rights and duties as active and mature citizens.

(...) we have listened, even though sometimes we have also lost attention and chatted among us, because we do not have the applications they have presented. (...) we discussed loudly because we were talking about our experiences. (...) it moved me, because my friend was in such situation.

When watching the short movies made by their peers on life skills on the *What's up FVG Youtube channel*, they were invited to critically reflect on the following: how the messages were conveyed and with what intentions; how they could be received by different types of audiences; who was the target recipient; what actions did they prompt; what would be their suggestions for improvement; recognizing what was worthwhile and useful; balancing praise and suggestions with a sandwich technique that connected the feedback-giving activity to a more constructive strategy: of remembering to appreciate the opportunities too.

Since the videos were mostly created non-professionally by students similar to themselves, they almost immediately felt motivated and tempted to try producing something creative themselves, to add information and quality, or just their own voice. Occasionally students expressed: “Some clips were banal and had weak points that could be improved. We can do better than this!”

### *Weaknesses and Threats*

Challenging competition for resources, clarity and (free) time. When a relatively new approach to work is introduced, in this case, based on competencies/life skills, initial, extra effort is needed from all the participants to tune in and adjust, and to feel confidence in what they are about to undertake. Feelings of frustration, discomfort and concern about the responsibility expected from teachers to recognize and eventually handle manifestations of psychological impairments and difficulties in their students were expressed. The reasons were mainly related to not feeling they were adequately competent or had had sufficient training for new responsibilities, or were related to past personal negative experiences that were still affecting their reactions to signs of psychological and mental health difficulties (e.g., suicide).

Consequently, there were feelings of relief in having an external psychologist and network of health services present at school who could actively take over the main responsibilities should such situations arise. They felt supported by the Program to manage and mobilize resources together in difficult situations, yet also felt vulnerable and at risk, if they were to operate without ongoing competency and capacity building. The diverse nature of the partnerships among different stakeholders and participants was both a source of strength and sometimes a challenge, making the fluidity of communication and the clarity of expectations, roles and responsibilities crucial elements for successful progression. As with all diverse teams, it takes time to learn and trust each other’s differences in language use, vocabulary and skills.

Media literacy, the ability to operate critically and reflectively, combined with socio-emotional literacy improves the social and interpersonal relationships among students, making them focus on teamwork, cooperation and listening, as well as presenting students with opportunities to personally interact with information, to critique and understand it, and to share their ideas with colleagues and teachers (High et al., 2015). On some occasions, though, the challenge is to shift from traditional interdisciplinary and individual competitiveness, to a more collaborative group approach or teamwork in the classrooms which would be of

benefit to the collectivity, rather than just to the individual “... there is too little attention on the individual in group work...”

Students were invited to find extra time and ways to make everyone involved and engaged, to negotiate roles, divide tasks, find joint meanings and agree on the modalities and strategies adopted to reach the goals, as well as to (self)-evaluate the processes (failure or success, leadership, communication, team group dynamics, individual and group contributions, etc.), and the outcomes or performances. They commented:

We did not have much time to prepare our presentation.

(...) Not everyone contributed equally, so some of us had to work more. (...) Some of our schoolmates did not come for the presentation. (...) It is not respectful that some students were disturbing during the presentation.

... didn't like the fact that meetings were (compulsory) during school assembly. We would prefer to have the evaluations in subgroups in normal hours.

Limited resources and time should not be underplayed either, as well as the pressurizing coercion to do such things as: stealing ‘free’ time at school assemblies, finding energy and motivation to plan and execute additional activities or produce more outcomes. Sometimes, less is more, especially when current teachers' and students' participation is not fully voluntary and bottom-up, which represents a significant threat and potential harmful barrier in achieving any Program objectives.

## **Discussion**

Exceptional work is currently underway regarding the promotion of social-emotional skills building in school curricula, but challenges and opportunities still present themselves. The review of the literature and of the ongoing experience of the Program *Crescere insieme - What's up* so far appear to confirm that socio-emotional approaches and media literacy can be valid approaches to promote life skills and active learning among the Net generation: those students who have been totally immersed in and surrounded by online/digital settings. It is important to note that social and emotional learning entails coordination of the community:

classroom, school, family and community members to assist young people in developing key social skills that help them in their lives. The Program evaluation offers several practical considerations.

In theory, teachers are among the “gatekeepers” who might be in position to identify early any warning signs of suicidal risk behaviour (Matthier & Hensley, 2013): to recognize prodromal symptomatology of psychological difficulties and prevent clinical or subthreshold problems which significantly impair youth trajectories in school and life (Pászthy, 2005). While perceived social support within schools, families and communities is significant to foster healthy development in youth (Kosic, Wiium, & Dimitrova, under review), teachers have to face a number of emotions relating to students (Chang & Davis, 2009), which may distress them and pressure them to delegate responsibilities to external experts: potentially resulting in their diminished independence, sustainability and proactivity. Continued support is therefore essential for them too. It can be in form of training and professional development to support themselves and their students (e.g. on stress and burn-out, relaxation techniques, communication with adolescents, conflict mediation). Parents can also benefit from informative meetings so as to gain key competencies on how to play a more active role in the promotion of health and wellbeing of their children and for themselves (e.g. on adolescent risk and protective factors, positive parenting, specific learning difficulties). Nevertheless, activities and learning experiences should not be overwhelming, or too many.

Social and emotional learning can be considered to be a wellbeing promotion activity for youth, yet simultaneously acts as preventive measure for mental ill-health and suicide. Our Program confirms through the SWOT analysis, and aligns with the Young Minds study (2017) that a primary challenge for schools rests with balancing the curricula that promotes academic achievement with one that fosters emotional wellbeing. Martens and Hobbs (2015) also point out that media literacy combined with social-emotional literacy, helps in building social skills by providing opportunities for adolescents to share ideas, to listen, and to collaborate meaningfully with each other. Sharing emotions, experiences, ideas and listening is a vital way youth can grow social and emotional capacity to prevent negative ill-health, such as depression, and build connectedness with others. Many suicides occur due to depression. The burden of depression and other internalizing or externalizing disorders can be reduced by sharing and collaborating with others if the environment is adequately prepared, informed and safe. Moreover, through media, Net Generation adolescents have a chance to challenge the social interaction rules and power relations around them (Pond,

2013). The Program outlined here, provides a platform where adults and adolescents can interact in a more equal partnership/ relationship, practice life skills together and learn from each other.

These preliminary data in the form of this SWOT analysis, suggests that this program is an example of good interdisciplinary practice which through the use of media literacy training and explicit socio-emotional teaching, empowers young people to engage actively in their own learning to develop their life skills and competencies. Further research is needed in this direction to triangulate the data and get a more comprehensive picture.

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