

HeIP

Healthy Teachers and Professionals in Education

News Bulletin

October 2015

Teaching teachers to cope with stress

Finding a teacher who doesn't feel stressed is possibly like trying to spot a unicorn. Today we know that stress levels do have a negative effect on the wellbeing of people, especially those working in so-called helping professions, which



include teaching. But where does most of the stress come from? If we look at schools, research tells us (A. Hillert, S. Koch, D. Lehr, 2013) that teachers have an extremely dense interaction with children, adolescents or adults.



Every hour this permanent

exchange implies hundreds of thousands of individual decisions. This process, especially when combined with a lack of support, poor

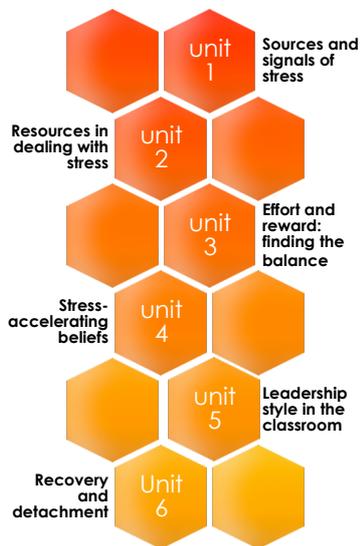
confidence, uncertainties or perfectionism can make teachers feel constantly exhausted. Workplace health must hence address the factors that are so often cited as stressors. **The aim of the HeIP project is to support teachers and show them how stress can be tackled at an individual level by the means of e-counseling.**

ABOUT HeIP

HeIP is a project funded by the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme under the Comenius sub-programme with the aim of supporting teachers to cope with job-related stress by the means of online training.



Lifelong
Learning
Programme



Course concept

The wish for healing has always been half of the health.

Seneca the Younger

SOME FACTS ABOUT BURNOUT

It is *de facto* impossible to detect psychosomatic burnout symptoms simultaneously with the alleged causes in a reliable and therefore valid manner.

1

Burnout is a powerful image and hence a currently popular subjective disturbance model, but not a diagnosis!

2

Serious social and work related changes result in increasing job pressure. Restricting individual leeway promotes the burnout experience. Nevertheless: from the epidemiological point of view, the frequency of mental disorder did increase if anything only slightly.

3

Course features

Being entirely **online**, the HeLP course concept uses important traits to engage with the target group teachers – first of all: **natural learning content – topics that** are inspired by specific situations faced by teachers in school every day. The starting point is a model of stress development (referred to as "The infernal quartet of stress development") and a model of coping (referred to as "the four recovery paths"). Furthermore much attention is paid to expressing content in a wording that is accurate, activating, warm, playful, inspiring, founded, illustrative and meaningful.

Again the course uses **learner-friendly pacing** so that participants are neither bored nor overloaded on any given week.

The training course comprises **6 units** of approximately **90 minutes** each.

Unit 1: Sources and signals of stress

Unit 2: Resources in dealing with stress

Unit 3: Efforts and rewards: finding the balance

Unit 4: Stress-accelerating beliefs

Unit 5: Leadership style in the classroom

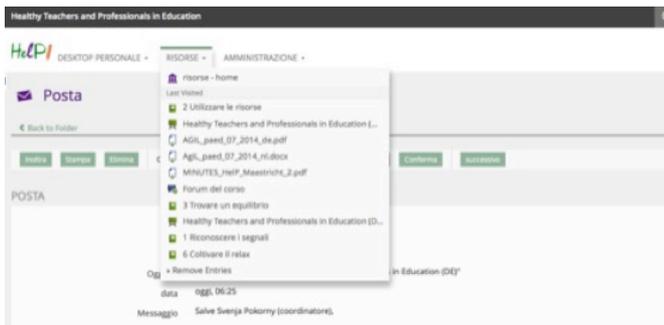
Unit 6: Recovery and detachment



Picture: screenshot HeLP video

All six units are available **in Dutch, German, Italian, Polish, Slovene and Spanish.**

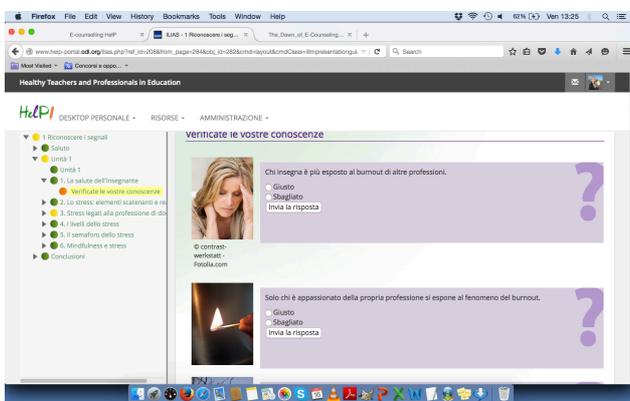
The Help online course is **supported by ILIAS 5.0, an open source web-based learning management system (LMS).**



Help course: Screenshot ILIAS learning platform

Emotional activation

To explore deep thoughts autonomously and to guide participants' attention to their feelings step by step, the Help course concept is based on **participant engagement**. Learners watch videos (see screenshot above), fill out short questionnaires, read informative abstracts and stories matching their experiences and engage in imaginative and relaxation exercises.



Help course: screenshot of an exercise example

Help is designed in a way that part of the work is dedicated to **self-directed assignments** that make learners practice between one unit and the other (e.g. by keeping a diary).

The methodology of self-directed assignments allows participants to develop higher sensitivity towards the handling of their resources. Test results and assignments make them systematically work and reflect on their strategies. The assignments are long-term exercises that help participants to become gradually acquainted with **alternative behavioural strategies** that progressively replace, as far as possible, unfavourable thinking and acting patterns.

Tutor profile

Participants are never left alone but accompanied by a tutor. The tutor has a pedagogical, psychological or psychiatric background (e.g.

Life is 10% of what happens to us and 90% attitude.



master/bachelor degree or at least traineeship on bachelor degree). The tutor has experience in tutoring by internet/ email and works according to guidelines. Tutors help learners to explore their own experience in a **non-judgmental manner**.

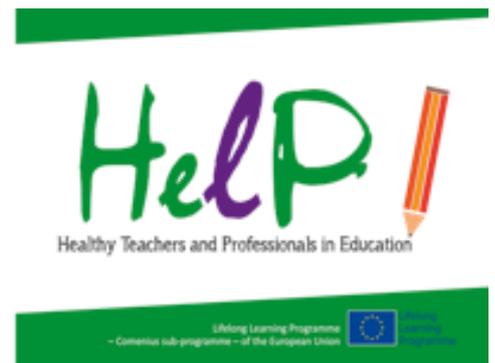
Sense of community

Participants are welcomed into the course by the tutor and can interact with both the tutor and their peers in a friendly atmosphere continuously alimented by the tutor in the **course forum**.

Self-care strategies – “recognizing without judging”

We cannot always control the circumstances that life puts in our way but we can control how well we take care of ourselves. Increasing the ability of teachers to go inward and listen to “what is there” and to stop disregarding their inner life, ignoring their needs and limits is a main purpose of the Help course.

- Unit 1: Sources and signals of stress
- Unit 2: Resources in dealing with stress
- Unit 3: Efforts and rewards: finding the balance
- Unit 4: Stress-accelerating beliefs
- Unit 5: Leadership style in the classroom
- Unit 6: Recovery and detachment



Course satisfaction

What would you like to improve?
“NOTHING I liked it all!” Help course participant

The feedback from teachers who take part in our Help course pilot was extremely positive.

Our evaluation instruments queried participants and tutors about 7 course characteristics: **understanding, interest, structure, usefulness, clarity, presentation and transferability.**

In all pilots the participating teachers from Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland perceived the Help course content to be **personally relevant and useful !**

We will now let our participants have the last word. Here are some of their final comments:

“I especially liked that I had the opportunity to review and improve my previous thoughts. Since then, I also feel when I get under stress”. (HeLP course participant – Germany)



“The course was inspiring and enabled me to become aware of some problems regarding my working style smoldering under the ashes. In future I want to use what I learnt to manage stress, to carry out my task with greater confidence and efficiency, also finding time for relaxing. I need to recharge my batteries”. (Help Course Participant – Italy)



“I liked everything, recognition of stress factors. The opportunity to learn new relaxation techniques. Transmission of the content and helpful hints”. (Help Course Participant – Poland)



“Spotlight on stress and reading on this topic and understanding times you experience stress. Combining exercises and theory”. (Help Course Participant – Netherland)

“Thank you!” (Help Course Participant – Italy)

Partnership

Bibliography

A. Hillert, K. Baecker, „Hintergründe und Daten aus dem „Stressmonitor“-Projekt Burnout – Modebegriff oder Krankheitskonzept?“, *Neurologie & Psychiatrie* 2/15, p. 24-27.

A. Hillert, S. Koch, D. Lehr, „Das Burnout-Phänomen am Beispiel des Lehrerberufs“, *Der Nervenarzt*, Springer, 2013 · 84:806–812.

Pictures

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The HeLP project is a Comenius programme and is funded by the European Commission. The consortium consists of the following partners from 7 countries:

1. Innovation in Learning Institute (ILI), University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany (Coordinator)
2. Rambla, Palma de Mallorca, Spain
3. Steps, Bologna, Italy
4. IPAK, Velenje, Slovenia
5. Schön Klinik Roseneck, Prien am Chiemsee, Germany
6. Wszechnica Society of Alternative Education, Krosno, Poland
7. Virenze Mental Healthcare, Gronsveld, The Netherlands

More information can be found on the

website www.help.odl.org