



National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Department of Psychology

LABORATORY OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en>

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Re-Connecting to the School



e-stories in the classroom

Useful tips

for the transition to online classrooms/distance learning and the management of conversations that may arise regarding the challenging times we experience

&

Activities

that aim to strengthen social and emotional connections in the online environment in order to promote resilience during school closures happening due to the global pandemic

Dear colleagues,

We are experiencing special circumstances in our everyday life and we are called to manage new complex issues that arise within the context of our multiple daily roles and responsibilities (e.g., we are educators, parents, caregivers, etc.). Regarding the educational aspect, it appears that it is recommended that we provide services through online learning environments and distance learning. Nonetheless, educators in the e-learning classroom (or when using any means of delivering long-distance educational services), are facing restrictions compared to the benefits of face-to-face instruction which include the learning process, the classroom dynamic, the relationship with the students, and the empowerment of the socio-emotional aspects of learning.

Our efforts to respond to the needs that have emerged from the challenging situation that we are all experiencing lead to the creation of the current document so as we can support educators when delivering distance learning services — particularly support them in aspects related to the re-building of the classroom environment and fostering peer relations (for other supporting documents from our Lab, [click here](#)). Our overarching goal is to support children by maintaining active the socio-emotional aspects of the learning process through fostering the resilience of our students along with ours.

Within this context, we describe certain basic parameters and tips to managing groups and supporting students transitioning and adjusting to the online classroom environment. Based on these parameters, we recommend activities and ideas that you can implement with your children in order to successfully support them. We hope that this effort will function as assistance to your undergoing work which pertains to helping children during challenging times with sensitivity, creativity, and lots of hard work.

We hope that we will soon be back/see each other in our classrooms, be close to our students where learning and caring manifest in their natural environment!

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Department of Psychology

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Re-connecting to the school

e-stories in the classroom

Useful recommendations for the transition to the online classroom environment and the management of conversations that may arise regarding the challenging circumstances we are experiencing.

At the beginning of the long-distance service delivery, educators may use the following recommendations to help them reconnect and rebuild the collaboration among all individuals in the classroom, boost the educational processes, and also manage conversations that may arise regarding the challenging circumstances we are all experiencing. These recommendations fall under the following three parameters: (a) the reconnecting of groups; (b) the socio-emotional empowerment of students and the management of difficult conversations; and (c) the facilitation of the educational process.

It is important that:

We recognize that we ourselves are also experiencing the same challenging situation in our own way. We may be experiencing our own unique challenges but also similar feelings and thoughts with our students. Self-care should be a priority. We take care of ourselves and foster our psychological resilience through our systems of support, so as we can be in a position to take care of and support our students.

We face multiple challenges when it comes to long-distance communication with our students as we attempt to respond to the uprising demands (e.g., spending multiple hours communicating with colleagues to try to find a better way/environment to communicate; adjusting our curriculum; experimenting with new online learning environments; attempting repeatedly to manage new challenges, ensure that every student has access to the online classroom, and search alternative ways of participation and connectivity).

We accept that this whole procedure is something novel and new for everyone and that it may cause us to feel distressed and anxious about our effectiveness as educators. Such feelings are completely normal and to be expected. We give time and space to ourselves and we move forward by setting small attainable goals while we make sure to use our strengths and systems of support across all levels.

A. Rebuilding the “team”

The first meetings as a group are very important because the students are called to reconnect at a different level under different circumstances. Certain recommendations that can facilitate their re-connecting part include:

Be appropriately prepared. We are appropriately prepared when it comes to responding to the needs of our students as well as possible questions that may be posed or challenging emotions that may arise.

Empowering the process of reconnecting/Focus on the present.

Our first conversation during this online class reunion may benefit from focusing on the present and the current process in place. Possible questions maybe: “What do you think of our online classroom?” or “How are you feeling that we are here today all together?”.

B. Supporting/Empowering/Fostering - Discussing our experiences with the group

Independently from the way we choose to come to contact with our students, synchronous (individual or group) and/or asynchronous (online classroom, email, etc.), the students may express their desire to discuss the current circumstances, ask questions, or express their unpleasant feelings. It is critical that our effort to manage this potential need includes the following:

Connection. The general message that is important to communicate during the first conversations or communication with the students is that the classroom can be a safe place where there is “Caring” – Mutual Support and Encouragement. Although we are no longer physically close to one another, this caring can manifest in multiple and diverse ways and even online. Our social relations constitute an important aspect of supporting children. Consequently, it is important to support the connections among students as well as group activities.

First communication. In the initial communications, it is recommended that the teachers create a welcoming message for their students that includes recognizing the challenging situation, **connecting to the last face-to-face communication (which was interrupted abruptly)**, recognizing the importance of reconnecting, encouraging public safety measures, and communicating a positive message. At the same time, posting of favorite lyrics, works of art, etc., are encouraged.

Spontaneous expression. In a long-distance meeting with the students or an online asynchronous communication environment, students may have spontaneous thoughts and express their feelings. It is natural and expected that when students are reconnecting, they want to share their experience and their feelings. Keep in mind that it may not be as easy for everyone to express how they feel or not everyone responds to the online environment in the same way.

The importance of the question content. We ask our students open-ended questions without guiding their responses. We avoid questions such as “Do you feel stressed?” and we try to allow the conversation to flow naturally. We prefer questions such as “What is the greatest challenge for you this period?” while with a follow-up question we try to counter balance this with a positive content question such as “What have you done recently that you enjoyed?”.

Sharing as a group. We provide students who want the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and experience during this “stay-at-home” period.

- We help students understand their emotions and that their reactions are typical and expected to the challenging times we are going through. Sharing a challenging experience is a particular process.
- It is possible that for some students it may function as a relief while others may feel discomfort that may manifest as various feelings (e.g., anger, sadness, fear) and behaviors (e.g., lack of concentration, defiance, withdrawal).
- No matter what, we do not pressure the students who seem to struggle with participating. For more information, [click here](#).

Understanding the circumstances. In the case of students expressing their thoughts and questions regarding the current situation, such as “How long will it last?” or “Will we miss a school year?” we respond with clarity in an age-appropriate way and we debunk rumors and myths. For more information, [click here](#).

Reassurance. We reassure through discussions that our students are fully aware of the circumstances and they know ways to minimize potential health risks. Discussing and clarifying specific guidelines promotes students’ ability to perceive this crisis as more under their control. It is also expected that there will be some anxious reactions to precautionary measures (e.g., hand washing, antiseptic use, etc.), which we need to try to maintain at a realistic level.

Empowerment. We help students through discussion and/or activities to identify their character and personality strengths along with strengths in their environment that they can use to manage the situation they face. We remember that some things may have been useful in the past (e.g., it helps me when I talk to my best friend).

Our own experience - Our sharing. We share, if we wish to, aspects of our experience or feelings **without adding our own worries**. We recognize the limitations of our role and we do not attempt to manage situations we cannot handle. There is no right or wrong way of response. Everyone has their own coping style that helps them manage challenging situations. When necessary, we seek professional help from mental health providers to help us support our students and ourselves.

C. Supporting the educational process

The feeling that some life aspects go on as before is very important to children. The beginning of the educational process, even when happening online, is an important source of support for the students. In order to help and assist children transitioning to this process, we aim to accomplish the following:

Maintain a routine. The maintenance of a routine — to the extent that is possible — can function as a counterbalance to a challenging situation. The maintenance of a school-related routine (schedule, activities, homework) can create the sensation that things are going back to normal. Moreover, it is a way to keep students occupied during this extended “stay-at-home” period.

Cooperation. A social network and friends can be a source of support and it is important to be used as much as possible as assets in the educational process. The assignment of activities in groups of two or more students, when possible, allows children to learn pleasantly and also to boost their social interactions and, thus, counterbalance potential feelings of loneliness and boredom.

Time management. When students have a schedule, it is easier to organize their studying and generally their time. We can organize with the children activities that can help them set daily goals and organize their studying schedule.

Facilitating learning. We seek ideas and materials that are available online or/ and we exchange useful and practical ideas with colleagues, by taking into account students with diverse educational needs, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, along with vulnerable or at-risk student groups.

“Re-connecting to the school”

e-stories in the classroom

Activity worksheets for the empowerment of social and emotional connectedness in electronic classrooms, to promote student resilience, during the period of school closure due to emergency measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic

The **“e-stories in the classroom”** document constitutes suggestions for teachers who wish to include activities that promote social and emotional connectedness, aiming to promote pupil resilience during school closure, due to the emergency measures taken for the prevention of the COVID-19 spread. The activities can be adapted according to pupils’ age, the learning environment or the medium of distance learning that has been chosen by the teacher. The activities may be delivered by the school psychologist, in the context of interdisciplinary collaboration.

An editable format of the activity worksheets is available through the website of the Laboratory of School Psychology:

<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/2020-03-08-17-58-59>

ACTIVITY 1

“All together, **connected**”



Introduction	In the activity “ All together, connected ”, students are encouraged to share ways in which they manage their daily life, during the “stay at home” period. Sharing thoughts, ideas and suggestions with the peer group can function protectively for the students and contribute to their psychological resilience.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Activate the group dynamics through the exchange of positive messages and practices that can help overcome an emotionally difficult situation.→ Understand that everyone is facing similar difficulties in crises and that there are ways to cope with such difficulties.→ Identify personal strengths and sources of social support (family, peer group, significant others) to manage daily life.→ Identify and share different approaches to managing possible difficulties that students experienced or are currently experiencing during the period that we all have to “stay at home”.
Explaining the activity to the students	<p>Recently, we are all going through a particular/different situation. However, we have the ability to manage difficult situations, and this ability results from all the little everyday moments that we enjoy. However, there are some difficult moments too. In those moments, we might have experienced unpleasant feelings, but we managed to endure them and found ways to cope.</p> <p>How were these days for you? Please fill out the “e-stories in the classroom” Worksheet (attach Worksheets 1a and 1b) and send it to ... (fill in the teacher’s preferred mode for receiving material from students).</p>

Process	<p>All together, connected, we share ideas that make us stronger in difficult times.</p> <p>Part 1 - Posting the instructions</p> <p>General suggestion: In asynchronous learning, the instructions may be posted (see Explaining the activity to the students) together with the relevant worksheet (see Worksheet 1a and 1b). In synchronous learning, an online group discussion may take place, prior to posting the instructions and worksheets.</p> <p>Part 2 - Feedback (optional but important):</p> <p>We collect the worksheets from the students and the teacher creates a synthesis of student responses (anonymously), promoting the message (in a short paragraph within the synthesis) that we all, to a certain extent, have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – good moments – strengths – sources of support – difficulties – coping strategies to manage and overcome difficulties <p>Part 3 - Completion/closure</p> <p>We complete the activity by sharing the anonymous synthesis of responses with the students. If possible, we encourage students to share thoughts and feelings they have after reading the group synthesis. In asynchronous learning environment, a group discussion can follow.</p>
Adaptations/ Alternative applications of the activity	<p>Choosing and presenting my strength</p> <p>After completing Worksheets 1a and 1b, this activity could be expanded by asking each student to choose one personal strength he/she has. Based on this strength, they are asked to make a drawing, write a poem/song, or choose any other form of expression to present their strength, and in turn, submit it to the teacher. The teacher creates a synthesis of the student artwork and sends the synthesized and anonymized feedback back to the students.</p>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The worksheets could be collected via email, or through the e-class, e-me or padlet platform, or through any other medium chosen by the teacher. – The feedback/synthesis of responses could be created digitally in any program the teacher feels comfortable using, such as PowerPoint, Word, padlet, flipbook, etc.

Discussion points
(if technically possible)

- ✿ How did the students feel when they were drawing/writing about themselves and their strengths?
- ✿ Were there any difficulties in the process, and if so, why? *(Students may find it hard to depict their strengths and skills; consequently, it is important for them to know that we are not interested in the aesthetic appeal of the artwork).*
- ✿ Looking at the final creation synthesizing everyone's strengths and skills, what are your thoughts? What can we achieve in our class, when we work together as a group?
- ✿ After the process is completed, how would they describe their group?

WORKSHEET 1a

e-stories in the classroom!

“All together, Connected” *Thinking Remembering Responding*

A. In the last week, I succeeded in...

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B. Which personal characteristic(s) helped me succeed?

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C. What else or who else helped me succeed?



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WORKSHEET 1b

e-stories in the classroom!

“All together, Connected”

Thinking Remembering Responding

A. Over the last week, one thing that was hard for me was...



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B. What did I do to overcome this difficulty?

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C. What else could I have done?



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ACTIVITY 2

“Plan our day”



<p>Introduction</p>	<p>It is important for students to organize their daily schedule, during a period when typical habits and routines have changed. In the activity “Plan our day”, the teacher encourages students to organize their time at home, suggesting that each student independently creates his/her own daily schedule, making use of ideas and suggestions provided by the group. Realizing that we can set small daily goals can help reduce our stress and provide a sense of control during a period of uncertainty.</p>
<p>Objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Highlight the importance of organizing our daily routine. → Identify helpful activities and routines through collaboration with the peer group. → Promote student self-organization, by planning daily goal-setting, in order for students to maintain a sense of control that is essential in a period of uncertainty.
<p>Explaining the activity to the pupils</p>	<p>Every day that we “stay at home” is a new day. We can choose to shape it any way we wish, finding interesting things to do at home, but also during our short daily walk for exercise.</p> <p>Let’s see what each of us do and get inspired to create our own daily schedule. Please fill out Worksheet 2 “the e-stories in the classroom” (attach Worksheet 2) and send it to... <i>(fill in the teacher’s preferred mode for receiving material from pupils).</i></p>

<p>Process</p>	<p>All Together Connected, we share ideas to “Plan our day”</p> <p>Part 1 - Posting the instructions</p> <p>General suggestion: In asynchronous learning, the teacher can post the instructions (see Explaining the activity to the pupils) together with the respective worksheet (see Worksheet 2). In synchronous learning, an online discussion can take place prior to posting the instructions and the worksheet.</p> <p>Part 2 - Feedback (optional but important):</p> <p>After collecting the worksheets, the teacher creates a synthesis of the responses (anonymously), sharing the message (in a short paragraph within the synthesis) that it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – plan our day; – identify moments and activities that we enjoy; – include in our day, not only studying and attending online classes but also pleasant activities, taking part in daily family routines, physical exercise; – be able to set small achievable goals for the next days. <p>We share the synthesis of responses with the students. If possible, we ask students to share thoughts and feelings after seeing the group work. In synchronous learning environments, the activity may be followed by a group discussion.</p> <p>Part 3 - We Plan our day</p> <p>After completing Parts 1 and 2, we give Worksheet 3 to the students and ask them to plan their own day.</p>
	<p>Explaining the activity to the pupils:</p> <p>Get inspired by your classmates’ responses to create your own routine. Remember to include time for: relaxation, enjoyable and creative activities, physical exercise, contact with friends, studying, and breaks.</p>
<p>Adaptations/ Alternative applications of the activity</p>	<p>For students in older grades of Primary/Elementary School & in Secondary Education:</p> <p>We encourage students to develop a weekly schedule, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – study material/worksheets for each subject for the whole week – total hours of attendance of synchronous and/or asynchronous learning activities – breaks – enjoyable/fun activities – contact with friends – physical exercise

Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The worksheets could be collected via email, or through the e-class, e-me or padlet platforms, or through any other medium chosen by the teacher. – The feedback/synthesis of responses could be created digitally in any program the teacher feels comfortable using, such as PowerPoint, Word, padlet, flipbook, etc.
Discussion points <i>(if technically possible)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ How important is it for someone to plan his/her daily schedule, especially in the current situation? ✿ What are some of the difficulties that students have faced in their effort to organize their day? ✿ What goals would students like to set for the following day?

WORKSHEET 2

e-stories in the classroom!

“Plan our day”

Thinking Remembering Responding

1. Describe a typical day during this “stay-at-home” period. What are your daily activities?



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2. Do you have a favorite moment or activity during the day?



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3. In what ways is it helpful to have a schedule during the day?



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4. What is my next goal for my daily schedule? What do I want to include?



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WORKSHEET 3

Organizing my day

 Things I have to do today...			
Morning 	Time: e.g. 9:00-10:00	e.g. attending online classes	
	Time: e.g. 10:00-11:00	e.g. doing my e-class homework	
	Time: e.g. 11:00-12:00	e.g. watching TV	
	Time: e.g. 12:00-13:00	e.g. listening to music	
Afternoon 	Time: e.g. 13:00-14:00	e.g. lunch time	
			
Evening 			
Remember to include in my day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ attending online classes ✓ doing homework for my e-classes ✓ fun activities: <i>e.g. boardgames</i> ✓ relaxing activities: <i>e.g. music</i> ✓ physical exercise <i>e.g. exercises at home</i> ✓ relaxation: <i>sleep</i> ✓ mealtimes ✓ contact with my friends and people I love <i>e.g. chatting with my friends, calling grandma/grandpa</i> & anything else I have chosen to do during this period at home			
What did I enjoy the most today? ----- -----		Don't forget to include in my schedule tomorrow...	

ACTIVITY 3

“One box full of solutions”



<p>Introduction</p>	<p>In the activity “One box full of solutions” the students are asked to share strategies that help them cope with difficulties and distressing feelings that they may be experiencing while they are “staying at home”.</p> <p>They collaboratively create “One box full of solutions” for those difficult moments in which distressing feelings, like anxiety, anger, sadness, or fear, might arise. In this way, they discover, through their peer group, helpful coping strategies for difficult moments and feelings.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Realize that their classmates might be experiencing similar difficulties and feelings during this difficult period. → Understand that when facing difficulties and have negative feelings, there are things they can do to help them cope and feel better. → Try new ways to cope with difficult situations and feelings by making use of the range of helpful coping strategies that they will have co-created with their classmates.
<p>Explaining the activity to the pupils</p>	<p>In situations where our daily life changes due to emergency conditions, it is normal to face some difficulties and experience negative feelings, like anxiety, anger, sadness, fear. For that reason, it is important to exchange ideas and opinions about helpful ways to cope in those situations. When you share your ideas with me, I will combine all the answers so that we can create a box full of solutions all together. Each time you feel that you have a difficult moment, the box will be available to you, so that you can choose one of the solutions the group has suggested.</p> <p>Please fill in Worksheet 4 “the e-stories in the classroom” (attach Worksheet 4) and send it to... <i>(fill in the teacher’s preferred mode for receiving material from pupils)</i>.</p>

<p>Process</p>	<p>All together connected... we share ideas to feel better.</p> <p>Part 1 - Posting the instructions General suggestion: In asynchronous learning, the instructions (see Explaining the activity to the pupils) could be posted, together with the respective Worksheet (see Worksheet 4). In synchronous learning, a group discussion could take place, prior to posting the instructions and worksheet.</p> <p>Part 2 - Creating “one box full of solutions” We collect the student worksheets and create a space within the electronic environment of our classroom, where the synthesis of the solutions proposed by the pupils can be posted so that everyone can have access.</p>
<p>Adaptations/ Alternative applications of the activity</p>	<p>With groups in older grades of Primary School/in Secondary Education</p> <p>We encourage students to collaborate online in small groups to create a poster about helpful coping strategies for managing difficult moments.</p>
<p>Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The worksheets could be collected via email, or through the e-class, e-me or padlet platforms, or through any other medium chosen by the teacher. – The synthesis of the activity “one box full of solutions” can be posted in an accessible and visible space in the e-class. The synthesis of student responses may be developed digitally in any program the teacher is comfortable using, for example through PowerPoint, Word, padlet, flipbook, etc.
<p>Discussion points <i>(if technically possible)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✿ It is normal/expected to have negative feelings, such as anxiety, in various situations in our life. ✿ Negative feelings, such as anxiety, might be experienced in different ways by different people. ✿ How can we make ourselves feel better? ✿ Are there people that can help us, when we experience negative feelings (e.g. when we are anxious)? How? ✿ When we feel calm, what can we do to care for our body and ourselves (e.g. physical exercise, good nutrition, sleep, pleasant activities, etc.)?

WORKSHEET 4

e-stories in the classroom!

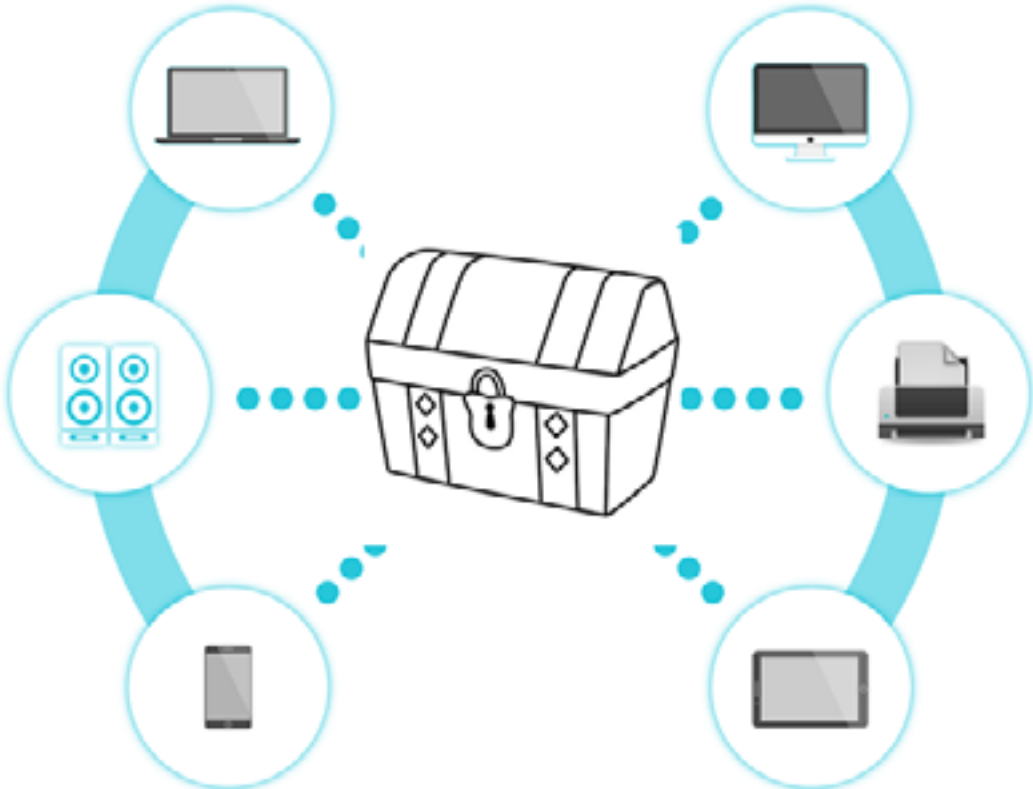
One e-box full of solutions

Thinking Remembering Responding

When I feel

I try to

It is helpful for me to think that



ACTIVITY 4

“The strengths of our classroom”



<p>Introduction</p>	<p>In this section, students will have the opportunity to remember the strengths they have as a group, as they have experienced them in face-to-face learning environments. They will also have the opportunity to identify new strengths, through their experiences in the current difficult situation we are going through. The underlying aim of the activity is to develop a cohesive and collaborative climate, by maintaining contact in distant learning environments – a special current circumstance. In that way, the activity seeks to highlight the school’s paramount role in supporting students, promoting the concepts of “supporting”, “caring”, “belonging” and, thus, reinforcing psychological resilience.</p>
<p>Objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Learn to appreciate that life experiences are important in themselves, regardless of how they are gained. ➔ Realize that even in crises, we can be flexible/adaptable. ➔ Understand that in both enjoyable and difficult moments, we have people in our lives that help and support us. ➔ Realize the importance of believing in oneself, making use of sources of support and dreaming for the future.
<p>Explaining the activity to the students</p>	<p>Well done, our group made it again! Despite the difficulties that we are all facing, we managed to communicate and collaborate in a new way. I propose that you divide into small groups, communicate online and create. What? Create something to reflect the successes of our group. That is to say, “what have we achieved as a group from the beginning of the school year until now?”. How? Make a video, a poster, a song, or whatever else you have in mind. What to include? Think, get inspired, collaborate, and express yourselves through art!</p> <p>Send your creation to ... <i>(write the medium that you have chosen to receive completed work from the students)</i></p>

<p>Process</p>	<p>All together, connected in our Classroom</p> <p>Part 1 - Posting the instructions</p> <p>General suggestion: In asynchronous learning, you could post the instructions (see Explaining the activity to the pupils). In asynchronous learning, a group online discussion could take place before the activity.</p> <p>Part 2 - Completion</p> <p>We collect children’s creations and develop a synthesis. Alternatively, we create a dedicated space within the distant learning platform that we use.</p> <p>If possible, we ask students to share their thoughts and feelings after seeing their classmates’ creations. In a synchronous learning environment, a group discussion could follow.</p>
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>— Students’ artwork could be collected via email, or through the e-class, e-me or padlet platforms, or through any other means of communication chosen by the teacher. Also, you could use a dedicated space within the “electronic classroom”, accessible to the students. The synthesis of the artwork may be developed digitally in any program the teacher is comfortable using, for example through PowerPoint, Word, padlet, flipbook, etc.</p>
<p>Discussion points <i>(if technically possible)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❁ Why is it important to recognize our achievements as a group? ❁ Who are the people in our lives, that we enjoy being with, that care for us, that support us and help us through difficult times? (we help pupils think of people at home, e.g. parents, relatives, siblings, and at school, e.g. teachers, classmates). ❁ How do important people in our lives help us?

Useful resources of the Laboratory of School Psychology for the psychosocial support of COVID-19

Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos, P., Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., & Athanasiou, D. (2020). *WE stay at home... WE stay connected*. Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).

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Resources for the psychosocial support for COVID-19

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