



Transforming Teaching with Emotional Intelligence

Report on an Erasmus+ Mobility in Funchal, Madeira, December 2025

Dr. Bert Gerhardt

Seminar für Ausbildung und Fortbildung der Lehrkräfte Stuttgart (Gymnasium)

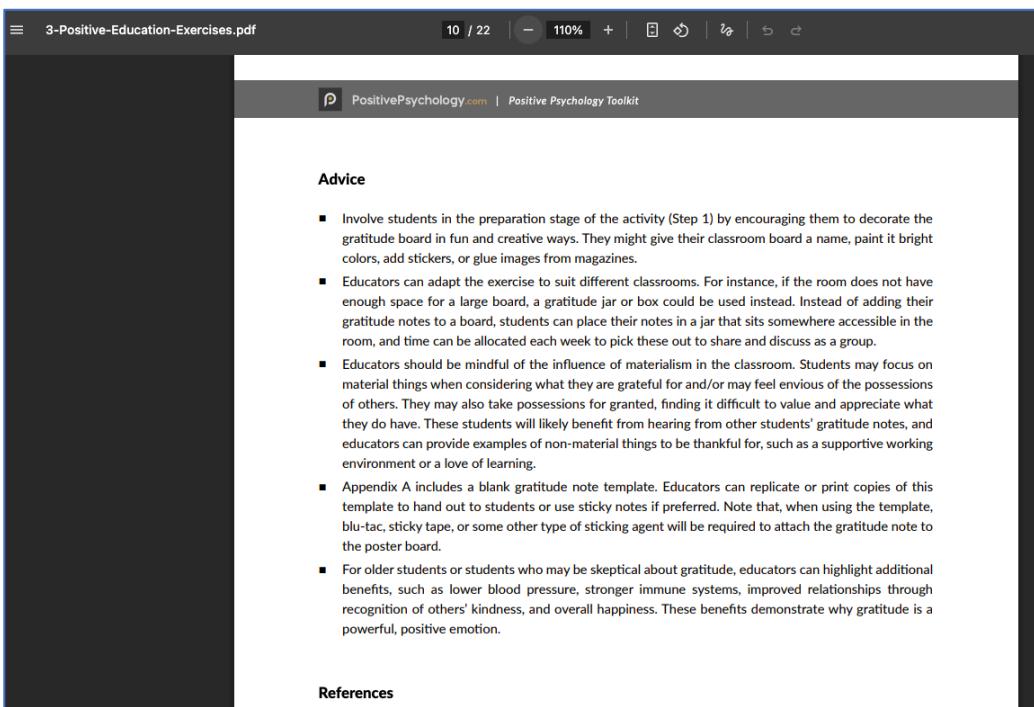
<https://www.learning-together.eu/>

The decision to take part in this Erasmus+ mobility grew out of a wish to reconnect my daily practice as a teacher and teacher educator with the deeper emotional foundations of learning. After years of navigating busy schedules, diverse student groups, curriculum changes and rising expectations, I felt the need to pause and look again at the human core of education. Madeira, with its gentle winter light and the open, international spirit of Funchal, offered an inspiring environment for this reflection. I arrived with a sense of anticipation, curious about the perspectives of colleagues from other countries and prepared to examine my own routines, strengths and blind spots through the lens of emotional intelligence.

From the very beginning, the programme encouraged an atmosphere of openness. On the first day, the welcome session created a shared space for orientation and trust. Meeting educators from different regions of Europe widened the horizon immediately: although we came from varied systems and cultures, similar questions resonated among us. How can we maintain our composure in stressful moments? How can we communicate with warmth and clarity? How can we notice and respond to subtle emotional cues from students? As we exchanged experiences, it became clear that emotional intelligence is not an abstract concept but a daily, lived competence that shapes classrooms, relationships and the meaning students attach to learning. The discussions about common challenges in increasingly digital school environments added another layer to this exchange, as many of us are confronted with new forms of distraction, pressure and communication barriers.

The second day marked a deep dive into the foundations of emotional intelligence within the teaching profession. Exploring the theoretical framework helped to situate our personal experiences within a broader pedagogical context. We examined our own emotional awareness, identifying patterns that either support or hinder our professional interactions. It was an honest and sometimes demanding process. Through guided reflection and practical exercises, we learned to observe how tension arises, which triggers affect our behaviour, and how we can regulate ourselves before responding. This self-regulation is a core prerequisite for modelling stability and empathy in the classroom. Conversations about stress management strategies were particularly valuable, as they provided simple but effective tools that can be integrated into daily routines without requiring major structural changes.

Day three turned our attention towards empathy, one of the most influential components of emotional intelligence. In interactive sessions, we explored how perspective-taking can transform classroom communication. When teachers actively listen to students and recognise the emotional dimensions behind questions, resistance or silence, relationships shift. Mutual respect grows, and the climate becomes more open. We practised conversational techniques that improve listening, helping us slow down, interpret verbal and non-verbal signals more carefully, and respond in ways that encourage dialogue rather than judgement. These exercises highlighted how easily misunderstandings arise and how quickly they can be softened through attentive communication.



The screenshot shows a PDF document with a dark header bar. The header bar includes the file name '3-Positive-Education-Exercises.pdf', page number '10 / 22', and a zoom level '110%'. Below the header is a navigation bar with icons for back, forward, search, and other document functions. The main content area has a dark background with white text. At the top of the content area is a header 'PositivePsychology.com | Positive Psychology Toolkit'. Below the header, the word 'Advice' is centered. Under 'Advice', there is a bulleted list of tips for educators. At the bottom of the content area, the word 'References' is centered.

Advice

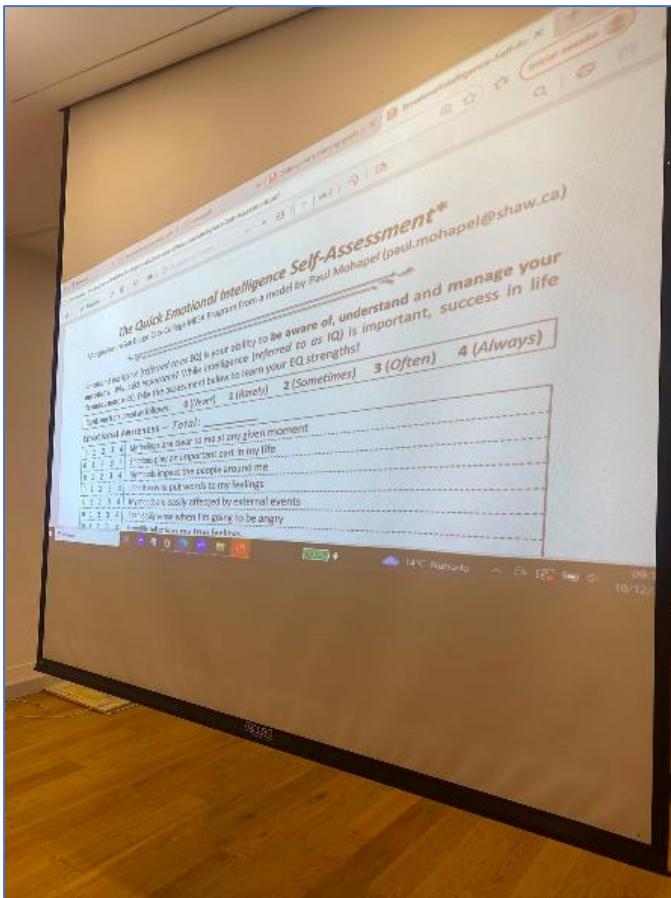
- Involve students in the preparation stage of the activity (Step 1) by encouraging them to decorate the gratitude board in fun and creative ways. They might give their classroom board a name, paint it bright colors, add stickers, or glue images from magazines.
- Educators can adapt the exercise to suit different classrooms. For instance, if the room does not have enough space for a large board, a gratitude jar or box could be used instead. Instead of adding their gratitude notes to a board, students can place their notes in a jar that sits somewhere accessible in the room, and time can be allocated each week to pick these out to share and discuss as a group.
- Educators should be mindful of the influence of materialism in the classroom. Students may focus on material things when considering what they are grateful for and/or may feel envious of the possessions of others. They may also take possessions for granted, finding it difficult to value and appreciate what they do have. These students will likely benefit from hearing from other students' gratitude notes, and educators can provide examples of non-material things to be thankful for, such as a supportive working environment or a love of learning.
- Appendix A includes a blank gratitude note template. Educators can replicate or print copies of this template to hand out to students or use sticky notes if preferred. Note that, when using the template, blu-tac, sticky tape, or some other type of sticking agent will be required to attach the gratitude note to the poster board.
- For older students or students who may be skeptical about gratitude, educators can highlight additional benefits, such as lower blood pressure, stronger immune systems, improved relationships through recognition of others' kindness, and overall happiness. These benefits demonstrate why gratitude is a powerful, positive emotion.

References

Communication remained the core theme on day four. We examined non-verbal cues more closely and realised how much meaning students derive from posture, tone of voice, eye contact and gestures. In small group activities, we practised giving feedback in ways that

motivate rather than discourage. Many participants noted how often feedback, even when well-intended, is perceived as corrective rather than supportive. Developing a language of encouragement can strengthen trust and create a more positive working atmosphere. A major part of the day centred on student engagement. We discussed how emotional intelligence can help teachers spot moments when individual learners need reassurance, challenge or a shift in approach, and how subtle interventions can sustain motivation.

Day five addressed classroom dynamics more broadly. Conflict, as we acknowledged, is not a sign of failure but a natural part of group life. The question is how we respond. Through case studies and role-play, we trained strategies for de-escalation, for helping students recognise their own emotional triggers, and for enabling groups to regain balance after tensions arise. Understanding the emotions present in a room—both spoken and unspoken—proved to be an essential skill for preventing conflicts from hardening. We also explored how mentorship can empower students, especially those who struggle with social or emotional challenges. Providing emotional support does not mean solving students' problems for them; rather, it means guiding them towards self-reflection and resilience.



On the sixth day, the group consolidated the learning of the week. In collaborative sessions, we worked out how emotional intelligence can be woven into practical classroom management and how small methodological changes can have a strong impact. Presentations allowed us to share insights from our different professional contexts, and the conversations naturally expanded to ideas for future cooperation. The evaluation phase was constructive and reflective; it became clear that participants felt they were leaving not only with new knowledge but with renewed confidence in their own capacity to teach with humanity and intention. The certification ceremony at the end of the day created a warm sense of closure while encouraging us to take the next steps at home.

The final day was dedicated to discovering Funchal together. The social programme helped to deepen the interpersonal

connections that had grown throughout the week. Walking through the city, visiting the coast, and sharing informal conversations added a cultural dimension to the mobility that complemented the professional learning. Intercultural understanding became tangible in these relaxed moments, where everyday life, traditions and perspectives were shared naturally. This experience served as a reminder that education always moves within cultural contexts and that widening one's view enriches professional identity.

Looking back, the mobility offered a coherent and transformative experience. The combination of theoretical grounding, practical techniques and intercultural exchange made the learning both substantial and personal. Emotional intelligence emerged not as an additional task but as a central quality of modern



teaching, essential for managing complexity, fostering well-being and creating learning environments that are both challenging and supportive. The programme strengthened communication skills, enhanced English fluency, and encouraged a more mindful approach to interaction. Just as importantly, it rekindled a sense of purpose. Teaching is relational work, and when we engage with our own emotions and cultivate empathy for others, we are better equipped to guide students in a world that demands resilience, cooperation and humanity.

The week in Funchal reminded me why this profession continues to inspire me. Returning home, I feel encouraged to integrate these insights into my daily practice and to share them with colleagues. Emotional intelligence is not a static competence but an ongoing process, and this mobility has given me new tools, new perspectives and renewed motivation to continue this path.



Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



Kofinanziert von der
Europäischen Union