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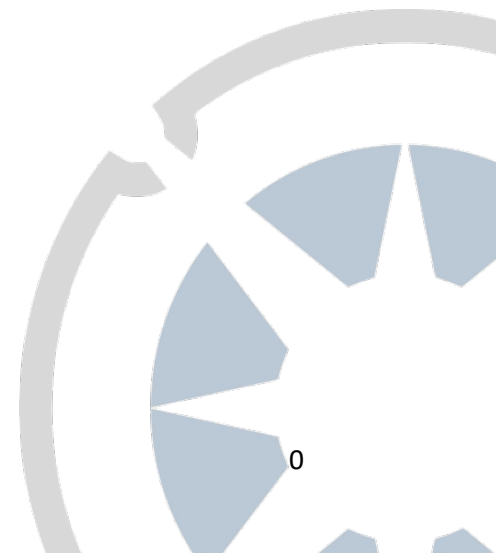
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Teaching resilience and personal purpose in an interdisciplinary university classroom

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Introduction

‘Resilience’ has become a buzzword in higher education in the face of concerns about rising mental health problems and a vulnerability amongst students. According to the *University Student Mental Health Survey* (2020), one-quarter of university students in the UK (26.6%) has been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and nearly half (42.3%) experienced a serious psychological issue requiring professional help (Pereira et al., 2020). The prevalence and severity of these challenges have a negative impact on well-being and academic success (Wyatt et al., 2017). In response, over the past decades, universities have implemented resilience programs in order to help students to cope with adversity. These programs, such as the Penn PERMA-workshops, have been influenced by positive psychology (Seligman, 2011a, b), and seek to equip individuals with a set of cognitive and practical skills that increase mental well-being.

However, the positive psychology framework is not without its critics. At universities, an emphasis on resilience may feed into a performance-culture by emphasizing the responsibility of the individual to overcome adversities through self-reliance (Omata, 2023) and downplaying the structural and systemic elements that undermine resilience (Brown, 2016; Illouz, 2020). Furthermore, the dominant conceptualization of resilience as ‘toughness’ (Duckworth, 2016; Tough, 2014), as opposed to vulnerability, leaves too little room for the complexities of life and personal growth (Métais et al., 2022). Finally, the positive psychology framework has been critiqued for lacking a strong ethical core (Kristjánsson, 2013; Cohen de Lara and Leesen, forthcoming 2025).

At Amsterdam University College (AUC), we share the concerns about students' mental health. In developing the course "Health, Resilience, and Human Flourishing," instead of working indiscriminately within the positive psychology approach, we used interdisciplinarity as a way to nuance and problematize the concept of resilience. The course was launched in January 2024 and lasts for four weeks with four three-hour seminars each week. The course is offered at the 100-level to students across majors [Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities] in their first, second, or third year towards their liberal arts and sciences bachelor degree. The first week is taught by a biomedical professor, who deals with the physiological dynamics of stress and trauma. The second week is taught by a philosopher-biologist on myth, religion, storytelling and sense of meaning. The third week, which is taught by a sociologist, is devoted to resilient societies and communities. The fourth and final week, which is taught by a philosopher-political scientist focuses on themes of meaning, personal purpose, and growth.¹

The fourth week involved a close reading of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (2004), and a personal purpose workshop (Banda et al., 2023). The premise of this week is that people who experience a sense of personal purpose and meaning in life tend to do better in times of stress, and have a greater ability to bounce back from trauma (Southwick and Charney, 2018). Therefore, an essential question in the development of the course was how the university classroom may become a place of meaning for students. More specifically, are certain texts conducive to reflection about resilience, meaning, personal purpose, and growth; how can students connect these texts to their personal lives; and how can teachers, without becoming their personal therapists, help students reflect constructively about the meaning of their own lives?

The current paper presents the first qualitative findings. The study employs the methodology of thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze, and report patterns of meaning within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is comprised of the students' final reflection papers. The preliminary findings indicate four factors contributing to students' experiencing the course as a place of meaning, namely: (1) the personal purpose workshops; (2) storytelling in texts; (3) the role of teachers in

¹ See appendix 1 for the course manual.

sharing personal stories; (4) the experience of a sense of friendship and community. In addition, the preliminary findings show the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of resilience as not merely a psychological-scientific concept but a multifarious concept with an ethical core, thus contributing to virtue literacy (Brant et al., 2022).

This paper will first provide a brief description of Amsterdam University College, and elaborate on the choice of teaching material for the fourth week. It will then discuss Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (2004), and provide an overview of the selected exercises from Banda et al., (2023). Subsequently, the paper briefly discusses the research methodology of 'thematic analysis', whereupon it provides the analysis itself. The paper concludes with summarizing and contextualizing the main findings.

Amsterdam University College

Amsterdam University College (AUC) is the honors college of both the University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam, which are two large, public research universities in the Netherlands. AUC offers a three-year international bachelor program in the liberal arts and sciences. It has 900 students, who are admitted through a selection process. At AUC, academic mentors and Student Life Officers (SLO) are the first point of contact for students experiencing mental health issues. The SLO's provide workshop sessions that impart coping skills, and may refer students to other health professionals. In addition to these services, AUC decided to offer a regular academic course on 'Health, Resilience, and Human Flourishing' (HRHF). This is not a resiliency program but a regular academic course that earns study credits. The course manual has a disclaimer that the course does not involve counseling, that the teachers are not trained as personal therapists, and that students are encouraged to meet with their academic mentor or the Student Life Officer if personal issues should arise. It follows the observation made by Walsh et al. (2020) that "there is a variety of learning methods and content areas in teaching resilience" (p.8), and that institutions offering an eclectic model with evidence-based pedagogical approaches, such as reflective practices and peer support, may work best.

Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*

Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning* was selected for week 4 of the course because it outlines how his theories helped him to survive his Holocaust experience. Frankl is referenced in the textbook for the course, Southwick and Charney (2018), as "the best-known and most influential advocate for finding meaning" (p. 251). Several studies indicate the usefulness of storytelling for developing resilience and well-being (Pettersson, 2017; McAllister and McKinnon, 2009; Meyer et al., 2009), and, in part, I selected Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* because it includes Frankl's personal experience of the concentration camps. Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was a neurologist and psychiatrist from a Jewish family living in Vienna, Austria. At the outbreak of World War II, Frankl and his family were deported to various concentration camps. Frankl survived and returned to Vienna after the War. His book *Man's Search for Meaning* was published in 1945.

In the first part of the book Frankl describes the horrific life of prisoners in a concentration camp. In a vivid scene, he recounts how he decided not to wake up a fellow prisoner who was having a horrible nightmare, because the dream, "no matter how horrible, could not be as bad as the reality of the camp which surrounded us" (p. 41). He adds that he made a firm promise to himself that he would not commit suicide, as many others would do.

Frankl describes the process that he observed in the mental life of his fellow prisoners: their emotional blunting, their mental agony over the injustice of the system, and the subsequent apathy that served as a defense mechanism. Most prisoners regressed to the primitive survival mode. He observes that, even in such desperate circumstances, people may still find meaning in their inner resources. He describes the consolation offered by secretly kept photographs of beloved persons, by humor, by songs and poems, and by glimpses of the beauty of nature. These sources of comfort are present in the inner self. Also, as Frankl notes, those "who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain ... but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom" (p. 47). Love and beauty find their meaning in the inner self, and the "intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence ... As the inner life of the prisoner tended to become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before" (p. 50). When he was working in a trench, Frankl felt that, in the midst of this

desolation, his soul was pierced by something that transcended the hopeless, meaningless world, and he experienced a victorious ‘yes’ in answer to his question whether there is an ultimate purpose in life. “At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse ... [and] a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me” (p. 51).

Frankl asserts that, especially in difficult circumstances, it is necessary to guard, protect, and nourish one’s inner resources. One important way to care for the inner self is by maintaining one’s commitment to one’s personal values. For Frankl, an important personal value was companionship. His commitment to this value became existential when a prison officer, who took a liking to him, offered to take his name off a list for transportation, possibly to the gas chambers. Frankl refused this offer, saying that “this was not my way; that I had learned to let fate take its course ... I might as well stay with my friends” (2004, p. 65). Together with his fellow prisoners, he was transported to what turned out to be another camp and eventually he survived. Companionship was an essential value in another incident, when a fellow prisoner asked him to join in an escape attempt. Frankl decided to stay with his patients, and recounts: “As soon as I had told him [the fellow prisoner] with finality that I had made up my mind to stay with my patients, the unhappy feeling left me. I did not know what the following days would bring, but I had gained an inward peace that I had never experienced before” (p. 68).

These inner resources, Frankl writes, are “anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life” (p. 72). He continues: “Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress” (p. 74). This freedom – the ability to choose one’s own values and maintain one’s own dignity – cannot be taken from man. For Frankl, one’s choices constitute the way towards survival. The way that one *chooses* to bear suffering is a genuine inner achievement, and this inner achievement makes life meaningful and purposeful:

“The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity – even under the most difficult circumstances – to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal” (Frankl, 2004, p. 76).

Even in the severely constricting circumstances of the camps, what remains is “the last of human freedoms,” the ability to “choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances ... [and to choose an attitude] worthy of their suffering” (p. 76).

Protecting and nourishing one’s inner resources, and guarding one’s personal values and commitment are essential for resilience. Frankl also argues that the discovery of a sense of personal purpose makes people stronger. He quotes Nietzsche’s axiom: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*” (p. 84). The existential question to ask is not what we expect from life, but rather what life expects of us. Man’s meaning, according to Frankl, differs for each person, and from moment to moment. At any moment, one can ask oneself what concrete response the situation calls for. This is the way to “restore a man’s inner strength” (p. 84): it is the realization that life still expects something from one. For Frankl in the camps, this meant clinging to the image of his wife (who unbeknownst to him had already died), and mentally reconstructing his theory on logotherapy, having lost his manuscript in the disinfection chamber at Auschwitz, and scribbling key words on tiny scraps of paper.

In the second part of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl elaborates on discovering one’s sense of personal purpose from the perspective of logotherapy, which literally means ‘healing through meaning.’ Frankl argues that the striving for meaning in life is the “primary motivational force in man” (p. 104), contrasting the will to meaning with the pleasure principle (Freud), and will to power (Adler, Nietzsche). Meaning is unique and specific to each individual. Practically speaking, Frankl recommends that people do not search for some kind of abstract meaning. Rather, “everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment” (p. 113). There is something in *this* world and *someone* whose purpose in life is to do it. Frankl indicates that the search for meaning is self-transcending; there is something outside of the self that needs doing. Indeed, “the cue to cure is self-transcendence” (p. 131).

In Frankl’s theory, the question is not “what is the meaning of my life?” or “what can I expect from life?” but rather “what is life asking of me?” and “what does life expect from me?” The answer lies in creating or doing something, experiencing something – which is not the same as achieving something – or encountering someone, and in one’s attitude towards unavoidable suffering: “In some

way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning” (p. 117). From this perspective, a proper response to hardship does not focus on remaining optimistic and bouncing back as quickly as possible – even though Frankl advocates a kind of optimism “by which it becomes possible to say ‘yes’ to life in spite of everything” (p. 139). Instead, an adequate response entails trying to find meaning in whatever happens, and this sense of meaning builds the capacity to cope with suffering and hardship.

Developing personal purpose

For the second element of week 4 of the course, we used various exercises from *Discover Your Life's Purpose: A Guide to Reflect on Life's Purpose* (Banda et al., 2023) in order to provide students with a personal experience of reflecting on their sense of purpose. We selected the following four exercises from the Guide: ‘Elaborating the axis of your life’ (1a), ‘Positive group recognition’ (2a), ‘Identifying your values’ (3), and ‘Writing a letter to your future self’ (6a). Banda et al. (2023) argue that meaning in life depends on understanding the **coherence** of one’s life, developing a sense of one’s **significance** or unique contribution to the world, and, based on coherence and significance, gaining a better sense of one’s personal **purpose**.

The first exercise, ‘Elaborating the axis of your life,’ is designed as an opportunity to reflect on the coherence of one’s life and develop a personal narrative. Students were asked to draw the axis of their life ranging from birth to the present and then locate six autobiographical milestones, namely, moments in which they had a significant impact on others. These six milestones are “moments that show the best version of you” (Banda et al., 2023, p. 6). Students are then asked to discuss their life axis with a fellow student.

The second exercise, ‘Positive group recognition,’ was designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on the significance of their lives. The aim of this exercise is to reinforce the experience of value in one’s own life through increased awareness of other people’s perception of one’s positive qualities. In groups of three, students write their names on a blank piece of paper and then hand the piece of paper to the other students who writes down any positive qualities,

achievements, or attitudes they value in the student. When the pieces of paper are returned, the students silently read the comments and, after a brief period of reflection, write down their thoughts.

The third exercise, 'Identifying your values,' was designed to help students identifying values that may function as 'signposts' pointing to one's purpose in life (Damon, 2008). Students are given a set of cards with ninety-two values, devised by Miller et al. (2001). They are asked to assign a level of importance to each value by sorting the cards into five columns ranging from 'not important' to 'most important.' They then select the five to ten 'most important' values, and reflect on how these values relate to a best version of oneself.

The fourth exercise, 'Writing a letter to one's future self,' was designed to help students integrate the outcome of the first three exercises. Student are asked to write a letter to their future selves about their progress towards discovering their personal purpose by the reflection on their life narrative, on the positive feedback they received from others, and on the clarification of their personal values. Students are asked to include concrete actions that will help them to pursue their purpose and that they may have discovered during the exercises, and to add any other message to their future selves.

Research methodology: thematic analysis

Students responded to Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* in various ways. For many students, what impacted them most was the idea of finding meaning in beauty and nature. For example, several students referred to the story about a dying woman in the sick ward who remains cheerful because she sees the beauty of a tree outside her window. Other students commented on the oppressiveness of the detailed description of life in the camps. There were also students who doubted whether everyone can actually find meaning. Life, they argued, may be too complex for some people, and not everyone may feel the need to search for meaning. Some also questioned the focus on human agency: what if a person cannot find meaning under any circumstances? For some people, this may be too much of a burden.

In order to gain a more systematic understanding of how week 4 had impacted students, this paper involves a thematic analysis of the students' reflection essays.² Thematic analysis is a methodology for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 79). The ‘keyness’ of various themes may capture something important in relation to the overall research question such as, in this case, the question how the HRHF-course has impacted students. Thematic analysis has the advantage that it usefully summarizing key features and offer a “thick description” of the data (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 97). In educational sciences, qualitative research methods such as thematic analysis is useful for exploring questions that arise from educational practice and inform that practice in an evidence-based way (Peel, 2020). As researcher, I am particularly curious about the meanings that students interpolate from the course; how does the course impact them on a personal level? In the thematic analysis, I have allowed room for subjective experience of the course, giving space to “personal meaning making and interpretations” (Peel, 2020, p. 4). My approach is realist, in that I seek to report the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants. I am not looking for a latent, ideological, or constructivist level. The study is analyst-driven in the sense that I am specifically keen to report student experiences of meaning in the course, and provide a rich description of what elements in the course provided them with an experience of meaning.

The course ran in January 2024 with 25 students, and will run again in January 2025 with 50 students. In future years, additional responses may allow for an enhanced thematic analysis, which may result in a final thematic map.

Thematic analysis of reflection essays

As part of the course requirements, students were asked to write a final essay on their learning experiences in the course. The essay prompt asked about students' learning experiences: “Look back on your own work and your own learning experiences in the context of the course as a whole. This is an open invitation/encouragement: you may reflect on specific insights that you gained, you may see

² The Research Ethics Committee of Amsterdam University College has approved the research project (reference 2024.02).

connections between the different sections of the course, and/or you may reflect on something that was personally meaningful for you in the course. Try to be both specific (what exact theory, insight(s), connection(s), meaning(s), moment(s), or experience(s) are you addressing) and reflective.” The essay prompt intentionally diverged from the main research question in order to allow for more analysis (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Most essays provide insights into how students have experienced the course, and the purpose sessions in particular. The first insight is the impact that the course has made on their personal lives. Several students reflected on the meaning that these sessions had for them. For example, one student (b) commented “This course is without a doubt the one that so far has made the biggest **impact** in my personal life ... I found myself questioning what I wanted from life and what I could do to reach that purpose”. Another student (e) mentioned “This discussion [in the final week] also allowed me to deeply reflect and confront my purpose which I am very grateful for.” One student (m) confessed that “Even though I still have not identified a life purpose I truly resonate with, I am leaving this class with the confidence that I am on the right track in finding one.” And another student (t) wrote “The course prepared me well to feel brave enough to make the decision to apply for transfer to Yale University.” Student (u) wrote that the course “turned out to be a very unique, interesting and personal learning experience.” And, finally, one student (v) wrote “The fourth week’s classes reminded me of some of my core values and what I comprehend to be my purpose: to find understanding for others and use my knowledge to help.”

Another theme that comes up is of **emotional** engagement and an emphasis on how **storytelling** fosters emotional engagement. One student (i), commented extensively on the impact that Frankl’s book had made, stating that s/he was “moved to tears more than once while reading this text, not by the more horrific anecdotes, but by the moments of tenderness in their midst.” From this student we learn, I think, that a course has the most impact then it engages students not merely at the cognitive-intellectual but at the emotional level. The student (i) provided an elaborate reflection on the final weeks of the course, worth quoting in full:

“I hope they [the personal experiences] serve to illustrate how this course has been very enlightening not only in knowledge but also in the outlook I have developed throughout the past four weeks and hopefully continue to in the future. Such real-life lessons rarely occur in academic courses, and I appreciated that this course was able to foster this in a genuine and natural manner”

Storytelling was appreciated not only in the texts we read but also by means of the personal stories that their **lecturers** shared with them. Student (m) wrote “Storytelling is effective in learning due to its ability to engage, create relevance, and evoke emotions.” The student goes on to cite that it was not the stories we read in the course that impacted her the most, but the personal stories of the four lecturers:

“Despite the in-depth and fascinating course content, realistically I will not remember much of it in 20 years. What I will remember though will probably be Jan [first teacher] opening up about his anxiety, Daan [second teacher] wearing earplugs to fight off the overwhelming feeling he got from being in the academic building, Maxim [third teacher] smiling at us whenever we got an answer right, and Emma [fourth teacher] telling us about her stubborn publisher. Having such resilient characters right in front of my eyes for these four weeks meant to me much more than any formal academic content could have.”

Another student (t) also commented that “The openness of our lecturers in sharing their own stories and vulnerabilities created a space for emotional expression.” This student appreciated personal storytelling, commenting on Frankl that it “was especially his personal story that made it so powerful for me.”

The emotional connection to the course was enhanced by the personal **connection** with between students and with the lecturers. Student (i) wrote about the purpose sessions “I was also particularly touched by the exercise on positive group recognition, consisting of writing down positive aspects we found in each other (Banda et al., 2023). Receiving such kind words from a classmate I did not expect had been so attentive to who I am as a person was an emotional and eye-opening experience.” Commenting on the excursion that we did during the third week in January when we held a session at a rural retreat one hour by bike from Amsterdam, student (i) writes: “Upon arrival, I remember observing my classmates – high achieving honors students well past childhood – playing in the snow, connecting and laughing together. This made me reflect on how the foundations of resilience can be present even in the mundane; how the ability to play and laugh regardless of age or circumstance could possibly translate to doing so when faced with adversity.” The personal

connection was also experienced with the lecturers. Student (t) wrote “I still remember the very first session when we were introduced to all our lecturers. It was also the first time I had received a personal handshake from any of my teachers at AUC, which made me feel so much welcome in this very new course.”

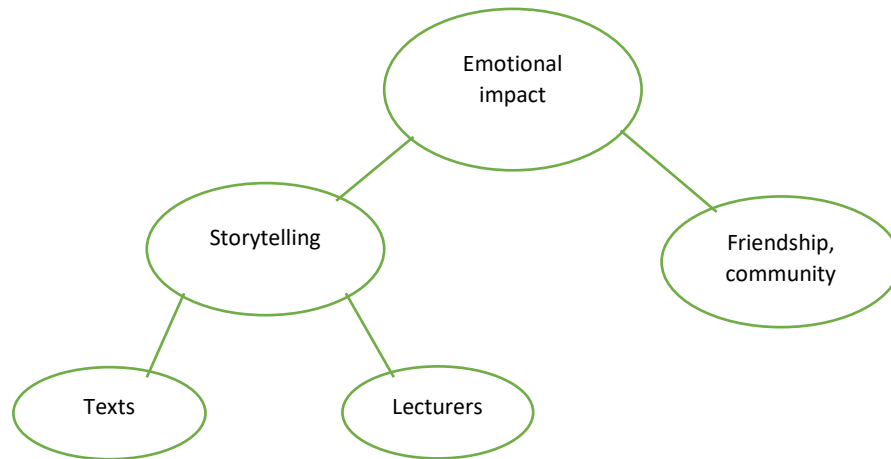


Figure 1: Thematic map showing four main themes connected to emotional impact

Several students commented that the concept of resilience was no longer straightforward at the end of the course. Student (e), who was particularly taken by the critique of ‘resilience’ as part of neoliberal discourse, wrote “When I entered this course, I believed that resilience was straightforward and widely applicable. Now I am aware of its **nuanced** and problematic reality.” One student (m) wrote about how their “understanding of resilience and well-being got deeply nuanced.” Another student (p) commented that the course has led to the belief that resilience “is a concept lacking a precise definition and deeply influenced by circumstance.” Going beyond nuance, one student who was also taken by the cooptation of ‘resilience’ by neoliberal discourse, wrote about their “incremental hostility towards the concept of resilience,” which however, changed when reaching an epiphany in the final week of the course that “reignited my faith in resilience’s usefulness.” And yet another student (r) expressed “a transformation from contentment to discontentment ... calling for a reconsideration of its [resilience’s] applicability in capturing the nuanced aspects of resilience globally.” Finally, one student wrote “It has become clear to me that resilience is not a flawless concept and should not be generalized as a virtue or ultimate goal for everyone.”

One theme running through the essays was that resilience was found to have a **moral** core. One student (a) wrote that while “resilience does not inherently ensure moral goodness ... the climb out of the depths of despair requires ethical considerations.” Another student (c) wrote: “Faith, flexibility, courage, and perseverance are all aspects of resilience that have allowed us as a species to overcome obstacles and advance to horizons previously rendered unimaginable.”

And, finally, several students commented on how the interdisciplinary course provided a more **holistic** understanding of resilience (students i, j, m, o, s and u) or a holistic understanding of human flourishing (students a and h).

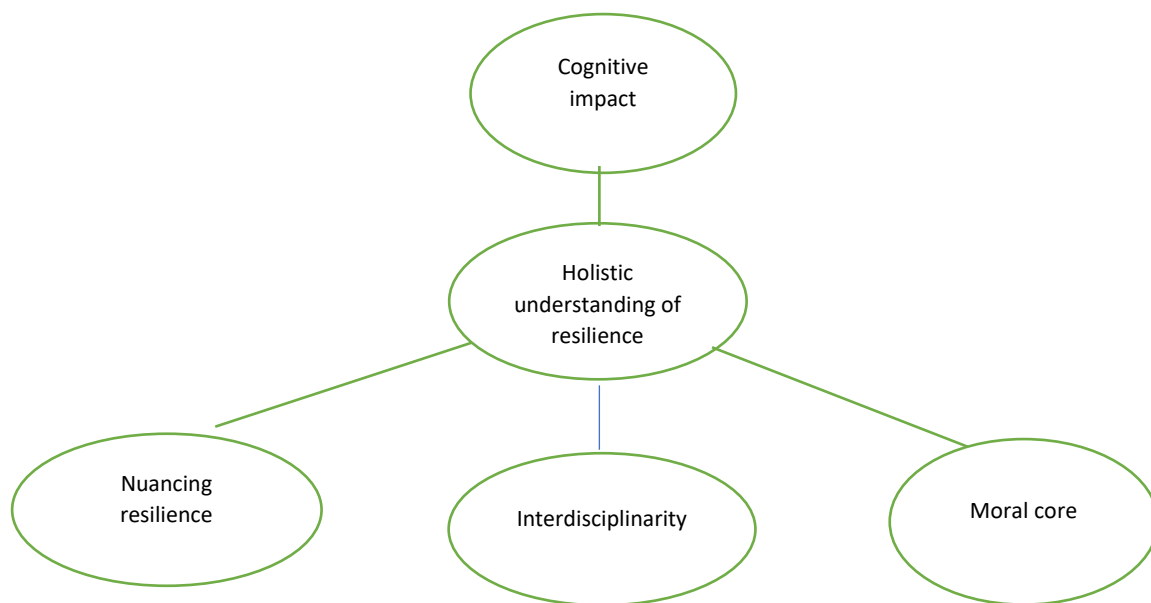


Figure 2: Thematic map showing three main themes connected to cognitive impact

Conclusion

This paper has elaborated on a section of the course Health, Resilience, and Human Flourishing (HRHF), taught at Amsterdam University College. The course has been developed in response to a significant challenge in higher education, namely, the rising number of mental health problems amongst students. HRHF has been designed as an interdisciplinary course that aims to provide students with a nuanced understanding of the concept of resilience. In addition, during the fourth week of the course, the students are given the opportunity to experience how the reflection on meaning and personal purpose may help them develop resilience.

The first qualitative findings indicate that week 4 of the course impacted students on an emotional and a cognitive level. The course impacted them on an emotional level by means of the experience of friendship and community in the classroom, and storytelling, that is: the story of Viktor Frankl's experiences in the concentration camps, the personal anecdotes told by the teachers about how they handled negative experiences, and the other stories offered in the course. The course impacted the students on a cognitive level by means of the interdisciplinary, critical, and ethical approaches, which helped them develop a more holistic understanding of resilience.

The take-away of this analysis may be threefold. Firstly, the analysis corroborates with findings that emphasize the importance of relationships in the classroom. McAllister and McKinnon (2009) state that: "Within an educational context, evidence suggests that resilience can be improved through the provision of relevant and practical protective factors, such as an educational setting that is caring and learner-centred, has positive and high expectations and provides a positive learning environment, is placed within a strong, supportive, social community, and offers supportive peer relationships" (p. 374). Secondly, the analysis corroborates with the proposition that storytelling is connected to developing resilience (McAllister and McKinnon, 2009; Meyer et al., 2009), that fictional literature helps students develop a more nuanced understanding of resilience (Nussbaum, 2008; Smith, 2008), and can aid moral development (Carr 2005). Thirdly, the interdisciplinary approach contributed to the student's ability for conceptual and ethical nuance of resilience.

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Appendix 1. Topics, readings, and activities of the HRFH course

Nr.	Topic	Readings	Activities
Week 1			
1	Introduction; Resilience: a biomedical perspective	Southwick & Charney, chs. 1-3	Team taught: teachers provide overview of the course; getting to know each other Interactive lecture: adverse life events, resiliency traits, stress systems and stress symptoms, panic attacks
2	Resilience: a biomedical perspective	Southwick & Charney, chs. 7-8	Interactive lecture: the stress response and the nervous system, hormones, brain, nutrition; genetics and epigenetics
3	Resilience: a biomedical perspective	Bowers & Yehuda 2020	Interactive lecture: intergenerational effects of stress and trauma; biomarkers of resilience; optimism; facing fear, exposure theory; role-modelling and mirror neurons
4	Practice of resilience; introducing the project assignment	Southwick & Charney, ch. 12	Discussion: definitions of resilience; practicing resilience Students pitch ideas for final project assignment: resilience factors in artworks
Week 2			
5	Moral compass; religion; social support	Southwick & Charney, chs. 4-6 Four myths: Enuma Elish, Oedipus Rex, Adam and Eve, myth in Plato’s Phaedrus	Interactive lecture: left brain-right brain, problem of evil, the need for stories Groups of students present each myth; discussion

6	Flexibility; meaning and purpose	Chapter 9-11 Southwick & Charney	Excursion to Oud Rustenburg [figure 1] Stories of hope: bring your own story of hope
7	Regaining agency in challenging times: insights	The Harvard Human Flourishing Program: https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/about	Guest lecture by Xavier Symons, Harvard Human Flourishing Program: different conceptions of flourishing, five domains of flourishing, pathways to flourishing
8	Resilience and positive psychology	Seligman, Flourish; Seligman, Building Resilience; Hart & Sasso, Mapping the contours	Interactive lecture: optimism, cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, flow Mock exam
Week 3			
9			Exam [open book]
10	Social suffering, failure, and structural violence	Rose, Social suffering; Walker & Peterson, Sociological approach; Carver, Preservation	Interactive lecture: towards a sociology of suffering and resilience; risk perception, social suffering, vulnerability, stigma, inequality
11	Resilience in individuals, communities, institutions	Southwick & Charney, App. 2; Yassen, Durable solutions	Guest lecture Nazar Jamil Abdulazeez, VU University: community resilience, refugee self-reliance, the case of Syrian refugees in Iraq
12	Social technologies of resilience: (un)making resilient citizens in an era of crisis	Illouz, Resilience; Mol, Material philosophy; Carver, A Small Good Thing	Interactive lecture: critical resilience studies, sociological imagination Discussion groups on Carver's short stories: agent and sociological view
Week 4			
13	Resilience and purpose	Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> , pp. 15-100; Banda et al., <i>Guide</i> .	Discussion groups on Frankl's experiences, coping mechanisms, inner life, values, self-transcendence, will to meaning Exercise: 'Elaborating the axis of your life': developing a personal narrative
14	Resilience and purpose	Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> , pp. 103-136; Banda et al., <i>Guide</i> .	Interactive lecture: will to meaning, techniques, tragic optimism, logotherapy and positive psychology Exercise: 'Positive group recognition'; 'Identifying your values'
15	Resilience, purpose, reading and healing	Brooks, 'Struggle', <i>Road to Character</i> , pp. 74-104; McNicol & Brewster, <i>Bibliotherapy</i> , pp. 77-92; Billington, Is Literature Healthy? pp. 1-46; Banda et al., <i>Guide</i> .	Discussion groups on Dorothy Day's experiences, inner life, values, finding a sense of purpose Interactive lecture: introduction to bibliotherapy, reading and healing, aesthetic mode, empathetic response, catharsis, insight and integration Exercise: 'Write a letter to your future self'
16			Final presentation; reflection essay due

Appendix 2. Students and teachers at Oud Rustenburg

