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## Exploring the coherence of the goals achieved through a youth development programme

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### Abstract

High goal coherence of a course has a positive effect on the participant's competence development. However, studies on the goal coherence of the youth development programmes are scarce. The participants were 153 teachers who attended to the LQ teachers' workshop. They filled in the questionnaire before and after the training. In addition, 61 teachers who comprised the comparison group answered also to the questionnaire twice but they did not participate in the LQ. The LQ questionnaire consisted of two elements, namely, how participants experienced the importance of the goals and their perceived competence in promoting the LQ goals. Four pairs of variables describing the participants' perceived importance of a course goal and the participants' perceived competence towards implementing it were produced in exploratory factor analysis. The coherence values for variable pairs using distance values were calculated by subtracting the perceived importance from the perceived competence for each goal. The coherence increased at the second measurement point among both the intervention and comparison groups. The LQ intervention resulted in a significantly increased coherence in the 'safe environment' and 'promoting SEL' variable pairs among training participants compared with the comparison group. Participating in the LQ training did not, however, increase the coherence significantly with regards to the 'help others' or 'healthy life' variable pairs compared with the comparison group. This piece of research highlights an interesting means of investigating the effectiveness of teacher training.

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## 1. Introduction

High-quality continuing professional development for teachers is important in many ways. Since teachers stand as professionals in teaching and learning, continuous training programmes should not underestimate their previous knowledge and experience. Solid learning sessions should build on the strengths of the teachers and the best teaching practices should be applied. It is, thus, important that deep-level learning takes place and that the content is update-to-date, appropriate and practical. The goals of the training should be transparent, coherent and clear. Teachers should find the training important and meaningful for their own work. After the course, they should feel competent and find the contents even more important than before.

During the last two decades, the promotion of social and emotional learning (SEL) has increased in schools. Comprehensive school teachers are offered a wide range of courses and materials to implement SEL as a part of teaching and learning at school. The organisation Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) published criteria for high-quality SEL materials and trainings (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2014). According to these criteria, initial training on implementing a particular SEL programme for teachers is essential. Indeed, according to our previous studies, teachers did not necessarily possess much knowledge on SEL when entering a course. However, after the training, teachers understood the central concepts of SEL and could apply the skills studied to specific situations (Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, & Lintunen, 2013; Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, & Lintunen, 2015). These findings mimicked similar results from studies by Barton-Arwood, Morrow, Lane and Jolivet (2005) and Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, and Greenberg, (2013) in education and by Aspegren (1999) in medical education. Accordingly, attendees may learn the basic theory and skills of SEL during a short training programme. For instance, we found that a teaching workshop on SEL increased teachers' perceived importance and experienced competence regarding SEL skills, which affected the SEL implementation process (Talvio, Berg, Ketonen, Komulainen, & Lonka, 2015). That study focused on a teacher workshop from the Lions Quest programme (LQ), which is the focus of the findings we present here, too. Even though there is some research on the benefits for the *students* (Berkowitz, Battistich, & Bier, 2008; Eisen, Zellman, & Murray, 2003; Kidron, Garibaldi, & Osher, 2014; Maticsek-Jauk & Reicher, 2014) research literature on *teacher* learning during LQ is surprisingly scarce.

LQ was originally developed to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and to reduce risky behaviour (Talvio et al., 2015). That is, the original objective of LQ aimed to prevent social exclusion. Today LQ serves as an SEL programme which has gained extensive international application. According to the LQ website, it is now available in 90 countries (Lions Quest, 2015). Since 1990, more than half a million teachers have participated in LQ workshops, and subsequently implemented LQ in their classrooms to more than 13 million pupils. The programme expanded its original goals and now primarily aims to support positive youth development in school settings through health promotion, strengthening SEL and emphasising service. In addition to teaching and studying SEL skills in the classroom, LQ promotes the creation of a safe learning environment, and encourages creating and maintaining solid connections to pupils' families and other networks associated with the school and its pupils. LQ also encourages the entire school community to learn in order to serve others. To maintain the quality of LQ, teachers must participate in the LQ teaching workshop which provides teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to implement LQ in the classroom setting.

The primary goals of LQ teacher workshops worldwide aim at promoting positive youth development and a healthy and meaningful life. The workshops are designed to consist of the following: Learning to use specific materials to conduct an LQ lesson aimed at creating a safe learning environment in which it is possible to support pupils' self-esteem, preventing drug and alcohol abuse, promoting SEL and strengthening service. Specialists create the learning materials, which contain specific instructions for each LQ lesson. The materials also emphasise the goal behind each task, a game or a group discussion. For example, role plays are designed to target at providing pupils with the skills they need to prevent drug and alcohol abuse. However, the materials are designed so that the teacher does not necessarily need to have a deep understanding of the theory or the structure to which the LQ goals aim at. They become clearer with the systematic use of the materials. This demands placing value on the use of the lessons and the materials.

Workshop trainers qualify as professionals after participating in a multiphase training that includes practicing LQ workshop delivery and receiving guidance from an experienced trainer. Each LQ country selects a senior trainer

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