

# CHANGING MINDS, FEELINGS AND STORIES AROUND 'BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN'

Preventing exclusion and building  
capacity in schools and services  
through mentoring and support:

*Reflections from Greece and elsewhere*

Richard Mills and Katerina Laskaridou



Synergy

AT-Autism



AIKATERINI  
LASKARIDIS  
FOUNDATION

# Coming up

- Background and context
- Overview of work in Attica, Greece
- Brief outline of the approach and underlying philosophy
- Conclusions



# Take home points

- *If WE change the way WE think*
- *If WE change the story*
- *If WE change OUR behaviour*
- *WE might change the outcome*





*Jamie*

# Oscar Wilde

*“The best way to make children good is to make them happy.”*





Lorna Wing



*"make that world less frightening"*

# Context

- Why are we still talking about scandals and abuse?





# 'Behaviour management'

## Whose 'behaviour'?

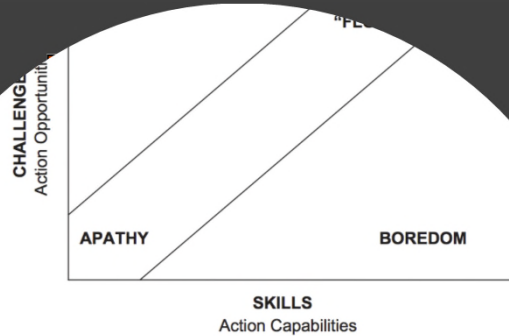
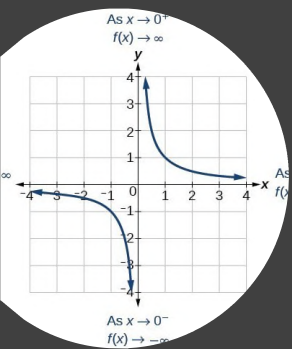
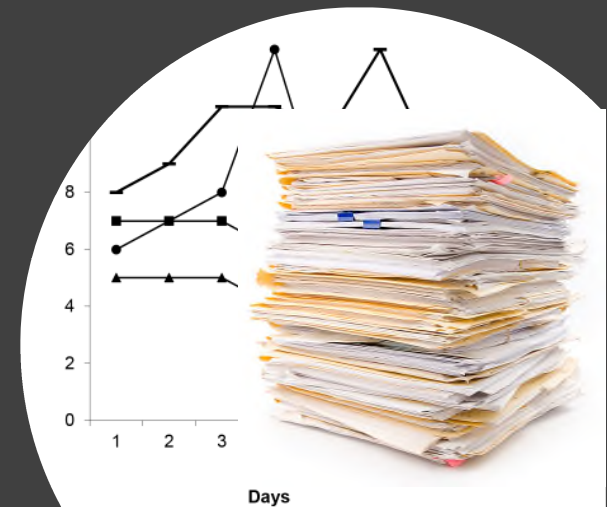


FIGURE 1. Challenge/Skill balance model.



A circular inset showing a table with columns for 'Substance Abuse', 'Delinquency', and 'Teen Programs'. The table has multiple rows with data entries.





*“Staff can be taught to behave appropriately in our training sessions but they do not necessarily behave appropriately when they return to their work settings.*

*In fact it would not be too strong to say that they rarely do so”*

(Cullen 1992)



# *Greece*





# Overview



Initial work began 2012 with  
Aikaterini Laskaridis  
Foundation, Piraeus, Greece  
'Synergy' from 2013





# The Synergy team

Synergy Mentors and  
Teacher Mentors





Attica



## Synergy 2014-2020

- 18 schools
- 7 school districts









# On autism: Commonly held beliefs in Greece

*With thanks to Katerina Laskaridou and Laskaridis Foundation*



**Transform Autism Education** Erasmus Project, found the following attitudes held by professionals regardless if they worked in mainstream schools, special schools or outpatient centers.

Commonly held/expressed beliefs :

“He/she is doing it on purpose.”

“The child is behaving in this way to get their own way.”

“He/she is lazy or spoilt”

“He shouldn’t be in a mainstream school.”

Even more extreme...

“He will end up killing someone”

“He will make me lose my job”

Supported by



Partners



genium



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



# Overview

- Exclusions from Greek schools for 'challenging behaviour'
- Austerity and resources
- 'One day workshop'





# Overview

## Focus

- Teacher -NOT 'child behaviour'
- Teacher behaviour, mindset and skills
- Teacher mentoring and support

# FOCUS

ON THE THINGS YOU  
CAN CHANGE AND  
LET GO OF THE THINGS  
YOU CAN'T.

[LIFEHAPPY.COM](http://LIFEHAPPY.COM)

# Overview

## NOT SPECIFICALLY AUTISM

- Generic - including refugees, intellectual disability, autism, ADHD, 'behavioural problems'
- Sensitive to local culture and resources





# Overview

## Model

- School-based mentors with support from Laskaridis Foundation and AT-Autism network

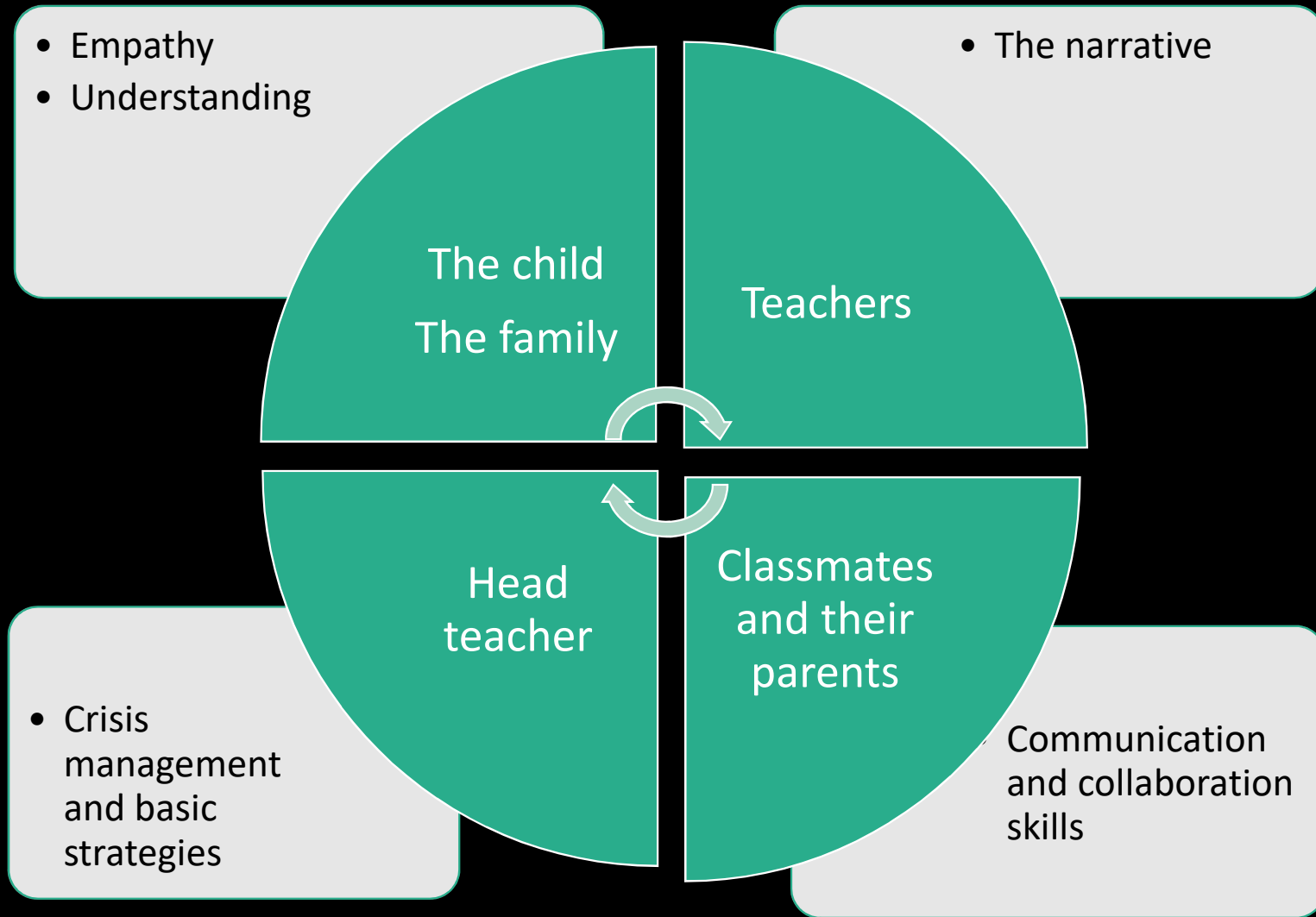


# Overview: Greece

- Schools in Attica
- Now in Peloponnese
- Building local capacity







# Principles and 'tools'



# ETHICS

Synergy

## Psychology

Mindset  
Biases  
Narrative

Kahneman  
Bandura  
Asch  
Zimbardo  
Milgram  
Rogers

## Physiology

Stress  
Arousal

Pfaff  
McDonnell

## Society & Culture

Verstehen

Weber  
Wolfensberger

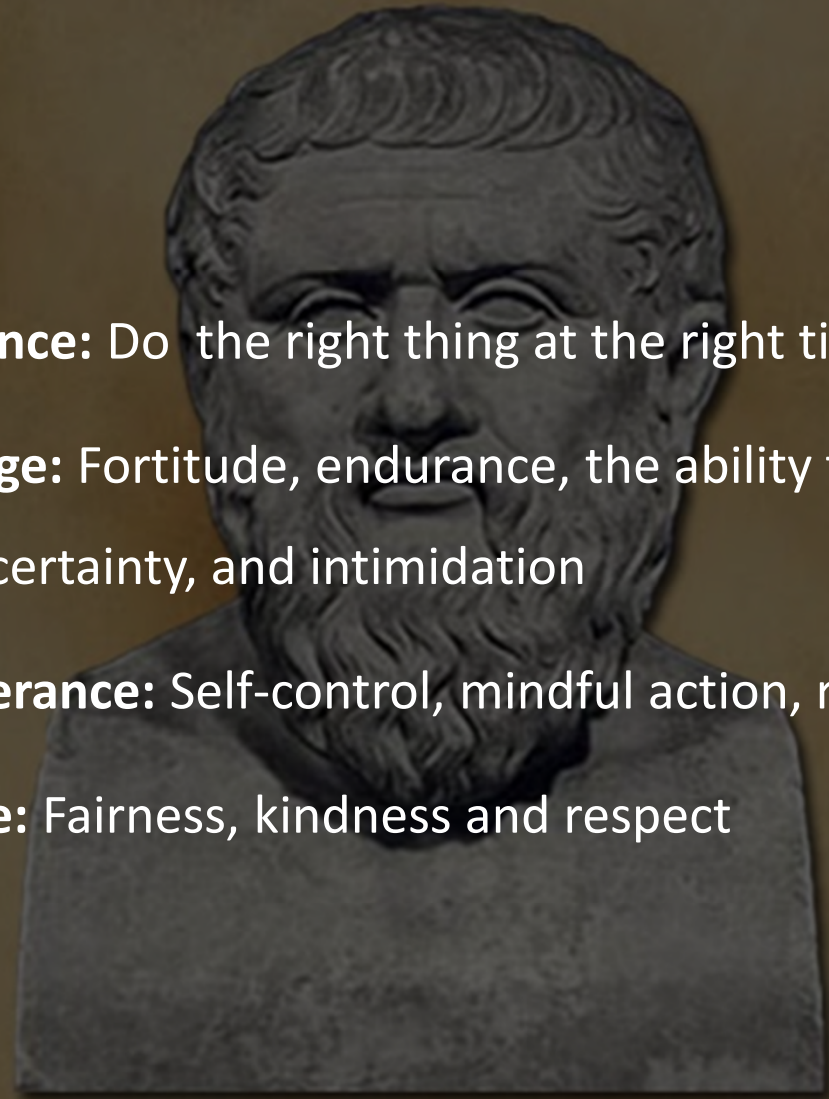
# Character

## 4 cardinal virtues

Plato  
427 - 347 BCE

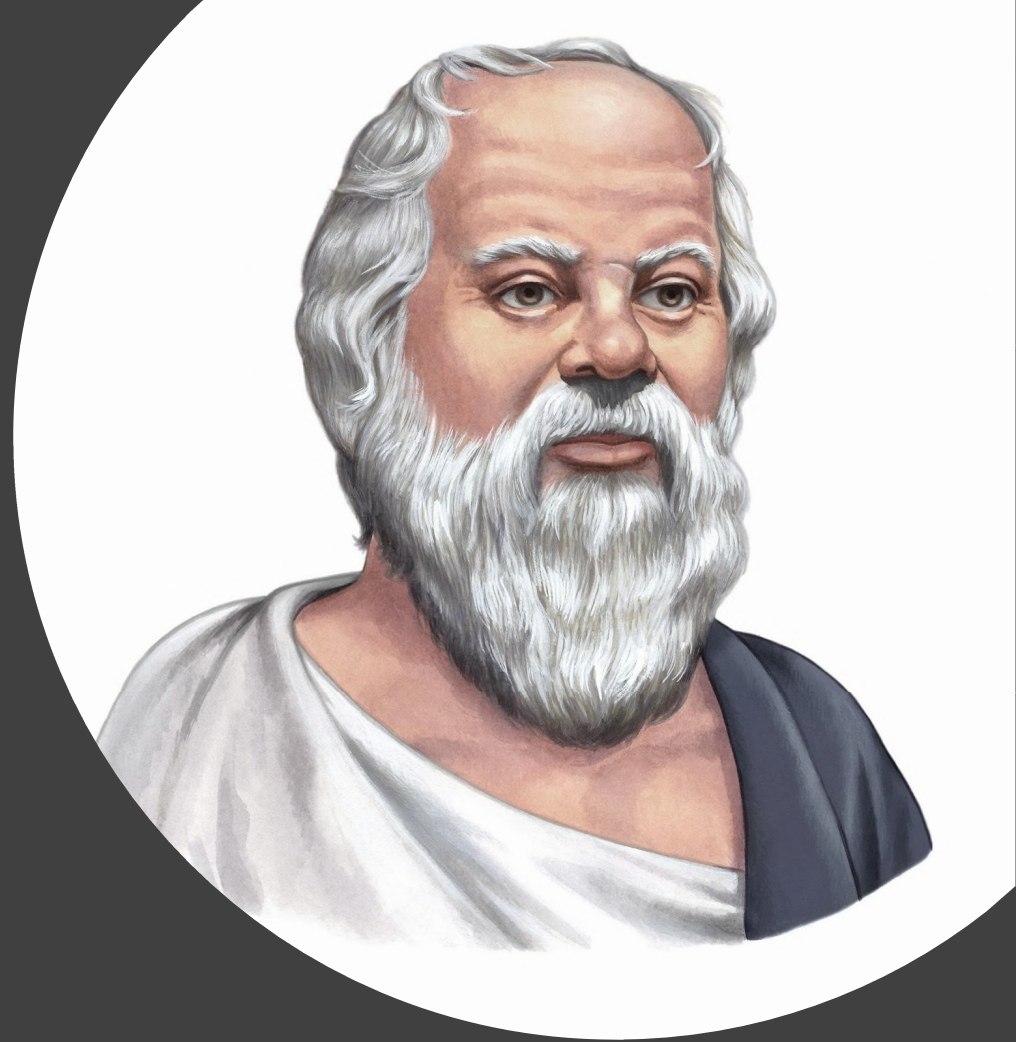
(derived from Plato)

1. **Prudence:** Do the right thing at the right time
2. **Courage:** Fortitude, endurance, the ability to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation
3. **Temperance:** Self-control, mindful action, reflection
4. **Justice:** Fairness, kindness and respect

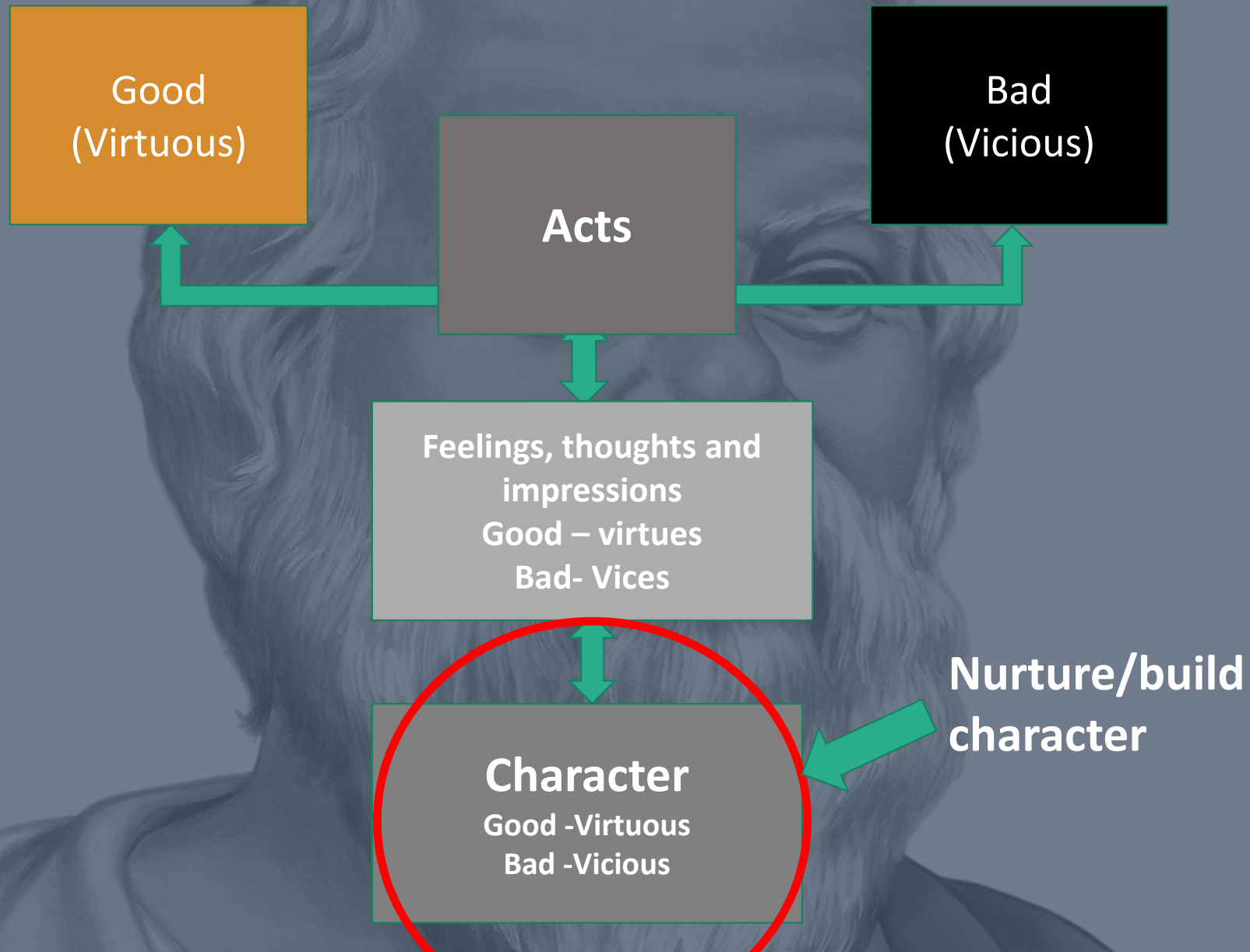


## The Socratic tradition

1. Humans can know themselves.
2. Humans can change themselves.
3. Humans can consciously create new  
habits of thinking, feeling and acting









Nurture character and good 'habits'

- Self-control and self-awareness
- Recognise and control emotions-avoid anger
- Be calm
- Be kind and generous
- Speak well of others





# What can we control?



## Within our control

- Our beliefs
- Our behaviour
- Our character- kindness and what we do for others

## Not within our control

- Everything else



# 'Examine our impressions'

*Mindsets, biases and behaviour*

*"people are not disturbed by things but rather by their view of things."*

Albert Ellis 1913-2007

*"Men are disturbed not by things, but by their opinions about them"*

Epictetus 55 – 135 AD



## Gaining control of our actions, beliefs and behavior

- Self-awareness and self-control
- Reflect on our thoughts and actions
- Aim to do the 'right' thing



“I realized that in the end, the only thing I can control is myself, and perhaps that is the biggest change.”

Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor, Laskaridis Foundation



..... cultivate 'character'

.....have a plan

..... self-control

.....self-awareness

.....reflect

.....mentor





Kahneman:



# Two brain systems the emotional brain v the thinking

System 1

**FAST**

Emotional

Impulsive

Unconscious

Automatic



System 2

**SLOW**

Rational

Reflective

Conscious

Considered



# Kahneman

## System 1:

the 'emotional brain'

- Fight/flight - high stress -reactive
- Impulsive - biased
  - 'gut feelings'
- catastrophising



## System 2:

the 'thinking brain'

- Planning- thoughtful, reflective, considered
- Logical

# System 1

- We need it - Useful
- Easy
- Instinctive

BUT

Error prone

- Panic
- Impulsivity
- Anger



# System 1

## - Biases

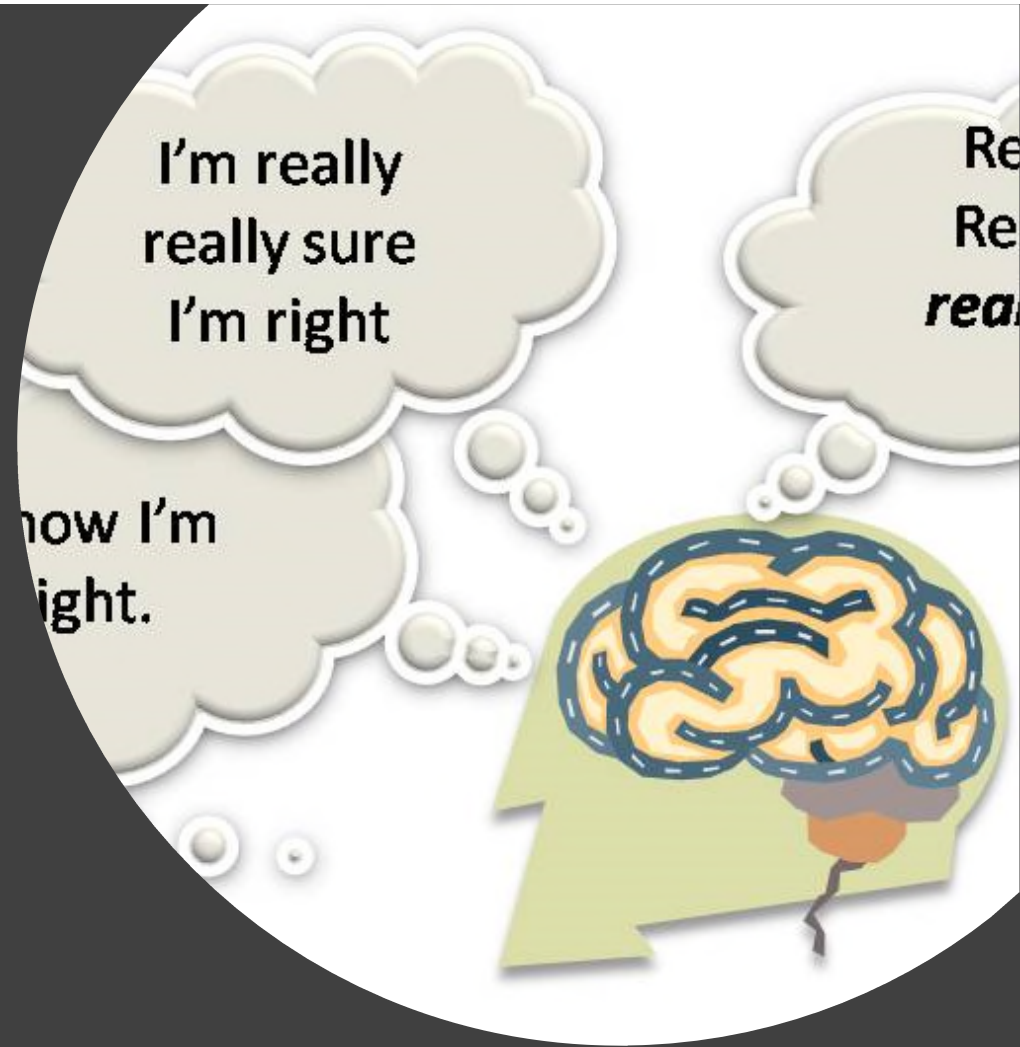
Perception

Narrative (story)

Beliefs and feelings



Reputation  
Forecasting  
Risk  
Stigma





# System 2

- Self-aware - In control -calm

But

- Can take time and effort - skills might be difficult
- Rehearsal and support important















Chagall



# System 1 System 2

System 1	System 2
 Fast	 Slow
 Unconscious	 Conscious
 Automatic	 Effortful
 Everyday Decisions	 Complex Decisions
 Error prone	 Reliable

# Switching from System 1 to system 2



## Understanding self : examining your impressions

- Stress
- Being aware of which 'system' you are in (1 or 2)
- Making a plan
- Being in control of yourself



**“If the oxygen mask drops put on your own mask before helping others”**

**In a crisis**

- **Gain control of OUR emotions**
- **Reduce OUR stress**
- **Have a PLAN**

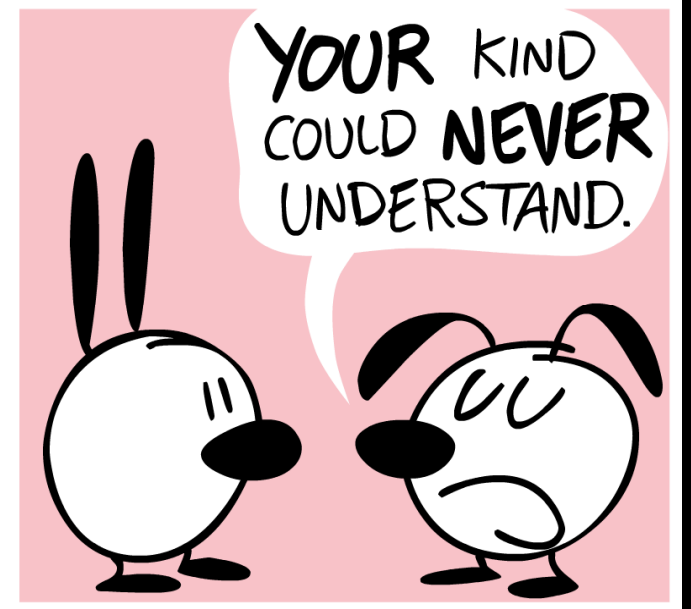




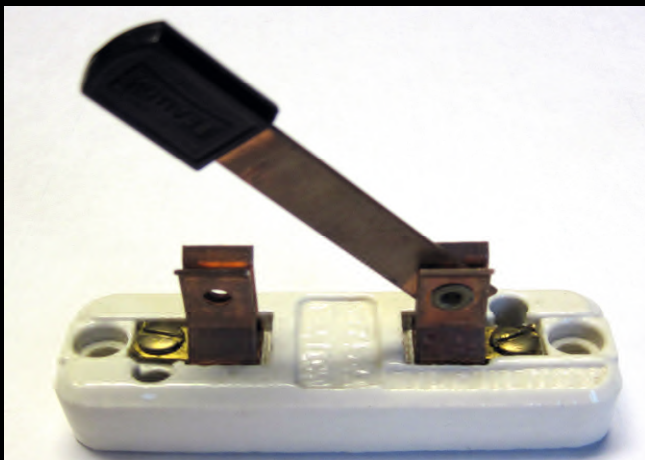
The role  
of the mentor

Changing narratives

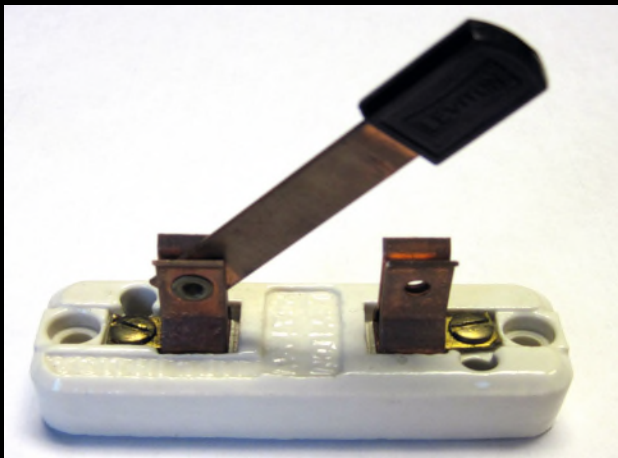




System 1 descriptions	
Complex	
Aggressive	
Unpredictable	



System 1 descriptions	System 2 descriptions
Complex	Human : Interesting: I don't understand
Aggressive	Scared: Unhappy: Frustrated: I don't understand
Unpredictable	Human: I don't understand



# Deep understanding



## ‘Verstehen’

- ‘Deep understanding’ of the experience of the other
- Reject superficiality- ‘see around the corner’

Weber

## Therapeutic relationship

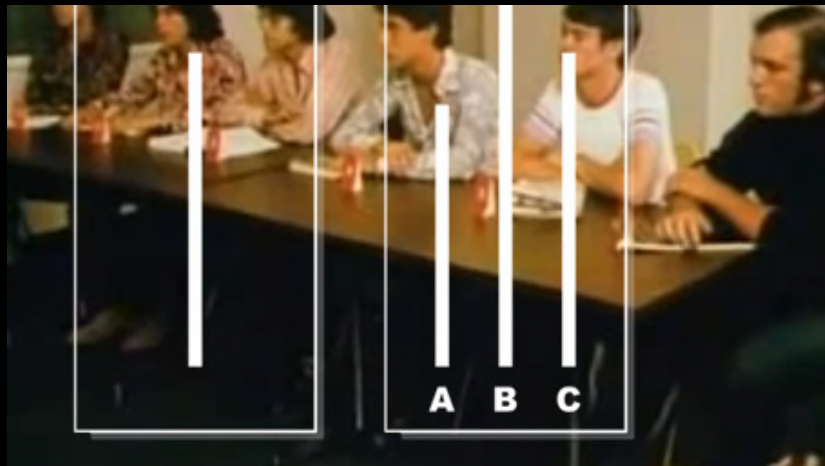
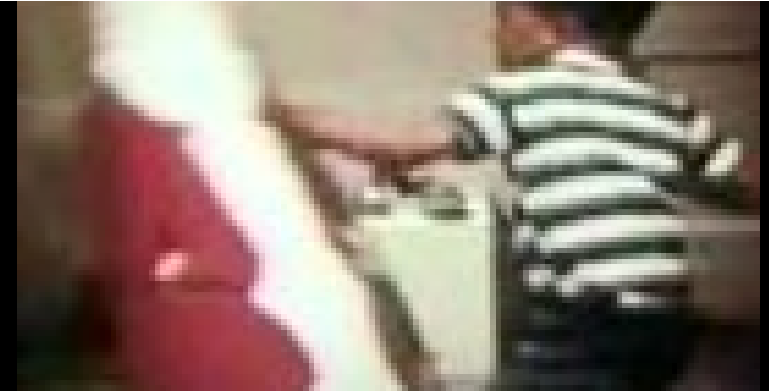
- Empowering -not controlling
- Present
- Active listening

Rogers





# Learning theory



Understanding of:

- Importance of role models
- Individual v group behaviour- agency, compliance, conformity, coercion and obedience

Bandura; Zimbardo; Asch; Milgram

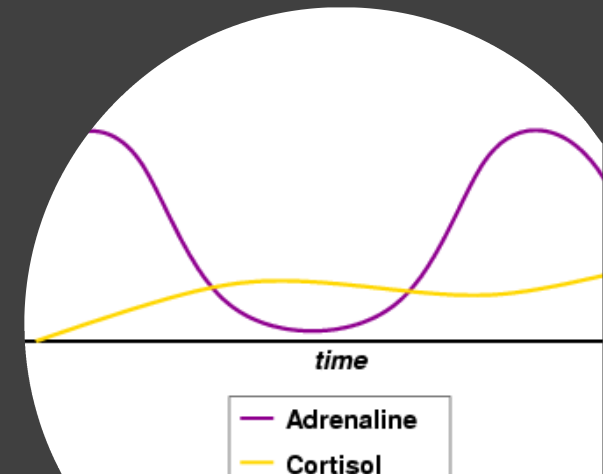
# Stress

## Physiology

- Cortisol and stress response
- Arousal
- Behaviour

Pfaff et al

McDonnell et al



Fidelity and Implementation



*“It all lies in the hands of the teachers. It doesn’t matter what other interventions the child may follow outside school. If the teacher doesn’t ‘push the right buttons’, inclusion is bound to fail.”*

# Implementation

Elena Giouroukou, Synergy Mentor

# Making a plan

System 1 to system 2

- Reducing stress through **planning AND rehearsal**
- Preparation ,reflection and understanding (examine impressions) - self and others- see around the corner (Verstehen)







## Plan for Zofia

- I am relaxed and calm
- I am well-prepared
- I am positive about Kostas
- The setting is ready (audit and check)
- Plan A is in place
- Activities for Kostas are clearly defined
- Materials needed are available
- Team is briefed, relaxed and calm
- The team is positive about Kostas
- Plan B is in place
- I am ready to greet Kostas
- I will check how Kostas is feeling
- I will check Kostas knows what will happen and when



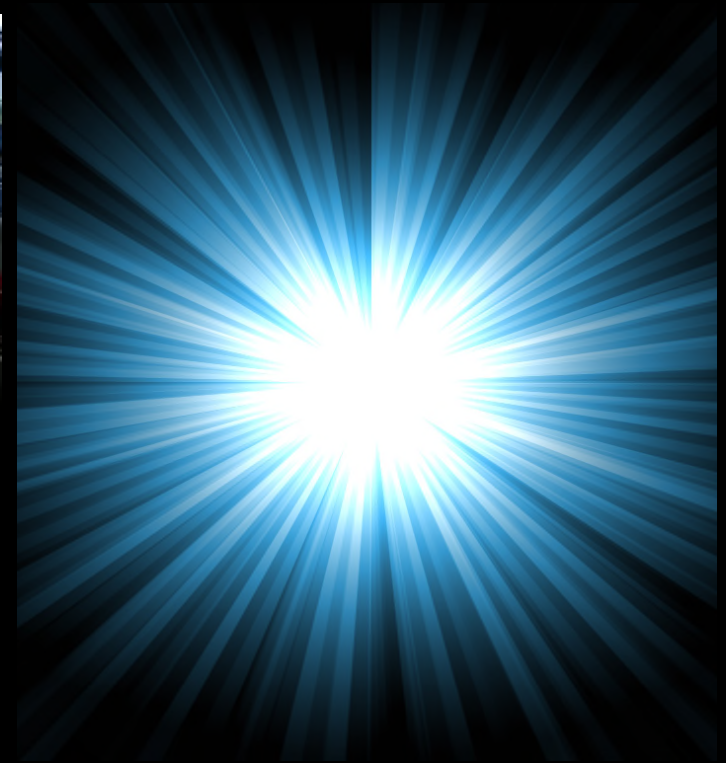
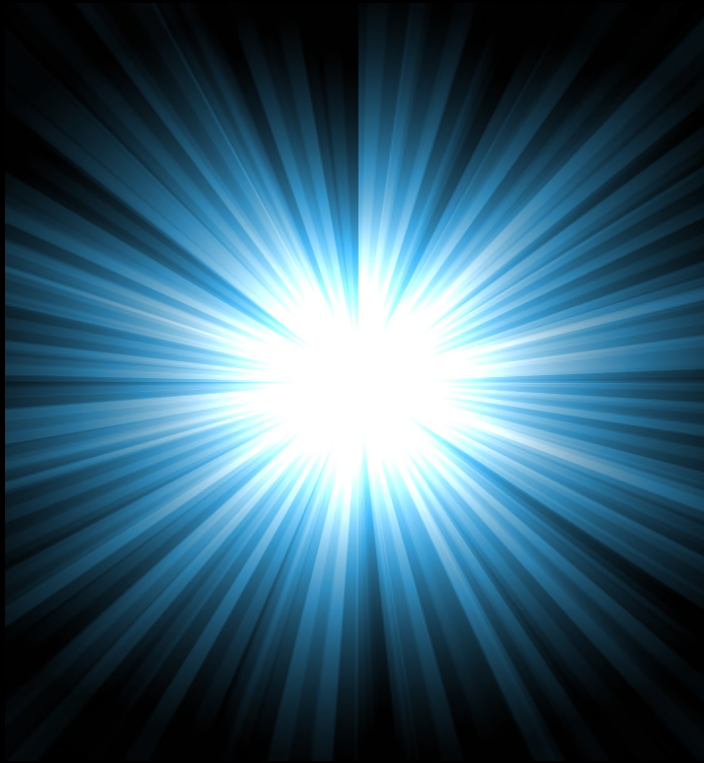
AIKATERINI  
LASKARIDIS  
FOUNDATION

With thanks to Katerina Laskaridou

# Implementation

- Teacher -Challenging and changing beliefs & mindsets ('reframing')
- Teacher self-awareness - 'verstehen'
- Narrative
- Reducing stress (through self-control - planning/rehearsal)
- Mentor support





Making the switch

Examine impressions

“I realized that in the end, the only thing I can control is myself, and perhaps that is the biggest change.”

Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor

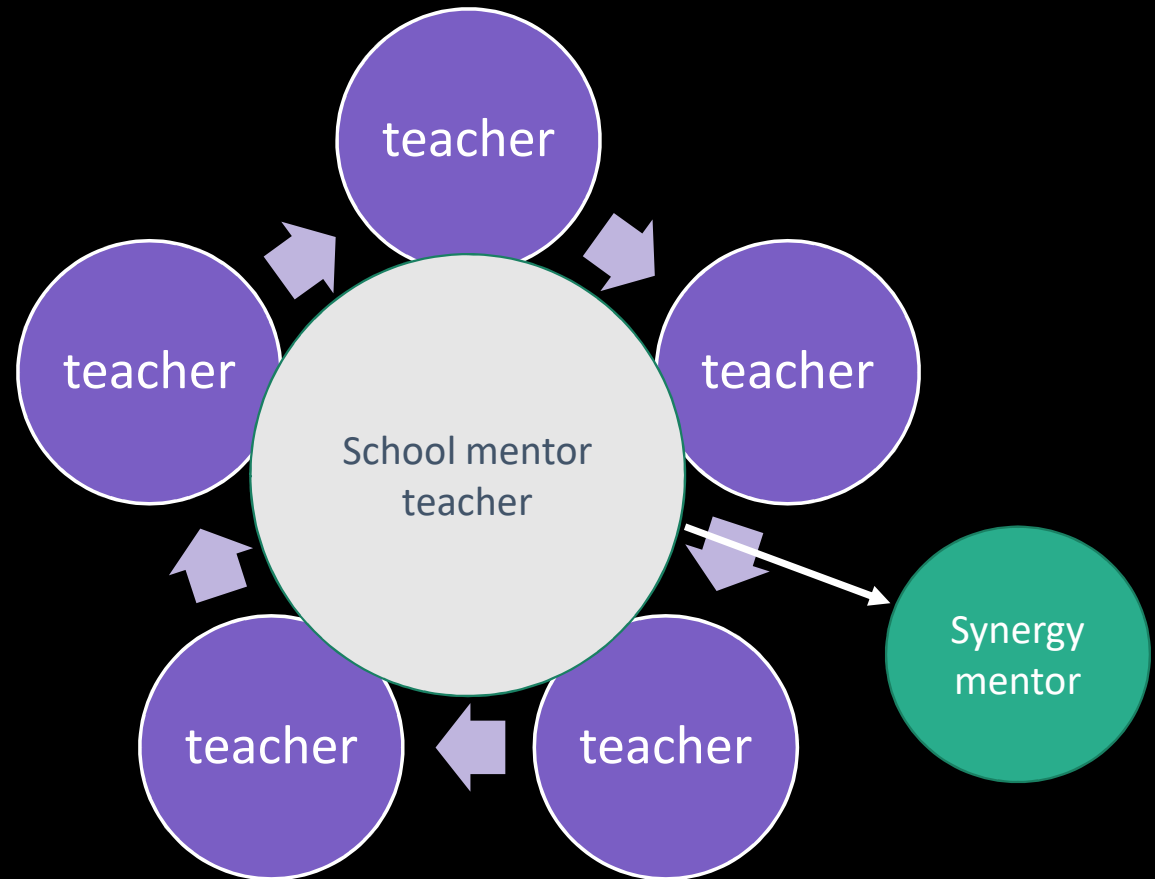


Ongoing valuation by The University of Athens  
and the University of the Peloponnese



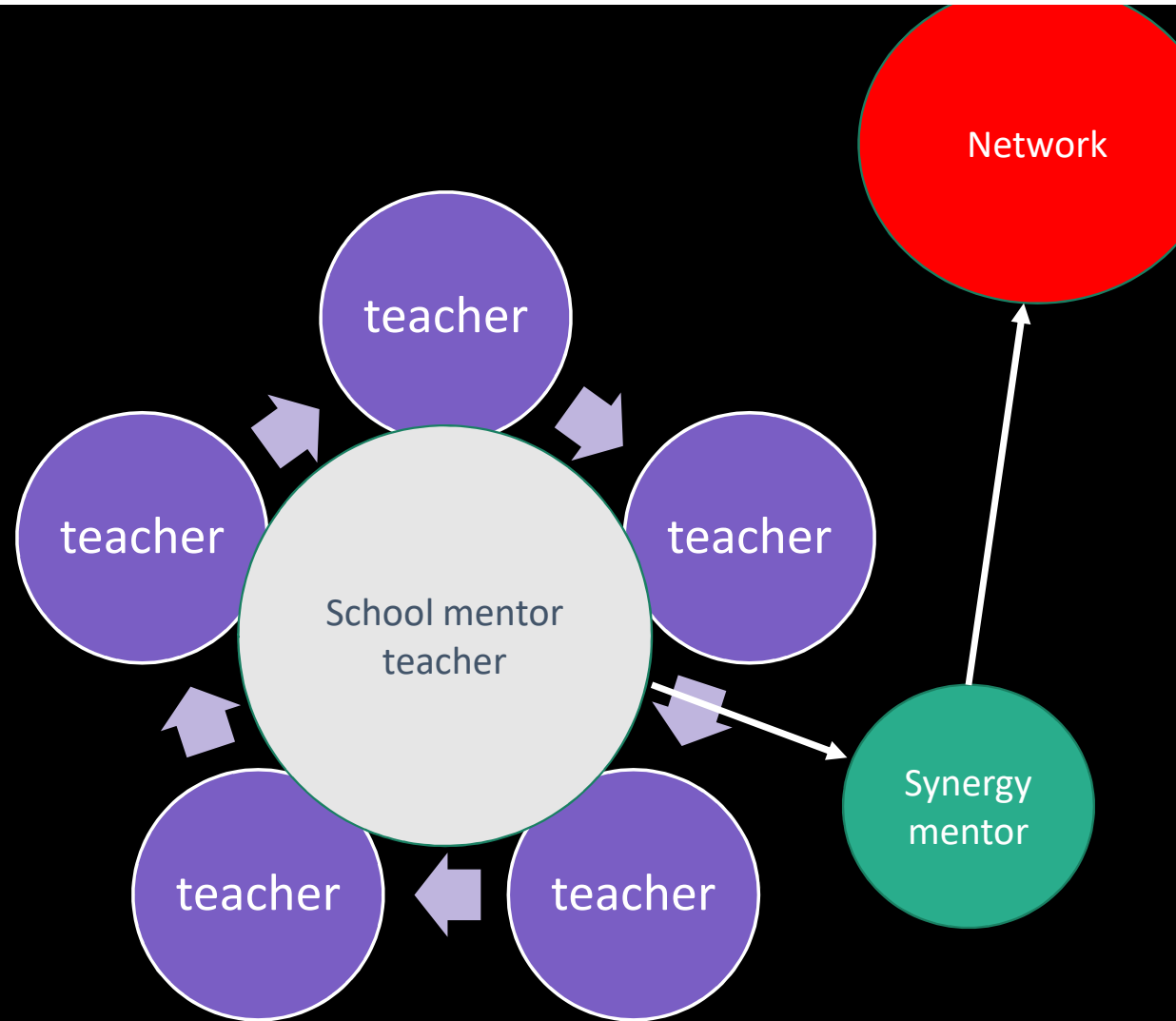
## Model : Attica

- One day practice workshop
- One day mentor workshop
- Annual 'get together' in Piraeus



## Model : Attica

- Teachers supported by local (school based) mentor
- School-based mentors supported by Synergy mentor
- Synergy mentors supported by AT-Autism network



# Attica

- Attica schools
- 18 in evaluation programme:  
all age
- To date no child excluded  
from a participating school





# Attica

*'There is greater activation in our strategic thought processes. We now rely more on planning and less on spontaneous and impulsive action. Through Synergy we have gained a deep understanding of the "other" and the "self", and how we can empower others (teachers) through showing respect and cultivating abilities and skill sets.'*

Tzonaka Josephina, Synergy Mentor



# Attica

*“Through Synergy we have gained a deep understanding of our selves and others. We learned how to empower others through showing respect and cultivating abilities and skill sets. Eventually we saw how this led to a change in school culture”*

Zozefina Tzonaka, synergy mentor

- *The program has definitely changed the way i think about ‘behaviour’. The last three years I had the opportunity to observe children's behavior within the school context. Talking with teachers helped me see things from a different perspective and to better understand behaviors of concern. As a result , I was able to help teachers and Headteachers share that understanding. This had an impact on how I also felt: As I started to truly understand human behavior, I felt less stressed and more capable of handling difficult situations and so did the teachers I worked with.’*
- Sofianopoulou Katerina- Synergy Mentor

# Attica

*“Before Synergy, I struggled when dealing with students with autism ,but now I feel calm and confident. The training gave me guide for me to follow.”*

Hara Nitsaki, Teacher Mentor

*Teachers often told me that now that they know that the child doesn't misbehave on purpose, they feel less stressed.”*

Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor

# Attica

*“There is greater activation in our strategic thought processes. We now rely more on planning and less on spontaneous and impulsive action.”*

*Tzonaka Josephina, Synergy Mentor*

*We can now see the difficulties and challenges with an emotional distance and not in an amplified by our daily stress.’*

*Tina Daltou, teacher mentor*



# Attica

*"I realized that in the end, the only thing I can control is myself, and perhaps that is the biggest change."*

Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor

*Interactions –no matter if you are talking about the child and the teacher , or the Headteacher towards the teachers- there is a common denominator. If the tension is high you can't communicate the message if you don't de-escalate first. You need to find ways to lower arousal so that you can begin to work towards a solution.*

Kaiti Sereti-Synergy Mentor

# Attica

*“ Sometimes, what made all the difference was being a good listener.”*

*Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor*

*“You listen very carefully –and you record- you make sure you have all the information correctly. You don’t have your own thoughts, draw your own conclusions. You let go of all previous assumptions, anything you thought was true and you just listen. Don’t rush to offer answers, or advice. Only encourage, guide and ask the right questions. Most of the times the teachers themselves will come up with the solution themselves.”*

Kaiti Sereti, Synergy Mentor

# Attica

*"I was working with one of my teacher mentors trying to get her to work as a team with the rest of the teachers in the school. She was complaining that one teacher was very hesitant to join the group, but she soon realized this was a reflection of her own hesitation to include the specific teacher who she felt uncomfortable with. "*

Kaiti Sereti, Synergy Mentor

*"One of the teachers was particularly lively and raised her voice a lot . The same teacher once told me she was frustrated because her class was particularly lively and loud. I somehow mirrored back to her that this was a reflection of her own behaviour, which made sense to her. So every time she would adjust her own behaviour and tone of voice and the class would follow her lead."*

Athina Sourbi, Synergy Mentor

## Attica

*“It all lies in the hands of the teachers. It doesn’t matter what other interventions the child may follow outside school. If the teacher doesn’t “push the right buttons”, inclusion is bound to fail.”*

Elena Giouroukou, Synergy Mentor

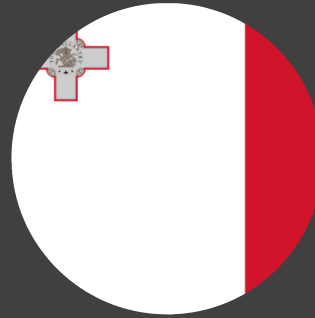
*The child is only the first stepping -stone, in a long walk among teachers, headteachers, peers, parents and even yourself.*

Kaiti Sereti-Synergy Mentor



# Synergy status

- CPD accredited
- Rolled out to other countries – and adults
- Context for further in-depth work – e.g.  
Crisis management, sexuality,  
homelessness, forensic settings, Elderly  
persons



# Structure of Synergy

## Seminar

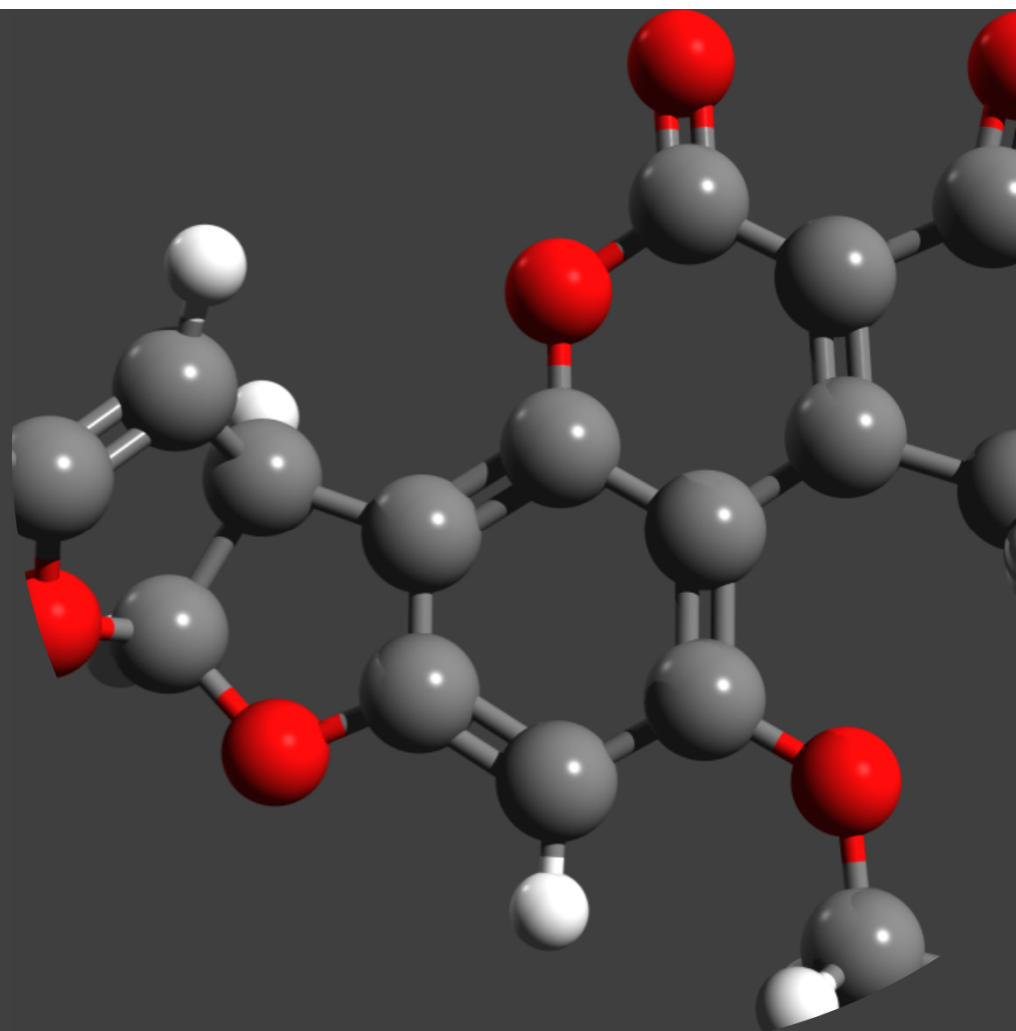
- Introduction: 2 hours
- Principles and description

## Practice workshop 6 hours (CPD)

- Principles and application
- Impact of mind-set and narrative – change strategies

## Mentor workshop 6 hours (CPD)

- Principles and techniques of mentoring and application



# Henry James

*“Three things in life are important, the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind and the third is to be kind”*



# Take home points

- *if WE change the way WE think*
- *If WE change the story*
- *If WE change OUR behaviour*
- *WE might change the outcome*



With grateful thanks to

*Katerina Laskaridou*

*Michael McCreadie*

*Linda Woodcock*

*Chris Atkins*

Synergy mentors at

AIKATERINI LASKARIDIS FOUNDATION

Piraeus, Greece

THANK YOU

[richardmills@atautism.org](mailto:richardmills@atautism.org)

[www.atautism.org](http://www.atautism.org)

# AT-Autism



AIKATERINI  
LASKARIDIS  
FOUNDATION



Synergy