

# The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education

*Edited by*

Margaret L. Kern · Michael L. Wehmeyer

**OPEN ACCESS**

palgrave  
macmillan

# The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education

“This impressive volume serves as an invaluable resource and a beacon to anyone interested in the type of education that allows individuals and communities to flourish. Congratulations to the editors for facilitating open access, ensuring that the richness and importance of diverse perspectives and practical guidance from scholars and educators around the world, is freely available to all.”

—Felicia Huppert, *Founding Director of the Well-being Institute and Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of Cambridge, UK*

“More than a decade after the term ‘positive education’ was coined, the Palgrave Handbook on Positive Education, brings together science, practice, and strategic vision to help implement evidence-based positive education programs across the globe. The approaches outlined in this volume will help expand the narrow focus on academic success to include psychological wellbeing for students and educators alike. It is a must-read for anyone interested in how positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, positive emotion, and meaning and purpose can be optimized in the educational settings.”

—Judith Moskowitz, Ph.D., MPH, *Professor of Medical Social Sciences, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, USA, IPPA President 2019–2021*

“Congratulations to all contributors to this valuable resource. The field of Positive Education continues to develop and grow, and so too does scholarship on the subject. The breadth of analysis provided by this book, and its examination of ‘third wave’ Positive Education, will significantly advance our understanding of this evolving field, as well as its practice and pedagogy.”

—Marita Hayes-Brown, *CEO, Positive Education Schools Association (PESA), Australia*

Margaret L. Kern · Michael L. Wehmeyer  
Editors

# The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

Margaret L. Kern  
Centre for Wellbeing Science  
University of Melbourne  
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Michael L. Wehmeyer  
Department of Special Education  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS, USA



ISBN 978-3-030-64536-6      ISBN 978-3-030-64537-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2021. This book is an open access publication.

**Open Access** This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Brian Jackson/Alamy Stock Photo; all rights reserved, used with permission

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction and Overview</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer</i>	
<b>Part I Perspectives on and Approaches to Positive Education</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Approaches to Positive Education</b>	<b>21</b>
	<i>Suzy Green, Clive Leach, and Daniela Falecki</i>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Positive Education in Practice</b>	<b>49</b>
	<i>Ricardo Arguís-Rey</i>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Positive Youth Development in Education</b>	<b>75</b>
	<i>Daniel Romer and David Hansen</i>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Systems Informed Positive Education</b>	<b>109</b>
	<i>Margaret L. Kern and Jessica A. Taylor</i>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Positive Education Pedagogy: Shifting Teacher Mindsets, Practice, and Language to Make Wellbeing Visible in Classrooms</b>	<b>137</b>
	<i>Lea Waters</i>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Positive Professional Practice: A Strength-Based Reflective Practice Teaching Model</b>	<b>165</b>
	<i>Mathew A. White</i>	

<b>8</b>	<b>Trauma-Aware Practice and Positive Education</b>	205
	<i>Tom Brunzell</i>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Self-Determination in Positive Education</b>	225
	<i>Michael L. Wehmeyer, Sung Hyeon Cheon, Youngsun Lee, and Matthew Silver</i>	
<b>10</b>	<b>Life Design for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future</b>	251
	<i>Ilaria Di Maggio, Maria Cristina Ginevra, Sara Santilli, Laura Nota, and Salvatore Soresi</i>	
<b>Part II Core Capabilities in Positive Education</b>		
<b>11</b>	<b>Wellbeing and Flourishing</b>	273
	<i>Covadonga Chaves</i>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Assessing Wellbeing in School Communities</b>	297
	<i>Aaron Jarden, Rebecca Jarden, Tan-Chyuan Chin, and Margaret L. Kern</i>	
<b>13</b>	<b>Wellbeing Literacy and Positive Education</b>	325
	<i>Lindsay G. Oades, Lisa M. Baker, Jacqueline J. Francis, and Jessica A. Taylor</i>	
<b>14</b>	<b>The Role of Coping Skills for Developing Resilience Among Children and Adolescents</b>	345
	<i>Tammie Ronen</i>	
<b>15</b>	<b>Developing Coping Skills in the Early Years: A Positive Educational Approach</b>	369
	<i>Erica Frydenberg, Jan Deans, and Rachel Liang</i>	
<b>16</b>	<b>Character Strengths Interventions in Education Systems</b>	395
	<i>Jillian Copley and Ryan M. Niemiec</i>	
<b>17</b>	<b>Building Positive Emotions and Playfulness</b>	421
	<i>Louise Tidmand</i>	
<b>18</b>	<b>Engaging Education: The Foundation for Wellbeing and Academic Achievement</b>	441
	<i>Mette Marie Ledertoug and Nanna Paarup</i>	
<b>19</b>	<b>Creative Learning in Education</b>	473
	<i>Ronald A. Beghetto</i>	
<b>20</b>	<b>Shifting Mindsets: Transforming Self, School, and Society</b>	493
	<i>Ash Buchanan and Jack Greig</i>	

<b>21</b>	<b>School Belonging: The Importance of Student and Teacher Relationships</b>	525
	<i>Kelly-Ann Allen, Christopher D. Slaten, Gökmen Arslan, Sue Roffey, Heather Craig, and Dianne A. Vella-Brodrick</i>	
<b>22</b>	<b>Helping Students Find Their Way to Meaning: Meaning and Purpose in Education</b>	551
	<i>Michael F. Steger, Maeve B. O'Donnell, and Jessica L. Morse</i>	
<b>23</b>	<b>Positive Spirituality</b>	581
	<i>Theo D. McCall</i>	
<b>24</b>	<b>Mindfulness in Education: Insights Towards an Integrative Paradigm</b>	609
	<i>Nimrod Sheinman and Prinit Russo-Netzer</i>	
<b>Part III Diversifying Positive Education</b>		
<b>25</b>	<b>Positive Education with Disadvantaged Students</b>	645
	<i>Sue Roffey and Denise Quinlan</i>	
<b>26</b>	<b>Four Fundamental Distinctions in Conceptions of Wellbeing Across Cultures</b>	675
	<i>Mohsen Joshanloo, Evert Van de Vliert, and Paul E. Jose</i>	
<b>27</b>	<b>Implementation of Positive Education Projects in Hong Kong</b>	705
	<i>Sylvia Kwok</i>	
<b>28</b>	<b>Teacher and Staff Wellbeing: Understanding the Experiences of School Staff</b>	715
	<i>Faye McCallum</i>	
<b>29</b>	<b>Applications of Positive Organizational Scholarship in Institutions of Higher Education</b>	741
	<i>Kim Cameron</i>	
<b>Part IV Conclusion</b>		
<b>30</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	769
	<i>Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer</i>	
<b>Index</b>		773

## Notes on Contributors

**Kelly-Ann Allen, Ph.D.** is an educational and developmental psychologist, senior lecturer at Monash University, and a senior honorary fellow of the University of Melbourne. She is currently a Director of the Global Belonging Collaborative, Editor-in-Chief of the *Educational and Developmental Psychologist* and Co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Belonging and Human Connection*.

**Ricardo Arguís-Rey** is a teacher of Special Education, Psychologist and Doctor in Education. He combines his current work as a remedial teacher in a state secondary school, with his activity as a lecturer and consultant in the field of positive education, both in Spain and abroad. He collaborates with various universities as an invited lecturer and has delivered numerous lectures and workshops. In July 2019, he received the “Positive Educator Impact Award” (IPPA’s 6th World Congress on Positive Psychology, Melbourne, Australia), in recognition of the impact of his long-standing work in the dissemination and application of positive education internationally.

**Gökmen Arslan, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor and Lecturer at Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University in Burdur, Turkey. His research interests are broadly focused on developing and validating measurement and intervention methods for promoting wellbeing and mental health in schools.

**Lisa M. Baker** has been a teacher and learner in the field of early childhood education for over 30 years. She holds a Bachelor of Education (specializing in Early Childhood), a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) and three decades of professional erudition, action research and practitioner inquiry. Lisa has a breadth of knowledge and experience in education and understands childhood is a critical time for development, learning and well-being. Lisa's writing and presentations, highlighting synergies between the fields of early childhood, wellbeing science and nature pedagogy, combine evidence, theory and strategy for educators.

**Ronald A. Beghetto, Ph.D.** is the Pinnacle West Presidential Chair & Professor for the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. He is Editor for the *Journal of Creative Behavior*, Book Series Editor for *Creative Theory & Action in Education*, Creativity Advisor for the *LEGO Foundation*, and an *APA Fellow*.

**Dr. Tom Brunzell, MST, EdM, Ph.D.** has experience as a teacher, school leader, researcher, and education advisor. Currently, he is the Director of Education at Berry Street and Honorary Fellow at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Tom presents internationally on topics of transforming school culture, student engagement, trauma-aware practice, wellbeing and positive psychology, and effective school leadership. His research at the University of Melbourne investigates both the negative impacts of secondary traumatic stress and the positive impacts of wellbeing on teachers and leaders working towards educational equity in their communities.

**Ash Buchanan** is an educator, collaborator, and wellbeing practitioner living in Melbourne, Australia. His work is informed by a love for the natural world and for creating intimate spaces where we can be in relationship with ourselves, others, and our kinship with the living Earth community. He is a student of a number of restorative and regenerative practices, including: Theory U, collective healing, social process, systems leadership, co-design, mindfulness, and yoga. He is the founder of cohere, a wellbeing design agency, and leads an action research initiative called benefit mindset, which supports schools and organizations with making a transformative contribution in the world.

**Kim Cameron, Ph.D.** is the William Russell Kelly Professor of Management and Organizations in the Ross School of Business and Professor of Higher Education in the School of Education at the University of Michigan.

He is a co-founder of the Center for Positive Organizations at the University of Michigan.

**Covadonga Chaves, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the Complutense University of Madrid. She completed a Doctorate in Experimental Clinical Psychology at Complutense University of Madrid (2013) and held a master's degree in Clinical and Health Psychology (2009). She was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Connecticut in 2013. Her work got the 2015 International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) Award to the Best Dissertation. From 2014 to 2016 she was the Research Director of the Institute of Happiness at Tecmilenio University (Mexico). She has published articles in academic journals (*Journal of Happiness Studies, Journal of Health Psychology*).

**Sung Hyeon Cheon, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Education at Korea University, South Korea. He received his PhD from Korea University. Dr. Cheon's research interests centre on the empirical study of all aspects of human motivation with a particular emphasis on teachers' motivating styles and students' motivation and engagement during learning activities. He has published 40 articles on motivation in journals such as the *Journal of Educational Psychology and Learning and Instruction*.

**Dr. Tan-Chyuan Chin, Ph.D.** is Senior Research Fellow and Director of The Wellbeing Profiler at the Centre for Wellbeing Science at The University of Melbourne. Tan-Chyuan's research examines the enablers and contextual factors of what contributes to optimal and sustained wellbeing over the lifespan. She specializes in multi-method approaches of measuring wellbeing for program evaluation, using a combination of established and innovative techniques across physiological, psychological and behavioural experience sampling methods. Collectively, her work highlights the use of comprehensive, innovative yet considered approaches to conceptualizing, measuring, and understanding complex concepts such as wellbeing.

**Dr. Jillian Copley, Ed.D.** serves as President and CEO of Mayerson Academy, a non-profit dedicated to transforming individual, team and organizational performance. During her tenure, the Academy has grown from a local professional learning provider to an international leader in the field of strengths-based programs. MA's work to transform cultures has engaged more than 150 organizations and K-16 education institutions across the United States and beyond. Dr. Copley has been invited to speak in China, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Canada, United Arab Emirates and MA's work

has been featured in numerous publications including EdWeek, Live Happy, and US News and World Report.

**Heather Craig** is currently a Ph.D. candidate enrolled at Monash University, in the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. With a particular interest in positive psychology, Heather is currently completing research into the association between optimism and health outcomes in elderly Australians.

**Jan Deans, Ph.D.** is the Director of the Early Learning Centre, which is the University of Melbourne's research and demonstration preschool. She is a long-time advocate for teaching and learning through the arts and has worked both locally and internationally in early childhood, primary, tertiary, and special education settings.

**Ilaria Di Maggio, Ph.D.** is a Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology at Padua University, a psychologist, and postgraduate degree in Career Counseling at the University of Padova. Since 2013 she has collaborated with the La.R.I.O.S. (Laboratory of Research and Intervention in Vocational Guidance) and with the University Centre for Disability and Inclusion, University of Padua. She is a member of the Italian Society for Vocational Guidance (SIO), and a member of the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counselling. Her research interests concern the fields of career counseling and disability.

**Daniela Falecki** is the founder of *Teacher Wellbeing*, known as the “keep-it-real” teacher. Specializing in positive psychology and coaching psychology with more than 20 years experience in government and independent schools in Australia. Daniela has a Masters in Education (Leadership), a Bachelor of Education (HPE), a Certificate in Rudolf Steiner Education, is a licensed Mental Toughness practitioner, certified Life Coach and NLP Practitioner and member of the International Coach Federation and International Positive Psychology Association. Daniela has lectured at Sydney University & Western Sydney University where she was named lecturer of the year 2014.

**Jacqueline J. Francis** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Wellbeing Science (CWS) at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education. Jacqui has a Bachelor of Behavioural Science, Bachelor of Teaching, and a Master of Education. Jacqui has extensive experience teaching in primary schools in the UK and Australia. She is currently part of the teaching team and works as a research assistant at the CWS. Her studies inquire into planning for, developing and measuring effective online positive psychology interventions. Her passion is for wellbeing, and for finding pathways for greater access equity to the language, knowledge, and skills of wellbeing.

**Erica Frydenberg, AM, Ph.D.** is an educational, clinical and organizational psychologist who has practised extensively in the Australian educational setting. She is a Principal Research Fellow and Associate Professor in psychology at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. She has authored and co-authored over 150 academic journal articles and chapters in the field of coping.

**Maria Cristina Ginevra, Ph.D.** is a Researcher at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, where she teaches Psychology of Career Guidance. She collaborates with the Larios Laboratory (Laboratory for Research and Intervention in Vocational Designing and Career Counseling) at the University of Padova. She is a member of the board of the Italian Society for Vocational Guidance (SIO), and a full member of the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling. Research activities concern the fields of career guidance and psychology of disability and inclusion.

**Dr. Suzy Green, Ph.D.** is a Clinical and Coaching Psychologist (MAPS) and Founder and CEO of The Positivity Institute, a positively deviant organization dedicated to the research and application of positive psychology for life, school and work. Suzy lectured on applied positive psychology at the University of Sydney for ten years and is an honorary vice president of the International Society for Coaching Psychology. Suzy is an Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of East London and holds honorary positions at the University of Melbourne, the Wellbeing Institute, Cambridge University, and the Black Dog Institute.

**Jack Greig** is a facilitator, writer, and teacher in the service of equity and wellbeing between people, communities, and the planet. He is a Senior Trainer at Berry Street, an Australian child and family services organization, and a facilitator with the Benefit Mindset project. Jack's approach to research and practice is relational and compassionate. He pays attention to the evolving spaces between, integrating insights from diverse areas, including education, trauma, wellbeing, ecology, and systems change.

**Dr. David Hansen, Ph.D.** is Associate Professor and Chair of Educational Psychology at the University of Kansas. He completed his doctorate (2001) and postdoctorate experience (2001 to 2007) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A developmental scientist with an applied research focus, his expertise is on adolescent development and learning in a variety of out-of-school settings, including the full range of organized youth activities (e.g., extracurricular, community-based programs). Dr. Hansen is

particularly invested in understanding *how* adolescents from impoverished communities learn “real-world” skills and competencies needed for adult life and citizenship, such as strategic planning, initiative, teamwork, and leadership.

**Aaron Jarden, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor and the Director of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne. He is a well-being consultant, social entrepreneur, has multiple qualifications in philosophy, computing, education, and psychology, and is a prolific author and presenter. He is the past president of the New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology, a co-editor of the *International Journal of Wellbeing*, lead investigator for the *International Wellbeing Study*, and Senior Scientist for Work on Wellbeing among others.

**Dr. Rebecca Jarden, Ph.D.** has been nursing 20 years in critical care across a variety of roles in the nursing team, most recently as an associate charge nurse manager, a flight nurse, and a quality portfolio manager. Currently Rebecca is a lecturer and a researcher with the University of Melbourne Department of Nursing. Her ongoing research collaborations include student and nurse wellbeing, work wellbeing, and mental health.

**Paul E. Jose, Ph.D.** is a Professor of Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. He teaches and performs research on topics in methodology and statistics (e.g., statistical mediation and moderation) as well as topics in developmental, personality, cross-cultural, and clinical psychologies. Much of his current work concerns the role of emotion regulation for positive psychological constructs. For example, a recent paper published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* shows that amplifying savouring positively predicts an increase in reports of everyday positive life events over time, termed ‘uplift generation’.

**Mohsen Joshanloo, Ph.D.** is a cross-cultural psychologist, working as an associate professor of psychology at Keimyung University in South Korea. His research focuses on wellbeing, culture, and measurement. He has published widely on cultural aspects of mental wellbeing using data from countries across 5 continents. He advocates a decentralized and pluralistic approach to the social sciences and is committed to an increased consideration of the diversity of human experience across cultural groups. Website: <https://mohsenjoshanloo.weebly.com>.

**Dr. Margaret L. Kern, Ph.D.** (also known as Peggy) is an associate professor at the Centre for Wellbeing Science at the University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education. Her research examines questions around who

thrives in life and why, including understanding and measuring healthy functioning, identifying individual and social factors impacting life trajectories, and systems informed approaches to wellbeing. She works with schools and workplaces to examine strategies for supporting wellbeing and bridging gaps between research and practice. She has published 3 books and over 100 peer-reviewed articles and chapters. You can find out more about Dr. Kern's work at <https://www.peggykern.org>.

**Dr. Sylvia Kwok, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the City University of Hong Kong. Her research focuses on the family ecological and positive psychological factors related to the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents. She has collaborated with over 300 local schools to promote positive education for students, parents, teachers, and the community. Positive education is also extended to the social welfare agencies, including elderly services, school social work services, children and youth services, services for students with special education needs, service for ex-mentally ill patients in halfway houses, and corporates. More can be found at [http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ss\\_posed](http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ss_posed).

**Clive Leach** is an organizational coach who has worked extensively with schools in many parts of the world on the development and implementation of wellbeing strategies and the application of interventions drawing on both positive psychology and coaching psychology. A graduate of the Master of Organisational Coaching program at the University of Sydney, Clive was the lead author on the chapter 'The Integration of Coaching & Positive Psychology in Education' in *Coaching in Professional Contexts* (Sage, 2016). He is also a visiting lecturer teaching on the world's first M.Sc. Applied Positive Psychology & Coaching Psychology (MAPPCCP) at the University of East London.

**Mette Marie Ledertoug, M.A., Ph.D.** in Educational Psychology and Positive Psychology and currently postdoc in positive education at Aarhus University, Denmark. Mette has twenty years of practical experience within the field of education, and she has published articles and books focusing on strength-based learning, engagement, resilience and wellbeing and she has recently co-authored the book *The Battle Against Boredom—in Schools*. Mette is currently a WP leader and mental health expert in the Upright project (EU). She is also a member of IPPA Positive Education Division organizing and facilitating events and conferences.

**Youngsun Lee, Ph.D.** is a Professor in the Department of Education at Inha University in South Korea. She earned her doctoral degree in Special Education with an emphasis in self-determination and transition to adulthood from the University of Kansas. Dr. Lee's research focuses on self-determination and quality of life technology for people with disabilities, specifically young adults with ASD and IDD. She has received grant funding from several sources, including the National Research Foundation of Korea and Korean Ministry of Education. She is the Editor of the *Journal of the Korean Association for Persons with Autism*.

**Rachel Liang, MEd.Psy.** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne where she works across several research projects including the coordination of the Early Years Coping Project from 2011 to the present. She also works as a registered psychologist at an independent school (K-12) in Melbourne.

**Reverend Dr. Theo D. McCall, Ph.D.** is the School Chaplain of St Peter's College, Adelaide, and the Senior Chaplain for Anglican Schools in South Australia. He is a Board member of St Barnabas College, Adelaide, and Adjunct Lecturer at Charles Stuart University. He is keenly interested in the dialogue between systematic theology and positive psychology, particularly from the practical perspective of delivering chaplaincy services and Religious and Values Education lessons. In 2013, Theo attended a meeting in Canterbury of spiritual leaders and psychologists, and he co-edited the meeting proceedings in the book, *Being Called*. He has presented and run workshops on wellbeing widely.

**Faye McCallum, Ph.D.** is Head of the School of Education and a Professor of Education at the University of Adelaide. She has worked in higher education for 30 years across Australia. Faye's research interests include wellbeing education; attraction, retention, and sustainability of teachers in rural areas; education policy and systems; and initial teacher education. She has published extensively with over 100 publications, her research has been cited in the 2019 Global Happiness and Wellbeing Policy Reports tabled at the World Government Summit in Dubai. Faye is an expert consultant to the OECD on teacher wellbeing.

**Jessica L. Morse** is a Ph.D. student in the Counseling Psychology program at Colorado State University. She is currently completing her internship in health psychology at the Phoenix VA. Her research focuses on exploring how two existential factors, meaning in life and tolerance of uncertainty, affect people's psychosocial and physiological health in the context of stressors and

life transitions as well as on developing strengths-based preventative health interventions that target meaning in life and tolerance of uncertainty.

**Ryan M. Niemiec, Psy.D.** is a leading figure in global education, research, and practice of character strengths. He is the education director of the VIA Institute on Character. Ryan is an award-winning psychologist, certified coach, an annual instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, and author of 10 books, 90+ academic papers, and several-hundred user-friendly articles. Ryan has been interviewed by a number of luminaries and given over 800 presentations across the globe, including a TEDx talk, a speaking tour of Australia, a Harvard conference keynote. He is a Fellow of the International Positive Psychology Association and serves on their Council of Advisors.

**Laura Nota, Ph.D.** is professor at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova. She is Delegate of the Rector for Disability. She teaches Career construction and Career counselling and Psychological Counselling for the Inclusion of Social Disadvantage. She is the Director of the Larios Laboratory at the University of Padova. She is a member of the Life Design International Research Group, of the Career Adaptability International Collaborative Group. Research activities concern the fields of career counselling and psychology of disability and inclusion.

**Dr. Maeve B. O'Donnell, Ph.D.** is a postdoctoral scholar with the Palliative Care and Resilience research team at Seattle Children's Hospital. She received her Ph.D. in counselling psychology from Colorado State University and completed her behavioural medicine/psychology residency at the University of Washington School of Medicine in 2019. Her research interests lie at the intersection of positive psychology and behavioural medicine, including a focus on bolstering resilience and fostering meaning-making for paediatric patients with chronic disease and their families.

**Dr. Lindsay G. Oades, Ph.D.** is an internationally acclaimed wellbeing public policy strategist, researcher, and author. As Director and Professor at the Centre for Wellbeing Science, at The University of Melbourne (Australia's #1 University), he leads a growing and dynamic team of researchers and educators who promote and investigate how people learn to improve wellbeing, in education, health, organizations, and communities. As a sought after speaker, known to provoke thought, he has given keynote or invited presentations in Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

**Nanna Paarup, M.A.** in positive psychology, Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration, founder of Solve-it ApS and [www.skolekonsulenter.dk](http://www.skolekonsulenter.dk). Her passion is learning. She is a co-author of *The Battle Against Boredom: In Schools* and has published several books on how to engage students. Nanna provides teachers training, focusing on classroom management, teamwork and professional learning communities. Nanna was part of the organizing committee and facilitating the IPPAed preconference in Budapest in 2018. Nanna is an editor of the Journal: *Kognition & Pædagogik* and is constantly searching for new ways to involve, engage, and motivate students, teachers and staff.

**Dr. Denise Quinlan, Ph.D.** is a founding director of the New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing & Resilience, a senior adjunct fellow at the University of Canterbury, and a published academic researcher. Trained in wellbeing science at the University of Pennsylvania, she attained her Ph.D. in psychological wellbeing from the University of Otago. She has taught global business leaders and educators around the world how to use wellbeing science for peak performance and wellbeing. Dr. Quinlan is acknowledged nationally and internationally as an outstanding presenter and facilitator. Denise's work supports the wellbeing of hundreds of schools around NZ.

**Dr. Sue Roffey, Ph.D.** is a psychologist, academic, and social activist, and acknowledged international authority on school and student wellbeing. She is currently an Honorary Associate Professor at University College, London and Western Sydney University and Director of Growing Great Schools Worldwide. Sue is a prolific author, having written many books and other publications on issues related to wellbeing, especially behaviour, relationships and social/emotional learning. Her most recent book is the co-authored *Creating the World We Want to Live In; How Positive Psychology Can Build a Brighter Future* (Routledge, 2021).

**Daniel Romer, Ph.D.** is the research director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where he has worked since 1998. His research focuses on social and personal influences on the healthy development of adolescents, especially the role of the media, family, schools, and peers as socializing agents. He has edited six books that identify strategies to promote the mental and behavioural wellbeing of adolescents and has proposed the Life-Span Wisdom Model of adolescent development as a counter to the view that adolescent risky behaviour is the result of an imbalanced brain.

**Professor Tammie Ronen, Ph.D.** is the former Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, and the head of the Renata Adler Memorial Research Center for child welfare and protection in Tel-Aviv University. She was the previous president of the Israeli Association for Behavior and Cognitive Psychotherapies and part of the International Association of Positive Psychology. She is the author of many books and research articles in the area of wellbeing of children, adolescents, and families. She developed several international projects for reducing aggression by increasing positive affect and self-control skills via group therapy, sport, and music with the Israeli philharmonic.

**Dr. Pninit Russo-Netzer, Ph.D.** is a researcher, a senior lecturer, author, and speaker. Her main research and practice interests focus on positive psychology, existential psychology, meaning in life, positive change and growth, and spiritual development. Pninit develops programs and curricula for various organizations on these topics and is the head of the Education Department at Achva Academic College. She is also the head of the Compass Institute for the Study and Application of Meaning, and the founder and head of the academic training program for logotherapy in Israel. She published several books as well as scholarly articles and chapters and serves as an academic advisor and consultant to academic and non-academic institutions.

**Sara Santilli** is a research fellow at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy, and Applied Psychology at Padua University. She is a psychologist, CBT therapist, and a postgraduate degree in Career Counseling at the University of Padova. She collaborates also with LaRIOS (Laboratory of Research and Intervention in Vocational Guidance). She is vice president of the Italian Society for Vocational Guidance (SIO) and a member of the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling. Research interest concerns the fields of career counselling, career construction, and workplace inclusion for people with and without a disability.

**Dr. Nimrod Sheinman, B.Sc., N.D.** is one of Israel's leading mind-body experts and an international spokesperson advocating holistic and integrative education and mindfulness in education perspectives. He is the founder and director of Israel's Centre for Mindfulness in Education, co-founder of Israel's Centre for Mind-Body Medicine, and initiator and director of the International Soul of Education Initiative. He is on the International Advisory Panel of the Sejahtera Leadership Initiative, a Malaysia-based organization supporting humanistic and wellbeing programs, locally and globally.

**Matthew Silver** is a Doctoral Research Fellow at University College London. He has researched positive psychology, with a focus on self-determination

theory and emotional intelligence, for more than a decade. His writing on the subject utilizes conceptual thought and theoretical insight which focuses on the advancement of leadership and managerial insight and practitioner application—receiving publication within journals including the *International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development*.

**Christopher D. Slaten, Ph.D.** Department Chair and Associate Professor for the Educational, School and Counseling Psychology Department within the College of Education at the University of Missouri. Dr. Slaten researches the issue of academic belonging and how it impacts career and academic outcomes for marginalized youth and college students

**Salvatore Soresi, Ph.D.** is a full professor at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padua. He has founded the Larios Laboratory and the University Centre for Research and Services on Disability, Rehabilitation and Inclusion of the University of Padova. He is also a founder member of the Italian Society of Vocational Guidance (SIO). In 2008 he received an award from the Society of Counseling Psychology (American Psychological Association). Research activities concern the fields of career counselling and psychology of disability and inclusion.

**Dr. Michael F. Steger, Ph.D.** is Professor of Psychology and the Director for the *Center for Meaning and Purpose* at Colorado State University. His research on meaning and purpose is widely cited, and he is the creator of the most widely used measures of meaning and purpose in the world, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and the Work and Meaning Inventory. He has published more than 130 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, and three books, including *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace* and the *Handbook of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*.

**Jessica A. Taylor** is an educator, action researcher, presenter, and possibilizer, with expertise in wellbeing and education. Specializing in primary and secondary education, Jessica has worked with schools, organizations, and governments globally to assist them place wellbeing at the heart of their vision and practice. Advocating that wellbeing is everyone's responsibility, throughout her research, writing, keynote engagements, and consulting work, she loves igniting new conversations, actions, and ways-of-being that help bridge the gap often found between research and practice to help people become active stewards in wellbeing and positive change endeavours. She contributes to the teaching team and research streams at the University of

Melbourne's Centre for Wellbeing Science, holding a Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) and Bachelor of Education.

**Dr. Louise Tidmand, Ph.D.** is a Danish “pracademic”—a practitioner and an academic. Her research focuses on life coping skills, resilience, self-efficacy and wellbeing in education. Louise is a teacher and educational psychologist, and passionate about transforming research into tangible educational materials for teachers, parents, and students to work within a school or home setting. She educates pedagogical personnel in teaching SEL, Character Strengths and Engaging Education—always focusing on how to build Playfulness and Positive Emotions in teaching. Her books and games have received recommendations from the Danish National Board of Health and the Danish Board of Social Services.

**Evert Van de Vliert, Ph.D.** is a professor emeritus of organizational and applied social psychology at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands. He has published more than 250 journal articles, chapters, and books including *Climate, Affluence, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). In 2005, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the International Association for Conflict Management. His current research concentrates on the geography and ecology of cultures, emphasizing the interactive impact of climate-based demands and wealth-based resources on happiness, creativity, aggression, collectivism versus individualism, and autocratic versus democratic governance and leadership. Website: [www.rug.nl/staff/e.van.de.vliert](http://www.rug.nl/staff/e.van.de.vliert).

**Dianne A. Vella-Brodrick, Ph.D.** holds the Gerry Higgins Chair in positive psychology and is Deputy Director and Head of Research at the Centre for Wellbeing Science, University of Melbourne. Dianne's research interests include the development and evaluation of wellbeing programs using innovative quantitative and qualitative methods. She specializes in working with young people in learning environments.

**Professor Lea Waters, AM, Ph.D.** is the Founding Director of the Centre for Positive Psychology, University of Melbourne, where she has held an academic position for 25 years and has 110+ academic publications. Lea sits on the Science Board of the University of California Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center and is an affiliate at the University of Michigan's Centre for Positive Organizations. She is an Executive Board member and immediate past president of the International Positive Psychology Association. She is the ambassador for the Positive Education Schools Association and was Chair of the 6th World Congress of Positive Psychology.

**Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ph.D.** is the Ross and Mariana Beach Distinguished Professor of Special Education; Chair of the Department of Special Education; and Director and Senior Scientist, Beach Center on Disability; all at the University of Kansas. His research has focused on issues pertaining to self-determination, positive psychology, and its application to disability, transition to adulthood, the education and inclusion of students with more extensive support needs, and technology use by people with cognitive disabilities. He has published more than 450 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and is an author or editor on 42 texts.

**Mathew A. White, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor and Deputy Head of the School of Education at the University of Adelaide. He is also a Principal Fellow in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Recent awards include 2020 Distinguished Contribution to Research in Educational Leadership—South Australian Branch Australian Council for Educational Leaders, and the 2020 University of Adelaide Prize for Teaching Excellence. Publications include *Future Directions in Wellbeing* (Springer, 2017), and *Critical Perspectives on Teaching, Learning and Leadership* (Springer, 2020). His next book is *Wellbeing and Resilience Education: COVID-19 and Its Impact on Education Systems* (Routledge, 2021).

# List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	The <i>InsideOut</i> self-leadership model (Original image published on Perth College Anglican School for Girls. (2012). <i>InsideOut</i> . <a href="https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/learning/inside-out/">https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/learning/inside-out/</a> , by Perth College Anglican School for Girls. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	39
Fig. 4.1	Mean ratings of life satisfaction on a scale from 0 = completely dissatisfied to 10 = completely satisfied, by age and gender from 2001 to 2012 in Australia (Original image published in Qu, L., & de Vaus, D. [2015]. <i>Life satisfaction across life course transitions</i> [Australian Family Trends, No. 8; p. 14], by Australian Institute of Family Studies. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	81
Fig. 6.1	Three key ways to expand the field of positive education	138
Fig. 6.2	Qualitative data reduction coding process	145
Fig. 6.3	Key themes, timelines, and levels of outcomes following a positive education pedagogy	146
Fig. 7.1	Brookfield's four lenses of critical reflection (Author adaptation from Brookfield, 2017, p. 61)	172
Fig. 7.2	A strength-based reflective practice model for teachers	175
Fig. 8.1	Trauma-informed positive education: developmental teaching model	212

Fig. 9.1	Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 1 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). <i>Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction</i> . <a href="http://www-self-determination.org">http://www-self-determination.org</a> , by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	241
Fig. 9.2	Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 2 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). <i>Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction</i> . <a href="http://www-self-determination.org">http://www-self-determination.org</a> , by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	242
Fig. 9.3	Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 3 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). <i>Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction</i> . <a href="http://www-self-determination.org">http://www-self-determination.org</a> , by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	243
Fig. 12.1	Me, We, and Us levels of wellbeing in a system (Original image published in Jarden, A., & Jarden, R. (2016). Positive psychological assessment for the workplace. In L. Oades, M. F. Steger, A. Delle Fave, & J. Passmore (Eds.), <i>The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of positive psychology at work</i> (pp. 415–437), by John Wiley & Sons. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	307
Fig. 15.1	Appraisal theory of coping	373
Fig. 16.1	Categorizing strengths-based interventions	400
Fig. 18.1	Loss of American student enthusiasm for school by grade level (Adapted from Jenkins [2019]. Original image published in Jenkins, L. [2019]. <i>How to create a perfect school: Maintain students' love of learning from kindergarten through 12th grade</i> , by LtoJ Press, Scottsdale, Arizona. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)	443
Fig. 18.2	The learning circle of experiential learning (inspired by Kolb, 1984)	450

Fig. 19.1	Factors involved in creative learning in schools, classrooms, and beyond	478
Fig. 20.1	Development in a horizontal and vertical direction	495
Fig. 20.2	Stages of vertical development. Based on Kegan and Lahey (2016)	496
Fig. 20.3	An example view of serving the wellbeing of all	501
Fig. 20.4	Ten example distinctions between fixed, growth, and benefit mindsets	505
Fig. 20.5	Horizontal and vertical development across three scales: self, school, and society (Based on Scharmer, 2019)	518
Fig. 21.1	Dianne's allergy story: An illustration of the challenge of fostering school belonging and the power of student-teacher relationships	530
Fig. 26.1	Four fundamental cultural differences in conceptions of wellbeing	693
Fig. 28.1	Comparing teacher wellbeing based upon whether the school prioritised teacher wellbeing ( $n = 384$ ) and number of years of teaching experience ( $n = 241$ )	726
Fig. 28.2	Words mentioned by teachers in defining wellbeing	730
Fig. 28.3	Factors that challenge employee wellbeing	732
Fig. 29.1	A continuum illustrating positive deviance (Adapted from Cameron [2003])	743
Fig. 29.2	Framework used at Laureate to expose the university to positive organizational scholarship and positive leadership	751
Fig. 29.3	Approaches developed by the positive energizers to accomplish the 90-in-90 challenge	753
Fig. 29.4	Scores on eight dimensions of positive practices	754
Fig. 29.5	Effects of positive leadership classes on students at universities in India, Peru, and Spain	755

# List of Tables

Table 3.1	Exemplary positive education programs	53
Table 3.2	Sources for educational resources useful for the practice of positive education	57
Table 5.1	Systems informed positive psychology guiding principles and explanations, with example applications in schools	117
Table 7.1	Strategies for incorporating Brookfield's (2017) four lenses with the 24 VIA character strengths, grouped by Peterson and Seligman's (2004) proposed six virtues	176
Table 12.1	An illustrative list of valid wellbeing assessment tools	311
Table 12.2	Questions to consider in thinking about the validity and usefulness of an assessment tool	317
Table 13.1	The five components of wellbeing literacy	328
Table 13.2	The five components of wellbeing literacy in an educational context	331
Table 15.1	Coping strategies identified by 4–5 year old children, classified as positive, negative-emotional expression, and negative-emotional inhibition (Adapted from Pang et al. [2015])	377
Table 15.2	Descriptive overview of the Families Coping Program	379
Table 15.3	Outline of the COPE-R program content	384
Table 15.4	COPE-R activities	385
Table 17.1	Adaptive and cognitive changes impacted by playfulness	426
Table 17.2	Model for planning for student positive emotions and playfulness in teaching	433
Table 17.3	Example of the model's application in language arts class	434

Table 18.1	Trowler's extended model of engagement	445
Table 18.2	Biggs and Tang's (2011) Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy of learning progression	447
Table 18.3	Example of a rubric for teachers in a teacher-training program for a PhD project in strength-based learning (Ledertoug, 2016)	448
Table 18.4	The five phases of the 5E Model, based on Bybee (2009)	451
Table 18.5	Intersections between the 5E model and the second and third levels of Biggs' (2003) theory of constructive alignment (based on Bybee et al., 2006)	453
Table 18.6	Questions to ask for preparing to create PERMA through teaching	455
Table 18.7	Integrating positive emotions across the 5E learning phases	458
Table 18.8	Integrating engagement across the 5E learning phases	459
Table 18.9	Integrating relationships across the 5E learning phases	461
Table 18.10	Integrating meaning across the 5E learning phases	462
Table 18.11	Integrating accomplishment across the 5E learning phases	464
Table 18.12	An example of engaging education that supports both academic skills and wellbeing through a Year 8 maths lesson	465
Table 23.1	Examples of analysing parables using character strengths	588
Table 24.1	Mindfulness for adults vs. mindfulness with children and youth	618
Table 24.2	Mindfulness in schools initiatives around the world	621
Table 28.1	Australian participants characteristics ( $N = 806$ )	724
Table 28.2	Example teacher definitions of wellbeing categorised across four themes	725
Table 28.3	Teacher wellbeing strategies, as suggested by the teachers	728
Table 28.4	Canadian participants characteristics ( $N = 174$ )	729
Table 29.1	Evidence of Tecmilenio's transformation: indicators of success in 2018	758



# 1

## Introduction and Overview

Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer

In 2009, Professor Martin Seligman and his colleagues declared *positive education* as an entity in and of itself, defined as “education for both traditional skills and happiness” (p. 293). Like the establishment of the broader positive psychology discipline, the ideas of positive education were nothing new to education (Kristjánsson, 2012), but the declaration called for a reconsideration of the purposes of education. Most young people spend the majority of their waking hours as part of a school community. Parents expect schools to provide their children with the capabilities needed to be successful in life. Despite all of the societal shifts that have occurred through the early part of the twenty-first century, along with healthcare, schools remain one of the truly essential social institutions. But what is the purpose of those social institutions?

Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) noted that most parents simply want their children to be happy. And yet many societies equate happiness with success. Within schools, that translates as an emphasis on academic achievement, often captured through grades, standardized examinations, and other relatively objective indicators. Pedagogies focus on developing specific pieces of knowledge, disconnected from the broader context

---

M. L. Kern (✉)

The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

e-mail: [Peggy.Kern@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Peggy.Kern@unimelb.edu.au)

M. L. Wehmeyer

University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

and purpose for learning those pieces. For some students, this works well—they fit within the standard expectations held by schools, have the resources and support they need, and are lauded for their successes. But others struggle. Reports speak of high levels of student disengagement, disconnection, and mental health issues (e.g., Kessler & Bromet, 2013; Lawrence et al., 2015). Teachers are leaving the profession at alarming rates (e.g., den Brok, Wubbels, & van Tartwijk 2017; Gallant & Riley, 2014). In Australia, principals report higher levels of stress, burnout, and lower wellbeing compared to general populations (Riley, 2019). What has gone so wrong?

The positive education movement called for a rebalancing of intentions and for placing academic development and wellbeing as equally valued core priorities. The earliest efforts arose from Geelong Grammar School, a private school in Victoria, Australia. A team of positive psychology experts spent time at the School, thinking about ways to incorporate positive psychology concepts, interventions, and practices within the explicit and implicit curriculum.

Over the past decade, the positive education movement has grown, with an increasing amount of research, curricula, programs, and approaches to supporting wellbeing. But what is meant by positive education? What does it look like? What opportunities does it bring? What are the limitations? This Handbook explores these questions.

## What Is Positive Education?

Positive education has been defined in a number of ways, through various articles, chapters, blog posts, and more. For instance, definitions include:

- “education for both traditional skills and for happiness” (Seligman et al., 2009, p. 293).
- “applied positive psychology in education” (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011, p. 1).
- “the development of educational environments that enable the learner to engage in established curricula in addition to knowledge and skills to develop their own and others’ wellbeing” (Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011, p. 432).
- “bringing together the science of positive psychology with best-practice teaching to encourage and support schools and individuals within their communities to flourish” (Norrish, Williams, O’Connor, & Robinson, 2013, p. 148).

- “an umbrella term to describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student well-being” (White, Slep, & Murray, 2017, p. 1).

Consistent across these definitions is a focus on promoting wellbeing and other positive states and qualities, such as happiness, flourishing, strengths, and capabilities. The definition of and focus on wellbeing is anchored in positive psychology rather than other disciplinary perspectives and philosophies of how to define, assess, and build wellbeing. As such, it becomes important to understand the positive psychology perspective, how positive education emerged from this perspective, and the implications moving forward.

## Positive Psychology as a Discipline and as a Perspective

A distinction can be made between positive psychology as a *perspective*—where research and practice align with the values and intentions of the positive psychology, regardless of identification with the field—and as a *discipline*—research and practice that purposely situate themselves within defined (albeit fluid) boundaries of a scientific field (Pawelski, 2016). As a perspective, positive psychology emphasizes the pursuit of what is good, virtuous, and possible, with less emphasis on escaping what is bad, immoral, and problematic. Focus is placed on strengths over weaknesses and thriving over (or in spite of) suffering.

As a discipline, positive psychology arose as a reaction against the overemphasis in psychological theory, research, and practice on pathology. As such, the initial underlying bias of the field was to emphasize the individual person and human agency, with only secondary focus on broader social and contextual aspects that impact upon human experience (Kern et al., 2020). The field aims to be scientific, epistemologically biased towards naturalism, such that identifying what wellbeing is and how to build it can be reduced to simple cause and effect relationships. Through this approach, numerous positive psychology interventions have been developed and supported in the literature, with varying levels of effectiveness in improving individual wellbeing (Bolier et al., 2013; Parks & Schueller, 2014; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; White, Uttl, & Holder, 2019).

Positive psychology as a discipline has developed and evolved considerably over the past three decades, with implications for what is meant by the positive psychology perspective. Lomas, Waters, Williams, Oades, and

Kern (2020) described this evolution as three distinctive waves, energy pulses that rise up from the greater sea of theory, research, and practice. Rather than separate stages, each wave flows into one another, with prior waves creating the necessary conditions for the latter waves. The first wave arose from discontent over traditional psychology. The wave focused on the positive perspective described above. The proposition was popular, with the number of studies focused on positive phenomena expanding rapidly across the next two decades (Rusk & Waters, 2013), the establishment and growth of a variety of training and certification programs, the establishment of professional bodies, and a growing number of interventions, programs, and more being offered.

Still, discontent arose both within and beyond the field. Interventions primarily focused on hedonic happiness—strategies for building the temporary feeling of pleasure, rather than broader elements of the life well lived. The overemphasis on the positive seemed to negate negative human experiences. Studies found, for instance, that the meaningful life is not necessarily a happy one (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013), and that some of the greatest experiences of joy arise from times of sorrow and pain (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014). Questions arose around what was meant by the word “positive” (Pawelski, 2016). As such, a second wave emerged, which critically considered the ideas of what is “positive” and “negative”, the valuing of all of human experience, and a turn towards more eudaimonic dimensions of wellbeing.

As the positive psychology perspective has increasingly been applied across a growing number of contexts and populations and incorporated within other disciplines, additional challenges and questions have emerged. Schools have been a critical part of this evolution. Simple positive psychology interventions, well tested and supported through a variety of studies, often do not work within the complexity of the classroom setting. Some students and teachers will find an activity helpful; others will disconnect or even experience harmful or unintended consequences. Models of and understandings about wellbeing and other positive phenomena arise primarily from a relatively privileged Western perspective (Kern et al., 2020), with less clarity around what these phenomena look like for those with diverse backgrounds (Black & Kern, 2020). As such, Lomas et al. (2020) suggest that a third wave is emerging, which: “goes beyond the individual and embraces greater complexity” (p. 4), with a broadening of focus (beyond the individual), disciplines (moving to an interdisciplinary perspective more broadly captured as *well-being science*), populations (extending to diverse populations, including across

cultures, socioeconomic levels, and life stages), and methodologies (drawing on diverse ways of knowing and establishing understandings of truth).

## The Emergence of Positive Education

The application of the positive psychology perspective within education similarly has undergone a series of evolutions, evident in the definitions above, with clarity around what positive education is and does and boundaries around what should and should not be included yet to be determined. The first wave of positive education is represented by the application of positive psychology as a discipline within schools. The focus was primarily on students, with teachers trained to deliver materials. Various frameworks, approaches, and curricula were developed that aimed to create happy, engaged learners.

This remains an appealing narrative. Indeed, the strongest rationale for positive education is the concern that has arisen worldwide over what has been called the mental health crisis. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, at least one in four young people reported symptoms of mental illness (World Health Organization, 2017). Over 50% of adolescent illnesses have a mental origin (Allen & McKenzie, 2015). Policymakers, communities, schools, and other organizations are increasingly identifying the need to prioritize mental health and wellbeing. Positive education has entered into this narrative, providing an inspiring image of happy, engaged learners, growing to their full potential within a supportive learning environment. Programs, curricula, and more have been developed, drawing on the science of positive psychology to train students how to feel and function well at school. Much of the early work occurred in private schools in Australia and abroad, as such schools had more flexibility with curricular design and more resources to draw upon. Schools have been generous, openly sharing lessons learned, resources, frameworks, and more to help broaden the positive education movement.

Still, unintended consequences and challenges arose. Some schools jumped on the idea of positive education, gaining training, adding mindfulness, gratitude, and other interventions to the classroom, including wellbeing classes in the timetable, etc. However, it has become clear that although focusing on student wellbeing and happiness can be beneficial, it is insufficient. Students are core business to schools; thus, it makes sense to focus on their wellbeing. But if teachers are struggling, how can they authentically teach wellbeing skills? Practices and approaches increasingly broadened beyond the students to include teachers, non-teaching staff, and school leaders. Further, there was

a growing recognition that the environment matters. Thus, the second wave of positive education emphasizes moving beyond specific programs developing specific skills to the creation of learning environments that support the wellbeing of everyone within the school community, through both the taught and caught curriculum (White & Kern, 2018).

Still, it remains unclear what positive education truly is. Is positive education simply a passing movement or something more? How does it fit with the many other approaches that already exist within schools, including social and emotional learning (SEL), positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS), character education, holistic education, etc.? Slempp et al. (2017) suggested that “positive education aims to build strengths, capabilities, wellbeing and resilience in educational communities... it is not a single approach, but rather provides an umbrella under which multiple theories, programs, frameworks, and approaches reside” (p. 103). On the one hand, this definition seems to add greater confusion than clarity. What are the boundaries of positive education? What are the intentions—is it about building wellbeing, skills, and capabilities, or something else? What does it look like across different cultures, populations, backgrounds, and interests? Who should be involved? And who should decide?

These are the questions of third wave positive education. From this perspective, there is no one right theory, model, approach, or perspective to positive education, but consensus can emerge through open dialogue and friendly debate about best practice approaches for defining, studying, and applying positive education. This wave emphasizes positive education as a perspective rather than as a discipline. Rather than positive psychology being applied to education, it highlights the need to embrace the positively oriented programs, structures, frameworks, etc. that already exist within schools, with continued refinements towards bringing out the best of what could be. It points to the need to emphasize not only content, but the pedagogy underlying that content. It calls for the need to situate understandings of and approaches to wellbeing within the context and community itself, requiring extensions to diverse populations, with approaches emerging from those populations themselves, rather than being imposed upon. And it calls us to recognize schools as complex human social systems.

## Handbook Overview

This Handbook arises within the shifting landscape of the waves of positive education. Aligned with the valuing of open dialogue and diverse

perspectives, authors provide various definitions of, perspectives around, and approaches to positive education, with the various waves arising and integrated within and across chapters. A broad range of topics are incorporated, aiming for an inclusive understanding of positively oriented approaches within education, arranged across three sections.

## **Part 1: Perspectives of and Approaches to Positive Education**

The Handbook begins by considering different perspectives of and approaches to positive education. This is not meant to be all-inclusive, but rather highlights a range of ways for thinking about, defining, and applying positive education. Green and colleagues (Chapter 2) overview various approaches to positive education, describing SEL, character education, growth mindset, resilience and mental toughness, and coaching as examples. Reflecting third wave positive education, they speak to practical recommendations for strategically implementing positive education within the complexity of different school environments.

Providing the helpful perspective of an educator, Arguís-Rey (Chapter 3) considers what positive education looks like in practice. The chapter speaks to the variability of practices that occur worldwide, with little clarity that different implementations are indeed having the effects that we desire, and calls for turning an eye towards the conditions that enable and hinder applications of research in practice. Accessibility to resources remains an issue, risking the potential that positive education is only available to those with resources, potentially fuelling greater inequities across the world. The chapter also provides implementation suggestions for practitioners.

Well before positive education was named as a sub-discipline, the emphasis on cultivating young person potential was already well-established within Positive Youth Development (PYD). Romer and Hansen (Chapter 4) point to the philosophical traditions underlying the PYD approach, which arise from Aristotle's emphasis on human virtue as critical to human happiness. Many of the existing PYD programs are grounded in developing the virtues of justice, prudence, courage, and temperance, with the intention of helping young people to develop to their full potential and become a thriving, contributing member of society.

Directly addressing the third wave perspective, Kern and Taylor (Chapter 5) introduce Systems Informed Positive Education (SIPE), which incorporates aspects of the systems sciences into positive education practice

and pedagogy to cultivate optimal learning environments that bring out the best in each individual and of the school community as a whole. The authors describe principles of the SIPE perspective that might enable wellbeing to be embedded at the heart of education. To bring this to life, they offer a number of examples of schools that are successfully cultivating thriving changemakers by incorporating positively oriented systems principles to help students to discover and bring about their full potential.

Chapters 6 and 7 further build upon the third wave perspective, focusing particularly on context and pedagogy. Waters (Chapter 6) suggests that positive education should be expanded by incorporating a greater focus on evidence-informed implicit approaches to wellbeing and a greater focus on the context for wellbeing. She suggests that this can be achieved through empowering teachers through positive education pedagogy, which places greater focus on how wellbeing concepts are taught than the content itself. The focus on pedagogy is further emphasized by White (Chapter 7), who introduces a strengths-based reflective practice model for teachers that allows critical self-reflection, improving effective practice. The model brings together the Values in Action (VIA) strengths classification with Brookfield's four lenses of reflective practice. Together, these chapters move away from positive psychology being applied to education (typical of wave 1 approaches), placing teacher practice lying at the heart of both explicit and implicit approaches to cultivating wellbeing within school communities.

Drawing further on the pedagogy of positive education, Brunzell (Chapter 8) illustrates approaches that need to be informed by and emerge from diverse communities, rather than being imposed upon by existing assumptions. The author reframes positive education from a trauma-informed perspective. For students impacted by trauma and systemic educational disadvantage, typical positive education approaches not only risk being ineffective, but can also be harmful. The chapter reviews trauma-aware pedagogy and recommends practical ways that teachers can practise wellbeing strategies from a trauma-informed perspective. Importantly, the chapter also points to the additional burden that secondary trauma creates, with the need for prioritizing support for teachers' own wellbeing.

As the pedagogy of positive education is returned to teachers, the question becomes what that pedagogy should focus on. Systems informed positive education (Chapter 5) points to the importance of responsibility in cultivating wellbeing—it is not only about teachers imparting skills in young people, but rather empowering young people to take responsibility for their own wellbeing, to the extent that the capability for wellbeing exists. Building upon this, Wehmeyer and colleagues (Chapter 9) describe the agentic aspect

of wellbeing, captured through self-determined behaviour, in which people act based on their own interests, values, and preferences. A large body of literature across diverse disciplines points to the importance of self-determination in enabling agentic human behaviour, with implications for wellbeing and functioning. Critical to this are pedagogical approaches that support students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, promoting student agency and ownership over their own learning, and a sense of meaning and purpose in practice.

The need for supporting student agency and purpose for learning becomes even more important in the uncertainty and changes of the twenty-first century. Di Maggio and colleagues (Chapter 10) emphasize the complexity of the modern world, and the need to equip students with skills to effectively deal with that complexity. Focusing on career guidance and life design, the authors point to the need to re-envision career guidance to better align with the shifting shape of the working world. This includes vocational guidance that is inclusive and sustainable, and the need for approaches that are sensitive to the specific needs of vulnerable individuals, including marginalized groups, immigrants, the unemployed, and those with disabilities. The authors provide actions that guidance professionals can take to empower young people to embrace, sustain, and foster optimal, inclusive, and sustainable societies of the future.

As a whole, the chapters in Part 1 illustrate the diverse and emerging direction that positive education might evolve in the future, taking it from specific programs based on simple interventions to diverse approaches that empower young people in their learning, wellbeing, and development. They emphasize the importance of pedagogy, valuing the expertise that educators bring to the classroom. They point to the diversification across populations and perspectives. Throughout, authors point to practical tips and clear guidance, highlighting the value of continued integration of research and practice as positive education continues to define itself and establish what its contribution to education will be.

## **Part 2: Core Capabilities in Positive Education**

With this foundation in mind, what should implicit and explicit pedagogies and approaches be focused upon? Wave 1 and 2 positive education placed the emphasis on happiness, wellbeing, and resilience as necessary complements to the traditional focus on academic performance and achievement. From that perspective, the core intention of positive education programs and

approaches is to increase how students feel and function. From a learning and development perspective, wave 3 positive education adds an intentional focus on capabilities for wellbeing—people’s abilities and opportunities to be and do what they value (Alexander, 2008; Sen, 1993). Rather than being about the achievement of wellbeing, a capability perspective focuses on equipping people with clarity about their values, mindsets that arise from those values, and skills to live in alignment with these values. In addition, values, mindsets, and skills need to be complemented with conditions that provide opportunities for people to experience wellbeing.

Building upon this perspective, Part 2 begins by examining what is meant by wellbeing, flourishing, resilience, and other outcomes that are often emphasized in positive education research and practices, with the various waves appearing throughout the chapters. Chaves-Vélez (Chapter 11) unpacks different models of and approaches to defining wellbeing and flourishing, why these matters, and approaches that have been incorporated within developmental environments to cultivate wellbeing and flourishing. Attention is given to the efficacy of such interventions for preventing subsequent problems and the importance of political commitments towards supporting wellbeing as necessary for interventions to be sustainable. Assessment plays a critical role for wellbeing to be sustainably incorporated into policies, schools, and approaches. Jarden and colleagues (Chapter 12) describe the essence of and principles toward good assessment within schools. Bringing this to life, the authors describe examples of several tools, along with what these tools look like in practice. Through a series of questions, the chapter describes the content, processes, and systems that need to be considered as part of assessment approaches and illustrates how good assessment can be used to guide decision making and practice.

Directly drawing on a capability perspective, Oades and colleagues (Chapter 13) shift the focus from wellbeing to the concept of wellbeing literacy—having language for and about wellbeing that is applied in contextually sensitive and intentional ways. The authors suggest that wellbeing literacy helps to orient the focus of positive education towards wellbeing capabilities and processes, draws upon existing learning and teaching capacities and strengths, and is contextually sensitive to the systems in which individuals exist.

A capability perspective speaks in part to equipping young people with language and skills for and about wellbeing. But it also points to the importance of context and experience. The contextual nature of wellbeing becomes particularly relevant in the case of chronic stress and challenge. Chapters 14 and 15 focus on resilience and coping. Complementing a trauma-informed

perspective (Chapter 8), Ronan (Chapter 14) illustrates the crises and traumas that many young people experience, illustrating the effects that such experiences have on children and adolescents. There is a need to facilitate resilience at multiple levels, protecting young people from harm while empowering them to use their strengths, grow through struggle, and experience happiness. Frydenberg (Chapter 15) elaborates on the development of coping skills, with a particular focus on early childhood. The chapter describes productive and unhelpful strategies, offering a number of examples that illustrate effective approaches towards equipping young people, teachers, and parents with effective coping skills that can be subsequently drawn upon throughout development, helping young people to effectively navigate the ups and downs of life and promoting greater resilience.

Some of the most salient capabilities that have been emphasized across most applications of positive education are character strengths. Copley and Niemix (Chapter 16) provide an overview of character strengths, with a particular focus on the VIA classification, which is the most common model used within schools, describing approaches to and impacts of strengths interventions. Again providing a third wave perspective, they point to the need for a systems approach for implementing strength-based intervention. Possibilities for simultaneously considering the content of the intervention and processes to include to create effective change are brought to life through practice-based examples.

Chapters 17, 18, and 19 turn to a variety of approaches that make the learning process enjoyable and engaging, providing clarity around what the capabilities are, why they matter, frameworks for understanding and applying the concepts, and examples of what they look like in practice for both teachers and staff. Tidmand (Chapter 17) illustrates how positive emotions and playfulness can successfully be incorporated into lesson preparation, pedagogical practice, and lesson evaluation, helping to support positive learning environments. Ledertoug and Paarup (Chapter 18) further build upon this, offering frameworks and approaches for making education engaging through the cultivation of active, involved, and motivated learning environments. Beghetto (Chapter 19) complements these approaches through a focus on creative learning, which emphasizes creative expression with the context of and approaches to academic learning.

The rest of Part 2 focuses on capabilities around, approaches towards, and considerations concerning connecting with ourselves, with others, and with the world. Buchanan and Grieg (Chapter 20) explore fixed and growth mindset theory in education, and then extend this to describe the benefit

mindset, which integrates personal transformation, social contribution, leadership, and recognition of our interdependence with the world. Allen and colleagues (Chapter 21) focus on connection with schools, unpacking research around school belonging, the importance of teachers in fostering a sense of connection, and the role that school leaderships play in fostering strong relationships. Steger and colleagues (Chapter 22) speak to our need and universal desire for our lives to be purposeful, coherent, and significant. They describe meaning in life research and point to tools and activities that can be integrated within and across positive education efforts to help students live and learn in purposeful ways.

Meaning arises, for many, from a connection with something beyond themselves, which can be fostered through various religious, spiritual, and contemplative practices. McCall (Chapter 23) describes positive spirituality, which acknowledges that personal spiritual growth can occur through a number of evidence-based approaches and techniques, including meditation, relaxation, and physical stillness to raise spiritual awareness and enable young people to connect with something or someone greater than themselves. Sheinman and Russo-Netzer (Chapter 24) further detail the application of mindfulness in education, overviewing what is known about mindfulness in education, summarizing various perspectives and practices, and the relevance of mindfulness for supporting holistic and integrative approaches to education.

Across the chapters, authors speak to the complexity of not only the capabilities themselves, but also the approaches necessary for application within schools. While various approaches, frameworks, and practices are mentioned, it is clear that application is neither simple nor straightforward. Context matters, pedagogy is critical, and appropriateness and impact are dynamic. As a whole, the chapters point to both the possibilities for and the challenges of supporting the holistic development of learners who are engaged with, passionate about, and active in pursuing their potential to contribute to the world in their own unique ways.

### **Part 3: Diversifying Positive Education**

The incorporation of positive psychology within the educational context necessarily calls for diversification across cultures and populations. According to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2015), all children, without any form of discrimination have the right to education that is directed at “the

development of the child's personality, talents, and physical and mental abilities to their fullest potential" (Article 29a). If positive education aims to help young people to develop to their full potential, then it necessarily needs to be accessible to young people of *all* backgrounds. And yet the broader positive psychology discipline has only begun to extend across cultures, contexts, backgrounds, and perspectives. Prior chapters speak to and provide examples of growing diversification. Part 3 explicitly focuses on examples of and opportunities for the growing diversification of positive education.

Addressing the need for extension to diverse populations, Roffey and Quinlan (Chapter 25) focus on young people who have experienced adversity, pointing to the issues that these young people face, the outcomes that arise from the challenges faced, protective factors, and what schools can and are doing to address the needs of disadvantaged students. They provide a series of case studies at school, city, and community levels, highlighting how positive education can be appropriately used to positively impact young people's lives, in ways that can break negative intergenerational cycles that perpetuate disadvantage.

The next two chapters consider diversity across cultures. Joshanloo and colleagues (Chapter 26) explore ways in which culture shapes how people pursue personal and collective wellbeing, resulting in cultural-specific prescriptions and customs about what wellbeing entails and approaches to pursue it. Specifically, the authors identify four fundamental differences that occur in terms of how different cultures conceptualize mental wellbeing, based upon the centrality of hedonic experience, self-enhancement, autonomy, and the relevance of contextual factors. The authors point to the implications of these different conceptualizations for designing interventions and policies and approaches to evaluation. As an example, Kwok (Chapter 27) describes how positive education has been implemented within early years, primary, secondary, and higher education institutions in Hong Kong. The chapter points to factors that affected effectiveness, with suggestions and directions of applications of positive education within the Hong Kong context. Together, these chapters point to the necessity of taking care when extending positive education across cultures.

Much of the work and approaches within positive education primarily are focused on school-aged students. Yet there is a growing recognition of the importance of focusing on the wellbeing of teachers, staff, and leaders. McCallum (Chapter 28) points to the health of teaching professionals as essential to anything that is done within education. Yet many educators are struggling. The chapter provides strategies for supporting teacher wellbeing, underscoring the need for positive education to not only be about

student wellbeing, but supporting optimal development and performance for all members of the educational community.

Considerable research around supporting employee wellbeing has developed across the first two decades of the twenty-first century through Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). Cameron (Chapter 29) describes the unique characteristics of POS, pointing to the importance of positive organizational dynamics for empowering high performance within organizations. The chapter describes core POS principles, illustrating the possibilities that can arise through the application of these principles. Case studies highlight how the approaches that two higher education institutions incorporated successfully contributed to achievement, wellbeing, and collective performance. The institutional-level focus of POS allows impact of effects to impact far beyond individual classrooms, impacting upon the school community as a whole.

We end the Handbook with final observations, opportunities, and our vision for the future. This Handbook was, fundamentally, an outgrowth of efforts within the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) to create a community within the expanding discipline of positive education. That effort resulted in the establishment of the IPPA Education Division (IPPAed) in 2016. Many of the authors in this Handbook have been involved with IPPAed in its formation and development. The Handbook was one means to begin to achieve the vision of IPPAed, which envisions a community of researchers, educators, students, and others who are dedicated to:

bringing out the best in educational communities through the intersection of the science of positive psychology and best learning educational practice. IPPAed recognizes the plurality of theories, models, methods, and perspectives relevant to positive education. IPPAed aims to connect members from around the world, fostering open dialect and the sharing of knowledge and resources, to empower individuals and educational communities worldwide to create and shape environments that allow all members of the community and the communities to flourish. (IPPA, 2016)

The Handbook attempts to support this vision, giving light to the plurality of models and perspectives, and highlighting high-quality research and research-to-practice efforts. We have purposefully emphasized an international and multi-disciplinary approach. In the final chapter (Chapter 30), we revisit these topics, identifying ways in which the field can evolve to be more inclusive, more effective, and more impactful, as we all work together to create and shape educational environments that allow all members of our educational communities to thrive, both now and for future generations.

## References

- Alexander, J. M. (2008). *Capabilities and social justice: The political philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum*. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Allen, K., & McKenzie, V. (2015). Mental health in an Australian context and future interventions from a school belonging perspective. *Special Issue on Mental Health in Australia for the International Journal of Mental Health*, 44, 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2015.1009780>.
- Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 505–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.830764>.
- Black, B., & Kern, M. L. (2020). A qualitative exploration of individual differences in wellbeing for highly sensitive individuals. *Palgrave Communications*, 6, 103. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0482-8>.
- Bolier, L., Haverman, M., Westerhof, G. J., Riper, H., Smit, F., & Bohlmeijer, E. (2013). Positive psychology interventions: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC Public Health*, 13, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-119>.
- Den Brok, P., Wubbels, T., & van Tartwijk, J. (2017). Exploring beginning teachers' attrition in the Netherlands. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(8), 881–895.
- Gallant, A., & Riley, P. (2014). Early career teacher attrition: New thoughts on an intractable problem. *Teacher Development*, 18(4), 562–580.
- Green, S. Oades, L. G., & Robinson, P. L. (2011, April). Positive education: Creating flourishing students, staff and schools. *InPsych*. [www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/april/green](http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/april/green).
- IPPA. (2016). *IPPA education division charter*. <http://www.ippanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IPPA-ed-board-charter-8Oct2016.pdf>.
- Kashdan, T., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2014). *The upside of your dark side: Why being your whole self—Not just your “good” self—Drives success and fulfillment*. New York, NY: Plume.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Kessler, R. C., & Bromet, E. J. (2013). The epidemiology of depression across cultures. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 34, 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031912-114409>.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2012). Positive psychology and positive education: Old wine in new bottles? *Educational Psychologist*, 47, 86–105.
- Lawrence, D., Johnson, S., Hafekost, J., Boterhoven de Haan, K., Sawyer, M., Ainley, J., et al. (2015). *The mental health of children and adolescents: Report on the second Australian child and adolescent survey of mental health and well-being*. Canberra: Department of Health.

- Lomas, T., Waters, L. E., Williams, P., Oades, L., & Kern, M. L. (2020). Third wave positive psychology: Broadening towards complexity. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1805501>.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3, 147–161.
- Oades, L. G., Robinson, P., Green, S., & Spence, G. B. (2011). Towards a positive university. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6, 432–439.
- Parks, A. C., & Schueller, S. M. (2014). *The Wiley Blackwell handbook of positive psychological interventions*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley.
- Pawelski, J. O. (2016). Defining the 'positive' in positive psychology: Part I. A descriptive analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11, 339–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137627>.
- Riley, P. (2019). *Australian principal occupational health, safety and wellbeing survey: 2018 data*. <https://apo.org.au/node/222071>.
- Rusk, R. D., & Waters, L. E. (2013). Tracing the size, reach, impact, and breadth of positive psychology. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 207–221.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35, 293–311.
- Sen, A. (1993). Capability and well-being. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds.), *The quality of life* (pp. 30–53). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65, 467–487. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20593>.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T. C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., et al. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Fryenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Singapore: Springer.
- United Nations. (2015). *Convention on the rights of the child* (Article 29a). <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.
- White, C. A., Uttl, V., & Holder, M. D. (2019). Meta-analyses of positive psychology interventions: The effects are much smaller than previously reported. *PLoS ONE*, 14(5), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216588>.
- White, M., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.
- White, M. A., Slemp, G. R., & Murray, A. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations and policy*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- World Health Organization. (2017). *Depression and other common mental disorders: Global health estimates*. [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/management/depression/prevalence\\_global\\_health\\_estimates/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/prevalence_global_health_estimates/en/).

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# **Part I**

## **Perspectives on and Approaches to Positive Education**



# 2

## Approaches to Positive Education

Suzy Green, Clive Leach, and Daniela Falecki

There has never been a more important time to consider the role of schools and learning institutions in teaching the skills of wellbeing, resilience and flourishing to students and staff. In 2020, the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world that we live in—characterised by rapid environmental, political, economic, technological, and social change—was challenged further through the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no question that the COVID crisis brought the need for wellbeing, resilience, and mental toughness in schools, organisations, and communities to the centre stage, evidenced by national, state, and local policies developed in multiple countries to address mental health concerns, media coverage emphasising mental health challenges in teachers and students, and a myriad of webinars and online conferences and courses that were readily made available throughout the year, as the positive psychology community focussed on upskilling and supporting local and non-local communities.

---

S. Green (✉)

The Positivity Institute & Centre for Wellbeing Science,  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [suzy@thepositivityinstitute.com.au](mailto:suzy@thepositivityinstitute.com.au)

C. Leach

Clive Leach Consultancy Ltd, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

D. Falecki

Teacher Wellbeing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Despite the many promising and necessary initiatives, these approaches were primarily reactive in nature. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools in Australia and elsewhere had already adopted various approaches to positive education, not as a result of a crisis per se (albeit we would argue that it was the mental health crisis that contributed to the initial uptake), but for the proactive enhancement of the wellbeing of their communities. In our perspective, supported by discussions with the schools with whom we have engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic, investments in wellbeing began to pay real dividends as they navigated through unprecedented and difficult times and yet still found ways to thrive despite the struggle.

Multiple approaches to positive education exist, some of which we consider in this chapter. We first point to challenges in sustainable implementation, pointing to the need for the strategic integration of approaches and cross-disciplinary collaboration, with a particular emphasis on the benefits of incorporating coaching into the process. We provide a case study to highlight how the successful integration of different approaches can be implemented. Finally, practical recommendations are provided to inform the strategic implementation of positive education. We posit that whatever the approach to positive education that is taken by schools, there appears to be a common theme of proactive, genuine and positive commitments from schools to place wellbeing and flourishing at the very heart of their mission.

## **An Applied Perspective of Positive Education**

We begin by considering the rise of positive education as a practice in schools, identify challenges that arise in implementation within the constraints of schools, and provide a lens for thinking about the application of positive education across educational communities.

### **The Emergence and Growth of Positive Education**

When a seminal paper was published by Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, and Linkins (2009), positive education was identified as a specific sub-discipline of positive psychology. This paper was largely based on the work Seligman and his team had conducted at Geelong Grammar School (GGS). The GGS approach included the explicit teaching of positive psychology to staff (by Seligman and his team), then to students (by the GGS staff) and, overtime, the school took a whole of school approach to embed the science into the

broader school culture (Norrish, 2015). This whole school approach to positive education centred on Seligman's model of wellbeing, PERMA (Seligman, 2011), with an added health (H) dimension (i.e., PERMAH). GGS developed the strategy of 'learn it, live it, teach it, and embed it', whereby staff were first encouraged to learn and apply the science of positive psychology to their own lives, then teach it to students, and then increasingly embed it within their everyday practice. Over time, GGS, also added a focus on establishing school-wide policies and processes to create a culture for wellbeing across the school community, embedding wellbeing into areas such as assemblies, sports, music, chapel services, and parent events.

Over the past decade, numerous schools have been inspired by GGS's proactive approach in equipping students with skills to prevent mental illness, promote student flourishing, and support academic performance. Since that time, there has been a significant uptake of positive education in Australia (Green, 2014; Slemp et al., 2017), with growing uptake worldwide. Many of the schools that first embraced positive education have been private/independent schools, which often have a greater capacity to finance external consultancy and create resources and have greater freedom in designing curricula and timetables than government/public schools. The investments made by these schools helped create an evidence base for positive education (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; White, Slemp, & Murray, 2017), enabled sharing of good practices, and provided inspiration and motivation to many schools and educators around the world to consider the potential benefits of taking a positive education approach.

## The Challenge of Sustainable Implementation

While extensions to less privileged schools and more diverse populations is encouraging, the scalability and sustainability of positive education remain questionable. Many schools are either limited by financial constraints and/or are uncertain of whether they wish to commit to a positive education approach wholeheartedly. They might dip their toe in the water, but resist jumping into the sea. For instance, we commonly find that schools will invite external expert consultants to provide one-off keynotes or staff workshops in the science of positive psychology/positive education, with the aim of exploring where and how positive education may align with their own school's mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives, which usually include enhancing student wellbeing and reducing mental health issues.

While learning may take place in these professional development sessions, these learnings are often not transferred into lived practices at the school,

nor are they embedded in school processes. Despite the popularity of this approach, studies show that there is limited 'transfer of training'. For instance, Saks (2002) found that about 40% of trainees failed to transfer knowledge gained immediately after training, 70% faltered in transfer one year after the program, and ultimately only 50% of training investments resulted in organisational or individual improvements. Transferability is more likely when organisations create a positive transfer climate (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993), which facilitates the use of what has been learned in training back on the job. Features of a positive transfer climate include cues that prompt individuals to use new skills, consequences for the correct use of skills, remediation for not using skills, and social support from peers and leaders in the form of incentives and feedback (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). We believe that this is particularly relevant to positive education efforts that primarily focus on professional development and training initiatives.

Training may also be more effective when it is driven by and championed by educators within the school, who understand the school context, have the skills and knowledge to make sense of the positive psychology literature, and motivate others within the school to incorporate positive education within the school. Some educators, school psychologists, and school leaders have gone on to further education, such as completing a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP), Masters in Coaching Psychology, doctoral study, or other certifications. There has also been the creation of and targeted recruitment to newly created leadership posts with specific briefs and job titles relating to positive education or whole school wellbeing. By building the internal capability of school staff, schools become less reliant on external consultants and better able to embed their approach in a context-specific manner.

Beyond the questionable transfer of training, school efforts can also be limited by ad hoc approaches, often focused on specific programs. For some schools, a program can be a launching pad to which further approaches might follow on as part of a strategic approach to positive education. However, many schools remain committed to a singular program even when it is no longer serving the school community well, failing to fully embrace and embed other key areas of positive education. For example, a school that is committed to a specific social and emotional learning (SEL) program may not offer any specific education to students or staff on growth mindset or character education. Equally, there are schools that embrace coaching to enhance teaching and learning, but not explicitly to support positive education (Lofthouse, 2017). Indeed, we have encountered numerous schools that have defined themselves by labels such as 'Growth Mindset School' or a

‘Character School’ to highlight their commitment to that approach. While a commitment to the effective implementation of a program is important and should be commended, given many programs often fail to be effectively implemented, it is our belief and recommendation that a school should consider multiple approaches to positive education, ideally underpinned by a coaching approach and the creation of a coaching culture. In this chapter, we review some of the approaches that schools might consider, with the recognition that as a young field, additional useful approaches will continue to be developed in the years to come.

School leaders can also have unrealistic expectations of changes and the timescale needed for the transfer of training and embedding of approaches to occur. From our experience, when schools do engage external experts to support a strategic approach, the process from commencement to the desired individual and collective outcomes (e.g., student, staff, and whole school flourishing) is a four-year minimum commitment. These cultures change not simply through training sessions by experts or the incorporation of a particular approach in the short term, but through a long-term commitment to and prioritising of positive education across the school.

## **Integrating Positive Education and Coaching**

Considering the challenges involved in sustainably implementing positive education within schools, we argue that the objectives of positive education, including the goal of promoting youth wellbeing, are grand challenges that remain to be solved, and as such require cross-disciplinary collaboration. Grand challenges have been defined as having a broad application, an ability to manifest themselves at different levels of scale, and the interest they attract in political and financial support for research in providing a solution (O’Rourke, Crowley, & Gonnerman, 2016). While it may be clear that there are a multitude of disciplines that have relevance to positive education, we believe that one of the most potent and relevant levers for sustainable implementation is evidence-based coaching (EBC).

We argue that the implementation of positive education through a positive transfer climate requires a strategic approach which includes coaching of school leaders, key teams, and champions combined with cultivating a culture of quality coaching conversations (Grant, 2017a, 2017b). Studies find significant gains in productivity of public sector managers and leaders who received coaching alongside training (e.g., Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997). In our experience, our roles as consultants, coaches, and facilitators have enabled the development of longer term ongoing relationships with schools that has

allowed us to coach them through the introduction of positive education, supporting them to set goals; develop strategy; collaborate effectively; implement action plans; review, reflect, evaluate, share, and present outcomes and measures internally and often at international conferences; and embed change over time. We believe that this approach enables the creation of positive transfer climates and supports the development of an overall positive culture that is necessary for sustainable change to occur.

The challenges in sustainably incorporating positive education point to the need for cross-disciplinary collaboration (especially between positive psychology and coaching psychology), the benefits of flexibly incorporating multiple approaches, and the need for broader and more strategic approaches. As such, we suggest that positive education can be thought of as:

The strategic and sustainable integration and implementation of the complementary fields of positive psychology, coaching psychology, and other relevant wellbeing science into an educational setting utilising multiple evidence-based initiatives aimed at creating flourishing students, staff, and whole-school communities.

As scientist-practitioners, we have been actively involved in and contributed to the growth of positive education in Australia, Asia-Pacific, the United Kingdom, and Europe since its inception in 2009. We have collectively worked with hundreds of private and public schools during this time. A large majority of our engagements have been larger scale and longer term consultancies, as part of ongoing cultural change programs, such as Knox Grammar School and Loreto-Kirribilli (Sydney, Australia), Perth College (Western Australia), St Columba (South Australia), Kurri Kurri High School (New South Wales, Australia), and Taipei European School (Taiwan). At the time of initial engagement, these schools were either interested in increasing student wellbeing without knowledge of the field of positive psychology or they were already attempting to utilise the science of positive psychology to promote student wellbeing, but they were struggling to adopt a strategic approach to enhance 'stickability' (White, 2016). It is our observation that many schools also failed to recognise the powerful role of teacher wellbeing and its associated impact on student wellbeing and hence the initiatives were often mostly student-focused.

The challenge becomes that without a strategic approach or alignment under an overarching framework, these initiatives appear as additional extras to the job of teaching curriculum. Our experiences so far suggest that most schools do offer students and staff (to a lesser degree) opportunities to enhance their wellbeing and personal and social capabilities. But many lack

strategic alignment to the overall school strategy or a strategy focused on the prevention of student mental health issues rather than a broader wellbeing strategy for students, staff, and whole school flourishing. To provide guidance for the sustainable integration of positive education, we first review some of the main approaches that have been used within positive education, before turning to a case study highlighting a sustainable approach.

## Some Approaches Used Within Positive Education

A variety of approaches to positive education exist (e.g. Slemp et al., 2017), including:

1. Social and emotional learning (SEL)
2. Character education
3. Growth mindset
4. Resilience and Mental toughness
5. Coaching and Mentoring
6. Mindfulness and Other Contemplative practices
7. Wellbeing practices
8. Restorative Justice
9. School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
10. Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE).

In this chapter, we focus on the first five, as these are the approaches that have been most common across schools that we have worked with. We provide a brief snapshot of each approach, highlighting the relevance to the aims and objectives of positive education, and identify limitations of using the approach on its own, rather than as a broader set of approaches.

### Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been described as ‘the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions’ ([www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)). The root of SEL originates from Plato where he suggested a holistic curriculum, however in recent times, SEL emerged from Yale School of

Medicine in the late 1960s. CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, was formed in 1994 with a mission of integrating evidence-based social and emotional learning into schools.

CASEL includes five key competencies that form part of an integrated SEL framework: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills. These competencies are typically integrated into programs that teachers incorporate into lessons throughout the year. There are many highly effective SEL programs in schools, supported with extensive research, such as the RULER program from Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, Rivers, Maurer, Elbertson, & Kremenitzer, 2011), Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships (RRRR, Cahill et al., 2016), The 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution; Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010), MindUP (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), and Peaceworks: Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids (Pickens, 2009). CASEL also emphasises the broader system in which these competencies are taught, including not only the SEL curriculum and instruction but also creating supportive learning environments through school-wide practices and policies, including the importance of embedding learning within family and community partnerships.

Many SEL approaches have been used throughout schools long before positive education was established. A meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students who participated in evidence-based SEL programs not only demonstrated small to moderate increases in social and emotional skills and positive social behaviours, but also demonstrated an 11% point gain in academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Research also shows effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater wellbeing, and better school performance, whereas those who fail to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Slemp et al. (2017) suggested that 'the vision, scope, and boundaries of positive education are yet to be fully defined, but it both intersects with and complements social and emotional learning' (p. 103). SEL arose through extensive education-based research, whereas positive education arose from positive psychology applied to education. Indeed, currently, there is little acknowledgement or frameworks provided on the significant connections between positive education and SEL (Ng & Vella-Brodrick, 2019), though the connections certainly exist. For instance, the core competencies of SEL support Seligman's PERMA model, with self-awareness needed to identify positive emotions, self-management required in choosing to be engaged in

a task, social awareness helps us build positive relationships, and responsible decision-making is needed to make meaningful contributions to the world around us. We suggest that SEL is a helpful approach that can be used as part of the broader whole-school focus on positive education.

Effective implementation of SEL programs can be challenging by competing demands for curriculum time, often resulting in a fragmented approach to learning (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This occurs, in part, because outcomes of SEL programs are rarely measured, and assessment and reporting are not required. The teacher is often the facilitator of these programs, yet little time is given to teachers to learn and live these competencies themselves (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). What we do know from the research is that SEL programs are only effective if all stakeholders are involved in the implementation process holistically and sustainably (CASEL, 2020). Teaching staff need opportunities for professional development to learn and live SEL, ensuring clear buy-in and involvement before teaching the SEL competencies to students. Research also has shown that regular and ongoing mentoring for teachers can support not only in the development of their own social and emotional competencies, but is effective in helping teachers better implement high-quality SEL programs (Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016).

## Character Education

Character refers to personal traits that are admired and respected by others, those qualities that define us, are integral to who we are, who we want to become and the value we can bring to the world (Neimeic & McGrath, 2019). Character education can be traced back to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, which emphasise the explicit and implicit teaching and development that helps young people to discover and build positive personal character strengths or virtues with the aim of leading flourishing lives (Jubilee Centre, 2017).

Numerous perspectives and definitions about what constitute ‘good’ character exist. The perspectives and approaches most often used within positive education build upon a set of virtues and strengths identified by Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman. Through an extensive review of the qualities that are generally universally considered good about being human, Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggested six virtues and 24 specific character strengths that have been shared by most cultures globally over multiple millennia. To measure and develop character in adults and subsequently young people, they developed the Values in Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths ([www.viacharac](http://www.viacharac)

ter.org). Hundreds of studies have demonstrated that positive outcomes arise for children, young people, teachers, and parents as they learn to recognise and use their strengths, including enhanced wellbeing, self-efficacy, resilience, engagement, academic attainment, and performance, as well as reductions in anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms (Harzer, Mubashar, & Dubreuil, 2017; Quinlan, Vella-Brodrick, Gray, & Swain, 2019; Waters & Sun, 2016). As a result, the VIA is now a prominent part of most positive education efforts, with the principles underlying the model being creatively applied from the early years through to the higher education sector.

An example of the explicit strategic incorporation of the VIA Strengths is the US-based KIPP (Knowledge is Power) Program (KIPP, 2020), a not-for profit network of over 240 schools that explicitly draws upon seven of the character strengths in particular and 24 associated behaviours which are deemed essential for a happy and successful life at school and beyond: curiosity, gratitude, self-regulation, grit, social intelligence, optimism, and zest. The KIPP approach is based on a deep belief that academic achievement and well-developed character strengths are interconnected and formally integrates strengths development alongside the academic curriculum. Student progress is measured by incorporating a Character Growth Report Card, in which students are scored by teachers on their character performance.

In the United Kingdom, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at Birmingham University has been at the vanguard of bringing character into both the caught and taught curriculum, and a number of schools have trialled requiring incorporating the development of character within their schools (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse, & Jones, 2015). Their *Framework for Character Education* (2017) argues for the development of a whole school ethos and culture that embraces character alongside the explicit teaching of character within classroom subjects (Harrison, Arthur, & Burn, 2016).

Both the VIA Institute of Character and Jubilee Centre are consistently building an evidence-base for character strengths assessment and encouraging innovation and the sharing of resources to support learning and application in schools, with a wealth of freely accessible research papers and resources available on their websites. However, a limitation in our experience is that initial excitement that usually accompanies the completion of the VIA is rarely maintained. Initially, it is commonplace for both staff and students to complete the assessment and then implement a variety of initiatives to raise awareness, such as strengths posters or strengths cards. However, these interventions are not usually a part of a 'strengths strategy' which considers the usage of strengths within the school including inclusion in policy/procedures and the explicit usage of strengths within the curriculum. There have also

been concerns around highly prescriptive approaches taken with strengths and alignment to academic performance whereby the relentless focus on grit and self-regulation can result in higher levels of stress and burn-out to the detriment of wellbeing (Abundis, Crego-Emley, Baker, & Lema, 2017).

We believe the key to maximising the benefits of character strengths lies in the strategic and mindful use in line with the mission and values of the institution (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2018). One way to enhance the stickability of a strengths approach may be through the use of evidence-based coaching and coaching conversations whereby strengths can be regularly applied to facilitate awareness and appropriate use by providing space for individual reflection, strengths-based goal setting, action planning, and accountability (Leach & Green, 2016; Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011).

## Growth Mindset

Growth mindset is ‘the belief that human capacities are not fixed but can be developed over time’ (Dweck & Yeager, 2019, p. 481). Research related to growth mindset examines ways in which one’s mindset impact human behaviour. The theory arose from a long history of studies in psychology that assume that human attributes can be developed. Theories such as learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) and attribution theory (Weiner & Kukla, 1970) suggested that how people explained failure could predict their response as one of helplessness or striving for mastery. Goal theory went one step further by attempting to identify the reasons for these responses. From this perspective, students with ‘achievement goals’ were thought to be trying to ‘prove’ themselves whereas students with ‘learning goals’ were trying to ‘improve’ themselves (Covington, 2000). The research was now shifting from understanding why some people avoid taking on challenges, to focusing on why some people fulfil their potential. This shift formed the foundation of Carol Dweck’s work of ‘implicit theories of intelligence’, which has come to be known as fixed and growth mindset thinking.

The idea of growth mindset arose from decades of research by Dweck and her colleagues, which found that students’ mindsets appeared to play a key role in their motivation and achievement. For instance, one study found that for students transitioning to 7th grade Maths, those with a growth mindset had significantly increased over 2 years compared to those with a fixed mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Studies in both education and organisations continue to suggest that one’s mindset impacts motivation, behaviour, and outcomes, albeit with small to moderate effect sizes, depending on the sample (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Yeager, 2019).

Building from this work, others have asked whether achievement could improve if educators change students' mindsets from thinking their intelligence was fixed to a mindset where they believe their intelligence could grow (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

While studies have identified that growth mindset interventions can influence the mindset of students to increase academic performance, Dweck and Yeager (2019) are clear to caution educators on oversimplifying the creation of growth mindsets in what has come to be known as 'false growth mindset'. This stems from educators praising effort when this effort is not effective or encouraging the use of growth mindset language from posters on the wall, yet little structure, guidance and direction is given on the process of learning. Indeed, two meta-analyses exploring the extent and circumstances of growth mindset interventions in improving academic performance, little or no significant effect was found (Sisk et al., 2018). In fact, Dweck and Yeager (2019) have shifted their research to question the role environments play on mindset, focusing on the messages that are conveyed in a system to support a growth mindset and how these messages might impact mental health, social coping, and wellbeing.

Growth mindset as a focus for positive education makes sense for many educators. Given that the primary role of schools is learning, including growth mindset interventions within a positive education curriculum provides a bridge between academic priorities and wellbeing related priorities. However, we argue that special consideration must be given to the types of interventions explored and how teachers are expected to embed these within the school. High-quality training of teachers is imperative. Teacher training is not only necessary to ensure the use of evidence-based interventions, but training may also strengthen the mindset of the teachers. Notably, teachers' mindsets are a core contributor to the development of students' mindset (Hattie, 2012). The perspectives that educators have about the potential of students—at both conscious and subconscious levels—have a major influence on how teachers think and behave, the mindsets that students develop, and resulting outcomes (Hattie, 2012). Fortunately, teacher mindset has been shown to shift towards growth mindset thinking with brief training interventions (Seaton, 2018). However, professional development must be considered within a holistic model to ensure reflections on pedagogy mirror the findings of Dweck and colleagues' research.

## Resilience and Mental Toughness

Many schools are focused on resilience as a means to address adversity rather than general wellbeing enhancement, although resilience to some extent underpins wellbeing and flourishing (Huppert & So, 2013). There are many approaches and programs available which claim to build resilience in schools. For instance, the Penn Resilience Program (PRP) aims to prevent depression in young people (Gillham, Jaycox, Reivich, Seligman, & Silver, 1990). Research has indicated that PRP produces positive and reliable improvements in students' wellbeing (Seligman et al., 2009). However, while evidence-based, a prohibitive factor to the uptake of this program, like many other proprietary resilience and wellbeing programs, is often cost, which makes it inaccessible to many schools with limited budgets.

Another approach some schools are taking to unpacking resilience is mental toughness (Clough, Earle, & Strycharczyk, 2002). Mental toughness is defined as 'the quality which determines in large part how people deal effectively with challenge, stressors and pressure...irrespective of prevailing circumstances' (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012, p. 1). In simple terms, mental toughness is described as having a 'can-do' attitude as well as having the skills to be able to navigate change as it occurs. Mental toughness acts as a proactive approach to embracing the challenge, seeking opportunities for growth, and building PERMAH.

The research foundations of mental toughness lie in cognitive hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), sports psychology (Loehr, 1982), and resilience (Masten, 2001). Merging theory and practice, Clough, Earle, and Strycharczyk (2002) developed the 4C model of Mental Toughness:

- **Control:** the degree to which a person believes they can control the things within and around them such as their emotions and their locus of control
- **Commitment:** the degree to which a person can set and achieve goals and manage distractions along the way
- **Confidence:** the degree to which a person believes in their capacity and is able to engage with those around them, including being able to ask for help when needed
- **Challenge:** the degree to which a person can seek new learning experiences and respond to setbacks.

Through understanding and learning these four components, students become proactive in responding to challenge, stress and pressure as learning

opportunities and have the necessary skills to respond to setbacks they experience.

Mental toughness has been applied primarily in the United Kingdom, with increasing interest and uptake in Australia. Mental toughness is a discrete and scientifically based concept which can easily be taught and learned by both teachers and students. It has been shown to provide a useful framework to study the non-cognitive predictors of positive academic outcomes, and correlates positively with greater resilience, perseverance, confidence, and self-efficacy, and correlates negatively with academic stress, test anxiety, and perceptions of bullying (McGeown, St Clair-Thompson, & Clough, 2016). Across three studies, St Clair-Thompson et al. (2015) found significant positive associations between the mental toughness components and academic attainment, school attendance, pro-social behaviour, and peer relationships, and lower levels of drop out, stress, anxiety, and depression.

The 4Cs can help schools to map existing support to students and address potential gaps in pastoral and study skills programs. There is emerging evidence from studies conducted at Blue Coat School, Austin Friars School, and the British Section at Taipei European School suggesting that the application of a range of positive psychology interventions, integrated within life skills or other positive education programs, can increase levels of mental toughness in young people as well as act as a buffer against stressful times such as exam periods. For example, the Blue Coat School study also found increased mental toughness for teachers involved in the delivery of their programs (AQR International, 2015). Still, although the mental toughness approach has benefits, we believe that one limitation is that the term 'mental toughness' can have connotations of machismo and the sporting world, which may disconnect some students and schools.

## Coaching

Over the last decade there has been increasing support for and application of coaching in educational contexts. However, the primary focus has been on coaching for teaching and learning rather than wellbeing (Lofthouse, 2017) and aimed at school improvement through leadership development and enhancement of professional practice including management skills and classroom teaching (Campbell, 2016; Knight, 2007). There is an element of mentoring required and expected of the coach. However, although coaching and mentoring are both methodologies for improving wellbeing and performance in personal and professional life (Passmore, Peterson, & Freire, 2016)

and the terms ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring’ in schools are often used interchangeably, we would argue they are separate concepts. Mentoring reflects the wise senior passing on information to the dutiful junior with a larger focus on telling and providing direction, whereby coaching reflects being the guide on the side with a less directive and more Socratic approach taken through the asking of questions rather providing expert knowledge (Devine, Meyes, & Houssemand, 2013). Here we focus on coaching, which has received greater support for its efficacy across the school as a whole (Ng & Vella-Brodrick, 2019).

As noted earlier, we have long argued that not only is evidence-based coaching a complementary partner to positive psychology, but that it is integral to both maximising and sustaining the benefits of applied positive psychology interventions (Falecki, Leach, & Green, 2018; Green, 2014; Leach & Green, 2016). The approach that we advocate for, and which has a significant evidence-base, is solution-focused cognitive behavioural coaching underpinned by the science of coaching psychology. This approach applies relevant psychological and learning theories and techniques within a collaborative relationship that facilitates wellbeing, engagement, self-directed goal identification, goal striving, goal attainment, personal insight, self-regulation, and accountability within the normal or nonclinical population (Grant, 2007; van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). There has been growing recognition that coaching offers tremendous opportunity to build wellbeing (Falecki et al., 2018; Leach & Green, 2016). Indeed Anthony Grant refers to the emergence of the third generation of coaching, claiming that coaching is evolving towards a more holistic and developmental approach, where the focus is on supporting organisations to flourish, optimising the wellbeing and performance of individuals and the system (Grant, 2017a, 2017b; Grant & Spence, 2009).

Hundreds of peer-reviewed articles and academic books support the benefits of applying coaching in schools (Tee, Barr, & van Nieuwerburgh, 2019). Research has shown that coaching has the potential to contribute to the hope and hardiness of students (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007) and professional development and wellbeing of school leaders and teachers (Grant, Green, & Rynsaardt, 2010). Madden, Green, and Grant (2011) found that coaching combined with the utilisation of character strengths led to increases in student engagement and hope. van Nieuwerburgh and Tong (2013) found that coaching led to improved attitudes to learning. Several recent studies find that coaching, combined with the purposeful creation of positive affect in the coachee, achieves the most significant positive outcomes for wellbeing, goal striving, and attainment and that solution-focused cognitive

behavioural coaching is more powerful in increasing wellbeing and engagement and reducing stress, anxiety, and depression than positive psychology interventions alone (Atad & Grant, 2020; Grant, 2017a, 2017b).

Despite the benefits of coaching, from our experience, most schools that are applying positive psychology approaches have not specifically utilised coaching as a means to amplify such interventions (Green & O'Connor, 2017). We suggest that evidence-based coaching as an individual or group approach helps to create positive school cultures, positive transfer climates, and environments that enable SEL, character development, growth mindset, mental toughness, and other approaches to be more effective, to leadership development, teacher engagement and wellbeing, goal striving, and hope, while reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. We believe that it is in the strategic integration of positive psychology-based approaches and evidence-based coaching where the most power and potential lies to ensure that individual students and educators along with their wider school communities can flourish.

The limitations of the uptake of a coaching approach within a school include (1) cost of initial training initiatives which can be prohibitive to schools; (2) the variation in coach training offerings many of which are not evidence-based approaches and with a corporate focus which are not suitable for an educational setting; (3) the challenges associated with the creation of a coaching culture, which requires a commitment of time and energy by the leadership and appointed coaching champions; (4) the need for allocation of time required to provide professional development in coaching; and (5) the time required for formal coaching to occur within a school setting.

## **Strategically Incorporating Positive Education Approaches**

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to enhancing the wellbeing of school communities; rather, attention to context with key components is critical for the change process to happen. As schools consider how to integrate one or more of the approaches described above, any school faces pressures in terms of scrutiny, academic expectations, bureaucracy, new government policy and initiatives, competing demands, lack of resources, conflict resolution, and staff retention. With the risk of teacher stress and burn-out are high (Green, 2014; Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014), introducing another educational initiative can be challenging, as teachers struggle to manage an already crowded curriculum. This can bring with it some level of cynicism and

push back from the staff. Therefore, creating the conditions and climate for positive change is important to ensure staff buy-in which includes a comprehensive understanding of how positive education approaches align with each school's unique context. Positive education approaches need to be seen as an added value and something that can be lived, taught, and embedded within a school rather than 'layering' on top of other initiatives (Norrish et al., 2013).

The approaches reviewed above (among others) can often be seen as competing approaches; however, by viewing them as complementary, we believe that it is possible that different approaches can be more flexibly incorporated and meet the needs of students, all within the overarching aim of supporting both academic development and wellbeing and creating a positive school culture. In addition, using an organising framework or model can be helpful in aligning multiple approaches and program. For example, in one of the schools that we have worked with, the school leaders opted to use PERMAH as an organising framework to help school leadership, teachers, parents, and students reflect upon where they and others within the school community might currently be and where they would like to be into the future. This approach facilitated a greater appreciation and understanding of what's working well already and where there is need for improvement, support, or a greater emphasis (Grant & Spence, 2009). It is also important that school leadership buy into and are committed to the implementation of positive education.

While initiatives are often driven by leaders, common understanding and buy-in is often more likely to arise from incorporating the perspectives and voices of people across the educational community. We have found that appreciative inquiry (AI; Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1998) can provide a practical strategy to help kick-start their positive education journeys. AI typically follows a process, known as the 4-D model, which involves discovering existing strengths, dreaming of possible futures, designing pathways to bring that future about, and delivering action. AI might be used at the beginning of incorporating positive education. For example, an AI Summit might be used to allow all the key stakeholders to voice their opinions, not only helping to create a common understanding of positive education but also enhancing intrinsic motivation for taking action. AI may be utilised after a period of implementation to review and re-assess the strategy identifying what's worked well and what is yet to be accomplished. It can also be used throughout implementation, with the additional utilisation of team coaching to ensure accountability and completion of specific projects identified through the AI process. As a whole, rather than positive education being imposed, AI, combined with a coaching approach, can help create a shared understanding

of the purpose and importance of positive education, making the initiative more likely to succeed.

Our experience is that facilitating school leaders and teachers to come together as a faculty and self-reflect when they are at their best helps them to gain a unique and meaningful understanding of what it actually means to flourish. Importantly, these reflections will often help identify the *early adopters*, who often self-select and become change champions for the implementation of positive education. Early adopters are those individuals that buy in quickly to the approach and are keen to see its implementation, and become important steerers of change, liaising with school leadership and ensuring continued commitment and progression of the strategic objectives.

## Perth College as a Case Study

To provide an example of a successful strategic approach to positive education, we consider Perth College in Western Australia as a case study. The K-12 school has a 117-year history of educating remarkable women. It is one of the oldest independent girls' schools in Western Australia and prepares young women to think creatively, embrace personal excellence, live generously, and lead (<https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/>). The school began its positive education journey in 2012, initially to address the inequality of females in leadership roles and increasing concerns about students' pastoral needs. Over time, the *InsideOut* program was developed to help students manage themselves by giving them social and emotional skills and character development skills.

*InsideOut* is underpinned by positive psychology, is tailor-made for each year group, and dynamically responds to changing needs. As illustrated in Fig. 2.1, the program is underpinned by a self-leadership model, which extends from Professor Martin Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Like GGS, a health dimension was added. Aligning with Seligman's theory, the dimensions are underpinned by character strengths. The program teaches students evidence-based strategies to increase emotional regulation and self-control, encourages the use of character strengths to build meaning and engagement, promotes awareness of self-talk, and allows time for self-reflection on gratitude, goals, actions, and behaviours. It is also based on evidence-based coaching principles, whereby students learn to become solution-focused and self-regulated.

Soon after the initial implementation of *InsideOut*, and helping to create a common understanding, Perth College leadership recognised the need for



**Fig. 2.1** The *InsideOut* self-leadership model (Original image published on Perth College Anglican School for Girls. (2012). *InsideOut*. <https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/learning/inside-out/>, by Perth College Anglican School for Girls. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

staff to share similar knowledge and gain the accompanying skills so that they could not only teach the skills but also embed them into their teaching, curriculum, and classrooms. As such, while *InsideOut* continues to be a stand-alone student program, there has been a commitment by the college to not only provide students with key psychological skills but also training staff through evidence-based training in the foundations of positive education and positive leadership combined with coaching provided to all staff in dedicated leadership positions. Regular expert consultation has also been provided. Underlying actions is the aim of building a positive school culture where all individuals in the school community become daring leaders and flourish into the best version of themselves.

Further contributing to a shared understanding of positive education, a whole-school AI summit was utilised early in their journey. This helped staff align around positive relationships being at the core of the College. AI has subsequently repeatedly been utilised with parents and staff, helping to ensure a common understanding and ongoing commitment to positive education.

To help identify pockets of success and to enable the sharing and adapting of boundaries, a dedicated team regularly audit the program and broader initiatives that fall under the positive education umbrella. School leadership regularly revise the strategic direction to ensure it is aligned to the school strategy and to encourage innovation and maintain focus on providing the best opportunities possible for the community. For instance, the school has found that it is helpful to identify key levers, or areas of focus to help grow and maintain a thriving organisation. The strategic team revisits these levers regularly and continue to focus on the ‘how’ to deliver the most positive education possible and create a culture of thriving. The impact of *InsideOut* on students and staff wellbeing is measured routinely via Assessing Wellbeing in Education (AWE; Assessing Wellbeing in Education, 2016) and the Gallup Student Poll (Gallup, 2020). Notably, the Gallup data demonstrated increases in hope, engagement and wellbeing between 2014 and 2019, while AWE data has indicated increased resilience across all cohorts.

Perth College acknowledges that their commitment to positive education is ongoing and evolving with the needs of the school. Their approach, however, is an example of a school that commenced their positive education journey with one existing approach being their SEL *InsideOut* program. Since that time, a commitment to staff training in both positive psychology and coaching psychology, the creation of a positive education team and the embedding of positive education principles both explicitly through teaching and learning and implicitly through internal processes and procedures highlights for us a strategic approach to positive education.

## Practical Recommendations

In this chapter, we have reviewed some of the approaches used within positive education and provided some suggestions with regard to a greater strategic approach that might incorporate multiple positive education approaches. We also provided a case study that illustrates an example of the successful strategic implementation of positive education. Based on our experiences, we conclude with a final set of practical recommendations.

- Learn from schools that have been successfully implementing Positive Education. Organisations such as PESA ([www.pesa.com.au](http://www.pesa.com.au)) and the IPPA education division (<https://www.ippanetwork.org/divisions/education/>) provide numerous examples, connections with other educators, and ideas to consider as the pioneering educators share their learning and open themselves up to scrutiny and review.

- Ensure your school is abreast of developments and research in the fields of coaching and positive psychology and provide an experiential introduction by experts in the field. Attend national and international conferences and symposia to hear the latest developments.
- Engage senior leaders first to gain buy-in and then for ongoing sponsorship and support. Consider dedicated education in positive leadership.
- Invest in leadership coaching to ensure leaders are role-modelling the principles of positive education and focused on the enhancement of their own wellbeing.
- Consider the unique context and needs of the school, and tailor efforts to fit the context of the school.
- Provide staff with the opportunity to explore the benefits of positive psychology and coaching for their own wellbeing through professional development opportunities. Follow up any professional development sessions with opportunities for quality reflection and feedback on current actions—what worked and did not work and what will happen next.
- Provide ongoing evidence-based initiatives that promote staff wellbeing.
- Establish a positive education team of champions or steering committee who are intrinsically motivated to ensure ongoing commitment. Provide more in-depth training on evidence-based coaching skills so this team can train others.
- Conduct an audit of current activities that are relevant to positive education.
- Engage a positive education expert consultant/coach to support the team to ensure accountable outcomes and to provide expertise and resources over an extended period.
- Adopt appreciative and coaching approaches to engage stakeholders in an action-research model of inquiry that is proactive and builds on what works well.
- Think strategically about how to embed positive psychology and coaching into the culture of the school.
- Engage with parents through briefings, training and opportunities to participate in positive interventions. Consider coaching conversation training for parents as part of the whole school approach.
- Use validated measures to benchmark wellbeing and engagement.

## Conclusion

While interest in positive education has grown over the past decade, schools often take a scatter-gun approach rather than a strategic approach. They might focus on a single wellbeing initiative, such as SEL, growth mindset, character strengths, mental toughness, or coaching, but with little integration. This can result in positive education being nothing more than a short-term program, rather than an impactful approach to cultural change aimed at improving school communities to ensure every member of that community can thrive. For those schools committed to a single approach such as strengths, we would recommend that the school leadership and internal thought leaders investigate additional approaches that will broaden the lens of positive education. These approaches can further benefit from evidence-based coaching approaches that create the positive transfer climate required for the sustainable success of positive education.

As Norrish et al. (2013) argued, ‘the practical implementation of positive education is complex’ (p. 148). The challenge is for the continued recognition, application, and integration of multiple approaches to positive education. To ensure the sustainability of positive education as a field in its own right, there is a pressing need for integration of the multiple and varied approaches to positive education. While the integration of multiple approaches may be complex and time-consuming, the investment over time is necessary to enhance the capacity of our students, staff, and schools to thrive in a VUCA world.

## References

- Abundis, E. T., Crego-Emley, A., Baker, O., & Lema, J. (2017). *Knowledge is power, but at a cost: KIPP CMO report*. <http://debsedstudies.org/knowledge-is-power-but-at-a-cost-kipp-cmo-report/>.
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2018). Understanding the priorities of Australian secondary schools through an analysis of their mission and vision statements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(2), 249–274.
- AQR International. (2015). *Blue coat study*. <https://aqrinternational.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Blue-Coat-Case-Study.pdf>.
- Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Walker, D., Sanderse, W., & Jones, C. (2015). *Character education in UK schools*. [http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1969/1/Character\\_Education\\_in\\_UK\\_Schools.pdf](http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/1969/1/Character_Education_in_UK_Schools.pdf).
- Assessing Wellbeing in Education. (2016). *Tracking wellbeing in school communities*. <https://www.awesome-schools.com/>.

- Atad, O. I., & Grant, A. M. (2020). How does coach training change coaches-in-training? Differential effects for novice vs. experienced 'skilled helpers'. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 1–17.
- Blackwell, L., Trzesniewski, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child Development*, 78, 246–263.
- Brackett, M. A., & Rivers, S. E. (2014). Transforming students' lives with social and emotional learning. *International Handbook of Emotions in Education*, 368.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Maurer, M., Elbertson, N. A., & Kremenitzer, J. P. (2011). Creating emotionally literate learning environments. In M. A. Brackett, J. P. Kremenitzer, M. Maurer, S. E. Rivers, N. A. Elberston, & M. D. Carpenter (Eds.), *Creating emotionally literate learning environments* (pp. 1–21). Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources Inc.
- Brown, J. L., Jones, S., LaRusso, M. D., & Aber, J. L. (2010). Improving classroom quality: Teacher influences and experimental impacts of the 4Rs program. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102, 153–167.
- Cahill, H., Meakin, C., Smith, K., Beadle, S., Farrelly A., Highman, L., & Crofts, J. (2016). *Resilience, rights & respectful relationships. Teaching for social and emotional learning and respectful relationships*. <https://fusecontent.education.vic.gov.au/d722b857-8d78-4afd-8519-2bc7801d5590/RRRRIntro.pdf>.
- Campbell, J. (2016). Coaching in schools. In C. van Nieuwerburgh (Ed.), *Coaching in professional contexts* (pp. 131–143). London: Sage.
- CASEL. (2020). *What is SEL?* <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>.
- Clough, P. J., Earle, K., & Sewell, D. (2002). Mental toughness: The concept and its measurement. In I. Cockerill (Ed.), *Solutions in sport psychology* (pp. 32–43). London: Thomson.
- Clough, P., & Strycharczyk, D. (2012). *Developing mental toughness: Improving performance, wellbeing and positive behaviour in others*. London: Kogan Page Publishers.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1998). An invitation to organizational wisdom and executive courage. In S. Srivastva & D. L. Cooperrider (Eds.), *Organizational wisdom and executive courage* (pp. 1–22). San Francisco, CA: The New Lexington Press.
- Covington, M. V. (2000). Goal theory, motivation, and school achievement: An integrative review. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 171–200.
- Devine, M., Meyers, R., & Houssemand, C. (2013). How can coaching make a positive impact within educational settings? *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 1382–1389.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.

- Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2019). Mindsets: A view from two eras. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(3), 481–496.
- Falecki, D., Leach, C., & Green, S. (2018). PERMA-powered coaching. In S. Green & S. Palmer (Eds.), *Positive psychology coaching in practice* (pp. 103–121). Australia: Routledge.
- Gallup. (2020). *Gallup student poll*. [https://www.gallup.com/topic/gallup\\_student\\_poll.aspx](https://www.gallup.com/topic/gallup_student_poll.aspx).
- Gillham, J. E., Jaycox, L. H., Reivich, K. J., Seligman, M. E. P., & Silver, T. (1990). *The Penn Resiliency Program*. Unpublished Manual. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.
- Grant, A. M. (2007). Past, present and future: The evolution of professional coaching and coaching psychology. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners* (pp. 23–39). New York: Routledge.
- Grant, A. M. (2017a). The third ‘generation’ of workplace coaching: Creating a culture of quality conversations. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 10(1), 37–53.
- Grant, A. M. (2017b). Solution-focused cognitive-behavioral coaching for sustainable high performance and circumventing stress, fatigue, and burnout. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69(2), 98.
- Grant, A. M., Green, L. S., & Rynsaardt, J. (2010). Developmental coaching for high school teachers: Executive coaching goes to school. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62(3), 151.
- Grant, A. M., & Spence, G. B. (2009). Using coaching and positive psychology to promote a flourishing workforce: A model of goal-striving and mental health. In A. Linley, S. Harrington, & N. Garcea (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work* (pp. 175–188). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Green, L. S. (2014). Positive education: An Australian perspective. In P. A. Alexander, M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman, & E. S. Huebner (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (2nd ed., pp. 401–415). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Green, S., Grant, A., & Rynsaardt, J. (2007). Evidence-based life coaching for senior high school students: Building hardiness and hope. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(1), 24–32.
- Green, S., & O’Connor, S. (2017). Partnering evidence-based coaching and positive psychology. In M. A. White, G. R. Slemp, & A. S. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations and policy* (p. 63–69). Springer International Publishing.
- Greenberg, M. T., Brown, J. L., & Abenavoli, R. M. (2016). *Teacher stress and health effects on teachers, students, and schools*. <https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/rwjf430428.pdf>.
- Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O’Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., et al. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist*, 58(6–7), 466.

- Harrison, T., Arthur, J., & Burn, E. (Eds.). (2016). *Character education: Evaluation handbook for schools*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Harzer, C., Mubashar, T., & Dubreuil, P. (2017). Character strengths and strength-related person-job fit as predictors of work related wellbeing, job performance, and workplace deviance. *Wirtschaftspsychologie*, 19(3), 23–38.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Hochanadel, A., & Finamore, D. (2015). Fixed and growth mindset in education and how grit helps students persist in the face of adversity. *Journal of International Education Research*, 11(1), 47–50.
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 837–861.
- Jubilee Centre. (2017). *A framework for character education in schools*. <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>.
- Kern, M. L., Waters, L., Adler, A., & White, M. (2014). Assessing employee well-being in schools using a multifaceted approach: Associations with physical health, life satisfaction, and professional thriving. *Psychology*, 5, 500–513.
- KIPP. (2020). *Focus on character*. <https://www.kipp.org/approach/character/>.
- Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching—A partnership approach to improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kobasa, S. C. (1979). Stressful life events, personality, and health: An inquiry into hardiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(1), 1–11.
- Leach, C., & Green, S. (2016). Integrating coaching and positive psychology in education. In C. van Nieuwerburgh (Eds.) *Coaching in professional contexts* (pp. 169–186). London: Sage.
- Loehr, J. (1982). *Mental toughness training for sports: Achieving athletic excellence*. New York: Plume.
- Lofthouse, R. M. (2017). Improving mentoring practices through collaborative conversations. *CollectivED Working Papers*, 1, 10–11.
- Madden, W., Green, S., & Grant, A. M. (2011). A pilot study evaluating strengths-based coaching for primary school students: Enhancing engagement and hope. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 6(1), 71–83.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238.
- McGeown, S. P., St Clair-Thompson, H., & Clough, P. (2016). The study of non-cognitive attributes in education: Proposing the mental toughness framework. *Educational Review*, 68(1), 96–113.
- Ng, A., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2019). Towards a cross-disciplinary framework for promoting youth wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 9(4), 26–42.
- Niemiec, R. M., & McGrath, R. E. (2019). *The power of character strengths: Appreciate and ignite your positive personality*. Ohio: VIA Institute on Character.

- Norrish, J. M. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong Grammar School Journey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3(2).
- Oberle, E., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning: Recent research and practical strategies for promoting children's social and emotional competence in schools. In J. L. Matson (Ed.), *Handbook of social behavior and skills in children* (pp. 175–197). New York, NY: Springer.
- Olivero, G., Bane, K. D., & Kopelman, R. E. (1997). Executive coaching as a transfer of training tool: Effects on productivity in a public agency. *Public Personnel Management*, 26(4), 461–469.
- O'Rourke, M., Crowley, S., & Gonnerman, C. (2016). On the nature of cross-disciplinary integration: A philosophical framework. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 56, 62–70.
- Passmore, J., Peterson, D., & Freire, T. (2016). *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the coaching and mentoring*. United States: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Perth College Anglican School for Girls. (2012). *InsideOut*. <https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/learning/senior-school/inside-out/>.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pickens, J. (2009). Socio-emotional programme promotes positive behaviour in preschoolers. *Child Care in Practice*, 15(4), 261–278.
- Quinlan, D., Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Gray, A., & Swain, N. (2019). Teachers matter: Student outcomes following a strengths intervention are mediated by teacher strengths spotting. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(8), 2507–2523.
- Rouiller, J. Z., & Goldstein, I. L. (1993). The relationship between organizational transfer climate and positive transfer of training. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 4(4), 377–390.
- Saks, A. M. (2002). So what is a good transfer of training estimate? A reply to Fitzpatrick. *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 39(3), 29–30.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). The effects of a mindfulness-based education program on pre and early adolescents' wellbeing and social and emotional competence. *Mindfulness*, 1, 137–151.
- Seaton, F. S. (2018). Empowering teachers to implement a growth mindset. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 34(1), 41–57.
- Seligman, M. E. (1972). Learned helplessness. *Annual Review of Medicine*, 23(1), 407–412.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish. A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. North Sydney, NSW: William Heinemann Australia.
- Seligman, M., Ernst, R., Gillham, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293–311.

- Sisk, V. F., Burgoyne, A. P., Sun, J., Butler, J. L., & Macnamara, B. N. (2018). To what extent and under which circumstances are growth mind-sets important to academic achievement? Two meta-analyses. *Psychological Science*, *29*(4), 549–571.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T. C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., ... & Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Frydenberg, A. E. Martin, & J. R. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Singapore: Springer.
- St Clair-Thompson, H., Bugler, M., Robinson, J., Clough, P., McGeown, S. P., & Perry, J. (2015). Mental toughness in education: Exploring relationships with attainment, attendance, behaviour and peer relationships. *Educational Psychology*, *35*(7), 886–907.
- Tee, D., Barr, M., & van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2019). The experiences of educational coaches prior to their first placement: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, *17*(2), 52–63.
- van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2012). *Coaching in education: Getting better results for students, educators, and parents*. London: Karnac.
- van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Tong, C. (2013). Exploring the benefits of being a student coach in educational settings: A mixed-method study. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, *6*(1), 5–24.
- Waters, L., & Sun, J. (2016). Can a brief strength-based parenting intervention boost self-efficacy and positive emotions in parents? *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, *1*(1–3), 41–56.
- Weiner, B., & Kukla, A. (1970). An attributional analysis of achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *15*(1), 1–20.
- White, M. A. (2016). Why won't it stick? Positive psychology and positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being*, *6*(1), 2.
- White, M. A., Slemp, G. R., & Murray, A. S. (2017). *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations and policy* (pp. 63–69). New York: Springer.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 3

## Positive Education in Practice

Ricardo Arguís-Rey

This chapter is addressed especially to readers who want to implement positive education in practice: teachers at all educational levels, from early education, to primary, secondary, tertiary, and alternative sectors; school counsellors, psychologists, and social workers; as well as parents, carers, and other stakeholders. The last chapter provided an overview and some approaches to positive education. This chapter focuses on how to translate into practice the elements of positive psychology in educational settings, and how to address barriers and obstacles that may arise along the way. Certainly, both theory and practice are essential for educators, who need to have knowledge of human wellbeing and the resources to promote it with children and young people, as well as understanding which experiences can work well. Thus, the objectives of this chapter are to bridge the gap between theory and practice; to provide ideas about possible content areas to implement in classrooms; and to explicate current trends in the implementation of positive education, outstanding evidence-based programs, and factors that enable or hinder the practice in this field.

---

R. Arguís-Rey (✉)  
Santiago Hernández High School, Saragossa, Spain

## The Practice of Positive Education: Related Topics and Typical Content

Positive education is not an isolated movement, but has strong connections with other related educational topics, such as social emotional learning (SEL), positive youth development, character education, civic education, and moral education, among many others. It is likely that many practitioners are familiar with some of those topics and have access to resources to implement practices pertaining to them in their classrooms. Particularly, SEL constitutes an essential point-of-reference for the field of positive education. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that positive education has a broader focus, integrating psychosocial skills together with many other aspects, including happiness, engagement, character, morality, meaning, and physical health (Slemp et al., 2017).

As noted, positive education includes a variety of topics that include happiness or wellbeing, character strengths, mindfulness, social and emotional skills, resilience, mindset (Dweck, 2006), grit (Duckworth, 2016), intrinsic motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2017), active-constructive responding (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), and many others. Sometimes educators run the risk of being too focused on a specific topic—for example, focusing solely on optimism, resilience, or perseverance. This can lead them to delve into one or a few topics and work them very thoroughly, but at the cost of neglecting other content areas that could also be implemented with their students. The best recommendation is to adopt an approach that is as multidimensional as possible, so as to implement as wide a range of interventions to promote knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertaining to positive education as possible.

## Present Outlooks and Trends in Positive Education

As previously noted, the practice of positive education in educational settings is diverse and varies according to many circumstances and situations. For example, with regard to **program design**, Grenville-Cleave (2013) distinguished between what she calls (1) off-the-peg programs (the implementation of a ready-made curriculum), (2) tailor-made programs (creating one's own program, adapted to a specific school or set of objectives), and 3) mixed strategies. If we look at **integration of contents into the school curriculum**, Green (2014) identified two different approaches: (1) explicit or *taught* curriculum (for example, wellbeing classes, based on stand-alone courses on

positive psychology), and (2) implicit or *caught* curriculum (experiencing and living positive psychology, embedded within the whole-school curriculum). Both approaches have benefits and disadvantages, and successful positive education programs would probably require a combination of both (White & Kern, 2018).

There are other differences in the practice of positive education. So, in looking at the **target population**, implementation could focus only on the wellbeing of students, while other efforts could include the wellbeing of teachers or the entire school community or involve families, communities, and other stakeholders. As for **people promoting those practices**, there are a myriad of possibilities, from the isolated action of one or a few teachers in a school to the collaborative action of groups of teachers, the entire teaching staff, or the school community.

Special consideration should be taken with regard to **the practice of mindfulness**, which has become a popular component of many positive education programs. Over the last few years, there has been an increase in research on this field, supporting the benefits of mindfulness practices for children and young people (Arguís-Rey, 2014; García-Campayo, Modrego, & Demarzo, 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). But mindfulness practices alone are not sufficient to promote positive education. Instead, such practices can be a first step to implementing a comprehensive model of positive education, for example, combining mindfulness with the education of character strengths (Arguís-Rey, Bolsas-Valero, Hernández-Paniello, & Salvador-Monge, 2012; Niemiec, 2014). Thus, the cultivation of a conscious lifestyle—the ultimate aim of mindfulness—can pave the way to building a well-balanced and harmonious personality in students, which includes education on character strengths.

Examining the recent evolution of positive education, one can detect the significant growth of such programs and experiences around the world. However, it should be noted that not everything published or presented under the name of ‘positive education’ is actually based on this field or has to do with the principles of positive psychology. Thus, the quality of differing approaches varies markedly: some are based on rigorous standards, while others are driven by a fad or profit motives that induce some authors to use the label ‘positive education’ to increase their own commercial benefits, ignoring necessary scientific rigour. The take-home message is that not all that glitters is gold, and practitioners should be cautious when deciding upon curricula, buying books on this topic, or enrolling in teacher training activities.

## Practical Resources for Positive Education

As has been noted, there are an increasing number of programs addressed to implement positive education in educational settings. Though not exhaustive, the general overview of resources available for practitioners in this section provides a good starting point for practitioners. In some cases (see Table 3.1), these are complete programs integrating diverse contents from a multidimensional approach. In other cases (see Table 3.2), they are more focused resources referring to very specific aspects that can be included in the practice of positive education.

It is not possible to provide an exhaustive evaluation of each of these resources in the context of this chapter, but in general, they are well-known tools, utilized widely across many educational contexts. Most of these programs have research supporting their effectiveness or such research is in process. In addition, there is a notable lack of tools and resources available for no cost, with the exception of two programs included in Table 3.1 (Happy Classrooms/*Aulas Felices*, and the character education programs of The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues), as well as many of the complementary resources cited in Table 3.2. This is an important issue to consider because, from a social justice perspective, positive education should be available for all children and not only for children in schools that can afford to pay for resources, including programs and teacher training. A subsequent section of this chapter discusses these issues more fully.

## Key Factors to Successful Positive Education Practices

As noted previously, in looking at the present outlook and trends in positive education, there is considerable variability in the quality of existing experiences and programs. This is understandable, as positive education is a relatively young field and still in its early stages of development. As such, it is important to establish clear guidelines that ensure high quality in the design of programs, practice, evaluation, and research.<sup>1</sup> In the absence, currently, of such standards, this chapter puts forward some suggestions to improve the practice of positive education now and in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup>Note that at the point in time this book was in production, the Education division of the International Positive Psychology Association was designing quality standards to establish guidelines to orient program design, practice, assessment, and research within positive education that will, eventually, be available online at <https://www.ippanetwork.org/divisions/education/>.

Table 3.1 Exemplary positive education programs

Programs	Main components	Educational levels	References
Bounce Back!	Wellbeing, resilience, and social emotional learning	Preschool, primary, and secondary education	<a href="http://www.bounceback.com.au">www.bounceback.com.au</a>
Celebrating strengths	Character strengths	Preschool, primary, and secondary education	<a href="http://www.viacharacter.org/blog/celebrating-strengths-a-school-project-using-via-strengths/">www.viacharacter.org/blog/celebrating-strengths-a-school-project-using-via-strengths/</a> <a href="https://corstone.org/">https://corstone.org/</a>
CorStone programs	Various resilience programs to improve wellbeing for youth, focusing on adolescent girls as critical change-agents in their communities	Secondary education	
GoZen	Online programs to manage stress and build resilience for kids	Preschool and primary education	<a href="http://www.gozen.com/allprograms/">www.gozen.com/allprograms/</a>
Happy Classrooms/Aulas Felices	Mindfulness and character strengths ( <i>Gratuitous and for free distribution, in Spanish and English</i> )	Preschool, primary, and secondary education	<a href="http://educaposit.blogspot.com">http://educaposit.blogspot.com</a> Lombas et al. (2019)

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Programs	Main components	Educational levels	References
KIDsmART	Academic achievement, in-depth learning, and problem-solving skills. Using the arts to create connections between content and different ways of learning	Primary and secondary education	<a href="http://www.kidsmart.org">www.kidsmart.org</a>
KidsMatter Primary & MindMatters	Social and emotional learning; working with parents, carers, and families; support for students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties	Primary and secondary education	<a href="http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au">www.kidsmatter.edu.au</a> <a href="http://www.mindmatters.edu.au">www.mindmatters.edu.au</a>
Learning Curve	Positive engagement, relationships and optimism, meaning and purpose strengths and emotions, skills and achievement, and exercise and vitality	Primary and secondary education	<a href="http://www.learningcurve.com.au">www.learningcurve.com.au</a>

Programs	Main components	Educational levels	References
Maytiv	Happiness, morality, and success	Preschool, primary, and secondary education	<a href="http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/main/research/maytiv/pages/default.aspx">http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/main/research/maytiv/pages/default.aspx</a>
Making Hope Happen (MHH)	Four components of hope in students: goals, pathways thinking, and agency	Secondary education	Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, and Rais-Ribeiro (2009)
Penn Resiliency Program (PRP)	Optimism, assertiveness, relaxation strategies, coping skills, and decision-making skills	Secondary education	<a href="https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/research/resilience-children">https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/research/resilience-children</a>
Personal Wellbeing Lessons for Secondary Schools	Positive self, positive body, positive emotions, positive mindset, positive direction, and positive relationships	Secondary education	Boniwell and Ryan (2012) Boniwell, Osin, and Martinez (2016)
Self Science	Social emotional learning skills	Primary education	<a href="http://www.6s.org">www.6s.org</a>
SMART Strengths	Character strengths	Primary and secondary education	Yeager, Fisher, and Shearon (2011)

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Programs	Main components	Educational levels	References
Strath Haven Positive Psychology curriculum (SHPPC)	Character strengths, relationships, meaning, and positive emotional experience	Secondary education	Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009)
Strengths Gym	Character strengths	Secondary education	Proctor and Fox Eades (2009) Proctor et al. (2011)
The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues	Character strengths ( <i>gratuitous and for free distribution</i> )	Primary and secondary education	<a href="http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1610/character-education/resources">www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1610/character-education/resources</a>
YouCanDolt!	On-line social emotional learning programs addressed to promote success, improve relationships, reduce stress, and increase wellbeing	Preschool, primary, and secondary education	<a href="https://youcandoiteducation.com.au/">https://youcandoiteducation.com.au/</a>
Youth Connect	Skills and knowledge to be successful in secondary education. Promotion of further learning and employment opportunities	Secondary education	<a href="http://www.youthconnect.com.au">www.youthconnect.com.au</a>

**Table 3.2** Sources for educational resources useful for the practice of positive education

Sources	References
Berkeley Greater Good Science Center	<a href="https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/who_we_serve/educators/educator_resources">https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/who_we_serve/educators/educator_resources</a>
Character Lab	<a href="https://www.characterlab.org">https://www.characterlab.org</a>
IPEN (International Positive Education Network)	<a href="http://ipen-network.com">http://ipen-network.com</a>
Mayerson Academy	<a href="https://www.mayersonacademy.org">https://www.mayersonacademy.org</a>
The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues	<a href="http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk">http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk</a>

Arguís-Rey et al. (2012) proposed four basic conditions that should be considered by those who wish to design and implement positive education programs:

1. A **solid scientific foundation** based on the tenets and results derived from positive psychology and related scientific fields. Programs and practices should have a strong theoretical basis, including evidence-based and empirically supported activities.
2. A **multidimensional perspective** combining diverse areas of intervention and going beyond occasional interventions focused on very specific topics.
3. Positive education activities and programs should be **integrated into the school curriculum** of current education systems, within different subjects in the school curriculum and beyond, as well as embedded into the school culture.
4. Positive education practices must be **built on a system of ethical values and make these values explicit**. These practices need to be backed by a values system based on respect for human dignity and that encourages healthy development and solidarity with others. This includes not only students' personal development, but also the need to foster a social perspective to balance personal growth with the rights of others, reinforcing solidarity and respect for human dignity.

These conditions could be a starting point, providing four factors that can lead to successful positive education practices. However, there are other aspects to be taken into account, and the following section will provide information on these.

One of the additional factors mentioned in the literature on positive education is the need for **whole-school approaches** (Norrish, Williams,

O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; Slemp et al., 2017). Educational communities are systemic in nature, so positive education programs should be addressed not only to individual students, but also to teachers, staff, families, and the broader community. As noted by Slemp et al. (2017), schools might focus first on staff, gain support from leadership, and eventually address students. An excellent model that illustrates this process well is that implemented at Geelong Grammar School in Australia, a school that has become an international reference for best practices in positive education. This model, originally proposed by Seligman et al. (2009), was later refined by Norrish et al. (2013), and its most recent version has been reworked by Hoare, Bott, and Robinson (2017). The Geelong model consists of four successive stages that intend to build an itinerary to gradually integrate positive education as a whole-school approach:

1. **Learn it.** This first step is focused on teacher training, which should also be extended to non-teaching staff and students' families. Initial training, together with ongoing training activities, based on the tenets of positive psychology and the different positive education domains, can ensure that all community members have a common language and a shared perspective on how to educate to promote both wellbeing and academic growth.
2. **Live it.** The training received by all the school faculty and staff paves the way for this second stage, which consists of experiencing what has been learned, bringing it into play in one's own life, as well as when working with students. Thus, faculty and staff members are encouraged to use their character strengths to meet the challenges of daily work, to practise mindfulness in everyday life, to lead a healthy life, and to strengthen social relationships. The objective is that the training received does not remain at a theoretical level, but also permeates the daily life and work of all the members of the educational community.
3. **Teach it.** In this step, educators are already able to teach their students the skills for wellbeing. This can be done through both explicit and implicit instruction. The first, explicit instruction, can be done by organizing stand-alone sessions with students to provide instruction about specific content derived from positive psychology. Implicit instruction consists of integrating the contents of positive education within the typical subjects of the school curriculum.
4. **Embed it.** Finally, the ultimate goal of the Geelong model is that positive education is integrated as an element within the culture of the educational community. This integration process can include things like: 1) the

wellbeing assessment of students and staff members as well as traditional academic evaluation; 2) the establishment of organizational guidelines to ensure that wellbeing is promoted in an effective and coordinated manner throughout the school; and 3) promoting wellbeing as a goal to strive for in both school and after-school activities.

The Geelong process provides a good example of how to implement a whole-school approach. Hoare et al. (2017) summarized the approach as such:

We propose that the ordering of *Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it* is a logical approach for school implementation. The sequence proposes that schools should first provide opportunities for the adults in the school community to learn about the science of wellbeing, then provide time and an environment which enables staff to put into practice and live the key tenets, then prioritize time within the curriculum for students to be taught the skills and knowledge of wellbeing, and finally, to gain maximum benefit, ensure the lens of wellbeing is applied sensitively to each facet of the school. (p. 64)

Another factor frequently mentioned by experts in the field is **the combination of explicit and implicit approaches** (Green, 2014; White & Kern, 2018), an aspect already mentioned in the discussion about the Geelong approach. This issue is also often referred to as the *taught* and *caught* curriculum, and according to White and Kern (2018), both approaches have advantages and limitations. The explicit or taught curriculum involves the teaching of positive psychology and wellbeing content within specific sessions of scheduled class time. The implicit or caught curriculum refers to the inclusion of this content across school subjects and beyond, embedded into the school culture, and visible in the language used, people's interactions, and the school norms.

A clear benefit of an explicit approach is that it allows more time to deal with certain topics in greater depth, but using this approach exclusively may involve considering positive education as a marginalized topic, not related to the rest of the contents of the school curriculum. An implicit approach establishes the relationship between positive education topics and the content in the school curriculum. Schools often struggle with an overcrowded curriculum and lack of time, so an implicit approach makes it possible to work on academic content and wellbeing simultaneously in the classroom. The limitation of this approach is that it may reduce time spent on content related to wellbeing. It seems evident, then, that the best approach is to combine both taught and caught approaches. Future research is needed

to clarify how both perspectives can be combined and to what extent, in order to promote best practice in positive education (White & Kern, 2018).

Another important aspect to highlight for the promotion of successful practices is that positive education needs to be **content and context focused**. One of the criticisms that positive psychology has received in recent years has been the neglect or lack of enough consideration of contextual and cultural variables. These and other criticisms, far from invalidating the positive psychology movement, have helped to promote its development and generate a more mature and grounded perspective, which some authors have called positive psychology 2.0 (Wong, 2011), the second wave of positive psychology (Lomas & Ivztan, 2015), contextual positive psychology (Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, & Parker, 2016), or Systems Informed Positive Psychology (Kern et al., 2020). These authors have pointed out that if these criticisms are not addressed, it could jeopardize the positive education movement, and positive psychology interventions could run the risk of being primarily centred on changing content, neglecting the importance of contextual and cultural factors. Content, according to Ciarrochi et al. (2016), refers to “the forms of private experience, including thoughts, feelings, images, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 2), while context has to do with “situational and historical events that exert an organizing influence on behavior” (Hayes, Boyd, & Sewell, 2011, p. 33). For example, it would be useless to focus exclusively on promoting self-esteem and perseverance in a student who fails in mathematics, if the main cause of this failure is poor pedagogy. In this case, it would be necessary to change contextual factors, specifically the teaching methodology or the way in which the teacher relates to the student.

An approach that does not take into account the necessary changes in context can have the unintended consequence of making people feel guilty, believing that the cause of their mistakes lies primarily in their abilities or their ways of dealing with experiences, rather than in the environment that surrounds them. Therefore, change efforts in psychology and education should not focus exclusively on the internal states of people, but take into account their interactions with the context and inherent cultural climates.

**Measurement and evaluation** constitute a key issue that has been gaining momentum in positive education over recent years. Positive education is committed to adhering to the scientific intent of positive psychology, so it is reasonable that evaluation should become a fundamental aspect of the positive education movement. Accordingly, it is not enough to promote wellbeing in classrooms, but it is necessary to start from scientifically grounded (and validated, if possible) interventions and to evaluate outcomes using validated measures. To this point, evaluation in positive education has too often been

limited to observations with no systematic means of providing evidence of impact or efficacy (Slemp et al., 2017).

Traditionally, measurement and evaluation in education have focused primarily on academic outcomes, but there is growing interest in evaluating other, so-called non-cognitive outcomes of schools. As such, the wellbeing of students has become a topic of interest in the field of educational policy. For example, the 2015 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) included wellbeing as one of the elements to be evaluated (OECD, 2017). There are three common approaches to measuring personal qualities other than cognitive ability: self-report questionnaires administered to students, questionnaires administered to teachers about their students, and performance tasks (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Those tools are typically used for several purposes, including program evaluation, accountability, individual diagnosis, or practice improvement, and all of them have advantages and disadvantages. According to Duckworth and Yeager, it is important to use a plurality of measurement approaches, though more research is needed to develop novel and innovative measures that contribute to complement and improve the existing tools.

Seligman and Adler (2018, 2019) highlighted the importance of evaluation as one of the hallmarks of positive education. They identified three areas of measurement that are important to evaluate wellbeing, both before and after a positive education intervention: (1) happiness, (2) unhappiness, and (3) measures of academic success. Wellbeing involves multiple elements and, therefore, it is fundamental to include measurement tools related to variables such as satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect, self-esteem, motivation, emotional intelligence, school climate, mindfulness, social relations, and so forth. Another important point is that the presence of happiness does not necessarily imply the absence of unhappiness (both can coexist), and this is why the inclusion of unhappiness measures is recommended. Moreover, it is advisable not to use only one-dimensional measures of wellbeing, but to combine their use with other multidimensional measures, which can provide more detailed information, identify strengths and limitations that can be used to shape subsequent interventions, and allow more individually targeted interventions. For example, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a one-dimensional measure that provides a general index of students' overall satisfaction with life, but the information it provides can be complemented with information from the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Wellbeing (Kern, Benson, Steinberg, & Steinberg, 2015), which is a multidimensional measure that includes

five specific areas (engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness). Both scales are illustrative examples of measures related to the hedonic and eudaimonic components of wellbeing, respectively, two aspects that should be taken into account in order to have a broader perspective on wellbeing (Adler & Seligman, 2016).

When discussing measurement and evaluation in education, it is important to distinguish between two general approaches: (1) academic research, typically aimed at validating the effectiveness of certain interventions or programs; and (2) traditional evaluation processes that take place in school settings. The former refers to a scientific process in which a variety of methods—including experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, or qualitative—are used to gain information about the scope and limitations of an educational intervention and to provide knowledge and contribute to scientific advances. In the latter case, from a more modest but not less important perspective, what is intended is to gain knowledge about students' levels in certain areas of instruction, document students' evolution over time, identify areas of instructional need, and so forth. Both forms of evaluation should be addressed in positive education.

Since the focus of this chapter is the practice of positive education from the perspective of educators, it is important to provide some detail about measurement and evaluation to assess student performance and progress. To this end, a first step is to specify what to evaluate. This can be quite wide-ranging and include information about what students have learned; changes produced in students as a result of an intervention; changes in the school climate; how the teaching team has implemented a specific intervention; and information about the program itself, including its effectiveness, if it is being correctly implemented, or its acceptance by teachers and students. To achieve this objective, there are a variety of tools that can be used: systematic observation procedures (anecdotal records, checklists, rubrics); students' work samples (student notebooks, written text, oral productions, summaries, monographic works, portfolios); oral activities with students (dialogues, interviews, sharing sessions, assemblies); exams (oral or written, multiple choice, true/false, essay or short-answer exams, solving exercises); self-evaluation, student peer evaluation, questionnaires (for teachers, students, non-teaching staff or parents); and external observations, to name a few. One practice to highlight is assessing the wellbeing of an entire school or educational context, an evaluation area that has been growing in recent years and for which there are models from which to learn, such as the experiences developed in Geelong Grammar School, St. Peter's College, Adelaide, or Tecmilenio University (IPEN, 2017; White & Kern, 2018).

There are, undoubtedly, many other factors that contribute to successful practices in positive education. Although it is not possible to describe them in detail in this chapter, it is worth identifying a few that are most relevant:

- **Customized programs:** there are no one-size-fits-all programs or experiences, so teachers should build upon best known research and practices. This involves personalizing and tailor-making their own initiatives, beginning with practices that are already working well and adjusting them to the specific characteristics of the community (Green, 2014).
- **Teacher and staff training:** initial and ongoing training is needed to provide the necessary theoretical foundations and the practical strategies to implement positive education.
- **Establish leadership support:** initiatives cannot be based on isolated actions carried out by individual teachers, but must be supported by leadership, including principals, leadership teams, and school governing boards.
- **Teacher engagement:** as a final consideration, we cannot forget the importance of the active involvement of teachers. Although it is sometimes possible and desirable to count on external experts, teachers in each school should be fully involved in the implementation of initiatives, working actively and enthusiastically to achieve shared goals.

## Some Common Obstacles and Possible Solutions

There are a number of factors that hinder progress in the implementation of positive education. The following four frequently identified barriers are discussed, as well as possible ways to address them (for a more in-depth review on this subject, see White, 2016).

1. **Wellbeing is not an important issue for schools.** Sometimes topics like wellbeing are seen as irrelevant or as distracting from the academic mission of the school (White, 2016). To address this, it is important to raise the awareness of policymakers, educators, and families about the fact that teaching skills for wellbeing is as important as promoting academic performance. Most people want to be happy, certainly, and this is something that can be learned from childhood. Nevertheless, if this argument is insufficient, additional justifications include: (1) adolescence is a challenging developmental period marked with declines in life satisfaction (Waters, 2015); (2) depression is the main cause of illness and disability

in adolescents, and suicide is their third cause of mortality (World Health Organization, 2014); (3) 10–20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders (World Health Organization, 2000); and (4) 75% of mental disorders begin before 25 years of age (Kessler et al., 2007). Consequently, adolescence is a challenging time, and promoting happiness and wellbeing may be important to counter those above-mentioned trends.

2. **Academics and wellbeing are considered incompatible.** Teachers complain about the lack of time they have to cope with seemingly overwhelming curricular or assessment demands. If they teach wellbeing, they often indicate, it takes time away from traditional subjects, so they have to choose between wellbeing or academic success (Adler, 2016; White, 2016; White & Kern, 2018). To refute this reasoning, policymakers, administrators, teachers, students' parents, and other stakeholders need to be convinced of the importance of efforts to promote wellbeing on academic outcomes by providing them with research-based data. There are several investigations showing that wellbeing programs not only produce improvements in personal and social development, but contribute to better academic performance (Adler, 2016; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Waters, 2011). In addition, teachers can be shown that it is possible to teach wellbeing within the context of the school day by aligning such instruction with other content areas.
3. **Lack of support from other teachers, principals, leadership teams, or governing boards.** Positive education initiatives need the support of leadership and staff, otherwise it is difficult to promote successful instructional experiences (Slemp et al., 2017). Both top-down and bottom-up initiatives are necessary. If there is not enough support from governing boards, changes can be initiated from the bottom up, starting with small experiences carried out by one or several teachers. With the passing of time, those initiatives can spread to the rest of the staff, convincing the leadership team of their importance and, eventually, becoming part of the whole-school focus.
4. **Teacher training provided by unqualified professionals.** An important concern is the presence of unqualified professionals offering teacher training services in the field of positive education, making money from wellbeing training activities, though in too many cases without the necessary qualification or experience. Therefore, it is important to ensure high-quality teacher training, provided by professionals with a wide knowledge of positive psychology and with practical experience in positive education.

## Positive Education for All Schools: Promoting a Democratic Perspective

It is clear that if positive education is to have the potential to promote happiness and better academic performance, its implementation should be accessible to all educational communities: from preschool, primary, and secondary schools to universities and alternative sectors. There are two barriers that can pose serious problems to this endeavour: the type of educational context and the financial resources available. With regard to the first, for example, the type of educational context determines the way teachers are hired, and this may impact the development of positive education experiences.

In some countries (e.g., Spain, France, or Greece), public school teachers are civil servants that obtain their position through a selection process and keep this position for life. These teachers usually apply for vacancies through a public bidding process, joining the educational centre they choose. In contrast, in other countries (such as the USA or the UK), both public and private school teachers are recruited by local school boards or school administrators. In these latter countries, teachers are under contract and they must abide by the conditions established by their employers. This is why it may be easier to implement positive education practices in schools where teachers are under contract. For example, these schools can organize compulsory training in positive psychology or require teachers to carry out positive educational experiences. If teachers do not meet such requirements, they run the risk of being fired—unlike civil servant teachers, who usually enjoy life tenure and may not be dismissed except in very extreme cases. This has advantages since it ensures that all teachers in private schools work in the same direction and share identical principles. The drawback is that teachers may feel compelled to apply positive education, carrying out their work with a lack of authentic commitment. In contrast, in public schools where teachers have a lifetime civil servant status, teachers have greater pedagogical freedom, and principals or leadership teams cannot so easily boost the implementation of positive education practices: this is a process that requires willingness and agreement from the entire teaching staff. As for the second barrier, financial resources, implementing positive education requires initial and ongoing staff training, purchase of programs and materials, or external advice to conduct wellbeing assessment. These are resources that not all schools may have. As such, positive education runs the risk of being implemented only in those educational contexts that are able to hire their own staff and have adequate resources.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, positive education should be available for *all* schools, regardless of their characteristics or financial

resources. Fortunately, there are some initiatives to provide free resources for schools, including educational programs, teacher training, and tools for well-being assessment. Table 3.2 provides online resources through which readers can find free resources related to the practice of positive education. Furthermore, Table 3.1 provides references to two multidimensional approaches, which are also freely available, and which will be briefly described below: the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues ([www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1610/character-education/resources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1610/character-education/resources)), and the Happy Classrooms Programme (Arguís-Rey et al., 2012).

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues is part of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom). That Centre is a pioneering interdisciplinary research centre whose activity is addressed to efforts to promote character, virtues, and values education so as to promote human flourishing. A team of experts at this centre has developed resources for teachers and other education stakeholders to be used in schools and other educational settings. Among these available tools are the following:

- **Teacher resources:** a character education program for primary students (aged 4–11) and another for secondary students (aged 11–16), an evaluation handbook for schools, teacher education resources, and some guidelines to teach character through subjects.
- **Parent resources:** reading and writing resources, as well as some activities for use by parents with their children to help them reflect on character strengths.

The Happy Classrooms Programme is a project launched in Spain, aimed at promoting positive education with children and young people ages 3–18 years old. It includes two fundamental axes: mindfulness and character strengths. This initiative is the result of several years of work by a team of teachers and psychologists—the SATI Team. They have grounded the program in the most recent contributions from positive psychology and offer general guidelines as well as more than 300 hands-on activities for students. It is freely available in English and Spanish (<http://educaposit.blogspot.com>). The Happy Classrooms Programme has achieved widespread and international recognition by the scientific community and education professionals and has been included as a reference manual in university training programs, master's degrees, and doctorates by various Spanish and foreign universities. In addition, there are currently several ongoing investigations to experimentally validate the effectiveness of this program. The first of these investigations

has recently been published and provides promising results (Lombas et al., 2019).

## Wellbeing Assessment for Schools: Guidelines from Spain

In recent years, several models related to wellbeing evaluation in educational settings have emerged, and it is expected that their number will increase, as happiness becomes a more important matter in schools. There are some noteworthy models that are being used in many schools: Visible Wellbeing (Waters, Sun, Rusk, Aarch, & Cotton, 2017), AWE (Assessing Wellbeing in Education; [www.awesomeschools.com](http://www.awesomeschools.com)), Social-Emotional Wellbeing Survey (SEW; [www.acer.org/gb/sew](http://www.acer.org/gb/sew)); Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS; [www.gl-assessment.co.uk](http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk)); and “Emociómetro” (Technology for Emotions; [www.technologyforemotions.com](http://www.technologyforemotions.com)), to name a few.

It should be noted that these and other initiatives require payment, and there is a lack of free evaluation models for schools. This is often because the development of assessment and measurement must be scientifically validated and meet high-quality standards. This requires starting from a solid theoretical framework, developing tools with adequate levels of validity and reliability, having a proper knowledge of statistical data analysis methods, and so forth. For all these reasons, it is understandable that many teachers prefer to delegate these tasks to experts outside the school. However, as mentioned previously, not all schools have the resources to pay for such services. Thus, the Spanish team, SATI, has been developing tools for free distribution (<http://educaposit.blogspot.com>). At this time, they are available only in Spanish, but might provide some utility for speakers of other languages. The following sections describe some characteristics of the SATI model.

### Educational Levels

These resources are addressed to all educational levels: preschool, primary and secondary education, universities, and non-formal education.

## What to Evaluate and How to Evaluate It

The objective of this model is that teaching staff in every educational context can carry out a wellbeing evaluation, with the necessary quality psychometric requirements. This evaluation can be addressed to one or several groups of students, to all students in an educational context, as well as the evaluation of the wellbeing of teaching and non-teaching staff and of students' families.

If the objective is to evaluate the wellbeing of all students in an educational context, the strategy may consist of measuring wellbeing at different times. For example, in a secondary school, evaluation can occur at three times: when students start this educational stage, halfway through this stage, and at the end of it. In this way, year by year results can be compared and used to assess the evolution of students' levels of wellbeing. SATI developers recommend using an online platform, creating an account in Google Forms, which facilitates the collection and processing of data.

What is measured is the level of happiness and unhappiness of whomever is being assessed, as well as other complementary variables of interest. For this, it is recommended that both happiness and unhappiness measures be included, as well as one-dimensional and multidimensional scales of wellbeing, measuring the hedonic and eudaimonic components of wellbeing. Other variables can be included, such as school climate and mindfulness. It is recommended to use not only self-report questionnaires administered to students, but also questionnaires administered to teachers about their students, performance tasks, systematic observation checklists, indicators of students' behaviour, and measures of academic success.

## Available Resources

By clicking on the "Wellbeing Evaluation" tab on the SATI website, users will find, among other things, the following resources:

- a general guidance document;
- a collection of questionnaires and observation scales for children and young people ages 2–18 (some of which are also applicable with adults);
- models of questionnaires already created in Google Forms as examples so teachers can design their own online forms;
- a wellbeing evaluation project carried out at Santiago Hernández High School in Zaragoza (Spain), which can serve to guide the process in other educational contexts;

- a protocol with instructions on how to conduct evaluation sessions with students;
- examples of Excel spreadsheets with analysed questionnaires, which can be used as templates for data analysis;
- an example of wellbeing evaluation report for a school; and
- guidelines for analysing data through the free statistical programs R Commander and PSPP.

Although the questionnaires available on this website are in Spanish, these are well-known scales that are also validated in other languages and countries, and users should be able to find the original versions in English or in their respective language.

### **Procedure to Follow**

First of all, users—students, staff, or families—should fill in the questionnaires, and teachers should collect additional data through other complementary tools. A second stage will be the analysis of results and preparation of an evaluation report, which should be delivered to the entire school's staff. Finally, the evaluation report should be discussed in teacher meetings, making it possible to plan intervention strategies to address issues found through evaluation. The process, as such, is:

1. Completion of the questionnaires by the target population (students, staff, or families) and collection of additional data through other tools.
2. Analysis of results and preparation of an evaluation report.
3. Delivery of the report to the entire school's staff.
4. Detailed analysis of the report in teacher meetings and planning of intervention strategies to address issues found through evaluation.

### **Possibilities for Analysing Results**

In theory, any teacher can perform a wellbeing assessment in their educational context using these resources. However, the level of depth of the analysis will depend on previous knowledge of computing and statistics. Based on this, three levels of analysis can be distinguished:

- **Level 1** (users with a very rudimentary level of computing and statistical skills): once the questionnaires are completed, Google Forms automatically generates very simple graphic summaries. However, the information provided in this way is quite limited.
- **Level 2** (users with an initial to average mastery of Excel, and a basic knowledge of statistics): Google Forms allows downloading data to an Excel sheet. Through the examples and guidelines provided on the SATI Team's website, it is possible to determine means and percentages, which provide richer information.
- **Level 3** (users able to handle statistical software and with average or advanced statistics knowledge): users who want more complex analyses can use the free programs PSPP and R Commander, which allows the determination of any significant differences between groups of students, or between the same group in different years, to detect gender differences, to calculate correlations between variables, and so forth.

## Usefulness of Wellbeing Evaluation Results

Wellbeing evaluation in educational settings can provide multiple benefits. First, it helps make wellbeing visible in schools, raising awareness of its importance and the need to nurture it. It allows for the assessment of levels of happiness, unhappiness, school climate, mindfulness, school behaviour, academic performance, and many other variables by groups of students and by educational levels. It also provides direction for the design of intervention programs, based on the analysis of areas in which unsatisfactory results have been detected. Moreover, wellbeing evaluation makes possible to detect at-risk students who may require special attention and follow-up.

A caveat to note is that when comparing results on different variables from one year to the next, it is difficult to infer improvements due to the implemented programs or interventions. For this to be possible, a control group would be required with similar previous conditions and no treatment, something not always possible in schools. In this case, the evaluation would have the character of research, with all that this implies adequate sample selection, control of other variables that can affect the results, etc. If this is not feasible, it does not mean that results are useless: on the contrary, the data may provide valuable information about students' levels in certain variables, their individual and group evolution, and what areas of instructional need exist for them.

## References

- Adler, A. (2016). *Teaching well-being increases academic performance: Evidence from Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru*. Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. 1572. Retrieved from <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1572>.
- Adler, A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2016). Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i1.429>.
- Arguís-Rey, R. (2014). Mindfulness y educación: Aprendiendo a vivir con atención plena. In A. Cebolla, J. García, & M. Demarzo (Eds.), *Mindfulness y ciencia* (pp. 129–149). Madrid: Alianza.
- Arguís-Rey, R., Bolsas-Valero, A. P., Hernández-Paniello, S., & Salvador-Monge, M. M. (2012). *The happy classrooms programme. Positive psychology applied to education*. Retrieved from <http://educaposit.blogspot.com/>.
- Boniwell, I., & Ryan, L. (2012). *Personal well-being lessons for secondary schools: Positive psychology in action for 11 to 14 year olds*. New York: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education.
- Boniwell, I., Osin, E. N., & Martinez, C. (2016). Teaching happiness at school: Non-randomised controlled mixed-methods feasibility study on the effectiveness of personal well-being lessons. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(1), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1025422>.
- Ciarrochi, J., Atkins, P. W. B., Hayes, L. L., Sahdra, B. K., & Parker, P. (2016). Contextual positive psychology: Policy recommendations for implementing positive psychology into schools. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(1561). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01561>.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71–75.
- Duckworth, A. L. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. New York: Scribner.
- Duckworth, A. L., & Yeager, D. S. (2015). Measurement matters: Assessing personal qualities other than cognitive ability for educational purposes. *Educational Researcher*, 44(4), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15584327>.
- Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228–245.
- García-Campayo, J., Modrego, M., & Demarzo, M. (2017). Eficacia de mindfulness en el alumnado. In J. García-Campayo, M. Demarzo, & M. Modrego (Eds.), *Bienestar emocional y mindfulness en educación* (pp. 133–161). Madrid: Alianza.

- Green, S. (2014). Positive education: An Australian perspective. In M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman, & E. S. Huebner (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (2nd ed., pp. 401–415). New York: Routledge.
- Grenville-Cleave, B. (2013, October 18). Positive education: Making a successful school. *Positive Psychology News Daily*. Retrieved from <http://positivepsychologynews.com/news/bridget-grenville-cleave/2013101827398>.
- Hayes, L., Boyd, C. P., & Sewell, J. (2011). Acceptance and commitment therapy for the treatment of adolescent depression: A pilot study in a psychiatric outpatient setting. *Mindfulness*, 2(2), 86–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-011-0046-5>.
- Hoare, E., Bott, D., & Robinson, J. (2017). Learn it, live it, teach it, embed it: Implementing a whole school approach to foster positive mental health and well-being through positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 7(3), 56–71. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v7i3.645>.
- International Positive Education Network (IPEN). (2017). *The state of positive education: A review of history, policy, practice, and research*. Dubai, UAE: International Positive Education Network. Retrieved from <https://worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document/8f647dc4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6>.
- Kern, M. L., Benson, L., Steinberg, E. A., & Steinberg, L. (2015). The EPOCH measure of adolescent well-being. *Psychological Assessment*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pas0000201>.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Kessler, R. C., Angermeyer, M., Anthony, J. C., De Graaf, R., Demyttenaere, K., Gasquet, I., ..., & Ustün, T. B. (2007). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of mental disorders in the World Health Organization's World Mental Health Survey Initiative. *World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 6(3), 168–176.
- Lomas, T., & Ivtzan, I. (2015). Second wave positive psychology: Exploring the positive–negative dialectics of wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-015-9668-y>.
- Lombas, A. S., Jiménez, T. I., Arguís-Rey, R., Hernández-Paniello, S., Valdivia-Salas, S., & Martín-Albo, J. (2019). Impact of the happy classrooms programme on psychological well-being, school aggression, and classroom climate. *Mindfulness*, 10(8), 1642–1660. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01132-8>.
- Lopez, S. J., Rose, S., Robinson, C., Marques, S. C., & Rais-Ribeiro, J. (2009). Measuring and promoting hope in school children. In M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman, & E. S. Huebner (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (pp. 37–50). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Meiklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, M. L., Griffin, M. L., Biegel, G., Roach, A., ..., & Saltzman, A. (2012). Integrating mindfulness training into K-12

- education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students. *Mindfulness*, 3(4), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0094-5>.
- Niemiec, R. M. (2014). *Mindfulness and character strengths. A practical guide to flourishing*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7, 133–144.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2>.
- OECD. (2017). *PISA 2015 results (volume III): Students' well-being*. Paris: PISA, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en>.
- Proctor, C., & Fox Eades, J. (2009). *Strengths gym*. St. Peter Port, Guernsey: Positive Psychology Research Center.
- Proctor, C., Tsukayama, E., Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Eades, J. F., & Linley, P. A. (2011). Strengths gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and well-being of adolescents. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(5), 377–388.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Adler, A. (2018). Positive education. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *Global happiness policy report 2018* (pp. 53–74). New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Retrieved from <http://www.happinesscouncil.org/report/2018/>.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Adler, A. (2019). Positive education. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *Global happiness policy report 2019* (pp. 53–72). New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Retrieved from <http://www.happinesscouncil.org/report/2019/>.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35, 293–311.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T. C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., ..., & Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Frynberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Singapore: Springer. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0\\_6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0_6).
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75–90.
- Waters, L. (2015). Strength based parenting and life satisfaction in teenagers. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 2(11), 158–173.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Rusk, R., Aarch, A., & Cotton, A. (2017). Positive education: Visible wellbeing and the five domains of positive functioning. In M. Slade, L. Oades, & A. Jarden (Eds.), *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health* (pp. 245–264). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.leawaters.com/research-access-sign-up.html>.

- White, M. A. (2016). Why won't it stick? Positive psychology and positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-016-0039-1>.
- White, M. A., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning *and* teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.
- World Health Organization. (2000). *The world health report 2000*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/whr/2000/en/>.
- World Health Organization. (2014). *The World Health Organization's 'Health for the World's Adolescents' report*. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/topics/adolescence/second-decade/en/](https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/second-decade/en/).
- Wong, P. T. P. (2011). Positive psychology 2.0: Towards a balanced interactive model of the good life. *Canadian Psychology*, 52(2), 69–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022511>.
- Yeager, J. M., Fisher, S. W., & Shearon, D. N. (2011). *SMART strengths. Building character, resilience and relationships in youth*. New York: Kravis Publishing.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 4

## Positive Youth Development in Education

Daniel Romer and David Hansen

There has been growing interest in positive youth development (PYD) as an approach to promoting the health and welfare of young people. This interest derives from the realization that there is more to understand regarding healthy development than there is from concerns about reducing risky behaviour or mental illness, both of which increase during adolescence and draw most of the attention of parents, policymakers, and the general public. With these problems at the forefront of attention, it is perhaps not surprising that researchers have devoted a large share of their attention to these concerns. However, there is increasing recognition that the mere absence of risk behaviours or mental illness is not synonymous with developmental success (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma Jr, 2007), which Pittman and Fleming (1991) poignantly summarized with the maxim *problem-free is not fully prepared*.

PYD has always been grounded in practice first, with research following in the 1990s to ostensibly provide empirical support for PYD practices based on the wealth of existing practitioner expertise (Lerner et al., 2018; Zeldin, 2000). Within the PYD framework, developmental success represents progress towards becoming a fully functioning adult with the abilities and

---

D. Romer (✉)

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

e-mail: [dan.romer@apcc.upenn.edu](mailto:dan.romer@apcc.upenn.edu)

D. Hansen

University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

competencies to reach one's potential while also contributing to the welfare of the community. Certainly health-compromising behaviour habits or mental illness can derail progress towards developmental success, but their absence alone does not define it. Similarly, an inordinate focus on problem prevention can only provide minimal insight into the factors that lead to positive development. PYD represents a shift in how we conceptualize the "positive" in youth development, which can ultimately lead to insights into how to promote developmental success including reduction in health-compromising outcomes.

## What Is Positive Youth Development?

PYD as a field is a loose collection of a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., academic disciplines and practice) across many areas connected by philosophical ideals. The nature of PYD as a collective means there is no single theoretical model that drives the field, yet despite this, there are common conceptual and theoretical principles that unify this multidisciplinary field.

Core theoretical tenets of PYD have been embedded within developmental and psychological sciences, which view development resulting from a complex interaction between individuals and the contexts in which they reside (Lerner, 1998). At the individual level, PYD theory asserts that individuals seek to be intentional, active agents or producers of their development (Larson, 2000; Lerner, Theokas, & Jelicic, 2005). That is, within the PYD framework every person has an inherent capacity for positive growth—to exercise personal agency—that pushes them to develop skills and competencies consonant with their goals.

Youth, as active agents, are also embedded within a community with various contexts, ecologies, and relationships from which they select to prioritize personal development (Benson et al., 2007). A positive developmental trajectory occurs when these various settings support or nurture individuals' agency as producers of their own development (Duerden, Widmer, & Witt, 2017). In addition, positive development is further enhanced when individuals are involved in multiple and, ideally, interconnected, supportive settings within a community. Community, then, is an important mechanism through which positive development occurs.

In this chapter we review the various research streams stemming from PYD that have sought to understand the factors that promote positive development especially as they apply to both formal and informal education. We begin with a review of the philosophical ideas that have foreshadowed much

of this research, namely the writings of Aristotle. His ideas not only provide a blueprint for many of the theories advanced to study PYD but also for questions that could receive more attention. PYD is a loosely connected field of research and practice guided to these philosophical ideals rather than a tightly orchestrated agenda. As such, we review a broad base of research, theory, and practice, with an eye towards educational application.

## Philosophical Roots of PYD

Aristotle's theories of human development have not only animated recent approaches to PYD but have been a long-standing influence on the evolution of democratic rule in the Western world. Aristotle's theory of happiness as the ultimate objective of life played a large role in subsequent theories of human rights as exemplified by the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution in which the "pursuit of happiness" was a motivating force. His focus on living a virtuous life was also a source of inspiration for the development of public education in America. It is critical therefore to unwrap what Aristotle meant by happiness and virtue because these concepts have been subject to different interpretations. In addition, despite his inspiration for modern discussion of wellbeing and positive development, his ideas have not always been faithfully interpreted, as we describe below.

The term used by Greek philosophers to connote happiness was *eudaimonia*, which literally means good spirit. Aristotle's (1999) theory of happiness was laid out in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, a rather compact tome that has been translated many times in different languages. It is believed that he titled the book after his son, Nichomachas, and intended the book to be a guide for life. For Aristotle, happiness is the ultimate objective of life because achieving it is sufficient to itself. Acting in ways that promote happiness is therefore living a good life. Pursuing one's goals, such as having a significant other in one's life, raising children, and contributing to one's community are all virtuous pursuits, as is perfecting one's talents. But the way in which one does these things also matters, which is why he argued that living the good life meant living "in accord with the virtues" (p. 1099a, 21).

An important distinction in Aristotle's thinking was the difference between seeking pleasure and seeking happiness. Pleasure can certainly be an important by-product of happiness, but it is not the objective. This is easy to see in that one can gain pleasure from doing things that are harmful to others and oneself. Since seeking pleasure is not a sign of virtue, maximizing pleasure cannot be the ultimate objective of living a good life. This view of

seeking happiness rather than pleasure differs from an approach to decision-making in daily life that emphasizes the hedonistic outcomes of behaviour that underlie many approaches to both psychology and economics. Aristotle rejected the hedonistic approach by focusing on the virtuous sources of decision-making. He thus linked the happy life to the ethical life.

Aristotle argued that people should strive to live a life that exemplifies universal virtues, including what he called the major virtues of character: *justice*, *temperance*, and *courage*. He saw these goals as the basis of ethics, which are closely related to the Greek term for character (*ethos*). One acts with justice by treating others with fairness and respect. One acts with temperance by steering away from maximizing pleasure and avoiding pain as the main criteria for decisions in life: what we now call self-regulation. Finally, one acts with courage by standing up for oneself and one's ideals and not fearing the pursuit of difficult goals, which shares similarities with modern conceptualizations of personal agency.

For Aristotle, pursuing virtue requires moderation. That is, if one only wants to maximize pleasure and avoid pain, then one will ignore the virtues of justice, temperance, and courage. For example, one will cheat others to gain an advantage, or become angry when something disappoints, or be afraid to stand up for one's rights. In each case, one is encouraged to follow the middle path, which will lead to virtue but not necessarily the most pleasant path. The path of moderation also leads to pursuing goals that are worthy for their own sake rather than to please others. This concept is evident in theories that emphasize what is now called intrinsic motivation.

Aristotle also prized what he called virtues of reason, such as *prudence*, which entails careful deliberation to consider the consequences of one's actions for both oneself and others to reach good decisions before acting. The prudent person considers the particulars of a decision so that one can satisfy the virtues while also achieving one's goals. As one matures, one also gains *practical wisdom*, which is knowing how to confront challenging ethical decisions (Wren, 2014).

In order to cultivate a virtuous life, Aristotle placed responsibility on parents and adults in the community to train its youth to recognize and develop the character of a virtuous person and the reasoning skills of the prudent person. In proposing the virtuous life as the guide to behaviour, Aristotle effectively linked ethics to character. Linking ethics to character development also has implications for positive development with his suggestion that the best way to develop a virtuous life is to practice acting in a virtuous manner. Aristotle viewed such practice as a necessary step to developing a virtuous character since virtuous character was unlikely to come

naturally. The best way to cultivate virtuous character required practice with the support and guidance of adults (see also Sherman, 1991).

Aristotle also emphasized the importance of politics as a source of virtue. The political system in his view has the responsibility of fostering virtue in its citizens, and thus an important part of this responsibility is the education of the young to appreciate the virtues of good government. The body politic also has the responsibility of enacting laws that will be beneficial to the public. This idea also was appreciated in America's movement towards public education in that it was hoped that universal education would inculcate the virtues of citizenship in young people. Horace Mann, the father of public education in the U.S., was a firm believer in the importance of the pursuit of happiness as a "law of our nature" and advocated for a system of public education that should have as its aims "social efficiency, civic virtue, and character..." (Cubberley, 1919, p. 167). John Dewey (1961) elaborated on this theme with his advocacy for democratic schools that enable the individual to become an active participant in democracy.

Finally, Aristotle emphasized the importance of relationships, especially friendships, as a key component of a happy life. In his view, connection with others who can share in the virtuous life enhances the ability of the individual to do so as well.

## From Philosophical Ideals to Contemporary Views of Happiness

Aristotle's conceptualization of happiness, with an emphasis on a virtuous life lived in connection with society, can be clearly seen in contemporary PYD concepts and frameworks. Before considering how PYD embodies Aristotle's conception of happiness, we contrast his eudemonic interpretation of happiness with some current approaches to happiness associated with the positive psychology movement, some of which focus more heavily on the hedonic aspects of happiness, such as the successful pursuit of pleasure.

### Happiness and Positive Psychology

Achieving happiness has become a subject of great popular interest, which is partly a result of the emergence of positive psychology as a discipline. Led by Martin Seligman (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), this approach explicitly focuses on the

factors that Aristotle noted as promoting a happy life, including the recognition of virtue and character strengths as guides to happiness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and the practice of virtuous habits, such as showing gratitude to those who have helped us rather than dwelling on the disappointments that may have hindered our success.

Despite the influence of Aristotle's conception of happiness, the pursuit of pleasure has remained a feature of positive psychology. In a review of the concept of happiness, Seligman and colleagues (Forgeard et al., 2011) suggested that a useful way to define happiness is to consider it as a form of wellbeing or flourishing with five components: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment or PERMA. These five elements "are the best approximation of what humans pursue *for their own sake*" (p. 97) They proposed that this definition includes both hedonic and eudemonic perspectives and therefore provides a more complete picture of what one means by happiness.

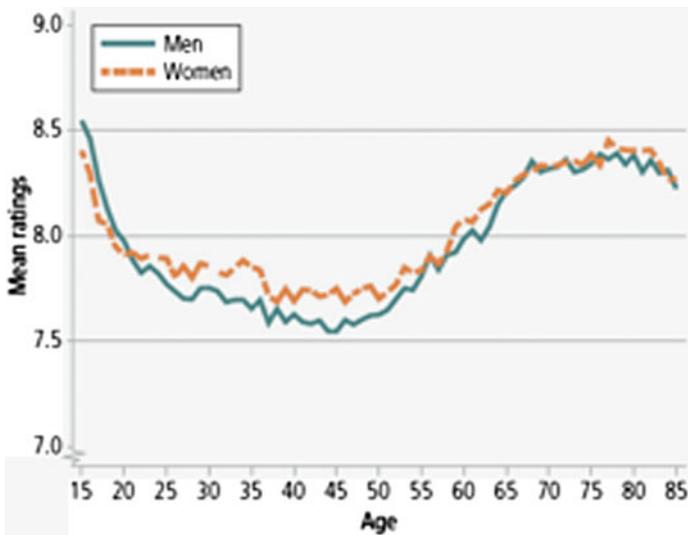
Another approach proposed by Keyes (2007) following on Ryff (1989) overlaps with Seligman and colleagues' focus on positive emotion, but it includes a variety of other factors that overlap with achievement and meaning, such as purpose in life, self-acceptance, positive relationships, and personal growth. As these approaches suggest, positive affect and emotion are considered prominent features of happiness. However, the field of PYD has tended to view these features as more of an effect of PYD than a motivator for development, as we illustrate next.

## Eudemonic Versus Hedonic Approaches to Happiness

The conflict between the eudemonic and hedonic approaches to happiness has received considerable attention in psychology (e.g., Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2007). This is perhaps sparked by some strands of positive psychology that have equated happiness with pleasure in the sense of maximizing pleasant affect and satisfaction with life: for example, the approach to wellbeing promoted by Diener et al. (2006). This approach de-emphasizes Aristotle's view that happiness is necessarily linked to living a virtuous life. The disregard for virtue may reflect the desire to measure happiness as defined by the individual rather than as defined by theories of virtue (Kashdan et al., 2008). Asking people how satisfied they presently are with their lives or how much pleasant affect they have recently experienced assesses wellbeing without constraining its definition. When this is done, there is an interesting U-shaped relation between satisfaction and age, with satisfaction starting to decline in adolescence and not

returning to its early level until late in life (see Fig. 4.1; Qu & de Vaus, 2015). If this definition is correct, then people are less than happy throughout most of their adult lives. A recent international study of life satisfaction (Jebb et al., 2020) confirmed this pattern of life satisfaction declining relative to age 20 in most regions of the world. But it is reasonable to expect that happiness in Aristotle's terms will increase during the lifespan as people gain wisdom and experience acting in accord with the virtues.

When people are surveyed using a measure more in line with Aristotle, a different pattern appears. In a study by Steger et al. (2009), the authors conducted a large online survey of persons ages 18–70 that examined age differences in happiness that asked about the presence of meaning in one's life (e.g., I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful) and the search for meaning in one's life (e.g., I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life). Trends in these measures were different from what was reported in Fig. 4.1. During the early adult period (ages 18–44), there was a decline in the presence of meaning and high levels of search for meaning. However, for older adults, achieving meaning increased with age while the search for it declined. Although ratings of satisfaction comparable to those taken in Fig. 4.1 were



**Fig. 4.1** Mean ratings of life satisfaction on a scale from 0 = completely dissatisfied to 10 = completely satisfied, by age and gender from 2001 to 2012 in Australia (Original image published in Qu, L., & de Vaus, D. [2015]. *Life satisfaction across life course transitions* [Australian Family Trends, No. 8; p. 14], by Australian Institute of Family Studies. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

positively related to the discovery of meaning (at about  $r = .60$ ), the age trends were different, suggesting that for meaning, once one enters middle age at about age 45, there is a steady increase in reports of meaning and a steady decline in the search for it, with both trends exceeding the levels observed in early adulthood (higher for presence and lower for search). These trends are more in line with what one would expect from an Aristotelian perspective towards happiness. They suggest that although we are not as satisfied with our lives as we progress from adolescence, this is more a result of our search for purpose than a source of disappointment. The findings also suggest that the search for meaning in early development provides opportunities for youth centred programs to facilitate the discovery of such meaning for each individual.

## A Eudemonic Approach in Psychology

Because the virtues are a form of excellence in action and reasoning that spring from one's unique interests and talents, theories that focus on intrinsic motivation are adopting this line of thought. The perhaps most well-developed psychological theory of intrinsic motivation is Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shogren & Little, 2017). They argued that to encourage learning and adaptive decision-making, one should use strategies that enable youth to follow their own interests in a supportive environment that promotes what they called *autonomy*. An environment that promotes autonomy enables parents, adults and communities to encourage development of curiosity and self-determination in youth. In short, activities that evoke the most passion (i.e., intrinsic motivation) will be the most fulfilling.

Aristotle's virtue of prudence can be seen in Deci and Ryan's focus on the importance of *competencies* to achieve one's goals. Competency involves learning basic skills of decision-making, as well as other skills, so that one can best achieve one's goals. And finally, they suggested that people have a need for *relatedness* or connection with others in order to become fully self-determined actors, which follows from the importance of justice along with parenting and friendship as important sources of upbringing and virtue.

Despite the reliance on eudemonic principles, Deci and Ryan do not emphasize the virtues as a source of happiness. Nevertheless, their theory does link with some of the major principles of PYD, as we illustrate below. The theory also emphasizes the importance of action and prudence as sources

of happiness, which is related to Aristotle's notion of good character and reasoning as the embodiment of virtue.

## Current Embodiments of Eudaimonia in Positive Youth Development

### The 5C's Plus Contribution

As noted, training to develop a virtuous character requires practice in the actions that comprise virtue. A leading model of PYD focuses on what is termed the five C's plus contribution popularized by Pittman et al. (2000) and others (Lerner et al., 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003): connection, competence, character, caring, confidence, and contribution. Lerner (2004) made contribution the centrepiece of his theory of thriving. Programs and policies that advance these objectives of development tend to focus on one or more, but they all tend to touch on at least one.

- **Connection.** PYD is facilitated by strong guidance and bonding with parents and other adults in one's community. Bonding with parents during childhood is a powerful factor in healthy development, and the ability to form close supportive relationships with parents, peers, and adults is integral for developing virtuous habits. This characteristic plays out in schools where positive climates between students and teachers are thought to encourage respect for the individual and foster academic achievement. It also applies to other community settings, such as out-of-school programs.
- **Competence.** Building agentic and adaptive decision-making skills is a cornerstone of PYD. This has been an important factor in many school programs that aim to encourage healthy development and to prevent problem behaviour. Included in these programs are specific skills that further the virtue of temperance which includes self-control over impulses and the ability to cooperate with peers.
- **Character:** This aspect of PYD reflects the person's ability to recognize and be sensitive to the virtues in oneself and others, including the three main virtues of justice, temperance, and courage.
- **Caring:** This aspect of character emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to the needs of others, which is closely aligned with justice, respect for others, and generosity.
- **Confidence:** This is the virtue of courage to believe in oneself and to stand up for the ideals that one holds dear.

- **Contribution:** This is the desire to make one's community stronger and to the fostering of virtues in the community. This element is considered a consequence of the 5Cs and is often studied as such. It is also embodied in the notion of the virtuous citizen whose strengths can be cultivated through programs of PYD (Lerner, 2004).

While PYD does not explicitly focus on happiness as an objective, the promotion and development of the above strengths is consistent with the acquisition of habits that lead to happiness in the eudemonic sense. The absence of any mention of life satisfaction or positive emotion is perhaps what distinguishes the PYD approach from some elements of positive psychology as an approach to youth and adult development.

### Assessment of the "5C's Plus" Contribution

The 5C's not only serve as aspirations for PYD programs, they have also been measured in programs designed to advance PYD objectives. Lerner and colleagues have developed self-report assessments of the 5C's that have high reliability and appear to be explained by a higher-order PYD factor (Geldhof et al., 2014; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010). The samples for this research were recruited in a longitudinal study of the 4-H program for youth discussed below. In the more recent study by Geldhof et al. (2014), the sample of 7071 youth spanned the entire range of the study from 5th to 12th grade. The higher-order PYD factor was positively correlated at all grades along with a measure of contribution. In addition, the scale was inversely related to a measure of depressive symptoms and problem behaviours. In Lewin-Bizan et al. (2010), trajectories of the PYD factor indicated that for most of the youth attending the 4-H program (67%), PYD increased from 5th to 10th grade. A small group (6%) exhibited declines.

A study conducted with students ages 11–19 in the Republic of Ireland also found support for the presence of a higher order PYD factor in both younger and older students (Conway et al., 2015). In this sample, there was also evidence that younger students (ages 11–14) had higher PYD scores than older students (ages 15–19). Nevertheless, the finding that PYD was positively related to a measure of contribution and negatively related to a measure of depressive symptoms and risk behaviour was replicated for both age groups.

## Developmental Assets and Thriving

Another embodiment of PYD focuses on developmental assets as the building blocks of *thriving* in adolescents and young adults (Scales, Benson, & Leffert, 2000; Scales et al., 2016). The assets approach has been studied in large surveys of adolescents by researchers at the Search Institute (<https://www.search-institute.org/>). They defined thriving as encompassing seven outcomes: *School success* is seen as evidence of striving for excellence, while *being a leader*, *helping others* and *valuing diversity* are signs of caring. The *ability to delay gratification* and to *maintain good physical health* are signs of the ability to self-regulate and make healthy decisions. Finally, the *ability to overcome adversity* can be seen as a sign of courage.

With these outcomes in mind, Scales and colleagues (Lefferts et al., 1998) proposed eight potential overarching assets that would enable a young person to thrive. These included four external assets: *support* from family and others in the community, *empowerment* in the community, *boundaries and expectations* for safe behaviour, and the presence of youth programs that promote *constructive use of time*. An additional four personal assets were seen as critical to thriving: *commitment to learning*, *positive values* that exemplify virtuous behaviour (e.g., honesty, caring, justice), *social competencies* such as good decision-making skills, and a *positive identity* that includes a sense of purpose in life and a positive view of the future.

In the first large-scale evaluation of the assets framework, Lefferts et al. (1998) administered a survey to 99,462 youth in grades 6 through 12 that assessed self-reports of the various assets and indicators of thriving. It was noteworthy that external assets tended to decline from middle to high school. For example, family support was endorsed by 71% of boys and girls in middle school but only by 59 and 60% of boys and girls respectively in high school. There was more heterogeneity in developmental change in internal assets. Most remained at about the same levels, but in some cases, there were declines, such as for restraint (from 53 to 25% in boys and from 67 to 36% in girls), perhaps reflecting the increasing tendency for exploration in adolescence.

Despite the age differences, many of the assets were inversely related to various risky behaviours, such as the use of drugs and other anti-social activities. This finding is consistent with the argument that PYD is protective for the development of unhealthy behaviour in adolescence. There was also evidence that many assets were protective against depression and suicidal ideation.

A later study examined the relation between assets and indices of thriving in a subsample of 6000 youth of the Lefferts et al. (1998) study (Scales, Benson, et al., 2000). In general, regarding thriving indicators, high school youth were less likely to affirm support for diversity than middle school students, male students were more likely to report overcoming adversity, and older students also reported overcoming adversity more than younger students. Regarding overall assets, the stronger the assets that students reported, the more likely they were to report indicators of thriving: school success, overcoming adversity, maintaining health, and delaying gratification. The various assets explained about 50% of the variance in thriving apart from demographic differences, and this pattern held for all of the various racial and ethnic groups that were included in the sample. Curiously, developmental assets accounted for less of the overcoming adversity indicator than of the other measures of thriving.

Scales et al. (2000) also examined an important tenet of PYD—that development is enhanced when individuals are embedded within multiple supportive contexts in a community. Consistent with this tenet, the amount of time youth spent in out-of-school programs correlated consistently and relative strongly with most of the thriving outcomes. Scales et al. interpreted this as a result of the many out-of-school programs basing their practices on PYD principles, such as “access to caring adults and responsible peers, as well as skill building activities that can reinforce the values and skills that are associated with doing well in school and maintaining good physical health. Further, youth programs may provide more opportunities than other contexts for youth to serve in leadership roles” (p. 43).

In a more recent analysis of the assets approach for the transition to adulthood, Scales et al. (2016) noted the apparent decline during high school in students’ perceptions of external assets. Based on these findings, they suggested that adolescents in the U.S. are not well prepared to make the difficult transition to adulthood.

In summary, two dominant approaches to PYD that are consistent with a eudemonic approach to happiness have defined major components of this concept and have developed self-report assessments that have been successfully administered to middle and high school youth. This research has made strides in defining the elements of PYD, but it has not identified the educational components that can promote PYD. It is to these approaches that we turn next.

## Educational Approaches to PYD

### Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has become the most well-known approach to PYD in the U.S. It encompasses a variety of programs to develop social and reasoning skills primarily for elementary and middle school contexts. This approach follows a long tradition focused on the importance of adaptive decision-making (e.g., judgement and decision-making; Klaczynski, 2005), which is also a cornerstone of Aristotle's reasoning virtues. The virtuous decision maker learns to generate alternative solutions to any problem and to evaluate the solutions with regard to likely outcomes. Furthermore, in considering consequences, one needs to consider their effects on others, especially their welfare in addition to that of the actor. This paradigm has been widely followed in programs that encourage adaptive problem-solving. For example, one of the earliest is the *I Can Problem Solve* approach of Shure and Spivack (1982) designed for use in preschool to grade 6 to encourage adaptive responses to common conflicts, such as sharing of resources or confronting bullying (Shure, 2001, 2003).

Effective problem-solving strategies are also central to the development of self-determination because they enable the individual to exert control over the process of making difficult decisions. These strategies also focus on emotional self-regulation to regulate one's temper as well as to recognize others' feelings. Thus, it is not surprising that these strategies are fundamental to school programs that develop competencies in what has become known as *social-emotional learning*.

According to Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011), youth in SEL programs are taught how to acquire "core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (p. 406). These competencies are clearly valuable, and this has given the approach much of its appeal. In addition, the meta-analysis of Durlak et al. (2011) indicated that programs that developed these skills also enhanced academic outcomes, which also added to its appeal. Kern et al. (2017) provided an overview of the various evaluations of these programs which have tended to show favourable outcomes in terms of better school achievement and fewer unhealthy behaviours in elementary and middle schools.

The challenge that such a broad set of goals raises, however, is how to adapt the educational mission and curricula of schools to achieve them. Some

programs have focused heavily on training the various skills that are encompassed by SEL isolated from a school's curriculum without considering how the training can best be integrated into the school curriculum. Attempting to teach SEL skills in isolation has created a somewhat unrealistic expectation about the ability of SEL programs to produce the results promised, such as improved academic achievement. As a result, many programs that claim to train SEL skills may do so without integrating them into the school's educational practices and, consequently, there is considerable variation in outcomes. For example, while it is expected that developing SEL competencies should reduce anti-social behaviour such as bullying, not all programs have been successful in this endeavour (Jones et al., 2017). SEL programs have also been more easily adapted for younger children than for adolescents (Yeager, 2017), perhaps because adolescents require a greater degree of respect for their autonomy than typical SEL training allows.

Although meta-analyses of SEL programs in schools tend to show favourable effects, many of the studies have not employed random assignment to conditions, nor have they validated assessments across all of the outcomes that are expected to be improved by SEL training. In response, the U.S. Department of Education undertook an intensive evaluation of seven programs that were regarded as having a strong evidence base (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010). The study was carried out in six states with 42 schools that were randomly assigned to receive the interventions versus continuing their regular programming. The programs were evaluated starting in third grade and continued through fifth grade. In total, over 6000 students were included in the evaluation. One of the programs focused more on character education, which is a strategy discussed below. Although all of the programs were found to implement their teaching objectives, the evaluation was essentially unable to identify consistent effects on the many outcomes said to comprise SEL outcomes during the period of the intervention. One of the interventions did begin to demonstrate effects after continued intervention into the seventh and eighth grades (Duncan et al., 2017).

It is clear that to reach the many goals of SEL, one needs a strategy for achieving them within the school context. As noted by Brunn (2014), "[t]he difficult thing for schools is not deciding whether or not to include social and emotional learning with the academic curriculum. The challenge is trying to figure out how to do it" (p. 265). Simply providing students with skills disconnected from the context in which they are practiced may not be sufficient to produce lasting change.

We illustrate how schools can integrate SEL principles into the school curriculum by looking at two programs that successfully achieved this goal. These programs use a whole school approach in which teachers are trained to create a caring environment that increases attachment to the school and that fosters a cooperative and respectful climate. We now turn to programs that focus on creating a school climate that fosters the goals of PYD.

## School Climate

Successful PYD programs in schools adopt a whole-school approach that integrates the goals of PYD into the academic program. This approach, like SEL, has many exemplars but also tends to be implemented at the elementary level. In this approach, the aim is to create a learning environment that is safe and respectful of student needs. Students are given a voice in how classes are structured and cooperation in group activities is encouraged. Two successful exemplars of this approach are the Seattle Social Development Project (SSSP) (Hawkins et al., 2001) and the Child Development Project (CDP) of the Developmental Studies Center (Battistich et al., 2004). Both programs adopt as the primary goal the establishment of a caring school climate that encourages *bonding* or attachment to the teachers and fellow students, an important form of connection. In these climates, students feel part of a community that is accepting and respectful of individuals. In the process, students adopt the norms and behaviours inculcated by teachers in their instructional styles (cf. LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2007).

What distinguishes these programs is the careful integration of PYD goals into the curriculum such that students learn how to cooperate and show respect towards each other and towards teachers by engaging in activities that embody these goals. For example, in the CDP, “students work together in pairs or small groups on tasks that require collaboration and often have group products” (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000, p. 6). In addition, “teachers discuss with students the values—such as fairness, consideration for others, responsibility—that underlie groupwork and the specific social skills and behavior from the values” (p. 7). They also learn decision-making skills as part of the academic program. This strategy is consistent with the Aristotelian approach of doing virtuous activity in order to develop virtuous capacities.

Evaluations of both programs have shown that attachment to school is a primary outcome from which other effects stem. In the case of the SSSP, school bonding was assessed with items reflecting liking for school. These effects lasted until the last years of high school indicating that early bonding

experiences endured into later years of schooling. Remaining attached to school is an important outcome in its own right because it tends to enhance academic achievement and reduce unhealthy behaviours, such as drug use and early sexual activity, all of which were observed as a result of the SSSP (Hawkins et al., 2001). In the case of the CDP, measures of seeing the school as a community were stronger in intervention schools with an effect size of  $r = .47$ , and this outcome mediated a range of PYD outcomes, such as feeling a sense of heightened intrinsic academic motivation, with an effect size of  $r = .33$ .

These examples illustrate the potential for implementing PYD programs in elementary schools with lasting effects. Evidence for middle and high schools is less robust. However, there is evidence that schools that encourage respectful relations between students and teachers in a fair disciplinary structure promote enhanced academic outcomes even in grades 9 through 12 (e.g., Cornell, Shulka, & Konold, 2016). There is also evidence that school climates that encourage respectful relations reduce adverse interpersonal events such as bullying (Voight & Nation, 2016). A meta-analysis across 51 studies mostly in the USA and Australia found that relationships with teachers play a large role in reports of school attachment at the high school level (Allen et al., 2018).

## Character Education

The field of character education overlaps with SEL and other approaches to PYD, but according to Berkowitz and Bier (2014):

Character is the set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable an individual to function as a competent moral agent. In other words, it is those aspects of one's psychological makeup that impact whether one does the right thing, whether that entails telling the truth, helping an unpopular student who is in jeopardy, resisting the temptation to cheat or steal, or some other matter of moral functioning. (p. 250)

This definition clearly places ethics at the centre of character education, a focus in line with the Aristotelian approach to happiness. Berkowitz sees character education as a subset of SEL, which we have already discussed. However, because SEL does not directly focus on ethics per se, this leaves the question of how best to inculcate the virtues into schooling unexplained. Indeed, Berkowitz and Bier in their latest review essentially sidestep this question.

Another approach to character education is presented by Davidson, Lickona, and Khmelkov (2014), who encapsulate it as containing two goals, the development of performance and moral character. Performance character is the set of qualities or assets that enable one “to realize one’s potential for excellence” (p. 293) such as developing an ethic of perseverance. Moral character is the set of virtues that enable one to treat others with respect and care. These two aspects of character are closely in line with Aristotelian approaches to self-fulfilment and happiness. They cite approaches that can be used in high schools to cultivate both sides of character, one of which is service learning, to which we turn below.

In a yet different approach, Narvez and Bock (2014) argued for the development of “moral expertise” much again in line with Aristotle: “applying the right virtue in the right amount in the right way at the right time” (p. 142). Their approach emphasizes the same principles that have been identified in the creation of supportive social climates in schools, such as establishing caring relationships with students and encouraging respect for peers as well as teachers in a cooperative learning environment. They also highlight the importance of developing a civic identity so that the student will be able to become a virtuous citizen. This form of PYD is advanced through civic education, which we also discuss below.

## Organized Youth Programs

Early conceptions of PYD focused on the importance of youth programs available outside of the typical school day. These programs were seen as providing opportunities for youth to develop talents and become connected to their community. Advocates of this source of PYD noted that programs such as 4H-Clubs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and scouting have long been promoted as avenues for PYD. During the early 2000s, scholars began to identify components of out-of-school programs that promote positive development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005). In 2005, the U.S. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine published a summary of the research on community programs that promote positive development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). In this publication, scholars identified eight features of positive developmental settings including: physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy, and mattering, opportunities for skill-building, and integration of family,

school, and community efforts. These features embody PYD principles and have served to frame research on organized youth programs.

**Participation and PYD.** A recent analysis by Agans et al. (2014) from the Lerner longitudinal study of out-of-school participation in grades 7 through 12 identified the importance of sustained participation in such programs. They found that youth who reported greater overall participation in various out-of-school programs over the course of middle and high school experienced greater levels of PYD as measured by the 5Cs. Not surprisingly, sports programs were the most popular activity, but religious programs were also quite popular, especially among youth who participated in multiple programs. These youth also tended to experience less depression and lower levels of risk behaviour, although this was not consistently true across the entire age span. In addition, two Cs were most important as outcomes of PYD, connection, and competencies, again reflecting what has been found in the SEL approach and what is emphasized by Deci and Ryan as important components of intrinsic motivation.

**PYD and developmental experiences.** Hansen and Larson conceptualized and developed a PYD research agenda around youth developmental experiences (e.g., goal setting, prosocial norms) in organized youth programs (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hansen, Moore, & Jessop, 2018; Hansen, Skorupski, & Arrington, 2010; Larson & Hansen, 2005; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005; Larson, Lampkins-Uthando, & Armstrong, 2014). An example of a specific developmental experience resulting from youth programs is related to identity: *This activity got me thinking about who I am* (Hansen & Larson, 2002). Theoretically, these developmental experiences form the basis for learning positive skills and competencies, although there is not yet research explicitly linking specific experiences to relevant skills.

In a study with a representative sample of 2280 11th grade students, Larson et al. (2006) examined profiles of developmental experiences across a wide range of out-of-school programs in which students participated. Results indicated that different types of youth programs, such as sports and arts, demonstrated distinct profiles of experiences. For example, compared to other youth programs, faith-based programs were associated with higher rates of identity, initiative, emotion regulation, teamwork and social skills, positive relationship, and adult network and social capital experiences. By way of comparison, sports were associated with higher rates of initiative, emotion regulation, and teamwork experiences but lower rates of identity, positive relationships, and adult network experiences. It is important to note that comparisons of developmental experiences between youth programs

and English and Math classes indicated that youth programs were rated considerably higher on all developmental experiences.

Using a subsample of the representative sample in Larson et al. (2006), Hansen and Larson (2007) examined the association between developmental experiences and four program involvement indicators: “dosage” (hours per week), motivations for participating in the program, holding a lead role, and the ratio of adults-to-youth in the program. Results indicated that each of the indicators was independently associated with PYD developmental experiences, accounting for a total of 23% of the variance in experiences.

Overall, research on adolescents’ developmental experiences suggests organized youth activities are a beneficial context for PYD. What this line of research does not yet address is the impact, both immediate and long term, of positive experiences on skill development. In addition, the measure of developmental experiences, the Youth Experience Survey (YES), was developed specifically to reflect the youth program setting. Thus, how well these experiences capture PYD experiences in other settings is unknown.

**Program characteristics that promote PYD.** Meta-analyses of the effects of extracurricular programs have produced mixed results. This is likely due to the great heterogeneity in program goals and strategies for attaining them. Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) examined a wide range of programs mostly in the USA and found that the programs that followed what they called SAFE implementation were the most successful in achieving favourable outcomes. These programs had practices that were *sequenced*, *active*, *focused*, and *explicit*. In short, they used strategies that employed a structured set of goals that helped youth to build social and personal skills as described in their program manual and used active rather than merely didactic teaching styles that were focused on specific learning goals. They identified 41 SAFE programs out of 68 that had been studied. Most of the programs were designed for local elementary and middle school students rather than being part of large national organizations such as the 4-H or Boys and Girls clubs.

Durlak et al. (2010) looked at several outcomes, such as self-perceptions (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy) as well as bonding to school and school achievement as important effects. They found that the SAFE programs produced effects in the range of  $r = .14$  (for school attendance) to  $r = .37$  (for self-perceptions). However, the effects for the other programs were largely negligible. Thus, their review suggested that appropriately designed programs could produce favourable outcomes.

Despite the favourable review by Durlak et al. (2010), a Campbell systematic review of out-of-school programs found limited effects on academic or

behavioural outcomes (Zief, Lauver, & Maynard, 2006). The lack of consistent effects led Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, and Gillings (2017) to conduct another evaluation of organized youth programs. They attempted to identify all randomized trials in both the published and unpublished literature and to use established criteria for program quality. With these criteria, they identified 24 programs, 20 of which were conducted in the U.S. The average ages ranged from 10 to 16 at baseline.

Ciocanel et al. (2017) examined three classes of outcomes: academic including grades in school, self-perceptions of efficacy and esteem, and prosocial and problem behaviour. There were small effects on academic achievement with an effect size of  $r = .22$ . There were also effects on self-perceptions with a size of  $r = .19$ . No effects on social or problem behaviour were observed. The authors also noted heterogeneity in effects that seemed to be stronger for lower risk youth.

The authors of this evaluation were less enthusiastic about the current state of out-of-school programs. However, the programs that were included in the review seemed to focus on problem behaviour and school performance, without much attention to the 5C's or contribution.

**Youth–adult partnerships.** This strand of research has focused on the role of adults in partnering with young people as a means of advancing PYD (Ramey & Rose-Krasnor, 2012; Sullivan & Larson, 2010; Zeldin, 2000), and has examined the effects that youth have on adults as they attempt to enter into cooperation with adults in the community. It also recognizes the negative stereotypes that adults hold of youth that hinder their willingness to include young people's voice in their programs. Reviews of characteristics of out-of-school activities that appear to make them successful use interviews with both youth and adults. These studies generally find that youth programs are most successful “when youth felt respected, were able to contribute, and played meaningful roles that drew on their strengths” (Sullivan & Larson, 2010; p. 101).

In summary, there is considerable room for refinement of out-of-school programs. Although the Durlak et al. (2010) review identified successful programs, the content of those programs remains obscure other than that they employed SAFE strategies (see also Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016, for similar concerns). Agans et al. (2014) study did not involve random assignment, so it is not clear whether the youth who participated in more programs were just more capable of exhibiting PYD. The same can be said about the findings of Scales et al. (2000). On the other hand, even if out-of-school programs largely reflect selection effects, it is reassuring to know that they are associated with more favourable PYD outcomes given their widespread availability

in many locales. The challenge is to identify the program characteristics that can lead to stronger outcomes relevant to the PYD agenda, such as personal assets or the 5Cs.

## Civics Education

Development of civic virtues is clearly relevant to the PYD agenda, since it is designed to encourage participation in community decision-making. As noted above, it is often cited as an objective of character education (Berkowitz, Althof, & Jones, 2008; Narvez & Bock, 2014). However, interest in civics as an educational objective predates the emergence of the PYD approach to healthy development. Studies of the effects of civic education go back to at least 1967 in the studies of Hess and Torney (1967). One stream of this research concerns the basic function of civics education, namely the acquisition of knowledge about one's government and regulations regarding participation in it, including voting (e.g., Niemi & Junn, 1998). Indeed, considerable evidence supports the importance of civics knowledge as a marker of active citizenship, such as voting (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). It would be expected that exposure to civics classes in schools would lead to greater knowledge about it and hence to civic outcomes such as voting. But the correlation between taking civics classes and knowledge is small (Niemi & Junn, 1998). And the relation between civics knowledge and actual political participation in young people is also tenuous (Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2008; Reichert, 2016).

Since the ground-breaking work of Hess and Torney (1967) and because of its obvious relevance to the socialization of good citizens, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has conducted four international studies of civic education since 1971. These studies have focused on children in the eighth grade (ages 14–15) from multiple countries. The surveys have also included teachers and administrators. The strongest conclusion from these studies that “consistently emerged across countries, contexts, times and groups...was that an open, participatory and respectful discussion climate is associated with civic knowledge and engagement” (Knowles, Torney-Purta, & Barber, 2018, p. 13). Students who report such civics classes endorse items indicating that they are encouraged to freely express their opinions and make up their own minds about political issues. There has also been evidence that effects of class climate are stronger for students from less advantaged backgrounds (Campbell, 2007).

Attention has also been directed to characteristics of teachers who are more likely to produce favourable outcomes. A variety of teaching techniques have

been associated with these outcomes, with no single one being any stronger than another as long as a climate of respectful discussion was maintained. Nevertheless, teachers tend to be more confident discussing some topics than others. For example, in the U.S., teachers reported feeling unease discussing controversial topics (Alviar-Martin et al., 2008). Another study found that “teachers who personally felt strongly about environmental and human rights issues were more likely to endorse an open classroom climate than were teachers who felt strongly about the importance of conforming to the law” (Knowles et al., 2018, p. 15). Those who were more comfortable raising controversial issues had students with greater civic knowledge.

An important outcome of civics education that has emerged in recent years is a sense of internal efficacy (Knowles & McCafferty-Wright, 2015; Manganelli, Lucidi, & Alivernini, 2015; Pasek et al., 2008; Reichert, 2016). Two types of internal efficacy have been identified: civic efficacy and political efficacy. Civic efficacy concerns the more general perceived ability to discuss and debate about issues of concern to the community; while political efficacy is more focused on the ability to participate in and potentially have a voice in politics through voting and discussion. Both have been associated with civic education that encourages learning about political issues in the media and developing an understanding of the arguments for and against particular positions. In one IEA study across 13 European countries (Knowles & McCafferty-Wright, 2015), the relation between both types of efficacy and perceptions of open classes was quite strong. Further, both types of efficacy as well as civic knowledge were found to mediate the relation between open classes and the reported importance of participation in civic and political life, a result that characterized all 13 countries. Similar relations have been found in other studies (Pasek et al., 2008; Reichert, 2016), with evidence that the relation holds at both the classroom and individual level (Manganelli et al., 2015).

A somewhat pessimistic evaluation of civics education was reached by Manning and Edwards (2014). They identified nine studies that compared a civics curriculum for youth against a control condition with a focus on a behavioural outcome, such as voting or signing a petition. However, no studies using random assignment were identified. They concluded that the evidence in favour of direct effects of the programs on voting was either lacking or of uncertain statistical significance. They did find evidence of effects on other forms of political expression, such as signing petitions and contacting a government official. In some cases, the effects on voting were mediated by such variables as political efficacy (e.g., Pasek et al., 2008), which the authors discounted. In total, their review showed that the research

testing the direct effects of civics education failed to use the best types of research design and that this inevitably limited the conclusions that could be drawn. Unfortunately, they did not assess the degree to which the programs employed the features of open discussion that have been identified as critical to the success of civics education. Thus, their pessimism seems unwarranted given the evidence of positive effects in most of the studies reviewed.

Evidence has also accumulated in the IEA studies regarding participation in school activities, such as student councils and other activities that encourage student voice in the school's administration (Mager & Nowak, 2012). Although some effects were stronger than others, all forms of participation appeared to improve the school's climate as evidenced by greater attachment to and enjoyment of school.

It is often lamented that civics education has received short-shrift in the U.S. (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Nevertheless, it is encouraging that voting and political participation have recently increased among American young people (Clement & Mellnik, 2019). It is also noteworthy that adolescents have been at the forefront of some social movements, such as greater regulation of guns and more concerted effort to combat climate change. If these trends continue, it would suggest that young people are becoming more civically and politically engaged than in the past despite the weak status of civic education in the schools.

## Service Learning

As noted in the review of approaches to character education, perhaps the most common strategy to develop a moral sense in education is the use of community service and its curricular embodiment of service learning. Although this approach differs from the traditional form of civics education, which focuses on knowledge about the workings of government and, when successful, open discussion about political issues, civics education and service learning are often contrasted as strategies for developing what might be called civic virtues (e.g., Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007).

Service learning is said to have its roots in John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1961) which advocated for the importance of the school curriculum in the development of socially concerned citizens. He also advocated for a "learning by doing" curriculum, which is consistent with an Aristotelian approach to ethical development. By engaging in service projects, youth are expected to develop an appreciation of the social and economic problems in their communities and the ways in which they can contribute to their solution (Hart et al., 2014). In addition, by actively reflecting on

their experience, students are thought to gain greater understanding and appreciation of their experience.

Some forms of community service have been studied even when they are not linked to a formal curriculum. These activities merely involve participation in a service activity in the community. In a random sample of 18,000 U.S. students in eighth grade in 1988 at baseline, Hart et al. (2007) examined the relation between both voluntary and required service activity during school years and engagement in various civic outcomes eight years after graduation. At a follow-up with over 6,000 respondents, a little over a fifth of the former students had volunteered in their community in the past 12 months. Larger proportions (46–62%) had voted in a recent election. With controls for a variety of personal and demographic factors, the results indicated strong associations between having engaged in either *voluntary* or *required* service during high school and voting at follow-up.

Hart et al. (2007) study also found that although civic knowledge as assessed at 12th grade was related to the number of social science classes taken, it was only related to voting at follow-up. Hart et al. (2007) summarized their findings “that providing opportunities for community service and extracurricular activities are particularly good choices for policy makers interested in grooming adolescents for citizenship” (p. 216).

Other studies have identified some of the factors that may mediate the effects of service learning. In one review of service learning, students in the programs were observed to be more adept at taking different perspectives in moral reasoning (Conrad & Hedin, 1982). Another study by Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier (2000) with over one thousand middle school students found that participation in service-learning programs led to greater efficacy beliefs about their ability to help others and stronger concern for others' welfare compared to students not in such programs. These effects were stronger the longer the exposure to the programs and when the programs involved reflection exercises that reviewed the service experience.

Conway et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 78 studies comparing service learning to control conditions. The studies focused on the entire range of education, from elementary to college students. The analysis found effects on citizenship as well as personal and social outcomes. The largest effects were found for academic outcomes ( $d = .43$ ), such as grades. The smallest effects were associated with citizenship outcomes ( $d = .17$ ), such as frequency of volunteering for service. The effect was somewhat stronger when the program included time for reflection ( $d = .22$ ). The effects of service-learning were observed at all levels of education. Another meta-analysis of service-learning programs with 62 studies found effects in the same range (Celio et al., 2011).

Not unlike other PYD programs, there is limited evidence about the components of service learning that produce the most effect on civic outcomes. Many have argued that reflection is critical, but this has not been established to date. The large study by Hart et al. (2007) suggests that even voluntary community service without a direct connection to course requirements can lead to greater civic and political outcomes. Furthermore, the content of reflection activities that might be effective has not been clearly isolated. Some involve writing journals while others just encourage discussion. The type of service activity has also not been clearly identified. Youniss and colleagues (Metz et al., 2003) have suggested that service involving direct contact with people in need should be more impactful than less direct contact. Further research will be needed to identify the best practices in this area of PYD education (Hart et al., 2014).

## Conclusions and Challenges for the Future

PYD is an active and promising approach to the healthy development of youth. It provides a conceptual umbrella for youth of all ages and in all contexts. Although much remains to be understood about the best ways to implement PYD programs, one conclusion that emerges from this review is the importance of classroom and school climates as critical for the positive development of youth. Consistent with John Dewey's argument, to develop virtuous citizens in a democracy will require democratic practices in and outside of schools (Dewey, 1961). These include an open and inclusive climate that encourages youth to learn in a setting of respect and cooperation whether they be with fellow students, teachers, or other adults in the community. This learning by doing increases connection to the setting and the adults who lead it. When teachers and adults in community programs approach education as a cooperative endeavour between adults and students and between students themselves, they are more likely to produce PYD outcomes. The strategies to accomplish this depend on the cognitive development of youth, but sufficient evidence has accumulated that PYD programs with these characteristics can further the various Cs at all ages.

Several challenges remain for PYD to reach its full potential. First, although PYD as practice, theory, and research has considerable potential to inform education, applying a PYD framework to education will challenge the traditional teacher–student model. Learning within the PYD framework is principled on the person and the community dynamically exerting a bidirectional influence (Lerner, 1998). The degree of influence and the direction

of influence in teacher–student relationship can have a profound impact on learning. The teacher–student relationship has traditionally been unidirectional in the sense that the teacher determined what was learned. A PYD framework challenges this conceptualization. Although schools are apt to see themselves as a “community” delivery system for PYD, formal education struggles to adhere to the core PYD tenet of the individual as an active agent who can direct their own learning goals. What teacher–student relationships in a PYD model means for formal education is, admittedly, difficult to envision but a necessary task. These challenges will continue to occupy both practitioners and researchers in the years to come.

Second, age matters. Despite sharing common tenets, there are important developmental differences between childhood and adolescence that should inform formal educational adaptations of PYD practice and theory. While age is an important consideration in PYD practice and theory, PYD applications have had the most traction in elementary education, most often in the form of SEL curricula. We suggest the traction PYD has had in elementary education again reflects embedded structural limitations of a prescriptive formal educational system that is ill-suited at present to accommodating adolescent agency-driven development.

Finally, there has been less attention to the implementation of PYD programs within resource-limited settings and for youth living in household poverty. The Lerner study of 4H clubs found that youth living in poverty were less able to display growth in the Cs than more advantaged youth (Phelps et al., 2007). Given the high rates of youth poverty in many countries including the U.S., it will continue to be a challenge to implement successful PYD programs for less advantaged youth.

## References

- Agans, J. P., Champine, R. B., DeSouza, L. M., Mueller, M. K., Johnson, S. K., & Lerner, R. M. (2014). Activity involvement as an ecological asset: Profiles of participation and youth outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *43*, 919–932. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0091-1>.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychological Review*, *30*, 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>.
- Alviar-Martin, T., Randall, J., Usher, E., & Englehard, G. (2008). Teaching civic topics in four societies: Examining national context and teacher confidence. *Journal of Educational Research*, *101*(3), 177–188.

- Battistich, V., Schaps, E., & Wilson, N. (2004). Effects of an elementary school intervention on students' "connectedness" to school and social adjustment during middle school. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 42*(3), 243–262.
- Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Hamilton, S. F. and Sesma, A., Jr. (2007). Positive youth development: Theory, research, and applications. In W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, & R.M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0116>.
- Berkowitz, M. W., Althof, W., & Jones, S. (2008). Educating for civic character. In J. Arthur, I. Davies, & C. Hahn (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of education for citizenship and democracy* (pp. 399–409). Sage.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2014). Research-based fundamentals of the effective promotion of character development in schools. In *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 248–260). Routledge.
- Brunn, P. (2014). Pedagogy for the whole child: The developmental studies center's approach to academic, moral, and character development. In L. Nucci, D. Narvez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 263–271). Routledge.
- Campbell, D. E. (2007). Sticking together: Classroom diversity and civic education. *American Politics Research, 35*(1), 57–78.
- Catalano, R. F., Berglund, M. L., Ryan, J. A., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 591*(1), 98–124.
- Celio, C. I., Durlak, J. A., & Dymnicki, A. B. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education, 34*(2), 164–181.
- Ciocanel, O., Power, K., Eriksen, A., & Gillings, K. (2017). Effectiveness of positive youth development interventions: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 46*, 483–504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0555-6>.
- Clement, S., & Mellnik, T. (2019, April 23). Young people actually rocked the vote in 2018, new Census Bureau data finds. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/23/young-people-actually-rocked-vote-new-census-data-find/>.
- Conrad, D., & Hedin, D. (1982). The impact of experiential education on adolescent development. *Child & Youth Services, 4*, 57–76.
- Conway, J., Amel, E. L., & Gerwien, D. P. (2009). Teaching and learning in the social context: A meta-analysis of service learning's effects on academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology, 36*, 233–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00986280903172969>.
- Conway, R. J., Heary, C., & Hogan, M. J. (2015). An evaluation of the measurement properties of the five Cs model of positive youth development. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*(1941), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01941>.

- Cornell, D., Shulka, K., & Konold, T. R. (2016). Authoritative school climate and student academic engagement, grades, and aspirations in middle schools. *AERA Open*, 2(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858416633184>.
- Cubberley, E. P. (1919). *Public education in the United States: A study and interpretation of American educational history*. Houghton Mifflin Company. <https://archive.org/details/publiceducationi00cubbuoft/page/n4>.
- Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2014). Smart & good schools: A new paradigm for high school character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 290–305). Routledge.
- Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1961). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Macmillan.
- Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: Revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, 61(4), 305–314. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.305>.
- Duerden, M. D., Widmer, M. A., & Witt, P. A. (2017). Positive youth development: What it is and how it fits in therapeutic settings. *Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs*, 4(1), 1698.
- Duncan, R., Washburn, I. J., Lewis, K. M., Bavarian, N., Dubois, D. L., Acock, A. C., et al. (2017). Can universal SEL programs benefit universally? Effects of the positive action program on multiple trajectories of social-emotional and misconduct behaviors. *Prevention Science*, 18, 214–224. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-016-0745-1>.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294–309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6>.
- Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. National Academies Press.
- Forgeard, M. J. C., Jayawickreme, E., Kern, M. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Doing the right thing: Measuring wellbeing for public policy. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(1), 79–106. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v1i1.15>.
- Geldhof, G. J., Bowers, E. P., Mueller, M. K., Napolitano, C. M., Callina, K. S., & Lerner, R. M. (2014). Longitudinal analysis of a very short measure of positive youth development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 933–949. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0093-z>.
- Hansen, D. M., & Larson, R. (2002). *The youth experience survey*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign.

- Hansen, D. M., & Larson, R. W. (2007). Amplifiers of developmental and negative experiences in organized activities: Dosage, motivation, lead roles, and adult-youth ratios. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 28*(4), 360–374.
- Hansen, D. M., Larson, R. W., & Dworkin, J. B. (2003). What adolescents learn in organized youth activities: A survey of self-reported developmental experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 13*(1), 25–55.
- Hansen, D. M., Moore, E. W., & Jessop, N. (2018). Youth program adult leader's directive assistance and autonomy support and development of adolescents' agency capacity. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 28*(2), 505–519.
- Hansen, D. M., Skorupski, W. P., & Arrington, T. L. (2010). Differences in developmental experiences for commonly used categories of organized youth activities. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31*(6), 413–421.
- Hart, D., Donnelly, T. M., Youniss, J., & Atkins, R. (2007). High school community service as a predictor of adult voting and volunteering. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(1), 197–219. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831206298173>.
- Hart, D., Matsuba, M. K., & Atkins, R. (2014). The moral and civic effects of learning to serve. In L. Nucci, D. Narvez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 456–470). Routledge.
- Hawkins, J. D., Guo, J., Hill, K. G., Battin-Pearson, S., & Abbott, R. (2001). Long-term effects of the Seattle Social Development Intervention on school bonding trajectories. *Applied Developmental Science, 5*(4), 225–236.
- Hess, V. K., & Torney, J. V. (1967). *The development of political socialization*. Aldine.
- Jebb, A. T., Morrison, M., Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2020). Subjective well-being around the world: Trends and predictors across the life span. *Psychological Science, 31*(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619898826>.
- Jones, S. M., Barnes, S. P., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Promoting social and emotional competencies in elementary school. *The Future of Children, 27*(1), 49–72.
- Kashdan, T. B., Biswas-Diener, R., & King, L. A. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 3*(4), 219–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802303044>.
- Kern, M. L., Park, N., & Romer, D. (2017). The positive perspective on youth development. In D. L. Evans, E. B. Foa, R. E. Gur, H. Hendin, C. P. O'Brien, D. Romer, M. E. P. Seligman, & B. T. Walsh (Eds.), *Treating and preventing adolescent mental health disorders: What we know and what we don't know* (2nd ed., pp. 1–28). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med-psych/9780199928163.001.0001>.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist, 62*(2), 95–108. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.2.95>.
- Klaczynski, P. A. (2005). Metacognition and cognitive variability: A dual-process model of decision making and its development. In *The development of judgment and decision making in children and adolescents* (pp. 39–76). Mahwah,

- NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.2.95>.
- Knowles, R. T., & McCafferty-Wright, J. (2015). Connecting an open classroom climate to social movement citizenship: A study of 8th graders in Europe using IEA ICCS data. *The Journal of Social Studies Research, 39*, 255–269.
- Knowles, R. T., Torney-Purta, J., & Barber, C. (2018). Enhancing citizenship learning with international comparative research: Analyses of IEA civic education datasets. *Citizenship Teaching & Learning, 13*(1), 7–30. [https://doi.org/10.1386/ctl.13.1.7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ctl.13.1.7_1).
- Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 170.
- Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2005). The development of strategic thinking: Learning to impact human systems in a youth activism program. *Human Development, 48*(6), 327–349.
- Larson, R. W., Hansen, D. M., & Moneta, G. (2006). Differing profiles of developmental experiences across types of organized youth activities. *Developmental Psychology, 42*(5), 849–863.
- Larson, R., Hansen, D., & Walker, K. (2005). Everybody's gotta give: Development of initiative and teamwork within a youth program. In J. L. Mahoney, J. S. Eccles, & R. W. Larson (Eds.), *Organized activities as contexts of development: Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs* (pp. 159–183). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Larson, R. W., Lampkins-Uthando, S., & Armstrong, J. (2014). Adolescents' development of new skills for prospective cognition: Learning to anticipate, plan, and think strategically. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology, 13*(2), 232–244.
- LaRusso, M. D., Romer, D., & Selman, R. L. (2007). Teachers as builders of respectful school climates: Implications for adolescent drug use norms and depressive symptoms in high school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*, 386–398.
- Lefferts, N., Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Sharma, A. R., Drake, D. R., & Blyth, D. A. (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science, 2*(4), 209–230.
- Lerner, R. M. (1998). Theories of human development: Contemporary perspectives. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (p. 1–24). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Lerner, R. M. (2004). *Liberty: Thriving and civic engagement among America's youth*. Sage.
- Lerner, R. M., Fisher, C. B., & Weinberg, R. A. (2000). Toward a science for and of the people: Promoting civil society through the application of developmental science. *Child Development, 71*(1), 11–20.
- Lerner, R. M., Theokas, C., & Jelicic, H. (2005). Youth as active agents in their own positive development: A developmental systems perspective. In W. Greve, K. Rothermund, & D. Wentura (Eds.), *The adaptive self: Personal continuity and intentional self-development* (pp. 31–47). Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.

- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Geldhof, G. J., Gestsdóttir, S., King, P. E., Sim, A. T., ... Dowling, E. (2018). Studying positive youth development in different nations. In *Handbook of adolescent development research and its impact on global policy* (pp. 68–83). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewin-Bizan, S., Lynch, A. D., Fay, K., Schmid, K., McPherran, C., Lerner, J. V., et al. (2010). Trajectories of positive and negative behaviors from early- to middle-adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 39*, 751–763. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9532-7>.
- Mager, U., & Nowak, P. (2012). Effects of student participation in decision making at school. A systematic review and synthesis of empirical research. *Educational Research Review, 7*, 38–61.
- Mahoney, J., Larson, R., Eccles, J., & Lord, H. (2005). Organized activities as developmental contexts for children and adolescents. In J. L. Mahoney, J. S. Eccles, & R. W. Larson (Eds.), *Organized activities as contexts of development: Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs* (pp. 3–22). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., & Alivernini, F. (2015). Italian adolescents' civic engagement and open classroom climate: The mediating role of self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 41*, 8–18.
- Manning, N., & Edwards, K. (2014). Does civic education for young people increase political participation? *A Systematic Review. Educational Review, 66*(1), 22–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.763767>.
- Metz, E., McLellan, J., & Youniss, J. (2003). Types of voluntary service and adolescents' civic development. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 18*, 188–203.
- Narvez, D., & Bock, T. (2014). Developing ethical expertise and moral personalities. In L. Nucci, D. Narvez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 140–158). Routledge.
- Niemi, R. G., & Junn, J. (1998). *Civic education: What makes students learn*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Pasek, J., Feldman, L., Romer, D., & Hall Jamieson, K. (2008). Schools as incubators of democratic participation: Building long-term political efficacy with civic education. *Applied Developmental Science, 12*(1), 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888690801910526>.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A classification and handbook*. American Psychological Association.
- Phelps, E., Balsano, A., Fay, K., Peltz, J., Zimmerman, S., & Lerner, R. M. (2007). Nuances in early adolescent developmental trajectories of positive and problematic/risk behaviors: Findings from the 4H study of positive youth development. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 16*, 473–496.
- Pittman, K., & Fleming, W. (1991). A new vision: Promoting youth development. Testimony of Karen Johnson Pittman Vice President Academy for educational development director center for youth development and policy research before the house select committee on children youth and families.

- Pittman, K., Irby, M., & Ferber, T. (2000). *Unfinished business: Further reflections on a decade of promoting youth development* (pp. 17–64). Public/Private Ventures. <https://www.issueab.org/resources/12137/12137.pdf>.
- Qu, L., & de Vaus, D. (2015). *Life satisfaction across life course transitions* (Australian Family Trends, No. 8; p. 14). Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Ramey, H. L., & Rose-Krasnor, L. (2012). Contexts of structured youth activities and positive youth development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(1), 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00219x>.
- Reichert, F. (2016). How internal political efficacy translates political knowledge into political participation. *European Journal of Psychology*, 12(2), 221–241. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v12i2.1095>.
- Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). What exactly is a youth development program? Answers from research and practice. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7(2), 94–111.
- Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016). Evaluating youth developmental programs: Progress and promise. *Applied Developmental Science*, 20(3), 188–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2015.1113879>.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.68>.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 141–166.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081.
- Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., & Lefferts, N. (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4(1), 27–46.
- Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Oesterle, S., Hill, K. G., Hawkins, J. D., & Pashak, T. J. (2016). The dimensions of successful young adult development: A conceptual and measurement framework. *Applied Developmental Science*, 20(3), 150–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2015.1082429>.
- Scales, P. C., Blyth, D. A., Berkas, T. H., & Kielsmeier, J. C. (2000). The effects of service-learning on middle school students' social responsibility and academic success. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 20(3), 332–358.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.
- Shapiro, S., & Brown, C. (2018). *The state of civics education*. Center for American Progress. [www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/02/21/446857/state-civics-education/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/02/21/446857/state-civics-education/).
- Sherman, N. (1991). *The fabric of character: Aristotle's theory of virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Shogren, K. A., & Little, T. D. (2017). Human agentic theories and the development of self-determination. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 17–26). Springer.
- Shure, M. (2001). *I can problem solve: An interpersonal cognitive problem solving program for children* (2nd ed.). Research Press.
- Shure, M. (2003). A problem-solving approach to preventing early high-risk behaviors in children and pre-teens. In D. Romer (Ed.), *Reducing adolescent risk: Toward an integrated approach* (pp. 85–92). Sage.
- Shure, M., & Spivack, G. (1982). Interpersonal problem solving in young children: A cognitive approach to prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 10*(3), 341–356.
- Social and Character Development Research Consortium. (2010). *Efficacy of school-wide programs to promote social and character development and reduce problem behavior in elementary school children* (NCER 2011–2001). National Center for Educational Research, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Solomon, D., Battistich, V., Watson, M., Schaps, E., & Lewis, C. (2000). A six-district study of educational change: Direct and mediated effects of the child development project. *Social Psychology of Education, 4*, 3–51.
- Steger, M. F., Oishi, S., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Meaning of life across the life span: Levels and correlates of meaning in life from emerging adulthood to older adulthood. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(1), 43–52.
- Sullivan, P. J., & Larson, R. W. (2010). Connecting youth to high-resource adults: Lessons from effective youth programs. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 25*(1), 99–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558409350505>.
- Voight, A., & Nation, M. (2016). Practices for improving secondary school climate: A systematic review of the research literature. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 58*(1–2), 174–191. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12074>.
- Waterman, A. S. (2007). On the importance of distinguishing hedonia and eudaimonia when contemplating the hedonic treadmill. *American Psychologist, 62*(6), 612–613. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X62.6.612>.
- Wren, T. (2014). Philosophical moorings. In L. Nucci, D. Narvez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 11–29). Routledge.
- Yeager, D. S. (2017). Social and emotional learning programs for adolescents. *The Future of Children, 27*(1), 73–94.
- Zeldin, S. (2000). Integrating research and practice to understand and strengthen communities for adolescent development: An introduction to the special issue and current issues. *Applied Developmental Science, 4*(S1), 2–10.
- Zief, S. G., Lauer, S., & Maynard, R. (2006). Impacts of after-school programs on student outcomes: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2006.3>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 5

## Systems Informed Positive Education

Margaret L. Kern and Jessica A. Taylor

The year 2020 was a year like no other. It began with massive bushfires consuming the Australian bushlands, destroying communities, with countless species driven to extinction. Climate change took central focus—surely that would be the big story and battle of the year. But even as smoke and flames still covered a drought-stricken land, China went into hard lockdown, as a novel coronavirus rippled out from marketplaces in the city of Wuhan. In a globalised world, the coronavirus rapidly spread, quickly becoming a global problem. Cities worldwide entered into varying levels of government-imposed restrictions. At first, there was collective nervous energy as people tried to navigate uncertainty. Store shelves were emptied of toilet paper and other commodities. Homes were converted into home offices. Teachers rapidly upskilled, creatively finding ways to teach online. Parents came face-to-face with the challenges that educators deal with every day as families tried to manage home learning. The changes were challenging to navigate, but the pain would be short-lived, and then life would return to normal. But case numbers kept growing, death counts rose. As weeks turned to months, economies buckled, mental health issues grew, exhaustion set in, tensions rose. The Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S. resulted in calls for systemic change in the U.S. and abroad. Conspiracy theories and misinformation festered through online networks, resulting in growing mistrust, polarisation, and uncertainty.

---

M. L. Kern (✉) · J. A. Taylor  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [Peggy.Kern@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Peggy.Kern@unimelb.edu.au)

Schools were at the frontline, becoming a battleground that illustrated the deep flaws embedded within many schools and systems. The novel coronavirus continually brought a number of complexities and surprises. Children seemed to be unaffected, but potentially could spread the disease, or might experience longer term consequences that are yet to be identified. Immediate questions arose. We needed to keep workforces running—how could people work if they also had to supervise home learning? Schools provide not only academic skills, but important non-cognitive skills, including social and emotional competencies and character development. What happens when that training is rapidly shifted back to parents, many of whom lack their own capabilities? A growing number of equity issues emerged, with some learners having ready access to technology and support from caring parents, while others lacked technology, disengaged with learning, or experienced home as an unsafe place. Teachers went far beyond expectation to support their students, teach academic skills, and manage the various pressures from students, parents, co-workers, leaders, and the broader society. Some teachers, students, and families coped well; others languished. As societies began to reopen, teachers were expected to return, supporting others, pressing on with imparting knowledge, all the while feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, fearful, and far too often under-valued and under-supported.

These tensions give light to long-held societal assumptions that pervade many school systems worldwide, including siloed thinking, the tightly held economic importance and expectations that are placed on academic achievement, accreditation and grading systems that act as a gateway to the future, unrealistic expectations and demands on staff to pivot without necessary upskilling and support, and disparities of resources. The challenges are daunting. They reveal broken systems and the need to rethink our approaches to education, mental health and wellbeing, equity, support, and the many complexities of the twenty-first-century world.

Within this landscape, mental health and wellbeing has increasingly come to the forefront, with many people not coping well. Before 2020, wellbeing was increasingly permeating policies, infrastructures, and applications (Biswas-Diener, Diener & Lyubchik, 2015; Buckler & Creech, 2014; Harrison et al., 2016), with schools seen as an ideal platform for mobilising wellbeing initiatives that aim to support individuals, communities, and societies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). As societies worldwide attempt to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, placing wellbeing at the centre of education becomes more critical than ever.

Positive education, with a direct focus on understanding and cultivating wellbeing, is well situated to contribute to this space, but must carefully consider what that contribution ought to be. Over the past decade, a growing number of schools have incorporated positive education into curricula, co-curricular activities, pastoral care, and other areas of the school. Some have even labelled themselves as “positive education schools”. Too often, positive education is presented as a specific model, program, or curriculum, with simplified activities that attempt to teach students and staff the skills and knowledge of wellbeing by focusing on isolated features, such as gratitude or mindfulness. Arbitrary distinctions are made between positive education programs, social and emotional learning (SEL), character education, holistic education, positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS), etc., such that programs are pitted against one another and schools pass from one program to the next or add additional initiatives to already over-crowded curricula. This can result in considerable activity with little impact (White & Kern, 2018).

The year 2020 accentuated the massive economic, social, psychological, political, equity, ethical, and ecological challenges facing our world, as well as the intricate interconnectedness of these challenges. Despite desires for simple solutions and quick fixes, our plans and solutions fail in light of the complexities of the issues we face (Nguyen & Bosch, 2013). Schools comprise multiple interconnected components, including students, teachers, parents, curriculum, legislation, policy, and funding, all of which intersect with the broader challenges and opportunities facing the world. We contend that for wellbeing initiatives to be successfully embedded within our school systems, we must approach wellbeing as a coordinated effort that involves seeing and sensing the whole system, along with the interrelationships and interdependencies amongst each element.

We suggest that for positive education to progress and truly create the impact that many educators envision, a *systems informed positive education* (SIPE) perspective is needed. SIPE explicitly incorporates aspects of the systems sciences into positive education practice and pedagogy to cultivate optimal learning environments that bring out the best in each individual—including students, teachers, staff members, school leaders, parents, and others who may be a part of, connected with, impact upon, or impacted by that community—and of the school community as a whole. In this chapter, we introduce the SIPE perspective. We highlight key principles and their application in schools. We provide several case studies, illustrating SIPE in action. We end with implications for embedding wellbeing as a lasting endeavour that becomes deeply woven within the fabric of education systems.

## Positive Education: Activity or Impact?

Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, there was exponential growth in research and practice around positive education (Slemp et al., 2017; White & Kern, 2018). The interest and excitement arose in part from the optimistic hope that positive education would become the next approach to fix the woes of education, and would provide a quick fix to both flailing academic scores and the growing mental health crisis. Yet while the excitement for positive education is commendable, there is danger in the field moving too quickly, practice far outstepping the research, and the movement as a whole becoming yet another passing educational fad, rather than a perspective and approach that transforms education to bring out the true potential of everyone within the educational community and beyond.

Clearly, as evidenced throughout this Handbook, there are numerous perspectives on and approaches to positive education. From our experience in Australia, positive education is often presented as a specific positive psychology-informed curriculum (i.e., positive psychology applied to education); as programs focused on specific topics (e.g., positive emotions, gratitude, mindfulness), often centred around a framework or model (which may or may not be appropriate for the specific needs of the school); or as a focus on the wellbeing of the individual student (and at times staff), rather than each of these elements as interconnected contributors to the broader systems in which they are embedded. While interventions from positive psychology can be useful and building upon existing research provides a helpful starting point, simple interventions and prescriptive programs often fail when incorporated within the complexities of classrooms, schools, and broader educational systems. Each student's experience of and interpretation around a positive intervention is impacted by their personality; social context; history and experiences at home, with peers, and across school settings; how the intervention or program is taught; along with a myriad of other factors.

Additionally, despite operating in a rapidly changing world, most educational institutions have remained organised and function as they have for decades, with rigid structures that often lack the flexibility and adaptability needed in the modern world (Garmston & Wellman, 1995). Demands on learners and education systems are rapidly evolving. Students today are growing up in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Fadel, Bialik, & Trilling, 2015). Demands are rising for schools to become learning organisations that not only acknowledge the complexities of today's world, but also help students learn the skills, knowledge, and capabilities that can help them make meaningful contributions within the complex

interdependent systems in which they are situated (Goleman & Senge, 2014; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012). It is no longer sufficient for schools to focus solely on reading, writing, and arithmetic; to teach discrete skills to solve disassociated problems; or to have standalone processes and knowledge for how to achieve wellbeing.

The world, and thus students today, faces global challenges that require global solutions, and education must provide opportunities for students to develop and build the awareness, understanding, capabilities, skills, and values to engage in resolving the many interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century (Global Education Leader's Program, 2013; OECD, 2018). We need to ask what education for an emerging and preferred future looks like for students, teachers, schools, and society as a whole. We suggest that there is a need to look beyond existing paradigms and structures to learn from and with the systems in which young people are embedded, their interrelationships and interdependencies, and our responsibilities of nurturing and understanding the interconnectedness of self, school, society, and the world as a whole.

## Towards a Systems Informed Approach to Positive Education

A system refers to a group of things that are interconnected in some manner (Senge et al., 2012). For example, a school is a system that includes students, teachers, administrative staff, leadership, and parents. A classroom is a system that includes students and teachers. Systems are all around us, and range from very small (e.g., the human body) to very large (e.g., a regional school district). The *systems sciences* study, model, and intervene upon systems (Hieronymi, 2013). Applying a systems perspective to positive psychology theory, research, and practice, Kern et al. (2020) suggested *Systems Informed Positive Psychology* (SIPP) as an evolution to traditional positive psychology, which explicitly incorporates aspects of systems science into positive psychology theory, methodologies, and discourse, so as to optimise human social systems and the individuals within them. SIPE applies this perspective specifically within education. Drawing upon the many systems elements and concepts the systems sciences have identified, SIPP identified several key systems elements that are particularly relevant for considering human flourishing and proposed a set of principles to guide positive psychology theory, research, and application. Here we briefly describe the

key elements and principles, pointing to how the SIPP principles appear in schools, before turning to case studies that illustrate SIPE in action.

## Key System Elements

There are multiple elements of systems that inform the SIPP perspective. First, different elements within the system interact and align, such that together they are different than any single part alone (Meadows, 2008). For example, reflecting on three good things that happened during the day might look very different in a personal reflection journal, versus sharing those things with a class, where you are trying to maintain a particular social identity.

Second, individuals within the system often have different perspectives, which they bring to any situation, behaviour, or interaction (Jackson; 2003; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). Those perspectives are developed throughout life through biological tendencies, environmental influences, personality characteristics, personal and social experiences, and a person's interpretations and understanding of those experiences (Spencer et al., 1997). Thus, two people with similar histories and backgrounds can experience the same situation in very different ways. This has several implications. There is a need to acknowledge that different people see things in different ways, and one perspective is not necessarily better than another. There is a need to consider whose perspective is being included and who is excluded, and the impact those inclusions and exclusions might have. In addition, one's perspective in the future will be affected by the perspectives that were or were not included in the past. We are often most likely to listen to the voices that reaffirm existing beliefs. Shifting prior beliefs requires purposefully listening to diverse perspectives with open-minded curiosity (Scharmer, 2018).

Third, there are many different interrelationships within a given system. If a person engages in an action, it not only impacts that person, but also numerous other elements within the system. For example, Jane gives a flower to Chris. Jane might feel good about doing a kind act. Chris could feel appreciated, might feel pressured to reciprocate the act, or might wonder if Jane is trying to manipulate him. Other students might believe that Jane is being nice, they might feel jealous that she did not give them a flower, or they might tease her that Chris is her "boyfriend". Thus, while the simple positive psychology intervention of doing an act of kindness might be beneficial, it might also be problematic for that individual or for other individuals that are somehow impacted—positively or negatively—by that act.

Fourth, every system has boundaries that are either explicitly or implicitly defined. Boundaries refer to what is in or out—what elements are considered to be a part of the system and what elements are outside of the system. For example, when we think about incorporating positive education within a school, we might draw the boundary of our system as a single classroom (which includes the students and the teacher), as a year level (which adds other classes), as a school (which adds staff and leaders at the school), as an educational community (which adds parents and the local community), or as a region (multiple educational communities across a state). Boundaries are fluid and temporary, but necessary to enable action. Where we draw that boundary impacts who and what we include in any intervention effort. For example, if we draw a narrow boundary—the classroom—then a teacher might plan a variety of activities to teach the students social and emotional skills. In contrast, if we draw a larger boundary—the whole school—then many more elements need to be included, such as varying student needs, staffing issues, funding, curricular demands, governance, and the climate of the school.

Fifth, systems are dynamic and ever-changing. Schools continually evolve over time, as staff and students come and go, leadership and policies change, curricula are introduced and retired, priorities shift, etc. Well-functioning systems adapt over time. The result that emerges might be quite different than the original vision but represents an adaptive shift over time. Positive education is never done, but rather needs to be an ongoing process that shifts and adapts to the dynamic changes that occur over time.

## SIPP Principles

Drawing upon these elements, SIPP makes an underlying assumption that “humans inter-dependently co-exist with themselves, others, and the environment in which they exist” (Kern et al., 2020, p. 709). Thus, “values, activities, and ways of being must recognize and strive for environmental, social, and economic sustainability, which goes well beyond the individual” (p. 709). This assumption is complemented by three philosophical assumptions:

- **Epistemological assumption:** There is an objective reality, but there are no single objective vantages of that reality.
- **Political assumption:** Power, rights, and responsibilities are continually explicitly and/or implicitly negotiated, granted, and embodied by people within a system.

- **Ethical assumption:** Wellbeing is defined in terms of virtuous we-being, striving towards what is collectively good, right, and optimal.

These assumptions result in a set of principles that, we suggested, should drive positive psychology theory, research, and practice. Table 5.1 summarises these principles, providing further explanations and examples of how they might manifest within schools.

We suggest, further, that a SIPE approach is more likely to be effective and sustainable than typical positive education approaches to education alone, as systems approaches take into consideration the complexity of a living system, and provides tools and strategies for bringing these complexities to light. Rather than positive education being a specific program applied within rigid and outdated school infrastructure, these principles provide fluid guidance for focusing positive education efforts on a contextually relevant, learnercentred, flexible, and adaptive approach that aims to bring out the full potential of every member of the educational community.

## SIPE in Action

To bring SIPE to life, we briefly describe some inspiring examples occurring in schools and education systems worldwide that illustrate how the incorporation of systems thinking and principles might inspire future development and implementation endeavours for positive education.

## CASEL

Although it is unclear at times whether SEL is part of or distinct from positive education, research on SEL programs provides the strongest support for focusing on non-cognitive skills in students (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Kern, Peterson, Park, & Romer, 2017). SEL programs empower students to understand their emotions and social responses to the external world around them. Students learn to regulate their emotions; increase their attention; develop self-efficacy, self-awareness, and a sense of empathy for others; and improve social skills; helping to increase overall wellbeing, sense of belonging, and feelings about learning (Durlak et al., 2011; Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012). While there is a diverse range of

**Table 5.1** Systems informed positive psychology guiding principles and explanations, with example applications in schools

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIFE explanation/examples
<b>Boundedness</b>	Boundaries are set by the observer, explicitly or implicitly	<p><b>Epistemological Assumption</b> (Our approach to how we generate knowledge)</p> <p><b>What are your boundaries for your positive education efforts?</b> You might focus on your own capabilities and feelings of wellbeing, incorporating positive psychology activities into your everyday practice to support your own wellbeing. You might focus on a specific group of learners, such as using a strengths-based SEL program or curriculum with a class or team, focused on developing a flourishing classroom system (Allison, Waters, &amp; Kern, 2020). You might focus on the school, incorporating multiple classes, teachers, non-teaching staff, and leaders. Or you might draw boundaries beyond the school, orienting individual, and collective efforts towards cultivating a benefit mindset (Buchanan &amp; Kern, 2017), aimed at serving the wellbeing of all</p>
<b>Multi-causality</b>	Human-relevant phenomena have multiple causes. Things only appear to have singular causes when boundaries are narrowly defined	<p><b>What other causes could be at play?</b></p> <p>There might be multiple causes for a student being distracted and disruptive in class. For instance, the student might misunderstand the material, but is afraid of appearing unintelligent in front of peers. The student might have been bullied on the playground. The student might not have gotten enough sleep or eaten a proper meal in days, due to money being tight at home. The student might have experienced a challenging or traumatising event at home</p>
<b>Dynamic</b>	Human systems are dynamic, reactive to observation, and change in unexpected ways	<p><b>How is your educational community changing and evolving?</b></p> <p>Positive education efforts are never complete. Students, educators, leaders are always evolving. Rather than applying the same curriculum or approaches that have been used in the past, take time to observe the students, staff, and school community as a whole. What are their needs and capabilities? How are those shifting over time? Positive education becomes a journey of discovery, rather than a fixed approach</p>

(continued)

**Table 5.1** (continued)

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIPP explanation/examples
<b>Gestaltic</b>	As multiple perspectives, periods, and settings come together, an understanding of reality emerges that is different from the sum of parts	<p><b>What collective insights and experiences can come together to inform practices?</b></p> <p>Positive education efforts are often guided by a framework and approach chosen by leaders. Instead, a school might bring students, staff, leaders, and parents together through an appreciative inquiry approach, listening to different voices and perspectives, and seeing what emerges, which might be different than what was initially expected</p>
<b>Simplicity</b>	Human systems are complex, but individuals within those systems desire simplicity. Explicit acknowledgment of boundaries allows parsimonious explanation, identification of leverage points, and more effective interventions	<p><b>What is the next right step?</b></p> <p>Begin by identifying and acknowledging the complexity of creating positive change within an educational community. You might conduct an audit of the school, identifying practices that are occurring, strengths and weaknesses throughout the systems, and opportunities and threats beyond the system. With that knowledge in mind, what actions will have the greatest benefit? You might focus on developing positive leadership practices, staff development, espoused and lived values, curriculum, co-curricular activities, parental engagement, measurement and evaluation, creating psychological safe environments, psychological capabilities, behaviour management, or a number of other levers. Focus on that area, then zoom out to consider where energy, effort, and resources should be placed at different times</p>

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIPP explanation/examples
<b>Pluralism</b>	Diversity in perspective is expected and should be tolerated. Values and ideals should be deliberated and socially constructed	<p><b>Political Assumption (Our approach to how we organise ourselves)</b></p> <p><i>How can you cultivate respectful, constructive conversations?</i></p> <p>Schools often have their expressed norms, visible in vision and mission statements, images in the school, and featured in newsletters and websites. And then there is the lived experience, with the norms that create the environment. How psychologically safe is that environment? Some environments embrace sharing one's perspective, exploring diverse perspectives and experiences. Other environments enforce a particular point of view, which can make more diverse perspectives unheard and unvalued. By creating safe spaces to explore various experiences and perspectives, it can create a sense of connection, belonging, and acceptance, with flow on effects to wellbeing, commitment, and performance</p> <p><b>How is power distributed?</b></p> <p>Schools are generally structured hierarchically, with a small group of leaders holding the power and driving decisions and actions in the school. Teachers lead and impose knowledge on students. Rather than delivering positive education to students, invite students into a process of co-discovery and co-creation. Allow leadership to arise from within by empowering every staff member to use their unique skills and strengths to serve the collective good, regardless of position</p> <p><b>Do people take responsibility for their own wellbeing and for supporting others' wellbeing?</b></p> <p>Although wellbeing ought to be available to all, inequity issues, high stress or unsafe environments, lack of skills and resources, authoritarian leadership, etc., undermine that possibility. People can place blame for problems on others, without taking responsibility for their own role in those problems. Barriers to wellbeing need to be identified and removed. Enablers of wellbeing need to be cultivated, providing staff and students with the skills and capabilities to care for their own wellbeing. Develop a culture where each person has the capabilities needed to experience wellbeing and is held accountable to do what they can to support their own and others' wellbeing, to the extent that they are able</p>
<b>Rebalanced power</b>	Human systems function optimally with equity across parts and appropriate distribution of power	
<b>Rights with responsibility</b>	All individuals have the right to wellbeing as well as the responsibility for nonmaleficence and benevolence towards others	

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIPP explanation/examples
<b>Institutional importance</b>	Institutions play a critical role in upholding the moral fabric of society, as they structure and order individual expectations and behaviours through value transmission, social norms, legislation, and regulation	<p><b>How is your educational community upholding the moral fabric of society?</b></p> <p>Shifting societal structures have increasingly shifted responsibility for the moral development of young people out of homes, religious institutions, and local neighbourhoods to schools. This means that schools play a critical role in not only the academic development of young people, but also in moral development, guiding students towards developing the qualities valued by society, such as social responsibility, self-regulated behaviours, and contribution beyond the self. It is inadequate for educators to see themselves as an imparter of facts and knowledge. They have both the privilege and the immense responsibility of developing the future leaders and drivers of society. There is a need to ask what future we'd like to see, the qualities young people will need for that future, and then embrace the development of those qualities as core business for our educational communities</p>
<b>Collective subjectivity</b>	Wellbeing is experienced subjectively but defined collectively, negotiated across individuals and communities within the system	<p><b>Ethical Assumption (Our approach to determining what is good and right)</b></p> <p><b>How is wellbeing defined and experienced individually and collectively?</b></p> <p>Rather than imposing a definition of wellbeing, foster open conversations that allow individuals and groups to share their own perceptions and experiences, fostering a safe, respectful, and empathetic environment. For example, a student might be upset after lunch because no one would play with her. The teacher could pause and invite the student to share how she felt, allowing other students to respond and identify their own experiences of being left out, and then together create solutions to prevent feelings of exclusion in the future</p>

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIPP explanation/examples
<b>Embeddedness</b>	Wellbeing cannot be separated from the socio-historical context and perspectives of people within the system	<p><b>What are the broader contexts, norms, and expectations that impact upon the school community?</b></p> <p>The culture and context in which we exist impact upon and form our values, conceptions of what is right and good, and desirable outcomes, both individually and collectively. For instance, many cultures equate happiness with growth, improvement, and success. Students are pressured to achieve academically so that they can attend the best universities, get a good job, and develop material wealth. Students experience wellbeing when they align with these expectations, and struggle when they fall short. Other cultures value relationships or purpose-driven action. Achievement matters less than holistic development. While the school might identify the culture that they want to create, the broader paradigms that either support or undermine that culture need to be acknowledged, and either embraced or purposefully transcended</p>
<b>Value-driven</b>	Wellbeing optimally occurs by living according to values that are established, defined, and maintained by communities	<p><b>What should be the values of your educational community?</b></p> <p>Schools often have an established set of values, included in promotional materials and posted on websites, intended to inform practice and provide guidance to the community. But stated values can become outdated, such that they no longer align with the felt values of members of that community. Values can be vaguely stated, such that members do not understand nor resonate with those values. At times, values need to be revisited, ensuring they still align with the perspectives of people across the community, with a shared understanding of what they mean. They need to be purposefully incorporated into norms, expectations, policies, and actions, not only superficially, but authentically embodied through the behaviours of leaders and empowered within staff and students</p>

(continued)

**Table 5.1** (continued)

SIPP principle	SIPP explanation <sup>a</sup>	SIFE explanation/examples
<b>Homeostatic</b>	Hedonic and eudaimonic elements of wellbeing provide feedback individually and collectively of success or failure in striving towards the negotiated ideal sense of wellbeing	<p><b>What feedback mechanisms are you listening to?</b></p> <p>Indicators of hedonic (e.g., positive and negative emotions) and eudaimonic (e.g., relationships, sense of meaning) wellbeing are often measured as desirable outcomes. But rather than being treated as static outcomes to achieve, see these indicators of feeling, and functioning as ongoing feedback of how people are navigating the opportunities and challenges of everyday life. For instance, if a student increasingly struggles with feeling valued and supported by others, the student might benefit from additional support; helping to identify potential blockers of good relationships and providing additional social skills</p>

<sup>a</sup>Explanations cited from Kern et al., 2020, p. 709

SEL-related programs and approaches, and the impact of SEL depends upon a range of implementation factors, as a whole, SEL programs have been found to successfully increase social and emotional skills, decrease anti-social behaviours, and correspond with better academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011; Kern et al., 2017).

The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL; [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)) sits at the centre of many SEL efforts, providing an organising framework, priorities, and infrastructures to support related programs, curricula, and more. With the many schools and youth development programs inundating schools, CASEL adopted a systemic and systematic way to pull together relevant learning material and experiences that would develop a more holistic view of child health and wellbeing. Increasing social and emotional capabilities within a systems informed perspective not only helps students understand themselves as a system, but subsequently helps students understand the school system more broadly and assists them contribute move positively to society through building skills to help good decision-making for life. CASEL aims to make evidence-based SEL an integral part of education from preschool through high school, and is passionate about supporting systems transformation across the self, the school, and society as inter-related systems, endeavouring to educate hearts and inspire minds (Goleman & Senge, 2014).

## Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a strengths-based approach to adolescence that arose from developmental systems theory (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). In contrast to the often deficit-based view of adolescence, PYD sees adolescents as potential resources to be developed, with both youth and their contexts containing a number of strengths (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). There are dynamic interactions between the young person and their context, which are ever changing and evolving throughout adolescence. Healthy development is evidenced by engagement in meaningful activities that benefit others, contribution to one's community, and low engagement in risky behaviours. When the developmental assets of the person (e.g., commitment to learning, social and emotional competence, positive identity) are aligned with ecological assets (e.g., external supports, connections with peers and adults, constructive use of time, boundaries, and expectations), positive development is more likely to occur (Benson & Scales, 2009; Larson, 2000; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers 2009; Vella, Oades,

& Crowe, 2011). PYD is committed to identifying and developing research-informed policies that strengthen communities, the capacity of young people, and the fit between the two.

For example, the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) is a PYD theory that builds upon Bronfenbrenner's (1994) socio-ecological systems model to understand stress and resilience during the course of adolescent development, taking into account not only the socio-historical context in which a young person develops, but also how that person's perceptions and appraisals that impact upon identity formation (Spencer, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997). PVEST emphasises a need to understand how young people perceive and interpret the people, opportunities, and experiences within their context; the structural and cultural factors that affect those perceptions; and the dynamic interactions amongst these elements. From this perspective, adolescents can experience the same event in completely different ways, depending on their own personality, previous experience, background, etc., resulting in maladaptive coping abilities, poor physical, mental, and social health, and deviant behaviours, or in competence, good health, and positive social outcomes. By understanding risk and protective factors, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, self-appraisal processes, and the dynamic interplay of different factors, it provides strategic opportunities for improving the long-term trajectories of young people at risk for poor developmental outcomes (Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, & Spencer, 2008).

Such an approach might be used to understand a young person's context, including his or her interpretation of those experiences. The SIPE perspective would specifically emphasise protective factors, adaptive coping strategies, and positive self-appraisal processes that can be used as strengths within the system. Maladaptive patterns and risk factors are not ignored, and resources are given towards reducing problematic features, but comparatively greater focus is given towards positive aspects, shifting from a focus on mitigating risks to boosting capabilities. Interventions might focus on proactively strengthening the young person's psychosocial abilities, shifting personal narratives, providing programs that productively engage the young person's time and energy, and building resources in the local community.

## **Schools that Learn**

Over the past several decades, Peter Senge, an influential thinker in the systems sciences, has called for schools to become learning organisations, where students, staff, and school leaders continually expand their capacity

to create the results they truly desire, new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. Here we point to several examples of schools that have embraced systems approaches in their contexts.

**Orange Grove Middle School.** Beginning in 1988, Orange Grove Middle School (<https://ogms.cfsd16.org/>), a private junior high school located in Tucson, Arizona, U.S., pioneered an alternative approach to learning that used systems thinking tools to engage in collaborative, real-world problem solving to hone students' critical thinking skills (Senge et al., 2012). The school incorporated a learner-centred approach aimed at helping students to connect and engage with school more deeply, foster habits of mind, and develop skills and motivations necessary to be leaders in today's complex world.

The first systems thinking classes were incorporated into the science curriculum, inviting students to design a new state park in the north part of the city. Through the project, students had to identify potential conflicts that could arise between park and wilderness management and other stakeholders. They used a systems dynamic computer software modelling program to create a simulation model of their designs. Not only did students engage with systems thinking approaches, but they also learned to think at a systems level as they explored the interdependency of economic, social, and ecological decisions and their subsequent consequences as they explored the complexity of the world as an interdependent system.

Senge et al. (2012) suggested that several elements helped students be immersed in their learning experience. First, students were engaged with real-world problems rather than conventional classroom exercises, making the learning meaningful and engaging. Second, there was no one right answer. Students were invited to think for themselves in adopting different ways of thinking, perspective building, and developing solutions. Third, the teacher became a mentor rather than an instructor and imparter of knowledge, co-learning with the students through the process. Fourth, students were invited into complex and dynamic ways of thinking that operate beyond an individual perspective. They had to learn to listen, feel, resonate, and cooperate, helping them see the different interacting parts of the system and to develop core systems thinking skills such as dynamics, operational thinking, and interdependencies.

**The Green School.** Disrupting conventional perspectives and structures that are often assumed to be necessary for students to develop the core academic competencies, the Green School (<https://www.greenschool.org/>) aims to create a community of learners who are driven to do what they

can to contribute to making the world a sustainable place. The school takes a holistic, student-guided approach, integrates with the local and broader community, and incorporates entrepreneurial learning within a wall-less natural environment. The school was founded in 2008 in Bali, Indonesia, with additional campuses recently opening in New Zealand, South Africa, and Mexico. Despite the lack of focus on grades and standardised testing, students have gone on to study at the best universities in the world, create lasting change in their communities, and are becoming inspiring change-makers of the future.

The school is underpinned by a culture of learning, with activities, structures, and approaches centred around the specific needs of the individual learner. Decisions and processes are underpinned by a strong sense of core values, captured by the acronym I-RESPECT: integrity, responsibility, empathy, sustainability, peace, equality, community, and trust. These values give rise to pedagogy that aims to be REAL: Relationship centred and holistic, Experiential and evolving, Authentic and interconnected, and Local to global. Through the REAL learning principles, students can authentically grow and nurture their values, skills, and competencies to support systems transformation across the self, the school, their community, and society. It is assumed that each student brings their own strengths and needs, which educators attune and adjust to. Focus is placed more on *how* a young person learns rather than *what* the young person learns. While not explicitly acknowledged, wellbeing is embedded at the heart of the community, starting with the individual, but also outward-facing, inspiring students to do what they can to support the wellbeing of others, the community, and the environment. This outward-facing, systems informed perspective results in life-long learners who make valuable contributions to solving social and ecological challenges.

**Lumineer Academy.** Based in Victoria, Australia, Lumineer Academy (<https://www.lumineer.edu.au/>) prides itself on having no uniforms, classrooms, grades, or homework. Its vision is to nurture students to be prepared for any version of the future world, and to be highly capable and compassionate builders of that world. Lumineer Academy harnesses both systems thinking and inquiry learning as core to helping its students be as fluent in emotional intelligence as in cognitive intelligence, supporting them to think independently and originally, and developing the skills with which they can architect this world ethically and compassionately. Lumineer offers *Learning Explorations*, which are numerous project deliverables that result in novel product invention or innovative services for real-world audiences. All experiences are supported by carefully constructed curriculum and learning explorations, which unify the fundamental prerequisites of learning and nurture

relationships, drawing upon cutting-edge cognitive, social and emotional tools, interconnected frameworks of delivery, and pedagogical approaches with educational philosophies. Embracing systems dynamics and multiple perspectives, leaning into these systems principles allows a style of learning that enables students to thrive in a world that is constantly in the process of being invented.

**The PLACE.** The Parent-Led and Community Education initiative (PLACE) in the UK (<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/>) merges home-schooling and mainstream schools as it seeks to reincorporate the local community as an integral element for understanding, learning, growth, and development. In the initiative, students engage with parents and members of the community, and together they explore real-world issues and learn foundational skills to problem solve and form solutions, ultimately trying to *be* part of the solution. The PLACE incorporates understanding of interdependencies; this awareness in turn encourages learners to develop personal agency and allows personalised learning to be co-created with communities (Global Education Leaders' Program, 2013).

**The Hole in the Wall.** The systems sciences suggest that self-organisation arises when local interactions between smaller component parts of an initially disordered system begin to coordinate and work together resulting in decentralised distribution (von Bertalanffy, 1968). As each individual plays their own role well within and interconnected with the whole, the system functions effectively. The Hole in the Wall (<https://www.hole-in-the-wall.com/>) experiment in New Dehli, India brought this to life. Local businessmen placed a computer into a wall in the slums of New Dehli, which could be accessed by anyone in the community. There was no instruction, but children in the area were drawn to the computer, exploring and learning, and working together. Over time, they managed to make sense of something they had never seen before and were able to engage with self-directed, peer-to-peer learning, and to identify ways to make the computer function. The children spread that knowledge to others, resulting in decentralised distribution of learning. The Hole in the Wall illustrates how an emergent learning experience can result in both accomplishment and deeper levels of engagement with learning (Global Education Leaders' Program, 2013; Senge et al., 2012).

## Implications

Effective implementation in education is a systems matter (Goleman & Senge, 2014). Adopting a SIPE perspective helps us to think beyond the self,

moving towards a holistic picture of school, society, and the world. Effective implementation requires more than just the coordination of activities and aims across a large group of people or offering programs or activities centred around specific outcomes, but to consider the infrastructures that might be needed within, across, and between each element of the system to allow new possibilities to emerge. For instance, you might adopt a well thought-out and contextually applicable curriculum. In addition, you support teachers with upskilling and training of the delivery, so that they feel confident in its delivery. Increasingly, schools are incorporating coaching models within schools, including teacher–student, peer–peer, and colleague–colleague combinations, to help translate key skills of facilitating positive education into what are sometimes challenging classroom contexts (Green & Norrish, 2013). Strong relationships and networks among staff need to be cultivated, with infrastructures that support and are further strengthened through alignment of the school’s values, priorities, actions, combined with the understanding that schools are learning societies.

As the complexities are explicitly acknowledged, it becomes clear that even as positive education approaches can add value, they are not a silver bullet. Much will impact what practices and approaches work, for who, and under what conditions. Simple activities alone will only have short-term effects unless they are embedded within the explicit culture of the school (e.g., slogans, physical setting, ceremonies) as well as the invisible aspects of the school (e.g., underlying values, attitudes, feelings, norms). Change efforts need to acknowledge the sheer complexities of the school environment and recognise that change often takes considerable amounts of time and continued effort. School leadership and teachers need to be committed to the long haul, or else positive education will simply be another passing fad, resulting in activity rather than impact.

Indeed, education has been famous for fads and unsuccessful attempts with quick fixes. There is often deep fragmentation of the educational process, and too often we fail to capture the imagination and commitment of the learner in the way any real learning process must (Senge, 1995). SIPE attempts to redress this, such that each learner can discover and develop to their full potential, contributing not only to their own growth and development, but also with the passion, inspiration, and capability to positively impact the world. Qualities of wholeness relate to every aspect of our lives, including work, school, home, and beyond with more information, intense interdependencies, and relentless change. This is why Senge and others see an enormous need to integrate systems thinking as a foundation for education for young people (Global Education Leaders’ Program, 2013; Goleman & Senge, 2014;

Senge, 1995; Senge et al., 2012). If positive education is going to become an integral part of education, then it likewise needs to integrate systems thinking into the foundation of its theory, research, and practice.

A challenge is the understanding of the word “system” itself. The word has been popularised without a fundamental understanding of its implications, to the point where everything is a “system”, but nothing is really treated as one (Betts, 1992). From our experience, people often think of systems in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) socioecological model, in which the individual is embedded with a series of levels (i.e., the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem). From this perspective, a school might take a systems approach by including not only students in positive education efforts, but also incorporating other stakeholders such as teachers, staff, leadership, and at times parents. While expanding beyond the individual is part of a systems informed approach, it is insufficient. A SIPE perspective goes beyond simply looking at the layers in which a person resides, impacts, and impacts upon, to incorporate other systems elements such as inter-dependencies, dynamics, complexity, adaptation, and emergence.

A SIPE perspective calls us to pause before taking action, taking time to listen widely and deeply. Positive education approaches often begin with decisions by leaders, who determine the appropriate frameworks, curricula, activities, and assessment approaches. Yet this can prioritise the perspective of the leaders, which might not align with the perspectives and needs of other shareholders within the system, including students, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and the local community. This is often accentuated by bringing in “experts” to guide the process: outsiders who lack an understanding of the specific context (and often have competing economic interests). SIPE emphasises the need to listen widely to diverse perspectives. Rather than moving immediately to action, implementors should take time to hear different perspectives, using a variety of tools or strategies. For instance, some schools have incorporated appreciative inquiry into their change approaches, providing an opportunity to give voice to and value multiple perspectives (e.g., Waters & White, 2015). Others have used participatory action research approaches to incorporate student voice into positive education efforts (Halliday, Kern, Garrett, & Turnbull, 2019).

SIPE also invites educators to listen deeply. What is really needed in the system? Are we creating content to fulfill our own need to be useful, or the content or space that people really need? For instance, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded and people worldwide were forced into lockdown, many across the positive psychology community responded by writing blogs, creating podcasts, sharing free resources, offering webinars, and more, all

focused on ways to support wellbeing. These were important as people grappled with the changes thrust upon them. There are times to build people up, temporarily helping them feel good, be productive, and keep functioning. At other times, there is a need to give space to reflect, grieve, and make sense of one's experiences. What are the needs of students, teachers, and leaders? Before action, we need to pause and consider what action is really needed and what will be most useful—not only in the moment, but in the longer term. At times, the greatest growth and healing occurs through times of struggle and pain.

A SIPE perspective suggests the need to embrace *simplicity*. As we have indicated throughout this chapter, human systems generally and schools in particular are complex. And yet as humans, we desire simplicity. This is why we like simple interventions so much—do this and you will feel or function better. The key is to find simple ways to act, while holding on to the complex nature of our schools. This is what learning systems are all about. We need to flexibly zoom into specific approaches and issues at specific times, and then zoom out to consider where our actions sit within the broader scheme. For instance, using a wellbeing assessment, we might identify that a particular year level is struggling with developing social relationships, whereas another year level has high levels of anxiety. These give us specific areas in which to incorporate programs to provide students with the skills and competencies they need. But we need to see this program within the broader course of the students' development. As a result, we might flexibly draw upon a range of resources, programs, curricula, and areas to meet and support the developing needs of our learners individually and collectively.

From a SIPE perspective, values are at the heart of all that we do. Wellbeing is not value-free. Attempts to define the good life are contingent upon the values defined by the context and systems that we are embedded within (Alexandrova, 2017; Kern et al., 2020). Wellbeing arises from living aligned with one's values, which are constantly defined by, negotiated, and embodied by people within and across our systems. Wellbeing occurs by living according to values that are established, defined, and maintained by communities (Kern et al., 2020). Schools commonly have a defined set of values (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2018). To what extent do these reflect the lived values of members of the school community? Where is wellbeing situated within those values? Positive education efforts should align with and stem from these values.

A SIPE perspective emphasises the shared and collective responsibility of wellbeing. As schools, it is our responsibility to do what we can to create environments that support our school community. But people need to accept responsibility for their own wellbeing, to the best that they are able. That

means equipping them with the skills and resources that they need, giving them opportunities for practice, and permission for autonomous behaviour.

Finally, SIPE challenges us to consider our role in creating positive change within our school communities. What is your role?

- **Informers:** How can you identify the best information that you can disseminate and share with others? What are the best means to do so, in ways that are cognizant of and respectful of the specific culture?
- **Visionaries:** How can you identify what is needed moving forward, not what you need?
- **Researchers:** How can you study human experiences in informative ways, while acknowledging your own biases? How can you more directly integrate with practice, while maintaining necessary rigour? How can you design your studies to move beyond simple linear relationships to better incorporate complexity and dynamics of individual and collective experiences?
- **Practitioners:** What evidence is most useful? When is the research useful, and when does it need to be adapted to the context? How can you feed that back to researchers?
- **For us all:** How can we extend beyond our desire for silver bullets and quick fixes to fully embrace the complexity of human experience?

## Conclusion

Education systems are complex, with multiple dynamic, interconnecting parts that form evolving interdependent relationships. For positive education to be more than a passing fad, this complexity must be acknowledged. For positive education to be truly effective and sustainable, it is critical that we take a systems approach to education. Creating positive change is challenging. Too often, school change initiatives view change through the lens of individual parts, rather than seeing the whole living system. Education systems are comprised of many interconnected elements, including, students, teachers, parents, curriculum, legislation, policy, funding, and buildings. These are each connected together with a range of other related elements, including perceptions, priorities, norms, beliefs, and values.

We are living through unprecedented times. In many ways, the world is ready for the SIPE perspective. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and workplaces that prioritised wellbeing prior to the pandemic have travelled better than those with dysfunctional cultures, but this becomes even more

challenging as we embrace the complexity of life. The challenge is to move beyond the appeal of simple approaches and quick fixes, to fully wrestle with and incorporate the messiness and magic of complexity, inspiring the hopes, insights, and potential of current and future generations.

## References

- Alexandrova, A. (2017). *A philosophy for the science of well-being*. Oxford University Press.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2018). Understanding the priorities of Australian secondary schools through an analysis of their mission and vision statements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *54*, 249–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18758655>.
- Allison, L., Waters, L., & Kern, M. L. (2020). Flourishing classrooms: Applying a systems-informed approach to positive education. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00267-8>.
- Benson, P. L., & Scales, P. C. (2009). The definition and preliminary measurement of thriving in adolescence. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *4*, 85–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802399240>.
- Betts, F. (1992). How systems thinking applies to education. *Educational Leadership*, *50*, 38–41.
- Biswas-Diener, R., Diener, E., & Lyubchik, N. (2015). Wellbeing in Bhutan. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *5*(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i2.1>.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In T. Husen & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 1643–1647). Oxford: Pergamon/Elsevier.
- Buchanan, A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). The benefit mindset: The psychology of contribution and everyday leadership. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *7*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v7i1.538>.
- Buckler, C., & Creech, H. (2014). *Shaping the future we want: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* (Final Report). UNESCO.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, *82*, 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.
- Fadel, C., Bialik, M., & Trilling, B. (2015). *Four-dimensional education: The competencies learners need to succeed*. Boston, MA: Center for Curriculum Redesign.
- Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. (1995). Adaptive schools in a quantum universe. *Educational Leadership*, *52*, 6–12.
- Global Education Leaders' Program. (2013). *Redesigning education: Shaping learning systems around the globe*. Booktrope.

- Goleman, D., & Senge, P. (2014). *The triple focus: A new approach to education*. Florence, MA: More than Sound.
- Green, L. S., & Norrish, J. M. (2013). Enhancing well-being in adolescents: Positive psychology and coaching psychology interventions in schools. In C. Proctor & A. Linley (Eds.), *Research, applications, and interventions for children and adolescents* (pp. 211–222). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019). The student voice in wellbeing: A case study of participatory action research in positive education. *Educational Action Research, 27*, 173–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1436079>.
- Harrison, E. K., Quick, A., Abdallah, S., Ruggeri, K., Garcia Garzon, G., Maguire, Á., ..., Zwiener, N. (2016). *Looking into the wellbeing kaleidoscope: Results from the European social survey*. New Economics Foundation. [https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/about/Looking\\_through\\_wellbeing\\_kaleidoscope.pdf](https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/about/Looking_through_wellbeing_kaleidoscope.pdf).
- Hieronymi, A. (2013). Understanding systems science: A visual and integrative approach. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science, 30*, 580–595. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2215>.
- Jackson, M. C. (2003). *Systems thinking: Creative holism for managers*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley.
- Kern, M. L., Park, N., Peterson, C., & Romer, D. (2017). The positive perspective on youth development. In *Treating and preventing adolescent mental disorders: What we know and what we don't know* (Vol. 2). In D. Romer & The Commission Chairs of the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and the Sunnyslands Trust (pp. 543–567). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist, 55*, 170–183. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.170>.
- Lerner, J. V., Phelps, E., Forman, Y., & Bowers, E. P. (2009). Positive youth development. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 525–558). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470479193.adlpsy001016>.
- Lerner, R. M., Almerigi, J. B., Theokas, C., & Lerner, J. V. (2005). Positive youth development: A view of the issues. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 25*, 10–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431604273211>.
- Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Nguyen, N., & Bosch, O. (2013). A systems thinking approach to identify leverage points for sustainability: A case study in the Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve, Vietnam. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science, 30*, 104–115. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2145>.

- Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: A framework for schoolwide implementation. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46, 277–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2015.1125450>.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030*. OECD. [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf).
- Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). What exactly is a youth development program? Answers from research and practice. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7, 94–111. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0702\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0702_6).
- Scharmer, O. (2018). *The essentials of theory U: Core principles and applications*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Senge, P. (1995). On schools as learning organizations: A conversation with Peter Senge. *Educational Leadership*, 52(7), 20–23.
- Senge, P. M., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., & Dutton, J. (2012). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. Currency.
- Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., Ritter, M. D., Ben, J., & Gravesteyn, C. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment? *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(9), 892–909. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21641>.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T. C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., ..., Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Fryenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Singapore: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0_6).
- Spencer, M. B. (1995). Old issues and new theorizing about African-American youth: A phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory. In R. L. Taylor (Ed.), *Black youth: Perspectives on their status in the United States* (pp. 37–69). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Spencer, M. B., Dupree, D., & Hartmann, T. (1997). A phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST): A self-organization perspective in context. *Development and Psychopathology*, 9, 817–833. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579497001454>.
- Swanson, D. P., Cunningham, M., Youngblood, J., II., & Spencer, M. B. (2008). Racial identity development during childhood. In H. A. Neville, B. B. Tynes, & S. O. Utsey (Eds.), *Handbook of African American psychology* (pp. 269–281). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Vella, S., Oades, L., & Crowe, T. (2011). The role of the coach in facilitating positive youth development: Moving from theory to practice. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23, 33–48.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General systems theory*. New York: Brazillier.

- Waters, L. E., & White, M. A. (2015). Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i1.2>.
- White, M., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 6

## Positive Education Pedagogy: Shifting Teacher Mindsets, Practice, and Language to Make Wellbeing Visible in Classrooms

Lea Waters

### Evolving the Field of Positive Education: Three Key Areas for Growth

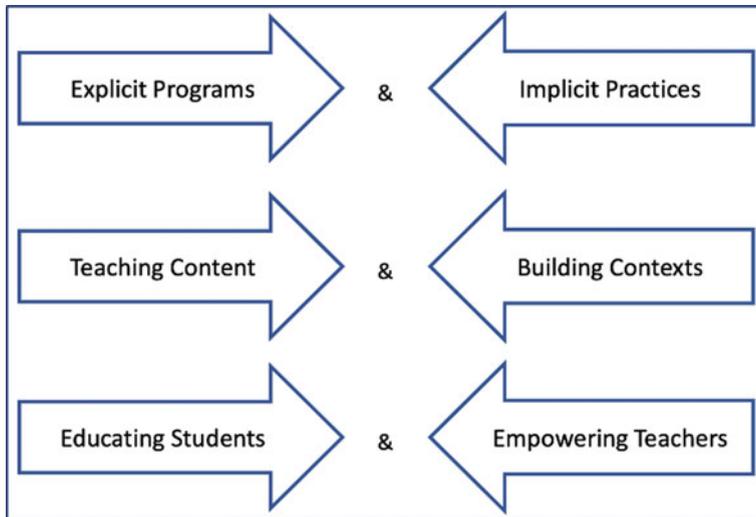
Positive education, although only just over a decade old, has enjoyed rapid growth (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Shankland & Rosset, 2017) and can pride itself on being an innovative and expansive field (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Waters & Loton, 2019). With the spirit of growth and innovation in mind, this chapter puts forward three key ideas for expanding the field (see Fig. 6.1). Below, I suggest that we need to find ways to implicitly deliver well-being practices in addition to the current delivery mode of explicit programs. Second, I propose that, in addition to the current focus on teaching the content of wellbeing, the field would benefit from approaches that build the contexts for wellbeing. Third, I recommend that, in addition to the current focus on educating the students, the field must also empower the teachers to more actively utilize their own teaching expertise and relationship. My aim is to motivate researchers and practitioners to build upon the current trend of focusing on programs, content, and students to also include approaches that emphasize practices, context, and teachers.

When it comes to building student wellbeing, schools can adopt explicit and implicit approaches (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg,

---

L. Waters (✉)

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [l.waters@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:l.waters@unimelb.edu.au)



**Fig. 6.1** Three key ways to expand the field of positive education

2009; Waters & White, 2015). While explicit approaches (i.e., curriculums) build wellbeing through *what* we teach students, the implicit approach opens the door to enhancing wellbeing through *how* we teach (i.e., pedagogy).

An explicit approach follows the principle of direct instruction and overtly educates students about wellbeing through prescribed curriculums and programs (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2008). (For a review of programs see Slemp et al., 2017; see also [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)). The international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) analysis revealed that schools typically rely on explicit curriculums and programs as the prevailing approach for promoting student wellbeing (OECD, 2016) and according to the analysis, most schools implement wellbeing programs through dedicated units within physical and health education, civic and citizenship education, moral education, and/or religious education. Other researchers have found the explicit approach is implemented via wellbeing programs being taught in after-school programs (e.g., Durlak Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010) as well as tutorial/house/pastoral groups (e.g., Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007; Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eades, & Linley, 2011).

There are several benefits to the explicit approach, namely that wellbeing curriculums are designed by experts, are developmentally appropriate, and provide teachers with high-quality resources including worksheets, scenarios, class discussion, and games (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Nelson, Westhues, &

MacLeod, 2003). Another strength of the explicit approach is that it provides a consistency of content, thus, allowing teachers to follow a uniform lesson sequence and ensuring all students are taught the same key lessons.

Despite the strengths of the explicit approach, it has been criticized for privileging content over context in ways that emphasize the teaching of content-based skills (e.g., mindfulness, cognitive re-framing) without considering how the environment impacts wellbeing. According to Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, and Parker (2016), most positive education programs fall short because they are designed to teach students how to change their inner state but fail to show students and teachers how to recognize, and thus change, the contexts that shape wellbeing (e.g., teacher–student relationships, classrooms, learning environments). Ciarrochi et al. (2016) go on to argue that teaching individual-level psychological skills to students, while well-intentioned, may place the onus of wellbeing too heavily on the shoulders of the student and, thus, make the student vulnerable to further distress if they are in a context where those skills are unable to be used (or, indeed, may even backfire).

In relation to teachers, the explicit approach may also have a downside by inadvertently disempowering them as active agents in building the wellbeing of their students. This can occur for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned above, wellbeing programs follow a set sequence and, thus, teachers may be unable to adjust the learning to suit the specific needs of their classroom and/or utilize it in their own pedagogy and unique teaching style. Second, not all teachers are given the opportunity to deliver wellbeing programs in a jam-packed timetable (White, 2016), meaning that many teachers are not trained and thus feel unequipped to know how to boost student wellbeing. Finally, by focusing on individual-level skills taught to students (i.e., content), explicit wellbeing curriculums do not provide professional development to teachers about the importance of context.

While acknowledging the downsides of the explicit approach, the evidence shows that wellbeing programs and curriculums do successfully build student wellbeing and, thus, are important for schools to have in place (Durlack Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Maynard, Solis, Miller, & Brendel 2017; Waters, 2011). Perhaps one way to get the best of the explicit approach while overcoming the shortcomings is to encourage schools to also adopt an implicit approach to building student wellbeing, thus extending beyond the formal teaching of wellbeing curriculums.

Unlike the explicit approach, the implicit approach does not aim to build wellbeing through formal instruction, but instead works on the principle of permeability to find flexible ways to infuse learning about wellbeing into the

student's daily life at school through academic subjects, co-curricular activities, the school yard, and so on (Balmer, Master, Richards, & Giardino, 2009). By weaving opportunities to learn about wellbeing into a wide range of experiences, the implicit approach allows for a focus both on content and on context (see White & Waters, 2014, for a case study of the way positive education can be implicitly woven into a school).

With respect to content, the implicit approach has already been shown to be successful through the integration of wellbeing topics into traditional academic subjects. Indeed, Norrish et al. (2013) demonstrate how positive education can be implicitly embedded into a broad range of academic curriculums, stating:

in History, students explore the topic of genealogy through the lens of character strengths by interviewing family members about their own and relatives' strengths. In art, students are asked to explore the word 'flourishing' and to create a visual representation of their personal understanding; and in Geography, students examine how flourishing communities can be enabled through the physical environment of towns and cities. (p. 151)

In this way, the implicit approach provides the advantage of reaching many students across a range of discipline areas and not leaving the learning solely to the realm of a formal wellbeing curriculum that sits only in certain subjects (e.g., health studies, religious studies).

These examples demonstrate how wellbeing can be implicitly delivered through content linkages to various academic curriculums. A second pathway offered through the implicit approach is that of context. According to Ciarrochi et al. (2016), context is a key factor shaping wellbeing. Although students operate within multiple contexts at school, the classroom is arguably one of the most significant. As such, the way a teacher shapes the classroom environment is likely to have a strong influence on student wellbeing (Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel, & Creemers, 2007). Indeed, past research has found links between aspects of teacher pedagogy and student wellbeing including instructional practices (Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch, & Michalowski, 2009), the degree to which teachers give academic help (Carmen, Waycott, & Smith, 2011; Løhre, Lydersen, & Vatten, 2010), teacher responsiveness to student needs (Andersen, Evans, & Harvey, 2012), teacher-student relationships (Hattie, 2008), and the peer relationships enabled in class by teachers (Hamm, Farmer, Dadisman, Gravelle, & Murray, 2011). These findings suggest that teacher pedagogy is a contextual factor worth exploring in positive education.

## Towards a Positive Education Pedagogy

Enhancing student wellbeing implicitly through teacher pedagogy is not a new idea and its roots can be traced back to child-centred teaching movements existing for many decades, including Montessori (100+ years old, Lillard et al., 2017), Steiner (first developed in 1919), and Reggio Emilia (developed after WWII, Katz, 1993). In recent years, a number of wellbeing-specific pedagogies have been developed including “person-centred pedagogy” (Fielding, 2006; Gatangi, 2007), “pedagogic connectedness” (Beutel, 2009), “student-centred pedagogy” (Cornelius-White, 2016), and “pedagogical wellbeing” (Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2010; Soini, Pyhältö, & Pietarinen, 2010). These approaches contend that wellbeing is a dynamic state constructed *within* the teaching process itself. According to Pyhältö et al. (2010) “pedagogical wellbeing is constructed in the core processes of teachers’ work” (p. 737). Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbell, and Donovan (2009) found that teachers are “key deliverers” of student wellbeing. Certainly, teachers interviewed in Kidger et al.’s (2009) study believed that taking care of a student’s emotional and mental health was a core part of teaching that is “inseparable from learning” (p. 7). The idea that student wellbeing can be fostered implicitly through pedagogy, as separate from delivering explicit student wellbeing curriculums, generates a fruitful opportunity for schools who are aiming to build student wellbeing. By training teachers how to incorporate the science of positive psychology into their teaching practice the implicit approach adds a new “wellbeing lever.”

In a recent example of using positive education pedagogy to design teacher interventions, Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2016) trained teachers how to incorporate trauma-informed principles into their daily teaching practice in order to boost the self-regulatory capacities of students affected by trauma.<sup>1</sup> In this study, nine teachers who worked in an alternative learning/trauma-affected setting were trained to more intentionally weave practices that fostered the students’ use of self-regulation into their teaching (e.g., using circle time to show students how to wait their turn to speak, helping students persist with a difficult task, using rhythmic activities such as drumming to calm the nervous system, teaching mindfulness). Following the intervention, the teachers were interviewed three times over a 13-week time period (i.e., one school term). The results of this study found that teachers had confidence in their new teaching practices and that students showed greater self-management.

---

<sup>1</sup>Given the nature of how trauma affects a student’s ability to learn, an explicit curriculum on self-regulation was unlikely to be successful, as such the implicit approach was adopted.

Building on this self-regulatory pedagogical intervention, and again working in a trauma-informed classroom context, Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2019) developed a year-long intervention called Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE). TIPE is a teacher training program that educates teachers on how to marry together positive education practices with trauma-informed principles in the classrooms. Eighteen teachers were trained over one year to adjust their teacher approaches in ways that were aimed to help their students to and overcome classroom-based adversity and grow their psychological resources. The teachers reported that TIPE enabled them to use a range of new wellbeing-oriented teaching strategies such as positive primers, play, mindfulness, and goal setting in class. According to the teachers, weaving these strategies into their teaching resulted in the students building stronger relationships skills, having higher trust in the teacher, and showing more frequent use of their character strengths. These research findings show the promise of using positive pedagogical interventions as a means for improving student wellbeing.

## **Exploring the Role of Positive Education Pedagogy: A Case Study**

In the last section I have argued that pedagogy is a core mechanism for schools to embed positive education into student life in ways that are implicit, context-based and teacher empowering. This section describes the design and findings of a qualitative study that explored the role of positive education pedagogy to examine my contentions.

### **Sample and Procedure**

Two Australian Government schools comprised the research sites for this study. Both schools educated mainstream students and had a socio-economic index equal to the Australian average (i.e., they were not disadvantaged or trauma-informed, alternate setting schools like those targeted for Brunzell et al., 2016, 2019). The first research site was a high school (grades 7–12) and the second research site was a K-12 school. In both schools, the Visible Wellbeing Intervention (explained below) was delivered to all staff. In addition to the all-staff professional development days, a small team of teachers were chosen to be the “Visible Wellbeing Implementation Team” and were given one additional day of training (in Term one) combined with a coaching

session run by the researcher in Terms 2 and 3. The teachers in this implementation team came from primary and secondary classes and ranged across all the major discipline areas of the school. It was this team that formed the study sample ( $n = 30$ ). The data was collected in three forms: focus groups, teachers writing about their practice, and the researchers notes team coaching sessions. These three forms of data were collected at three time points over a full academic year.<sup>2</sup>

## Methodological Approach

An inductive qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable for this study. The inductive approach allows for findings to be built-up through the data, rather than imposing a pre-existing theory (Langdrige, 2004; Willig, 2008), and is considered the best approach for investigating new ideas where theory does not yet exist. An inductive qualitative approach was also deemed the most suitable for this study given that the implicit delivery of wellbeing via pedagogy will be expressed in many varied ways (as many different ways as there are teaching styles) and, as such a one-size fits all framework like PERMA would be too blunt. Finally, given that implicit teaching methods are often subtle (i.e., not mapped out in the content of a lesson plan), a fine-grained open-ended approach was required to capture the small and varied changes that teachers were potentially making to their practice following the intervention.

The inductive qualitative paradigm has a strong history of developing methods that are repeatable, dependable, and transferable across studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters, & Synard, 2017). Such processes include member checks (in this study, data themes were sent back to a smaller sample of the teachers from both schools to check that the themes identified by the researcher were accurate), data triangulating (in this study, data came from three sources: group coaching session, focus groups, and written transcripts), sample variation (in this study, the data was sourced from two schools across three campuses over two different states in Australia), prolonged and substantial engagement (in this study, participants were followed across a full academic school year with substantial connection between the researcher and study participants), a dedicated step-wise data

---

<sup>2</sup>The three time points were determined by the two schools who acted as research sites and were decided upon based on the researcher needs for the best timelines to collect data showing changes in teacher practice together with school calendar and other teacher commitments. The timelines were: 1) the end of Term 1 (the training was at the start of Term 1), the end of Term 2, and mid-way through Term 4.

analyses processes that allow for rigour in the data analysis (the current study used Miles and Huberman's [1994] data analysis process), and peer debriefing (i.e., the researcher had multiple-discussions with research colleagues through the analysis process to sense-check interpretations).

## Pedagogical Intervention: Visible Wellbeing

Research into classroom teaching has seen a big push for the “science-informed pedagogy of learning” (Fischer et al., 2007), with research devoted to using science to improve teacher practice in ways that allow for greater student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008; Hattie, 2008; Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). Along the same lines, Waters (2015, 2017, 2018) has argued for a “science-informed pedagogy for wellbeing.” Teachers can integrate the science of wellbeing into their pedagogy in ways that allow for greater promotion of student wellbeing. Waters has devised a pedagogical intervention called *Visible Wellbeing* that trains teachers how to marry together the science of wellbeing with the science of learning and teaching (Waters, 2015, 2017, 2018; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Cotton, & Arch, 2017).

Visible Wellbeing (VWB) is not a program or a set curriculum about wellbeing. Rather, it is a pedagogical intervention delivered to teachers that trains them how to implicitly integrate the science of wellbeing into their teaching. VWB trains teachers in a language, a framework, and a process for seeing and building the wellbeing of their students.

The aim of the VWB intervention is to help teachers teach in a way that shifts wellbeing from a subjective, internal experience occurring within the student to a tangible, observable phenomenon that is visible in class for students and teachers to see. When wellbeing becomes visible in class, it becomes a resource for learning (Waters, 2018). By teaching in ways that make wellbeing visible, students learn how their emotions influence their learning, see patterns in their wellbeing, and become knowledgeable about how context shapes their emotions, thus responding to the call of Ciarrochi et al. (2016) to take a contextual approach to wellbeing.

## Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman's (1994) four-step qualitative framework was used to analyse the three forms of data: data reduction, data display, and verifying conclusions. Figure 6.2 outlines the iterative process used for data reduction in the current study. A loop-like pattern of multiple rounds was undertaken

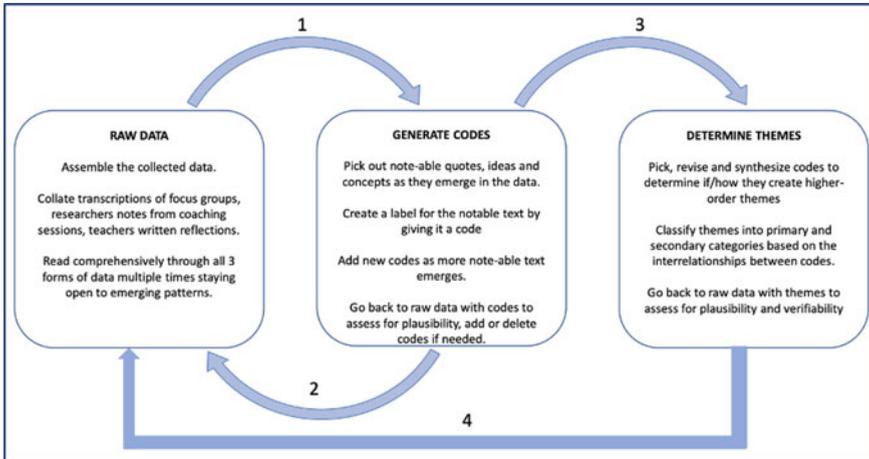


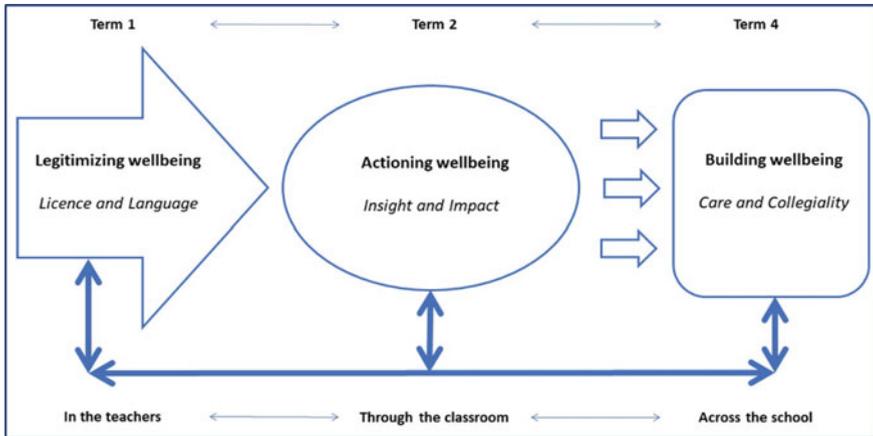
Fig. 6.2 Qualitative data reduction coding process

starting with the raw data being examined to generate initial codes (step 1), revisiting the data as additional codes emerged (step 2), making connections between codes to create higher themes (step 3), and verifying the themes by going back to the original data (pathway 4).

## Results

Three primary themes were identified in this study that had the following temporal order: (1) legitimizing wellbeing in the teacher's minds, (2) actioning wellbeing in the classroom, and (3) building wellbeing through relationships across the school. Six secondary themes were identified. Two subthemes arose through legitimizing wellbeing: licence and language. For the "actioning wellbeing" theme, two secondary themes emerged: insight and impact. The third primary theme, building wellbeing through relationships, contained two secondary themes: care and collegiality. Richer data, in the form of teacher quotes, for each secondary theme will be provided below.

Figure 6.3 depicts the temporal order of the themes and shows that at the end of Term 1, following the VWB intervention, the theme of "legitimizing wellbeing" emerged. This was seen through a change in the mindset of the teachers who reported viewing wellbeing as a more worthwhile goal. Teachers conveyed that the VWB intervention had given them the licence to prioritize wellbeing and the language to discuss wellbeing with students. This change in teachers' mindset gave them the confidence to incorporate changes into their teacher practice so that wellbeing was more intentionally woven in.



**Fig. 6.3** Key themes, timelines, and levels of outcomes following a positive education pedagogy

At the second round of data collection (end of Term 2), teachers described greater insight into the wellbeing of their students, and this allowed them to tweak and adjust their teaching practices in ways that better supported wellbeing and learning. Teachers were seeing the impact of their new teacher practices rippling across the classroom through better student learning, engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour.

Finally, analysis of the third round of data collection (mid-way through Term 4) found that, as teachers and students became more and more comfortable using VWB practices in class, they were taking the new wellbeing practices outside of the classroom and creating positive changes to their relationships across the school.

The temporal relationships of the three primary themes showed a pattern that sequenced from change at the individual-level (within the teacher), through to group-level impacts (across classrooms), and on to the school-level effects (through relationships outside of the classroom; student–student, teacher–student, and teacher–teacher). Although the three primary themes each emerged at consecutive time points across the year it was also evident that, as the visible wellbeing practice deepened, the earlier themes were still present and were forming feedback loops as indicated with the bi-directional arrows in Fig. 6.3.

#### **Term 1 data: Legitimizing wellbeing.**

**Secondary theme: Licence.** Following the visible wellbeing pedagogical intervention, teachers observed that wellbeing had been a given legitimate place in the classroom. For some, this increased the value they now placed on

student wellbeing, and for others it gave them licence to do what they were already doing. Representative comments included:

- “I’ve always known that student wellbeing is important but, to be honest, in the past I would think “Yeah, yeah, but I’ve got to get on with my curriculum” and I’d put the emotional needs of my students to the back of my mind. When you teach in Year 12 there’s always so much curriculum to get through. I’ve been teaching English for 29 years, but it’s only since the training that I really know that if the student is not feeling emotionally ready to learn then I am not doing my job as a teacher. It is *THE* most important thing as far as I’m concerned and I wish I’d realised this much earlier in my career” (ST, Year 12 English).
- “This is not meant to sound offensive, but when the school first announced we would be doing this training I thought it would be full of ‘hocus-pocus’. I’m a chemistry teacher and I was thinking ‘What will I do with this training?’ I can see now I had a classic fixed mindset about wellbeing and about my ability to teach wellbeing. I feel embarrassed admitting that now because I had no idea about the science of the field. I’ve used the training to think about the elements of my teaching that create the optimal ‘emotional chemistry’ for learning. I introduced the idea of wellbeing to my students through the lens of chemistry and we’ve talked about the ‘chemical reactions’ that foster a productive learning environment” (ST, Year 11, Chemistry).
- “I’ve always wanted to connect more with my students from a personal perspective but I didn’t think I could. I’d see other teachers doing it so naturally and I figured ‘Well, this is just not my style’. I guess I gave up on myself. Since the training I have now learnt that I can do this and there are skills and techniques I can learn that have made me more personable with my students” (ST, Year 9, Mathematics).
- “If I’m honest with myself, I have had the same teaching style since I first graduated 22 years ago which is ‘Mr Task Master’ mode. What I found after the training is that I am capable of changing my approach and being a bit more relaxed and friendly in class. It proves you can teach an old dog new tricks and the kids are watching me change my old style in front of them which shows them they can change too” (Primary, Grade 5).
- “My mindset has radically changed. I’ve gone from thinking my job is to teach ‘physics’ to my job is to teach ‘students about physics’. I’ve realised that the more I become a person, and not just a teacher, the better my students will learn” (ST, Year 10, Physics).

- “Well, yeah, I’ve always prioritised wellbeing. In the past I was known as the ‘hippie’ teacher but now it’s like Visible Wellbeing has given me the licence to do what I have always done. Others see the legitimacy of what I do now” (ST, Year 11, Business Studies).

**Secondary theme: Language.** Another way in which teachers reported that wellbeing was legitimized as a result of the VWB intervention was through the greater use of shared vocabulary about wellbeing. Representative comments included:

- “The major difference is the language, I can now give students the words for them to better recognise their wellbeing and how it influences their behaviours and actions. We are still managing some of the relationship conflicts of the group, but through conferencing and discussions they are able to identify things. They are self-recognising when they have overstepped the mark or have hurt someone’s feelings” (PT, Grade 5).
- “I have an ASD student, who used to get overwhelmed with his emotions and lash out. After the training I wrote up 5 words for negative emotions we’re allowed to feel and talk about in class as well 5 words for positive emotions we want to feel more of in class. It was not part of a formal lesson, we just discuss those words as situations come up during the day, like if there has been a fight at lunchtime or when the kids are happy about a project they are working on. It’s helped all the students but my ASD student has benefited the most. Now he is developing a language to express his state of wellbeing he is able to say “I don’t want to hear your voice right now, it is making me tense” and I know to walk away. This is such a step forward from the way he would previously have handled his overwhelm which would have been to physically lash out at me” (PT, Grade 3).
- “Students have a broader vocabulary around emotions and it’s allowing them to express themselves in a more open and honest way, they feel safer to express the negatives and I can see it is helping their stress levels to get their bad feelings out in the open and to know they are not the only ones who feel this way. They can see that life is ‘sweet and sour’ for everyone. It’s very normalising and it means we don’t get stuck on the negative because we can discuss it, release it, have a good vent and then move on” (ST, Year 10 Co-ordinator).
- “We have one boy who has oppositional defiance disorder, most of the students know this boy from last year and so they came into my class already having labelled him as naughty. I decided to use the wellbeing

language to help us all reframe his behaviour. The students understand that he just hasn't learnt how to handle his emotions as well as they have and that he is not been intentionally naughty. They don't call him naughty anymore, now they remind him 'take some deep breaths, keep your calm, use your strengths' (PT, Grade 2).

**Term 2 data: Actioning wellbeing.** At the end of term two teachers were still discussing licence and language but it was clear that they were now actioning more of VWB practices they had been trained in. Two new secondary themes: insights and impact.

**Secondary theme: Insight.** Teachers spoke about how the visible wellbeing training gave them insight into the wellbeing of their students and themselves. Representative comments included:

- "I am more conscious of the students' wellbeing now. I look at their body language, I listen to the tone of their voice, I read their facial expression. I'm way more observational and I'm using this to bring their wellbeing to my attention and also to their attention. We are learning Grammar rules at the moment and, you know, it's complex stuff because the English language doesn't make sense half the time. We're learning about conjugating verbs and I can see them shaking their head in derision or confusion, I can see them tuning out and looking at me blankly. Prior to the training I would have unconsciously picked up on this and I would have felt frustrated because I was losing them. But it would have been all under the surface, you know. I wouldn't have been aware of it consciously and I would have started raising my voice and becoming sarcastic to re-assert my authority. Now I can read these minor signs of wellbeing in real time. It has become second nature now to take this into account when I am running my classes and I use it as a teaching tool because I point it out. I say "What's with the faces guys?" and I ask them where they got lost rather than pressing ahead for the sake of finishing my lesson plan. I'll say "I notice your hunching over, let's take a deep breath and sit up." It is surprising how much difference this small teacher practice makes to the class. I'll say "I can see you're smiling, you're getting this, I can see your enjoying today" or with some of those hard to crack students I can joke "you're not crossing your arms as much as you used to" and then there's a little half smile and I feel like it's little sign of success and I'm making inroads towards getting them to love English" (ST, Year 8 English).
- "I've learnt to constantly check the wellbeing of the class, like a weather thermometer. I know what to look out for and I'm happy to stop the class

in the middle of the lesson and do a quick brain break to re-energise or refocus them” (PT, Grade 5).

- “I feel myself being more observant and tuning into the emotional climate. I look at my class before I act. I take into account facial expressions and body language. I listen to whether the noise is productive or not before I automatically tell them to be quiet” (PT, Grade 2).
- “I find it easier to see now when students are not themselves. I have much better insight into where they are at emotionally. I think it comes with knowing them better now because I use the visible wellbeing tools and I know my role is to help them ‘feel before they think’” (ST, Year 9, Politics).

**Secondary Theme: Impact.** The greater insight teachers were gaining into the wellbeing of their students flowed into concrete changes in their teaching practices, which then flowed into tangible changes for the students. Teachers reported a fluid change in practice that allowed them to create learning environments that were adaptive and took into account the wellbeing of their class. Teachers also reported an observable impact on student outcomes such as engagement, behaviour, wellbeing, and learning. Representative comments included:

- “My grade 4 students have a tendency to give up when the learning gets tough. I talked to them about the importance of grit. We then followed it up with some activities that are hard to do like drawing a picture with your non-dominant hand, writing a sentence with a big word and then having an attempt at a Sudoku. During these activities I could hear kids saying: “this is too hard”, “I can’t do it”, “I give up”. After a little time I then heard other children say to them: “don’t give up”, “keep trying” “use your grit”. I now continually hear children say “we need to persevere”, “you will get it if you keep trying!” Using grit has become a teaching tool that I can see gives my students endurance to learn effectively” (PT, Grade 4).
- “As a German teacher, I used to be very military and regimented about the exams, whereas as I now create a calm and playful environment. Prior to the oral exams I now play music and I invite the students to intentionally clear their brains and let their bodies relax. You can physically see a shift in their mindset before they stand up and do the oral exams, they get less stressed about memorising the words and they go more to the meaning of the words, they get more playful and inventive. I use the science of ‘Broaden and Build’ to know if I boost their wellbeing in that moment it will help them perform better academically. I have also changed the way I assess the Year 11 and Year 12 oral work. I set up a production-line and I

get the more able German speakers to have conversations with those in the line just about general stuff. It's about loosening up their tongue and it's using relationships to put people at ease. I ask them to have a conversation in German about the things in their life that make them happy, I put the more nervous kids at the back of the line so they have longer to get over the nerves. If I hadn't been shown how to think about the wellbeing of the students I would never have done this. It used to be that students had to come up alphabetically now the order of testing is on their state of wellbeing because I know that the most effective way for me to truly test their skills is when their mind is positive and open. My students all do much better in their orals" (ST, Year 7, 11, and 12 German).

- "These past two terms since the training and our coaching sessions I get students to choose a 'leaving song' at the start of the class. They know I will play the song as they leave class if (and only if) they have completed all of their tasks. When the song is played it is a reward for doing their work. Students are leaving on a positive note and it's great to see them dancing their way out of the door – overhearing conversation about how much they love the subject as they leave" (ST, Year 8 Science).
- "What I've really been struck by is how the visible wellbeing approach has helped to give some of the more introverted students a bit more confidence to engage in class. We all did the strengths survey and then these kids understood that being shy doesn't mean you're not strong. It boosted their confidence so much to understand that thoughtfulness, prudence, humility and the ability to be quiet and listen to others are actually strengths. They can see how these strengths help them learn and one little boy volunteered for a leadership role which blew his mum and me away. Neither of us could believe it and couldn't wipe the smile of our faces. I think it's because when you help kids to focus on what's on the inside the outside difference seem less important" (PT, Grade 5).
- "My homegroup this year is a really difficult group and, yeah, there's lots of behaviour management issues, they're disengaged with school, no parental involvement and so on. I'm dealing with some fairly troubled kids and, yeah, the class dynamics can get volatile pretty quickly. I was chosen for this group because I'm a big guy and I guess the thinking was that I'd be able to control them. The funny thing is that because of the training my focus is now on understanding what going on for these kids inside and trying to make their wellbeing visible rather than control by power. I've adopted a 'Gentle Giant' approach. I sit with them on the floor and we talk about what we would do if we had a magic wand. I tell them about my weekend and help them see I'm on their team. I bring homecooked food

on Monday morning. We have created a music sound track that plays as they enter homegroup and it's a great way to start the day. They started out ribbing each other's music choices but we talked about tolerance and how to mindfully listen and now they support each other's choices and, yeah, they are quieter and more respectful. Now they turning up to homegroup and I've gone from about a 30% turn-up rate to 90% - I'm stoked!" (ST, Homegroup).

**Term 4 data: Building wellbeing through relationships.** By Term 4, the impact of the VWB pedagogical intervention had started to extend beyond the classroom and spill into the staff/faculty rooms and positively influence relationships across the school. Student–teacher and teacher–teacher relationships were characterized as being more caring and teachers also reported higher level of collegiality.

**Secondary theme: Care.** The data showed an emerging theme of teachers and students taking greater care of each other by term four, following the pedagogical intervention. Representative comments included:

- “We have focused on kindness in class and I hear the kids use more words that express kindness to one another, they are more open to thanking one another and praising one another. When someone is being unkind, I don't have to correct this as much because the other students have the words to articulate what is going and they remind each other ‘It's time to be kind.’ Because they have a vocabulary for kindness it means they are seeing it more in others and they report it back to me that ‘such and such was kind because they helped me glue my worksheet in my book or they lent me their eraser when I made a mistake. I really see how bringing the wellbeing words into my class is changing what the kids see and what they value in each other” (PT, Grade 1).
- “The thing I see is that because I have set the emotional tone of the class the students are noticeably more caring for each other. This is a big win when you're teaching 15-year olds who can be fairly self-involved” (ST, History Year 9)
- “I had an exam in my class on Monday that had a few issues and made late for my next class. All term we have been working on the habit of being ‘on time’ and yet here I was arriving late. I was feeling frazzled and had not eaten since breakfast. The students could have been very hard on me, but they showed kindness and smiled. They held my coffee, offered to take my laptop, and they got my keys out. Straight away they got into their groups and started working on their art projects. They allowed me time to drink

and finalise an issue from the exam. They got on with the job. I talked to them about how stress effects us all and thanked them for allowing me to take a few moments to settle my mind. The visible wellbeing training has allowed to talk with the students about wellbeing in an open way and we realise we're all in this together and everyone has emotions" (ST, Year 10, Art).

- "I teach Learning Support and many of my students struggle with low self-esteem and mental health issues. One such student is John. John is from Japan and has learning difficulties that can't be diagnosed due to his language barrier. He suffers with mental health issues. In class he was brave enough to ask me what a mentor was. One of the boys sniggered at him, asking how he didn't know. John immediately went back into his shell and became withdrawn and self-conscious again. I took the moment to point out one of John's strengths. I asked the other students (there are only 9 of them) if they knew that John spoke fluent Japanese. They didn't realise, even though he is obviously Japanese and has an accent. I told them about how English was John's second language and sometimes he had to ask questions that seemed simple to us so he could understand. I asked them to imagine what it would be like to go into a classroom in Japan and have people start talking at them in Japanese. The other boys then became interested in John's story. They asked him questions about what it was like living in Japan, how to say certain words, what people did for fun. I watched as the boys stopped viewing John as someone who didn't know very much and began to see him as a wealth of knowledge in an unfamiliar culture. I felt the mood in the room shift from one of judgement and insecurity, to curiosity, humour and a little bit of awe. John is more confident in my class now to ask questions and take learning risks" (ST, Year 8).

**Secondary theme: Collegiality.** In addition to care becoming a more apparent feature of the relationship across the two schools, teachers also reported on a greater sense of collegiality coming forward. Representative comments included:

- "I set up a gratitude wall in the Year 8 common room and it was a big hit. I was honestly taken aback about the gratitude that poured out of these young teenagers and especially how many of them wrote gratitude notes about their teachers. I invited the teachers to come along in their lunch break one week and see what the students had written. You could see the wellbeing lifting in the teachers when they read the notes that students had written about them. That gave me the idea of doing the same thing in the

faculty room. I snuck in one weekend and set up a wall and then over the next few weeks watched as teachers started writing on the walls about the positives they saw in the students and the gratitude they had towards other teachers and support staff” (ST<sup>3</sup>).

- “It’s a simple thing, but after the training, we decided to set up a birthday cake roster where people put their name down if they want to be involved, and then against someone else that they will bring a cake for on their birthday. It’s a nice way to get the staff sitting around the table chatting and having a good time over lunch and cake. This I believe has encouraged more staff to make a regular event of sitting around the main table for lunch and has brought the staffroom closer together. It’s made us more productive too as a lot of stuff that used to come to the formal meetings now gets sorted out more informally – all because we decided to care more for each other and deliberately work on building up a collegial culture. That’s what struck me about the training is that wellbeing is just as important for us” (PT).
- “One of the teachers asked me the other day about the mindfulness sessions I run at the start of my classes. She said she noticed how much calmer the students are when they come to her following my class compared to other classes. I showed her the App I’m using and a few weeks ago she told me how she’d been using that App at home and what a difference it has made to her stress levels. It felt great to think that I am helping one of my colleagues in this way, not just my students” (ST).
- “This week, we’re heading into exam period which is always a time of high stress for us. For the first time since I’ve been at this school there was talk about how we can support each other and we came up with a bunch of things to do. It’s not like we haven’t supported each other in the past but this time we are being more pro-active about it” (ST).

## **Positive Education Pedagogy: Implicit Approaches, Content, and Teacher Empowerment**

Within the spirit of growth and innovation, I have used this chapter to put forward three key ideas for expanding the field of positive education: (1) the use of implicit practices (in addition to explicit programs), (2) the

---

<sup>3</sup>Given that these quotes are about staff room collegiality, it is not necessary to put detail as to what class or year level the teacher was teaching.

consideration of context (in addition to the teaching of content), and (3) the empowerment of teachers (in addition to the education of students).

These three ideas have been explored through the design and findings of a qualitative study that investigated the impact of an evidence-based positive educational pedagogy intervention that was set up so teachers could develop a positive education pedagogy unique to their own teacher practice, suited to their own discipline area (e.g., science, art, geography, language studies), and applicable at all school levels (e.g., primary, secondary).

The idea that wellbeing can be delivered through pedagogy, in addition to programs, was eye opening for teachers in the current study and many reported a change in their mindset about their own role in building student wellbeing. By “legitimizing wellbeing” and providing teachers with the licence and language for wellbeing, the pedagogical intervention helped to shift those teachers who had a fixed idea about teaching (e.g., *I am here to deliver academic content*) to a more open viewpoint of teaching the whole student.

This shift in their idea about their role as a teacher triggered a shift in mindset for some teachers about their ability to modify their own pedagogy. Mindset refers to the underlying beliefs people hold about the world and about their capacity for change (Heyman & Dweck, 1998). Dweck (2008) identified two types of mindset: growth and fixed. A person with a growth mindset sees themselves as having qualities that can be changed through effort and practice, while someone with a fixed mindset sees personal qualities as being static and unchangeable. Although the notion of mindset was initially applied to one’s understanding of the malleability of intelligence (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), it has since been expanded to include people’s underlying beliefs about the degree to which they can change can occur across a range of aspects such as one’s talents, character, relational abilities, and strengths (Burnette, O’Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkel, 2013; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016; Heyman & Dweck, 1998; Jach, H., Sun, J., Loton, D., Chin, TC., & Waters, 2018).

Mindset is at play in teachers when it comes to their beliefs about their capacity to change their pedagogy, specifically as it relates to changing the way one teaches so as to build student wellbeing. Teachers in this study explained:

- “I can see now I had a classic fixed mindset about wellbeing and about my ability to teach wellbeing.”
- “I’ve always wanted to connect more with my students from a personal, perspective but I didn’t think I could... I have now learnt that I can do this and there are skills and techniques I can learn that have made me more personable with my students.”

- “If I’m honest with myself, I’ve had the same teaching style since I first graduated fifteen years ago which is ‘Mr. Task Master’ mode.”
- “I am capable of changing my approach and being a bit more relaxed and friendly in class.”

Given that positive education and mindsets are both relatively new areas of research inquiry, the current study has made an important contribution by linking the two topics and exploring how teachers’ mindsets about their ability to adopt a positive pedagogical approach are surfaced and changed through intervention. Evidence that the VWB intervention can trigger a growth mindset about teaching style supports past research that has found mindset about other aspects (i.e., intelligence) can be changed through intervention (Blackwell et al., 2007).

The importance of creating interventions to foster growth mindsets in teachers is powerful when considering the work of Meadows (2008) on systems, who suggests that mindset is a core “change lever” in creating system wide change. The change in a teachers’ internal mindset about positive education pedagogy flowed through into changes in their practices that had visible impacts on classroom environments and the relational systems across the school. Starting first at the classroom level, with a new growth mindset about positive pedagogy, teachers set about “actioning wellbeing” in their classes. Teachers developed the confidence to try new classroom strategies based upon positive psychology such as kindness, gratitude, mindfulness, grit, goal setting, and strengths. Specific examples included: establishing the “emotional elements of learning” in chemistry, the use of positive words to redirect the behaviour of a student who has Oppositional Defiance Disorder, using a music playlist to motivate students to finish their tasks in science, and using gratitude boards in student common rooms.

Past researchers writing about wellbeing pedagogies contend that wellbeing is a dynamic state constructed *within* the teaching process itself (Kidger et al., 2009; Pyhältö et al., 2010). In the current study, it became apparent that wellbeing occurs, and is built up, in the multiple small moments of connection and positivity that occur between a teacher and his/her students. Importantly, teachers observed that when they fostered wellbeing, they also fostered better student learning, higher engagement, stronger confidence, and more co-operative behaviour. Teachers reported that their new teaching practices enabled more stamina in the learning process (e.g., the students who encouraged each other to keep trying), built resilience against adversity (e.g., doing better in time tables, taking an oral test in German), and fostered more

respectful and supportive student relationships (e.g., the high school boys who included the Japanese student).

The link that teachers observed between positive pedagogy with learning, wellbeing, and social class dynamics can be explained using Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden and Build theory, which asserts that positive emotions serve to broaden one's awareness (encourage novel, varied, and exploratory thinking) and one's social resources (encourage prosocial and empathetic actions towards others) in the moment that they occur *and* that positive emotions build these cognitive and social resources over time.

Further evidence of the broaden and build effect was the "Building wellbeing across relationships" theme that emerged in Term 4. Teachers across both schools reported that the VWB intervention created a deeper connection with their students and colleagues. Teachers found that they were connecting professionally around the VWB practices and were also using the practices to intentionally take care of each other's wellbeing, especially at peak times of stress during the academic year. Students were showing more care and compassion towards teachers (e.g., the students who allowed the teacher time to eat while they went about their own learning tasks) and each other (students supporting kids on the spectrum).

The change in relationships, together with the change in teachers' mindset and language, are each concrete examples of how pedagogical interventions, such as VWB, can trigger "systems change." According to Rosas (2017), schools are systems that are made up of interconnected elements that work together (or sometimes in opposition). A systems approach to the study of positive education is particularly important given the repeated criticism of the field as being overly focused on intrapersonal interventions and ignoring the role of contextual wellbeing (Ciarrochi et al., 2016). Kern et al. (2020) developed Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP), which applies principles from the systems sciences to positive psychology theory. SIPP can be used to explain the changes outlined by teachers in this study as the principles of SIPP tell us that people are interdependent with the systems they are a part of, and that wellbeing is thus influenced by changes to the system. SIPP also shows us that appropriateness of interventions is dependent on the context and people within the system. This principle was born out in the current study, where the chemistry teacher adopted different aspects of the VWB training in his class compared to the German Language teacher and the English teacher. This was also found with the evidence of teachers using different VWB practices in their non-classroom contexts (e.g., the Dean and Homegroup teacher). Teachers understood that the practices for one context may be different for

another and showed evidence of understanding the system effects for positive change.

Systems research shows that when one element of a system is targeted for change, an “action–reaction pattern” is triggered that in turn activates change in other elements, thus leading to new patterns of interaction across the system (von Bertalanffy, 1975). The VWB intervention helped teachers to change their pedagogy—a *core* element of the system—and when teachers were shown how to change this one element, an “action–reaction pattern” unfolded that created change in a range of other elements such as mindsets, language, and relationships. These changes then interacted in new ways to build wellbeing, learning, and more positive relationships in both students and teachers over time.

Each of the elements of the system that were changed, although small, was noticed by teachers to make a big difference. In fact, a core narrative through the qualitative data was the surprise that teachers expressed at the impact that small tweaks to their practice were having on key outcomes. Representative quotes include “It is surprising how much difference this small teacher practice makes to the class” and “It seems like a small thing but it has made a big difference to the way we use the learning plans.” Teachers marvelled at how “simple things” and “little sign of success” added up to create tangible, positive changes to the learning climate, wellbeing outcomes, and relationships across the school.

## Conclusion

The World Economic Forum (2016) claims that “to thrive in the twenty-first century, students need more than traditional academic learning. They must be adept at ... the skills developed through social and emotional learning” (p. 4). Positive education is clearly an important field to grow and evolve. The current chapter distinguishes itself by putting teacher pedagogy, as opposed to student curriculum, at the core of creating change through positive education. The finding that positive education pedagogy deepened and extended its impact on wellbeing, learning, and relationships inside and outside of the classroom over time is best understood by looking at the results through the lens of mindsets, the broaden and build theory, as well as SIPP. The power of using positive education pedagogy as a key lever for change in schools is the fact that it creates positive change through implicit, context-based, teacher-empowered ways, and thus, provides an important complement and evolution to the more typical program, content, student-focused approaches.

I hope that this chapter encourages future researchers and practitioners to consider the exciting and effective role that pedagogy and other potential implicit mechanisms can play in growing our field.

## References

- Andersen, R. J., Evans, I. M., & Harvey, S. T. (2012). Insider views of the emotional climate of the classroom: What New Zealand children tell us about their teachers' feelings. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 26(2), 199–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2012.657748>.
- Ashdown, M. D., & Bernard, E. M. (2012). Can explicit instruction in social and emotional learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being, and academic achievement of young children? *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(6), 397–405. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-011-0481-x>.
- Balmer, D. F., Master, C. L., Richards, B., & Giardino, A. P. (2009). Implicit versus explicit curricula in general pediatrics education: Is there a convergence? *Pediatrics*, 124(2), e347–e354. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-0170>.
- Beutel, D. (2009). Teachers' understandings of their relationships with students: pedagogic connectedness. *The International Journal of Learning*, 16, 507–518.
- Blackwell, L., Trzesniewski, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child Development*, 78(1), 246–263.
- Brunwasser, S. M., Gillham, J. E., & Kim, E. S. (2009). A meta-analytic review of the Penn Resiliency Program's effect on depressive symptoms. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(6), 1042–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017671>.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016). Trauma-informed classrooms and flexible learning: Strengthening regulatory abilities and the readiness to learn. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family studies*, 7(2), 218–239. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs72201615719>.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). *Shifting teacher practice in trauma-affected classrooms: Practice pedagogy strategies within a trauma-informed positive education model*. School Mental Health, First available on-line.
- Burnette, J. L., O'Boyle, E. H., VanEpps, E. M., Pollack, J. M., & Finkel, E. J. (2013). Mind-sets matter: A meta-analytic review of implicit theories and self-regulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(3), 655–701. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029531>.
- Carmen, B., Waycott, L., & Smith, K. (2011). Rock up: An initiative supporting students' wellbeing in their transition to secondary school. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(1), 167–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.08.030>.

- Chodkiewicz, A. R., & Boyle, C. (2017). Positive psychology school-based interventions: A reflection on current success and future directions. *Review of Education*, 5(1), 60–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3080>.
- Ciarrochi, J., Atkins, P., Hayes, L., Sahdra, B., & Parker, P. (2016). Contextual positive psychology: Policy recommendations for implementing positive psychology into schools. *Frontiers of Psychology*, 7, 1561. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01561>.
- Cornelius-White, J. H. D. (2016). *Person-centered approaches for counselors*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Barron, B., Pearson, D., Schoenfeld, A., Stage, E., Zimmerman, T., ..., Tilson, J. (2008). *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3–4), 294–309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6>.
- Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Fielding, M. (2006). Leadership, radical student engagement and the necessity of person-centred education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120600895411>.
- Fischer, K. W., Daniel, D. B., Immordino-Yang, M. H., Stern, E., Battro, A., & Koizumi, H. (2007). Why mind, brain, and education? Why now? *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1(1), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2007.00006.x>.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218>.
- Gatangi, F. (2007). Theory and practice: Person centered approach in schools: Is it the answer to disruptive behaviour in our classroom? *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 20(2), 205–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070701403406>.
- Green, S., Grant, A., & Rynsaardt, J. (2007). Evidence-based life coaching for senior high school students: Building hardiness and hope. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(1), 24–32.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Haimovitz, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2016). Parents' views of failure predict children's fixed and growth intelligence mind-sets. *Psychological Science*, 27(6), 859–869. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976166639727>.
- Hamm, J. V., Farmer, T. W., Dadisman, K., Gravelle, M., & Murray, A. R. (2011). Teachers' attunement to students' peer group affiliations as a source of improved

- student experiences of the school social-affective context following the middle school transition. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(5), 267–277. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2010.06.003>.
- Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York: Routledge.
- Hefferon, K., Ashfield, A., Waters, L., & Synard, J. (2017). Understanding optimal human functioning—The ‘call for qual’ in exploring human flourishing and well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 211–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1225120>.
- Heyman, G. D., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Children’s thinking about traits: Implications for judgments of the self and others. *Child Development*, 69(2), 391–403. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1132173>.
- Jach, H., Sun, J., Loton, D., Chin, T. C., & Waters, L. (2018). Strengths and subjective wellbeing in adolescence: Strength-based parenting and the moderating effect of mindset. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 19(2), 567–586. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9841-y>.
- Katz, L. (1993). Multiple perspectives on the quality of early childhood programmes. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 1(2), 5–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13502939385207411>.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Kidger, J., Gunnell, D., Biddle, L., Campbell, R., & Donovan, J. (2009). Part and parcel of teaching? Secondary school staff’s views on supporting student emotional health and wellbeing. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6), 919–935. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903249308>.
- Langdrige, D. (2004). *Introduction to research methods and data analysis in psychology*. Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited.
- Lillard, A. S., Heise, M. J., Richey, E. M., Tong, X., Hart, A., Bray, P. M. (2017). Montessori preschool elevates and equalizes child outcomes: A longitudinal study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8(1783). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01783>.
- Løhre, A., Lydersen, S., & Vatten, L. J. (2010). School wellbeing among children in grades 1–10. *BMC Public Health*, 10(526). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-10-526>.
- Maynard, B., Solis, M., Miller, V., & Brendel, K (2017). Mindfulness-based interventions for improving cognition, academic achievement, behavior and socio-emotional functioning of primary and secondary students. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2017(5). <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2017>.
- Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. Vermont, USA: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Nelson, G., Westhues, A., & MacLeod, J. (2003). A meta-analysis of longitudinal research on preschool prevention programs for children. *Prevention & Treatment, 6*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1037/1522-3736.6.1.631a>.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 3*(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2>.
- OECD. (2016). *PISA 2015 results (Volume I): Excellence and equity in education*. Paris: PISA, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>.
- Payton, J., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Pianta, R. C., Barnett, W. S., Burchinal, M., & Thornburg, K. R. (2009). The effects of preschool education: What we know, how public policy is or is not aligned with the evidence base, and what we need to know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 10*(2), 49–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100610381908>.
- Proctor, C., Tsukayama, E., Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Eades, J. F., & Linley, P. A. (2011). Strengths gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and wellbeing of adolescents. *the Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(5), 377–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.594079>.
- Pyhältö, K., Soini, T., & Pietarinen, J. (2010). Pupil's pedagogical well-being in comprehensive school-significant positive and negative school experiences of Finnish ninth graders. *European Journal of Psychological Education, 25*(2), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-010-0013-x>.
- Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosas, S. R. (2017). Systems thinking and complexity: Considerations for health promoting schools. *Health Promotion International, 32*(2), 301–311. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav109>.
- Seligman, M. E., & Adler, A. (2018). Positive education. In T. G. H. Council (Ed.), *Global happiness policy report 2018* (pp. 54–73). New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Shankland, R., & Rosset, E. (2017). Review of brief school-based positive psychological interventions: A taster for teachers and educators. *Educational Psychology Review, 29*(2), 363–392. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9357-3>.
- Slemp, G. R., Tan-Chyuan, C., Kern, M. R., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L., ..., Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Fydenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Singapore: Springer Nature. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0_6).
- Soini, T., Pyhältö, K., & Pietarinen, J. (2010). Pedagogical well-being: Reflecting learning and well-being in teachers' work. *Teachers and Teaching, 16*(6), 735–751. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2010.517690>.

- Steiner, R. (1919). *The philosophy of freedom*. Forest Row: Rudolph Steiner Press.
- Suldo, S. M., Friedrich, A. A., White, T., Farmer, J., Minch, D., & Michalowski, J. (2009). Teacher support and adolescents' subjective well-being: A mixed-methods investigation. *School Psychology Review, 38*(1), 67–85.
- Van Petegem, K., Aelterman, A., Rosseel, Y., & Creemers, B. (2007). Student perception as moderator for student wellbeing. *Social Indicators, 83*(3), 447–463. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-006-9055-5>.
- Von Bertalanffy, L. (1975). *Perspectives on general systems theory*. New York: George Braziller.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 28*(2), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1375/aedp.28.2.75>.
- Waters, L. (2015). Why positive education? *Teaching and Learning Network, 22*(3), 16–19.
- Waters, L. (2017). Visible wellbeing in schools: The powerful role of Instructional leadership. *Australian Educational Leader, 39*(1).
- Waters, L. (2018). Visible wellbeing: A critical resource for leadership and learning in schools. *Horizon, 8*, 4–10.
- Waters, L., & Loton, D. (2019). SEARCH: A meta-framework and review of the field of positive education. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*. First available on-line. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-019-00017-4>.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Rusk, R., Cotton, A., & Arch, A. (2017). Positive education. In M. Slade, L. Oades, & A Jarden (Eds.), *Wellbeing, Recovery and Mental Health* (pp. 245–246). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Waters, L., & White, M. (2015). Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 5*(1), 19–32.
- White, M. (2016). Why won't it stick? Positive psychology and positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being, 6*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-016-0039-1>.
- White, M., & Waters, L. (2014). The good school: A case study of the use of Christopher Peterson's work to adopt a strengths-based approach in the classroom, chapel and sporting fields. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.920408>.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- World Economic Forum Annual Meeting. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2016>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 7

## Positive Professional Practice: A Strength-Based Reflective Practice Teaching Model

Mathew A. White

The past few years have brought numerous advances in positive education theory, research, and practice. For instance, Waters and Loton (2019) proposed a data-driven meta-framework for evidence-based approaches to the field. O'Brien and Blue (2018) challenged teachers, principals, and administrators to develop a positive pedagogy, designing pedagogical practices that facilitate positivity within the classroom. Oades and Johnston (2017) argued that wellbeing literacy is an important element in positive education. While these developments are encouraging, a critical topic continues to be overlooked—professional practice—which this chapter addresses.

To date, positive education has no agreed conceptual framework or model to guide teachers to theorise and critically self-reflect on what they do and how they have an impact based on existing theories of professional practice (White & Murray, 2015). As such, positive education continues to be a pedagogy in search of a practice (White, 2015). Therefore, if developments such as Oades and Johnston's (2017) wellbeing literacy, O'Brien and Blue's (2018) positive pedagogy, or Waters and Loton's (2019) framework are to achieve deep pedagogical change, I assert that critical teacher self-reflection is an integral starting point building on White and McCallum's (2020) call to enhance teacher quality through evidence-based wellbeing frameworks. Written from the researcher–practitioner perspective, this chapter proposes a conceptual

---

M. A. White (✉)

The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia

e-mail: [mathew.white@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:mathew.white@adelaide.edu.au)

model for critical self-reflection for teachers of positive education, guided by two questions:

1. Can positive psychology developments enhance the planning, implementation, and self-reflection required for effective learning and teaching?
2. How can character strengths be integrated into reflective practice to enhance effective learning and teaching?

In this chapter, I address these questions by first highlighting how professional practice remains a missing component in positive education theory and practice. Second, I identify the importance of teacher pedagogy. I describe relevant aspects of Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) strengths classification, surfacing the underlying assumptions of positive education pedagogy, and point to the critical role of reflective practice. Next, I introduce Stephen Brookfield's (2017) four lenses for critical reflection, which is one of the widest reflection methods used in teaching. Then, illustrating how character strengths can be integrated into reflective practice to enhance effective learning and teaching, I propose a strengths-based model that integrates the VIA across all stages of Brookfield's four-lens reflective practice model. Finally, I consider the potential applications of this approach. I contend that a strength-based model is a missing piece in the puzzle needed to support reflective practice and will enhance teacher's professional practice in positive education.

## A Need to Focus on Teacher Professional Practice

Over the past decade, positive education has been interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) first defined positive education as an approach to "teach both the skills of wellbeing and the skills of achievement" (p. 294). White (2009, 2015) claimed that it is a blend of evidence-based learning from the science of positive psychology and best practices in learning and teaching, whereas White and Murray (2015) argued that it is "an umbrella term that is used to describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student wellbeing" (p. 2). Slemp et al. (2017) asserted that positive education "combines the concepts and scholarship of positive psychology with best practice guidelines from education" (p. 101).

Stemming from these definitions, research has focused on developing frameworks, interventions, and activities to support student wellbeing (e.g.,

Brunwasser & Garber, 2016; Noble & McGrath, 2016; Waters, 2011). There have been case studies of schools as positive institutions (e.g., Adler & Seligman, 2016; Halliday, Kern, Garrett, & Turnbull, 2019a, 2019b; Seligman & Adler, 2018; White & Murray, 2015). Reviews of positive psychology interventions, programs, and frameworks have been conducted (e.g., Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2015; Froh & Bono, 2011; Rusk & Waters, 2013, 2015), the most extensive of which is Waters and Loton's (2019) bibliometric review of over 18,403 positive psychology studies.

Yet despite all this activity, only a handful of publications have explicitly focused on the role of the teacher. In his critique of the teacher's role in positive education, Kristjánsson (2017c, p. 188) contends that the "flourishing paradigm of positive education" takes a strength-based approach to *student wellbeing*; it is all about furthering assets that students already possess in nascent forms and helping them continue developing the character virtues that are intrinsically related to (i.e., constitutive of) eudaimonia. While Kristjánsson (2007, 2012, 2015, 2017b) indicates there are many professional implications for teachers, he calls "for an active political contribution from teachers, in order to make sure that the economic precondition of student flourishing is universally met" (Kristjánsson, 2017c, p. 190).

International research has established that teachers are the most significant in-school factor impacting student outcomes (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dickerson, & Helm-Stevens, 2011; Hattie, 2009, 2015; Sachs et al., 2019). The McKinsey Report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) argued that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (p. 19). McCallum and Price (2010, 2012, 2015) advocated that for children and young people to be well, teachers must also be well. Teacher quality, retention, and satisfaction are crucial elements for sustaining the profession, maintaining motivation, and preparing teachers to fulfil aspirational outcomes as leaders (McCallum & Price, 2015). And yet teachers are struggling. Many are leaving the profession early (Heffernan, Longmuir, Bright, & Kim, 2019), reports of burnout and stress are high (Oberle, & Schonert-Reichl, 2016), and numerous mental health issues exist (Bullot Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017; Carlisle et al., 2018; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014). As Brookfield (2017) claimed, "it's insane for any teacher to imagine he or she can walk into a classroom and overturn centuries of racial, gender and class exploitation" (p. 43).

Over the past decade, the pedagogy—what teachers do, the professional practice of positive education—has remained uncharted territory. Questions abound around teachers' professional identity (who teachers are), professional practice (what teachers do), and efficacy (how teachers know they are having

an impact). For example, McGrath (2018) noted that “character education specialists seem to know it when they see it, but what it means to call something a character education program remains unclear” (p. 23). Overall, there is a dearth of studies focusing on the professional practice of positive education teachers. As White and Kern (2018, p. 2) noted, “the time has come for the discourse on the *pedagogy* of positive education to become more sophisticated”. That pedagogy necessarily focuses on *teacher practice*.

## Intersections of Strengths and Reflective Practice

Trask-Kerr, Quay, and Slep, (2019) contend that a significant hurdle for positive education is that it “revolves around issues to do with psychology itself and the capacity of psychology to comprehensively inform the imagined idea of positive education” (p. 2). As Kristjánsson (2019) noted, positive education’s focus on a flourishing paradigm should allay “the fears of traditionalists that the flourishing paradigm is just one more attempt to smuggle a Trojan horse of touchy-feeliness into the classroom in order to undermine standard subjects and processes” (p. 28). Trask-Kerr et al. (2019) further highlight that “teachers have imagined education in positive terms for a very long time” and “it seems that positive psychology’s philosophical roots have been largely assumed” (p. 2). They argue for a “Deweyan positive education” that “incorporates psychological knowledge in the embrace of philosophical thinking” (Trask-Kerr et al., 2019, p. 13). I argue that it is beneficial for the research, discourse, and professional practice of positive education to develop through the integration of Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) VIA character strengths classification and Brookfield’s (2017) theory of reflective practice.

## The Values in Action Character Strengths Classification

The VIA advanced by Peterson and Seligman (2004) quickly became one of the earliest adopted developments in positive education (Han, 2018; Niemiec, 2018; White & Waters, 2015). The classification provides a framework enabling teachers to theorise whole-of-class and whole-of-school strength-based approaches (Waters & White, 2015; White & Murray, 2015). Although the VIA has attracted criticism for its philosophical limitations (Kristjánsson, 2007, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2019; Niemiec, 2018; Snow, 2018),

the classification remains one of the foundational elements of many positive education approaches across the world.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) determined a set of criteria for the classification of these strengths based on the contribution of over 40 experts from philosophy, theology, and the social sciences. From this review of various disciplines, Peterson and Seligman (2004) created the VIA, which includes six virtues that manifest as 24 strengths. These are: *wisdom* (creativity, curiosity, judgement, love of learning, perspective), *courage* (bravery, honesty, perseverance, zest), *humanity* (kindness, love, social intelligence), *justice* (citizenship, fairness, leadership), *temperance* (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation) and *transcendence* (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality).

Recent findings on strengths over the past five years have implications for teachers' professional identity, professional practice, and efficacy (Niemic, 2018; Waters & White, 2015). For example, Bates-Krakoff et al. (2017) found that character could be developed through carefully designed curricula. Having extensively reviewed strength-based studies, McGrath (2018) proposed that character education programs should include seven features: school-based, structure, addresses specific positive psychological attributes, addresses identity, moral growth, holistic growth, and the development of practical wisdom (Kristjánsson, 2017a). Based on eight reviews, Berkowitz, Bier, & McCauley, (2017) identified 42 evidence-based practices to derive lessons on effective practice. They proposed a conceptual framework of six foundational character educational principles to aid the dissemination of evidence-based practices more broadly: prioritisation, relationships, intrinsic motivation (internalisation of character), modelling, empowerment, and developmental pedagogy (PRIMED) (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Reviewing character strength interventions, Lavy (2019) identified how strengths could be linked with the development of twenty-first-century skills, offering an integrative model for strength in schooling. Lottman, Zawaly, and Niemic (2017) emphasised the importance of incorporating strengths within everyday language.

Across studies and reviews, it becomes clear that strengths underlie much of positive education practice. However, I contend that greater focus should be placed on explicitly incorporating strengths within teacher pedagogy; specifically, through the purposeful use of reflective practice.

## The Critical Role of Reflective Practice

I suggest that a missing part of positive education discourse is the incorporation of teachers' critical self-reflection on professional practice. To be clear, when I discuss professional practice, I do not mean just the classroom programs, worksheets, activities, or interventions teachers undertake with their classes. Rather, professional practice refers to a teacher's ability to self-reflect and the "repertoire of effective teaching strategies, and use them to implement well-designed teaching programs and lessons" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). While many schools will adopt wellbeing or positive education approaches to shift educational practices, the challenging task of shifting professional practice is often overlooked. Initial enthusiasm gives way to a dominant school culture that leaves wellbeing on the sidelines (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Within education, a widely recognised body of research focuses on the significant role that reflective practice plays a part in transforming teaching (Brookfield, 2003, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2017). Indeed, teaching is often referred to as a reflective profession in which teachers are continually evaluating their impact on learning and practice. Reflective practice aims to progress teachers' knowledge, understanding, and actions throughout various stages of their career, so that they positively impact student outcomes (Brookfield, 2009, 2015). At the heart of reflective practice research is a teacher's ability to know, understand, and reflect upon professional practice through four lenses. Brookfield (2017) argues that:

Critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and scrutinise the assumptions that undergird how we work. The most effective way to become aware of these assumptions is to view our practice from different perspectives. Seeing how we think and work through different lenses is the core process of reflective practice. (pp. xii–xiii)

Key researchers in reflective practice include Borton (1970), Kolb and Fry (1975), Argyris and Schön (1978), and Brookfield (2017). Studies by these researchers and others have advanced discourse and research in the area and influenced initial teacher education across the world. Indeed, teacher registration authorities are increasingly requiring teachers to provide evidence of critical self-reflection on teaching practice, a step in the teacher registration process. Similarly, the American Association of Nurse Practitioners requires critical self-reflection as part of the renewal of registration (Brookfield, 2017).

While reflection is widely accepted as an integral part of effective teaching (e.g. Molla, & Nolan, 2020; Sato, Ludecke, & Saito, 2020), there are

many theories and models showing how to approach this task. First theorised in 1995, Brookfield's conceptual framework has been widely applied in initial teacher education and other professions, including health and nursing. I suggest that it can also be helpfully applied within positive education, especially when school leaders and teachers have become frustrated after initial training and investment in positive education efforts but have had limited sustainable results. Brookfield (2017) defines reflective practice as "the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions" concerning learning (p. 3). Four aspects of Brookfield's definition of reflective practice provide much-needed clarity for teachers of positive education and respond to White and Kern's (2018) criticism "that the time has come for the discourse on the *pedagogy* of positive education to become more sophisticated" (p. 2). Brookfield (2017) claims that reflective practice needs to (1) be sustained, (2) be intentional, (3) seek evidence, and (4) assess teaching assumptions. He asserts that paradigmatic assumptions are widely present in education and "critical reflection is all about hunting the assumptions that frame our judgments and actions as teachers" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 21).

I suggest that with the rapid rise of positive education and enthusiasm surrounding its application, some teachers have jumped the gun, focusing on implementation without undertaking the significant critical self-reflection demanded in professional practice. While various programs and curricula have been developed, there is scant evidence of how this has been integrated into professional practice beyond a series of worksheets or claims that they are based on what works for in-school experience (Waters, 2011; Waters & Loton, 2019). As classrooms and schools are complex ecosystems, professional practices that take that complexity into account are needed. I suggest that Brookfield's (2017) *Four Lenses of Critical Reflection* provide a vehicle to allow educators to incorporate positive education in a manner that places professional practice at the centre of the pedagogy.

Brookfield argues there are four lenses of critical reflective practice: (1) our students' eyes, (2) our colleagues' perceptions, (3) personal experience, and (4) theory. These are illustrated in Fig. 7.1.

**Lens 1: Our students' eyes.** At the centre of reflective practice is the teachers' ability to continually reflect on the impact they have on the students in their classrooms. This includes the mode of instruction, types of activities chosen, tasks that are set, and the way learning is set up in the classroom. Brookfield (2017) asserts that this is the basis of "student-centred teaching: knowing how your student experiences learning so you can build bridges that

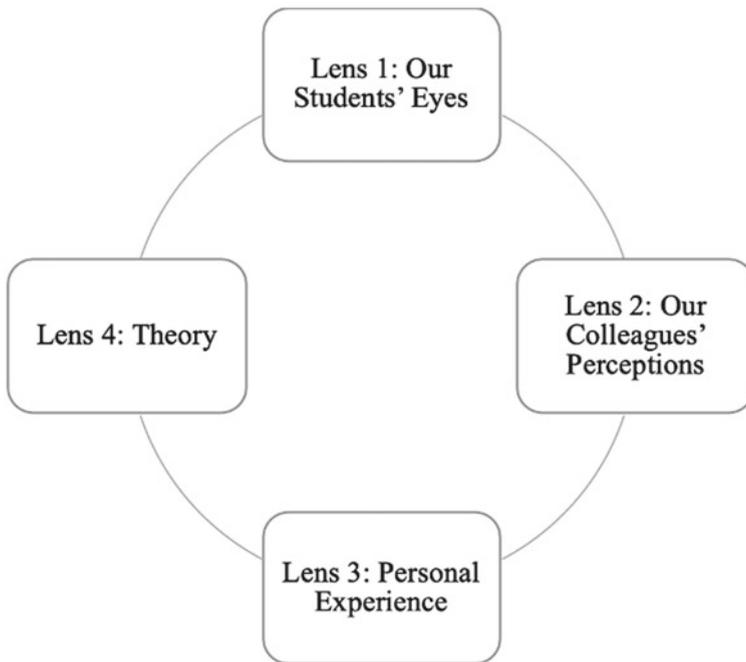


Fig. 7.1 Brookfield's four lenses of critical reflection (Author adaptation from Brookfield, 2017, p. 61)

take them from where they are now to a new destination" (p. 62). Brookfield asserts that effective teachers must collect data to confirm their belief that a learning experience, assessment, or task is working well, in addition to seeking areas for improvement. This includes the teacher clearly articulating the classroom process and procedures, why these are taking place, and how they link back to the learning goal originally established. Brookfield stresses the importance of regular anonymous feedback and the teacher discussing this openly and often, and articulating how teachers have changed their professional practice based on this feedback to help establish trust in the group.

**Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions.** In many education systems, teachers will often be encouraged to provide feedback on effective teaching as a part of an appraisal process. Brookfield asserts that a 'critical friend' is one who will challenge our underlying assumptions about education and enable us to undercover new perspectives and revisit challenges or dig deep into why we use an approach. Brookfield asserts that some of the best conversations are about the "nature of resistance to earning" (p. 67). I find that this point resonates with teachers who attempt to teach positive education but are met

with resistance from students and/or colleagues, triggered in part by the word 'positive'. Engaging with the resistance begins to unearth people's underlying assumptions about the purpose of learning, which often assumes the centrality of 'academic' courses, with wellbeing training perceived to be of little relevance. Rather than being a problem, such resistance provides the opportunity to expose such underlying assumptions, and then identify the actions, activities, and approaches that resonate versus those that are ineffective within that context. As Brookfield highlights, some of the resistance to learning in education is "grounded in events that happened before I showed up" (p. 67). Further, the best community of reflective practice is multidisciplinary rather than discipline-specific groups, which may reach conclusions about learning and teaching too rapidly and affirm pre-existing paradigms of teaching (Brookfield, 2017).

**Lens 3: Personal experience.** Learning by the personal narrative is a powerful lens in reflective practice; that is, who do I engage with the process of learning? Many people will find the individual stories of learners who have benefited from a positive education approach meaningful. This includes teachers who recount the power of gratitude exercises, strength-based learning, and focusing on what works well in class. While these individual stories will move us, and often they are what people in the field will remember long after a detailed dataset, they are also paradoxically some of the first examples to be dismissed. As Brookfield argues, the most effective academic criticisms discuss a view of a proposition as 'merely anecdotal'. Brookfield extends this argument and suggests that in specific emotional experiences, there are 'universal elements' embedded within them. Further, he reminds us that "personal experiences of learning are intertwined with teaching practice" (p. 70). The implications for positive education here are profound. Brookfield contends that "we can trace the impulse of these decisions back to the kinds of situations in which we felt excited or confused as learners. We assume that what worked for us will be similarly galvanizing for our own students" (p. 70). When teaching, or discussing positive education, teachers also report concern that students 'opt-out' or are disengaged. Herein, it is an essential point of reflection for teachers of positive education. Brookfield (p. 71) challenges us to consider when we have felt disengaged, and suggests the following examples:

- "I don't see the reason why I'm being asked to do a particular activity."
- "The instructions provided are unclear."
- "The time allowed for it is too short."
- "The leaders have not demonstrated any commitment to the activity."

Brookfield asserts that all teachers and learners have paradigmatic assumptions about the way power is perceived in classroom culture based on personal experiences. He argues that these establish causal assumptions about how different parts of the education world work and the conditions under which they can be changed. Ongoing reflective practice invites teachers to consider these paradigmatic assumptions through the students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences, and theory and research.

**Lens 4: Theory.** Brookfield argues that explaining the importance of theory to practising teachers is one of the most challenging areas. For example, he asserts that teachers will say “they don't have time to read or that educational theory and research doesn't have anything to do with the particularities of their classroom” (p. 73). Why does theory matter? Brookfield asserts that it “puts into cogent words something you've felt but been unable to articulate” (p. 73). The uptake in positive education research and application in schools can partly be explained in this way. Various aspects of the growing evidence-based approach provide theoretical frameworks for phenomena teachers have observed in the classroom but were unable to describe.

## A Strength-Based Reflective Practice Model for Teachers

Brookfield (2017) aptly noted that “methods and practices imported from outside rarely fit snugly into the contours of our classrooms” (p. 54). Indeed, despite the rapid uptake of positive education, schools are also struggling to maintain initial efforts and create sustainable change. In a 2016 paper, I outlined various series of elements of professional practice and educational systems, which I argued were essential for developing comprehensive well-being programs in schools (White, 2016). Since then, I have spent more time reflecting on the pedagogical principles behind positive education. I posit that one of the significant hurdles to the sustainable implementation of positive culture within traditional education systems is that many teachers do not undertake the critical self-reflection required to shift professional practice from the way they were taught to the way they think they teach. One of the critical changes needed to develop a professional practice of positive education is for teachers to see their professional training from the four lenses established by Brookfield (2017).

Notably, the research on strengths provides an opportunity for incorporating reflective practice in a manner that aligns with the core values of

positive education. Thus, I propose a model that integrates reflective practice and strengths based on the combination of Brookfield's four lenses and the 24 VIA character strengths. The purpose of this integration is to promote deeper reflection between teachers' professional practice and what they do in the classroom with the character strengths profile and critical reflection. Figure 7.2 illustrates the underlying theoretical model. The figure demonstrates the process teachers can adopt to integrate Brookfield's Four Lenses of Critical Reflection with a character strengths approach to create a strength-based reflective practice model.

Supporting this model, Table 7.1 offers a series of questions that arise from the integration of the four lenses across the 24 VIA strengths. The table outlines the strengths linked with each of the six virtues and applies each lens to that strength. For Lens 1 (students' eyes), questions could be posed to students participating in a critical reflection of professional practice, inviting students to catch circumstances when their teachers demonstrated each strength. Once the student feedback has been collected anonymously, I suggest that teachers use Lens 2 to seek feedback from colleagues who can also respond to similar questions, focusing on the strengths demonstrated by

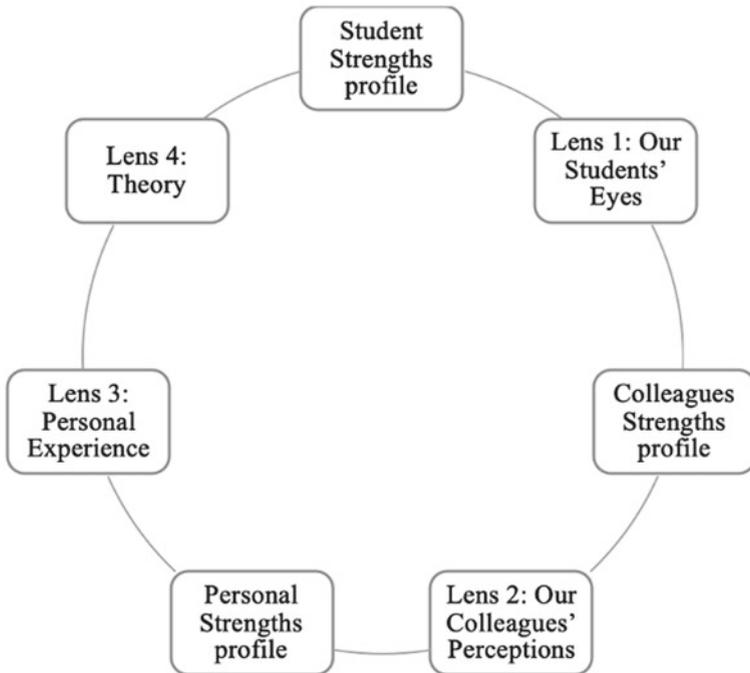


Fig. 7.2 A strength-based reflective practice model for teachers

**Table 7.1** Strategies for incorporating Brookfield's (2017) four lenses with the 24 VIA character strengths, grouped by Peterson and Seligman's (2004) proposed six virtues

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Creativity</b>	Original, adaptive, ingenuity, seeing, and doing things in different ways	When have you seen your teacher adapt their teaching approach and do things differently to engage student learning? How did this strengthen your engagement in class?	<i>Virtue: Wisdom</i> Think of a time when your colleague has shown creativity in their work. What was the challenge, how did they respond, and what was the evidence of impact on professional practice?	Reflect on a time when you were creative. What were you doing? Who was there, and what impact did you have?	What researchers on creativity have you read? What are some of the evidence-based approaches on creativity? Can you teach creativity?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Curiosity</b>	Interest, novelty-seeking, exploration, openness to experience	Tell us about a time when your teacher helped to kindle your curiosity. What was the topic, and what impact did it have on you as a learner?	When have you seen your colleague be open to new ideas and concepts? What was the topic? How did this impact their professional practice?	Reflect on a time when you were curious. What were you doing? Who was there, and what was your impact?	What researchers on curiosity have you read? What are some of the evidence-based approaches on curiosity? Can you teach curiosity?
<b>Judgement</b>	Critical thinking, thinking through all sides, not jumping to conclusions	Think about an example when your teacher explored all the angles of a complicated topic? What impact did it have on you as a learner?	Think about a time when your colleague has been called to weigh up different points of view without making strong judgements. What was the challenge? How did they use evidence to inform decision-making, and how did this impact their professional practice?	Reflect on a time when you needed to use critical thinking and evidence to inform professional practice. What were you doing? Who was there, and what was your impact?	Find out the significant researchers on critical thinking and various models. What evidence is there to support teaching critical thinking skills? What evidence supports the multiple models you have seen in professional practice?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Love of Learning</b>	Mastering new skills and topics, systematically adding to knowledge	When have you seen your teacher at their best, showing a love of learning when discussing their subject? How did it impact you as a learner?	Recount a time when you have seen your colleague show their love of new ideas. When did this happen? Who was there? What was the goal and how do you think it impacted your colleagues' professional practice?	When are/were you most excited by your teaching discipline? What were you doing? Who was there, and what was your impact?	Who are the significant researchers in learning? Is it possible to teach a love of learning? What evidence do you have to support learning approaches in your professional practice? What are the philosophical assumptions and biases of various learning approaches?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Perspective</b>	Wisdom, providing wise counsel, taking the big picture view	How has the feedback you received from your teacher helped you to be able to see learning from different perspectives? How has that benefited you as a learner?	Recall when your colleague provided you with wise, professional advice. What was the situation, and how did your professional practice benefit?	Think of a time you were asked to provide counsel. When was it, who was involved, and what was the impact?	Who are the dominant researchers in perspective? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching perspective? How is perspective measured? What are the theoretical models of perspective? Are these culturally specific?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Bravery</b>	Valour, not shrinking from threat or challenge, facing fears, speaking up for what's right	Learning is tough, and sometimes it means we need to speak up. Recall a time when your teacher has helped you in your learning	<p><i>Virtue: Courage</i></p> <p>Think of a time when you have seen your colleague speaking up for what is right and also facing their fears. How did this improve their professional practice?</p>	Think of a time when you've had to face your fears in professional practice. What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about yourself as a learner? How did this impact your professional practice?	Find three researchers in the field of bravery in education. What evidence can you find to support courage as a step in learning and teaching? What evidence can you find to support the integration of risk-taking in learning? How do effective teachers teach bravery?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Honesty</b>	Authenticity, being true to oneself, sincerity without pretence, integrity	Think about your experience as a learner. When have you seen your teacher demonstrating authenticity in their teaching? How has this improved your learning experience?	Recall a story where you have observed your colleagues being true to themselves in education. Recall the circumstances. What do you think was the impact on their professional practice?	When have you been challenged to be true to yourself and demonstrate honesty and integrity? How has this shown in your professional practice, and how do you promote this in learning?	Find the names of researchers who focus on honesty. Is it possible to teach morality? What are the philosophical implications of teaching honesty in education? What philosophers influence Eastern and Western understandings of truth and honesty? Are there evidence-based approaches to teaching morality?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Perseverance</b>	Persistence, industry, finishing what one starts, overcoming obstacles	Tell a story about when you have seen your teacher finishing a tough learning obstacle. How did this enhance your learning?	Think of a time when you have seen your colleague persist to achieve a significant goal. What was the challenge? Who is involved? And what was the impact on professional practice?	Think of a time when you've had to persevere to achieve a significant goal. What was the goal? What were the objectives? How does this link to your overall strategy to enhance student learning? And what did you learn about your professional practice?	Who are the leading researchers of perseverance or grit? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching perseverance? Is perseverance desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical emotions about learning when perseverance is promoted?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Zest</b>	Vitality, enthusiasm for life, vigour, energy, not doing things half-heartedly	When have you seen your teacher show enthusiasm for their teaching? What was the topic, and what was the impact on your learning experience?	Think of a time when you haven't possessed zeal in your colleagues' teaching. When did you see this?	Think of a time when you demonstrated zest for your work. When do you feel alive during professional practice? Is it when you're leading a class? Is it when you're providing more wellbeing support to students? When do these things take place, and how does it impact your professional practice overall? What is your impact?	Find out who researches zest or enthusiasm. What do you think is the importance of zest in learning? What evidence do you have to support your claim? Can you find evidence to support teaching students the significance of zest in learning and teaching?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Kindness</b>	Generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruism, doing for others	Think of a time when your teacher was generous, caring, and showed compassion for other learners	<p><i>Virtue: Humanity</i></p> <p>When have you seen your colleague being generous to others in the learning journey? What have they been doing? What has the impact been? And how has this inspired others?</p>	Think of a time when you have demonstrated kindness towards others in the learning journey. Do you think you have been able to demonstrate this effectively? Are there circumstances when you feel challenged to maintain kindness towards others in the learning experience? Why do you think this is the case?	Who are the leading researchers of kindness? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching kindness? Is kindness desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching kindness?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Love</b>	Loving and being loved, valuing close relations with others, genuine warmth	Think of a time when you have enjoyed spending time with your teacher. What was the situation? How were relations between students and teachers fostered? And what do you think are the major characteristics that enable the teacher to truly know and understand other students?	Recall a time when you have seen your colleagues demonstrate close relationships with others they genuinely support on their learning journey. This could be between colleagues or teachers and students. What was the goal? What was the learning outcome? And what was the impact of professional practice overall?	Think of a time when you have been challenged to demonstrate love for your discipline? When do you think you have been the most in love with learning? When do you feel most alive? Is it when you're teaching the subject? Is it when you're preparing and in the process of getting ready to deliver complex ideas?	Who are the leading researchers of love? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching love? Is love desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching love?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Social Intelligence</b>	Aware of the motives and feelings of oneself and others, knowing what makes others tick	Think of a time when you have seen your teacher show significant social intelligence. Do they really seem to know how other students know and understand how to navigate through learning? What were the circumstances? How did you feel about your role as a learner? And what did you learn about yourself in the learning process?	Think about a time when you have seen your colleagues demonstrate awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others and navigate this effectively to achieve learning goals. How have they done this? When have they shown this most effectively? How have they been able to bring along people who are reluctant to engage in learning? What do you think about the major characteristics your colleagues demonstrate?	Think of a time when you have used your social intelligence in learning. When do you think you use this most often? Do you think you demonstrate greater social intelligence when working closely with colleagues or students? Why do you think this is the case? Do you show greater social intelligence with students with challenging circumstances? How do you think this impacts your professional practice?	Who are the leading researchers of social intelligence? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching social intelligence? Is social intelligence desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching social intelligence?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Fairness</b>	Adhering to principles of justice; not allowing feelings to bias decisions about others	Think of times when you have seen your teachers demonstrating fairness in their teaching. How has this impacted you as a learner? What do you think is the importance of this for your learning?	<p><i>Virtue: Justice</i></p> When have you seen your colleague demonstrate the principles of fairness during the learning process? Do you think they are their best at this? What skills do you think they demonstrate to mitigate against personal biases? How do they use evidence to inform professional practice?	Think of times when you've had to demonstrate fairness and equity during the learning process. What were you doing? When were you called upon to use your skills of fairness? How did you use evidence to support the decisions you made during the learning process? Were you invigorated by this?	Who are the leading researchers of fairness? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching fairness? Is fairness desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching fairness?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Leadership</b>	Organising group activities to get things done, positively influencing others	How do your teachers promote learning and a positive influence over others from a leadership lens? How do they organise groups to enable those who are leaders and also those who are followers to have a clear voice? What is the positive impact on your learning?	When have you seen your colleagues demonstrate leadership to promote positive learning? What did they do to promote leadership in others to create positive learning environments? How did they demonstrate the balance between leadership and followership in others to create positive learning cultures?	Think of times you worked with leaders who created positive learning environments. What did those leaders do to create positive learning cultures? How did they establish positive classrooms, and how did it make you feel? How does this influence your role within the professional practice of learning?	Who are the leading researchers of leadership? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching leadership? Is leadership desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching leadership?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Teamwork</b>	Citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty, contributing to a group effort	Recall a time when your teacher showed the ability to get teams to work really effectively. What did they do to promote teamwork? How did they encourage people who don't normally speak up to contribute? Has your teacher shown social responsibility and been able to promote teamwork? How has this impacted your learning?	When have you seen your colleagues working at their best in a team? What were they doing? How were they supporting the team? How did they achieve goals? How did they encourage others? What do you think is the most pivotal thing they did to enable others to understand the learning process?	When did you feel you were part of an optimal team? What were the main characteristics of the team? How did the team achieve its learning goals? What were the team's strengths? How did the team enable you to understand your role clearly to promote learning?	Who are the leading researchers of teamwork? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching teamwork? Is teamwork desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching teamwork?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Forgiveness</b>	Mercy, accepting others' shortcomings, giving people a second chance, letting go of hurt	Think of a time when you have observed your teacher showing forgiveness, giving people a second chance in learning. How has this positively impacted your learning experience?	<i>Virtue: Temperance</i> When have you seen your colleague forgive others to promote professional practice and learning? What do you think is the importance of the strength of forgiveness in the learning cycle? How do you think your colleague enables understanding the role of forgiveness in learning and professional practice?	Have you experienced the powerful role of forgiveness in the learning cycle? What role do you think forgiveness plays in the development of your professional identity and professional practice? Do you think forgiveness plays a role in developing positive student relationships? How do you promote forgiveness within the learning cycle with your students?	Who are the leading researchers of forgiveness? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching forgiveness? Is forgiveness desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching forgiveness?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Humility</b>	Modesty, letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves	When do you see your teacher at the most modest? What do you think is the role of modesty in your learning process? Do you think it helps you or is it hindering you?	Consider a time when you have seen your colleague demonstrating modesty. What was the situation? What were they doing? And how did the modesty link to their professional practice? Did their modesty elevate others?	Have you experienced humility in professional practice? What do you think is the significance of humility in promoting positive professional practice? How do you think this helps to promote a healthy profession?	Who are the leading researchers of humility? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching humility? Is humility desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching humility?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Prudence</b>	Careful about one's choices, cautious, not taking undue risks	When have you observed your teacher modelling prudence? How does this impact your knowledge and understanding of the process of learning? What do you think is the role of prudence in your learning cycle?	Have you seen your colleague use evidence to inform decision-making in professional practice? In doing so, how have you seen this approach demonstrates your college being careful about the choices they make in the learning cycle for professional practice?	Have you experienced the importance of being cautious about the choices you make in professional practice? Think of a time when you have used evidence to inform decision-making in your professional practice. What was the impact on the learning outcomes?	Who are the leading researchers of prudence? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching prudence? Is prudence desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching prudence?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	Self-control, disciplined, managing impulses, emotions, and vices	Self-control is one of the key elements for achieving goals in learning. When have you seen your teacher demonstrate significant self-control to achieve a long-term learning goal with your class? How has this impacted your understanding of how learning works? When do you think you self-regulate?	When have you seen your colleague demonstrate disciplined, self-controlled professional practice? What do they spend when working hard to achieve a learning goal with the class? Why has it been trying to achieve mastery of a key pedagogical approach?	When have you used self-control to manage your emotions to establish a positive class environment? When do you get to use self-control to achieve your own learning goals? What is the most challenging and invigorating element of this?	Who are the leading researchers of self-regulation? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching self-regulation? Is self-regulation in learning desirable and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching self-regulation?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Appreciation of Beauty &amp; Excellence</b>	Awe and wonder for beauty, admiration for skill and moral greatness	Beauty appears in all sorts of ways in learning. It could be the beauty of mathematical equations, language, and poetry, or knowing and understanding the significance of historical events. When have you not seen evidence of discussion of beauty and appreciation and admiration for this in your learning? Do you think that has impacted the way you engage with your learning?	<p><i>Virtue: Transcendence</i></p> <p>When have you seen your colleague at their best, demonstrating an appreciation of the beauty of the subject discipline? What were the circumstances? What was happening? Who was involved? And what was the impact on the learning environment?</p>	Think about a time when you were excited by the beauty of your subject discipline. What were you studying? What did this tell you about you as a learner? What do you think is the link between your appreciation of the beauty of your subject discipline and how you approach your professional practice?	Who are the leading researchers of beauty and awe? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching beauty and awe? Is beauty and awe desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching beauty and awe?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Gratitude</b>	Thankful for the good, expressing thanks, feeling blessed	How has your teacher shown gratitude in the learning process? When do you feel most grateful in the process of learning? Have you felt grateful when you suddenly found you were able to progress in your learning? How does this impact the way you engage with learning?	When have you seen your colleague express gratitude for professional practice? When have they expressed gratitude and thanks for the students and the resources they have available to them? Have you seen your colleague express excitement and thanks for the learning process?	When have you felt most grateful to be a part of the teaching profession? What are you most grateful for in being a part of the lives of the students you teach? What energises you the most about the learning process?	Who are the leading researchers of gratitude? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching gratitude? Is gratitude desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching gratitude?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Hope</b>	Optimism, positive future-mindedness, expecting the best, and working to achieve it	When have you seen your teacher demonstrating a positive future-mindedness? When do they show their greatest levels of optimism? How does this impact your learning? Do you think there is a link between the level of optimism that you experience in learning and your ability to achieve goals?	When have you seen your colleague demonstrate optimism for the profession? When have you seen them show future-mindedness for their students? When have you seen them show hopefulness? What is the implication for their professional practice?	When have you felt you are most optimistic in teaching? When have you felt most hopeful for your profession? When have you felt most energised and future-minded about the professional practice you undertake?	Who are the leading researchers of hope? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to hope? Is hope desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching hope?

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Humour</b>	Playfulness, bringing smiles to others, light-hearted—seeing the lighter side	When have you had the most fun in class? Do you think your teacher is able to balance humour and hard work? What do you think is the importance of humour in your learning progress? Have you thought about how you can promote more humour in class?	When have you seen your colleague at their most playful? When have you seen them at their most light-hearted? How often does your colleague laugh? What do you think are the implications for your colleagues' professional practice and your team?	When do you feel most playful in your professional practice? When are you able to have the most fun in your teaching? When was the last time you had great fun teaching? What do you think is the implication for your professional practice when you're experiencing fun?	Who are the leading researchers of humour? Is it possible to adopt an evidence-based approach to humour? Is humour desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching humour?

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Strength	Description	Lens 1: Our students' eyes	Lens 2: Our colleagues' perceptions	Lens 3: Personal experience	Lens 4: Theory
<b>Spirituality</b>	Connecting with the sacred, purpose, meaning, faith, religiousness	Do you think spirituality has a role to play in the learning process? Have you seen your teacher having faith in you? How do you think this manifests in learning? Do you think this has a role at all?	When have you seen your colleague most connected with their purpose in teaching? When have you seen them deeply engaged in the calling of teaching? When have you seen them daring to lead in teaching? When do you see your colleague getting the greatest meaning out of a professional practice?	Where do you get your greatest meaning in teaching? What elements of teaching give you the greatest sense of meaning and accomplishment and professional practice? When do you think you have achieved your mission in teaching? When do you think you have connected your own learning experience with teaching?	Who are the leading researchers of spirituality in education? Is it possible to adopt a research-informed approach to spirituality? Is spirituality desirable in learning and teaching? What are the philosophical implications of teaching spirituality?

their colleagues. Using Lens 3, teachers are invited to reflect on their own experience, considering when they felt they demonstrated the strength while teaching, how they felt at that time, and what impact it had on their own journey as a learner. Lens 4 encourages teachers to connect with relevant scholarship and theory applicable to the strength, comparing and contrasting their own experiences with the theory, making sense of concepts that have been raised.

These questions aim to enable teachers to move from one type of professional practice to a more desired, strength-based approach. These questions have been designed to provoke discussion around the role of the teacher in professional practice, the part of the student in professional practice, the role of theory in professional practice, and also the teachers' own lived experience and ability to reflect on the decisions they make in learning. The questions encourage teachers to consider their role in learning, how they approach specific tasks, and how this impacts upon the experiences of students and their colleagues.

Throughout, participants are invited to reflect on evidence that supports claims made (by students, colleagues, and their own reflection), consider the impact on learning, and reflect upon their own practices. Many of the strengths are integrated into the positive education programs that teachers may be teaching within their school, so this process allows teachers to critically reflect upon the research, their own experience, and the perceptions of others. Teachers are also encouraged to consider how they demonstrate the strengths in their day-to-day teaching, as well as in the content they are exploring.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that positive education continues to be pedagogy in search of a practice (White, 2015). I theorised that one of the hurdles for the development of professional practice in the field is that teachers do not critically reflect on their professional practice fully. I argued that Brookfield's (2017) four lenses provide a robust approach for incorporating reflection into positive education practices. To support this, I introduced a strength-based model and related strategies. I argue that it is possible to achieve this goal over the next decade if researchers systematically investigate the experience of pre-service teachers, practising teachers of positive education, school managers, school leaders, and school governance. As "only then can the field adequately

put forward positive education as the heart of a new approach to pedagogy” (White & Kern, 2018, p. 12).

**Acknowledgements** A draft of this chapter was presented at the 6th World Congress on positive psychology in Melbourne in a symposium on the positive humanities with Dr. Louis Tay, Professor James Pawelski, Dr. Yerim Shim, and Dr. Daniel Loton. The author acknowledges the feedback and encouragement of Professor Jane Burns, Dr. Tim Lomas, Professor Faye McCallum, Professor Mike Steger, and Professor James Pawelski.

## References

- Adler, A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2016). Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(1), 1–35.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Addison-Wesley.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2014). Australian professional standards for teachers. *Education Services Australia* (February), 1–28.
- Barber, M., & Mourshed, M. (2007). How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top. *Analysis*, 56.
- Bates-Krakoff, J., Mcgrath, R., Graves, K., Ochs, L., Wallace, B., & Shaughnessy, M. (2017). Beyond a deficit model of strengths training in schools: Teaching targeted strength use to gifted students. *Gifted Education International*, 33(2), 102–117.
- Berkowitz, M., Bier, M., & McCauley, B. (2017). Toward a science of character education: Frameworks for identifying and implementing effective practices. *Journal of Character Education*, 13(1), 33–51.
- Borton, T. (1970). *Reach, touch and teach*. New York: McGraw-Hill Paperbacks.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2003). Racializing the discourse of adult education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(4), 497–523.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2009). The concept of critical reflection: Promises and contradictions. *European Journal of Social Work*, 12(3), 293–304.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2013). *Powerful techniques for teaching adults*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2015). *The skillful teacher: On technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

- Brunwasser, S., & Garber, J. (2016). Programs for the prevention of youth depression: Evaluation of efficacy, effectiveness, and readiness for dissemination. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 45(6), 763–783.
- Bullot A., Cave, L., Fildes, J., Hall, S., & Plummer, J. (2017). *Mission Australia's 2017 youth survey report*. Mission Australia.
- Carlisle, E., Fildes, J., Hall, S., Hicking, V., Perrens, B., & Plummer, J. (2018). *Youth survey report 2018*. Mission Australia.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. Teachers College Press.
- Dickerson, M. S., & Helm-Stevens, R. (2011). Reculturing schools for greater impact: Using appreciative inquiry as a non-coercive change process. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(8), 66–74.
- Donaldson, S., Dollwet, M., & Rao, M. (2015). Happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning revisited: Examining the peer-reviewed literature linked to positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(3), 185–195.
- Froh, J., & Bono, G. (2011). *Gratitude in youth: A review of gratitude interventions and some ideas for applications* (Research-Based Practice) (Report). *Communique*, 39(5), 1.
- Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019a). The student voice in well-being: A case study of participatory action research in positive education. *Educational Action Research*, 27(2), 173–196.
- Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019b). Understanding factors affecting positive education in practice: An Australian case study. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00229-0>.
- Han, H. (2018). The VIA inventory of strengths, positive youth development, and moral education. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(1), 32–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1528378>.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Hattie, J. (2015). High impact leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 72(5), 36–40.
- Heffernan, A., Longmuir, F., Bright, D., & Kim, M. (2019). *Perceptions of teachers and teaching in Australia*. Faculty of Education, Monash University.
- Kolb, D., & Fry, R. (1975). Towards an applied theory of experiential learning. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of group processes: Wiley series on individuals, groups, and organizations* (pp. 33–58). Wiley.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2007). *Aristotle, emotions and education*. Ashgate.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2012). Positive psychology and positive education: Old wine in new bottles? *Educational Psychologist*, 47(2), 86–105.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2015). *Aristotelian character education*. Routledge.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2016). Flourishing as the aim of education: Towards an extended, 'enchanted' Aristotelian account. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(6), 707–720.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2017a). Moral education today: Ascendancy and fragmentation. *Journal of Moral Education*, 46(4), 339–346.

- Kristjánsson, K. (2017b). Recent work on flourishing as the aim of education: A critical review. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 65(1), 87–107.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2017c). Teachers as facilitators of student flourishing in positive education: What are the political implications? In M. White, G. Slemp, & A. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations and policy*. Springer International Publishing AG. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56889-8>.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2019). *Flourishing as the aim of education: A neo-Aristotelian view*. Routledge.
- Lavy, S. (2019). A review of character strengths interventions in twenty-first-century schools: Their importance and how they can be fostered. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9700-6>.
- Lottman, T. J., Zawaly, S., & Niemiec, R. (2017). Well-being and well-doing: Bringing mindfulness and character strengths to the early childhood classroom and home. In *Positive psychology interventions in practice* (pp. 83–105). Cham: Springer.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2010). Well teachers, well students. *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, 4(1), 19–34.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2012). Keeping teacher wellbeing on the agenda. *Professional Educator*, 11(2), 4–7.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2015). *Nurturing wellbeing development in education: From little things, big things grow*. Taylor & Francis.
- McGrath, R. (2018). What is character education? Development of a prototype. *Journal of Character Education*, 14(2), 23–35.
- Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2020). Teacher agency and professional practice. *Teachers and Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1740196>.
- Niemiec, R. M. (2018). Foundations of strengths-based practice: Seven core concepts of the science of character. In R. M. Niemiec (Ed.), *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners* (pp. 1–21). Hogrefe.
- Noble, T., & McGrath, H. (2016). *The PROSPER School pathways for student wellbeing: Policy and practices*. Springer.
- O'Brien, M., & Blue, L. (2018). Towards a positive pedagogy: Designing pedagogical practices that facilitate positivity within the classroom. *Educational Action Research*, 26(3), 365–384.
- Oades, L. G., & Johnston, A. L. (2017). Wellbeing literacy: The necessary ingredient in positive education. *Psychology and Behavioral Science International Journal*, 3(5), 169–173.
- Oberle, E., & Schonert-Reichl, K. (2016). Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students. *Social Science & Medicine*, 159, 30–37.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues a handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Rusk, R. D., & Waters, L. E. (2013). Tracing the size, reach, impact, and breadth of positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(3), 207–221.

- Rusk, R. D., & Waters, L. E. (2015). A psycho-social system approach to wellbeing: Empirically deriving the five domains of positive functioning. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(2), 141–152.
- Sachs, J., Adler, A., Bin Bishr, A., de Neve, J.-E., Durand, M., Diener, E., ..., Seligman, M. (2019). *Global happiness and wellbeing policy report 2019*. Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing. <https://www.happinesscouncil.org/report/2019/>.
- Sato, M., Ludecke, M., & Saito, E. (2020). Embodied dispositions towards learning: Reading students' embodied practice. *Teachers and Teaching. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1732913>*.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Adler, A. (2018). Positive education. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *Global happiness policy report: 2018*. (pp. 52–73). Global Happiness Council.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(3), 293–311.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T.-C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., ..., Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Frydenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific: Perspectives, programs and approaches* (pp. 101–122). Springer.
- Snow, N. E. (2018). Positive psychology, the classification of character strengths and virtues, and issues of measurement. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 14*(1), 20–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1528376>.
- Trask-Kerr, K., Quay, J., & Slemp, G. (2019). A Deweyan positive education: Psychology with philosophy. *Oxford Review of Education, 45*(6), 786–801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1625761>.
- Vesely, A. K., Saklofske, D. H., & Nordstokke, D. W. (2014). EI training and pre-service teacher wellbeing. *Personality and Individual Differences, 65*, 81–85.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 28*(2), 75–90.
- Waters, L., & Loton, D. (2019). SEARCH: A meta-framework and review of the field of positive education. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology, 4*, 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-019-00017-4>.
- Waters, L., & White, M. (2015). Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 5*(1), 19–32.
- White, M. (2009). Why teach positive education in schools? *Curriculum leadership: An electronic journal for leaders in education*. Retrieved from [https://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/why\\_teach\\_positive\\_education\\_in\\_schools.27066.html?issuelID=11751](https://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/why_teach_positive_education_in_schools.27066.html?issuelID=11751).
- White, M., & McCallum, F. (2020). Responding to teacher quality through an evidence-based wellbeing framework for initial teacher education. In Jillian Fox,

- Colette Alexander & Tania Aspland (Eds.), *Teacher education in globalised times: Local responses in action* (pp. 115–137). Springer Press.
- White, M., & Waters, L. (2015). A case study of ‘The Good School:’ Examples of the use of Peterson’s strengths-based approach with students. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.920408>.
- White, M. A. (2015, November 11). Where is the education in positive education? *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/positive-education/201511/where-is-the-education-in-positive-education>.
- White, M. A. (2016). Why won’t it stick? Positive psychology and positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being*, 6(1), 2.
- White, M. A., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1), 1–17.
- White, M. A., & Murray, A. S. (2015). Building a positive institution. In M. White & A. S. Murray (Eds.), *Evidence-based approaches in positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools* (pp. 1–26). Springer.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 8

## Trauma-Aware Practice and Positive Education

Tom Brunzell

Teachers often witness students who *act out* and show hyper-aroused behaviours including escalated stress responses, low frustration tolerances, aggressive and loud behaviours, and teachers also witness students who *act in* and show hypo-aroused behaviours such as withdrawal, silent refusal, freezing up, and giving up. Students who appear to struggle, resist, or refuse to learn in classrooms are often given labels such as “attention-seeking”, “oppositional”, “power-hungry”, or “disengaged”. These labels are often given by well-meaning teachers who desperately want their students to learn, but do not understand the underlying causes of the students’ behaviours and possible pathways towards successful classroom intervention.

Such behaviours often arise from children who have had one or more traumatising experiences (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014). Trauma-aware practice for teachers emerged to help teachers to better understand why students were acting out and/or acting in within their classrooms (de Arellano, Ko, Danielson, & Sprague, 2008; Downey, 2007), accompanying urgent calls for schools to become trauma-sensitive in their teacher practice, school policy, and pastoral care (Cole et al., 2009). It was within this province of empirical investigation (Berger, 2019), teacher practice models (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009), and policy recommendations (Howard, 2019; Ko et al., 2008) that the well-meaning professionals who desired to assist schools to better meet the unmet and complex needs of their

---

T. Brunzell (✉)

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

e-mail: [tbrunzell@berrystreet.org.au](mailto:tbrunzell@berrystreet.org.au)

students evolved. However, for the past 20 years, the research and practice of trauma-aware pedagogies in schools arose within a silo of trauma-aware practices, which focused on managing the difficulties that arise from trauma, with scant discussion or introduction of the topic of wellbeing for these same students. The field was exclusively focused upon healing in the classroom—and did not focus on the possibility of the new science of wellbeing and growth of psychological resources within the classroom (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

Positive education arose within a separate silo, focusing on integrating positive psychology interventions within schools (Seligman et al., 2009), with little understanding of or acknowledgement of trauma aware practices. This is understandable, considering that most positive psychology interventions that were applied within education were tested with normally functioning individuals, tested with student samples that excluded student cohorts who were classified as trauma-affected or were specifically parsed for adverse childhood experiences (Waters, 2011). Over the past decade, the field of positive education has steadily grown (White & Kern, 2018), and yet trauma-aware approaches have mostly been absent in the positive education discourse (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016b).

These silos have created considerable confusion for teachers, who are already overburdened and sometimes dealing with their own secondary trauma responses. In our research and its applications for pedagogical practice, teachers on both sides of this divide are frustrated and urgently seeking answers for how to teach and care for their struggling students (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2018). Many teachers who are trying to adhere to trauma-aware approaches feel a desire to effectively integrate positive education and do not know how—or worse, are told by their school leaders that there is no room in the busy curriculum nor is wellbeing a priority in their school's strategic planning. On the other side of this coin, teachers who were only doing positive education in trauma-affected classrooms are facing failure when their highly escalated students do not sit still to practice mindfulness, learn about their character strengths, or engage or benefit from practices that seemingly ought to be helping.

This chapter advocates for a trauma-informed positive education approach for educators and researchers who believe that there can be an integrated, developmental approach between these two paradigms. In time-poor schools where teacher professional learning time is at premium, most schools do not have the option to prioritise one over the other. Instead, schools are best served when schools gain understandings that there can be *one* professional learning journey to support students who need wellbeing the most.

## Trauma-Aware Practice for Teachers

Trauma is often defined by the overwhelming view that the world is no longer good and safe. *Type 1 trauma* describes a one-time event (e.g., natural disasters, community events, loss of a loved one) when the child unexpectedly must contend with the adverse event. Often, the child receives adequate care and support through family and community actions, helping the child to restore the perception that the world is indeed good and safe. Such events bring little shame or guilt, as they can happen to any family, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, situation, or background. In contrast, *Type 2 trauma*, often called relational trauma, can have far more distressing and far-reaching consequences (Brunzell et al., 2015a). Type 2 trauma describes ongoing abuse and/or neglect from adults known to the child. Relational trauma often occurs repeatedly over time. As such traumas are more likely to arise from factors such as generational poverty, systemic institutional childhood abuse, or family violence and the effects of that violence in communities, the child often lacks support from the family, school, and community. The child often feels great shame, guilt, and isolation.

Depending on the national context, trauma-aware practice in schools is also referred to as *trauma-sensitive* or *trauma-informed*. While some countries (e.g., the U.S. and the U.K.) mostly reserve the term *trauma-informed* to refer to clinical and therapeutic work with individuals and employ *trauma-aware* for use in schools, other countries (e.g., Australia) have yet to make the clear distinction between these terms (Cole et al., 2005). This chapter uses the term *trauma-aware* when discussing teachers and teachers' own transformation when learning about these approaches and uses the term *trauma-informed* when discussing the evidence to support these practice models to acknowledge the empirical lineage of the evidence.

Trauma-aware teachers are teachers who understand that childhood trauma can have long-lasting negative impacts on a child's learning and education trajectory to higher education and future professional pathways. Understanding trauma's impacts on the biological, neurological, and cognitive resources required for successful learning is essential for effectively assessing *why* a child may be having in maladaptive ways, *what* unmet needs this child is trying to meet, and *how* a teacher can choose an intervention pathway to help the child meet those needs in healthy ways within the classroom (Wolpow et al., 2009).

The causes of childhood trauma are systemic, complex, and difficult to fully assess. The term *complex unmet needs* can be helpful to trauma-aware teachers as they begin to understand the physical, emotional, cognitive, and

spiritual needs of their students (Brunzell et al., 2015a). For instance, when it looks like a child shows loud, escalated behaviour in the classroom because they did not get what they want (e.g., “*I want to use the ipad!*”), trauma-aware teachers might consider: Is this student acting this way because they have a physical need to move their body and regulate themselves? Is this student acting this way because they have an emotional need to feel safe and successful in the classroom? Is this student acting this way because they have a cognitive need, such as believing that iPad will better facilitate their learning?).

One such need that students have is a need for *control*. These students have been labelled “power-hungry” and “attention-seeking” for good reason: they are indeed on a quest for power (e.g., empowerment) and attention because they are not successfully meeting those needs outside the classroom. They have learned how to meet these needs in maladaptive ways by turning classrooms into their own environments to master in the only ways they know how. These students are often hypervigilant, scanning the classroom for threats and opportunities as a survival mechanism, often instigating arguments because it is more predictable way for them to gain power and control than to work collaboratively with their peers or accept directions and feedback from a teacher.

These are students who have multiple social and emotional struggles. They can struggle with self-reflection and self-awareness to understand the impacts of their behaviour on others (Schore & Schore, 2008). They struggle with noticing the changes within their own bodies in the rise of escalation and feeling the effects of stress within their own bodies (Murphy, Catmur, & Bird, 2018). And they struggle to understand the effects that their behaviour has on others and the need to restore ruptured relationships. While trauma unaware teachers might address these struggles by lecturing the student on “making better choices”, trauma-aware teachers know that it is up to *teachers* to deeply reflect on the underlying needs of the child and to create a classroom environment and proactively support positive behaviour within the classroom to facilitate success for students.

## Trauma-Informed Pathways for Intervention

Trauma-informed care in schools has evolved into multi-tiered approaches including training for all school staff (Tier 1), consultation between teachers and school wellbeing/welfare staff (Tier 2), and consultation between school wellbeing/welfare staff and external professionals (Tier 3) (Berger, 2019). These multi-tiered approaches acknowledge that trauma not only affects the

individual, but also impacts the systems of support surrounding the individual. Teachers within trauma-aware schools know that they cannot do this work alone, and they are best positioned to care for their students when they embrace and connect to community systems of support including parents and carers, external agencies, and community networks.

While a number of trauma-informed models exist (e.g., Bloom, 1995; Downey, 2007; Wolpov et al., 2009), most models incorporate two domains for teacher practice as priorities for teachers to understand and then integrate into learning aims for students: (1) a focus on increasing self-regulatory capacities, including physical and emotional regulation, and (2) a focus on increasing relational capacity for students who resist forming strong and sustainable school-based relationships (Brunzell et al., 2016b).

### Domain 1: Increasing Self-Regulatory Capacities

Most trauma-informed practice models for teachers prioritise increasing self-regulatory capacities to help students build self-regulation within their physical body and within their emotional regulation (Brunzell et al., 2016b). When a child perceives that the world is no longer good and safe, they may have an elevated resting heart rate. This in turn increases the reactivity of their arousal and stress-response systems (van der Kolk, 2003). For these children, the threat of ongoing physical and psychological danger requires their bodies to be on *high-alert* and therefore, they can have difficulties managing stressors caused by unexpected changes or will perceive threat when in fact, there may be no imminent threat present in the classroom.

Moreover, learning is often stressful for these students. Students who can regulate themselves well when faced with the challenge of learning something new can embrace the temporary escalation in the body when the mind is challenged (e.g., *Can I do this numeracy problem? If I can't do it, who can I get support from?*)—the brief increase of energy motivates focus and productive action. But this same escalation in the body of other students quickly pushes them over their limit for stress tolerance. They lack effective strategies to manage the escalation, and quickly give up as a protective mechanism to save their reputation in front of their peers, or react quickly without realizing what is happening (e.g., *Can I do this numeracy problem? No way! This is stupid! This whole class is stupid!*).

Trauma-aware practice encourages teachers to have clear pathways of intervention to strengthen the foundations of classroom culture to increase self-regulatory abilities (Brunzell et al., 2015a), such as students:

- Having pre-agreed upon strategies for *de-escalation* when experiencing stress in the classroom (e.g., deep breathing, asking for a two-minute drink of water in the hall, speaking to a trusted friend).
- Learning about their own *stress response* and how that stress response can help us understand the shifts in emotion within our bodies.
- Having opportunities to identify and understand how *heated emotions* escalate us and work within our bodies.
- Having a classroom that is *predictable* and *rhythmic* by maintaining predictable routines for classroom procedures, student movements, and consistent responses to address classroom adversity.

When teachers revise their classrooms to become places that hold predictable rhythms throughout the day, students begin feeling more empowered to take care of their own needs when escalated, and teachers develop better ability to maintain positive classroom culture (Brunzell et al., 2016b). The opposite is also true: a dysregulated and unpredictable teacher may be mirroring and modelling inconsistency for their students. This can promote a feeling of student uncertainty and prompt ongoing cycles of adverse behaviour.

## Domain 2: Increasing Relational Capacity

Students who are trauma-affected often struggle to make and maintain strong classroom relationships. Successful learning requires these relationships. Within a relational context, students must be able to (1) feel connected to and be collaborative with their peers and (2) feel connected to and accept feedback from their teachers. Relational trauma can impact a student's ability to feel safe and supported in the classroom, and this learning for trauma-aware teachers can be confronting. However, it can also provide valuable answers to questions like: "*Why is he treating me like the enemy? I'm the nice adult in his life!*" or "*Why is she too clingy with me in the classroom? If I ask her to wait a moment when I help others, she has a tantrum or she cries*". Trauma-aware practice encourages teachers to have clear pathways of intervention to increase relational capacities (Brunzell et al., 2015a), such as teachers who:

- understand the importance of *attachment* and *attunement* in the classroom.
- ground their classroom relationships in *unconditional positive regard*.
- see their role in students' lives as *co-regulatory* through side-by-side verbal and non-verbal interactions.

- understand the role of *power*, power dynamics, and power imbalances within teacher–student relationships.

In our research and practice (Brunzell et al., 2015b; Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016a), we have witnessed teachers increase their own capacities to relate to their students through the aforementioned guidelines. Without this knowledge, teachers can revert back to ineffective classroom management, which imbalances relational power even further (e.g., “*Sit down now! You’re being annoying again, and I need you to make a better choice*”), rather than co-regulating the student through deliberate attempts to form a relationship, even when the student is resistant to learning (e.g., kneeling down side-by-side with the student, shoulder to shoulder saying, “*I see that you’re struggling. Let’s figure out two strategies to get through this assignment together*”).

The trauma-informed literature often describes these two domains as *bottom-up* interventions which assist the body with bottom-up integration (Perry, 2006). Knowing that trauma is stored within the body (van der Kolk, 2003), teachers require effective strategies to help students understand and regulate their own bodies when pushed into their challenge zone (i.e. the zone of proximal development; Eun, 2019). For teachers, this means that we are not expecting a student to change their behaviour simply by making better choices. Rather, we are assisting the student to increase regulatory and relational connection within their own bodies to maintain positive goals when they feel uncertain or dysregulated.

## Repositioning Positive Education in the Classroom

The application of positive education often involves the explicit and implicit teaching of wellbeing through deliberate classroom and school-based strategies that: (1) can be integrated into academic instruction, (2) inform student management in promoting positive student behaviours, (3) contribute to specific curriculum for social emotional learning (SEL) and strengths-based approaches, and (4) fortify broader relationships within schools (e.g., parents, teachers, community supports).

Positive education and trauma-aware practice developed in separate silos. I, along with my colleagues Lea Waters and Helen Stokes, believed that conceptually linking the two areas would help educators understand that both paradigms offer proactive avenues for student support and provide possibilities to improve teacher practice when meeting the complex unmet

needs of trauma-affected students (Brunzell et al., 2015b; Brunzell et al., 2016b). The resulting model (see Fig. 8.1) was predicated on Keyes' (2002) dual-continua model of mental health, which claims that supporting mental ill-health (healing) requires a separate and distinct pathway than increasing wellbeing (growing)—and both are required to help a struggling individual to heal and grow.

The model was also grounded in the belief that strengths are not nurtured solely by focussing on weaknesses (Magyar-Moe, 2009). Rather, trauma-aware teachers benefit from looking to identify and replicate the environmental cues that make moments possible when students identify, understand and employ their strengths, and have their own shining moments of learning.

There are now many ways to posit how wellbeing may be identified and nurtured in individuals (Brunzell et al., 2015a). For instance, teachers might:

- Prime the day and their lessons with activities that deliberately generate positive emotion and provide opportunities to practice a growth mindset, resilient self-talk and the like.
- Structure lesson activities to deliberately allow the practice of students' character strengths.
- Provide students with opportunities to contribute to others, building a sense of connection and community.

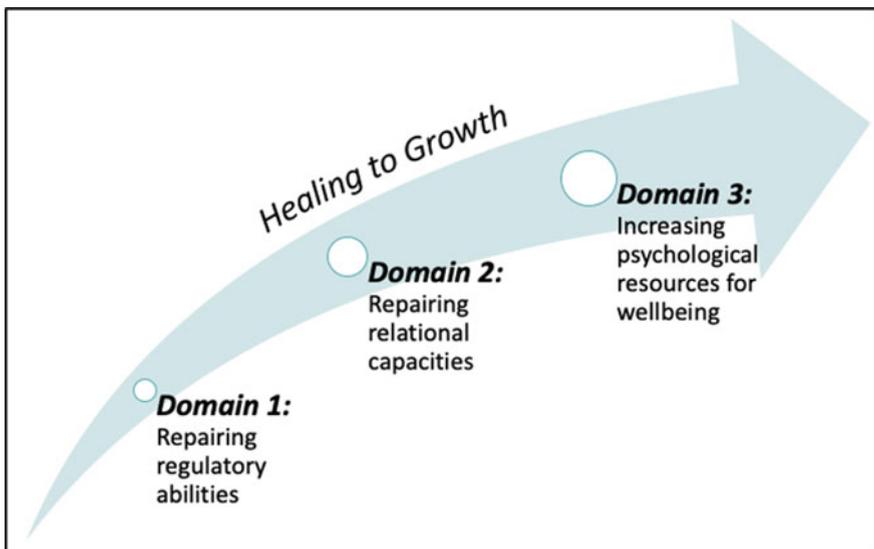


Fig. 8.1 Trauma-informed positive education: developmental teaching model

- Enable students to capitalise and savour small wins and academic successes (especially for students who have not experienced academic success before).
- Offer students multiple opportunities to identify and practice their character strengths including linking their use to successful pathways beyond formal education.

Importantly, many of these strategies require top-down, cortically modulated capacities. In other words, many of these wellbeing strategies require a well-regulated brain and body to sit in a classroom, learning something new (e.g., identifying one's self-talk patterns) and then apply that new learning within everyday contexts. If students lack these capacities, as typically occurs for students who have experienced trauma, these activities are less likely to have a positive impact. Concerned teachers have said, "I asked what [student] thought his strengths were, and he said he didn't have any. I need to address this, but he still won't participate when we discuss character strengths." To respond to these and other concerns, our model provides an alternative approach: Trauma-informed positive education (TIPE).

In our model, teachers are first introduced to *bottom-up priorities* of focussing on increasing self-regulatory capacities (domain 1), including physical and emotional regulation, and focussing on increasing relational capacity (domain 2), before they deliberately focused on a focus on *top-down priorities* of increasing psychological resources for wellbeing (domain 3). Teachers found that when they worked through the three domains of TIPE, they found students to be ready to learn (resulting from self-regulatory strategies), connected in stronger relationships with their teachers (resulting from relational strategies used by the teacher), and thus, effectively learning wellbeing strategies coming forward from positive psychology interventions in the classroom (Brunzell et al., 2016a; Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019).

Our work in TIPE suggests that teachers can indeed understand these practice recommendations as developmentally informed and practically possible to shift the cultures of achievement within their classrooms (Brunzell et al., 2016b). Through an integrated bottom-up and top-down approach, teachers can begin to address the unmet needs of students in a variety of ways—and create cultures of healing *and* growth within the daily life of the classrooms.

## Getting Started with Incorporating TIPE into the Classroom

Central to incorporating TIPE into the classroom is the recognition that all students have needs for safety, predictability, and clear expectations within

classrooms. However, for teachers who are the first to explore these concepts in their own schools, the challenge can be daunting—especially once teachers realise that no student is managed by just one adult each day. One of the most effective ways to generate a whole-school shift in teacher practice is collective teacher efficacy (Eells, 2011), which refers to a shared belief that when working together, teachers can positively increase student outcomes. Collective teacher efficacy might be initiated by a single teacher incorporating TIPE strategies on their own with the aim of becoming a “lighthouse” of practice within their school. In this process, teachers can gain collective support of their coaches/mentors within the school, increase peer-teacher relationships through peer-observation, feedback and support, all with the aim of showing their school’s leadership a new direction for trauma-informed positive education within their school.

Regardless of whether a teacher is functioning on their own or as part of a collective group, we find that creating safety, routines, and clear expectations (domain 1), complemented by the intentional development of relational capacities (domain 2) and intentional positively oriented structures (domain 3) are beneficial for both teachers and students. Here are two examples of what this looks like in everyday practice through co-regulation and classroom routines.

**Co-regulation.** Arising from TIPE research is the dual employment of TIPE domain 1 (increasing regulatory abilities) and domain 2 (increasing relational capacity) together when teachers deliberately form *co-regulatory* relationships. Co-regulation can refer to a developmental way of nurturing classroom relationships (e.g., “As a teacher, I am trying to co-regulate [student] so, one day, he can self-regulate”). It also refers to an intentional way of approaching students when they feel heightened in the classrooms. For instance, instead of confrontationally talking down to students while standing over them or lecturing students in front of their peers on poor behavioural choices, teachers have feedback conversations with students privately, side-by-side, shoulder to shoulder to maintain the student’s self-concept and not embarrass them in front of their peers.

Teachers can more effectively co-regulate students when they themselves feel well-regulated in the face of everyday classroom stressors (Brunzell et al., 2016a). Before teachers experienced TIPE, teachers often reverted to their own escalation, yelling, and unhelpful lecturing when students resisted. Other times, teachers were too passive and afraid to address adverse student behaviour for fear of driving the students deeper into frustration. Beyond feeling their own sense of failure for not facilitating better student outcomes,

teachers reported that when mirroring their students' dysregulation, they were making classroom problems worse.

By practicing strategies of de-escalation (e.g., taking a breath, proactive help-seeking) teachers were modelling domain 1 (increasing self-regulatory abilities) while at the same time increasing these regulatory abilities in themselves. This first step promoted stronger relationships between students and teachers, because teachers both gained credibility as co-regulators while effectively relating to their students and showing them a new way to be in the classroom. Teachers then found their own classrooms primed for more relational interactions and easier to practice unconditional positive regard for students who challenged them, and eventually were able to implement more classroom routines to facilitate self-regulatory strength.

**Classroom routines.** Routines begin from the moment a student walks through the threshold of the school gates. While some teachers do not yet recognise the importance of intentional, positive student management from the moment the student enters the classroom, TIPE teachers learned that every opportunity to build classroom culture should be employed. The following routines have been adapted to suit many teachers' practice and the community contexts of their schools.

The class-period might begin with some kind of welcoming routine to reset students from the hour before or the prior class. A *circle* routine has been effective to build self-regulatory capacity and relational cohesion in classrooms (Brunzell et al., 2015a). A circle represents both a metaphor for community and also serves as a teacher assessment for students' readiness to learn for the day. A circle routine can be adapted for all ages of students. For example, a circle routine might involve (Brunzell et al., 2015a):

- A handshake greeting to promote healthy touch, eye-contact, and the positive saying and hearing of one's name.
- A short 2-minute circle game (e.g., "pass the clapping rhythm") to positively prime the room to participate, connect, and generate positive emotions.
- A statement of classroom (or school) values to anchor the meaning and purpose of coming together to learn.
- A quick reminder of positive behaviour expectations during the day's lesson.
- Any positive announcements such as birthdays or special student celebrations.

- Concluding with a What Went Well prompt to give students an opportunity to self-reflect and share what has already gone well in the circle routine.

Once this circle routine concludes, students then are prompted into the next academic lesson. Lessons provide the greatest benefits when they have the dual purpose of having a learning aim and a TIPE aim to help students meet their own needs when faced with learning new content and the potential escalation of the stress response if pushed beyond their own window of tolerance (Corrigan, Fisher, & Nutt, 2011). For instance,

- The lesson might begin with a de-escalation activity before the introduction of new content (e.g. mindful breathing or another transition activity such as a “do-now” challenge problem on the board to get started).
- The lesson might next have a “hook” to interest students through positive emotion, a character strength that they can use to complete the lesson, or clear connection as to why the learning intention relates to students.
- Focus might be given to stamina—strategies to help students stay with challenging tasks and strategies to address their own mindsets when learning something new (e.g., identifying mind-hooks in one’s self-talk, activating a growth mindset, recognising when heated emotions arise when faced with learning uncertainty).
- Giving students regular opportunities to have *brain-breaks*, which are short, lesson interruptions to renew focus on learning; brain-breaks can include physical movement such as rhythm or clapping games, and they can include mindfulness and sensory tools to integrate somatosensory inputs.
- A focus on character strengths for students who must have daily exposure to the language and practice of character strengths by highlighting both character strengths within the curriculum (e.g., “Let’s explore how the two characters in the novel are clashing due to their overuse of their strengths”) and to direct student feedback (e.g., “You are really using your strength of courage today to face this challenging chemistry problem”).

Studies suggest that teachers who are effectively holding the rhythm and routines of TIPE practice are effectively nurturing classroom cultures for their trauma-affected students (Brunzell et al., 2015a; Brunzell et al., 2016a). Students come to rely and expect these routines every day, which can eventually lead to their ownership of the learning and setting higher expectations for themselves in the classroom. By passing responsibility back to the students for

shared empowerment within classrooms, students can hold teachers accountable to TIPE structures, particularly when students lead the morning circle, create their own brain-breaks, and begin to recognise their own character strengths throughout the school day.

## Trauma-Informed Positive Education Changes Us

Within positive education, Norrish and colleagues (2013, p. 150) issued a call for teachers to “live it, teach it, embed it”. This special focus on *living it* emphasised the importance of deeply reflecting upon and integrating the learning of wellbeing research in our own lives as educators and/or practitioner researchers. To understand wellbeing is to manifest a daily practice of personal wellbeing. While positive education helps teachers and their own wellbeing (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014), it may be an imperative for trauma-affected students to have living models of wellbeing teaching, coaching, and mentoring them each day.

When it comes to trauma-aware practice in schools, the positive education dictum of *living it* takes on special importance. Some students already have a highly honed radar for authenticity—in that, they can immediately tell which adults want to be teaching, which adults are truly interested in the content they are teaching, and which adults actually want struggling students in their classroom. Students are quick to see what may trigger escalation in a teacher; and conversely, they can be quick to see which teachers maintain their own unconditional positive regard towards their students in the face of daily stressors. Modelling patient and safe adulthood is what trauma-affected students must witness each day. It may be that if educators working in trauma-affected communities do not take it upon themselves to *live* TIPE practice, they may be on a devastating pathway to professional burnout.

Left unmitigated, the impacts on trauma’s secondary harmful effects, including vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue, leads to about 25% of teachers leaving the profession within a professional that already has 50% workplace turnover (Betoret, 2009; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Pines, 2002). This startling upheaval to the teaching workforce, particularly in trauma-affected schools in communities of systemic disadvantage, requires approaches beyond mitigating burnout. Prior positive psychology interventions have attempted to address teacher wellbeing (see for example Chan, 2013; Siu, Cooper, & Phillips, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015); however, these attempts were not purposely designed to assist teachers to understand the effects of secondary traumatic stressors alongside what teachers can do (1) to effectively teach trauma-affected students and (2)

to increase their own workplace wellbeing within trauma-affected school communities.

Trauma-informed positive education may be able to assist both of these concerns. TIPE can be employed as a path of refinement for our teaching, our professional and our own personal journeys. The teachers in the research reflected that they indeed felt like the professionals they strived to be when they could de-escalate in times in moments of student resistance, when they could maintain healthy bonds of attachment to students when relationships were ruptured, and when they could reframe struggling students as students overusing their strengths (Brunzell et al., 2019). Once teachers became trauma-aware, they stopped asking, “What is *wrong* with this student?” to “What is *right* with this student—and how can we replicate the enabling conditions for success?”.

## Future Directions

TIPE is a relatively new model, and while results are promising, trauma-aware approaches to positive education require future investigation. As an emergent practice model, the developmental claims of the three TIPE domains, the interactions between the domains, and TIPE’s applicability to different cultural and community contexts have not been tested. Future research should endeavour to focus on culturally responsive practice to address Aboriginal and First Nations communities (in the Australian context and around the world), dual-culture/dual-language communities and other contexts where institutional/historical trauma has intergenerationally impacted community systems. For instance, in the work of the Berry Street Education Model (Brunzell et al., 2015a), we are working with Aboriginal childcare agencies to co-create a new model of trauma-informed positive education practice that is culturally informed, culturally respectful, and safe for all members in the community.

Parents and carers should be involved in these efforts, and work is needed on how to best incorporate parent voice, experiences, and aims for their own children within schools. Beyond establishing a shared home-school language to support children and young people, the field should strive to understand how parents and carers can form stronger communication with classroom teachers to adapt successful strategies that students employ in the classroom to their homes, sports fields, clubs, and beyond. The voices and experiences of parents and carers may strengthen the implementation of TIPE in school

communities by providing shared understandings and fortifying a shared purpose when addressing the developmental needs of students.

Pre-service teachers and teacher training would benefit from incorporating the research, learnings, and practical experience of TIPE to better prepare future teachers to face the changing nature of communities. In our investigation, teachers new to the profession voiced disappointment that they had not spent any quality time in their teacher preparation programs considering the effects of trauma on learning nor intervention pathways through wellbeing classroom interventions (Brunzell et al., 2016a). These teachers found themselves resorting to ad hoc solutions or worse, knew that their own escalation was making things far worse for their students. Once these teachers learned the science integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches to student engagement, they found their work to be more possible, rewarding, and wanted to share their practice with others.

## Conclusions

Students who struggle from systemic concerns of relational trauma from abuse and/or neglect require schools who understand that their mandate to care for students encompasses far more than the national academic curriculum agenda. A positive education that is trauma-aware makes it possible for teachers to effectively reach and teach the students who need wellbeing strategies the most. Trauma-informed positive education is one way that schools and school systems can approach the dual aims of healing and growth in the classroom—alongside the dual aims of student and teacher wellbeing in the classroom.

TIPE is a call for those of us who aspire to the values of positive education to look beneath the surface of what our students are saying and doing in order to employ positive education itself to help meet unmet learning needs within the classroom. TIPE can bolster teachers to stay the course with positive education—and can provide hopeful encouragement to refine and creatively grow pedagogical practice so that *all* students benefit.

## References

- Berger, E. (2019). Multi-tiered approaches to trauma-informed care in schools: A systematic review. *School Mental Health, 11*, 650–664. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-019-09326-0>.

- Betoret, F. D. (2009). Self-efficacy, school resources, job stressors and burnout among Spanish primary and secondary school teachers: A structural equation approach. *Educational Psychology, 29*(1), 45–68.
- Bloom, S. L. (1995). Creating sanctuary in the school. *Journal for a just and Caring Education, 1*(4), 403–433.
- Brunzell, T., Norrish, J., Ralston, S., Abbott, L., Witter, M., Joyce, T., & Larkin, J. (2015a). *Berry Street Education Model: Curriculum and classroom strategies*. Melbourne, VIC: Berry Street Victoria. <https://www.childhoodinstitute.org.au/EducationModel>.
- Brunzell, T., Waters, L., & Stokes, H. (2015b). Teaching with strengths in trauma-affected students: A new approach to healing and growth in the classroom. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 85*(1), 3–9.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016a). Trauma-informed flexible learning: Classrooms that strengthen regulatory abilities. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies, 7*(2), 218–239. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs72201615719>.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016b). Trauma-Informed Positive Education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students. *Contemporary School Psychology, 20*, 63–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-015-0070-x>.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2018). Why do you work with struggling students? Teacher perceptions of meaningful work in trauma-impacted classrooms. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(2), 116–142.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). Shifting Teacher practice in trauma-affected classrooms: Practice Pedagogy strategies within a trauma-informed positive education model. *School Mental Health, 11*, 600–614. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-09308-8>.
- Chan, D. W. (2013). Counting blessing versus misfortunes: Positive interventions and subjective wellbeing of Chinese school teachers in Hong Kong. *Educational Psychology, 33*(4), 504–519.
- Cole, S., Greenwald, J., Gadd, M. G., Ristuccia, J., Wallace, D. L., & Gregory, M. (2005). *Helping traumatized children learn: Supporting school environments for children traumatized by family violence*. Boston: Massachusetts Advocates for Children.
- Corrigan, F. M., Fisher, J. J., & Nutt, D. J. (2011). Autonomic dysregulation and the window of tolerance model of the effects of complex emotional trauma. *Journal of Psychopharmacology, 25*(1), 17–25.
- de Arellano, M. A., Ko, S. J., Danielson, C. K., & Sprague, C. M. (2008). *Trauma-informed interventions: Clinical and research evidence and culture-specific information project*. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved from <https://www.nctsn.org/nctcs/asset.do?id=1392>.
- Downey, L. (2007). *Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatized children*. Melbourne: State of Victoria, Child Safety Commissioner.

- Eells, R. J. (2011). *Meta-analysis of the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement* (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University). [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/133](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/133).
- Eun, B. (2019). The zone of proximal development as an overarching concept: A framework for synthesizing Vygotsky's theories. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 51*(1), 18–30.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. *Psychological Science, 13*, 172–175.
- Hakanen, J. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2006). Burnout and work engagement among teachers. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(6), 495–513.
- Howard, J. A. (2019). A systemic framework for trauma-informed schooling: Complex but necessary! *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 28*(5), 545–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2018.1479323>.
- Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2014). Assessing employee wellbeing in schools using a multifaceted approach: Associations with physical health, life satisfaction, and professional thriving. *Psychology, 5*, 500–513. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2014.56060>.
- Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(3), 262–271.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 43*(2), 207–222.
- Ko, S. J., Ford, J. D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S. J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., Brymer, M. J., & Layne, C. M. (2008). Creating trauma-informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, health care, juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology, 39*(4), 396–404.
- Kokkinos, C. M. (2007). Job stressors, personality and burnout in primary school teachers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*(1), 229–243.
- Magyar-Moe, J. L. (2009). *Therapist's guide to positive psychological interventions*. Burlington: Academic Press.
- Murphy, J., Catmur, C., & Bird, G. (2018). Alexithymia is associated with a multidomain, multidimensional failure of interoception: Evidence from novel tests. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 147*(3), 398–408.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2014). *Facts and figures, rates of exposure to traumatic events*. Retrieved from <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/facts-and-figures>.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 3*(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2>.
- Perry, B. D. (2006). Applying principles of neurodevelopment to clinical work with maltreated and traumatized children: The neurosequential model of therapeutics. In N. Boyd Webb (Eds.), *Working with traumatized youth in child welfare*. New York: The Guildford Press.

- Pines, A. M. (2002). Teacher burnout: A psychodynamic existential perspective. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(2), 121–140.
- Schore, J. R., & Schore, A. N. (2008). Modern attachment theory: The central role of affect regulation in development and treatment. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 36, 9–20.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35, 293–311.
- Siu, O. L., Cooper, C. L., & Phillips, D. R. (2014). Intervention studies on enhancing work wellbeing, reducing burnout, and improving recovery experiences among Hong Kong care workers and teachers. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 21(1), 69–84.
- Stokes, H., & Turnbull, M. (2011). *The Berry Street Education Model*. Melbourne, VIC: Author. Retrieved from [www.berrystreet.org.au/Assets/245/1/BerryStreetModel2.pdf](http://www.berrystreet.org.au/Assets/245/1/BerryStreetModel2.pdf).
- Taylor, C., Harrison, J., Haimovitz, K., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Roserer, R. W. (2015). Examining ways that a mindfulness-based intervention reduces stress in public school teachers: A mixed-methods study. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 115–129.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2003). The neurobiology of childhood trauma and abuse. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics North America*, 12, 293–317. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1056-4993\(09\)00003-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1056-4993(09)00003-8).
- van der Kolk, B. A., & McFarlane, A. (1996). *Traumatic stress: The effects of overwhelming experience on mind, body and society*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1375/aedp.28.2.75>.
- White, M. A., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.
- Wolpow, R., Johnson, M., Hertel, R., & Kincaid, S. (2009). *The heart of learning and teaching: Compassion, resiliency, and academic success*. Olympia: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Compassionate Schools.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 9

## Self-Determination in Positive Education

Michael L. Wehmeyer, Sung Hyeon Cheon, Youngsun Lee,  
and Matthew Silver

In 2004, pollsters with the Gallup Youth Survey asked U.S. teenagers to select the words that “best described how you usually felt at school”. Options included *challenged*, *interested*, *encouraged*, *excited*, *supported*, *appreciated*, and *happy*. What were the top two words they selected? *Bored* (selected by half of these teenagers) and *tired* (selected by 42%). Only 31% of these teens said they were happy or challenged, 22% said they were interested, and a mere 16% said that they were encouraged or excited. Unfortunately, over a decade later, little has changed. The cover story of a 2017 Harvard Graduate School of Education Magazine entitled *Bored Out of Their Minds* discussed a series of German studies over the past decade showing that student boredom was rampant, and it was related to lower test scores, which in turn, increased boredom (Jason, 2017). Boredom has been linked to helplessness and depression, anxiety, impulsiveness, and loneliness (Center on Addiction, 2003).

---

M. L. Wehmeyer (✉)  
University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA  
e-mail: [wehmeyer@ku.edu](mailto:wehmeyer@ku.edu)

S. H. Cheon  
Korea University, Seoul, South Korea

Y. Lee  
Ewha University, Incheon, South Korea

M. Silver  
University College London, London, UK

Why is education failing so many young people? We suggest that this is due in part to the ongoing paradigms of pedagogy grounded in teacher-driven instruction, undermining the self-determined motivations and energies of young learners. This chapter examines the primary theoretical frameworks that have driven educational interventions focused on self-determination and overviews several interventions derived from these theories.

## From Teacher-Directed Pedagogy to Self-Determined Learning

Most people, and certainly almost all educators, are familiar with the word *pedagogy*. Pedagogy, they would probably say, refers to the practice of teaching—the methods that are used by teachers to promote learning in their students. A pedagogue is an educator, or as we interpret it today, someone who educates children. The word pedagogy comes from the Greek words *pais* (παῖς), meaning child, son, or daughter, and *ágō* (ἄγω), meaning leader. Together they form *paidagōgia* (παιδαγωγία), or, as it came to mean in ancient Greece, the office of a child's tutor. From the Greek root words, a pedagogue is a person who *leads* children. It is unidirectional: educators teaching students.

Teacher-directed learning continues to dominate many educational practices today. Consider the typical vocabulary for what happens in schools. Synonyms for *educate* include train, instruct, lecture, discipline, drill, direct, tutor, and edify. Even the less authoritative synonyms—coach, develop, enlighten, foster—imply that it is the adult who does something to the child. Pedagogy refers, essentially, to teacher-directed instruction. Yet the high levels of student boredom and disengagement with learning suggest a mismatch of pedagogy with student interests and needs. There is a need to go beyond teacher-directed pedagogy to more autonomous forms of learning.

## Andragogy

We know how to do this better with adults. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, the field of adult education stressed the importance of *andragogy* rather than pedagogy in adult learning. There are obvious etymological similarities to these words, with the familiar *ágō* (ἄγω) meaning leader. The Greek ἀνδρ (andr-) means man, so andragogy derives from the now gender-insensitive notion of leading or teaching man. In implementation, however, andragogy, or as it came to be referred to, *self-directed learning*, reflects the importance

of self-direction, rather than teacher-direction, in adult education. Psychologist Malcolm Knowles, who originated the term andragogy, observed that “individuals who take the initiative in learning, learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers possibly waiting to be taught” (Knowles, 1975, p. 14).

Self-direction in learning presumes that learners are driven by a sense of curiosity, that experiences are resources that should be exploited to maximize learning, and that learners who are motivated internally will learn more effectively. Adult education theorists have expanded the ideas associated with andragogy, dividing self-direction in learning into two dimensions. The first, *self-directed learning*, refers to the process in which the learner engages to plan, implement, and evaluate learning. The second dimension, *learner self-direction*, focuses on the “learner’s desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2012, p. 24). Responsibility refers to the notion of learner autonomy, rather than to an obligation or requirement to adhere to some rule. Responsibility as autonomy means that:

One can and does set one’s own rules, and can choose for oneself the norms one will respect. In other words, autonomy refers to one’s ability to choose what has value, that is to say, to make choices in harmony with self-realization .... to be free from all exterior regulations and constraints. (Chene, 1983, p. 39)

Personal autonomy as used in learner self-direction refers to “a broad disposition toward thinking and acting autonomously in all situations” (Candy, 1992, p. 101). Candy lists the qualifications for an autonomous person as someone who (p. 125):

- Conceives of goals and plans,
- Exercises freedom of choice,
- Uses the capacity for rational reflection,
- Has will power to follow through,
- Exercises self-restraint and self-discipline, and
- Views himself or herself as autonomous.

These characteristics are important for students as well as adults if they are to become more self-directed learners. The lesson from adult education and the ideas forwarded through andragogy is that learning has to be situated in learner autonomy and choice.

## Heutagogy

Just as changing educational contexts and demands require a shift to positive education and personalized learning today, the demands of online learning, the introduction of new technologies, and the need for greater self-direction have resulted in the need for another step in self-direction in adult learning. Blaschke (2012) observed that:

Pedagogical, even andragogical, educational methods are no longer fully sufficient in preparing learners for thriving in the workplace, and a more self-directed and self-determined approach is needed, one in which the learner reflects upon what is learned and how it is learned and in which educators teach learners how to teach themselves. (p. 57)

That next step in a more self-directed learning approach is referred to by the term *heutagogy*, from the Greek εὕρημα, which means discovered. Heutagogy suggests that importance of discovered learning, or, more commonly, *self-determined learning*. Blaschke (2012) notes that “in a heutagogical approach to teaching and learning, learners are highly autonomous and self-determined and emphasis is placed on development of learner capacity and capability with the goal of producing learners who are well-prepared for the complexities of today’s workplace” (p. 56).

Self-determined learning incorporates practices in self-directed learning, but the instructor “fully relinquishes ownership of the learning path and process to the learner, who negotiates learning and determines what will be learned and how it will be learned” (p. 59). While much of the research on self-determined learning has occurred in adult education, we suggest that it is both relevant for and at times already is used in child and adolescent education. Specifically, in early, primary, and secondary education, a focus on self-determined learning has emerged from research and practice focused on issues pertaining to motivation and self-determination.

## Self-Determination in Positive Psychology

There are two theoretical frameworks pertaining to self-determination that have driven most of the research and intervention development in the application of self-determination to the educational context and self-determined learning: *Self-Determination Theory* and *Causal Agent Theory*.

## Self-Determination Theory

Far and away the most visible framework of the self-determination construct arising from psychology is *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT), formulated by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. Readers of this text will likely be familiar with SDT and due to the voluminous amount of research on SDT, this chapter will provide only a cursory overview (cf. Ryan & Deci, 2017 for a detailed review). SDT is “an empirically based, organismic theory of human behaviour and personality development” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 3). SDT is comprised of six sub-theories (i.e., basic psychological needs theory, causal orientations theory, goal contents theory, organismic integration theory, relational motivation theory, cognitive evaluation theory), providing a “comprehensive macro-theory that details the origins and outcomes of human agentic action” (Adams, Little, & Ryan, 2017, p. 47).

At its core, SDT is a theory of motivation focused on identifying social conditions that facilitate or hinder human flourishing and to identify “factors, both intrinsic to individual development and within social contexts, that facilitate vitality, motivation, social integration, and wellbeing” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 3). The theory attempts to explain how biological, social, and cultural conditions either enhance or undermine the inherent human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

SDT presumes that “humans are active organisms, motivated to assimilate and integrate knowledge and capacities in both their physical and social environments” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 47). SDT proposes three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness; the fulfilment of which leads to autonomous (i.e., acting with a sense of full endorsement and volition) versus controlled (i.e., acting on the basis of a desire for external rewards or fear of punishment) motivation, optimal growth, and positive developmental outcomes. Autonomous actions are those that are self-endorsed, and congruent with one’s values and interests (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010). The need for autonomy is met when a person experiences choice and acts volitionally and, consequently, sees themselves as the origin of their actions. Competence refers to a person’s need to perceive oneself as effective within environments (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). It does not refer to skills or skill levels; the need for competence is met when one perceives oneself as being competent and mastering activities and tasks (Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013). The need for relatedness is met when people feel connected with other people, when they feel a sense of social belonging, and when they feel that they care for others and are cared for by others (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Unlike most motivation theories, SDT differentiates motivation into autonomous and controlled types, with types of motivation on a continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic: amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation, and intrinsic motivation. External regulation refers to actions that are extrinsically motivated and have strictly an external perceived locus of causality. Introjected regulation refers to actions performed due to self-administered rewards or punishments. Identified regulation refers to actions that align with personally valued goals, but still might be externally regulated. That is, the locus of causality remains external, but the alignment with personally valued goals make such actions more autonomous and self-determined. Integrated regulation refers to actions in which the person has internalized the values of the task as consistent with his or her own intrinsically motivated actions. And intrinsic regulation is internally motivated action, arising from one's own values and interests. Satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs mentioned previously is a foundational concept to SDT and considered essential for maintaining intrinsic motivation and the self-regulation of extrinsic motivations. SDT posits that autonomy-supportive social contexts enhance intrinsic motivation, while controlling social environments, often characterized by external rewards, thwart or reduce intrinsic motivation and action compelled by such motivation.

SDT has been applied across a broad range of domains (cf. Ryan & Deci, 2017), including education, some of which will be reviewed subsequently that suggest that it is critical that classroom environments support competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Frederic, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). This research has shown that autonomous motivation is linked to the student's engagement in academic tasks and their academic achievement. Establishing autonomy-supportive classrooms (see below for further discussion), involves creating learning spaces that maximize student involvement and self-determined learning and minimize teacher-controlled actions. Autonomy-supportive teachers spend more time listening to their students, as well as giving them time to work through problems and discover solutions. In these classrooms, students have meaningful roles in setting expectations, feel safe to explore and take risks, are supported to solve problems, set personal goals, and are responsible for monitoring and evaluating their progress.

In many ways, competence- and relatedness-supportive teaching and classrooms are built upon the foundation of autonomy supports and, indeed, most of the research on SDT in educational contexts has been in relation to autonomy-supportive teaching and classrooms. Ryan and Deci (2017)

explained that it is “not that the need for autonomy is in any way more important than the needs for relatedness or competence” but that “in most settings having support for autonomy as a contextual factor plays a critical role in allowing individuals to actively satisfy all of their needs” (p. 247). Students obviously need to feel competent within school environments and contexts. One element of providing competency supports in classrooms is to ensure that students have an optimal challenge in relation to learning goals. That is, the content or task is difficult enough to challenge the student, but not so difficult as to thwart success. Also, performance versus mastery goals differently impact perceived competence. Mastery goals are goals that one volitionally adopts to improve one’s knowledge, skills, or abilities. Performance goals are goals that tend to be comparative, looking at one’s performance in contrast or compared with others’ performance (or some form of a standard). Mastery goals have been shown to improve both academic performance and enhance wellbeing (Wehmeyer & Zhao, 2020).

Relatedness-supportive teaching simply involves efforts that facilitate student feelings of connection and relatedness. Importantly, “relatedness is deeply associated with a student feeling that the teacher genuinely likes, respects, and values him or her” (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 139). That is one of the benefits of autonomy-supportive teaching: when students perceive that teachers are autonomy-supportive, they are more likely to also believe that they are cared for and cared about. Further, relatedness supports involve more than creating a caring relationship between a student and a teacher: relationships among students matter as well.

## Causal Agency Theory

A second theoretical framework that has driven work in promoting and explaining the development of self-determination is *Causal Agency Theory*, which arose from the work of Richard DeCharms on intrinsic motivation. DeCharms (1968) noted that:

Man’s primary motivational propensity is to be effective in producing changes in his environment. Man strives to be a causal agent, to be the primary locus of causation for, or the origin of, his behavior; he strives for personal causation. (p. 269)

In the early 1990s, efforts in the field of special education to improve life outcomes for young people with disabilities turned a focus to issues of self-determination, drawing from research in SDT and DeCharms’ notion of

causal agency (Wehmeyer, 1992; Wehmeyer, Kelchner, & Richards, 1996). These efforts sought to develop interventions and supports that enabled young people to become causal agents in their lives. One of the outcomes of these efforts was Causal Agency Theory (Wehmeyer, 2004; Wehmeyer & Mithaug, 2006), which in recent years was updated to incorporate the expanding research in SDT and positive psychology (Shogren et al., 2015). Being a causal agent in one's life implies that one makes or causes things to happen in their life. Acting in a self-determined manner, thus, indicates that people make or cause things to happen in their own lives, rather than someone or something else making them act in specific ways. Self-determined action is goal oriented, driven by preferences and interests, and ultimately serves to enable people to enhance the quality of their lives (Shogren et al., 2015).

Causal Agency Theory was proposed to facilitate an understanding of the development of self-determination and, thus, drive educational interventions to promote self-determination and self-determined learning. The theory defined self-determination as:

A dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one's life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life. (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258)

As is the case with SDT, Causal Agency Theory is situated within human agentic theories that state that action is self-caused, and that people have an underlying desire to be the origin of their own behaviour. The theory proposes three essential characteristics of self-determined action—volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs—that enable people to act as a causal agent in their lives, the performance thereof which leads to the development of self-determination. *Volitional action* refers to self-initiated actions that enable a person to act autonomously and to engage in self-governed action. Such actions refer to the means by which something is done or achieved; they are self-directed and goal focused. When they act agentically, self-determined people identify pathways that lead to specific ends or cause or create change. The identification of pathways, or pathways thinking, is a proactive, purposive process. *Agentic action* involves self-regulated and self-directed action that enables a person to progress towards freely chosen goals. Agentic actions involve actions that enable people to sustain action towards a goal. *Action control beliefs* refer to acting based upon the beliefs that one has what it takes to achieve freely chosen goals. People who have such beliefs see a link between their actions and the outcomes they desire.

To account for these beliefs and actions, Causal Agency Theory incorporates basic tenets of Action-Control Theory (Little, Hawley, Henrich, & Marsland, 2002), which posits three general beliefs associated with the causal action sequence:

control expectancy [beliefs], which refers to the relation between agent and ends, meaning that individual's expectancy about their capability to achieve a given goal or end; means-ends beliefs, which represent the relation between means and ends; and agency beliefs, [which] refer to an individual's beliefs of what means they are capable of utilizing when the self acts as an agent. (Chang, Adams, & Little, 2017, p. 285)

That is, people who are self-determined believe that they have the means (skills, knowledge, abilities) to set and achieve a goal and that if they attempt to do so, they will be successful.

## The Development of Self-Determination

Wehmeyer and colleagues (2017) proposed that self-determination develops as an adaptive outcome of a person's response to threats to and opportunities for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in one's environment. These threats and opportunities energize a causal action sequence that involves volitional and agentic action, as framed by Causal Agency Theory, as a means for a person to remain autonomous, competent, and maintain meaningful relationships, as emphasized by SDT. These volitional and agentic action responses are mediated by action-control beliefs (Mumbardó-Adam, Guàrdia-Olmos, & Giné, 2018). So, from early in childhood onward, humans are motivated to act volitionally and utilize a causal action sequence involving volitional and agentic action mediated by action-control beliefs that enables them to act as a causal agent in their lives. Repeated experiences of causal agency, in turn, enable a person to meet basic psychological needs for, particularly, autonomy and competence, and result in enhanced self-determination.

Young people who have repeated experiences of acting as the causal agent in their lives become self-determined young people. Such experiences usually involve addressing small, day-to-day problems. So, for example, a young person may want to take a course in an area about which they are passionate about but may seem frivolous to their parents. It is through the process of negotiating with their parents to satisfy their desire to take the course and to address the parents' concern about the utility of the course that the young person can implement actions that enable them to act more autonomously,

learn and practice skills that promote causal agency, and, over time, become more self-determined.

Describing a course for the development of self-determination is important so as to understand how to promote self-determination across the life course. It is through these types of experiences that young people become self-determined and it is important that teachers provide opportunities that enable young people to meet their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and to provide opportunities for young people to learn the skills and actions that enable them to act as causal agents in their lives. The next section examines interventions to promote autonomy and self-determination.

## Creating Autonomy-Supportive Classrooms

Johnmarshall Reeve and colleagues (Reeve, 2002, 2012; Reeve & Cheon, 2014; Reeve, Ryan, & Deci, 2018) have identified a variety of factors that might lead to and result from autonomy supportive classrooms and teaching. This research has studied teacher-student interactions that promote the intrinsic motivation of students and, in turn, has led to the development of interventions to promote autonomy-supportive approaches to teaching. Reeve (2002) summarized research exploring the practices of autonomy-supportive teachers and determined that they avoided being directive, praised mastery, avoided criticizing students, provided prompts rather than giving answers directly, responded reliably to student-generated questions, and communicated with the perspective of the student in mind. Reeve summarized this literature by categorizing autonomy-supportive teachers as being responsive, flexible, and motivating by generating interest, whereas controlling teachers tended to emphasize being in charge, shaping students towards specific answers, emphasizing non-standardized evaluation, and motivating through pressure. Importantly, this literature suggests that autonomy-supportive classrooms are communities in which students take meaningful roles in setting classroom rules, feel safe to explore and take risks, engage in problem-solving activities, set personal goals, and take responsibility for monitoring their own progress towards those goals.

Chang, Fukuda, Durham, and Little (2017) further identified important characteristics of autonomy-supportive teachers:

- Communicate frequently to clarify expectations and acknowledge students' feelings and to ensure that students know what is expected of them and do not have to depend upon the teacher to direct learning.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to choose from, considering the relevance of activities to students' interests and values
- Do not rely on controlling events and experiences, such as competitions or evaluations.
- Encourage and support students to participate actively, rather than being passive observers/absorbers.
- Emphasize student self-direction and active involvement in generating, delivering, and consuming information and content.
- Provide informational feedback that is constructive but positive.
- Provide structured guidance that clearly states expectations and the student's role in meeting those expectations and supports students to plan for learning and action.

When teachers are autonomy-supportive, they can adopt students' perspective and provide them with choices, display patience for students' self-paced learning, communicate with a tone of understanding, provide meaningful rationales for requests, accept and acknowledge students' negative feelings, and use informational or invitational language (Reeve & Cheon, 2020). Autonomy-supportive classrooms are learning environments in which students are motivated to act and engage in self-determined learning (Chang, Fukuda, Durham, and Little, 2017; Reeve, 2002).

In contrast, when the classroom structure is developed in a controlling manner, students' motivation and engagement can be undermined (Cheon, Reeve, & Song, 2019; Cheon, Reeve, & Vansteenkiste, 2020; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Mouratidis, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2010). And yet too often, the structure that teachers provide in classrooms is delivered in a more controlling manner. This is due in part to the general structure of schools (e.g., classroom goals, school-wide rules, statements of expectations, adherence to standardized testing), which are often controlling in nature, and impact upon how both teachers and students see their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. While these structures are well-intentioned, it can lead teachers (often unconsciously) to configure their classrooms in ways that are more controlling. For instance, teachers might develop rules with *contingent/tangible rewards* or *punishment*, expectations with *conditional rewards*, and classroom goals, guidance, or corrective feedback with *teacher-prescribed ways*. While these structures might meet the needs of the teachers to present

information and lead the child, they can undermine student self-determined ways.

Notably, by structuring classrooms and practices in ways that are autonomy supportive, it can also support students' needs for competence and relatedness. For example, creating autonomy-supportive classrooms involves building learning spaces that emphasize student involvement and self-direction and minimize teacher-controlled actions, thus facilitating the promotion of student perceptions of competence. Autonomy-supportive teachers spend more time listening to their students, as well as giving them time to work through problems and discover solutions. Again, this has the added benefit of promoting student perceived competence and in establishing relationships based upon respect for student choice and voice that enhance student perceptions of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

There are clear benefits of autonomy-supportive environments, but how can teachers develop such environments and practices? There have been several programs and curricula developed based upon SDT and the research on autonomy-supportive teaching, including the Autonomy-Supportive Intervention Program (ASIP) and the Deeper Living Deeper Learning Curriculum.

## **Autonomy-Supportive Intervention Program**

Based upon the research on autonomy-supportive classrooms and teachers, Reeve, Cheon, and colleagues developed ASIP, a teacher-focused, workshop-centred intervention program that aims to upgrade the quality of teachers' motivating styles and to develop their professions (Cheon, 2010; Cheon & Lee, 2010; Cheon & Moon, 2010; Cheon, Reeve, Lee, & Lee, 2018; Cheon et al., 2019; Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012; Cheon, Reeve, & Song, 2016, 2019; Cheon et al., 2020; Reeve & Cheon, 2016; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004). The main purpose of the ASIP is to enable teachers to become more autonomy-supportive and less controlling in their approach to teaching.

The program is delivered in three parts. The first part involves a three-hour workshop-like experience. The session begins with a warm-up activity in which participants consider scenarios describing teachers who are either highly autonomy-supportive or highly controlling and reflect on which scenario might best illustrate their teaching style. Participants are then provided with a presentation on a SDT view of student motivation, teacher motivating styles (i.e., autonomy-supportive instructional behaviours and controlling instructional behaviours), and examples of autonomy-supportive

instruction, along with supporting evidence. The first part concludes with a group discussion in which participants brainstorm how they might be able to engage in autonomy-supportive teaching styles in the classroom.

The second part occurs about six weeks later and lasts about three hours. The session begins with a brief presentation reviewing the features of autonomy-supportive teaching. Next, in small groups, teachers share and discuss about the autonomy-supportive teaching practices that they had implemented during the time in between the two sessions, including identifying concerns, obstacles, and successes. Next, teachers learn the “how to” of skills and strategies needed in supportive teaching. Through practical cases and examples, modelling, scaffolding, guidance, and feedback about practices engaged, teachers learn ways to present learning activities in an autonomy-supportive manner that identify, nurture, and vitalize students’ inner motivational resources (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Teachers also learn how to be need-supportive towards their students in their particular teaching activities, such as providing explanatory and meaningful rationales for requests and by taking students’ perspectives.

In the third part, which is again about four to six weeks after the previous section, participants again engage in a group discussion, with this one focused exclusively on sharing ideas, practical experiences they have had since beginning the program, and further motivational strategies regarding ways to be autonomy-supportive in the instructional context and to develop classroom structures in an autonomy-supportive manner. For instance, this includes strategies for offering step-by-step guidance, providing new and corrective feedback, modelling, establishing classroom rules and expectations, reflecting on learning activities in students’ perspective, using informational and non-pressurizing tone of speech, and providing meaningful rationales. In group discussions, teachers not only talk about their classroom teaching experiences in *general* but also share and develop their *specific* activity-by-activity and situation-by-situation teaching experiences, such as how to utilize autonomy-supportive instructional strategies at both individual level, activity level (team games vs. individual games), and classroom level.

Cheon et al. (2018) found that the ASIP was effective not only in promoting student autonomy, but also in empowering teachers who implement these practices. They suggested that participation in ASIP “allows teachers to develop three empowering personal-professional resources—namely, greater psychological need satisfaction during teaching, efficacy, and the adoption of relatively more intrinsic (and less extrinsic) instructional goals” (p. 44). That is, teacher’s implementing autonomy-supportive practices improve their own positive need satisfaction, gain a sense of efficacy, and feel

more intrinsically motivated in the classroom and less controlled by external forces.

The ASIP research has consistently demonstrated three main effects. First, when teachers learned how to become autonomy supportive, students benefited from receiving autonomy support, compared to students in standard classrooms (Cheon & Reeve, 2015; Cheon et al., 2012). The ASIP effects are sustained as teachers became even more autonomy-supportive over time (Cheon & Reeve, 2013). Second, teachers involved in the ASIP reported greater job satisfaction as a teacher, greater passion to teach, greater subjective vitality, and less psychological ill-being from providing autonomy supports to their students, compared to teachers who were not part of the ASIP (Cheon et al., 2020; Cheon, Reeve, Yu, & Jang, 2014). Finally, teachers who received the ASIP upgraded their classroom motivating styles, becoming more need-supportive, less need-indifferent, and less need-thwartive, and developed their professional resources, reporting greater need satisfaction, greater teaching efficacy, and more reliance on intrinsic goals to teach (Cheon et al., 2018; Reeve & Cheon, 2016).

## The Deeper Living, Deeper Learning Curriculum

Beyond training teachers to develop their classrooms and teaching styles to be more autonomy-supportive, specific curricula have been developed that explicitly aim to promote self-determination. One such curriculum is the *Deeper Living, Deeper Learning Curriculum* (Silver, 2020). The framework for the curriculum intentionally links with an aligned autonomy leadership approach aimed to sustainably enhance Reeve's (2002) social nutrients and cultural conditions that enhance self-determination, while being mindful of the biological factors of individual learners. The curriculum was developed to increase five key components that theoretically underpin the approach drawn from positive psychology and SDT:

1. Autonomy,
2. Competence,
3. Relatedness,
4. Meaning, and
5. Mastery.

Building from these dimensions, rather than forcing specific prescribed content, the curriculum provides structural prompts. This gives teachers and learners the opportunity to autonomously plot their volitional action

and their individual and collective agentic actions that the curriculum structure and chosen qualifications ask of them, seeking to increase their self-determination over time (Chang, Adams, & Little, 2017; Shogren et al., 2015). As part of the curriculum, teachers work with students to support them to choose a project on which they will work on across the semester (for approximately 350 hours during the year), increasing their competence along the way. In so doing, teachers promote autonomy by providing choices and by allowing students to select subjects, projects, and qualifications that are meaningful to them and on which they can be successful in pursuing future pathways. Teachers promote students' competence with weekly reflections supporting this, as well as meta-cognition. There are also twice-a-term exhibition days to celebrate and share with the community's stakeholders. Students are enabled to set their own learning pace, to identify individualized goals that they would work towards, and the process emphasized creating community amongst learners and teachers as well as connecting students with their communities outside of the school context.

Having to design and negotiate this process together supports stakeholder autonomy and relatedness, while forming project group identity and ownership of the agentic action. Group collaboration is common, enhancing relatedness among learners, peers, and teachers, as each person invests trust into the relationships and which are enhanced by shared responsibility in decisions and actions (Brockett & Hiemstra, 2012). Raising learners' sense of self-accountability during decision making, guided by conversation about values, ego and moral maturity, steers learning behaviour to be mediated by action-control beliefs. Such responsibility is supported by the wellbeing components of the curriculum in that it enhances learners' ability to respond appropriately, through understanding communication, self-awareness, and self-regulation and their respective techniques (Chene, 1983). Purposeful increases to promote autonomy in target settings and sessions learners wished to attend impacted on engagement and outcomes.

The *Deeper Living, Deeper Learning Curriculum* has shown positive impact on student wellbeing, academic achievement, and destinations (Silver, 2020). Importantly, the curriculum has been implemented with students with disabilities, who are too often not addressed in positive education efforts. That, in turn, leads us to work in the field of special education to promote self-determined learning.

## Promoting Self-Determined Learning

The focus on autonomy-supportive classrooms and teaching driven by SDT has been primarily on the context in which students learn and the ways in which teachers interact with students. However, an important part of education involves students learning skills, knowledge, and abilities that enable them to be successful. To that end, efforts driven by Causal Agency Theory have been designed to teach skills related to causal agentic action and to promote student self-determination and self-determined learning. While various approaches have been developed, the most widely researched such intervention is the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* (SDLMI; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000).

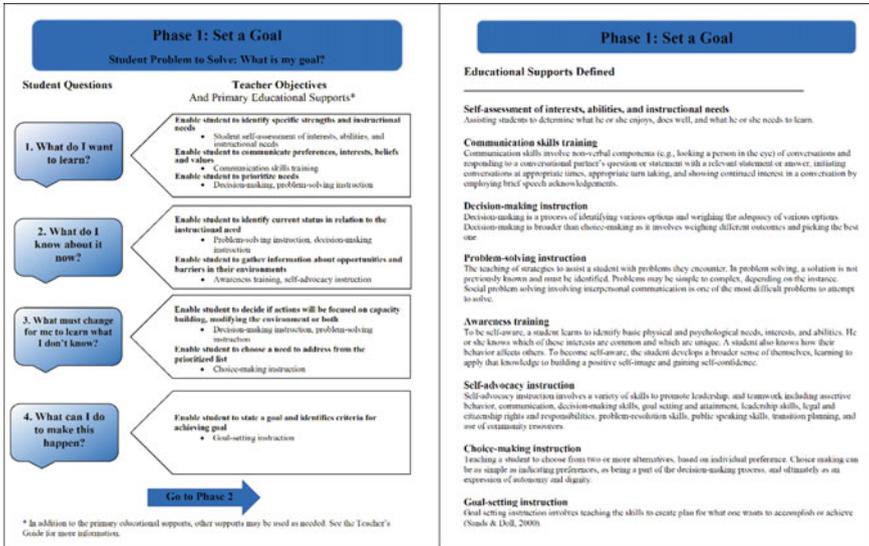
The SDLMI provides teachers with a model that enables them to teach students to teach themselves. The SDLMI arose from causal agency theory, aiming to provide a teaching model to support student self-determined learning (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Though developed initially with students with disabilities, the model has more recently been utilized with students with and without disabilities (Shogren, Wehmeyer, & Lane, 2016), and has been used to support instruction across age ranges. Implementation of the SDLMI consists of a three-phase instructional process that is illustrated in Figs. 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3.<sup>1</sup>

Each phase of the SDLMI presents a problem to be solved by the student, which the student does by answering a series of four student questions that they learn, modify to make their own, and apply to reach self-set goals. Each student question is linked to a set of teacher objectives, which in turn are linked to educational supports that can be used to teach or support students to answer the question and, thus, self-regulate problem-solving to set and attain goals. In each phase, as emphasized in Causal Agency Theory, the student is considered the causal agent for actions, including choice, decision making, and goal setting.

The student questions direct students through a problem-solving sequence, the solution to which leads to the problem in the next phase, and the problem-solving sequence is repeated. The problems to be solved are:

---

<sup>1</sup>A full description of the SDLMI process is beyond the scope of this chapter and is available in *The self-determined learning model of instruction teacher's guide* (Shogren, Raley, Burke, & Wehmeyer, 2019), available at <http://www.self-determination.org>. The description here is a shortened version from this source.



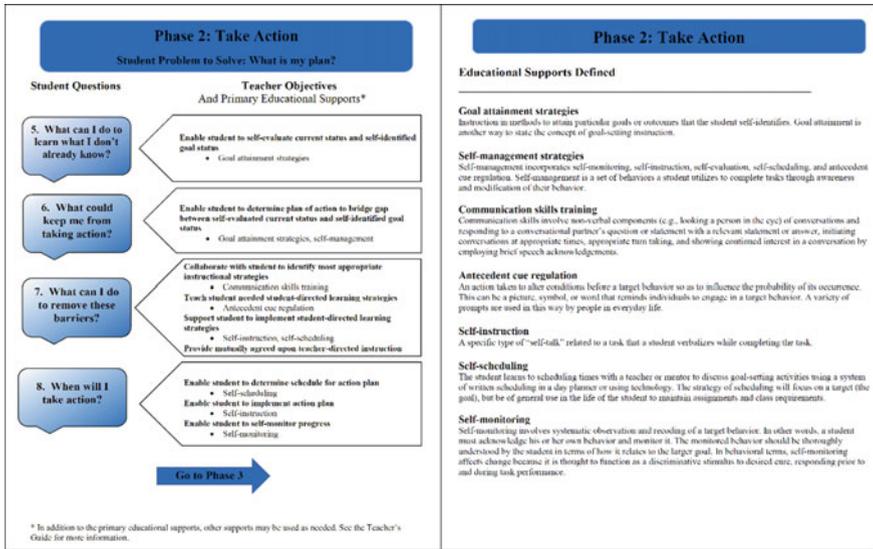
**Fig. 9.1** Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 1 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). *Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction*. <http://www-self-determination.org>, by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

- Phase 1-What is my Goal?
- Phase 2-What is my Plan?
- Phase 3-What have I Learned?

The four questions in each phase are worded differently to enable the student to solve the unique problem posed in each phase, but in each phase, the four questions represent identical steps in a problem-solving sequence:

- (1) identify the problem,
- (2) identify potential solutions to the problem,
- (3) identify barriers to solving the problem, and
- (4) identify consequences of each solution.

The SDLMI is an instructional model, and so it is designed for teachers to implement and, as such, the student questions are worded so that teachers understand the intent of the question. Thus, the first time a teacher uses the model with a student, the teacher can read each question with or (if necessary) to the student, talk about what the question means with the student, and,

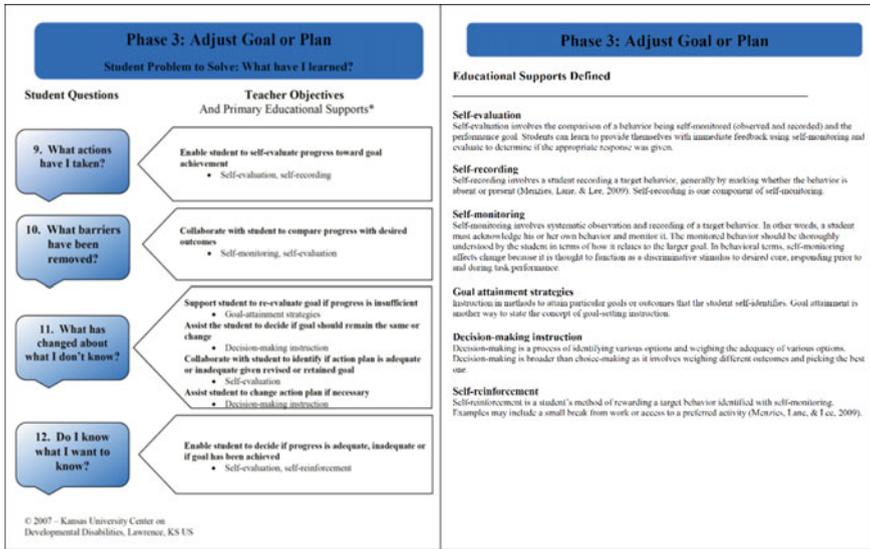


**Fig. 9.2** Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 2 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). *Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction*. <http://www-self-determination.org>, by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

if it is the student's preference, to reword the question so that student can understand the intent. By the time a teacher and student go through the model once, students will have a set of questions that are their own.

The teacher objectives provide specific information to teachers on what they need to support students to do when answering a question. The teacher objectives provide a road map for the teacher to enable students to solve the problem stated in the student question. For example, with the first student question (what do I want to learn?), the teacher objectives are to enable the student to identify his/her specific strengths and instructional needs related to the content area, identify and communicate his/her preferences, interests, beliefs, and values about the content area and its link to adult outcomes, and prioritize his/her instructional needs.

Each teacher objective is linked to at least one educational support. So, for example, the final question in the first phase prompts students to set an educational goal. If they have not had prior experience with goal setting, they will need instruction to do so, and as such, goal setting and attainment instruction is an educational support associated with that question.



**Fig. 9.3** Self-determined learning model of instruction Phase 3 (Original image published in Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). *Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction*. <http://www-self-determination.org>, by Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

Most of these supports are identified from the self-management and self-directed learning literature. Since the purpose of the SDLMI is to enable teachers to teach students to self-directed and self-determine learning, it makes sense that teachers should enable students to use self-management and self-regulation strategies that enable them self-direct learning. But not every instructional strategy is student directed. The purpose of a teaching model is to promote student learning. Sometimes the most effective method or strategy to achieve an educational outcome will be a teacher-directed strategy. Within the SDLMI context, students are active in determining these educational plans, whether self- or teacher-directed.

There is strong evidence to support the efficacy of the SDLMI, including randomized trial studies conducted in the United States have established causal relationships between implementing the SDLMI and more positive student self-determination and school and adult outcomes (Wehmeyer, Shogren, Little, & Lopez, 2017). Though primarily evaluated with students with disabilities, the SDLMI is not a disability-specific intervention and large-scale studies are underway that are evaluating the impact of the SDLMI as implemented for all students in high school Language Arts and Algebra

classes. Combined with autonomy-supportive teaching and classroom strategies, the SDLMI provides educators with a means to teach students to self-regulate problem-solving to set and attain educational goals, adjusting their goals and plans as necessary. In other words, the SDLMI enables young people to be causal agents in their lives and to act to attain basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence.

## Conclusion

Importantly, issues of self-determination and self-determined learning are at the heart of personalized education and twenty-first-century learning (Wehmeyer & Zhao, 2020). Learning in twenty-first-century schools should be characterized by student voice in school governance and environment, student choice in a broad and flexible curriculum, and a strengths-based focus on student uniqueness and curiosity (Zhao, 2012). It is clear that to prepare young people for the twenty-first-century world, among the most important things we can do is to promote self-determination and self-determined learning, emphasize goal setting and problem-solving, and consider student strengths and support students to design a life based on those strengths, interests, and abilities (Wehmeyer & Zhao, 2020).

Zhao (2018) suggested that the educational status quo is a system that is based upon two flawed assumptions: (1) that “there is a set of skills and knowledge everyone must have in order to live a successful life in the world” and (2) that “all children are capable of and interested in acquiring the skills and knowledge at a similar pace” (p. 8). He argues that understandings of human nature and learning suggest that human beings are differently talented, have different desires and interests, and have different experiences that interact with their natural talents and interests to give each person a unique profile of abilities and desires, stronger in some areas and weaker in others, and that in such a context, there is no utility to notions of “average”. To create schools that benefit all students, we need to focus on promoting student agency, student ownership over learning, and emphasize meaningfulness and purpose.

Student agency is more than just students’ having a voice in what happens, but instead, is about students being, as Zhao (2018) noted, “owners of their own learning ... they must have agency in designing their own learning” (p. 58). Student agency is central to positive education, personalized learning, and twenty-first-century education. Students become agents in their own learning through the arrangements of environments and contexts to be

autonomy-supportive and engaging in autonomy-supportive interactions and promoting self-determined learning, as has been discussed in this chapter. Student agency and ownership over learning are, it could be argued, at the heart of positive education.

## References

- Adams, N., Little, T. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 47–54). New York: Springer.
- Blaschke, L. M. (2012). Heutagogy and lifelong learning: A review of heutagogical practice and self-determined learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *13*, 56–71.
- Brockett, R., & Hiemstra, R. (2012). Reframing the meaning of self-directed learning. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 155–162). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Reframing-the-Meaning-of-Self-Directed-Learning%3A-An-Hiemstra-Brockett/a831600fb05c0dc8dacdc23208f4c55a0c80a995>.
- Candy, P. C. (1992). *Self-direction for lifelong learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Center on Addiction. (2003). *CASA 2003 teen survey: High stress, frequent boredom, too much spending money: Triple threat that hikes risk of teen substance abuse*. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2003-teen-survey>.
- Chang, R., Adams, N., & Little, T. (2017). Action-control beliefs and agentic actions. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 285–295). New York: Springer.
- Chang, R., Fukuda, E., Durham, J., & Little, T. D. (2017). Enhancing students' motivation with autonomy-supportive classrooms. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination throughout the life-course* (pp. 99–110). New York: Springer.
- Chene, A. (1983). The concept of autonomy in adult education: A philosophical discussion. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *1*, 38–47.
- Cheon, S. H. (2010). The effects of providing rationales in autonomy-supportive ways upon the identified regulation and intention of amotivated students toward physical activity. *Korean Journal of Sport Psychology*, *21*, 309–326.
- Cheon, S. H., & Lee, Y. (2010). Effects of autonomy support intervention implemented in inclusive physical activity on basic psychological needs and behavioral: Emotional engagement of middle school students. *The Journal of Special Children Education*, *12*, 201–221.

- Cheon, S. H., & Moon, I. S. (2010). Implementing autonomy-supportive fitness program to facilitate students' autonomy and engagement. *Korean Journal of Sport Psychology, 21*, 175–195.
- Cheon, S. H., & Reeve, J. (2013). Do the benefits from autonomy-supportive PE teacher training programs endure? A one-year follow-up investigation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 14*, 508–518.
- Cheon, S. H., & Reeve, J. (2015). A classroom-based intervention to help teachers decrease students' amotivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 40*, 99–111.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., & Moon, I. S. (2012). Experimentally-based, longitudinally designed, teacher-focused intervention to help physical education teachers be more autonomy supportive toward their students. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 34*, 365–396.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., Lee, Y., & Lee, J.-W. (2018). Why autonomy-supportive interventions work: Explaining the professional development of teachers' motivating style. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 69*, 43–51.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., Lee, Y., Ntoumanis, N., Gillet, N., Kim, B. R., et al. (2019). Expanding autonomy psychological need states from two (satisfaction, frustration) to three (dissatisfaction): A classroom-based intervention study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 111*, 685–702.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., & Song, Y.-G. (2016). A teacher-focused intervention to decrease PE students' amotivation by increasing need satisfaction and increasing need frustration. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 38*, 217–235.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., & Song, Y.-G. (2019). Recommending goals and supporting needs: An intervention to help physical education teachers communicate their expectations while supporting students' psychological needs. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 41*, 107–118.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., Yu, T. H., & Jang, H.-R. (2014). The teacher benefits from giving autonomy support during physical education instruction. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 36*, 331–346.
- Cheon, S. H., Reeve, J., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2020). When teachers learn how to provide classroom structure in an autonomy-supportive way: Benefits to teachers and their students. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 90*.
- DeCharms, R. (1968). *Personal causation: The internal affective determinants of behavior*. New York: Academic Press.
- Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M., & Guay, F. (2013). Self-determination theory and actualization of human potentials. In D. M. McInerney, H. W. Marsh, R. G. Craven, F. Guay, & D. M. McInerney (Eds.), *Theory driving research: New wave perspectives on self-processes and human development* (pp. 109–133). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Deci, E. L., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2004). Self-determination theory and basic need satisfaction: Understanding human development in positive psychology. *Ricerche di Psicologia, 27*, 17–34.

- Frederic, G., Ratelle, C. F., & Chanal, J. (2008). Optimal learning in optimal contexts: The role of self-determination in education. *Canadian Psychology, 49*(3), 233–240.
- Gallup Youth Survey. (2004). *Most teens associate school with boredom, fatigue*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/11893/most-teens-associate-school-boredom-fatigue.aspx>.
- Grolnick, W. S., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2009). Issues and challenges in studying parental control: Toward a new conceptualization. *Child Development Perspectives, 3*, 165–170.
- Jason, Z. (2017, Winter). Bored out of their minds: A look at why students get increasingly bored as they get older—and why it matters. *Harvard Education Magazine*. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/17/01/bored-out-their-minds>.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. Chicago, IL: Follett Publishing Co.
- Little, T. D., Hawley, P. H., Henrich, C. C., & Marsland, K. (2002). Three views of the agentic self: A developmental synthesis. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 389–404). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Mouratidis, A., Lens, W., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2010). How you provide corrective feedback makes a difference: The motivating role of communicating in an autonomy-supporting way. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 32*, 619–637.
- Mumbardó-Adam, C., Guàrdia-Olmos, J., & Giné, C. (2018). Assessing self-determination in youth with and without disabilities: The Spanish version of the AIR self-determination scale. *Psicothema, 30*(2), 238–243.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(2), 133–144.
- Reeve, J. (2002). Self-determination theory applied to educational settings. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 183–203). Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press.
- Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 149–172). New York, NY: Springer.
- Reeve, J., & Cheon, S. H. (2014). An intervention-based program of research on teachers' motivating styles. In S. Karabenick & T. Urdan's (Eds.), *Advances in motivation and achievement: Motivational interventions* (Vol. 18, pp. 293–339). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Reeve, J., & Cheon, S. H. (2016). Teachers become more autonomy supportive after they believe it is easy to do. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 22*, 178–189.
- Reeve, J., & Cheon, S. H. (2020). Sociocultural influences on teachers' reactions to an intervention to help them become more autonomy supportive. In G. A. D. Liem & D. M. McNerney (Eds.), *Promoting motivation and learning in contexts: Sociocultural perspectives on educational interventions* (pp. 13–36). Information Age Publishing.

- Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., & Barch, J. (2004). Enhancing high school students' engagement by increasing their teachers' autonomy support. *Motivation and Emotion, 28*, 147–169.
- Reeve, J., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2018). Sociocultural influences on student motivation as viewed through the lens of self-determination theory. In D. M. McInerney & G. A. D. Liem (Eds.), *Big theories revisited 2: Research on socio-cultural influences on motivation and learning* (pp. 15–40). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Burke, K. M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). *Teacher's guide to the self-determined learning model of instruction*. Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. <http://www-self-determination.org>.
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Lane, K. L. (2016). Embedding interventions to promote self-determination within multi-tiered systems of supports. *Exceptionality, 24*(4), 213–244.
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Forber-Pratt, A., Little, T., & Lopez, S. (2015). Causal agency theory: Reconceptualizing a functional model of self-determination. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 50*(3), 251–263.
- Silver, M. (2020). *The deeper living, deeper learning curriculum*. Harrow, UK: Shaftesbury High School. <https://www.shaftesbury.harrow.sch.uk/Overview/>.
- Vansteenkiste, M., Niemiec, C. P., & Soenens, B. (2010). The development of the five mini-theories of self-determination theory: An historical overview, emerging trends, and future directions. In T. C. Urdan & S. A. Karabenick (Eds.), *The decade ahead: Theoretical perspectives on motivation and achievement* (advances in motivation and achievement, vol. 16 part A, pp. 105–165). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1992). Self-determination and the education of students with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 27*, 302–314.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (2004). Beyond self-determination: Causal agency theory. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 16*, 337–359.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Kelchner, K., & Richards, S. (1996). Essential characteristics of self-determined behavior of individuals with mental retardation. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 100*, 632–642.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Mithaug, D. (2006). Self-determination, causal agency, and mental retardation. In L. M. Glidden (Series Ed.) & H. Switzky (Vol. Ed.), *International review of research in mental retardation: Vol. 31 current perspectives on individual differences in personality and motivation in persons with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities* (pp. 31–71). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S., Agran, M., Mithaug, D., & Martin, J. (2000). Promoting causal agency: The self-determined learning model of instruction. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 439–453.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Little, T. D., & Lopez, S. J. (2017). *Development of self-determination through the life-course*. New York: Springer.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Zhao, Y. (2020). *Teaching students to become self-determined learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Zhao, Y. (2012). *World class learners: Educating creative and entrepreneurial students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Zhao, Y. (2018). *Reach for greatness: Personalizable education for all children*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 10

## Life Design for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future

Ilaria Di Maggio, Maria Cristina Ginevra, Sara Santilli,  
Laura Nota, and Salvatore Soresi

We live in a world characterized by uncertainty, complexity, rapid change, globalization, and inequality, all of which has significant impact on the well-being of people, groups, and communities. Further, it seems clear that the world is in the midst of significant ideological, social, and environmental changes (Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen, 2018). These changes make it more difficult not only for a great part of the population to live in the present, but also for succeeding generations to aspire to and imagine a possible future (Guichard, 2018; Hooley et al., 2018; Santilli, Di Maggio, Ginevra, Nota, & Soresi, 2020).

From the 1970s to the present, a neoliberal vision of markets and the economy permeated, little by little, cultures, education, and the role of citizenship, infusing the idea that the wellbeing of the person is related to consumption and the ownership of objects and items (Guichard, 2018; Santilli et al., 2020). As a result, there is a saturation of market-related models in many different areas of human, social, and political life. Too often, in this context, people look for happiness and wellbeing in new products, new markets, and new ideas, and competition is considered a *source of social progress* (Dardot & Laval, 2013).

Moreover, processes such as globalization, understood mainly in terms of the free movement of capital, brought a shift of production systems in developing countries. These forces brought higher availability of low-cost “global

---

I. Di Maggio · M. C. Ginevra · S. Santilli · L. Nota (✉) · S. Soresi  
University of Padova, Padua, Italy  
e-mail: [laura.nota@unipd.it](mailto:laura.nota@unipd.it)

manpower,' while also bringing the loss, in Western countries, of a considerable number of workplaces and positions (Chomsky & Polychroniou, 2018). All of this has been exacerbated and augmented by rapid automation that has fostered the substitution of routine jobs with technology, reducing further the possibilities for work for a wider swath of the population (Milanovic, 2017).

These realities dominate the contexts in most countries, resulting too often in inequalities and the exclusion of a significant number of people (from the most vulnerable to middle-class people) who, previously, were protected (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2018; Milanovic, 2017). Moreover, there is a contrast between Western countries and developing countries: in the former, there is the centralization of capital, techniques, and comforts, while in the latter there is, too often, despair and desolation. Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesize that emigration could exponentially increase over the next decade, exacerbating problems such as poverty, consistent levels of social heterogeneity, high competitiveness, precariousness, and excessive exploitation of natural resources (Nota, Soresi, Di Maggio, Santilli, & Ginevra, 2020).

One implication of this somewhat gloomy forecast is the need to revise multiple assumptions of and processes pertaining to career guidance and the changing shape of careers and the world of work. Being alert to issues of inclusion and sustainability will be even more important in the future, and professionals in career and vocational guidance will need to be trained to recognize discrimination, address inequalities, remove barriers, and minimize exploitation; to focus on the overall wellbeing of humanity and of the world we live in, particularly where people from younger generations will live (Hooley et al., 2018; Nota et al., 2020).

In this chapter, following a brief historical excursion through the social role that career guidance has had through the years, we outline possible actions that career guidance professionals could perform so as to embrace, sustain, and foster the creation of a better future for everyone and to contribute to the creation of inclusive and sustainable societies.

## **Career Guidance, Career Design, and Career Counselling: Past, Present, and Future**

For much of recent history, a number of presumptions about careers and work prevailed and shaped career guidance: work and workplaces were reliably stable; there were enough jobs available that workers could choose what they

wanted, particularly in the wealthiest countries; and getting adequate education and training would almost guarantee employment in a timely manner. The role of career guidance and counsellors in such a context was to assist young people to choose among different career options based upon factors related to ability and interest. As such, the field of career guidance has studied and applied criteria and tools to analyse the relationships between supply and demand so as to predict job availability.

Parsons (1909) is credited with establishing these “matching” practices in career guidance, proposing that guidance counsellors identify aptitudes and match them to work contexts and demands. Within this model, the counsellor expends time and effort to identify a person’s aptitudes, including sensory and physical skills, cognitive and emotional capacities, and the person’s interests when providing career guidance (Nota & Rossier, 2015; Savickas, 2011; Savickas et al., 2009).

This course of action in the field of career guidance brought about tremendous social change, since before that time people were “trapped” in their social class: there were no jobs to choose or to be prepared for if a person was not in a certain social stratum. School success (and thus school opportunity), during this time, was characterized as confirming one’s social status. Career guidance provided opportunities to individuals who, previously, had no such chances and emphasized their rights to choose employment and a career by, in essence, serving as a mediator “between” the career environment and the person.

The social context that inspired Parsons and his followers began to change after the end of the Second World War, once again bringing about radical social changes. During these years, there was a higher demand for skilled labour, both in technical and clerical fields. Education finally became an investment for the economic growth of countries. Employment opportunities, higher educational attainment levels, the widening of rights and civic protections for marginalized people, and increased attention to the population’s wellbeing: all these factors contributed to focus attention on career choices and themes such as career fulfilment. The idea of “career” started to take hold in career guidance activities.

Accordingly—and paralleling the development of psychological, educational, and social science studies pertaining to career and work—career guidance processes began to take into account greater complexity. Rather than focusing only on what Parsons referred to as “interests,” career and vocational guidance counsellors and theorists incorporated knowledge about personality and motivation, with the idea that if such traits are nurtured in specific career environments, it could foster both career fulfilment and enhanced career performance (Holland, 1959).

Thus, variables such as motivation, knowledge, skills, career values, and personal characteristics required more attention from guidance counsellors. These variables eventually began to be seen as interconnected with contextual factors, such as emphasized in *Social-Cognitive Career Theory* by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994). Career decision-making models were formulated to assist people in making career choices (e.g., Gati, Garty, & Fassa, 1996). The idea of career development took on a major role in theory and practice with the recognition that, like other areas of human development, career interests, preferences, and knowledge developed over time. Donald Super (1980), for example, introduced an early theory of career development, the *Life Career Rainbow*, which described career development in terms of life stages and life roles, providing fruitful ideas and information for both practitioners and researchers.

Super's theoretical framework was extended, expanded, and renewed by Savickas, who, during the 1990s, proposed *Career Construction Theory* (Savickas, 2005), which lies at the heart of the *Life Design paradigm* (Savickas et al., 2009), as described below.

## The Life Design Approach

The Life Design International Research Group emerged in the period when the world was facing the economic crisis of the 2008 Great Recession. The causes of the crisis were complex and not clear to many people who, too often, experienced job losses, increased unemployment, and increased job insecurity levels (Nota, Soresi, Ferrari, & Ginevra, 2014; O'Reilly, Lain, Sheehan, Smale, & Stuart, 2011). There arose a need to begin to provide solutions to problems and discomforts that were becoming more and more consistent, by looking for new ways to deal with a reality that was still not so understandable.

The Life Design paradigm, based on the epistemology of social constructivism (Young & Collin, 2004), recognized that professional development is highly contextualized and individualized. It claims that career development cannot only focus on career decisions regarding finding a suitable job according to personal competences, values, and interests. Rather, it conceptualizes career development as a dynamic interaction between personal characteristics and contextual factors. Specifically, according to this paradigm, the individual is an active agent and actor of their own personal and career development, of their present and future, by designing their life stories or narratives and formulating coherent life aims and plans (Pouyaud, 2015;

Wehmeyer et al., 2019). They are not shaped by the context, but is in interdependence with it. This means that the individual develops in a specific social and cultural context, which involves multiple systems (e.g., organizations, societal policies, and practices), which can affect human functioning (Nota & Rossier, 2015). As a result, focusing exclusively on environmental conditions or individual attitudes, interests, and abilities as a basis for successful career development is not enough; instead career counselling should focus on how these multiple nonlinear interactions can have a positive impact on career and life outcomes (Hirschi & Dauwalder, 2015).

The Life Design paradigm underlines the need for supporting individuals in co-constructing and planning personal and professional pathways. Career designing should be the result of a continuous construction and reconstruction of life themes that include past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations (Pouyaud, 2015). The personal meaning of these themes allows individuals to adapt to social changes that are crucial in their working lives (Savickas et al., 2009). Therefore, life designing is a dynamic, recursive, and strategic process that should not be detached from self-reflection, taking into account the numerous experiences and time of life (past, present, and future) together with the diverse contexts and roles everyone can play during their existence.

The Life Design paradigm, as described by its founding group in the 2009 article (Savickas et al., 2009), was built on five premises:

- (1) **From Traits and States to Context.** The suggestion was to move beyond objective measurements and regulatory profiles, which turned out to be inadequate in describing people as living beings that interact and adjust to multiple contexts. Professional identities should be considered as variable patterns influenced by stories and not representable by static, conceptual, and simplified profiles, built with scores obtained through tests.
- (2) **From Prescription to Process.** The idea was to move from traditional processes involving giving direction and advice about a career to follow to focusing on promoting coping strategies to enable clients to manage and deal with the complexity of a labour market characterized by frequent job changes and multiple choices and decisions throughout one's professional life.
- (3) **From Linear Causality to Non-linear Dynamics.** People's professional lives are a complex phenomenon that cannot be dealt with using linear prediction modalities. Working activities will evolve, will be more

complex and, there will be the need for analytic skills that enable one to focus on more holistic life projects.

- (4) **From Scientific Facts to Narrative Realities.** There was particular attention to the necessity to take into consideration the constant construction and reconstruction of people's multiple, subjective realities. Rather than referring to group rules and conceptual terms, clients should be involved in activities that help them give meaning to their situation and, as a consequence, to look for new ways to see themselves.
- (5) **From Describing to Modelling.** Clients' professional plans are, by definition, personal, therefore unique. As a consequence, efficient career counselling has to be adjusted in every single case. Every standardized activity reduces the value of such counselling.

The studies that took inspiration from the Life Design approach allowed the field to underline the need to proceed with customized, personalized actions. Moreover, it allowed the field to take into consideration people's right to receive specific attention, avoiding more standardized career guidance activities, which may be damaging because they do not account for the uniqueness of every person (Savickas et al., 2009). In the Life Design approach, more value was given to unique possibilities, opportunities, and, even, to unexpected outcomes. The authors of the stories used in such counselling have been encouraged and motivated to build, or instead to co-build, unique conclusions, new projects, and new stories for clients (Nota & Rossier, 2015). Rather than considering, measuring, and evaluating those aspects that in the past were considered the most important predictors of academic and career success (such as interests, aptitudes, skills, leadership, motivation, etc.), career practitioners should focus on other factors. More specifically, they should support clients to consider issues regarding career adaptability, the potential benefits of investment in education, resilience, hope, optimism, and taking events in perspective (Nota & Rossier, 2015). Under prior socio-economic contexts, career guidance aimed to promote skills useful for career choice processes, focusing on enabling clients so that their working life could become a source of wellness. In this way, it was faithful to the mission of discipline with regard to social relevance (Soresi & Nota, 2020).

Nowadays, however, the living conditions of people have changed considerably when compared to the past. Wellbeing seems to be a condition achieved by fewer people. Traditional processes used to support career choice and inclusion are no longer sufficient. Today, career practitioners have to consider that supporting clients to deal with the future means reflecting on how to face alarming risks. Some of these risks are, for example, increasing

inequality, the concentration of prosperity and of work opportunities within an increasingly narrow band of people, the increasing movement of peoples across borders, the depletion of natural resources, the impact of technology on working environments and on quality of life, and job conditions that are at the same time more insecure and less decent. Another risk is the paradoxical request addressed to people to become, despite everything mentioned, more competitive and more resilient: people have to be “constantly” ready and good enough to deal with unpredictable opportunities. People are also expected to become self-entrepreneurs, even without the actual amount of money that is required to start such a career (Hooley et al., 2018; Nota et al., 2020).

Having considered all these factors, it is hard to escape the fact that career guidance needs a change of pace that, according to us, can only be associated with investments in inclusion and sustainability.

## Starting from Inclusion and Sustainability

At the root of neoliberal economic ideas and policies that have characterized the last three decades, there is the individual. Too little attention has been given to social, societal, and social justice issues. But the global issues discussed previously are pushing the consideration of new strategies, embracing solidarity, mutual aid, a sense of societal responsibility, empathy towards the others, and, overall, inclusion and sustainability within and beyond national borders. These strategies can be used for economic growth and development (Hooley et al., 2018). Before describing the role of career guidance in the construction of inclusive and sustainable contexts, it is appropriate to define these two terms.

**Inclusion.** The term inclusion refers to contexts in which all people fully and actively participate in all aspects of society and in which they are able to obtain a satisfying quality of life (Di Maggio & Shogren, 2017). When the term inclusion is used, the emphasis is not on what might make the person “different,” whether referring to one’s racial/ethnic, linguistic, disability, or socioeconomic status when compared with any other group, but instead, emphasis is placed on the interaction between what makes each person unique and how that contributes to improved social, civil, and career participation (Owens, 2015; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Schalock, & Thompson, 2016).

Inclusion implies that all people and all institutions are “active” in seeking to guarantee the full participation of every person in social and civil life

(Asante, 2002). In other words, promoting inclusion requires an emphasis on the contexts in which all people live, learn, work, and play (e.g., organizations, systems, and societal policies and practices), as these contexts play a critical role in promoting individuals' functioning and quality of life and the co-construction of their strengths and weaknesses (Asante, 2002; Shogren et al., 2016).

**Sustainability.** The United Nations adopted sustainable development as a guiding principle for economic, environmental, and social development. This principle aspires to meet “the needs of the present” without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and fosters an “equitable sharing of the environmental costs and benefits of economic development between and within countries” (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987).

According to the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), sustainability involves the protection of the environment and natural resources. It also emphasizes social and economic welfare to present and subsequent generations. Sustainable development is also understood as socially just and ethically acceptable. Sustainability has thus been recognized as an essential normative principle for the society in establishing long-term ethical relationships between present and future generations (Hansmann, Miegb, & Frischknecht, 2012). It is an integrative construct, which incorporates environmental, social, and economic factors as three fundamental dimensions. These three dimensions are pillars of sustainability: responsible development requires attention to the natural, human, and economic capital or, informally, the planet, the people, and the profits (Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019).

The above-mentioned is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This was adopted on 25 September 2015 at a special United Nations summit. The Agenda is a commitment to guarantee sustained and inclusive economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection; promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies through a new global partnership. As it pertains to this chapter, Goal 4 and Goal 8 are particularly relevant. Goal 4 emphasizes *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals*, especially for women, girls, and marginalized people in vulnerable environments. Goal 8 aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth; full and productive employment, particularly for young people; and reduce informal employment and the gender pay gap while promoting safe and secure working environments so as to create decent work environments for every person.

Based on these premises, Pouyaud and Guichard (2017) suggested that career guidance should prepare people to be engaged in aspects of life that might lead to inclusive and sustainable global development. In other words, it is essential to support individuals to think about forms of active life that promote sustainability and inclusion.

Santilli et al. (2020), based on the Life Design approach and considering the new and global challenges that characterize today's world and societies, emphasized that career guidance should encourage people to look at the global reality and what is likely to happen in the future, to focus less on self, and to recognize that discriminations, inequalities, and barriers exist and limit inclusion and sustainability. Career guidance professionals should also encourage people to take on work that combats these negative inequities and creates alternatives for improving the wellbeing of humankind and the world.

## Career and Life Design for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future

Given the premises of careers and work thus far pertaining to the Life Design approach and considering recent reflections in the field of career guidance discussed previously, there are a number of ways in which this approach can contribute to career guidance practices that foster inclusion and sustainability, particularly with adolescents and marginalized populations.

**Inclusive and sustainable vocational guidance for adolescents.** Adolescents today find themselves planning their future career in a social context characterized by globalization, the hegemony of neoliberal politics, rapid technological advancements, precariousness, and unemployment. There are also a series of social risks, challenges, and environmental issues that have substantial repercussions on adolescent career decision-making and future career planning (Hooley et al., 2018).

Several studies have shown that issues associated with job and work precariousness and unemployment contribute to feelings of discomfort and uncertainty about the future for young people. Such issues and perceptions are also related to low expectations of career success, a sense of hopelessness for the future, a tendency to orient to the present and act without consideration of the future and, overall, the perception that the world of work is full of obstacles capable of compromising their educational and career development (Hatala et al., 2017).

However, lack of awareness of issues pertaining to globalization and market-driven economies and their repercussions on the labour market and

on future career planning can be a problem. Globalization is fairly widely perceived as a complex phenomenon, characterized by economic, cultural, and exchange aspects. Ginevra, Di Maggio, Santilli, Berti, and Nota (2019) found, however, that adolescents did not consider these issues, including critical issues associated with economic and social disparities (e.g., Myers, 2010).

In the career guidance field, specific career interventions are needed to stimulate greater reflexivity and awareness concerning these phenomena. Furthermore, such interventions are necessary because of the social and political challenges that, in an inclusive and sustainable perspective, young people must consider when thinking about their future. Career guidance should be able to enable young people to think about the challenges they will face in the future. It also should foster the growth and social development of young people by “shifting” from a mostly individualistic, inward-looking, present-oriented vision to a more contextually oriented worldview that includes a focus on society and the common good, social development, and sustainability (Soresi & Nota, 2020).

The shifting emphasis in career guidance on social phenomena should enhance some form of collective good rather than solely individual empowerment. The central idea is that the management of these challenges requires the collaboration of professionals, multidisciplinary approaches, the use of heterogeneous skills, and a view that underlines how people together can change the future, rather than the single person can change the future (Anderson, Turner, Heath, & Payne, 2016; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011).

Further, Di Maggio, Ginevra, Santilli, and Nota (2019) pointed out that the propensity to consider global challenges is associated, directly and indirectly, with hope in achieving personal goals and goals pertaining to the common good, and to a more significant investment in higher education. The latter is important for career guidance professionals in that their role becomes, in part, to prepare future professionals to understand and prevent global threats and find new, complex, and innovative solutions to existing challenges, thus providing promise to them and future generations of a society able to provide wellbeing and satisfaction for all (Peterson & Helms, 2014).

Considering this, we have developed and tested the effectiveness of the *Stay Inclusive, Sustainable, Curious, Cosmopolitan, Aspirant, Etc.* project at the Larios Laboratory of the University of Padova, Italy. The focus of this project was to use a Life Design approach to encourage young people to reflect on the future and career planning, taking into account the global challenges that they will face in that future. The project includes a series of assessment instruments that guide young people in the identification of possible future concerns, on

the one hand, and a series of future scenarios on the other. For example, to get young people to reflect on the future, the questionnaire *The future is around the corner... What does it hold?* was developed, aimed at encouraging adolescents to reflect on developing sustainable and inclusive contexts. The instrument *Thoughts on development and the economy of the future* was developed to support young people to reflect on their ideas about an economy for the benefit of all people and society. Additional instruments have been developed to focus the attention of adolescents on resources and skills for planning their future in conditions of uncertainty and insecurity in the labour market, conditions that will likely be present into the near future (Santilli et al., 2020). These skills are, for example, the ability to keep up to date, to be able to engage in Life Design activities even in complex and uncertain situations (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002); optimism, flexibility, persistence, curiosity, and risk-taking (Krumboltz, 2009); and cosmopolitanism (Van de Vijver, Van Hemert, & Poortinga, 2015).

As part of the project, a career guidance intervention was also planned for high school students, titled *Looking at the Future and at the University in an Inclusive Way*. It is intended to encourage reflections on global challenges and on the contribution that they can make in their educational and career futures. It consists of five didactic units of two hours each, one for each week for a total of five weeks. In the first unit, future emergencies identified by the United Nations are discussed, and students are asked to examine these as they pertain to their hopes and concerns for the future. In the second unit, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations are presented. The importance of education and self-determination towards the future are discussed to encourage students to reflect on what these can bring to their future and how they could relate those to the United Nations' goals. During the third and fourth meetings, students are invited to think about their possible future visions, taking into account the United Nations' goals. In the last unit, adolescents are helped to identify occupations and professional activities related to their vision, and possible training paths that could help them to acquire knowledge and useful skills to perform them. In line with this, different and extensive academic fields are examined, rather than specific degree courses. This is intended to stimulate participants to reflect on the role that education has in the realization of their visions and the contribution that study and training could make in pursuing the goals identified by the United Nations.

To test the effectiveness of this career intervention, a study was conducted with 92 high school students ( $M_{\text{age}} = 17.21$ ;  $SD = 0.62$ ), randomly assigned

to either a traditional career intervention group (43 students) or to the treatment “inclusive” career intervention group (49 students). Results highlighted that adolescents in the inclusive career intervention group showed higher levels of career adaptability, career decisiveness, and investment in higher education than did students in the traditional intervention group. Results suggest that this program could be used in school contexts to provide effective career guidance training to large groups of students interested in promoting sustainable and inclusive social contexts.

It should be noted that it is crucial to involve parents and teachers who, if properly trained, can support young people to analyse social phenomena in a more sophisticated manner; and to explore activities, training, and professional paths to which to commit, with the goal of contributing to the construction of sustainable and inclusive social contexts (Pouyaud & Guichard, 2017).

**Inclusive and sustainable career guidance for individuals with vulnerability.** The conditions described in the opening pages of this chapter have very real negative consequences, especially for people who are vulnerable, including people with disabilities, immigrants, who are unemployed, or who are early school leavers (Carr & Battle, 2015). Prejudices and stereotypes about these marginalized groups persist and tend to be associated with a lack of hope, doubts on one’s skills, self-depreciation, and inclinations to focus on one’s negative aspects (Millner & Kim, 2017). Research by Di Maggio, Santilli, Nota, Ginevra, and Soresi (2019) showed, for example, that people with stories of addiction have to face persistent contextual barriers, such as negative evaluations from others, lack of social/economic support, and prejudice in working environments. All these factors strain their psychological stability and make it difficult for them to project or re-project their working future.

Considering all of the above, it is clear that when dealing with inclusive and sustainable career guidance, it is more important to give voice to people who are vulnerable so as to support them to recognize external and contextual factors that affect their stories in relation to the broad sociopolitical system in which they live. It is important to help marginalized people reconsider their life stories, underlining the positive or negative role that the context played in their working life and to help them think about how much that could affect their construction of the future. On the one hand, this process creates forms of consciousness and awareness, on the other hand it creates procedures of critical reflection, which help to reduce the “weight” of experiences of failure, difficulties, and discomfort (Kenny, Blustein, Gutowski, & Meerkins, 2018; Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015).

Kenny et al. (2018) suggested, in line with what has also been highlighted by Hooley et al. (2018), that career practitioners should, first of all, help people to consider the sociopolitical circumstances that affect their life stories. Career practitioners should analyse, explicitly, the power disparities and sociopolitical inequities that exist that result in bias and discrimination. They also should understand, through their clients' life stories, their meaningful, concrete, working and life experiences, and, as a consequence, foster guidance to account for these experiences. Finally, they should help individuals to challenge negative stereotypes and to reduce the perception of guilt.

In this context, guidance professionals might call particular attention to the courage a person has shown in dealing with difficult circumstances, thus emphasizing a human virtue (Putman, 2010). Courage is a protective mechanism for coping with situations of discrimination and vulnerability (Putman, 2010; Santilli et al., 2020), a combination of strengths that include bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. It promotes "the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 199).

In line with this, Santilli et al. (2020) have involved young people in envisioning themselves in precarious conditions so as to give them a voice in those situations, starting from their stories of courage. These young people are asked to tell a real personal story of courage. In particular, the participants are told:

the purpose of this interview is to better understand the experience of courage that people exhibit in their life or professional life. Life is often complex and difficult, and for this reason, it requires patience, perseverance and courage. In your experience, have you ever been courageous? If yes, can you try to describe a situation in which you were a courageous person?

Analyses were conducted on answers provided and two core themes emerged. The first was connected to indecent and undignified working conditions and the second core theme was connected to neoliberal ways of conceptualizing the person and work. The first core-theme concerned unacceptable requests regarding the working environment in terms of time, place, and salary (e.g., "*I call it exploitation because I was forced to work in the company without a contract. I signed nothing and I worked: this is courage.*"). Other stories were about proposals for odd jobs and overbearing promises ("*I had the courage to try a little bit of everything. So many times I found myself doing odd jobs ... he made me do everything, and I did learn anything*"). Other requests identified were requests that were urgent without a compelling reason, requests to make

future life decisions without having time to reflect (“*I was called to work in Malta overnight ... the departure would have been the following week*”). There were also stories about discriminatory conditions (“*Once in a bar where I worked for four months as a bartender, I met an owner who reminded me of the devil. He treated me like a slave.*”).

The second core-theme concerned the neoliberal work context. Specifically, two sub-themes were identified: the idea that the responsibility for one’s failures and successes is only personal (“*only sometimes I think it’s not all my fault because I can’t find a job. I think that this is not due to my characteristics but to a global situation*”) and competition in working contexts (“*Courage is facing the pressure they put on you ... they make you know right away that it is a ruthless competition for that position*”).

When focusing on courage, it is possible to identify positive actions performed by people and to value them. People can be helped to adopt an assertive stance that can help them connect to society and reshape their lives in the face of scarcity, marginalization, and oppression (Kenny et al., 2018; Sanchez Carmen et al., 2015).

The examination of these situations can also be the basis for helping people face categorizations and labelling that tend to foster self-depreciation and the propensity to focus on one’s negative aspects (Millner & Kim, 2017). People should also be helped to reflect upon the propensity to internalize the myth to which the neoliberal culture has accustomed us: being *self-entrepreneurs* (Santilli et al., 2020). According to that myth, individuals are actually those who determine their chances of success and failure. This mistakenly leads people to think that they are entirely in charge of their problems and their failures. These beliefs can become “millstones” that people are forced to live with and that may often hinder a courageous re-design of one’s existence (Kenny et al., 2018).

The scientific and experiential knowledge that practitioners collect through an attention to barriers and negative context conditions may be used, at this point, to breathe life into guidance activities dealing with awareness and activism. This can also be accomplished through the involvement of private and public institutions’ stakeholders and through educational interventions aimed at promoting the creation of inclusive scholastic, working, and community contexts. These contexts have to directly address and eliminate discriminations and inequalities and have to foster active involvement of all (Appadurai, 2004; Di Maggio, 2019).

## Conclusions

The socioeconomic conditions that have characterized the last few decades, specifically globalization and neoliberalism, impact our daily life as well as the economics and societal structures of countries, creating an inextricable intertwining of progress and threats. The threats, as described in this chapter, have serious implications for career decisions and wellbeing of young people, particularly young people who are vulnerable, and can lead to limitations quality and satisfying futures. All of this leads to the need to identify critical steps in career guidance that can lead the field towards efforts to promote inclusion, sustainability, and to combat inequality and discrimination.

Such a recalibration begins with career guidance professionals assume the role of change agents; to make it clear that career guidance is no longer just about the *self*, but about the person *within* the context of experiences and environments. Is also important to reflect on the negative consequences of contexts that are not inclusive and work environments and conditions that are not respectful, and to find ways to act to change negative and dehumanizing environmental and social conditions (Soresi, Nota, Ginevra, Santilli, & Di Maggio, 2019). To further this agenda, Soresi et al. (2019) developed (in partnership with a wide array of researchers and practitioners) a *Memo-randum on Guidance and on Career Counseling*, to address issues that need to be addressed to ensure that populations with vulnerability are included. This memorandum states that career scholars, professionals, and practitioners should, among other things:

- anchor their reflections and promote, through their interventions, those theoretical models and practices that connect scientific rigour to a specific vision of the future, in terms of sustainability, equity, and inclusion;
- suggest analysing the influence of contextual factors in determining needs, successes, and failures;
- maximize preventive and early intervention opportunities, especially for members of vulnerable communities;
- detect and remove barriers that may reduce the involvement of every person into social, educational, and working life;
- collaborate with other agencies, services, and professionals interested in sustainable development, social activism, and in people's wellbeing;
- provide psychosocial and psycho-educational support, particularly for people from vulnerable and marginalized groups;

- mobilize complex processes that take into account interpersonal, cultural, social, environmental, economic, and political-institutional factors to enable agentic action and encourage and produce change dynamics;
- use qualitative and quantitative procedures to highlight the effects of career guidance on choice processes and on processes regarding career design for groups and people (e.g., the ability to explore and get to know educational and professional contexts, the ability to deal with and sort out difficult situations, the ability to pursue fair, inclusive and sustainable development's goals and ambitions, etc.); and
- foster equal opportunities in educational and professional contexts and the reduction of any form of discrimination, of undignified jobs, of underemployment and precariousness.

## References

- Alvaredo, F., Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2018). *World inequality report*. Retrieved from: <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf>.
- Anderson, C., Turner, A. C., Heath, R. D., & Payne, C. M. (2016). On the meaning of grit... and hope... and fate control... and alienation... and locus of control... and... self-efficacy... and... effort optimism... and... *The Urban Review*, 48(2), 198–219.
- Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. *Culture and Public Action*, 59, 62–63.
- Asante, S. (2002). *What is inclusion?*. Toronto: Inclusion Press.
- Carr, S., & Batlle, I. C. (2015). Attachment theory, neoliberalism, and social conscience. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 35(3), 160–176.
- Chomsky, N., & Polychroniou, C. J. (2018). *Ottimismo (malgrado tutto). Capitalismo, Impero e Cambiamento Sociale* [Optimism (despite everything). Capitalism, empire and social change]. Milano, Italy: Ponte alle Grazie.
- Dardot, P., & Laval, C. (2013). *La Nuova Ragione del Mondo. Critica della Razionalità Neoliberista* [The new reason for the world. Criticism of neoliberal rationality]. Roma, Italy: Derive Approdi.
- Di Maggio, I. (2019). La rilevanza dell'orientamento e del career counselling per un futuro di qualità per tutti [The importance of career guidance and career counselling for a quality future for all]. In S. Soresi, L. Nota, & S. Santilli (Eds.), *Il Contributo dell'Orientamento e del Counselling all'Agenda 2030*. Padova, Italy: Cleup.

- Di Maggio, I., & Shogren, K. (2017). Any given context (school, work, society) will be considered inclusive only if... In L. Nota & S. Soresi (Eds.), *For a Manifesto in favor of inclusion. Concerns, ideas, intents and passwords for inclusion* (pp. 29–34). Firenze: Hogrefe.
- Di Maggio, I., Ginevra, M. C., Santilli, S., & Nota, L. (2019, October). *Global challenges, social hope and investment in training for an inclusive e sustainable future goals*. Paper at Italian Conference of Career Guidance, University of Catania, Italy.
- Di Maggio, I., Santilli, S., Nota, L., Ginevra, M. C., & Soresi, S. (in press). Orientamento e progettazione professionale in persone con storie di dipendenza [Career and Life Design for people with Substance Abuse Disorder]. In S. Soresi, L. Nota, & S. Santilli (Eds.), *Il Contributo dell'Orientamento e del Counselling all'Agenda 2030*. Padova: Cleup.
- Gati, I., Garty, Y., & Fassa, N. (1996). Using career-related aspects to assess person–environment fit. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43(2), 196–206.
- Ginevra, M. C., Di Maggio, I., Santilli, S., Berti, A. E., & Nota, L. (2019, September). *La percezione dell'economia in un gruppo di giovani coinvolti in un progetto di orientamento inclusivo [The economic perception in a group of young people involved in an inclusive vocational guidance intervention]*. Paper presented at XXXII AIP National Conference. Naples, Italy.
- Guichard, J. (2018). Life design interventions and the issue of work. In V. Cohen-Scali, J. P. Pouyaud, M., Drabik-Podgorna, G., Aisenson, J. L. Bernaud... & J. Guichard (Eds.), *Interventions in career design and education: Transformation for sustainable development and decent work* (pp. 15–28). Paris: Springer, Cham.
- Hansmann, R., Mieg, H. A., & Frischknecht, P. (2012). Principal sustainability components: An empirical analysis of synergies between the three pillars of sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, 19(5), 451–459.
- Hatala, A. R., Pearl, T., Bird-Naytowhow, K., Judge, A., Sjoblom, E., & Liebenberg, L. (2017). “I have strong hopes for the future”: Time orientations and resilience among Canadian Indigenous youth. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(9), 1330–1344.
- Hirschi, A., & Dauwalder, J. P. (2015). Dynamics in career development: Personal and organizational perspectives. In L. Nota & J. Rossier (Eds.), *Handbook of life design: From practice to theory and from theory to practice* (pp. 27–39). Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Holland, J. L. (1959). A theory of vocational choice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 6(1), 35–45.
- Hooley, T., Sultana, R., & Thomsen, R. (2018). *Career guidance for emancipation: Reclaiming justice for the multitude*. London: Routledge.
- Kenny, M. E., Blustein, D. L., Gutowski, E., & Meerkins, T. (2018). Combating marginalization and fostering critical consciousness for decent work. In V. Cohen-Scali, J. Rossier, & L. Nota (Eds.), *International perspectives on current*

- research in career counseling and guidance. *Building careers in changing and diverse societies* (pp. 55–73). New York: Springer.
- Krumboltz, J. D. (2009). The happenstance learning theory. *Journal of Career Assessment, 17*(2), 135–154.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*(1), 79–122.
- Milanovic, B. (2017). *Ingiustizia Globale: Migrazioni, Disuguaglianze e il Futuro della Classe Media* [Global injustice: migration, inequalities and the future of the middle class]. Roma, Italy: LUISS University Press.
- Millner, U. C., & Kim, M. (2017). Perspectives on work and work-related challenges among Asian Americans with psychiatric disabilities. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 8*(3), 177–189.
- Myers, J. P. (2010). Exploring adolescents' thinking about globalization in an international education program. *Journal of Research in International Education, 9*(2), 153–167.
- Nota, L., & Rossier, J. (2015). *Handbook of life design: From practice to theory and from theory to practice*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Nota, L., Soresi, S., Di Maggio, I., Santilli, S., & Ginevra, M. C. (2020). *Sustainable development, in career counseling and career education*. London: Springer.
- Nota, L., Soresi, S., Ferrari, L., & Ginevra, M. C. (2014). Vocational designing and career counseling in Europe: Challenges and new horizons. *European Psychologist, 19*(4), 248–259.
- O'Reilly, J., Lain, D., Sheehan, M., Smale, B., & Stuart, M. (2011). Managing uncertainty: The crisis, its consequences and the global workforce. *Work, Employment & Society, 25*(4), 581–595.
- Owens, J. (2015). The social model of disability and its application to dentistry. *Dental Nursing, 11*(8), 448–450.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford: University Press.
- Peterson, P. M., & Helms, R. M. (2014). Internationalization revisited. In A. Maldonado-Maldonado & R. M. Bassett (Eds.), *The forefront of international higher education* (pp. 101–111). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Pouyaud, J. (2015). Vocational trajectories and people's multiple identities: A life design. In L. Nota & J. Rossier (Eds.), *Handbook of life design: From practice to theory and from theory to practice* (pp. 59–74). Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Pouyaud, J., & Guichard, J. (2017). A twenty-first century challenge: How to lead an active life whilst contributing to sustainable and equitable development. In T. Hooley & R. G. Sultana (Eds.), *Career guidance for social justice* (pp. 31–45). London: Routledge.
- Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2019). Three pillars of sustainability: In search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science, 14*(3), 681–695.

- Putman, D. A. (2010). Philosophical roots of the concept of courage. In C. L. S. Pury & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *The psychology of Courage: Modern research on an ancient virtue* (pp. 9–22). Washington, DC, USA: American Psychological Association.
- Sanchez Carmen, S. A., Dominguez, M., Greene, A. C., Mendoza, E., Fine, M., Neville, H. A., et al. (2015). Revisiting the collective in critical consciousness: Diverse socio-political wisdoms and ontological healing in sociopolitical development. *Urban Review*, *47*, 824–846.
- Santilli, S., Di Maggio, I., Ginevra, M. C., Nota, L., Soresi, S. (2020) Life Design, inclusion and sustainable development: constructs, dimensions and new instruments to stimulate a quality future design for all. In M. Yuen, W. Beamish, V. S. Solberg (Eds.), *Careers for students with special educational needs—Perspectives on development and transitions from the Asia-Pacific region*. Springer Education & Language.
- Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, *1*, 42–70.
- Savickas, M. L. (2011). Constructing careers: Actor, agent, and author. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *48*(4), 179–181.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J. P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., ... & Van Vianen, A. E. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *75*(3), 239–250.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Martinez, I. M., Pinto, A. M., Salanova, M., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). Burnout and engagement in university students: A cross-national study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *33*(5), 464–481.
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Schalock, R. L., & Thompson, J. R. (2016). Reframing educational supports for students with intellectual disability through strengths-based approaches. In M. L. Wehmeyer & K. A. Shogren (Eds.), *Handbook of research-based practices for educating students with intellectual disability* (pp. 25–38). London: Routledge.
- Soresi, S., & Nota, L. (2020). *L'Orientamento e la progettazione professionale* [Career counselling and vocational designing]. Bologna, Italy: il Mulino.
- Soresi, S., Nota, L., Ginevra, M.C., Santilli, S., Di Maggio, I. (2019). Per uno sviluppo sostenibile, dignitoso ed inclusivo per tutti: una Carta-Memorandum dell'Orientamento e del Career counseling [For a sustainable, dignified and inclusive development for all: Carta-Memorandum for Career Counseling]. In S. Soresi, L. Nota, & S. Santilli (Eds.), *Il Contributo dell'Orientamento e del Counselling all'Agenda 2030*. Padova, Italy: Cleup.
- Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *16*(3), 282–298.
- Van de Vijver, F. J., Van Hemert, D. A., & Poortinga, Y. H. (2015). *Multilevel analysis of individuals and cultures*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.

- Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2011(134), 43–57.
- WCED. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Nota, L., Soresi, S., Shogren, K. A., Morningstar, M. E., Ferrari, L., ... & Di Maggio, I. (2019). A crisis in career development: Life designing and implications for transition. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 42(3), 179–187.
- Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 373–388.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# Part II

## Core Capabilities in Positive Education



# 11

## Wellbeing and Flourishing

Covadonga Chaves

### Childhood Mental Health

In recent decades, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in mental illness in children and adolescents globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005), the prevalence of childhood psychological disorders fluctuates between 8 and 20%. Adolescence and the start of adulthood are characterized by major changes and decisions about life objectives or professional aspirations (Thompson & Swartout, 2017), resulting in a high prevalence of mental illness in this period (Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011; Woods & Pooley, 2015). Many children and youth suffer physical, psychological, and/or sexual violence, which often leads to the appearance of psychological problems in the long term. Half of all diagnosed lifelong mental illnesses appear by the age of 14 (Kessler & Brommet, 2013). Mental health problems create a huge personal and social burden in the long term, increase the risk of lifelong physical and mental disability, and present a greater probability of unemployment or premature death.

At the same time, although the economic level of developed countries has increased in recent years (e.g., countries' gross domestic product), levels of individual life satisfaction have not reflected this improvement. In fact, the low rates of life satisfaction in children in economically advantaged countries like the U.K. and the U.S. (UNICEF, 2007) are especially notable. In a large sample of American adolescents, Keyes (2007)

---

C. Chaves (✉)

Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain

found that over half did not meet the criteria for flourishing (i.e., presence of emotional wellbeing and positive functioning almost every day or every day during the past 30 days), and rates of flourishing decreased as adolescence progressed. Therefore, it seems that levels of happiness in childhood and adolescence do not reflect the progress in levels of economic development.

That academic success nowadays is measured by academic performance is in part a reflection of a modern society concerned with economic progress and the accumulation of material possessions. The vast majority of modern educational systems reflect this conception of success in the way in which they prepare children to have productive lives rather than full and meaningful lives (Adler, 2017). As a result of this, the objectives of curricula have become more academic and oriented towards cognitive abilities, leaving objectives to promote mental health as secondary to the academic program.

Moreover, the conceptualization of childhood mental health has traditionally been focused on treating the symptoms once they have already appeared. However, this focus has shown to have been costly and largely ineffective. The earlier the start of the mental illness, the greater its lifelong negative impact is (Kessler et al., 2009). Therefore, a preventative focus is needed that reduces the risk of developing a mental illness or reduces its severity once it has already been established. In that sense, research in recent years has shown greater interest in identifying and managing mental health problems or preventing problems like bullying in school and antisocial behaviours. Although these interventions have shown promising results, it is important to bear in mind that the promotion of health and the prevention of mental illnesses cannot be treated as one-dimensional extremes. In fact, there is sufficient empirical evidence to affirm that the absence of mental illness does not necessarily imply the presence of high levels of positive mental health, and vice versa (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). For example, young people who do not have a diagnosable disorder may nevertheless not be functioning at their optimal level (Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011). Further, it has been found that adolescents with a low level of psychopathology who also have a low level of wellbeing exhibit similar functioning to adolescents with a psychopathology (Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2009). Therefore, if our interest is in promoting the comprehensive wellbeing of children and adolescents, we need to go beyond simply relieving symptoms or preventing problematic behaviours and also incorporate tools that allow for the development of the abilities necessary for a more full and satisfactory life.

In this line, Antaramian, Huebner, Hills, and Valois (2010) proposed a two-factor model that defines childhood mental health in two psychometrically distinct but correlated continuums of mental illness and positive mental

health. Nurturing both dimensions is beneficial. From the prevention standpoint, normalizing conversations surrounding mental health in childhood can serve as a ‘buffering factor’ to prevent and detect the symptoms of mental illnesses early; meanwhile, the promotion of wellbeing builds emotional intelligence and wellbeing literacy in children, acting as an ‘enhancing factor’ that promotes flourishing. Schools thus have the potential to play a positive role in aspects of all areas: students’ wellbeing, recovery, and mental health (Waters, 2014).

In this context, the field of positive psychology (PP) provides a frame of reference for professionals and researchers whose aim is to study and promote optimal functioning in individuals, organizations, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

## The Architecture of Wellbeing

A significant conceptual contribution of PP relates to its efforts to more precisely define the core features of what can be called psychological wellbeing or flourishing. The term *wellbeing* is operationalized in a variety of ways, such as to refer to psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, happiness, or finding meaning in life (Howell et al., 2016). Although definitions of wellbeing abound in the literature, there is a growing consensus that wellbeing is a complex construct that concerns optimal experience and functioning. Explorations of what it means to live a good life are frequently characterized as being consistent with one of two philosophical traditions: the hedonic or the eudaimonic approach.

This *hedonic dimension* of psychological wellbeing has been called *subjective wellbeing* (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003) and includes both affective and cognitive components. Affective components of subjective wellbeing include positive affect (experiencing pleasant emotions and moods), low negative affect (experiencing unpleasant, distressing emotions and moods), and ‘hedonic balance’, defined as the overall equilibrium between positive and negative affect. High levels of hedonic wellbeing do not imply the absence of negative emotions; rather, this indicates that negative emotions are still present, but they are less frequent and prominent than positive ones (Fredrickson, 2013). Life satisfaction (global judgements of one’s life) and satisfaction with specific life domains (e.g., housing, education, health) are considered cognitive components of subjective wellbeing.

The second main dimension of the architecture of human wellbeing is *eudaimonic wellbeing*, which is derived from actions that are consistent with

personal values that imply a full commitment with which people feel alive and real (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, wellbeing consists of the harmonious development of an individual's capacities that lead to a virtuous life. This perspective on the nature of eudaimonic wellbeing is one of the reasons why the identification, development, and application of psychological strengths has become a central target in PP (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A fulfilled life is one in which we have the opportunity to express and develop our maximum potentials that bring benefits not only to ourselves but also to society at large (Waterman, 2008).

Eudaimonic wellbeing approaches emphasize that it is crucial to include optimal functioning when assessing wellbeing in order to get a more precise picture of the wellbeing of individuals (e.g., Hervas & Vazquez, 2013). Based on traditional models (e.g., Frankl, 1946; Maslow, 1943), Carol Ryff (1989; see also Ryff & Singer, 1998) defined psychological wellbeing as the consequence of high levels of autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, competence or environmental mastery, and positive relations with others. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that of these areas, relations, autonomy, and competence are most relevant to wellbeing.

Obviously, overall wellbeing is influenced by multiple variables, both internal and external. These eudaimonic models attempt to differentiate key variables from those that simply function as moderators. For example, gratitude, emotional intelligence, and optimism are associated with wellbeing, but they can be considered contributors rather than essential components.

Research suggests that psychological wellbeing (as defined by Ryff's model) and subjective wellbeing (as defined by Diener's model) behave as two separate but related factors (Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne, & Hurling, 2009). Although people can engage in activities that provide only hedonia, almost all eudaimonic activities are positively related to hedonia. In other words, engaging in activities that increase personal competencies and optimal functioning necessarily has an impact on hedonic outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction, positive affect). Therefore, the connections between these two pillars of wellbeing are more profound than previously thought (cf. Waterman, 2008).

Recent definitions of flourishing combine hedonic and eudaimonic elements to create a more comprehensive and holistic approach. Martin Seligman (2002) argued that wellbeing is derived from experiencing positive emotions (the pleasant life) but also from experiencing a high level of engagement in satisfying activities (the engaged life) and a sense of connectedness to a greater whole (the meaningful life), later complemented by achievement and relational dimensions, with an expanded model that of psychological

wellbeing that consists of five dimensions: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Purpose, and Accomplishment (PERMA). Thus, a fulfilled life is one in which people can express and develop their maximum potentials, leading to benefits not only for themselves but also for society at large (Waterman, 2008).

In the field of education, Noble and McGrath (2015) propose the PROSPER framework, a guide based on data for the implementation of positive education that defines seven paths to wellbeing: Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement, and Resilience.

Besides considering the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of wellbeing, some authors suggest the need to incorporate a component of *social wellbeing* that includes feeling connected to others and valued by one's community (Keyes, 2007). Keeping in mind these three components, wellbeing can be defined as the combination of *feeling good* (aligned with a hedonic approach), *functioning well* (consistent with an eudaimonic approach that helps children thrive), and *doing good for others* (commitment to prosocial behaviours and choices that benefit others and the wider community; Huppert, 2013; Waters Sun, Rusk, Aarch, & Cotton, 2017). Using this definition of flourishing and a review of more than 18,400 peer-reviewed publications in fields such as psychology, education, public health, neuroscience, and the social sciences over twenty years, Rusk and Waters (2015) propose the *Domains of Positive Functioning* (DPF) Framework, which provides educators with a rigorous, unifying, and evidence-based working model in order to develop efficient practices based on the six domains of psychosocial functioning in a strategic manner. Furthermore, collecting data on the psychosocial functioning of children in these domains can help to make wellbeing more visible, tangible, and measurable for both children and educators.

## Feeling Good During Childhood

Some consensus exists among researchers regarding the role that negative emotions have played in our evolution as a species (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Fear, anger, and anxiety are alarms that prepare us to respond in the face of danger. However, Barbara Fredrickson's (2001) broaden and build theory of positive emotions, as well as the plethora of studies carried out in recent years derived from this theory suggests that positive emotions are related to the expansion of the possibilities of attention, cognition, and action as well as to an improvement in the physical, intellectual, and social resources of people. Fredrickson (2001) described how

the functions of positive emotions would come to compliment the functions of negative emotions and that both would be equally important in an evolutionary context. For example, if negative emotions solve the problems of immediate survival and promote protection, positive emotions develop us, make us grow personally, and connect us socially. In other words, positive emotions like happiness, love, inspiration, optimism, and pride promote personal opening and development.

A clear example is children's play. Thanks to the positive emotions that children experience during play, they learn and practice a series of physical, social, and psychological abilities that they will be able to use in real life and that will help them grow intellectually, socially, and psychologically. This outcome is much more difficult to achieve if the child is surrounded by an atmosphere of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. This is why emotional education should follow an eminently practical methodology (group dynamics, self-reflection, games, relaxation, breathing, etc.) with the goal of fostering the development of emotional competency.

Although positive emotions may seem temporary and fleeting, their effects on a personal and social level can be observed in the long term. In her theory of expansion and construction of resources, Fredrickson (2001) suggests that positive emotions increase our attention and expand our range of vision. For example, children that learn under a more positive emotional state are more creative and resolve problems with greater ease (Hoffmann & Russ, 2012). Positive moods generate more flexible, less rigid forms of thought. They also have positive effects on behaviour since they increase motivation for the attainment of objectives and goals. For example, learning based on close models encourages the child to feel inspired; those moments of inspiration or admiration promote the implementation of actions to emulate those achievements. According to this theory, positive emotions open our minds to greater possibilities; they make us more persistent when faced with failure and they increase our intrinsic motivation, leading us to take on greater challenges. Moreover, positive emotions encourage positive social interaction. For example, feeling emotions like gratitude or compassion facilitates companionship and healthy social relationships, and, at the same time, positive relationships provide more positive affect. Positive emotions enable us to build lasting internal resources that indirectly prepare us to cope with adversities in the future (Aspinwall, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 2003). These personal resources include physical (e.g., healthy behaviours; Cohen, Alper, Doyle, Treanor, & Turner, 2006), social (Kok et al., 2013), intellectual (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002), and psychological resources (e.g., optimism, gratitude; Chaves, Hervas, Garcia, & Vazquez, 2016). This building of resources

promotes, ultimately, a transformation of the person, who becomes more creative, shows a deeper knowledge of situations, finds meaning in adverse situations, better endures hardship, and is better integrated socially, with which an ‘upward spiral’ is produced that leads them to experience new positive emotions (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

The optimal ratio of positive and negative emotions has been debated (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013), and it is clear that there is no specific ratio that creates benefit. However, existing evidence demonstrates how greater ratios of positivity are predictors of better mental health as well as other beneficial consequences (Fredrickson, 2013).

## Functioning Well: Analysis of Personal Strengths

Besides research into emotions, educators are beginning to pay attention to individual characteristics associated with wellbeing. According to Seligman (2011), one of the pillars of wellbeing and a factor that makes people flourish is their engagement in life. Living an engaged life means being actively involved in what we do and being aware of the skills necessary to effectively face challenges on a wide spectrum of human functioning. The model proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004)—the Values in Action (VIA) model—is a comprehensive classification initially created to counterbalance the excessive emphasis on pathology that psychology has had, replacing it with a focus on human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This model proposes a taxonomy of positive psychological traits by identifying six classes of virtue (i.e., core virtues) made up of twenty-four measurable character strengths. These character strengths are independent, relatively stable over time, and mouldable by the context. To evaluate the strengths of children and adolescents from 10 to 17 years of age, The Values in Action Inventory of Character Strengths for Youth (VIA-Y) was created (Park & Peterson, 2006).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) emphasised that promoting competencies in children is more than fixing what is wrong in them; it requires identifying and strengthening their predominant qualities and helping them to find spaces in which they can express them. Fostering strengths in children and adolescents can promote more effective confrontation of current and future hardships (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004). For instance, many adolescents do not have the opportunity to develop within a supportive and positive context due to a variety of circumstances, which thereby places them in vulnerable situations. Cultivating character strengths

can allow adolescents to balance their life conditions by counteracting the negative influences and consequently help them to succeed.

One of the questions that it is worth asking when studying human strengths in children and adolescents is how they become consolidated as such. Adolescence is considered a fundamental period in the development of personality as well as a moment of crisis that enables change and, in the majority of cases, the construction of self-identity. Biological factors and temperament, the role of parents and family members, relationships with peers, social models, and institutions are some factors that can explain the evolutionary development of human strengths. Children will acquire and develop, thus, all the values and strengths that they perceive as important to the people and contexts that are meaningful to them. Besides family, school, and friends, advertising, television, and society in general transmit values that children assume as their own based on their needs, interests, or aspirations.

The development of character strengths is related to a large number of indicators of physical and psychological wellbeing. On a physical level, the implementation of strengths has been related to a greater number of healthy behaviours and greater perceived physical health (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, & Ruch, 2013). On a psychological level, the development of strengths allows children to be happier and increase their levels of wellbeing. The strengths that are most related with life satisfaction in children are gratitude, love, vitality, perseverance, and love of knowledge (Giménez, 2010). For example, Froh, Yurkewicz, and Kashdan (2009) found that children and adolescents with a more grateful look on life experience more positive emotions, have greater social support, and employ a greater number of prosocial helping behaviours towards others. Regarding love, children and adolescents that score higher on this strength feel more secure and confident when facing daily stress and are capable of implementing more effective strategies for establishing more satisfactory social relationships (Hazan, 2004). Further, various studies conclude that strengths are important for academic and work success. For example, Davidovitch, Littman-Ovadia, and Soen (2011) found that the pre-admission record of a student (high school grades) was not as predictive of work success and work satisfaction over the course of a career as was the development of strengths during the university period. In other words, students who knew their strengths and how to use them effectively were more likely to find a job and for that job to be their liking as compared to students who had not worked on their strengths.

## Doing Good for Others

Besides feeling well and functioning well, doing good for others is a central domain of wellbeing. Social wellbeing is characterized by creating strong social connections and developing emotional competencies that help children build and nurture positive relationships. Children's development does not occur in isolation. In fact, social contexts have a large influence on healthy development (Bronfenbrenner & Bronfenbrenner, 2009). For example, some studies indicate that social isolation in childhood is related to depression, substance abuse, suicide, and other mental illnesses (Hassed, 2008). Feeling connected and supported by family and by an academic support network (teachers, classmates) is fundamental to the wellbeing of children and adolescents (Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle, & Hardie, 2004). The benefits of positive relationships have been demonstrated on a physical and psychological level. On a psychological level, social support has been related to subjective wellbeing and vital meaning (Hicks & King, 2009) and even to better academic performance (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). On a physical level, it has been shown that social support is related to better indicators of health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996).

## Wellbeing Interventions in Children

The interest in positive interventions in children in the past two decades has favoured the appearance of a large variety of wellbeing programs such as social-emotional learning (SEL; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), emotional intelligence (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2013), resilience education (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009), forgiveness interventions (Nousse, Enright, & Klatt, 2012), values and character education (Arguís, Bolsas, Hernández-Paniello, & Salvador-Monge, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Nielsen, 2010), and contemplative practices (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

To articulate the different intervention models in childhood wellbeing, Waters et al. (2017) proposed a two-axis model: a horizontal axis that ranges from models more focused on intrapersonal wellbeing (e.g., resilience, emotional intelligence, contemplative practices, self-regulation) to models with a more interpersonal focus (e.g., character education, values education); and a vertical axis, which ranges from one-dimensional models (e.g., emotional intelligence, mindfulness) to multicomponent models (e.g., social-emotional learning). The goal is to have a general framework that guides the

selection of one to various movements when designing an intervention to increase childhood wellbeing, knowing the strengths and limitations of each focus and making strategic decisions about which components to include in the development and implementation of new programs. It is important that these programs, besides generating a positive impact on wellbeing, are really capable of building cross competencies for psychosocial functioning. That is to say, wellbeing programs should develop resources and abilities that allow for increasing childhood wellbeing to different vital areas in a sustained and generalized way. Thus, it is necessary that, beyond stand-alone approaches, wellbeing programs be applied using a more comprehensive method. Both initiatives have delivered meaningful results (Berkovitz & Bier, 2004; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

## Wellbeing in Schools

Keeping in mind the time that children spend in academic environments throughout their lives (Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2009), it seems reasonable that schools are the ideal place for PP interventions seeking to support the social and emotional development of young people (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017). The evidence suggests that relationships with classmates and school staff (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010; Hawker & Boulton, 2000) as well as school climate and culture in general (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007) are intimately linked to a variety of benefits to the physical and mental health of children. Thus, a commitment on the part of the entire school to create an environment that nurtures and builds wellbeing is essential.

In addition, a close relationship exists between wellbeing and academic learning (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Sometimes, educators (parents or teachers) assume that investing in wellbeing may take time and resources away from other academic activities. However, research shows that promoting flourishing has positive effects on academic performance. Suldo et al. (2011) found that students with better wellbeing had higher grades and fewer school absences. Similarly, Howell (2009) found that students who were flourishing reported higher grades and greater self-control than those who had moderate mental health or who were experiencing languishing. Moreover, a meta-analysis that reviewed 284 emotional and social education programs attended by over 200,000 students found that these programs raised students' scores by 11% on standardized academic performance tests (Durlak et al., 2011). Similarly, Dix, Slee, Lawson, and Keeves (2012) found that wellbeing interventions improved academic performance for students by an amount

equivalent to that of six extra months of schooling by year 7 (ages 11–13), and Suldo et al. (2011) found in a longitudinal study that life satisfaction and positive affect significantly predicted objective measures of academic performance one year later.

In short, although many educators have a traditional view of learning as a solely cognitive process, research has confirmed that emotions play a fundamental role in the development of academic abilities (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Indeed, some authors recognize the importance of both paths to learning (i.e., rational and emotional), underscoring the influence of the emotional climate of the classroom in promoting the recall of material taught in class (Jensen, 2008). Therefore, flourishing should be a complementary rather than competing goal in academic development.

Over the last decade, several studies have shown that different dimensions of wellbeing can be effectively developed through a wide variety of school interventions. In relation to benefits on an emotional level, it has been found that incorporating practices for wellbeing in schools prevents and reduces symptoms of depression (Brunwasser et al., 2009) and anxiety (Neil & Christensen, 2009) and also prevents future psychological problems (Seligman et al., 2009). It has also shown positive results on the development of important psychological resources for confronting difficult situations, such as character strengths (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; White & Waters, 2015), values (Nielsen, 2010), or resilience (Brunwasser et al., 2009).

On a social level, promoting wellbeing in schools encourages the development of positive relationships with classmates (Nielsen, Meilstrup, Nelausen, Koushede, & Holstein, 2015; White & Waters, 2015) as well as better relationships with parents and professors (Gillham, Brunwasser, & Freres, 2007; Milatz, Lüftenegger, & Schober, 2015). Meaningful relationships with positive adult figures protect adolescents in the face of problems like depression, gang membership, juvenile delinquency, risky sexual behaviour, and substance abuse (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Research into the efficacy of character development programs (specifically, development of academic and social abilities) has reported a 15% reduction in violent behaviour in students and up to a 29% reduction in high school students (Hahn et al., 2007).

With regard to physical health, it has been shown that self-esteem and positive emotions generate positive effects on physical health in children and adolescents and that, in addition, wellbeing in childhood predicts better perceived health and less risky behaviours in adulthood (Hoyt, Chase-Lansdale, McDade, & Adam, 2012).

The rapid growth of research into student wellbeing derives from the publication of various meta-analyses and review articles (Durlak et al., 2011;

Kavanagh et al., 2009; Kraag, Zeegers, Kok, Hosman, & Abu-Saad, 2006; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012; Waters, 2011; Waters, Barsky, Ridd, & Allen, 2015). Waters (2011) showed the benefits of implementing positive interventions in 11 different schools. Similarly, Neil and Christensen (2009) reviewed 27 randomized controlled trials implementing school-based PP programs, concluding that they are effective in reducing anxiety symptoms in young people. Moreover, in their meta-analysis, Durlak et al. (2011) found that these socio-emotional learning programs improved students' emotional regulation skills and increased their social competence. These treatment effects were maintained up to six months following the intervention. In the same line, Stockings et al. (2016) concluded that preventative school-based interventions are effective in reducing the onset of internalizing disorders in students for up to a 12-month period, indicating that the effects of these interventions may be sustainable. This growth of research on student wellbeing suggests that it is increasingly being viewed as an important goal of education.

Promoting flourishing in schools implies action on different levels. It does not imply simply facilitating the wellbeing of children, developing their socio-emotional abilities; it also implies promoting the flourishing of the entire educational community, involving professors and academic staff and valuing their enormous effort so that they feel a profound sense of commitment and belonging, promoting a culture of wellbeing, effective learning, and social responsibility. Only by intervening on multiple levels will it be possible to promote the flourishing of the entire educational community.

## Wellbeing in the Family

Students spend a considerable amount of time in school, but we cannot forget that the family is one of the most important developmental contexts in the life of a child. The responsibility to develop a child's character starts with the family, which is also responsible for promoting constructive opportunities for the child's health, safety, and education. What happens in the family also has an important influence both on the wellbeing of students and on their academic performance (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). Many parents, although they want their children to be happy, often leave this as a secondary objective in favour of focusing on the academic performance of their children (Seligman et al., 2009). Furthermore, the mental health problems present in families frequently end up affecting the children, causing them to grow up in high-risk environments where it is expected that

schools be the ones to teach them vital values and abilities (Chaves & Kern, 2017).

There is a need and a growing interest in knowing how to promote the wellbeing of parents, family, and communities. The science that underlies PP provides evidence that should be communicated to parents. There are some examples of incorporating families into school wellbeing programs. Geelong Grammar School, St. Peter's College—Adelaide, the Knox Grammar School, and the Universidad Tecmilenio have recently developed modules offered to families and the external public (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011; White & Murray, 2016). These sessions have been very successful among parents who want to participate in the wellbeing of their children. However, to nurture the wellbeing of students in a comprehensive way, it is ultimately necessary for parents and families to learn and apply the same abilities, activities, etc., at home. Progressively, through programs, chats, activities, etc., that are offered to the community and by challenging students themselves to share what they have learned outside the classroom, schools can become beacons of wellbeing with a positive impact on the entire community. For example, Waters (2015) evaluated the positive impact of positive parenting on the wellbeing of children, concluding that strength-based parenting has a crucial effect on the life satisfaction of children. However, much more work is needed in this field. In addition, parents that could benefit more from these practices and who possibly have a greater negative impact on the wellbeing of their children are often the most difficult to involve in these types of actions. This is a challenge that will have to be addressed in the near future.

## Policies for Wellbeing in Childhood

For childhood wellbeing to truly be a priority, a commitment is needed not only on an individual level but also on a broader political and social level. In the past few decades, there has been widespread interest in including wellbeing and positive mental health (Beddington et al., 2008) as a relevant element in designing public policies. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Science published a series of academic reports in 2008 in many different areas to assess the status of 'wellbeing and mental capital' in the country as a basis for designing policies aimed at improving the lives of U.K. citizens (Jenkins et al., 2008). This initiative generated a national political debate on wellbeing (Stoll, Michaelson, & Seaford, 2012), which led, among other plans, to including periodic measures of psychological wellbeing on national surveys.

Similarly, the United Nations decided in its General Assembly in June 2011, with the support of recognized researchers of psychological wellbeing, to consider the inclusion of measures of subjective wellbeing as additional indicators of human development in United Nations' statistics (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013). In a converging line of interest, children's wellbeing has become a global educational goal in recent years for international organizations as represented in the interagency initiative among the World Health Organization, UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), Education International, Education Development Center, the Partnership for Child Development and the World Bank, and Focusing Resources for Effective School Health (FRESH). The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) envisions a commitment to individual and collective wellbeing for education in 2030: 'we are committed to helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the planet' (Howells, 2018, p. 3).

However, it is worth considering that even when legislation begins to include wellbeing as a priority, sometimes these policies are not realistic. For example, schools are especially susceptible to the changing interests of politicians in charge. Change in curricular designs has become a common situation in schools, and frequently these curricular changes translate into academic programs with very diverse objectives. Although the idea of supporting childhood wellbeing from school may sound appealing, sometimes there is no space in the curriculum to incorporate lessons about wellbeing and strengths. If the research has shown that wellbeing programs have many benefits for children, then it should be incorporated as part of the culture of any school through its mission and values, its way of evaluating students, its curriculum, and its extracurricular activities.

And it is precisely through evaluation that this look can truly be expanded and go beyond the academic performance of students. Standardized tests like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) compare student performance on an international level, and, within this framework, grades have become an indicator of the quality of the school. Without a doubt, access to education and improvement in the academic performance of students guarantee important benefits for the development of a country, not only regarding opportunities for better employment and higher income but also for the promotion of physical and mental health. However, when policies are centred almost exclusively on the results of tests, the true value of an education is being forgotten.

Nowadays, we have clear examples of political support for the promotion of childhood wellbeing. This is the case in Bhutan, where the Ministry of Education developed and implemented a wellbeing program in 11 schools. The impact of this program was compared with 7 similar schools that received the typical curriculum. After 15 months, students in the positive schools reported higher levels of wellbeing and better academic performance. Additionally, these results were maintained six months later (Adler, 2017). The United Kingdom has also addressed the debate about implementing wellbeing programs in public schools as a fundamental line for promoting mental health, and this proposal already has a parliamentary majority. Little by little, wellbeing education is coming to countries around the world and gaining more and more evidence of success (see the report of the International Positive Education Network; IPEN, 2017).

## Conclusions and Future Steps

The study of childhood wellbeing and flourishing is a relatively new field. These ideas and strategies have existed for centuries, but their methods are enriched by scientific support and conclusions derived from years of research in PP. In recent decades, we have witnessed some changes that have favoured the proliferation of research in this area. The challenges posed by modern society require us to provide children with the cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that help them prevent future mental illnesses as well as flourish socially and professionally. This involves designing strategies to support children and other educational agents in addressing and preventing these difficulties in all key areas for their development. It will be necessary to continue validating interventions and multicomponent programs for the promotion of different dimensions of childhood wellbeing. Increasing knowledge of therapeutic techniques will allow clinicians and educators to have effective tools for the prevention and treatment of psychological problems in childhood.

PP has given way to new changes that will allow us to understand schools and families as enabling environments of wellbeing in the future. However, many questions remain to be answered. For example, what are the main dimensions that predict positive developmental trajectories? What is the most effective frequency, intensity, or duration when intervening? Are the changes sustainable over time? How does culture influence the focuses and benefits of the applications of PP in childhood? How can institutions become enablers of wellbeing? These are open questions that should be addressed in the future.

Ultimately, PP is a frame of reference for professionals and scientists when designing strategies to promote wellbeing. Moreover, it is a field with immense potential to exercise meaningful changes in educational institutions. Enabling educational spaces need to be built that allow for the development of the maximum potential of children, spaces in which, besides being prepared to have productive lives, children are provided with tools to have full and meaningful lives that let them construct societies that flourish.

## References

- Adler, A. (2017). Educación positiva: educando para el éxito académico y para la vida plena. *Papeles Del Psicólogo*, 38(1), 50–57.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30, 1–34.
- Antaramian, S. P., Huebner, E. S., Hills, K. J., & Valois, R. F. (2010). A dual-factor model of mental health: Toward a more comprehensive understanding of youth functioning. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80, 462–472.
- Arguís, R., Bolsas, A. P., Hernández, S., & Salvador, M. M. (2012). *Programa Aulas Felices. Psicología Positiva aplicada a la Educación*. Retrieved from <http://www.aulasfelices.org>.
- Aspinwall, L. G. (2001). Dealing with adversity: Self-regulation, coping, adaptation, and health. In A. Tesser & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intraindividual processes* (pp. 591–614). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Beddington, J., Cooper, C. L., Field, J., Goswami, U., Huppert, F. A., Jenkins, R., ..., Thomas, S. M. (2008). Mental wealth of nations. *Nature*, 455, 1057–1060.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education: A research-driven guide for education*. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership.
- Broderick, P. C., & Metz, S. (2009). Learning to BREATHE: A pilot trial of a mindfulness curriculum for adolescents. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 2(1), 35–46.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Bronfenbrenner, U. (2009). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, N. J. L., Sokal, A. D., & Friedman, H. L. (2013). The complex dynamics of wishful thinking: The critical positivity ratio. *American Psychologist*, 68, 801–813.
- Brunwasser, S. M., Gillham, J. E., & Kim, E. S. (2009). A meta-analytic review of the Penn Resiliency Program's effect on depressive symptoms. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(6), 1042–1054.
- Chaves, C., Hervas, G., Garcia, F. E., & Vazquez, C. (2016). Building life satisfaction through positive emotions, benefit finding and strengths of character: A

- longitudinal study in children with a life-threatening illness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17(3), 1051–1067.
- Chaves, C., & Kern, M. L. (2017). Bienestar emocional y educación positiva. In J. García-Campayo & M. Mondrego (Eds.), *Bienestar Emocional y Mindfulness en la Educación* (pp. 27–50). Madrid: Alianza.
- Chodkiewicz, A. R., & Boyle, C. (2017). Positive psychology school-based interventions: A reflection on current success and future directions. *Review of Education*, 5(1), 60–86.
- Chu, P. S., Saucier, D. A., & Hafner, E. (2010). Meta-analysis of the relationships between social support and well-being in children and adolescents. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 29(6), 624–645.
- Cohen, S., Alper, C. M., Treanor, J. J., & Doyle, W. J. (2006). Positive emotional style predicts resistance to illness after experimental exposure to rhinovirus or influenza A virus. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 68, 809–815.
- Davidovitch, N., Littman-Ovadia, H., & Soen, D. (2011). Myths in the academe—Pre-enrollment profiles and academic education as key to post-graduation employment and satisfaction. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 29. Retrieved from <http://journals.indexcopernicus.com/abstract.php?icid=942635>.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The ‘what’ and ‘why’ of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227–268.
- Diener, E., Scollon, C., & Lucas, R. (2003). The evolving concept of subjective well-being. *Advances in Cell Aging and Gerontology*, 15, 187–219.
- Dix, K. L., Slee, P. T., Lawson, M. J., & Keeves, J. P. (2012). Implementation quality of whole-school mental health promotion and students’ academic performance. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 17(1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2011.00608.x>.
- Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432.
- Frankl, V. (1946). *Man’s search for meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218–226.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Updated thinking on positivity ratios. *American Psychologist*, 68, 814–822.
- Fredrickson, B. L., Tugade, M. M., Waugh, C. E., & Larkin, G. R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crisis? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 365–376.
- Froh, J. J., Yurkewicz, C., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32, 633–650.

- Gillham, J. E., Brunwasser, S. M., & Freres, D. R. (2007). Preventing depression early in adolescence: The Penn Resiliency Program. In J. R. Z. Abela y B. L. Hankin (Eds.), *Handbook of depression in children and adolescents* (pp. 309–332). New York: Guilford Press.
- Gilman, R., Huebner, E., & Furlong, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of positive psychology in schools*. New York: Routledge.
- Gimenez, M. (2010). *La medida de las fortalezas psicológicas en adolescentes (VIA-Y): Relación con Clima Familiar, psicopatología y bienestar psicológico* (Doctoral dissertation). Complutense University, Madrid. Retrieved from <http://eprints.ucm.es/11578/>.
- Green, S., Oades, L., & Robinson, P. (2011, April). Positive education: Creating flourishing students, staff and schools. In R. Croswell (Ed.), *InPsych* (pp. 16–18). Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society.
- Hagelskamp, C., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2013). Improving classroom quality with the RULER approach to social and emotional learning: Proximal and distal outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 51*(3–4), 1–14.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development, 72*, 625–638.
- Hahn, R., Fuqua-Whitley, D., Wethington, H., Lowy, J., Crosby, A., Fullilove, M., ... Task Force on Community Preventive Services. (2007). Effectiveness of universal school-based programs to prevent violent and aggressive behavior: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 33*(2), S114–S129.
- Hassed, C. (2008). *The essence of health: The seven pillars of wellbeing*. Sydney: Random House.
- Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment: A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 41*, 441–455.
- Hazan, C. (2004). Love. In C. Peterson & M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (pp. 303–324). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (Eds.). (2013). *World happiness report* (Mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations). New York: The Earth Institute, Columbia University.
- Hervás, G., & Vázquez, C. (2013). Construction and validation of a measure of integrative well-being in seven languages: The Pemberton Happiness Index. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes, 11*, 66.
- Hicks, J. A., & King, L. A. (2009). Meaning in life as a subjective judgment and a lived experience. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 3*, 638–653.
- Hoffmann, J., & Russ, S. (2012). Pretend play, creativity and emotion regulation. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 6*, 175–184.
- Howell, A. J. (2009). Flourishing: Achievement-related correlates of students' well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(1), 1–13.

- Howells, K. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030: The future we want* (Working Paper). Paris: OECD.
- Howell, K. H., Coffey, J. K., Fosco, G. M., Kracke, K., Nelson, S. K., Rothman, E. F., & Grych, J. H. (2016). Seven reasons to invest in well-being. *Psychology of Violence, 6*(1), 8–14.
- Hoyt, L. T., Chase-Lansdale, P. L., McDade, T. W., & Adam, E. K. (2012). Positive youth, healthy adults: Does positive wellbeing in adolescence predict better perceived health and fewer risky health behaviors in young adulthood? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 50*, 66–73.
- Huppert, F. A. (2013). The state of well-being science: Concepts, measures, interventions and policies. In F. A. Huppert & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Interventions and policies to enhance well-being*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Immordino-Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. *Mind, Brain, and Education, 1*(1), 3–10.
- International Positive Education Network. (2017). *The state of positive education. A review of history, policy, practice, and research*. Retrieved from [https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document/8f647dc4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6?mc\\_cid=7ba0f17ca8&mc\\_eid=7131579056](https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document/8f647dc4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6?mc_cid=7ba0f17ca8&mc_eid=7131579056).
- Jenkins, R., Meltzer, H., Jones, P. B., Brugha, T., Bebbington, P., Farrell, M., ... Knapp, M. (2008). *Foresight mental capital and wellbeing project*. Londres: The Government Office for Science.
- Jensen, E. (2008). *Brain-based learning: The new paradigm of teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kavanagh, J., Oliver, S., Lorenc, T., Caird, J., Tucker, H., Harden, A., ... Oakley, A. (2009). School-based cognitive-behavioural interventions: A systematic review of effects and inequalities. *Health Sociology Review, 18*, 61–78.
- Kessler, R. C., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Alonso, J., Chatterji, S., Lee, S., Ormel, J., ... Wang, P. S. (2009). The global burden of mental disorders: An update from the WHO World Mental Health (WMH) Surveys. *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale, 18*(1), 23–33.
- Kessler, R. C., & Bromet, E. J. (2013). The epidemiology of depression across cultures. *Annual Review of Public Health, 34*, 119–138.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist, 62*, 95–108.
- Kok, B. E., Coffey, K. A., Cohn, M. A., Catalino, L. I., Vacharkulksemsuk, T., Algoe, S. B., ... Fredrickson, B. (2013). How positive emotions build physical health: Perceived positive social connections account for the upward spiral between positive emotions and vagal tone. *Psychological Science, 24*, 1123–1132.
- Kraag, G., Zeegers, M. P., Kok, G., Hosman, C., & Abu-Saad, H. H. (2006). School programs targeting stress management in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 449–472.

- Linley, P. A., Maltby, J., Wood, A. M., Osborne, G., & Hurling, R. (2009). Measuring happiness: The higher order factor structure of subjective and psychological well-being measures. *Personality and Individual Differences, 47*(8), 878–884.
- Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Motivation as an enabler for academic success. *School Psychology Review, 31*(3), 313–327.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*, 370–396.
- Milatz, A., Lüftenegger, M., & Schober, B. (2015). Teachers' relationship closeness with students as a resource for teacher wellbeing: A response surface analytical approach. *Frontier in Psychology, 6*, 1–16.
- Neil, A., & Christensen, H. (2009). Efficacy and effectiveness of school-based prevention and early intervention programs for anxiety. *Clinical Psychology Review, 29*, 208–215.
- Nielsen, T. W. (2010). Towards pedagogy of giving for well-being and social engagement. In T. Lovat & R. Toomey (Eds.), *International research handbook on values education and student well-Being* (pp. 617–630). New York, NY: Springer.
- Nielsen, L., Meilstrup, C., Nelausen, M. K., Koushede, V., & Holstein, B. E. (2015). Promotion of social and emotional competence: experiences from a mental health intervention applying a whole school approach. *Health Education, 115*, 339–356.
- Noble, T., & McGrath, H. (2015). PROSPER: A new framework for positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being: Theory, Research and Practice, 5*(2), 1–17.
- Nousse, V., Enright, R. D., & Klatt, J. S. (2012). An educational forgiveness intervention for young adult children of divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 53*, 618–638.
- Oades, L. G., Robinson, P., Green, S., & Spence, G. B. (2011). Towards a positive university. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 432–439.
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006). Moral competence and character strengths among adolescents: The development and validation of the values in action inventory of strengths for youth. *Journal of Adolescence, 29*, 891–909.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Proyer, R. T., Gander, F., Wellenzohn, S., & Ruch, W. (2013). What good are character strengths beyond subjective well-being? The contribution of the good character on self-reported health-oriented behavior, physical fitness, and the subjective health status. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 8*, 222–232.
- Rusk, R. D., & Waters, L. (2015). A psycho-social system approach to wellbeing: Empirically deriving the five domains of positive functioning. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(2), 141–152.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 141–166.

- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 1069–1081.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 1–28.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourishing*. New York: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35, 293–311.
- Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychological interventions: A practice-friendly metaanalysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65, 467–487.
- Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., De Ritter, M., Ben, J., & Gravesteyn, C. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment? *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(9), 892–909.
- Stewart, D., Sun, J., Patterson, C., Lemerle, K., & Hardie, M. (2004). Promoting and building resilience in primary school communities: Evidence from a comprehensive health promoting school approach. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 6(3), 26–33.
- Stockings, E. A., Degenhardt, L., Dobbins, T., Lee, Y. Y., Erskine, H. E., Whiteford, H. A., & Patton, G. (2016). Preventing depression and anxiety in young people: A review of the joint efficacy of universal, selective and indicated prevention. *Psychological Medicine*, 46(1), 11–26.
- Stoll, L., Michaelson, J., & Seaford, C. (2012). *Well-being evidence for policy: A review*. London: New Economics Foundation.
- Suldo, S. M., Shaunessy, E., Thalji, A., Michalowski, J., & Shaffer, E. J. (2009). Sources of stress for students in high school college preparatory and general education programs: Group differences and associations with adjustment. *Adolescence*, 44, 925–948.
- Suldo, S., Thalji, A., & Ferron, J. (2011). Longitudinal academic outcomes predicted by early adolescents' subjective well-being, psychopathology, and mental health status yielded from a dual factor model. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(1), 17–30.
- Terjesen, M. D., Jacofsky, M., Froh, J., & DiGiuseppe, R. (2004). Integrating positive psychology into schools: Implications for practice. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(1), 163–172.
- Thompson, M. P., & Swartout, K. M. (2017). Epidemiology of suicide attempts among youth transitioning to adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47, 807–817.

- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2002). Positive emotions and emotional intelligence. In L. F. Barrett & P. Salovey (Eds.), *The wisdom in feeling* (pp. 319–340). New York: Guilford Press.
- Uchino, B. N., Cacioppo, J. T., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (1996). The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanism and implications for health. *Psychology Bulletin*, *119*, 488–531.
- UNICEF. (2007). Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries. *Innocenti report card 7*. Florence: UNICEF.
- Waterman, A. S. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: A eudaimonist's perspective. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *3*, 234–252.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, *28*(2), 75–90.
- Waters, L. (2014). Balancing the curriculum: Teaching gratitude, hope and resilience. In H. Sykes (Ed.), *A love of idea* (pp. 117–124). Future Leaders Press.
- Waters, L. (2015). Strength-based parenting and life satisfaction in teenagers. *Advances in Social Sciences*, *2*, 158–173.
- Waters, L., Barsky, A., Ridd, A., & Allen, K. (2015). Contemplative education: A systematic, evidence based review of the effect of meditation interventions in schools. *Educational Psychology Review*, *27*, 103–134.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Rusk, R., Aarch, A., & Cotton, A. (2017). Positive education: Visible wellbeing and the five domains of positive functioning. In M. Slade., L. Oades., & A. Jarden (Eds.), *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health* (Chapter 20; pp. 245–264). Cambridge University Press.
- Way, N., Reddy, R., & Rhodes, J. (2007). Students' perceptions of school climate during the middle school years: Associations with trajectories of psychological and behavioral adjustment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *40*, 194–213.
- Wentzel, K. R., & Caldwell, K. (1997). Friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership: Relations to academic achievement in middle school. *Child Development*, *68*(6), 1198–1209.
- White, M., & Murray, S. (2016). *Evidence-based approaches to positive education*. NY: Springer.
- White, M. A., & Waters, L. E. (2015). Strengths-based approaches in the classroom and staffroom. In M. A. White & A. S. Murray (Eds.), *Evidence-based approaches in positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools* (pp. 111–134). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer.
- Woods, R., & Pooley, J. A. (2015). A review of intervention programs that assist the transition for adolescence into high school and the prevention of mental health problems. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Health*, *8*(2), 97–108.
- World Health Organization. (2005). *Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, practice. A report of the World Health Organization*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 12

## Assessing Wellbeing in School Communities

Aaron Jarden, Rebecca Jarden, Tan-Chyuan Chin,  
and Margaret L. Kern

Imagine that a group of students joins your school, and you have no records of their abilities or past performance. How do you determine which year level they should be a part of and what their learning needs might be? You would likely use a variety of tools to assess the level that the students are at, and to match them with other students who are at a similar learning level. Likewise, the same principle applies for the assessment of individuals within a school community regarding their psychological wellbeing, and for the usefulness of such data for making decisions. Moreover, assessment of a school community's psychological wellbeing is a crucial link in the positive education chain—not only to determine where the community's wellbeing is at one point in time, but also to inform possible intervention approaches both initially and going forward, with targeted adaption over time. Without this vital information about what aspects are working for whom, and which aspects are driving, increasing, or compromising wellbeing, practitioners and education decision-makers are largely flying blind and not aptly applying practices which are theoretically grounded or research based.

---

A. Jarden (✉) · T.-C. Chin · M. L. Kern  
Centre for Wellbeing Science, Melbourne Graduate School of Education,  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [aaron.jarden@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:aaron.jarden@unimelb.edu.au)

R. Jarden  
Department of Nursing, Melbourne School of Health Sciences,  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

As such, wellbeing assessments are critical in the context of positive education initiatives.

In this chapter, we firstly summarize the basics of assessment and principles of good assessment. Secondly, we outline wellbeing assessments in schools: what they are, why they are important, and examples of good assessment tools and their use in practice. Thirdly, we illustrate how wellbeing assessment data can be used in decision-making for various stakeholders. Finally, we provide a comprehensive list of questions schools and decision-makers may find useful in considering assessment tools and approaches. It is our hope that this chapter will aid in encouraging appropriate wellbeing assessments in schools, especially aligned with positive education initiatives, and make initiatives more useful in establishing and sustaining positive education in school communities.

## Assessment Basics

### What Is Assessment?

There are four key related terms that need to be clarified: testing, measurement, assessment, and evaluation. From a psychometric perspective, *testing* can be defined as “the act or practice of giving tests to measure someone’s knowledge or ability” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019c), with a test being “an instrument or technique that measures someone’s knowledge of something to determine what he or she knows or has learned” (Penn State University, 2019, First section, para 1). For example, testing might involve administering a reading level test to a child. *Measurement* refers to when “a ‘test’ is given, and a ‘score’ is obtained” (Shum, O’Gorman, Myors, & Creed, 2013, p. 17). For example, measurement would reflect the child’s result (the score) of the reading test. *Assessment* refers to “the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019a). From an education perspective, assessment can be defined as “the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, test, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2015). For example, the reading test that was administered to the child is used to assess the child’s reading level. Lastly, *evaluation* can be defined as “the process of judging or calculating the quality, importance, amount, or value of something” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019b), but can also be conceived as

the process of determining the worth or value of the result of a measurement (Shum et al., 2013). For example, the child's reading level is used to decide their placement in a particular class level.

Clearly there is a lot of overlap amongst these definitions, and one may begin to wonder what the difference is amongst testing, measurement, assessment, and evaluation. Rather than trying to distinguish these lexicologically, we address these from a practical perspective. We consider that a *test* provides a *measurement* of some aspect, or aspects, of which can then be *evaluated* against some criteria or knowledge base. This process as a whole can be conceived of as encompassing the process of *assessment* more broadly. That is, assessment can be considered the broader process, which incorporates tests, measures, and evaluations. Specifically, an assessment involves a test of some sort, which measures some aspects and collects data, and then an evaluation is made of the data.

## Principles of Good Assessment

Knowing what assessments are, it then follows that there are some principles which allow for good assessments. Here we highlight three principles that we believe are important for good assessments in school communities.

Firstly, assessments should follow appropriate psychological assessment processes (see for instance Shum et al., 2013). The process begins with careful planning of the assessment (e.g., identifying the goals of assessment and the best approaches to meet those goals). This is followed by data collection, which obtains quantitative and/or qualitative information through approaches such as surveys, observations, behavioural measures, existing records, or experience sampling. Next, data need to be processed. This might involve coding and processing the raw data, statistical analyses appropriate to the goals of the assessment, and judgements about what the data show. Finally, results are communicated through a variety of means (e.g., written reports, verbal reporting, infographics, conference presentations, academic papers, direct communication to participants and other stakeholders). A good assessment should follow these four main overarching processes.

Secondly, assessment should be psychometrically sound. By this we mean that the measures, as a whole and not in part, should be rigorously tested and empirically validated, with careful attention to their validity and reliability. Validity ensures that the assessment effectively measures what it both purports to and should measure. Reliability requires that the assessment can be relied upon to provide consistently accurate results. A good assessment should be both valid and reliable (See Chapters 4 and 5 of Shum et al., 2013; Cook &

Beckman, 2006; Coolican, 2014, for detailed discussion and consideration of validity and reliability.)

Thirdly, assessments should follow appropriate ethical approaches (Jarden, Rashid, Roache, & Lomas, 2019). An *ethical approach* is a broad category that could include aspects such as: always checking and obtaining copyright for psychometric test usage, using appropriate tests for the ages and contexts, only collecting information that there is a plan to use, obtaining appropriate consent, considering issues of privacy and confidentiality, safe data storage, and considering the dangers in some types of testing feedback such as to very young children or around sensitive topics (see Kern et al., 2020 for ethical aspects to consider with school-based assessments that include well-being and mental health information). Good assessments take into account these different ethical aspects, striving to avoid harm (non-maleficence) and to do what is good and right (beneficence).

## Wellbeing Assessment

With this background on what assessments refer to and principles of good assessment, we turn specifically to wellbeing assessments within school communities. A wellbeing assessment is an assessment that focuses on psychological wellbeing—broadly defined. Thus, it firstly depends on the definition of wellbeing that one adopts, and secondly on the model of wellbeing that this definition is aligned to. We first consider definitions and models that have been used within positive education, and then point to context and process aspects. In addition, particularly relevant to assessment within school communities, we highlight the importance of considering the system within which assessments occur.

### Defining Wellbeing

Common definitions of wellbeing focus on the individual, such as: “well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole” (Michaelson, Mahony, & Schifferes, 2012, p. 6.), and “the notion of how well a person’s life is going for that person. A person’s well-being is what is ‘good for’ them” (Crisp, 2017, The Concept section, para 1).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>See Oades and Heazlewood (2017) for a nuanced consideration of wellbeing definitions.

In line with the original conception of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), we agree and contend that wellbeing not only incorporates aspects of what is going well in life (having happiness, a sense of meaning, engagement, etc.), but also incorporates aspects of ill-being (having depressed mood, loneliness, feelings of stress, etc.), thus encompassing a broad spectrum or continuum. Therefore, a wellbeing assessment ought to capture *both* what is going well and what is not going well for an individual. It also includes multiple domains, such as emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness), cognitions (e.g., judgements about one's life satisfaction, trouble concentrating), behaviours (e.g., practising gratitude, crying), and physiology (e.g., heart rate variability, somatic symptoms).

There are a host of additional issues and distinctions that could be discussed with regard to wellbeing definitions, such as lay versus expert definitions, hedonic versus eudaimonic conceptions, subjective versus objective perspectives, unidimensional versus bidimensional conceptions, and experienced versus evaluative notions (see for instance Diener, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013 for consideration of these issues). There is no internationally agreed-upon definition of wellbeing that currently exists, other than that it is multi-faceted (Hone, Jarden, Schofield, & Duncan, 2014). Furthermore, and sometimes confusingly, the term “wellbeing” is quite often used interchangeably with the terms “mental health”, “mental illness”, “wellness”, “quality of life”, “happiness”, “thriving”, “flourishing”, and “health”, amongst others (Hone, Jarden, & Schofield, 2014). These issues all compound and are layered challenges as the lack of a definition of “wellbeing” makes deciding which model to base a wellbeing strategy upon, and which psychometric tool or tools to select for assessments, a conundrum for practitioners, and decision-makers.

## Models of Wellbeing

There are many wellbeing models in the education space, and a full review is beyond our scope here (see Positive Education Schools Association [PESA], 2020 for a more nuanced discussion of existing wellbeing frameworks and identification of other models used within education). To illustrate, we outline four models that, from our experience, have commonly been incorporated as guiding frameworks for positive education within Australian schools.

First, Seligman's *PERMA* (2011) model has become popular over the past decade. Seligman contends that wellbeing arises from nurturing five elements: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Many schools adapt the model to capture additional dimensions. For

example, Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Australia includes H for health is added (i.e., *PERMAH*), with all elements infused with the notion of character strengths (Norrish, 2015). The Wellbeing and Resilience Centre in South Australia uses *PERMA+*, where the “+” refers to the four elements of optimism, nutrition, sleep, and physical activity (Iasiello, Bartholomaeus, Jarden, & Kelly, 2017).

Second, Water’s *Visible Wellbeing*<sup>TM</sup> (Waters, 2017; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Aarch, & Cotton, 2017) is an approach that aims to combine the science of wellbeing with the science of learning to build wellbeing via teacher pedagogy using the SEARCH framework (Strengths, Emotional management, Attention and awareness, Relationships, Coping, and Habits and goals: Waters, 2018; Waters & Loton, 2019). The SEARCH framework is based on Rusk and Waters’ (2015) *Five Domains of Positive Functioning*, which specially focuses on psychosocial functioning, defined to mean “the moment-by-moment psychological and social processes, states and events that contribute to well-being” (p. 141). As *Visible Wellbeing* is a pedagogical approach, it broadens positive education beyond program delivery.

Third, *Five Ways to Wellbeing* was developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in the U.K. (Aked & Thompson, 2011), but has spread internationally. The New Economics Foundation was commissioned by the U.K. government to develop a set of evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing. Using accessible language and building on an extensive review of the wellbeing literature (i.e., the Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project), NEF identified five ways for supporting wellbeing: Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning, and Give.

Fourth, Noble and McGrath (2015) proposed the *PROSPER* framework, which focuses on seven components: Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose and meaning, Engagement, and Resilience. The framework aims to provide an organizational tool for the implementation of the seven components to help people, groups, organizations, or communities to flourish or function optimally. The authors suggest it can be used as a planning tool or as an audit tool to help schools to identify current areas of strength and practices that might need to be further enhanced.

These four frameworks give just a taste of the many models and frameworks that are available. Some schools choose to use these models to guide measurement and practice; other schools have developed their own frameworks or variants of these models to fit the values and context of their school. Regardless of the model chosen, it is important that there is alignment between the working definition of wellbeing chosen and the model adopted. Such alignment between definition and model allows for assessments to be

chosen and developed that fit with both the definition of wellbeing and model being used.

Beyond definitions and models, consideration also needs to be given to the content that is being assessed (i.e., the what), the process of assessment (i.e., the how), and the systems involved (i.e., the who). The next three sections consider these aspects in more detail.

## The Content of Assessment

While the definition and model can guide the focus of assessment, the next question is *what* should be included in the assessment—the content. From a psychometric perspective, perhaps one of the most accessible resources for considering the content of an assessment is the OECD's (2013) *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Wellbeing*. This guide points to the need for considering conceptual frameworks, validity, and accuracy, along with various methodological considerations such as question construction, response formats, cultural considerations, order effects, and survey context, to name just a few. Various aspects of implementation are also considered. The OECD recommends assessing life evaluation, affect, experienced wellbeing, and domain wellbeing, and they provide examples of how to do so. However, while the guidelines provide a comprehensive and useful resource, one drawback is that the recommendations largely apply to adults, and thus are more relevant for teachers, school staff, parents, and carers. The same guidelines, especially in relation to the content that is included in an assessment, may or may not be appropriate for young people.

Some measures specific to children and adolescents do exist. For example, The Children's Society (2019) in the U.K. developed the *Good Childhood Index* which measures life satisfaction, happiness, and wellbeing in ten key areas of children's lives (e.g., friends, home, appearance, school). Huebner, Suldo, and Valois (2003) developed a widely used 7-item life satisfaction scale and the 5-item brief multidimensional student life satisfaction scale. Kern, Benson, Steinberg, and Steinberg (2016) developed the *EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being*, which measures five positive psychological characteristics: Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, and Happiness. Still, until recently, less attention has been given to the development and validation of measures and best practice approaches for capturing children's wellbeing (Rose et al., 2017; Stevens & Jarden, 2019).

One consideration in determining the content to be included in an assessment is the underpinning model of wellbeing that the school is embracing, to ensure the assessment captures all elements of the relevant model. The

model is the prerequisite base from which to link the wellbeing assessment to, and as such, no assessment should take place until an appropriate model and definition of wellbeing has been identified and clarified. A measure that has evidence of validity and reliability is of little use if it is misaligned with the school's way of understanding wellbeing.

We suggest that it is important to not only consider wellbeing itself, but also what might be impacting upon and driving wellbeing. For example, let us say a school is working with the PERMAH model, and has implemented a program that aims to build high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) in the staff, with the intention of building better relationships amongst staff (the "R" in PERMAH). The assessment should include a measure of relationships, ensuring that the program achieves its intended outcomes. But the assessment might also include the other elements of PERMAH, global perspectives of wellbeing (e.g., life satisfaction, work satisfaction, overall happiness), as well as personal and social characteristics of the staff. That is, it is often beneficial if wellbeing assessments not only aim to assess the impacts of positive education initiatives and changes in school community wellbeing over time (i.e., "did it work?"), but also have enough sophistication and investigative depth to decipher potential broader impacts of the program and to identify which elements are driving any impactful changes. For instance, it may be possible that the PERMAH element of "Relationships" does not change as a result of the high-quality connections program, but the program helps staff enjoy themselves (Positive emotion increased), they develop a greater sense of meaning (Meaning increased), and generally are more satisfied with their life as a whole. Further, the program might have been useful for primary level teachers and not for secondary teachers or depend upon how introverted or extraverted the staff member is. Such information allows the practitioner to then investigate if the effects of the program may be delayed, or due to other contextual factors, or if the program was not successful and another approach may be needed to bolster that element of "Relationships" in PERMAH. As the common business saying goes, "you can only manage what you measure". More comprehensive assessments can allow better management, because well designed assessments allow for data-driven decision-making.

At the same time, comprehensiveness must be balanced across the length of assessment and participant burden in the particular context of use (Lopez & Snyder, 2003; OECD, 2013; Rolstad, Adler, & Ryden, 2011). If assessments are too long, students may not take them seriously or lose focus, which then impacts data quality (validity and reliability). Therefore, there is a pragmatic

aspect of what can be asked of students, especially younger students. Likewise, all data captured should be planned to be used, as it is a waste of time and resources to capture information that is not used.

## The Process of Assessment

Once one determines what should be included, the next question becomes *how* assessment should be done, or the process involved. The process of assessment refers to the mode (e.g., self-report versus observation, online versus offline), context and setting, frequency, and timeline of assessments. One thing to consider is whether assessment is meant to provide a cross-sectional snapshot across an array of areas, versus longitudinal tracking of wellbeing and changes in wellbeing over time. Although there is no specific assessment practice data in schools to draw on, from our experience, cross-sectional assessments of wellbeing in school communities are the most common practice. The cross-sectional assessments sample different individuals without the need to link responses over time. By comparing responses from one year to another, trends across the school can be identified, testing for example whether adding a wellbeing program during the year increased how students on average performed in their classes. There are several reasons why schools might opt for a single cross-sectional snapshot. It is challenging to assess the same individuals over time and link their data, especially with very few assessment platforms suitable for this purpose. With snapshots, responses can be kept anonymous, potentially increasing comfort in revealing sensitive information. It is also less time and resource intensive for both schools and participants. But it also means that there is a greater amount of between person variance, and numerous other factors that could be contributing to differences, including historical events, characteristics of a particular group of students, the timing of the assessment, and other confounding factors (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2014).

In contrast, longitudinal tracking of wellbeing involves multiple assessment points tracking the same individuals over time and assessing change at both the individual and group level. Longitudinal assessments more directly look at changes in wellbeing over time, along with pointing to potential predictors, enablers, and barriers to wellbeing as an outcome. But such data is much harder to capture, as students change classes and schools. Data must be identifiable or linkable in some ways, which can increase desirability responding (OECD, 2013). Participants can tire of completing the same survey multiple times or adjust their responses as the assessment becomes predictable. The inclusion of identifiable mental health information raises

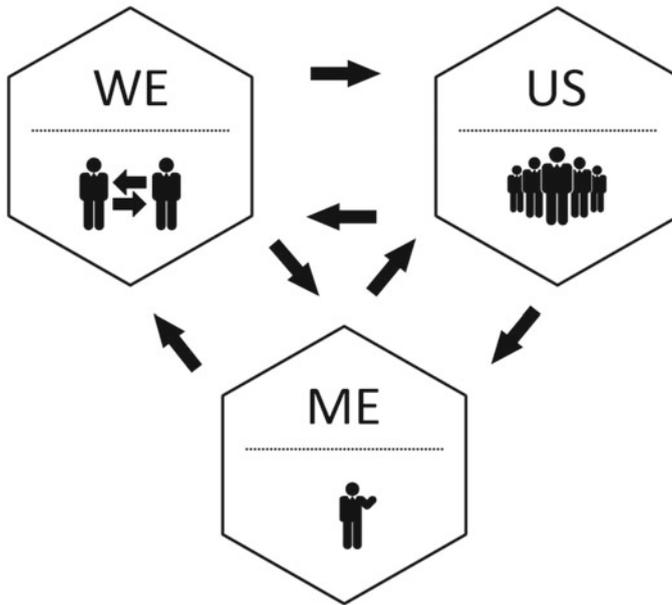
a number of ethical questions around young people's rights, confidentiality, and protection (Kern et al., 2020). In addition, some psychometric measures, especially those with short response scales (e.g., a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4), are often not sensitive to capturing change over time, and are thus only suitable for cross-sectional use (OECD, 2013).

Another important issue related to assessment process is the use of test norms and comparisons. Our experience is that norms are often not useful, unless the assessment is a one-off cross-sectional snapshot. For most well-being measures, while diverse participants may have been included in the development and testing of the measure, they are often not representative of different populations, and thus may be an inappropriate comparison point to the school's population. In addition, if one's school is reported to be higher than the comparison group, this can cause complacency and lack of continued investment in wellbeing. Alternatively, if one's school is reported to be lower than the comparison group, this may cause feelings of hopelessness. We recommend capturing longitudinal data over several time points, as any change from baseline provides valuable information regarding the implementation of positive education initiatives. This changes the focus from "others" which a school or practitioner cannot control, to "your school" and aspects that are more within the schools and practitioners' control. Such an approach assists in setting growth and approach-based targets and aspirations for schools.

To enable the incorporation of regular assessment of wellbeing, it can be beneficial to link and align wellbeing data with data the school already routinely collects, such as academic achievement or behavioural data (e.g., absences, bullying). Analysis of the link between these datasets can provide useful information attuned to the interests of diverse stakeholders across the school community.

## The Systems Being Assessed

Beyond the content and process involved, consideration should be given to *who* should be involved in assessments within the school community. A systems informed perspective suggests that different perspectives are valuable, and there is value in considering assessment at different levels within a system (Kern et al., 2020). Within a school community, as illustrated in Fig. 12.1 (Jarden & Jarden, 2016, p. 427, used with permission), wellbeing assessments and programs can happen at three distinct levels, regardless of the structure or size of the school community: the individual level (*Me*; such as a student, a teacher, a parent), the group level (*We*; such as pairs of students,



**Fig. 12.1** Me, We, and Us levels of wellbeing in a system (Original image published in Jarden, A., & Jarden, R. (2016). Positive psychological assessment for the workplace. In L. Oades, M. F. Steger, A. Delle Fave, & J. Passmore (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of positive psychology at work* (pp. 415–437), by John Wiley & Sons. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

the student, and teacher, the teacher and parent, the class), and the organizational level (*Us*; such as the school as a whole). These levels are inter-related and co-dependent, and each reveals unique but important information about the wellbeing of the school community as a whole.

Individual-level (*Me*) wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that teachers or students can do by themselves, such as learning about and utilizing their strengths or undertaking a mindfulness program (Niemiec, 2013). In such cases, measures such as the *Strength Use and Knowledge Scale* (Govindji & Linley, 2007) or the *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale* (Brown & Ryan, 2003) might be used for assessment of these constructs. Group level (*We*) wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that involve the individual working on their wellbeing with at least one other person that they are directly in contact with on a regular basis, such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski, 2014) or building high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and for students strategies and tasks such as delivering gratitude letters to favourite teachers (Norrish, 2015). In such cases, job crafting could be assessed with the *Job Crafting Questionnaire* (2013), and high-quality connections could be

assessed with various connection measures (Dutton, 2003). Organizational and whole school level (*Us*) wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that aim to have an impact over the whole of the school community, such as creating a school wellbeing policy (HAPIA, 2009) or framework, directing resources towards one-off or smaller scale wellbeing initiatives, whole of school wellbeing assessments, or Appreciative Inquiry (AI) summits (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The *Us* level is best assessed with global wellbeing measures that are anchored to the school's definition of and model of wellbeing—these could include scales such as the *Happiness Measures* (Fordyce, 1988) or *Flourishing Scale* (Diener et al., 2009).

These levels of *Me*, *We*, and *Us* can also be integrated for maximal effect. For example, in a school setting a teacher (*Me*) can choose to identify and work on their strengths (e.g., an individual strengths assessment such as the *Strength Profile*: [www.strengthsprofile.com](http://www.strengthsprofile.com)). A team (*We*) can choose to focus on team members strengths in the deployment of team projects (e.g., comparing strengths profiles or different patterns of strengths knowledge and use—Govindji & Linley, 2007). The school (*Us*) can choose to invest in the cost of a strengths development program for all teachers and school staff, or focus on combined organizational strengths during an AI summit.

All three of these levels require different assessment approaches, with arguably the *Me* level easiest to assess, followed by the *We* level, with the *Us* level the hardest, based upon our current validated assessment measures. Some measures at each level do exist. For example, at the individual (*Me*) adult level, wellbeing measures include the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985), the *Subjective Happiness Scale* (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), and the *Hope Scale* (Snyder et al., 1991), for children the *Good Childhood Index* (Children's Society, 2019) and *Student Life Satisfaction Scale* (Huebner et al., 2003), and for adolescents the *EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being* (Kern et al., 2016). At the group levels (*We*), measures such as the *Workplace Wellbeing Index* (Page, 2005) or *Work on Wellbeing* (Jarden & Jarden, 2016) capture team functioning. At the organization (*Us*) level, individuals might reflect upon the organization more globally (e.g., “does your organization invest in wellbeing?”), or measures such as the *School Wide Evaluation Tool* (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019) captures school-wide features impacting upon behaviour and functioning.

At present, arguably, much of the emphasis within education focuses on individuals. Further, when the group and organization levels are considered, measures typically involve the aggregation of individual responses of persons within the team or organization. From a systems perspective, the whole (e.g.,

capturing the wellbeing of the community) is more than the sum of the parts (Allison, Waters, & Kern, 2020; Kern et al., 2020). A key priority becomes how to best integrate these levels, which are integral to the school community context, with appropriate assessment within and across levels. How exactly these levels are integrated, and what possibilities for integration exist, is yet to be investigated, so is largely unknown. For example, a question from a school might be “should we start at the Me level, then progress to the We level, and then progress to the Us level, or should we do it the other way around?”, or it could be “should we start at all three levels simultaneously?” It is also unknown how to best capture the levels and integrations between the levels. In practice, schools have already started at one or more of these levels and so the challenge is to broaden, capture valid data across the levels, which may point to a natural starting point at one level that is more obvious. Yet within this integration perhaps lies the great possibility to increase organizational and educational performance and flourishing, as we move towards “opening the possibility for yet unimagined solutions that allow both current and future generations to thrive” (Kern et al., 2020, p. 714). Nonetheless, a systems perspective highlights the idea that both assessing wellbeing and intervening at different possible levels within school communities may be one of the best pathways to increasing overall and long-term wellbeing and sustaining it.

The language and idea of *Me*, *We*, *Us* provides a “wellbeing literacy” (Oades, 2020) that is easily understandable and communicable to both decision-makers, leaders, and staff, providing an accessible approach for turning this priority into a reality. However, there is no measure, scale, or tool that holistically accounts adequately for all three levels of the *Me*, *We*, *Us*. At most it is our contention that further consideration of the *We* and *Us* levels, along with intersections and relationships amongst the three levels, is both needed and would be beneficial—both in practice, and from a research intervention and assessment perspective.<sup>2</sup> We contend that it is time to consider the *Me*, *We*, *Us* framework for guiding the implementation and assessment of wellbeing programs.

## Wellbeing Assessment Tools

There are many wellbeing assessment tools available, which range greatly in quality. Some have been validated, some have been widely used despite being

---

<sup>2</sup>Social Network Analysis is one approach that does provide some optimism in this regard, however is seldom used in positive education research.

of poor quality, some provide feedback to users, some provide data that are more useful than others, some are free and some are expensive, and some are more reliable (from a technology perspective) than others. We contend that validity is the benchmark for good assessment. Validity means that the assessment actually measures what it says it measures and it consistently measures the same things each time it is used (reliability). It is no easy job to determine whether a psychometric tool is valid or reliable, so we encourage test users to gain expert insight from individuals or consultants knowledgeable about psychometric testing and test properties. As a bare minimum, the test providers should provide information about the psychometric properties of their measures, which ideally have been peer-reviewed.

We contend that no measure, no matter how shiny or cheap, should be used unless you can rely on its psychometric properties. Table 12.1 provides a few examples of measures that have been validated in the literature. This list is in no way exhaustive, but rather provides an illustration of some of the sound tools currently available.

## Examples of a Wellbeing Assessment Tool in Practice

To make the use of tools more concrete, we describe examples of how the Wellbeing Profiler (<https://www.wbprofiler.com>) was beneficially used as part of positive education efforts within an educational community. As summarized in Table 12.1, the Wellbeing Profiler is a measurement and reporting service developed for schools to examine the wellbeing of their students from ages 10 to 25 years old. The Profiler measures wellbeing in 6 domains (Emotional and Strengths, Psychological, Cognitive, Social, Physical, and Economic) as identified in the research literature as important indicators of youth wellbeing (Chin, 2017; Slemp et al., 2017).

The Centre for Wellbeing Science at the University of Melbourne in Australia has used the Wellbeing Profiler to develop or refine the wellbeing strategies and plans in schools across the three main education sectors in Australia (Catholic, government, and independent) since 2015, as well as local government agencies and networks in Australia (as described below). Areas of cohort strengths and concerns have been identified through needs analysis of the aggregate data, providing schools and councils with rich information to assist with allocating appropriate funding and resources for targeted interventions and support for young people in their care.

For example, since 2016, Maroondah City Council (outer east suburbs of Melbourne, Australia) has utilized the Wellbeing Profiler to collect data from young people attending school in the municipality. The project initially

**Table 12.1** An illustrative list of valid wellbeing assessment tools

Information and features	Flourishing at School	Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEW) Survey	The Wellbeing Profiler
Website	<a href="http://www.flourishingatschool.com">www.flourishingatschool.com</a>	<a href="http://www.acer.org/sew">www.acer.org/sew</a>	<a href="http://www.wbprofiler.com">www.wbprofiler.com</a>
Description of tool: What is it?	To provide preventative mental health assistance to students and staff in schools. The goal is to keep individuals well and assist them to achieve an optimal level of wellbeing	An anonymous strength-based survey which provides an ecological view of students' wellbeing by assessing indicators of students' social-emotional wellbeing, students' social-emotional competencies, and 'environmental' influences (measured in the secondary survey only)	A wellbeing needs analysis tool, developed by researchers at The University of Melbourne in response to growing community demand to assess wellbeing in schools and youth organisations (creative arts, local government agencies, and sporting groups)
What does it measure?	PERMAH and an option to easily include the VIA character strengths. In all, 14 constructs are measured (e.g., positive emotion, purpose, community). It also links to another measure of adult wellbeing for school staff (called FlourishDx)	A wide variety of social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes of their student population. It "uses an 'ecological', positive-psychology model of the social and emotional wellbeing of young people"	Captures wellbeing across six domains: Psychological, Cognitive, Economic, Social, Physical, and Emotional wellbeing and strengths). These six domains include 45 constructs

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

Information and features	Flourishing at School	Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEW) Survey	The Wellbeing Profiler
Number of questions	58 items	3 survey types: prep, primary, and secondary have different questions. Prep is 50 questions completed by the teacher, Primary is 42 questions completed by the student, and Secondary is 76 questions completed by the student	Between 75 to 168 survey items (dependent on age group)
What age groups is the tool appropriate for?	Students 11–18 years	Students aged 3–18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student survey: 10–25 years</li> <li>• Staff survey: 18 + years</li> </ul>
How long does it take?	Information not provided. An estimate for 58 items would be 10 min	Information not provided. An estimate for 42 items would be 8 min, and 76 questions 15 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student (Primary version with 75 items): 20–25 min</li> <li>• Student (Secondary version with 168 items): 35–40 min</li> <li>• Staff survey (with 99 items): 20 min</li> </ul>
Approximate costs for students only	\$4.50 AUD per student per year	Two options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option one \$8 AUD per student</li> <li>• Option two by school size (less than 100 = \$405 AUD, greater than 1,200 = \$2,785 AUD)</li> </ul>	Dependent on school enrolment size. Small to medium sized school (less than 400 students): \$650 AUD
Approximate costs for staff and students	\$42 AUD per staff per year	N/A	Dependent on school enrolment size. Small to medium sized school (with fewer than 400 students): \$910 AUD

Information and features	Flourishing at School	Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEW) Survey	The Wellbeing Profiler
What the users/organization gets	<p>Students: Review results and historical results on your timeline</p> <p>Organisation: Access aggregate and individual survey results/wellbeing goals. Wellbeing supports and suggestions</p>	<p>Both primary and secondary school reports available. No individual level reporting or reports</p>	<p>Organisation: Comprehensive school report with aggregate mean scores for 6 domains and 45 constructs with distribution of survey responses by participating year levels, house/mentor groups, by gender groups (if co-ed).</p>
Group or individual level data?	Both available	Only group reports	Aggregate reporting by year or group levels only.
Number of schools used to date	Data not on website, however they list 20 + schools	"Hundreds of schools around Australia" since 2003	220 + schools in Australia, 10 + schools internationally
When was it available for use?	Data not on website. However, the measure has been in the market since at least 2017	Has a history of data going back to 2003, however the current version is from 2018	Since October 2015

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

Information and features	Flourishing at School	Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEW) Survey	The Wellbeing Profiler
Main strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical manual available on website which includes detailed psychometrics</li> <li>• User functionality and flexibility provided</li> <li>• Provision of wellbeing information and supports</li> <li>• Detailed information about IT security and standards that are met</li> <li>• Wellbeing goal setting feature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An organisation with a long history of assessment experience and quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive approach to assessment, capturing more than wellbeing outcomes, including predictors and risk factors</li> <li>• Survey tool has ethics approval for research and evaluation</li> <li>• Parental consent and youth assent processes included as part of assessment</li> <li>• Reports checked and reviewed by an academic researcher with postgraduate qualifications in psychology</li> </ul>
Main limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None obvious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited flexibility</li> <li>• No psychometric information publicly available, but presumed available on request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lengthy: Length of survey requires at least 20 min for primary students and for staff</li> <li>• Need to allow at least 2 weeks ahead for informing parents and collecting consent for youth surveys</li> </ul>

involved 4,777 students between the ages of 10 and 20 years from 19 different education settings (11 primary schools, 7 secondary schools, and students in a professional diploma program<sup>3</sup>: Chin, Jiang, & Vella-Brodrick, 2016). Maroondah City Council (2017) used the survey findings and report recommendations to inform their 2017–2019 *Youth Strategy Action Plan*. This collaborative partnership has since grown to include all 27 government schools in the local municipality and has also attracted additional project funding from the Department of Education and Training in Victoria to undertake a whole of systems approach in 2019 to measure and understand the wellbeing needs of staff, students, and their parents/carers.

A second collaborative partnership occurred with the Rural City of Wangaratta (Victoria, Australia), where over 1,400 young people across eight schools and youth service providers participated in the Wellbeing Profiler survey (Chin & Vella-Brodrick, 2018). The regional council utilized the survey findings and recommendations to inform their 2019–2021 *Youth Action Plan* (Rural City of Wangaratta, 2019). Similar to Maroondah City Council, youth strategies and plans were developed to address the identified needs of their youth, which included physical health indicators (such as sleep quality and quantity, physical and sedentary activities, perception of overall health, and physical self-concept); mental health and emotional wellbeing outcomes (including happiness, resilience, risk factors such as anxiety, stress, anger); and as adaptive (cognitive reappraisal) and maladaptive (suppression and rumination) emotion regulation strategies.

Through collaborating with grassroots organizations and schools, the Wellbeing Profiler has provided valid and reliable data to guide wellbeing policy planning, training, and to help determine how resources are best utilized. The survey findings and recommendations from the commissioned school and research reports have led to more targeted planning and development of evidence-based strategies to address identified needs across local networks of schools. This impact is evident from the use of data from the commissioned reports to shape local councils' youth strategy plans and policy documents (e.g., Maroondah City Council Youth Strategy, 2017). In addition, the localized data have been used to inform the participating schools' annual implementation plans to address, plan and develop future programs. Importantly, the Wellbeing Profiler reports have provided the partner organizations with enhanced capacity to seek external funding to develop targeted interventions to address the identified needs from the reports, with the councils securing between \$890,000 AUD and \$2.7 million AUD in funding to

---

<sup>3</sup>VCAL students in one TAFE—known as 'Technical And Further Education' in Australia.

advance their positive education efforts. The valid assessment of wellbeing through the Profiler has been critical to these successes.

## Questions to Consider for an Assessment

While there are many tools available, the process of determining the right wellbeing assessment for a school can be daunting. There is no one right measure or approach, as what is right and useful depends on the specific context of the school, including the intentions of the assessment, the model of wellbeing, the stakeholders involved, and the time and resources available. When considering whether or not to use a particular tool, we find that it is helpful to consider a series of questions, which together can aid in this decision-making process.

First, we encourage you to ask these three questions:

1. What type or model of wellbeing does the assessment tool measure? Does that model align with your schools' model of wellbeing?
2. Has the complete assessment measure (the *assessment battery*, based on all questions included) been validated as a whole (not just some of the measures that might be included in the tool) and published in peer-reviewed literature?
3. Who owns the data, who has access to the raw data, and how can the data be used? Different standards often apply for internal school reporting purposes versus research purposes, so your intentions with using the data, and making sure you can meet those intentions with the data that will be available to you, is helpful.

These are the three most important questions. If the answer is unclear to any one of them, we suggest that undertaking the use of an assessment measure may be risky and advise against it. If the answers are clear, Table 12.2 outlines some further questions to consider for thinking about how valid and useful the tool might be for your purposes.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Rather, we suggest that you consider the potential value of the tool based on your needs and purposes in conducting the assessment. Key aspects that these questions focus on include psychometric appropriateness, survey and tool flexibility, user experience, data use and safety, and fit for purpose and alignment with the school's model of wellbeing.

**Table 12.2** Questions to consider in thinking about the validity and usefulness of an assessment tool

---

How was the assessment measure developed? Did the development follow standard test development procedures (see Boateng, Neilands, Frongillo, Melgar-Quiñonez, & Young, 2018; Shum et al., 2013)? If so, were those tests performed by someone suitably qualified to do so?
How expensive is the assessment measure? Do you have sufficient resources available? Will a more expensive measure provide a better return on investment?
How reliable is the infrastructure for administering the tool? For instance, if using an online measure, are there any log-in or account problems or resource bandwidth issues? You might ask the providers whether other schools have had issues with this tool in the last year, and if so, when, what, and to what extent were the issues
How many schools have used the assessment tool in the last year, and is it possible to contact two of them for their opinions and perspectives?
Does the assessment tool comply with all industry standards and local regulations for data storage and safety in the country it is being used?
Does the tool comply with the privacy legislation for your city/state/country?
What are the main benefits of using this assessment tool over choosing one of the others available?
How flexible is the measure? For instance, can you easily adjust when the tool is administered, add users, or change the questions that are included to fit your context?
Who administers the assessment? Who is involved and how does the process work? Is the process transparent or does it operate behind a black box?
Does the measure include the opportunity to capture qualitative data?
What age ranges are the assessment tool suitable for, and do different age ranges get different assessments?
Has the tool been reviewed by an ethics review board? What ethical issues might the tool bring? How does the tool handle consent or assent procedures?
What data, visual graphs, and reports will you receive at the end of the measurement? What is reported back to the individual respondent versus the school?
How long on average does the assessment take for students and adults of different learning abilities and backgrounds? How often is the assessment recommended?
Can the measure easily track the same individuals over time? How easily can the data be linked to other information?
Is the assessment tool available in additional languages? Does it include the languages spoken by people within your school?
Is the assessment measure available in additional formats? (e.g., paper-based, mobile-based, text message)
Does the assessment tool work robustly on all technological platforms or devices (e.g., phones, tablets, various web browsers)?

---

(continued)

**Table 12.2** (continued)

---

Does the assessment tool align with the objectives you have for your school's assessment?
Does the assessment tool have functionality related to duty of care, such as where students report low wellbeing or mental health issues? How are these aspects managed and reported?
Assessments create opportunities for conversations about wellbeing, and conversations about wellbeing focus individual's attention on wellbeing and in themselves improve wellbeing. In this regard, what does your tool provide to the users (e.g., individual-level reports, organizational level reports, summaries, onscreen graphs, suggested actions, raw data)?

---

While these questions largely relate to the assessment tool that could aid in your school's positive education efforts, two further questions are also important to consider in the broader context of wellbeing assessments as a whole:

1. How receptive are students and teachers in your school to positive education?
2. How much energy and sense of propriety is there for positive education in your school?

If you do not know, how could you find out? Could answering these questions be part of the initial assessment? Answers to questions like these can also support assessment decisions. For example, if receptivity, energy, and propriety are low, then a short, less frequent wellbeing assessment battery would be optimal. It is also possible that at one point you may choose not to use a formal assessment tool at all, but rather many insights and conclusions may be drawn from data your school already collects—this may include data relating to attendance, behaviour management, referrals to school counsellors (positive and negative), and academic improvements.

## Conclusion

A growing amount of evidence is demonstrating that wellbeing is beneficial to workplaces (e.g., Foresight, 2008; Jarden & Jarden, 2016; Lewis, 2011; Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2009; Rath & Harter, 2010), schools (e.g., Jarden & Jarden, 2015; Norrish, 2015; PESA, 2020; Waters, Sun, Aarch, & Cotton, 2016), families (e.g., Conoley, Winter-Plum, Hawley, Spaventa-Vancil, & Hernandez, 2015; Sheridan & Burt, 2009), and communities as a whole (e.g., Neto & Águeda, 2014; Schueller, 2009). The question then becomes

how to cultivate and sustain wellbeing in schools. We suggest that assessment plays a critical role. This chapter has summarized some of the basics of assessment and outlined wellbeing assessments in schools: what assessments are, why assessments are important, and examples of good assessment in practice. We stressed the importance of a systems lens and highlighted the *Me, We, Us* framework, demonstrated the benefits of assessment data in decision-making, and provided a comprehensive list of questions schools and decision-makers may find useful in considering assessment tools and approaches.

It is our hope that high-quality psychological wellbeing information can be obtained with a focus on practices that are theoretically and research based, and then be used to create positive school environments where staff and students are able to engage in meaningful and enjoyable work and learning that taps into their greatest strengths and their most important goals. With such information, schools can capitalize on the unique intellectual and personal strengths of each student and staff member. Rather than focusing on making staff and students to do more work and learning, the focus can be on how to enable them to do *good* work and learning based on the strengths and values of that person and what they can contribute to others within the school community. Coupled with good wellbeing assessment that acknowledges and captures different types of information, we contend that schools can go beyond fixing problems to promote excellence in a more sustainable way for every individual within and beyond the school community.

## References

- Aked, J., & Thompson, S. (2011). *Five ways to wellbeing: New applications, new ways of thinking*. London: New Economics Foundation.
- Allison, L. M., Waters, L., & Kern, M. L. (2020). Flourishing classrooms: Applying a systems-informed approach to positive education. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00267-8>.
- Boateng, G. O., Neilands, T. B., Frongillo, E. A., Melgar-Quíñonez, H. R., & Young, S. L. (2018). Best practices for developing and validating scales for health, social, and behavioral research: A primer. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *6*(149), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00149>.
- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*, 822–848.
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (2019a). *Assessment*. Retrieved 28 October 2019 from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/assessment>.
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (2019b). *Evaluation*. Retrieved 28 October 2019 from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/evaluation>.

- Cambridge English Dictionary. (2019c). *Testing*. Retrieved 28 October 2019 from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/testing>.
- Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. (2019). *School wide evaluation tool*. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/school-wide-evaluation-tool-set>.
- Chin, T.-C. (2017). Keeping up with the times: A considered approach to measuring youth well-being. In M. White, G. R. Slempp, & S. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations, and policy* (pp. 47–51). Adelaide, SA, Australia: SPC Press.
- Chin, T.-C., Jiang, J., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2016). *Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah: Findings from the student well-being survey*. The University of Melbourne, VIC, Australia. Commissioned by Maroondah City Council.
- Chin, T.-C., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2018). *Understanding the needs of young people in Wangaratta: Findings from the student well-being survey*. The University of Melbourne, VIC, Australia. Commissioned by the Rural City of Wangaratta.
- City of Maroondah. (2017). *Youth strategy: Raising the wellbeing of Maroondah's young people*. <http://www.maroondahyouth.com.au/files/assets/youth/documents/youth-strategy-2017.pdf>.
- Conoley, C., Winter-Plum, E., Hawley, K. J., Spaventa-Vancil, K. Z., & Hernandez, R. J. (2015). Integrating positive psychology into family therapy: Positive family therapy. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 43(5), 703–733. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000015575392>.
- Cook, D. A., & Beckman, T. J. (2006). Current concepts in validity and reliability for psychometric instruments: Theory and application. *The American Journal of Medicine*, 119, 166.e7–166.e16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2005.10.036>.
- Coolican, H. (2014). *Research methods and statistics in psychology* (6th Ed.). Psychology Press.
- Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Crisp, R. (2017). Well-being. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/well-being/>.
- Diener, E. (Ed.). (2009). *Assessing well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener*. New York, NY, USA: Springer Science + Business Media. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2354-4>.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larson, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71–75.
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247–266.
- Dutton, J. (2003). *Energize your workplace: How to create and sustain high quality connections at work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dutton, J., & Heaphy, E. (2003). The power of high quality connections. In K. Cameron, J. Dutton, & R. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 263–278). San Francisco: Berrett - Koehler.

- Fordyce, M. W. (1988). A review of research on the happiness measures: A sixty-second index of happiness and mental health. *Social Indicators Research*, 20, 63–89.
- Foresight. (2008). *Foresight mental capital and wellbeing project: Final project report*. London: The Government Office for Science. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/our-work/projects/current-projects/mental-capitaland-wellbeing>.
- Govindji, R., & Linley, P. A. (2007). Strengths use, self-concordance and well-being: Implications for strengths coaching and coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(2), 143–153.
- HAPIA. (2009). *Best practice guidelines: Workplace health in Australia*. Sydney: Health and Productivity Institute of Australia.
- Hone, L., Jarden, A., & Schofield, G. (2014). Psychometric properties of the Flourishing Scale in a New Zealand sample. *Social Indicators Research*, 119(2), 1031–1042.
- Hone, L., Jarden, A., Schofield, G. M., & Duncan, S. (2014). Measuring flourishing: The impact of operational definitions on the prevalence of high levels of wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 4(1), 62–90. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v4i1.1>.
- Huebner, S. E., Suldo, S. M., & Valois, R. F. (2003, March 12–13). *Psychometric properties of two brief measures of children's life satisfaction: The Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) and the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS)*. Paper prepared for the Indicators of Positive Development Conference. [https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Child\\_Trends-2003\\_03\\_12\\_PD\\_PDCConfHSVP.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Child_Trends-2003_03_12_PD_PDCConfHSVP.pdf).
- Iasiello, M., Bartholomaeus, J., Jarden, A., & Kelly, G. (2017). Measuring PERMA+ in South Australia, the state of wellbeing: A comparison with national and international norms. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 1(2), 53–72.
- Jarden, A., & Jarden, R. (2015). Applied positive psychology in higher education. In M. Henning, C. Krägeloh, & G. Wong-Toi (Eds.), *Student motivation and quality of life in higher education* (pp. 37–44). London: Routledge.
- Jarden, A., & Jarden, R. (2016). Positive psychological assessment for the workplace. In L. Oades, M. F. Steger, A. Delle Fave, & J. Passmore (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of positive psychology at work* (pp. 415–437). Published Online: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118977620.ch22>.
- Jarden, A., Rashid, T., Roache, A., & Lomas, T. (2019). Ethical guidelines for positive psychology practice (version 1.0: English). *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 9(3), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v9i3.921>.
- Kern, M. L., Benson, L., Steinberg, E. A., & Steinberg, L. (2016). The EPOCH measure of adolescent well-being. *Psychological Assessment*, 28, 586–597.
- Kern, M. L., Cahill, H., Morrish, L., Farrellu, A., Shlezinger, K., & Jach, H. (2020). The responsibility of knowledge: Identifying and reporting students with evidence of psychological distress in large-scale school-based studies. *Research Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016120952511>.

- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Lewis, S. (2011). *Positive psychology at work: How positive leadership and appreciative inquiry create inspiring organizations*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lopez, S. J., & Snyder, C. R. (Eds.). (2003). *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures*. Washington, DC, USA: American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10612-000>.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research, 46*, 137–155.
- Maroondah City Council. (2017). *Youth strategy: Raising the wellbeing of Maroondah's young people*. Victoria: Maroondah City Council. <http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/strategies/youth-strategy-1.pdf>.
- Michaelson, J., Mahony, S., & Schifferes, J. (2012). *Measuring well-being: A guide for practitioners*. London: New Economics Foundation.
- Neto, L. M., & Águeda Marujo, H. (2014). Positive community psychology and positive community development: Research and intervention as transformative-appreciative actions. In H. Águeda Marujo & L. Neto (Eds.), *Positive nations and communities: Cross-cultural advancements in positive psychology* (vol 6). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Niemiec, R. (2013). *Mindfulness and character strengths: A practical guide to flourishing*. Gottingen, Germany: Hogrefe Publishing.
- Noble, T., & McGrath, H. (2015). PROSPER: A new framework for positive education. *Psychology of well-Being, 5*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-015-0030-2>.
- Norrish, J. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong grammar school journey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oades, L. (2020). Towards a wellbeing literate society. In K. Andrews, F. Papps, L. Mancini, K. Nicholson-Perry, G. Senior, & E. Brymer (Eds.), *Innovations in a changing world* (pp. 14–18). Australia: Australian College of Applied Psychology.
- Oades, L., & Heazlewood, F. (2017). *Wellbeing language and definitions guide*. Sydney, NSW, Australia: Mental Health Commission of NSW. <https://wbcnsw.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/language-and-definitions-guide-web.pdf>.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2013). *OECD guidelines on measuring subjective well-being*. OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.
- Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2009). *Happiness and productivity* (IZA Discussion Paper 4645). Institute for the Study of Labor.
- Page, K. (2005). *Subjective wellbeing in the workplace* (Unpublished honours thesis). Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- Penn State University. (2019). *Differences between testing, assessment, and evaluation*. <http://tutorials.istudy.psu.edu/testing/testing2.html>.

- Positive Education Schools Association (PESA). (2020). *Positive education framework: A guide to understanding and implementing positive education*. <https://www.pesa.edu.au/>.
- Rath, T., & Harter, J. (2010). *The economics of wellbeing*. Washington, DC: Gallup Press.
- Rolstad, S., Adler, J., & Ryden, A. (2011). Response burden and questionnaire length: Is shorter better? A review and meta-analysis. *Value in Health, 14*, 1101–1108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jval.2011.06.003>.
- Rose, T., Joe, S., Williams, A., Harris, R., Betz, G., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2017). Measuring mental wellbeing among adolescents: A systematic review of instruments. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*, 2349–2362. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0754-0>.
- Rural City of Wangaratta. (2019). *2019–2021 youth action plan*. <https://www.wangaratta.vic.gov.au/wyap>.
- Rusk, R., & Waters, L. (2015). Exploring the underlying components of positive psychology interventions: Five domains of positive function. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(2), 141–152.
- Schueller, S. (2009). Promoting wellness: Integrating community and positive psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology, 37*(7), 922–937.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*, 5–14.
- Shaughnessy, J. J., Zechmeister, E. B., & Zechmeister, J. S. (2014). *Research methods in psychology* (10th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sheridan, S., & Burt, J. (2009). Family centered positive psychology. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 551–560). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Shum, D., O’Gorman, J., Myors, B., & Creed, P. (2013). *Psychological testing and assessment* (2nd ed.). Melbourne, VIC, AUS: Oxford University Press.
- Slemp, G. R., Chin, T.-C., Kern, M. L., Siokou, C., Loton, D., Oades, L. G., ... Waters, L. (2017). Positive education in Australia: Practice, measurement, and future directions. In E. Frydenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific* (pp. 101–122). Australia: Springer.
- Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., ... Harney, P. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 570–585.
- Stevens, S., & Jarden, A. (2019). The importance of child wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 9*(4), I–IV. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v9i4.1011>.
- The Children’s Society. (2019). *How happy are our children: Measuring children’s wellbeing and exploring economic factors*. [https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research\\_docs/12pp%20Well-being%20Report.pdf](https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research_docs/12pp%20Well-being%20Report.pdf).

- The Glossary of Education Reform. (2015). *Assessment*. <https://www.edglossary.org/assessment/>.
- Waters, L. (2017). Visible wellbeing in schools: The powerful role of instructional leadership. *Australian Educational Leader*, 39(1), 6–10.
- Waters, L. (2018). Visible wellbeing: A critical resource for leadership and learning in schools. *Horizon*, 8, 4–10.
- Waters, L., & Loton, D. (2019). SEARCH: A meta-framework and review of the field of positive education. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 4(1–2), 1–46.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Aarch, A., & Cotton, A. (2016). Positive education: Visible wellbeing and the five domains of positive functioning. In M. Slade., L. Oades., & A. Jarden (Eds). *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health* (Chapter 13; pp. 235–260). Cambridge University Press.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Rusk, R., Aarch, A., & Cotton, A. (2017). Positive education: Visible wellbeing and the five domains of positive functioning. In M. Slade., L. Oades., & A. Jarden (Eds)., *Wellbeing, recovery and mental health* (pp. 245–264). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wrzesniewski, A. (2014). Engage in job crafting. In J. Dutton & G. Spreitzer (Eds.), *How to be a positive leader: Insights from leading thinkers on positive organisations* (pp. 65–76). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 13

## Wellbeing Literacy and Positive Education

Lindsay G. Oades, Lisa M. Baker, Jacqueline J. Francis,  
and Jessica A. Taylor

How can educators best prepare and support students for the twenty-first century world? Over the past several decades, educators worldwide have targeted a number of capabilities, including knowledge, skills, and behaviours, across learning and teaching domains. A capability may be defined as *what we can be and do* (Sen, 1993). The development of capabilities has supported student growth in multiple domains, including multi-modal literacy, numeracy, information technology, and thinking. Capabilities are inherently future focussed and emphasise potential. These qualities are consistent with the “positive” lens of positive education.

However, it is imperative to ask if significant capabilities have been neglected (Hinchcliffe & Terzi, 2009). If so, what are they and what benefit can they provide? We suggest that *wellbeing literacy* (Oades & Johnston, 2017) is one of those neglected capabilities. As a capability, wellbeing literacy refers to what *we can be and do with wellbeing language* for the purpose of wellbeing. In this chapter, we first introduce capabilities and consider their pedagogical role within positive education. We define wellbeing literacy, describing its five components. We illustrate what wellbeing literacy looks like in action and why it matters. We then consider implications for educators. As a whole, we suggest that wellbeing literacy may be the tool teachers are seeking to articulate and validate previously disparate wellbeing practices,

---

L. G. Oades (✉) · L. M. Baker · J. J. Francis · J. A. Taylor  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [lindsay.oades@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lindsay.oades@unimelb.edu.au)

leading the way to system wide capacity to consistently and intentionally use vocabulary, knowledge, and language skills about and for wellbeing in a manner which is sensitive to the context.

## Capabilities as Central to Twenty-First Century Pedagogy

Teaching is shaped by underpinning pedagogical beliefs. Teaching methods of the twenty-first century combine the wisdom of past philosophers with necessary adaptations for a globalised and complex world. Education facilitates learning *about* the world, and more importantly, learning *how to learn* about the world, through building capabilities.

In educational discourse, people often use the terms *capability*, *capacity*, *competence*, *skill*, and *ability* interchangeably, however they are distinct concepts (Scheffler, 1985; von Tunzelmann, 2009). Within the context of this chapter, we define a *capability* as the fluid, dynamic, and interwoven formation of skills, knowledge, opportunities, choices, and behaviours that emerge as a dialectic between a person and the environment (Nussbaum, 2011; Scheffler, 1985; Sen, 1993). For example, Nina wishes to play the piano. If Nina has some ability to play, and the opportunity to play is present, then you could say that Nina has the capability to play the piano. If Nina chooses to play, she has exercised the capability. This is distinctive from a capacity, which is seen as the limit of her ability. A competency is the demonstrable and measurable aspect of one's ability, but unlike the concept of a capability, is silent on whether the opportunity to play a piano is present beyond that situation. Nina has played the piano in the past, and therefore has the demonstrated ability.

Positive education is an adaptation of traditional forms of education focused on building academic competencies, blending the knowledge of wellbeing science with effective pedagogy to promote learning for traditional academic skills, optimal development, and wellbeing (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Positive education seeks to develop students' capabilities in wellbeing (defined herein as "feeling good and functioning effectively" (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 838). From that perspective, then, the key capability that underlies positive education pedagogy is the development of wellbeing literacy.

## Wellbeing Literacy

Wellbeing literacy has been defined as the capability (incorporating knowledge, vocabulary, language skills) of comprehending and composing wellbeing languages, sensitive to contexts, used intentionally to maintain or improve the wellbeing of oneself or others; in short, mindful language use about and for wellbeing (Oades et al., 2020). Language is central to this definition. Language is a lever for influencing wellbeing as a natural, universal, and constant tool that is never put down (Brothers, 2005; Oades et al., 2020).

It is helpful to note that wellbeing literacy is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple domains of wellbeing. For example, emotional literacy can be conceptualised as existing as a specific area within wellbeing literacy, not as wellbeing literacy itself (Steiner, 2003). Health literacy and mental health literacy similarly are conceptually different from wellbeing literacy; whereas health literacy is intended to improve safety and quality in health (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2014) and mental health literacy concerns understanding mental disorder (Jorm et al., 1997), wellbeing literacy is concerned with the flourishing end of the mental health continuum.

Wellbeing literacy is necessary to realise an education system that equally includes the promotion of academic and wellbeing capabilities. Possessing the language, knowledge, and language skills of wellbeing makes it possible to intentionally communicate for the wellbeing of oneself and others. We suggest that individuals, groups, and systems, including those within educational contexts, require this capability to flourish. Further, as later discussed, we consider wellbeing literacy as a fundamental tool to facilitate positive education, including the implementation of positive psychology interventions, providing an integrated model that can enable teachers to integrate wellbeing education with other forms of education.

### Wellbeing Literacy as a Capability

As a capability *about and for* wellbeing, wellbeing literacy is a relational process between a person and their environment. As evident from the necessary components *about* and *for*, wellbeing literacy as a capability model is more than merely a fixed skill, competence, or ability. The term *capability* is a distinct, dynamic core organising concept, possessing five components that interact between people and their environments to create one's *capability* (see Table 13.1). Firstly, one must possess *vocabulary and knowledge* about wellbeing. That is, does the person have one or more words for describing

**Table 13.1** The five components of wellbeing literacy

Component	Description
Vocabulary and knowledge <i>about</i> wellbeing	Words and basic facts about wellbeing (i.e. content that is signified)
Comprehension of multimodal text related to wellbeing	Reading, listening, viewing about and for wellbeing
Composition of multimodal text related to wellbeing	Writing, speaking, creating about and for wellbeing
Context awareness and adaptability	Awareness of differences across contexts and adapting the use of language to fit the relevant context
Intentionality <i>for</i> wellbeing	Habit of intentionally using language to maintain or improve wellbeing of self or others

wellbeing that helps them understand the experience? Secondly, one must have *comprehension of multimodal texts*—the ability to engage with words and knowledge receptively. Third, arising from comprehension is composition—the ability to produce words and knowledge. Fourth, *context sensitivity* matters—one needs to be able to demonstrate awareness of the contexts within which we use this knowledge, combined with skills to adapt our words for specific contexts. Lastly, actions are *intentional*—one demonstrates behaviours that embrace choice and intentionality for using these words, skills, and knowledge for the intent of wellbeing for self and others.

**Vocabulary and knowledge.** Wellbeing vocabulary includes language associated with the wellbeing of oneself and of others. For example, words might include mindfulness, perspective, and belonging. Wellbeing knowledge includes declarative knowledge about wellbeing. For example, a child coming into class after morning break may be able to articulate some words associated with enhanced wellbeing, such as: “the mindfulness corner is comfortable. Mindfulness helps me focus. I feel good when I can focus on my painting”.

**Multimodal comprehension.** Communicating about and for wellbeing, includes both receptive (comprehension) and productive (composition) aspects. Wellbeing literacy reflects a real-world, socially informed view of wellbeing. *Comprehension* of wellbeing communication occurs through reading, listening, and viewing (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2020a). For example, reading about, or for wellbeing could include reading the novel “Tomorrow When the War Began” by John Marsden in class, and discussing the different perspectives that appear to build student empathy for people who have experienced war. Listening about or for wellbeing could involve intentionally listening to a class playlist to

boost student and teacher mood. Viewing about or for wellbeing could involve viewing a portrait that generates positive feelings such as awe or inspiration.

**Multimodal composition.** Beyond receiving wellbeing-related information, communication also includes a productive aspect. *Composition* of wellbeing occurs through writing, speaking, and creating (ACARA, 2020a). Language is understood here as a socio-cultural phenomenon, which occurs between people (Gee, 1998). Wellbeing experiences are likely composed in congruence with one's socio-cultural values and contexts. Examples of intentionally composing for wellbeing could include writing a letter *for* a grandparent, who lives some distance away to boost their sense of connection with the family. Speaking *for* wellbeing, could involve singing your favourite song in the shower, exercising your personal strength of playfulness and boosting positive emotion. Creating *about* wellbeing could involve choreographing a dance representing the joys and sorrows of life.

**Context sensitivity.** The meaning of language varies across different times and contexts. For instance, while the word “sick” traditionally refers to being physically unwell, in an online context for Generation Z, it could indicate crazy or cool. Words and communication modes differ across a student's life domains, such as home, school, with grandparents, friends, or work colleagues. Wellbeing literacy requires identifying the context and adapting language use to the context. Sensitivity to context is demonstrated when an individual can use different language and modes to meet the needs and situation of each context. A wellbeing literate person effectively adapts their comprehension and composition of language according to the context, evidencing a form of bilingualism.

**Intentionality.** Finally, wellbeing literacy requires intentionality (Malle & Knobe, 1997). Our definition of intentionality is based on Malle and Knobe (1997), involving belief, desire, intention, and awareness. It is purpose driven, with wellbeing as an outcome being the source of that intentionality. Does the sender or receiver of communication aim for wellbeing outcomes? In common language, this could be called the “skillful” or “mindful” use of language. From this perspective, wellbeing literacy assumes that language is non-autonomous. That is, language does not use itself; it has a user within intentions, aware of the contexts within which they are using the language. Like learning a second language, at early stages, use of the language is conscious and energy-laden, but over time it becomes habitual, such that the non-autonomous use of language naturally occurs, like the fluidity of a bilingual individual.

## The Five Components in Action

The five-component model of wellbeing literacy is designed to assist people to understand the components of the overall capability and how they are related. A broad overview of the wellbeing literacy model within the school context is shown in Table 13.2, with examples of the capabilities being developed and how the capability might be taught across different ages. To bring this to life, the following vignette illustrates the capability model in action.

Imagine a day within a primary school. The students gather together as the teacher reads a book on mindfulness, asking what the students think mindfulness means. One child responds, “looking at the stars, being quiet”. She writes the word “mindfulness” on the whiteboard, and reads: “mindfulness is about connecting with the world around us and the present moment. It helps to balance our minds and our bodies”. Students listen, periodically answering questions and sharing ideas. Reading further, the book talks about mindful listening and mindful tasting. The teacher asks, “If we stop and listen now, what do we notice? What can we hear? What is your favourite food? How does it taste? It is hot, salty, sweet, or sour?”

The children move to tables and use art materials to create giant sized cakes and fruit, labelling their work with words about taste, savouring, feeling happy, and being mindful. The teacher encourages the students to place their artwork on display and will use the artwork stimuli for future discussion and writing about ways bodies can be balanced in the present moment and feel well. The teacher also takes photographs of the artwork and sends the photos home with the children, providing a visual reminder for the children to see and reflect upon at home. Then at lunchtime, as the children eat, the teacher roves between small groups and asks, “If you stop and think mindfully, how does your food taste? Is it hot, salty, sweet, or sour? Can you remind yourself to stay in this moment of nourishing your body? How does your body and mind feel after you have eaten?”

Later in the week, other sensory examples of mindfulness are explored, such as touching and smelling. The teacher also introduces a formal practice of mindfulness to the class. The art teacher provides the students with clay and other materials, challenging them to create a sculpture what mindfulness may look like. Music is played at the start of maths to encourage the students to reconnect with their bodies and focus on the present moment and cognitive challenges.

This vignette illustrates that capabilities for and about wellbeing can be built within and through the simultaneous meeting of key curriculum learning requirements. The example could be adapted to the age and stage

**Table 13.2** The five components of wellbeing literacy in an educational context

Question Addressed	Wellbeing literacy Component & Description	Capabilities for students	How might this capability be taught?
What	<p><b>1. Wellbeing vocabulary and knowledge</b></p> <p>Possessing words (<i>vocabulary</i>) and <i>knowledge</i> about wellbeing that is consistent with one's values and social context</p>	<p>I have words that I can use and that other people understand to help myself and/or others feel good and function well</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years. Children learn that mindfulness can help them feel calm. They learn the word mindfulness</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary. Children learn that our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours are linked. They learn the vocabulary of perspective taking</li> <li>• Secondary. Children learn that humans have the fundamental psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. They learn the vocabulary associated with these needs, including belonging</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 13.2 (continued)

Question Addressed	Wellbeing literacy Component & Description	Capabilities for students	How might this capability be taught?
How	<p><b>2. Wellbeing comprehension</b></p> <p>Being able to comprehend texts relevant to wellbeing in multiple modalities, including viewing, listening and reading <i>about</i> and <i>for</i> wellbeing</p>	<p>I can hear, see, read, and understand ways to feel good, function well, and contribute to others' wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years. Children listen to a story about mindfulness and understand that mindfulness can help them feel calm</li> <li>• Primary. Children watch and understand a movie illustrating two different perspectives of the same situation</li> <li>• Secondary. Children read a novel with a core theme of belonging</li> </ul>

Question Addressed	Wellbeing literacy Component & Description	Capabilities for students	How might this capability be taught?
	<p><b>3. Wellbeing composition</b></p> <p>Being able to compose texts relevant to wellbeing in multiple modalities, including writing, creating and speaking <i>about</i> and <i>for</i> wellbeing</p>	<p>I can write, draw, make, create, and talk about things that make me happy and that promote happiness in others</p>	<p>• Early years. Children create artwork to illustrate their experience of mindful eating and tasting</p> <p>• Primary. Children collaborate in teams to present a debate, for and against a chosen topic</p> <p>• Secondary. Children analyse and explain the language of belonging in the novel and compare this to language use in social media, and how this impacts a sense of belonging and relatedness</p>

(continued)

Table 13.2 (continued)

Question Addressed	Wellbeing literacy Component & Description	Capabilities for students	How might this capability be taught?
Who, when, & where	<p><b>4. Sensitivity to Context</b>                      Awareness of and adapting language according to the specific context</p>	<p>I know that receiving and expressing language can be different in different places, with different people and different circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years. Children collaboratively decide on the ideal space to undertake a daily mindfulness practice</li> <li>• Primary. Children consider an appropriate audience to watch their debate based on the topic</li> <li>• Secondary. Students compare the language of belonging in difference life domains, such as home, school, club, and work</li> </ul>
Why	<p><b>5. Habit of Intention</b>                      Intentionally communicating for the purposes of wellbeing. A mindful or skilful use of language with an intention, desire and awareness <i>about</i> and <i>for</i> wellbeing</p>	<p>I can purposefully use language (by listening, reading, looking, writing, making, and speaking) for and about my own wellbeing and that of others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years. Students routinely engage with mindfulness practice, for the purpose of calming their minds and bodies</li> <li>• Primary. Students use the skill of perspective taking, during conflict resolution</li> <li>• Secondary. Students use the language of belonging to purposefully create cohort connection</li> </ul>

of students. Through these cross-curricular activities and interactions, the teachers in this scenario provided opportunities for students to view, listen, read, write, speak, and create about mindfulness. The term “mindfulness” may not be considered as strictly “wellbeing” by some wellbeing scholars. However, in the context of all five components of wellbeing literacy, if it is used intentionally and in context, it is considered wellbeing literacy. That is, a term gains its meaning within context. Through conversations and experiences regarding nutrition, presence, physicality, senses, and the like, they were teaching students language, knowledge, and skills about wellbeing, for the wellbeing of students, intentionally and with sensitivity to their educational context. The students in turn were developing their own wellbeing literacy as they explored the language, knowledge, and language skills of wellbeing by reading, writing, listening, speaking, creating, and experiencing mindfulness.

## Why Does Wellbeing Literacy Matter?

We suggest that wellbeing literacy is important to positive education practices and future development. Wellbeing literacy suggests a refocus on the intended outcomes of positive education, calling for a need to focus on building student capabilities, rather than focusing on the state or condition of feeling and functioning well. With a natural home in education, it provides an avenue to better integrate positive education within the curriculum, rather than being seen as an added on and separate component. It provides a fundamental tool for incorporating positive psychological practices within the classroom in ways that goes beyond simple activities to impact upon the pedagogy itself, providing a systemic approach to understanding, building, and measuring wellbeing.

First, wellbeing literacy reorients the outcomes that we might be trying to achieve through positive education efforts. Positive education, even in its definition, is about supporting wellbeing. But what does wellbeing mean for the developing young person? If indeed we “treasure” positive education, we must strive to measure it (White & Kern, 2018). Measurement ensures that targeted constructs are actually fostered (Waters & Loton, 2019), safeguards legitimacy and evidence base of training and positive psychology interventions (White, 2016), and provides links between wellbeing and academic mastery (Adler & Seligman, 2016). But what should be measured to support positive education efforts? If the focus is on wellbeing, then evidence around positive education efforts are often minimal at best. Students vary in how they feel and function, as they traverse various social and emotional contexts.

Rather than focusing on wellbeing per se, wellbeing literacy focuses on the capabilities that will support positive functioning. When students engage in various positive education activities, what did they learn? Do students apply these learnings in the future? What are the mechanisms for change? Wellbeing literacy provides intermediate constructs that might enable or modify how and the extent to which students benefit from various program and activities. Wellbeing literacy is not about a “quick fix” and/or short-term wellbeing gains. Rather, wellbeing literacy is about a sustained shift in language, knowledge, and skills, whereby language use and co-created actions result in sustained wellbeing. Analogous to the well-known proverb, “Give a man(sic) a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”, wellbeing literacy feeds for a lifetime (Oades et al., 2020).

Second, wellbeing literacy provides an avenue to integrate positive education into the fabric of the education system. The link between wellbeing and other discipline specific learning and teaching are not always immediately obvious (White & McCallum, 2020). As wellbeing literacy draws on existing learning and teaching capacities associated with multimodal literacy comprehension and composition (ACARA, 2020a), providing language and approaches that educators are already familiar with. Wellbeing literacy learning and teaching can occur while simultaneously addressing existing curriculum requirements (ACARA, 2020a, b). As such, wellbeing literacy re-positions positive education as a purposeful and effective direction for wellbeing education that can be integrated with already over-crowded curricula, making it more likely for educators to prioritise and integrate wellbeing. We argue that by weaving wellbeing literacy into the fabric of education, positive education may become more broadly accessible, acceptable, and sustainable at multiple system levels (i.e., student, parents, teachers, wider community, and governing bodies). Synergistic “buy-in” to positive education across these levels and thus sustained practice may be better achieved through the shared understandings and practices achieved through wellbeing literacy.

Third, wellbeing literacy supports systems-informed approaches to education (Allison, Waters, & Kern, 2020; Kern et al., 2020). Positive psychology has been criticised for overemphasising the individual within its approaches and interventions (Kern et al., 2020). Positive education similarly often fails to view wellbeing as a complex and adaptive system that goes beyond the individual student. Education comprises a variety of systems. Individual students are nested within multiple school systems, including teacher/student, student/student, student/parent, parent/teacher systems. These micro-systems are nested within larger school systems, such as parent/teacher/student. These interrelated parts and systems are necessarily

mediated by language. Individual wellbeing, systemic wellbeing, and language are thus inseparable and interdependent. Wellbeing literacy helps us use language to traverse all dimensions of wellbeing, as educators and students interact with language itself, and with each other. This language system can help generate wellbeing for the entire system.

As a language system, wellbeing literacy supports the repositioning and reframing of communication interactions within education, becoming a systemic approach to understanding, building, and generating wellbeing. More effective and sustained learning *for* and *about* wellbeing can be realised through an understanding of these language systems. A systems conceptualisation of wellbeing via wellbeing literacy also allows for “unintended wellbeing” literacy consequences (Hieronymi, 2013). Students have individual levels of, and approaches to, wellbeing and wellbeing literacy, as do teachers and parents. Previously unobserved, emergent benefits from wellbeing conversations had between students, teachers and parents (Oades et al., 2020) are visible through a wellbeing literacy model.

## Implications for Educators

We have proposed wellbeing literacy as a capability for students and as a language system and key to positive education. However, educators may ask, *so what?* What impact, effective, useful or not, does wellbeing literacy have on daily practice or pedagogy? Can it help students? Can it help me? These questions are rightly expressed by those at the “coal face” of education.

Whether it is a new concept or one that immediately feels known, from our experience, wellbeing literacy resonates with teachers. Languishing students are not uncommon in classrooms, and teachers and educators ardently seek student wellbeing (White, 2016). The Australian Report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018) records 99% of teachers believe student wellbeing to be important (White & McCallum, 2020). However, while teachers are passionate about their students and vocation, teaching is complicated and practitioners require answers and pragmatism (Allen, Rowan, & Singh, 2019; Fried, 2001).

Teachers are crucial for wellbeing science and contemporary positive education practices, such as wellbeing literacy, to be successfully applied within education systems. Wellbeing literacy must not only engage educators, but also be practical, comprehensible, and does not add to an already crowded curriculum and workload. With these factors in mind, we suggest that wellbeing literacy offers a *measurement tool*, a *frame* for educational practices, a

*conduit* for positive education, and a *language system* for students, teachers, and families.

## Wellbeing Literacy Offers a Measurement Tool

As discussed, wellbeing literacy offers the potential for capturing the true ingredients of positive education practices, rather than wellbeing outcomes that may or may not be detectable. Ongoing and rigorous assessment of wellbeing programs is the key for the longevity of positive education (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Waters & Loton, 2019). Additionally, educators pursue evaluation of the effectiveness of pedagogical and wellbeing practices. Teachers need to know what outcomes are expected and if they are being reached. A teacher-friendly, testable model of student wellbeing, such as the wellbeing literacy model, is the next logical step for positive education and teacher practice (Waters & Loton, 2019). Notably, while work is still developing in this area, wellbeing literacy potentially can be assessed via self-report measures such as the Wellbeing Literacy 6-item Self Report Scale (Oades et al., 2020) or via tracking the acquisition of skills (representing latent wellbeing literacy through developmental stages).

## Wellbeing Literacy as a Frame for Educational Practices

Positive educational practices are growing globally and rapidly (Rusk & Waters, 2013; Seligman & Adler, 2018), offering a broad terrain of programs and curricula for schools and educators to consider. However, conceptualisations of wellbeing lack clarity in schools and policy, leading to fragmentation and inconsistent implementation (Thomas, Graham, Powell, & Fitzgerald, 2016). Context, time, relevance, efficacy, and practicality need to be weighed by busy educators. Ad hoc, one-off, inconsistent, and/or disconnected programs and activities might be enthusiastically or involuntarily added on to curriculum, resulting in a variety of fads, rather than a sustainable integrated approach to positive education. Despite efforts being well meant, ineffective or harmful effects can thus result (White, 2016; White & Kern, 2018; White & Murray, 2015).

Wellbeing literacy, as a model of capability provides a frame for teachers to view and deliver existing and/or new positive education practices. The meta-construct of wellbeing literacy offers teachers a structure or lens through which to select, convey, and connect specific activities. Previous disparate practices, such as gratitude journaling in English, breathing exercises in physical education, reflective self-portraits in art, charity collections, and buddy

activities can be connected as comprehension and composition of wellbeing capabilities. Existing “caught” and “taught” curriculum of various labels (pastoral care, social and emotional learning, character education, relationships, personal identity, and positive education) that may not be formally linked to discrete curriculum outcomes, can be woven together under the higher order frame of wellbeing literacy capabilities. Overall, this can provide a frame for embedding a focus on wellbeing within schools.

### **Wellbeing Literacy as a Conduit for Positive Education**

For positive education to “stick” (White, 2016) teachers need reassurance that positive education activities are working. But improvements in wellbeing (or the lack thereof) often occur within a black box, unclear why some students benefit while others do not, and whether any gains might be due to specific activities or not. Oades (2017) argues wellbeing literacy is an essential conduit between wellbeing education and student learning outcomes. Insight on wellbeing gains is possible when students are viewed as developing a capability and intentionality, language skills, and knowledge related to wellbeing that enable them to continue to improve wellbeing over time. Instead of an external intervention being “done” to students (Oades & Johnston, 2017), capability is built, and students are more likely to remain engaged.

### **Wellbeing Literacy as a Language System**

As argued, positive psychology, with extensions to positive education, requires a systems approach and interconnected view for effectiveness, sustainability, and longevity (Kern et al., 2020). Teachers understand the inseparable and interdependent relationships within their school system, primarily as a nest or triad of student, teacher, and parent (or family). Student wellbeing is vital to all parties in the triad; however, communication about this complex and intangible construct can be challenging. Wellbeing literacy offers an intelligible bridge for teachers to involve and inform parents about wellbeing and positive education through the familiar and tangible reference of literacy. With age and meta-cognitive abilities, older students can conceptualise and value their own capabilities in communication for and about wellbeing. An educator’s task is arguably easier when all parties share a common language and expectation for wellbeing in education practice and pedagogy. Advantages exist for students (and teachers) when parents can speak “the language of

schooling” (Clinton, Hattie, & Dixon, 2007, p. 19) and parental expectations and ambitions for their child are both shared and realistic.

## Conclusion

Education has long been concerned with developing the distinct capacities of individuals (Dewey, 1916). Positive education’s growth-based emphasis is compatible with this notion of building capability. Wellbeing literacy is focused on building wellbeing capabilities and teaching rather than treating to proactively build student’s capability to flourish. With challenges to sustaining positive education efforts, we suggest that the focus within education systems should be on building wellbeing literacy, rather than wellbeing per se. We must teach, rather than treat, for flourishing. Twenty-first century learning and learners requires multi-literate, multimodal, and inclusive wellbeing education. Educators and education systems need to know how wellbeing learning is enabled, measured, and sustained. The 5-component model of wellbeing literacy offers a language system for positive education practices and interventions, fostering personalised, collective, and systemic approaches to creating the conditions for students to flourish. Wellbeing literacy potentially teaches people the vocabulary, knowledge, and skills to positively affect their own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of others. Wellbeing literacy is thus vital to positive education as a fundamental tool, an integrated model, and a sustainable and measurable view of wellbeing.

The role of educators is central to this. Educators discern, deliver, and evaluate positive education-related practices daily. Wellbeing literacy offers educators a tool for framing those practices, creating connection across otherwise disconnected components. Within the necessarily interconnected system of education, wellbeing literacy also provides a bridge between students, educators, and families, helping all to share the language of wellbeing education and school. Capabilities framed and articulated by educators, shared by families, and embedded in students, hold promise for sustainable growth. This overarching wellbeing literacy goal of capability building is well positioned in the pedagogical hands of educators.

## References

- Adler, A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2016). Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(1). <http://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i1.429>.

- Allen, J., Rowan, L., & Singh, P. (2019). Status of the teaching profession— Attracting and retaining teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(2), 99–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1581422>.
- Allison, L., Waters, L., & Kern, M. L. (2020). Flourishing classrooms: Applying a systems-informed approach to positive education. *Contemporary School Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-019-00267-8>.
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. (2014). *Health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality*. Sydney: ACSQHC. <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Health-Literacy-Taking-action-to-improve-safety-and-quality.pdf>.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2020a, June 16). *Literacy*. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2020b, June 16). *General capabilities*. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/>.
- Brothers, C. (2005). *Language and the pursuit of happiness: A new foundation for designing your life, your relationships & your results*. Naples, FL: New Possibilities Press.
- Clinton, J., Hattie, J., & Dixon, R. (2007). *Evaluation of the Flaxmere Project: When families learn the language of school*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.
- Dewey, J., (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*.
- Fraillon, J. (2004, June 16). *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion Paper*. Australian Council for Education Research. [https://research.acer.edu.au/well\\_being/8/](https://research.acer.edu.au/well_being/8/).
- Fried, R. L. (2001). *The passionate teacher: A practical guide*. Beacon Press.
- Gee, J. P. (1998). What is literacy? In V. Zamel & R. Spack (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp. 18–25). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hieronimi, A. (2013). Understanding systems science: A visual and integrative approach. *Systems Research*, 30, 580–595. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2215>.
- Hinchcliffe, G., & Terzi, L. (2009). Introduction to the special issue ‘capabilities and education’. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28(5), 387–390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-009-9133-7>.
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. C. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 837–861. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9966-7>.
- Jorm, A. F., Korten, A. E., Jacomb, P. A., Christensen, H., Rodgers, B., & Pollitt, P. (1997). “Mental health literacy”: A survey of the public’s ability to recognise mental disorders and their beliefs about the effectiveness of treatment. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 166(4), 182–186. <https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.1997.tb140071.x>.

- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Malle, B. F., & Knobe, J. (1997). The folk concept of intentionality. *Journal of Experimental and Social Psychology, 33*, 101–121. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.1996.1314>.
- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 3*(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2>.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Oades, L. G. (2017). Wellbeing literacy: The missing link in positive education. In M. A. White, G. R. Slep, & A. S. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-being: Education, organizations and policy* (pp. 169–173). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Oades, L. G., & Johnston, A. L. (2017). Wellbeing literacy: The necessary ingredient in positive education. *Psychology Behavioural Science International Journal, 3*(5), 1–3.
- Oades, L. G., Ozturk, C., Hanchao, H., & Slep, G. (2020). Wellbeing literacy: A language-use capability relevant to wellbeing outcomes of positive psychology interventions. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(5), 696–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1789711>.
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 results (Volume III): What school life means for students' lives*. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.
- Rusk, R. D., & Waters, L. E. (2013). Tracing the size, reach, impact, and breadth of positive psychology. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 8*(3), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.777766>.
- Scheffler, I. (1985). *Of human potential: An essay in the philosophy of education*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Adler, A. (2018, June 16). Positive education. In *Global happiness policy report 2018* (pp. 52–74). Global Happiness Council. <http://www.happinesscouncil.org/>.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(3), 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980902934563>.
- Sen, A. K. (1993). Capability and wellbeing. In M. C. Nussbaum & A. K. Sen (Eds.), *The quality of life* (pp. 30–53). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Steiner, C. (2003). *Emotional literacy: Intelligence with a heart*. Berkeley, CA: Personhood press.
- Thomas, N., Graham, A., Powell, M. A., & Fitzgerald, R. (2016). Conceptualisations of children's wellbeing at school: The contribution of recognition theory. *Childhood, 23*(4), 506–520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568215622802>.

- von Tunzelmann, N. (2009). Competencies versus capabilities: A reassessment. *Economia Politica*, 26(3), 435–464.
- Waters, L., & Loton, D. (2019). SEARCH: A meta-framework and review of the field of positive education. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 4(1–2), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-019-00017-4>.
- White, M. A. (2016). Why won't it stick? Positive psychology and positive education. *Psychology of Well-Being*, 6(1), 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-016-0039-1>.
- White, M. A., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1), 1–17.
- White, M. A., & McCallum, F. (2020). Responding to teacher quality through an evidence-informed wellbeing framework for initial teacher education. In J. Fox, C. Alexander, & T. Aspland (Eds.), *Teacher education in globalised times* (pp. 115–137). Singapore: Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4124-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4124-7_7).
- White, M. A., & Murray, S. (2015). Building a positive institution. In M. A. White & S. Murray, (Eds.), *Evidence based approaches in positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools*. New York, NY: Springer Press. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 14

## The Role of Coping Skills for Developing Resilience Among Children and Adolescents

Tammie Ronen

### The Effects of Changes, Crises, and Traumas on Children and Adolescents

Ensuring the wellbeing of children and adolescents comprises a major goal for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. During childhood and adolescence, a wide range of cultural and environmental transformations occur as a result of young people's rapid physiological growth, psychosocial development, and cognitive changes—encompassing increased family responsibilities, rising academic and social demands, separation and individuation from the family unit, and exploration of stressful new experiences with peers and novel adult activities (Steinberg, 2007). Taken together, these developments reinforce the emerging understanding of childhood and adolescence as a critical or sensitive period for the individual's reorganization of regulatory systems, which is fraught with both opportunities and risks (Steinberg, 2013).

The rapid pace of these changes and fluctuations, alongside young people's dependence on adults, renders them vulnerable and sensitive to environmental circumstances that may adversely affect their physical or emotional development (Levendosky, Leahy, Bogat, Davidson, & von Eye, 2006). This is especially manifested when, in addition to experiencing developmental changes, children and adolescence are exposed to traumatic experiences

---

T. Ronen (✉)

Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv, Israel

e-mail: [tamie@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:tamie@tauex.tau.ac.il)

within the family (such as neglect, abuse, illness, divorce, death) or to environmental and community stressors and disasters (such as war, terrorist attack, or earthquake). Trauma symptoms have been reported in children as young as one year old (Bogat, DeJonghe, Levendosky, Davidson, & von Eye, 2006).

Cicchetti (2006, 2013) claimed that children's and adolescents' limited life experiences—together with their vulnerability and sensitivity—preclude them from dealing effectively with stress, threats, and crises, which can affect their physical development as well as their personality and emotional development and may predispose them to behavioural, emotional, or cognitive disorders. Other researchers have noted that stressful life events may also impair family relationships, increase behaviour problems, and decrease social competence (Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006; Levendosky et al., 2006).

There is no doubt that change, crisis, and trauma render tremendous influence on young people's psychosocial development; however, debates remain about how such experiences impact them. While some traumatic experiences seem to increase the mental health problems of children and adolescents, who demonstrate symptoms ranging from mild distress to severe dysfunction, it appears that other traumatic experiences, paradoxically, seem to affect them positively (Garbarino, 2002).

Two main trends have characterized research studying children's and adolescents' behaviour disorders under adverse conditions. The environmental approach conceptualizes changes and stress as the most important components influencing children's disorders (Levendosky et al., 2006). According to this approach, change (of any kind) acts as a stimulus eliciting stress and anxiety, dependence, and regressive symptoms. It can jeopardize future growth and development, lead to disabling emotional disorders, and leave permanent psychological scars, which are then followed by behavioural and emotional changes and might disrupt the development of basic competencies, threatening the child's ability to process and manage emotions effectively (Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, von Eye & Levendosky, 2009). The new or exacerbated symptoms might disappear after a short period of time, or they may develop further into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Garbarino, 2002). For years, research coinciding with the environmental approach has concentrated on the negative consequences of adversity, conceptualized primarily in terms of risks for psychopathology, dysfunction, breakdown, and other adverse impacts on individuals and families (Masten, 2018).

The second group of studies, in line with a resilience approach, has focused on normal development, asserting that children and adolescents generally respond 'normally' even to severe crises. These studies suggest that although

children may evidence an increase in their frequency of behaviour problems, they often do not develop PTSD after exposure to trauma or stress, and after a time they return to their usual patterns of behaviour, relating to the event as a challenge (Ronen, Rahav, & Rosenbaum, 2003). Accordingly, while some individuals or families appear to be more vulnerable to adversity, there are others who seem to be better protected or to recover better after exposure to objectively similar traumas or family crises. Sometimes these ‘buffering’ effects may reflect children’s individual functioning at the positive end of a continuum (such as strong levels of emotional regulation or problem-solving) along indices previously shown to exacerbate the risks posed by adversities such as poverty or family violence. In other cases, these young people may have access to ‘buffering’ environmental influences (like a supportive friend or mentor) that help protect them from the vulnerabilities typically studied in earlier models of stress and coping. According to this approach, resilience is the component that determines the difference between those individuals or families who continue on successfully and those who do not (Angelkovski, 2016).

Positive adjustment in general, and in high-risk samples in particular, demonstrates the influences of personal traits, coping behaviour patterns, and specifically the ability to adapt to change. During recent decades, scholars have shifted their focus from studying trauma and risk to studying personal and environmental strengths and resources in the context of risk or adversity—including capabilities, processes, or outcomes denoted by desirable adaptation (Masten, 2007, 2018). The present chapter upholds the view that stress is a challenge, which requires that children and adolescents be resourceful, cope, and adapt to the changing environment and their changing selves.

## Resilience: Definitions and Ecological Levels

The concept of resilience emerged from the phenomenon of exposure to trauma, crisis, and change that necessitates coping with and living with adversity (Masten, 2007). The construct has several definitions; some highlighted responding to an event (Ungar, 2008) while others defined resilience as a trait characteristic of an individual or family (Luthar, 2006) or even of a community (Pike, Dawley, & Tomaney, 2010). Others have emphasized resilient processes, outcomes, or patterns (*a way of life*). Richardson (2002) reviewed three waves in scholars’ identification of resilient qualities. The first wave, from the early twentieth century, identified developmental

assets and protective factors phenomenologically. The second wave, in the mid-twentieth century, described the process of disruption followed by reintegration in order to access resilient qualities. The third wave, exemplifying the postmodern and multidisciplinary view, identified resilience as the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruption.

In that vein, this chapter upholds that resilience occurs in the presence of significant adversity or threat. It infers the human capacity for adapting to adversity or overcoming the challenges posed by a threat or pressure while observably maintaining healthy successful functioning or 'bouncing back' after an initial distress response (Masten, 2007, 2018). As part of the tendency to focus on positive virtues and strengths rather than on pathology and risk within the framework of positive psychology, the study of resilience emphasizes its adaptation and coping characteristics. Thus, the goal is not to look at the absence of pathology but rather to pinpoint behavioural and cognitive competencies and the mastery of appropriate developmental tasks that may explain the capacity for resilience (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Kim-Cohen, Moffit, Caspi, & Taylor, 2004; Seligman, 2011). Masten (2018) emphasized the importance of both external adaptation to the environment and an internal sense of wellbeing as part of a comprehensive assessment of resilience. Moreover, resilience is better characterized as a dynamic process, because individuals can be resilient to specific environmental hazards or resilient at one time period but not another (Rutter, 2006). Through growth, children acquire new skills and resources that help them to 'bounce back' and develop an ability to succeed when faced with negative events later in life (Richardson, 2002). Evidently, whether one understands resilience as a developmental outcome, as a set of competencies, or as coping strategies, there is much overlap between these conceptualizations.

Moreover, although the definition of resilience has focused primarily on the individual and his or her outcomes to a traumatic or stressful event, coping also depends to a great extent on the developmental components and social determinants of health surrounding that individual (Luthar, 2006, Luthar, Sawyer, & Brown, 2006). This is important because resilience is a coping process necessitating the interactions between the child or adolescent and his/her surroundings (Gilligan, 2004). Thus, resilience has been conceptualized as reflecting protective factors at the individual level (e.g., the capacity to navigate health-sustaining resources and seek out opportunities to experience feelings of wellbeing) and also protective conditions in the individual's family, community, and culture that provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways (Luthar et al., 2006). Therefore, resilience is influenced by the child's environment, such that the

interaction between individuals and their social ecologies may determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced. Rutter (2006) emphasized the need for environments such as schools to examine their balance of risk and protective factors in order to build support mechanisms and provide more protective situations.

Furthermore, cultural variation is hypothesized to exert an influence not only on specific children's resilience but also on their local communities' resilience. Pike et al. (2010) asserted that resilience has emerged as a notion seeking to capture the differential and uneven ability of geographical regions to react, respond, and cope with uncertain, volatile, and rapid change. Resilient communities adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of risk. Pike et al. (2010) emphasized that analysis of regional development and functioning has recently broadened from a mere focus on growth to a wider perspective on regions' relative resilience in responding to the modern world's ever-increasing diverse array of external shocks and transitions, including financial crises, dangerous climate change, terror campaigns, and extreme weather events.

Hence, overall, resilience depends not only on the individual child's or adolescent's developmental pathway and the family and immediate environment, but also on broader community resources. This constellation of characteristics may converge when high-risk, vulnerable children and adolescents grow up happy and successful despite being born and raised under disadvantaged circumstances. In this sense, resilience refers to better-than-expected developmental outcomes and to the ability for competence under stress (Ungar, 2008).

## Basic Components Encompassing Resilience

As discourse on childhood and adolescence has expanded to focus on health instead of just on illness, Rutter (2006) underscored the need to relate to the correlations between risk and protective factors in explaining the processes underlying resilience. With regard to risk dimensions at the individual level, Seligman (2011) offered the '3 Ps' of resilience—three perception distortion tendencies that can hinder recovery from adversity: personalization, pervasiveness, and permanence. *Personalization* is a cognitive distortion that makes people believe they are to blame for every problem, instead of looking at other, outside factors that may play a part in the adverse situation. People should take responsibility for a failure, but they should not see themselves as a failure. *Pervasiveness* refers to the distorted belief that an adverse event will

affect all areas of life instead of just one. People who have this mindset may find it hard to carry on with life because they feel there is no way out of their situation. *Permanence* is the distorted belief that one's feelings or situation will last forever. This may cause the person to feel overwhelmed. The truth is that time passes by, and life's challenges go with it. Pain and pleasure are temporary. By recognizing these thoughts and beliefs as counterproductive, individuals can better understand their own tendencies to perceive situations, events, and themselves and can learn to foster resilience.

With regard to the vulnerability and protective factors explaining the processes underlying resilience, such dimensions characterize not only the individual child or adolescent but also the factors at play in the young people's social and political context (Luthar, 2006; Luthar et al., 2006), spanning the family and community levels. The fact that some children and adolescents develop and function successfully even under dire circumstances accentuates the need for parents and professionals to become aware of the very different resources that may sustain young people's wellbeing in various families and communities under stress, especially in schools.

Importantly, children and adolescents are capable of learning new skills that can increase their likelihood of adaptation to adversity (Luthar et al., 2006; Shannon, Beauchaine, Brenner, Neuhaus, & Gatzke-Kopp, 2007). Studies have pinpointed coping resources (Folkman, 2008) and learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1990, 2000) as crucial variables affecting the human response to stress. Among such skills, Ungar (2008) mentioned the importance of a sense of belonging, personal meaning, the experience of self-efficacy, life skills, vocational competencies, and the expression of one's cultural and ethnic identification as aspects of healthy functioning associated with resilience (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter 2013).

The next sections of this chapter discuss some resilience-related skills mentioned in the literature. These include individual components such as self-control skills, self-efficacy, subjective wellbeing in general, and positive affect in particular, as well as familial and environmental components such as social support and interpersonal relationships.

## The Role of the Individual in Developing Resilience

**Self-control skills.** Research has shown that self-control is of great importance to human psychological health and involves a crucial personal component for coping with stressful events—therefore a major element for

becoming resilient (Ronen & Rosenbaum, 2010). The human desire to control is powerful, and the feeling of control is rewarding, while the loss of control is the main reason for the development of a large range of disorders. Hence, it is important to help children and adolescents feel that they can control situations (Gilbert, 2005).

Self-control may therefore be viewed as a coping mechanism, as skills and strategies, or as a protective factor in coping with life's demands. Self-control comprises a goal-directed learned repertoire of behaviours that help people overcome stressful situations, pain, and disturbing emotions and be more resilient (Rosenbaum, 1990, 2000). This repertoire of self-control skills enables people to act upon their aims, overcome difficulties, delay gratification, and cope with distress. Thus, it targets both internal as well as external disturbing situations. Self-control necessitates that people assess disruptions in their habitual way of thinking, believe that their actions can improve their coping, and expect themselves to be capable of creating the desired change.

A considerable body of research has previously shown that children and adolescents who were high in self-control behaviours—such as postponing gratification, planning the future, and using cognitions to guide actions—were less likely to behave aggressively (Blair, Denham, Kochanoff, & Whipple, 2004; Gyurak & Ayduk, 2008). Self-control skills are positively related to students' academic competence and performance, independent of general intelligence, cognitive ability, and prior achievements (Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010; Valiente, Swanson, Lemery-Chalfant, & Berger, 2014).

Self-control skills increase coping both via a direct main effect and an indirect buffer effect. Directly, self-control increases one's sense of value, self-efficacy, or self-evaluation while feeling support from others. The buffer effect refers to the decreased negative impact experienced as an outcome of stress and becoming more resilient (Ronen & Rosenbaum, 2010). Self-control can also have an effect on one's subjective wellbeing by mediating the connection between stress and subjective wellbeing, thereby influencing a person's primary or secondary appraisal of the distressing situation. Conceiving support as more available leads to better feelings about one's ability to cope, to evaluate and resolve problems, and to decrease the potential threat (Orkibi & Ronen, 2015, 2017).

Studies of Israeli adolescents have found significant links between high self-control skills and fewer negative emotions, as well as higher self-efficacy beliefs, positive emotions, and a higher positivity ratio and ability to be resilient while facing stress. For example, among children and adolescents, during the first and the second Gulf Wars in Israel, higher levels of self-control skills were connected to lower levels of fear and to fewer symptoms (Ronen

et al., 2003; Ronen & Seeman, 2007). The existence of self-control skills was also found to enable the development of fewer symptoms while facing parents' divorce or sickness (Hamama & Ronen-Shenhav, 2012; Ronen, Hamama, Rosenbaum, & Mishely-Yarlp, 2014).

Traditionally, self-control skills have been associated with reductions in maladaptive outcomes such as aggressive behaviour. Students with higher self-control skills reported a less hostile attribution bias (i.e., interpreting others' intentions or behaviours as hostile and threatening) and less physically aggressive behaviour (Agbaria, Hamama, Orkibi, Gabriel-Fried, & Ronen, 2016). Further, self-control skills have been associated with increases in adaptive outcomes such as interpersonal and prosocial outcomes. Studies have demonstrated that when students showed high self-control skills, they reported higher perceived social support than their peers with low self-control skills (Orkibi & Ronen, 2015; Ronen, Abuelaish, Rosenbaum, Agbaria, & Hamama, 2013) as well as a higher rate of positive emotions and the subjective cognitive appraisal of being happy (Gilbert, 2005; Ronen et al., 2014). Some researchers view self-control as resulting from positive emotions because the latter create a good foundation for applying skills to achieve goals (Baumeister & Sparks, 2008; Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2007). Considering that self-control skills have been highlighted as a crucial component in coping with crisis and in maintaining high levels of subjective wellbeing, it may be assumed that children and adolescents who possess a higher level of self-control skills will achieve higher levels of subjective wellbeing and develop better resilience.

**Self-efficacy.** Whereas self-control relates to behaviour, self-efficacy relates to beliefs about oneself. Self-efficacy comprises beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve one's goals (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs influence thought patterns, which can then enhance or undermine performance (Bandura, 1997). Such beliefs shape the plans and behaviours that people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavours, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, and whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding. Thus, perceived self-efficacy may constitute a primary mediation agent in behavioural change.

Stronger perceived self-efficacy leads people to set higher personal goals and to commit themselves more firmly (Bandura, 1997). Inasmuch as challenging goals raise the level of motivation and performance attainments, the capacity to influence one's own process of change actually comprises a component of control (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Pastorelli, 2001). Thus, once a person possesses the necessary self-control skills, it is crucial for the

person to believe that s/he possesses those skills and that s/he is capable of executing the actions needed to achieve the desired change.

By predicting outcomes, people foster adaptive preparedness and exercise control that helps bring significance to their lives (Bandura et al., 2001). The way people think or believe in their own ability constitutes a most important feature in the process of change and may best be predicted by the combined influence of efficacy beliefs and the types of performance outcomes expected within given social systems (Bandura, 1997). The outcomes people anticipate depend largely on their judgement as to how well they will be able to perform and the anticipated consequences (Bandura, 1997). For example, Ronen, Hamama, and Rosenbaum (2013) found that children who wet the bed at night were able to overcome their bedwetting when they actively participated in predicting the process of change, such as their pace of decreasing weekly bedwetting frequency. Thus, predicting outcomes can become an important component involving children's beliefs and the change process itself (Masten, 2007).

Self-efficacy has also been found to correlate with wellbeing. For instance, studies of Israeli adolescents revealed significant links between stronger self-efficacy beliefs and a higher *positivity ratio*—the positive ratio between positive emotions to negative emotions—which is an indication of a high level of wellbeing (Orkibi & Ronen, 2015; Ronen & Seeman, 2007). Self-efficacy was also shown to be important for improving family life and happiness (Waters, 2011, 2015). Caprara, Steca, Gerbino, Paciello, and Vecchio (2006) reported that self-efficacy was a significant determinant of happiness.

Becoming active in change processes, believing in one's ability to influence change, and predicting one's own outcomes are all acquired skills (Rosenbaum, 1990, 2000). These crucial components in the process of change are skills needing to be taught and practiced with clients (Masten, 2007; Ronen & Rosenbaum, 2010). Considering that self-efficacy beliefs have been pinpointed as a crucial component in overcoming difficulties and stress as well as in becoming happier and increasing wellbeing, it may be assumed that children and adolescents who possess a higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to develop better resilience.

**Positive affect.** Researchers have claimed that happiness is a protective or coping mechanism to help children and adolescents become resilient. Studies have presented good outcomes for happy people, who appear to be less aggressive and less anxious, to have better interpersonal relationships, and to be more inclined to be kind and charitable (Keyes, 2006, 2013; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Within the framework of positive psychology, happiness has been studied as a positive personal resource, as a major life goal, and as a factor important for the optimal flourishing and functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Carr, 2004; Fredrickson, 2009; Gable & Haidt, 2005). Keyes (2006, 2013) suggested that happiness incorporates two abilities: achieving subjective wellbeing by expressing positive emotion, and achieving positive functioning towards oneself and one's environment. Research showed that in order to become happier, people need to gain a sense of mastery, connectedness, and self-acceptance (Keyes, & Simos, 2012). Being happy does not mean that people do not experience stress, crises, or problems; rather, happiness encompasses a 'secret weapon' in trying to cope with such distress. For example, 'happy' people may understand that although distress exists, happy moments will return and one can work towards achieving more happiness (Diener, 2019; Keyes, 2006; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ryff, 2014).

Many concepts relate to happiness: subjective wellbeing, satisfaction with life, flourishing, thriving, and more. The present chapter focuses on positive affect as an easier concept to explain, assess, and teach children and adolescents to be aware of and use.

Emotions have long been recognized as a major cause of human behaviour. Positive emotions increase positive human behaviour (Fredrickson, 2009). Positive emotions like enthusiasm, pride, and determination operate as independent bipolar constructs from negative emotions (e.g., fear, frustration, guilt), so that the existence of one does not necessarily point to a lack of the other (Bradburn, 1991; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Research has shown that the psychological impacts of unpleasant phenomena outweigh those of pleasant phenomena (Baumeister & Sparks, 2008) and that the impact of good events dissolves more rapidly than the impact of bad events, whereas a single bad event has greater impact than a comparable good event (Baumeister et al., 2007). Thus, it takes a larger quantity of positive emotional experiences to counteract the impact of adverse ones.

Positive affect and negative affect are often studied as part of a positive–negative rating scale (Watson et al., 1988). Positive emotions broaden momentary thought-action repertoires, resulting in a higher likelihood of pursuing a wider range of thoughts and actions, because one can see more possibilities (Fredrickson, 2009). While positive affect correlates with satisfaction from life as well as with high levels of self-confidence and a richer social life (Bood, Archer, & Norlander, 2004), negative affect correlates with reports of stress symptoms (Bood et al., 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Negative affect narrows momentary thought-action repertoires and

causes humans to see fewer opportunities (Fredrickson, 2009; Magyar-Moe, 2009).

The experience of positive emotions is associated with better functioning and, in the long run, correlates with enhanced physical, intellectual, and social resources (Johnson, Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2010). It is therefore a crucial component for achieving resilience.

In several studies, we demonstrated the importance of positive affect for children's and adolescents' coping. Coping is regarded as an internal mechanism within the individual, which comprises a main way to manage diverse situations in life and to master environmental and internal conflicts, and thus to develop resilience (Folkman, 2008). Adolescents were shown to cope better with fear of wars and missile attacks when they maintained positive affect (Ronen & Seeman, 2007). Among Arab adolescents, lower rates of symptoms and of aggression emerged when they could express higher levels of positive affect (Ronen, Abuelaish et al., 2013), and when Israeli students expressed positive affect, they flourished, even while under exposure to risk (Orkibi & Ronen, 2015).

Thus, teaching children and adolescents to express positive affect, to overcome negative affect, and to look for activities and situations that increase their happiness may be major tools for helping them become more resilient, cope with difficulties, and be able to flourish.

## The Role of the Family and Peers in Developing Resilience

The previous section presented self-control skills, self-efficacy, and positive affect as individual coping mechanisms for helping children and adolescents achieve resilience. However, children do not grow up alone; their family and society hold main roles in helping them develop those resilience skills. As Gilligan (2004) stated, while resilience may previously have been seen as residing in the person as a fixed trait, it is now more usefully considered as a variable quality that derives from a process of repeated interactions between a person and favourable features of the surrounding context in that person's life. The degree of resilience displayed by a person in a certain context may therefore be said to be related to the extent to which that context has elements that nurture this resilience. It is therefore important to ask: How can families and communities increase resilience among children and adolescents? How can we train them to do so?

The desire to belong and to form attachments with family and friends is considered a fundamental human need. Multiple positive health and adjustment effects have been associated with a sense of belonging and with interpersonal attachments. It is also through supportive relationships that self-esteem and self-efficacy are promoted. Having social competence and having positive connections with peers, family, and prosocial adults are significantly related to children's ability to adapt to life stressors (Masten, 2007).

Family-level protective factors include resources and supportive relationships, such as family coherence, stable caregiving, and parental relationships. Children whose mothers are available and supportive developed self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem abilities. (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Strength-based parenting, parental warmth, support, positive expectations, and low derogation predict children's behavioural and emotional adaptation under a wide variety of adverse circumstances (Kim-Cohen et al., 2004). Parents who are aware of and use their children's strengths enable them to enhance their self-efficacy beliefs, thus resulting in higher levels of well-being (Waters, 2011, 2015). Effective parenting is associated with decreased externalizing behaviours and increased positive adaptation (Levendosky et al., 2006).

For children, the development of friendships and the ability to get along with peers individually and in groups is paramount. Friendships provide support systems that can foster emotional, social, and educational adjustment. Positive peer relationships have been shown to protect children during times of family crisis. Being part of at least one best friendship may also improve children's adjustment. As children enter adolescence, these friendships may carry even more weight, as teens shift from being dependent on their immediate environment (the parents) to relating more to their peers. Society plays major roles in affecting adolescents' self-identity, self-image, and self-evaluation (Steinberg, 2007).

Social support encompasses personal, social, and familial relationships (Sarason & Sarason, 1990). In the course of adolescence, relations with peers become a more central source of social support, and perceived support from parents either remains constant or decreases. Research has identified four kinds of social support: informative, instrumental, emotional, and companionship (House, 1981). The need for relatedness (the emotional and companionship aspects of support) refers to the need to feel significant, connected to, and cared for by important others rather than isolated or disconnected from others (Milyavskaya & Koestner, 2011). During recent decades, social support has been identified as one of the most crucial factors

helping human beings cope, overcome difficulties, and enable a healthy lifestyle (Keyes, 2006, 2013; Keyes & Semoes, Simoes 2012).

In all our studies, we have found that children and adolescents presented higher levels of wellbeing and a greater ability to flourish—even when exposed to terror, war, and aggression—when they had either family support or peer support (Orkibi & Ronen, 2015; Ronen et al., 2014). We can therefore conclude that children and adolescents can be resilient once they acquire the basic needed skills and live in a protective supportive environment of family and peers. Parents and communities can help enable children and adolescents to become resilient, which is important because professionals, on the one hand, can train children to enhance their social skills for obtaining support from others and, on the other hand, can train parents and families to increase children's strengths, focus on those strengths, and help them express positive affect on the path towards greater resilience.

## The Role of Schools in Developing Resilience

A major focus of research into resilience has investigated close figures in the child's and adolescent's extrafamilial environment as influencing young people's coping ability. Beyond examining individual developmental pathways of vulnerable children and youth and their family resources as discussed previously, these studies have explored the health-enhancing capacities of the community and, especially, of the school system. Thus, protective factors at the community level may include peer relationships, non-family-member relationships, non-family-member social support, and religion, among others (Keyes, 2006; Gavriel-Fried & Ronen, 2016; Orkibi, Hamama, Gabriel-Fried, & Ronen, 2018).

There is broad agreement among educators, policymakers, and the public that schools are the child's main life setting and has an important role to play in raising healthy children, by not only fostering their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). Considering the amount of time the average child spends at school during their lifetime, the influence of schools should never be underestimated (e.g., Howard & Walton, 2015). Schools provide environments for children with opportunities for positive peer interactions, significant relationships with adults other than their parents/caregivers, and promotion of social and emotional learning (Graham, Phelps, Maddisson, & Fitzgerald, 2011; Howard & Walton, 2015). Many schools have well-developed programs

aimed at building resilience that are implemented across the board by teachers (Nolan, Taket, & Stagnitti, 2014). Educators can choose to enhance, or add to, these programs for the benefit of their students, employing various explicit or implicit strategies in doing so.

Students' self-control skills are linked directly to their resiliency and well-being at school and may also be mediated through students' perceived satisfaction of their basic psychological needs; hence, attaining basic needs at school is a key feature determining wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) posited that the satisfaction of students' basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence is crucial for students' motivation, optimal development, effective functioning, and good health (Milyavskaya & Koestner, 2011). At school, subjective wellbeing consists of school satisfaction and the experience of more frequent positive emotions than negative emotions in school, as well as feeling confident, protected, a sense of trust, and autonomy—which enables students' development of self-determination (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017).

In the United States, students who were higher on school satisfaction also scored significantly higher on measures of general life satisfaction, hope, and internal locus of control. Good teacher–student relationships and perceived peer social support are the basic components needed to achieve resiliency and wellbeing (Jiang, Huebner, & Siddall, 2013) as well as better in-school behaviour (Suldo, Bateman, & Gelley, 2014). School satisfaction was positively linked with positive emotions in school and negatively linked with negative emotions in school (e.g., Long, Huebner, Wedell, & Hills, 2012). Perceived goal mastery and teacher and peer support were significantly linked to school engagement and hope, whereas perceived autonomy was also linked to academic achievement in middle and high school students in the United States (Van Ryzin, 2011). In an extensive line of studies with Chinese adolescent students, wellbeing in school was generally significantly linked to perceived social support, scholastic competence, and social acceptance, and predicted students' sense of school belonging and students' wellbeing in school (Liu, Tian, Huebner, Zheng, & Li, 2015; Tian, Chen, & Huebner, 2014).

The field of positive psychology strives to understand the strengths within individuals, families, and even communities, and what they need to flourish. It is therefore natural to place emphasis on positive education to develop the art of 'bouncing back'—the ability to spring back from negative events to live a high-quality life (Angelkovski, 2016). An important purpose of educational institutions is to equip students with the essential life skills required to become competent members of society after they complete their school years

(White & Waters 2015). One of those vital capabilities is developing the capacity to be resilient. From an education perspective, children and adolescence should understand that things do not always go according to plan, and that remaining positive in these instances can help to ensure the best possible outcome (Angelkovski, 2016). In line with this view, we reasoned that because self-control skills are goal-directed skills that help people regulate their emotions, they will lead to greater self-determination in terms of helping students experience a greater sense of autonomy, volition, and self-endorsement of their behaviour in school as well as a sense of relatedness, belonging, and genuine connection with teachers and peers, and a sense of competence by enabling them to effectively interact with their school environment and maximize opportunities to express or develop their capabilities and strengths (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017).

## Resilience-Promoting Projects

Many projects have developed over the last decade to impart resilience skills to children and adolescents. Their shared components entail interactive identification of protective factors, free play, behavioural methods, rehearsal, training in relaxation and self-control techniques, practice in generalizing the acquired skills, active parent involvement, and harnessing of teachers' strengths (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Lavy, 2019).

In three large-scale national projects adopted by the Israeli government, our research and intervention team has targeted children and adolescents to impart self-control skills for decreasing behavioural disorders, increasing positive affect, and enhancing resilience. Each of the three projects started as a university-based controlled trial, implemented by university students to children and adolescents. As research outcomes supported these interventions' efficacy, we started training teachers and educators in the field to apply these resilience-promoting projects as part of their regular school curricula while initially receiving supervision from us. Today, schools all over Israel now apply these projects independently.

The first project, initially called *Be Strong* (Ronen, 1994), offered children and adolescents a weekly course (adapted to age level) that focused on 'how to become strong'. Participants first learned about strong people in the history of the world and in their country. They identified the characteristics and strengths that helped these people. Second, participants learned about human beings in general, while focusing on the links between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in order to understand how people process experiences and

function. In the third phase, participants observed and charted their own behaviours, trying to understand antecedents of those behaviours, the way they process information, and the links between their behaviours and their environment's responses. They learned self-control skills and practiced them both at school and after school. In the last phase, each participant was asked to set a goal for change and to implement it using the material they had learned. The course was taught using the scientific method, where participants had to raise hypotheses about their own behaviours and find ways to observe and try to support those hypotheses.

Evaluation of the initial university-based program demonstrated that participating children and adolescents were able to change their behaviour, apply self-control skills, reduce behaviour problems such as disobedience or aggression, and improve prosocial goals such as increasing their social skills or number of friends. Higher self-control skills were found among those who participated in the program in comparison to classmates who were on the waiting list to begin the program.

This program was also adapted to small groups of high-risk aggressive young people, who studied their own aggressive patterns and thus learned to change their hostile thoughts and negative affect and to express more positive affect. This program targeting at-risk youth, called *Empowering Children and Adolescents*, is applied nationwide by the Israeli Ministry of Education. A controlled study assessing participating children/adolescents and their parents and teachers demonstrated substantial increases in self-control skills, prosocial behaviour, and school achievements alongside decreases in aggressive behaviour, showing significantly better outcomes compared to waitlisted students (Ronen & Rosenbaum, 2010).

Next, we were interested in learning if effective intervention requires explicit verbal training or if children and adolescents could boost their self-control skills and resilience by engaging consistently in structured activities that they enjoy, such as sports or music. In our *Through Sports* intervention, students who were assessed by their teachers as aggressive were offered the opportunity to join an extracurricular afterschool program involving six hours of sports each week, which integrated challenging and competitive athletic activities. The physical education teachers or coaches oversaw the program, and our only request was for them to give students feedback on their participation and to help students set goals each time for the next sports practice. Our controlled study of the program's effectiveness demonstrated two different paths for reducing aggression among the student participants: One way was to reduce hostile thoughts and angry feelings, and the other way was to promote positive thinking and positive affect. Compared to peers who

did not participate in the sports program, participants revealed significantly higher levels of self-control skills, positive affect, and happiness (Shachar, Ronen-Rosenbaum, Rosenbaum, Orkibi, & Hamama, 2016).

In another extracurricular program, *Sulamot: Music for Social Change*, we targeted the same goals via music. Together with the Israeli Philharmonic, we established children's orchestras in boarding schools and institutions for children at risk, teaching all students to play an instrument and participate in the school's orchestra. Empirical studies showed that even those children who were hyperactive, who were diagnosed with attention deficit disorders, who had been sexually or physically abused, or who had not successfully learned to read and write were able to learn musical notation, instrument playing, and skills of coordinating with peers in the orchestra. These studies (master's theses and doctoral dissertations available only in Hebrew) demonstrated that playing music regularly in such high-status orchestras enabled children to reduce aggression, increase self-control and happiness, and become similar to children who were not assessed as high-risk.

## Conclusion

The concept of resilience has been proposed as an answer to help young children and adolescents cope with exposure to change, crisis, and trauma—whether in low-risk or high-risk populations. Over recent years, it has become apparent that every human being faces difficulties in life, even young people in childhood and adolescence, and that trauma is not a direct outcome of an event but rather the way one deals with it. It is therefore necessary for all those involved in caring for, raising, and teaching young persons to work towards resilience as a developmental resource or set of natural coping skills for each individual child, in order to increase wellbeing and happiness and to better cope with the challenges, fluctuations, and adversities encountered in life.

Thus, the facilitation of children's and adolescents' resilience must be a shared undertaking by parents, extended family, schools, and the community—to impart them with those skills and to set up optimally protective environmental conditions. In addition to nurturing children and ensuring that their basic needs are met for food, sleep, and warmth, the adults in their lives should foster trust, confidence, the ability for healthy relationships, joyful and satisfying experiences, and self-acceptance. Children and adolescents who attain these crucial skills will be more resilient to deal with whatever they encounter in their lives.

Taking this approach one step further by describing resilience as a quality of the broader societal environment as much as of the individual and his/her closer circles, policymakers may do well to pay 'careful attention... to the structural deficiencies in our society and to the social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations' (Seccombe, 2002, p. 385). This view of resilience that integrates multilevel factors related to individual dispositions, family resources, community opportunities, and social policy offers hope for improving resilience in significant ways, thereby 'changing the odds', especially for at-risk children, rather than expecting individual-level change alone to 'beat the odds' (p. 385).

## References

- Agbaria, Q., Hamama, L., Orkibi, H., Gabriel-Fried, B., & Ronen, T. (2016). Multiple mediators for peer-directed aggression and happiness in Arab adolescents exposed to parent-child aggression. *Child Indicators Research*, 9(3), 785–803. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-015-9346-y>.
- Alvord, M. K., & Grados, J. J. (2005). Enhancing resilience in children: A proactive approach. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 36(3), 238–245. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.36.3.238>.
- Angelkovski, R. (2016). Education matters. *Journal of Student Engagement*, 6(1), 39–45.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Bandura, A., Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Sociocognitive self-regulatory mechanisms governing transgressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Behavior*, 80, 125–135.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Sparks, E. A. (2008). If bad is stronger than good, why focus on human strength? In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *Positive psychology: Exploring the best in people* (Vol. 1, pp. 54–79). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., DeWall, N. C., & Zhang, L. (2007). How emotion shapes behavior: Feedback, anticipation, and reflection, rather than direct causation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 11, 167–203. <https://10.1177/1088868307301033>.
- Blair, K. E., Denham, S. A., Kochanoff, A., & Whipple, B. (2004). Playing it cool: Temperament, emotion regulation, and social behavior in preschoolers. *Journal of School Psychology*, 42, 419–443.
- Bogat, G. A., DeJonghe, E. S., Levendosky, A. A., Davidson, W. S., & von Eye, A. (2006). Trauma symptoms among infants who witness domestic violence toward their mothers. *Child Abuse & Neglect: the International Journal*, 30, 109–125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1996.tb01881.x>.

- Bood, S. A., Archer, T., & Norlander, T. (2004). Affective personality in relation to general personality, self-reported stress, coping, and optimism. *Individual Differences Research, 2*, 26–37.
- Bradburn, I. S. (1991). After the earth shook: Children's symptoms 6–8 months after a disaster. *Advance of Behavior Therapy, 13*, 173–179.
- Caprara, G. V., Steca, P., Gerbino, M., Paciello, M., & Vecchio, G. M. (2006). Looking for adolescents' well-being: Self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of positive thinking and happiness. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences, 15*(1), 30–43.
- Carr, A. (2004). *Positive psychology: The science of happiness and human strength*. New York: Hove and Brunner-Routledge.
- Cicchetti, D. (2006). Development and psychopathology. In D. Cicchetti, & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 1. Theory and method* (2nd ed., pp. 1–23). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939383.ch1>.
- Cicchetti, D. (2013). Annual research review: Resilient functioning in maltreated children: Past, present, and future perspectives. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 54*, 402–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.02608.x>.
- Cornum, R., Matthews, M. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Comprehensive soldier fitness: Building resilience in a challenging institutional context. *American Psychologist, 66*(1), 4–9. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021420>.
- Davies, P. T., Winter, M. A., & Cicchetti, D. (2006). The implications of emotional security theory for understanding and treating childhood psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology, 18*, 707–735.
- Diener, E. (2019). The science of well being. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 37*, 1–10.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432.
- Folkman, S. (2008). The case for positive emotions in the stress process. *Anxiety Stress and Coping, 21*, 3–14.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2009). *Positivity*. New York: Crown.
- Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 103–110.
- Garbarino, J. (2002). Forward: Pathways from childhood trauma to adolescent violence and delinquency. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, and Trauma, 6*(1), xxv–xxxii.
- Gavriel-Fried, B., & Ronen, T. (2016). Positive emotions as a moderator of the associations between self-control and social support among adolescents with risk behaviors. *International Journal of Mental Health in Addiction, 14*, 121–134. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-015-9580-z>.
- Gilbert, D. (2005). *Stumbling happiness*. New York: Vintage.
- Gilligan, R. (2004). Promoting resilience in child and family social works: Issues for social work practice, education and policy. *Social Work Education, 23*(1), 93–104.

- Graham, A., Phelps, R., Maddisson, C., & Fitzgerald, R. (2011). Supporting children's mental health in schools: Teacher views. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(4), 479–496.
- Grolnick, W. S., & Ryan, R. R. (1989). Parents styles associated with children's self-regulation and competence in school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(2), 143–154.
- Gyurak, A., & Ayduk, Ö. (2008). Resting respiratory sinus arrhythmia buffers against rejection sensitivity via emotion control. *Emotion*, 8, 458–467.
- Hamama, L., & Ronen-Shenhav, A. (2012). Self-control, social support, and aggression among adolescents in divorced and two-parent families. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 1042–1049. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.02.009>.
- House, J. S. (1981). *Work, stress and social support*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Howard, S., & Walton, R. (2015). *Educational psychology: Foundations of learning and development*. Macksville, NSW, Australia: David Barlow.
- Jiang, X., Huebner, E. S., & Siddall, J. (2013). A short-term longitudinal study of differential sources of school-related social support and adolescents' school satisfaction. *Social Indicators Research*, 114, 1073–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0190x>.
- Johnson, K. J., Waugh, C. E., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2010). Smile to see the forest: Facially expressed positive emotions broaden cognition. *Cognition and Emotion*, 24(2), 299–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930903384667>.
- Keyes, C. L. (2006). Mental health in adolescence: Is America's youth flourishing? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76, 395–402.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2013). Promoting and protecting positive mental health: Early and often throughout lifespan. In C. L. M. Keyes (Ed.), *Mental well-being: International contributions to the study of positive mental health* (pp. 3–29). New York: Springer.
- Keyes, C. L. M., & Simoes, E. J. (2012). To flourish or not: Positive mental health and all-cause mortality. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(11), 2164–2172.
- Kim-Cohen, J., Moffitt, T. E., Caspi, A., & Taylor, A. (2004). Genetic and environmental processes in young children's resilience and risk to socioeconomic deprivation. *Child Development*, 75, 651–668.
- Lavy, S. (2019). A review of character strengths interventions in 21st century schools: Their importance and how they can be fostered. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9700-6>.
- Levendosky, A. A., Leahy, K. L., Bogat, G. A., Davidson, W. S., & von Eye, A. (2006). Domestic violence, maternal parenting, maternal mental health, and infant externalizing behavior. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 544–552.
- Liew, J., Chen, Q., & Hughes, J. N. (2010). Child effortful control, teacher–student relationships, and achievement in academically at-risk children: Additive and interactive effects. *Early Child Research Quarterly*, 25, 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.07.005>.

- Liu, W., Tian, L., Huebner, E. S., Zheng, X., & Li, Z. (2015). Preliminary development of the elementary school students' subjective well-being in school scale. *Social Indicators Research*, *120*, 917–937. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0614-x>.
- Long, R. F., Huebner, E. S., Wedell, D. H., & Hills, K. J. (2012). Measuring school related subjective well-being in adolescents. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *82*, 50–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2011.01130.x>.
- Luthar, S. S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti, & D. J. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 3. Risk, disorder, and adaptation* (2nd ed., pp. 739–795). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939406.ch20>.
- Luthar, S. S., Sawyer, J. A., & Brown, P. J. (2006). Conceptual issues in the studies of resilience: Past, present, and future research. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1095*, 105–115.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*, 803–855. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.803>.
- Magyar-Moe, J. L. (2009). *Therapist's guide to positive psychological interventions*. New York: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Martinez-Torteya, C., Bogat, G. A., von Eye, A., & Levendosky, A. A. (2009). Resilience among children exposed to domestic violence: The role of risk and protective factors. *Child Development*, *80*, 562–577.
- Masten, A. S. (2007). Resilience in developing systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Development and Psychopathology*, *19*, 921–930. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0954579407000442>.
- Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience theory and research on children and families: Past, present, and promise. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *10*(1), 12–31.
- Milyavskaya, M., & Koestner, R. (2011). Psychological needs, motivation, and well-being: A test of self-determination theory across multiple domains. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *50*, 387–391. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.10.029>.
- Nolan, A., Taket, A., & Stagnitti, K. (2014). Supporting resilience in early years classrooms: The role of the teacher. *Teachers and Teaching*, *20*(5), 595–608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.937955/>.
- Orkibi, H., Hamama, L., Gabriel-Fried, B., & Ronen, T. (2018). Pathways to adolescents' flourishing: Linking self-control skills and positivity ratio through social support. *Youth & Society*, *50*, 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x15581171>.
- Orkibi, H., & Ronen, T. (2015). High self-control protects the link between social support and positivity ratio for Israeli students exposed to contextual risk. *Journal of School Psychology*, *53*(4), 283–293.
- Orkibi, H., & Ronen, T. (2017). Basic psychological needs satisfaction mediates the association between self-control skills and subjective well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00936>.

- Pike, A., Dawley, S., & Tomaney, J. (2010). Resilience, adaptation and adaptability. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3(1), 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq001>.
- Richardson, G. (2002). The metatheory of resilience and resiliency. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58(3), 307–321.
- Ronen, T. (1994). Imparting self-control skills in the school setting. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, 16(1), 1–20.
- Ronen, T., Abuelaish, I., Rosenbaum, M., Agbaria, Q., & Hamama, L. (2013a). Predictors of aggression among Palestinians in Israel and Gaza: Happiness, need to belong, and self-control. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.10.015>.
- Ronen, T., Hamama, L., & Rosenbaum, M. (2013b). Enuresis—Children's Predictions of Their Treatment's Progress and Outcomes. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 22(1–2), 222–232.
- Ronen, T., Hamama, L., Rosenbaum, M., & Mishely-Yarlap, A. (2014). Subjective well-being in adolescence: The role of self-control, social support, age, gender, and familial crisis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17(1), 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9585-5>.
- Ronen, T., Rahav, G., & Rosenbaum, M. (2003). Children's reactions to war situation as a function of age and sex. *Anxiety Stress and Coping*, 16, 59–69.
- Ronen, T., & Rosenbaum, M. (2010). Developing learned resourcefulness in adolescents to help them reduce their aggressive behavior: Preliminary findings. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20(4), 410–426. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731509331875>.
- Ronen, T., & Seeman, A. (2007). Subjective well-being of adolescents in boarding schools under threat of war. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 20, 1053–1062.
- Rosenbaum, M. (1990). *Learned resourcefulness: On coping skills, self-control, and adaptive behavior*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Rosenbaum, M. (2000). The self-regulation of experience: Openness and construction. In P. Dewe, T. Cox, & M. Leiter (Eds.), *Coping, health, and organizations* (pp. 51–67). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Rutter, M. (2006). Implications of resilience concepts for scientific understanding. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094, 1–12.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68>.
- Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: Advances in science and practice. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28.
- Sarason, B. R., Sarason, I. G., & Pierce, G. R. (1990). *Social support: An interactional view*. New York: Wiley.
- Secombe, K. (2002). Beating the odds versus changing the odds: Poverty, resilience, and family policy. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 64, 384–394.
- Seligman, M. E. (2011). Building resilience. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(4), 100–106.

- Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410–421.
- Shachar, K., Ronen-Rosenbaum, T., Rosenbaum, M., Orkibi, H., & Hamama, L. (2016). Reducing child aggression through sports intervention: The role of self-control skills and emotions. *Children and Youth Services Review, 71*, 241–249. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.11.012>.
- Shannon, K. E., Beauchaine, T. P., Brenner, S. L., Neuhaus, E., & Gatzke-Kopp, L. (2007). Familial and temperamental predictors of resilience in children at risk for conduct disorder and depression. *Development and Psychopathology, 19*, 701–727.
- Steinberg, L. (2007). *Adolescence* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Steinberg, L. (2013). Does recent research on adolescent brain development inform the mature minor doctrine? *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, 38*, 256–267.
- Suldo, S. M., Bateman, L. P., & Gelley, C. D. (2014). Understanding and promoting school satisfaction in children and adolescents. In M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman, & E. S. Huebner (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (2nd ed., pp. 365–380). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tian, L., Chen, H., & Huebner, E. S. (2014). The longitudinal relationships between basic psychological needs satisfaction at school and school-related subjective well-being in adolescents. *Social Indicators Research, 119*, 353–372. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0495-4>.
- Tice, D. M., Baumeister, R., Shmueli, D., & Muraven, M. (2007). Restoring the self: Positive affect helps improve self-regulation following ego depletion. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 43*, 379–384.
- Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*(2), 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl343>.
- Ungar, M., Ghazinour, M., & Richter, J. (2013). What is resilience within the social ecology of human development? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 54*, 348–366. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12025>.
- Valiente, C., Swanson, J., Lemery-Chalfant, K., & Berger, R. H. (2014). Children's effortful control and academic achievement: Do relational peer victimization and classroom participation operate as mediators? *Journal of School Psychology, 52*, 433–445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2014.05.005>.
- Van Ryzin, M. J. (2011). Protective factors at school: Reciprocal effects among adolescents' perceptions of the school environment, engagement in learning, and hope. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 40*, 1568–1580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9637-7>.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 28*(2), 75–90.
- Waters, L. (2015). The relationship between strength-based parenting with children's stress levels and strength-based coping approaches. *Psychology, 6*(6), 689–699.
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal*

- of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063–1070. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063>.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2017). The development of self-determination during adolescence. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 89–98). Dordrecht: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1042-6>.
- White, M. A., & Waters, L. E. (2015). A case study of “the good school:” Examples of the use of Peterson’s strengths-based approach with students. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 69–76.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 15

## Developing Coping Skills in the Early Years: A Positive Educational Approach

Erica Frydenberg, Jan Deans, and Rachel Liang

### Coping in the Context of Policies and Standards

Consistent with global imperatives to improve the health and wellbeing of children, countries such as the U.K., the U.S., and Australia have developed a variety of national policies, frameworks, and standards for children's wellbeing from birth through the primary and secondary school years. For example, Australia launched their first national plan *The Nest* action agenda in 2013, with a vision for all Australian children and youth to achieve six outcomes: being loved and safe, having basic necessities, being healthy, learning, participating, and having a positive sense of identity and culture (ARACY, 2014). In line with this action plan were many initiatives to track and improve the wellbeing and development of children in the early years. One such initiative is the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), which provides a national measure to monitor five areas or "domains" of early childhood development in Australia:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge

---

E. Frydenberg (✉) · J. Deans · R. Liang  
University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [e.frydenberg@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:e.frydenberg@unimelb.edu.au)

These domains have been linked to good adult health, education, and social outcomes (AEDC, 2015). As a population-based measure, the AEDC helps communities know how their children are progressing and highlights what is working well (developmentally on track) and what needs to be improved (developmentally at risk or vulnerable) to support children and their families for health and wellbeing. Programs like the AEDC sit alongside and impact the initiatives that drive social emotional aspects of early years education. In the context of social emotional education in general, coping constructs and concepts have led to the development of a range of practical applications in educational settings.

While coping research preceded the positive psychology and social emotional learning movements, it fits both of these landscapes appropriately and effectively. Additionally, it has considerable practical applications across the lifespan. Positive psychology is an orientation and approach to attaining wellbeing and resilience, while coping is the process by which they are achieved. As such, it is helpful to think about the role that coping can play, particularly within the early years.

This chapter addresses the importance of developing social emotional skills in today's complex societies so as to build wellbeing and resilience. It illustrates how coping skills provide an exemplar of life skills as a valuable tool with which to deal with circumstances as they arise. How we view things matters, so a positive appraisal of events is helpful. There is no better time to start than in the early years. Additionally, individual resilience building capacity is enhanced by bringing the family on board and providing them with good coping skills. An intergenerational program further illustrates how young people's engagement with the elderly in the community develops a dimension of sharing and caring for others at an early age.

## Unpacking Coping

In simple terms, coping can be described as the thoughts, feelings, and actions in response to the demands of our everyday lives. Thoughts, feelings, and actions can be operationalized, and like other psychological constructs (e.g., IQ and emotional intelligence, anxiety), description of the concepts makes it possible for coping to be measured. With coping measures, there is no ideal score, but rather a description of which strategies are used a great deal, sometimes, or a little. There are helpful (productive) coping practices and unhelpful (non-productive) ones, which may become habitual in nature and can occur simultaneously (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2011). For example, you can

both try to solve the problem (a productive strategy) and be worried about the outcome (a non-productive strategy).

Coping habits develop from an early age and continue to change and develop across the life span (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009a, 2009b). Substantial research in child and adolescent coping has demonstrated that coping is similar to adaptation with situations in which temperament, developmental, and environmental factors all play a part. For example, children with an engaging temperament are more likely to use positive coping strategies, as are young people who traverse their developmental milestones without difficulties. This means there is no right or wrong way of coping, but rather that the situation determines what is likely to achieve the desired outcomes. Ultimately, the individual decides what is helpful and what is not, and that often determines which coping strategies become part of the coping repertoire.

It is widely acknowledged that a child's developmental level may both contribute to and limit the type of coping responses employed, and hence influence the types of coping strategies that a child utilizes in different contexts (Compas, 2009; Compas et al., 2001; Rudolph, Dennig, & Weisz, 1995). In general, as children develop, cortical functioning increases, and their coping repertoire increases and shifts from primarily behavioural to more cognitive influenced actions (Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). This enhances both the child's self-control when facing a stressful situation and their ability to plan effective coping options (Derryberry, Reed & Pilkenton-Taylor, 2003).

Helpful coping links consistently with positivity (Fredrickson, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2008) and wellbeing (Bryden, Field, & Francis, 2015; Frydenberg, Deans, & Liang, 2017; Zeidner, Matthews, & Shemesh, 2016), whereas as unhelpful coping has been related to anxiety (Pang, Frydenberg, & Deans, 2015; Yeo, Frydenberg, Northam, & Deans, 2014). As such, we encourage upscaling and increasing the use of helpful coping and downscaling the use of less helpful coping strategies, described below.

## The Nature of Coping

To date, much of the coping research in the child and adolescent area has been predicated on the theorizing of Folkman and Lazarus, which emphasizes the context in which the coping actions occur, the attempt rather than the outcome, and the fact that coping is a process that changes over time, as the

person and the environment are continuously in a dynamic, mutually influential relationship (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). That is, the same circumstances are not being dealt with on an ongoing basis, but rather continue to shift and change over time. For example, if a child is so anxious about speaking in front of the class that he/she is paralyzed into inactivity and does not want to go to school, anxiety is likely to be compounded by having to go to school the following day. The theory of coping proposed by Richard Lazarus (1993) is generally known as the Transactional Model of Coping. Lazarus (1993) defined coping as the response to the “ongoing cognitive and behavioural demands that are taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 237). That is, what we want to achieve in coping is to build up coping resources by providing individuals with opportunities to trial strategies and learn as to what works and what does not.

Functional coping styles represent direct attempts to deal with a problem, with or without reference to others. Dysfunctional coping styles, in contrast, relate to the use of what we call non-productive strategies, such as worry and crying or screaming, while productive coping has generally been associated with positive adaptation (Ebata and Moos, 1991). The terms functional and dysfunctional styles do not refer to “good” or “bad” styles, since styles of coping are largely dependent on context. In fact, whether one is deemed to be a good or bad copier depends on the skills that one brings to a particular situation and the outcome following the coping action/s. Furthermore, an individual can both change him or herself and modify the environment (Aldwin, 2007) to support the capacity to cope.

## Cognitive Appraisal in Coping

One of the basic tenets of Lazarus’ (1993) theory is *appraisal*. In simple terms, appraisal refers to whether or not an individual perceives an event or situation as stressful is a result of how an individual assesses or evaluates the event. It focuses on the thoughts and emotions that a person experiences as they live from day to day, impacting upon whether the individual perceives a situation as threatening or challenging. When an event occurs (internally or externally), a person engages in cognitive appraisal—cognitively evaluating whether the particular encounter is relevant to his or her stress and wellbeing. How a person appraises the situation affects how they feel about it.

As illustrated in Fig. 15.1, according to this theory, there are two things that a person thinks when they encounter a situation: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. *Primary appraisal* asks: “what is at stake in terms of

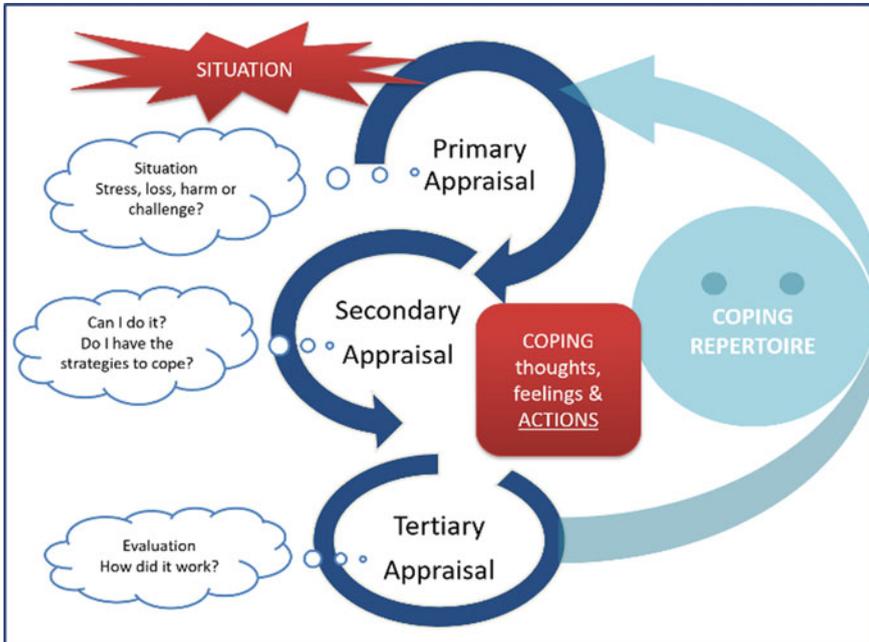


Fig. 15.1 Appraisal theory of coping

potential harm or benefit?” Secondary appraisal asks: “what can be done about the situation or what are the options or resources available?” (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). The appraisals may initiate a chain of activity and coping actions to manage a situation. *Tertiary appraisal* occurs when the individual puts a chosen coping strategy into action, evaluates the coping outcome of the coping effort, and decides whether it fits into his or her coping repertoire to be called into action on future occasions.

Early studies found that appraisal is associated with the type and amount of coping (Stone & Neale, 1984), and that students assessed what is stressful in a work situation according to whether they regarded the situation as one of loss, threat, or challenge (Manzi, 1986). In relation to stressful academic and social events in a school environment, appraisal played a part, in that the severity of the stress was assessed according to whether individuals felt they could do something constructive to deal with the problem (Fahs, 1986). Through interview responses with 9–10-year-olds, Muldoon (1996) found that events that are harmful or loss-inducing are perceived by children as most stressful, and when asked to describe an event that is stressful children spontaneously described a harmful event (see also Compas, 2009).

A number of studies in the coping literature have looked into the effect that positive thinking has on the appraisal of stress, coping, and wellbeing. Positive thinking allows the individual to interpret situations in ways that are conducive to growth and success while negative thinking leads to appraisals that anticipate bad outcomes. For example, Folkman (1997) and Naseem and Khalid (2010) have argued convincingly that positive thinking and positive affect are related to distress reduction and predicting healthy outcomes, and how positive emotions can undo the effect of negative emotions on cardiovascular function.

## Coping in Childhood

These adult conceptions of coping have been useful in delineating children's coping and bringing teachers and parents along the coping journey with their children. As we learned through the *Early Years Coping Project*, described below, it is possible to take account of situations that are stressful for children and ask them to describe how they cope. These descriptions in turn form the basis of how we measure and teach coping skills to children, taking account of age appropriate language and circumstances. By utilizing what is known about adult coping and what we know about how children cope, it is possible to achieve the best outcomes both in family and school contexts.

### The Early Years Coping Project

Since 2010, our team has focused on early childhood (i.e., ages 3–6 years). We see this as the most relevant and opportune age for the teaching of coping skills. It is the stage of life when both children, teachers, and parents are receptive to learning and sensitive to developments in the family. Parents are often readily engaged in children's learning experiences. Indeed, we have found through our *Families Coping Program* that children and their participating parents learned to enjoy having a common language of coping which enabled the parents to apply the coping skills they acquired in a parenting program into the family context. Below, the phases of the *Early Years Coping Project* is described, along with the purposes.

## Overview of the Early Years Coping Project

The multiphase *Early Years Coping Project* commenced in 2011 when we first identified the concepts and constructs relating to young children's coping and developed visual tools that enable children to engage in conversations and interventions relating to age-appropriate concerns and coping in the early years. This was followed by the development of a parenting program that incorporated coping skills development for both parents and children, and more recently we developed a COPE-Resilience program that has been integrated into classroom practice. The ongoing project has involved 9 phases to date:

- **Phase 1—2008:** Investigation into preschool children's coping responses and matching these with parents' understandings of their children's coping responses (Chalmers, Frydenberg, & Deans, 2011; Deans, Frydenberg, & Tsurutani, 2010).
- **Phase 2—2009:** Development of the *Early Years Coping Cards*, a teaching and learning tool that depicts a range of visual representations of challenging situations to be used to stimulate children's verbal responses about their coping strategies (Frydenberg & Deans, 2011).
- **Phase 3—2010:** Application of the *Early Years Coping Cards* in multiple settings (early childhood centres and homes) with teachers and parents (Deans, Frydenberg, & Liang, 2012).
- **Phase 4—2011:** Investigation of parents' use of the *Early Years Coping Cards* (Frydenberg, Deans, & Liang, 2014).
- **Phase 5—2012:** Development of the *Families Can Do Coping (FCDC)* parenting program (Frydenberg, 2015).
- **Phase 6—2013:** Development of the *Families Coping* (FC – an adapted version of the FCDC) parenting program for families from CALD backgrounds and disadvantaged communities—the *Early Years Productive Parenting Program (EYPPP)* (Deans, Liang, & Frydenberg, 2016).
- **Phase 7—2014:** Exploration of the relationship between anxiety and coping (Pang, Frydenberg, & Deans, 2015; Yeo, Frydenberg, Northam, & Deans, 2014).
- **Phase 8—2015:** Development of the *COPE-R Program for Preschoolers: Teaching empathy and prosocial skills through the Early Years Coping Cards*. The process of socialisation and embodiment of a Social Emotional Learning program in an early years setting (Deans, Klarin, Liang, & Frydenberg, 2017) and teacher experience (Alexander, 2018).
- **Phase 9—2018:** Cross generational program (Stirling, 2020).

Through these phases, numerous findings and insights have arisen. Here we highlight some of the key findings and offer a more detailed description of the programs that have been developed as a part of the project.

## Understanding Coping in Young Children

The first phase involved understanding coping responses in children and considering how these overlap with their parents' perceptions. The children were asked to describe how they would manage seven typical situations that included saying goodbye to a parent, fear of the dark, fear of trying something new, being in trouble with a teacher or parent, being bullied, losing something special, and being hurt. Parents were also surveyed with the aim of identifying the ways in which they described their children's coping. We also wanted to identify whether a correlation existed between the children's understandings of coping and their parents' views. We found that children aged 4–5 were able to articulate 36 different active and passive coping responses, some of which had not been identified previously (Chalmers, Frydenberg, & Deans, 2011; Deans, Frydenberg, & Tsurutani, 2010). There are numerous ways of categorising the strategies. In one study the strategies were classified as active or passive. Active strategies described what children do proactively and passive strategies typically involved withdrawing from or avoiding difficult situations. These strategies could also be grouped as *productive self-reliant* (e.g., thinking positively, doing something else, solving the problem), *productive reference to others* (e.g., seeking help, seeking comfort), and non-productive (e.g., doing nothing, don't know, get angry/throw a tantrum (Deans, Frydenberg, & Tsurutani, 2010). More recently they have been grouped as *positive*, *negative emotional expression*, and *negative emotional inhibition* (see Table 15.1).

Notably, parents reported fewer coping strategies, with a larger number of passive strategies being reported. Parents indicated that their children were more likely to cry/feel sad, complain of illness, seek help from grown-ups, or blame others. Teachers, on the other hand, indicated that children were more likely to do nothing, keep their feelings to themselves, or seek help from others. More fathers than mothers considered that their children worked hard at solving problems. Importantly, all the situations that were presented to the children were also recognised by both teachers and parents to relate frequently to the children's experiences; the one exception was choosing between two groups of friends for play, as this was more frequently identified by the teachers because of its relevance in the school situation.

**Table 15.1** Coping strategies identified by 4–5 year old children, classified as positive, negative-emotional expression, and negative-emotional inhibition (Adapted from Pang et al. [2015])

Positive	Negative-emotional expression	Negative-emotional inhibition
Have fun, play sport, draw, play games	"Lose it"—cry, scream or fight	Keep feelings to self/not show he/she feels
Play	Cry or scream	Do nothing
Chat to friends	Feel sad	Don't let others know how they are feeling
Work with others	Get angry with others	Get stomach aches or headaches
Work hard	Keep away from other children	Give up
Try to help others	Feel bad	Get sick
Be happy with the way things are	Blame themselves/when things go wrong	Ask a teacher for help
Hope	Worry	
Spend a lot of time with a good friend	Get mad with themselves	
Go out and play and forget about their problem		
Try		
Notice what others are doing		
Get a teacher or grown-up to help		

The overall conclusions drawn from these studies are that young children do respond to challenging situations, that they can articulate and utilise a wide range of coping strategies that are not generally recognised in the current literature. Parents tend to be more critical of their children's coping, and this is reflected in their frequent visits to doctors regarding children's and their own parenting anxieties. In addition, parents' perceptions of their children's coping strategies vary from that of their teachers' and the children themselves.

## Building Family Resilience Through the Families Coping Program

Beyond identifying coping strategies, the project moved towards developing a repertoire of coping skills. The capacity to cope is a key factor that contributes to both parents' and children's healthy adaptation to everyday experiences.

The ability of parents to manage the demands associated with raising a child, as well as to show willingness to engage in a process of self-enquiry so as to improve their parenting practices and learn new skills, inherently calls on the use of everyday coping skills. To provide parents with the skills needed for health adaptation, we developed the *Families Coping Program* (Frydenberg, 2015), which incorporates good communication skills (active listening, assertiveness, and managing conflict), positive psychology principles, coping skills, and mindfulness. The elements are underscored by the guiding principle that it is important to have adults and children share an understanding of the language of coping so that social learning and modelling can take place both in the home and in the school setting.

Table 15.2 provides an overview of the *Families Coping Program*. The five sessions introduce parents to information associated with positive parenting principles, family communication, and use of a visual resource to help parents stimulate conversations about coping with their children. The twin aim is to teach parents communication skills while receiving practical psychoeducation and training on how their own productive coping skills can be developed, and their use of non-productive strategies can be minimised. Learning mediums include direct facilitator instruction, a self-directed workbook, and participation in role-plays and group discussions. The intended outcome is to contribute to early years' wellbeing through enhancing the application of positive parenting skills in addition to the development of adaptive coping in both parent and child.

The evaluation of the program uncovered parents reporting a move towards the development of more positive parenting practices and use of productive coping by their child, as well as some aspects of improvement in both parent and child wellbeing (Gulliford, Deans, Frydenberg, & Liang, 2015). This indicates that the *Families Coping Program* provides a useful addition to the pool of programs currently available to parents.

## Extensions to Other Populations

Numerous researchers in the field of early years wellbeing have pointed out that young children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are disproportionately exposed to family and neighbourhood-level risk factors (e.g., low maternal education, low parental income) for poor child mental outcome (e.g., emotional difficulties, peer problems) and are more susceptible to family violence, substance abuse, and increased problems relating to parenting (Parker, 2009; Priest, Baxter, & Hayes, 2012). The early

**Table 15.2** Descriptive overview of the Families Coping Program

Focus	Session overview
<b>Session 1</b> <i>Positive Psychology of Parenting</i>	The history and core principles of positive psychology and positive parenting and how such practices support family health and wellbeing. Parents are encouraged to review their own wellbeing and consider personal strengths. Quality family time in each family is considered
<i>Coping with Stress in the Family</i>	Stresses associated with family life are part of everyday living. Social learning theory and parents as role models are considered. The transactional model of stress and coping is introduced to highlight how parents manage their stress not only impacts their own health and wellbeing but also their child's coping and wellbeing. Parents identify the difference between parenting styles and the building blocks of healthy and happy families
<b>Session 2</b> <i>Parents Dealing with Difficult Situations</i>	The concepts and constructs of coping are introduced to help parents examine and enhance their coping skills. Parents consider their own styles of coping by reflecting on their <i>Coping Scale for Adults</i> profiles and use of coping strategies, specific to their parenting role. What is helpful and unhelpful coping is considered
<i>Everyday Worries and Anxieties of Children</i>	The ages and stages of social emotional development are present, particularly in the 4 to 8-year-old age group. What worries children and how they deal with worries are identified. Parents learnt how to help their children identify stressors and the physical symptoms of stress in the body

(continued)

Table 15.2 (continued)

Focus	Session overview
<b>Session 3</b>	
<i>Listening to Children: The Neuroscience of Communication</i>	The neuroscience of communication and benefits of reflective listening are considered along with the barriers to communication being presented. Parents learn how to respond to children's concerns and worries in a helpful way
<i>Purposeful Behaviour of Children: When Assertiveness Helps</i>	Parents are encouraged to reflect on their parenting styles as they explore the skills of assertiveness. The notion that parents being in charge is presented. The notion that all children's behaviour is purposeful is taken into account, with parents reflecting on the behaviours of their own children and making the distinction between needs and wants
<b>Session 4</b>	
<i>How Children Deal with their Worries and Talking about Challenging Situation with Children</i>	The <i>Early Years Coping Cards</i> are presented. Parents are taught to apply skills of open questioning and reflective listening as helpful communication tools. The cards are introduced to parents and a number of ways in which these can be used is presented so that parents can use the cards with their children. Games and various activities are suggested that bring together a situation card with different visually illustrated child coping actions (e.g. seek help, think happy thoughts, worry, hide)
<i>Collaborative Problem Solving</i>	Problem solving is presented as a core skill that can be drawn on in diverse contexts. Parents rehearse the skills and are encouraged to apply the skill to their own problems and children's problems when they arise. Problem solving is encouraged to be used with children as a collaborative process

(continued)

Table 15.2 (continued)

Focus	Session overview
<b>Session 5</b> <i>Mindfulness as a Way of Achieving Wellbeing</i>	The practice of mindfulness, with its emphasis on staying in the moment and paying full attention to the here and now is considered in the context of parenting. The historical origins of mindfulness and contemporary evidence-based applications along with the relationship between mindfulness and relaxation are considered. The teaching of these skills is emphasised both for parents and children
<i>Putting it Together</i>	The core messages of the five sessions are drawn together. Parents are encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences during the program in relation to parenting, coping, and wellbeing for both themselves and their child. Parents are asked about highlights and areas they will continue to focus on to improve family life

years provide a window of opportunity to engage these parents in mental health promotion and the development of healthy parent–child relationships in a particular context.

The *Families Coping Program* was subsequently adapted into a simplified and culturally sensitive *Early Years Productive Parenting Program* (EYPPP) for a group of CALD parents attending a playgroup in an inner urban early childhood setting in metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. The EYPPP emphasised what parents from CALD families with pre-schoolers can do to facilitate helpful coping strategies in parenting practices and how they can be proactive in developing these skills. Easily accessible stand-alone resources such as a set of illustrated parenting tip sheets and group activities were designed for developing positive relationships through self-reflection, an enhanced awareness of children's behaviour, and suggestions for engaging/guiding/responding to children so that there is mutual gain for both parent and child. A key format variation from the *Families Coping Program* was the inclusion of a set of image-based tip sheets designed for each session and introduced at the beginning of each session. Parents are encouraged to utilise the "tips" during the week and the experiences are discussed during the following session,

using a parent as an interpreter if required. The tip sheets focus on good parenting practices and age-appropriate developmental issues. These sheets include suggestions such as, talk, read, play with your child each day, praise effort, celebrate good behaviour, build a support network, set simple family rules, play out clear limits, and use kind words in the family.

The EYPPP was delivered to 17 families at a community playgroup setting, a natural environment for parent–child interaction, to maximise learning opportunities for this group of families (Dean, Liang, & Frydenberg, 2016). All these families came from diverse backgrounds, including Sudan, Somalia, Vietnam, New Zealand, and Australia. The participants brought their children (aged 2–5 years), plus younger (7 months old) and occasionally older (teenagers) siblings who participated in the 5-session one-hour program as part of the playgroup's activities. Results from this pilot study indicated that CALD parents were more likely to report the use of self-blame and ignore the problem as coping strategies in their parenting journey. They also reported the highest-level helpfulness rating of the program for their parenting journey and many of them quoted new skills and strengths acquired from this brief program. The outcomes of this small study highlight the significance of providing a flexible and inclusive model of community-based parenting program as a resource and part of a support-network building opportunity for families of CALD background.

## COPE-Resilience

Having developed tools for children, parents, and teachers, our next extension involved the development of additional resources that meet the curriculum requirements for teachers in early childhood settings. A key consideration in education and increasingly within positive education is the role of teachers. Teachers' confidence or self-efficacy, perception of and attitude towards an intervention, knowledge, belief in the program, and their level of skill to implement it with fidelity are important components for achieving effective program outcomes (Brackett et al., 2012; Domitrovich et al., 2009; Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichel, 2017). Further, if teachers feel that the goals of the program are appropriate and feasible, and that they as teachers are well supported, they are likely to implement the program with greater motivation and fidelity (Denham & Burton, 2003).

Drawing on these insights from the literature, we developed a resource for use by teachers: the COPE-R program. The program comprises activities on Caring for Others (C); Open communication (O); Polite/Respectful

behaviours (P); Empathise/Sharing behaviours (E), and a Review (R), which incorporates *the Early Years Coping Cards* along with explicit empathy and prosocial skills. It has been developed to incorporate coping skills and utilise them to teach empathy and prosocial skills to children aged four to eight years of age.

Tables 15.3 and 15.4 outline the program content and the activities that are utilised in the COPE-R Program. The program offers comprehensive teaching content with teachers being asked to utilise at least two activities for each of their teaching sessions so as to capitalise on instructor skill and interest. During several of the sessions in the COPE-R program, the *Early Years Coping Cards* (Frydenberg & Deans, 2011) are used to help children explore their feelings, that of others, and what they might do in the different situations presented. Children are asked to become a “Feelings Detective”. There is also use of drawings, puppetry, and role plays.

To illustrate how the curriculum is implemented, along with age-related responses of the children, two examples are offered. During the lesson on feelings titled “Walking in someone else’s shoes”, the teacher asked the children: “*What can you do to show your friends that you understand how they feel?*” The children’s responses included: “*offer help*”, “*call the teacher if help is needed*”, “*ask a person ‘Are you ok?’*”, “*if the person is feeling hurt you could get a tissue or band aid or even some olive oil [soothing]*”, and “*you can gently touch them and say ‘do you need help?’ even if they are not your friend*”. One child summed it up succinctly: “*if you go to someone when they need you, that person will be grateful and that’s a good way to make a new friend. By helping others, we make friends*”.

In the lesson on Caring the teacher asked: the children “What is caring?” Responses included: “*looking after someone*”, “*respecting the forests means that you care for them*”, and “*looking after our friends and family*”. The children also identified ways to recognise someone needing care, such as: “*they might look upset*”, “*they might have sad eyes*”, and “*a person might be homeless and not having a bed*”. The teacher then prompted: “*How do we care for others?*” Children noted that they could care for others by helping, playing, listening, cuddling, and showing kind gestures such as “*we can take them flowers to cheer them up*”, asking “*do you want me to call a teacher/parent?*”, and “*give a homeless person a cup of tea*”. The teacher also enriched the discussions by prompting children to demonstrate ways they could care for themselves and other living things.

**Table 15.3** Outline of the COPE-R program content

Lesson	Lesson content
<b>Foundation skills: Understanding Emotions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings Detective: Noticing Emotions in Ourselves and Others</li> <li>• Role-Play/Puppet-Play: What Feelings Look Like</li> <li>• Art/Craft: Putting Ourselves In Someone Else's Shoes</li> <li>• Singing/Dancing/Movement: We All Have Feelings</li> <li>• Additional Resources and Activities</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 1: C Caring for Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Coping Card: Getting Hurt</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: What Is Caring?</li> <li>• Play/Puppet-Play: When I'm Caring For Others</li> <li>• Art/Craft: Caring Behaviours</li> <li>• Singing/Dancing/Movement: Looking After Ourselves While Caring for Others</li> <li>• The Caring Tree: Lesson Close</li> <li>• Additional Resources and Activities</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 2: O Open Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Coping Card: Wanting To Play With Others</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: How a Good Listener Listens</li> <li>• Role-Play/Puppet-Play: Supportive Statements</li> <li>• Art/Craft: Two Mouths and One Ear</li> <li>• Singing/Dancing/Movement: Types of Communication</li> <li>• The Caring Tree: Lesson Close</li> <li>• Additional Resources and Activities</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 3: P Politeness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Coping Card Teasing</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: The Impact of Behaviour</li> <li>• Role-Play/Puppet-Play: Politeness</li> <li>• Art/Craft: Respect</li> <li>• Art/Craft: Different Cultural Backgrounds</li> <li>• The Caring Tree: Lesson Close</li> <li>• Additional Resources and Activities</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 4: E Empathetic Sharing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Coping Card: Sharing</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: Feelings Charades</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: The Benefits Of Sharing</li> <li>• Role-Play/Puppet-Play: Different Ways We Can Share</li> <li>• Art/Craft: How Can We Share?</li> <li>• The Caring Tree: Lesson Close</li> <li>• Additional Resources and Activities</li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table 15.3** (continued)

Lesson	Lesson content
<b>Lesson 5: R Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art/Craft: Caring for Others (C) Review</li> <li>• Singing/Dancing/Movement: Open Communication (O) Review</li> <li>• Role-Play/Puppet-Play: Politeness (P) Review</li> <li>• Feelings Detective: Empathic Sharing (E) Review</li> </ul>

**Table 15.4** COPE-R activities

Activity	Description
<b>Early Years Coping Cards</b>	These cards provide images of situations for children to help them explore their feelings, others' feelings, and what they might do in the different situations presented
<b>Feelings Detective</b>	Children will be asked to become a "Feelings Detective" and to engage in fun detective cases to support their learning. Either a pretend or real detective hat can be used
<b>Role-Play/Puppet-Play</b>	Role-plays provide children with an experiential opportunity to practise the skills being learnt. These activities may provide opportunity for more active involvement from the children
<b>Art/Craft</b>	There are a variety of activities such as drawing to assist children's learning using their creativity, imagination, and non-verbal skills.
<b>Singing/Dancing/Movement</b>	These are fun activities that allow children to learn through song and understanding the importance of body language
<b>The Caring Tree</b>	Children's pro-social behaviours can be acknowledged throughout the week by providing tokens that are familiar to the children (e.g., leaves, hand prints, paper hearts) and placed on a "tree"/"chart" in the room
<b>Additional Resources and Activities</b>	While these are not core activities, there are some additional resources and activities provided if needed

These interactions illustrate how the teacher's questioning enables both teaching of the concepts and assessment of how the children think in relation to particular situations and how they would respond if the situations arose in real life.

An early evaluation of the teacher-led program reported significant reductions in emotional problems post program (Deans, Klarin, Liang & Frydenberg, 2017). Qualitative responses from parents also indicated that they noticed positive differences in their children after the program finished. A thematic analysis of parents' responses was conducted, revealing two major themes in the differences that the parents noticed in their children: increased prosocial behaviour and enhanced communication skills. Drawings and comments made by preschool participants provided further support for the efficacy of the program (Cornell et al., 2017; Pang, Frydenberg, Swana, Deans, & Liying, 2018).

Providing additional support for the program, in 2018, six teachers in three classrooms participated in teaching the program to 91 pre-schoolers (Alexander, 2018). Two of the three classrooms received the COPE-R Program, delivered by their classroom teacher over a six-week period. In one of these classes, the teacher already had experience with COPE-R. In the second class, the teacher delivered the program for the first time. The third class was assigned to be the comparison group, which engaged in an inter-generational program, involving visiting a nearby elderly residential setting (described in more detail below). Measures included the Empathy Questionnaire (Rieffe, Ketelaar, & Wiefferink, 2010), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997, 2001), the Children's Coping Scale-Revised (CCS-R, Yeo, Frydenberg, Northam, & Deans, 2014), and the Childhood Executive Function Inventory (Thorell & Nyberg, 2008). Child interviews on emotional knowledge were also conducted. While children in all three classes increased in emotional literacy and coping skills across the intervention period, students in COPE-R Program classrooms demonstrated significant improvements in teacher-rated prosocial skills and positive coping, compared to the control group. Importantly, students undertaking COPE-R Program with an experienced teacher facilitator demonstrated the greatest improvements in teacher-rated behavioural and coping outcomes, as well as on direct measures of child coping. As a whole, the results provide additional support for the program, and suggest that greater experience with the program by the facilitator enhances implementation success.

## A Cultural Adaptation

While Australia provides a cultural setting where SEL is well accepted within the educational community and teachers are obliged to implement the program to meet the requirements of the curriculum, in many cultures where there are different social and cultural imperatives, SEL has only more recently become a requirement in early childhood education, with coping a relatively recent addition. To consider the extent to which the COPE-R Program can be beneficial in such cultures, we trialled the program in Taiwan (Wu, 2020). We first carefully translated the teaching materials. Focus groups were conducted, and adaptations to the resource materials were made to fit well with the culture. Teachers were trained, with some supervision by the researcher, a qualified early childhood educator, who had been involved with the 2018 program. The program resulted in beneficial outcomes for the students, though the teachers sought more scripted resources and further support for implementation. Users of the COPE-R Program across other cultural settings should be cognisant of teachers' comfort with the material and be ready to provide additional resources and support if needed.

## An Intergenerational Approach

A final focus in the *Early Years Coping Project* is the *Intergenerational Program*, which has been occurring since 2016. Quality early childhood social and emotional development includes a focus on reducing young children's prejudice and preconceptions about ageing (Femia et al., 2008; Low et al., 2015). Other studies find that children who have participated in intergenerational programs have positive gains on their social emotional development, behaviour, school performance, and attitude towards older adults (Femia et al., 2008; Heyman, Gutheil, & Whiteman, 2011).

Returning to the study by Alexander (2018) described above, the control class engaged in an Intergenerational Program, which involved visiting a neighbouring elderly citizens' residential setting. The early learning setting was located in metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. During the program, children visit residents, who volunteer to participate in the program, on a fortnightly basis. For instance, in one trial, 20 children (4–5 years of age) visited 10 residents (65–100 years old) in the nearby residential setting (Stirling, 2020). The children and residents engaged in shared activities such as art, singing, gardening, and playing games such as Bingo. Additionally, there was storytelling from the residents with prompts using artefacts from

the past such as milk bottles, cameras, kitchenware, and photographs of cars that told a story about times past. The activities generally resulted in communications between the residents and the children. Multiple outcomes were assessed through parent and participant feedback, children's reflective drawing-tellings, and observation of the children. Parents commented that there were key learnings from the program about "ageing and death".

As with the COPE-R program, teachers who had participated in several iterations of the intergenerational program had "deeper" relationships with the residents and were able to facilitate better communications between the residents and the children, meeting the goals of the program.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we pointed to the importance of incorporating the development of coping strategies as critical to positive education, with early education being a pertinent time to be developing these skills. To illustrate, we described the *Early Years Coping Project*. Several key aspects of this program of research described in this chapter are particularly relevant to wellbeing and positive education. Firstly, each of the sequenced elements of the nine phases of the *Early Years Coping Project* is beneficial when integrated into early years educational experience. Children receive classroom input at the same time as they are illuminating what can be achieved in the early childhood context through application of the concepts and constructs of coping. Secondly, these concepts provide psycho-educational tools as a means of advancing healthy development. The tools of measurement, visual resources for engagement in conversations, scripted curriculum support material, or parent programs each provide resources for teachers that help them to advance social emotional aspects of education in a positive learning environment.

In 2020, as we face the challenges of a pandemic such as COVID-19 with families in lock down for extensive periods, home schooling as an ongoing experience, where parents are closely engaged in the educational process with their children through home schooling with online learning programs as the norm, it is clear that coping skills both for adults and children are important. In the *Families Coping Program*, parents are encouraged to reflect on their own coping and engage with their children to facilitate the development of both their own skills and that of their children. In a social emotional learning program such as COPE-R, along with an *Intergenerational Program* such as the one described above, children learn values including empathy, respect, caring for each other and the world around them, along with skills

to regulate their emotions. These are all qualities and skills that need to be fostered in the twenty-first century so that together we can build emotionally healthy communities that are able to deal with the challenges that may confront them.

## References

- Aldwin, C. M. (2007). *Stress, coping, and development: An integrative perspective*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Alexander, M. A. (2018). *Social and emotional learning: The building blocks of preschool mental health and coping* (Master of Educational Psychology Research Project). University of Melbourne.
- Australian Early Development Census Data. (2015). Australian Early Development Census Domains fact sheet. Retrieved from: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/about-the-aedc-domains>.
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). (2014). *The Nest action agenda: Improving the well-being of Australia's children and youth while growing our GDP by over 7%*. Canberra: ARACY.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Reyes, M. R., & Salovey, P. (2012). Enhancing academic performance and social and emotional competence with the RULER feeling words curriculum. *Learning and Individual Differences, 22*(2), 218–224.
- Bryden, C., Field, A., & Francis, A. (2015). Coping as a mediator between negative life events and eudaimonic well-being in female adolescents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(12), 3723–3733. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0180-0>.
- Chalmers, K., Frydenberg, E., & Deans, J. (2011). An exploration into the coping strategies of preschoolers: Implications for professional practice. *Children Australia, 36*, 120–127.
- Compas, B. E. (2009). Coping, regulation, and development during childhood and adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 124*, 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.245>.
- Compas, B. E., Connor-Smith, J. K., Saltzman, H., Thomsen, A. H., & Wadsworth, M. E. (2001). Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence: Problems, progress, and potential in theory and research. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*(1), 87–127.
- Cornell, C., Kiernan, N., Kaufman, D., Dobee, P., Frydenberg, E., & Deans, J. (2017). Developing social and emotional competence in the early years. In E. Frydenberg, A. Martin, & R. Collie (Eds), *Social emotional learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 391–412). Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Deans, J., Frydenberg, E., & Liang, R. (2012). Building a shared language of coping: Dynamics of communication between parents and preschool children. *New Zealand Research into Early Childhood Research Journal, 15*, 67–89.

- Deans, J., Frydenberg, E., & Tsurtoni, H. (2010). Operationalising social and emotional coping competencies in kindergarten children 2010. *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education Journal*, *13*, 113–124.
- Deans, J., Klarin, S., Liang, R., & Frydenberg, E. (2017). All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, *42*(4). <https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.4.09>.
- Deans, J., Liang, R., & Frydenberg, E. (2016). Giving voices and providing skills to families in culturally and linguistically diverse communities through a productive parenting program. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *41*, 13–16.
- Denham, S., & Burton, R. (2003). *Social and emotional prevention and intervention programming for preschoolers*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Derryberry, D., Reed, M. A., & Pilkenton-Taylor, C. (2003). Temperament and coping: Advantages of an individual differences perspective. *Development and Psychopathology*, *4*, 1049–1066.
- Domitrovich, C., Bradshaw, C., Greenberg, M., Embry, D., Poduska, J., & Ialongo, N. (2009). Integrated models of school-based prevention: Logic and theory. *Psychology in the Schools*, *47*(1), 71–88.
- Durlak, J. A., & Dupre, E. P. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *41*(3–4), 327–350.
- Ebata, A., & Moos, R. (1991). Coping and adjustment in distressed and healthy adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *12*, 33–54.
- Fahs, M. E. (1986). *Coping in school: Correlations among perceptions of stress, coping styles, personal attributes and academic achievement in inner-city junior high school students*. Paper delivered to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco, CA, USA.
- Femia, E. E., Zarit, S. H., Blair, C., Jarrott, S. E., & Bruno, K. (2008). Inter-generational pre-school experiences and the young child: Potential benefits to development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *23*(2), 272–287.
- Folkman, S. (1997). Positive psychological states and coping with severe stress. *Social Science and Medicine*, *45*(8), 1207–1221.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1988). The relationship between coping and emotion: Implications for theory and research. *Social Science and Medicine*, *26*(3), 309–317.
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Gruen, R. J., & DeLongis, A. (1986). Appraisal, coping, health status, and psychological symptoms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *50*(3), 571–579.
- Fredrickson, B. (2004). The broaden and build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transaction of the Royal Society B*, *359*, 1367–1377.
- Frydenberg, E. (2015). *Families coping*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Frydenberg, E., & Deans, J. (2011). *the early years coping cards*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

- Frydenberg, E., Deans, J., & Liang, R. (2014). Families can do coping: Parenting skills in the early years. *Children Australia*, 39, 99–106. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2014.7>.
- Frydenberg, E., Deans, J., & Liang, R. (2017). Parents and children's coping: Building resilience and wellbeing in the early years. *Social Indicators Research*, 145, 629–640. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1752-8>.
- Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (2011). *Adolescent Coping Scale-2*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Goodman, R. (1997). The strengths and difficulties questionnaire: A research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38(5), 581–586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1997.tb01545.x>.
- Goodman, R. (2001). Psychometric properties of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 40(11), 1337–1345.
- Gulliford, H., Deans, J., Frydenberg, E., & Liang, R. (2015). Teaching coping skills in the context of positive parenting within a preschool setting. *Australian Psychologist*, 3, 219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12121>.
- Heyman, J. C., Gutheil, I. A., & White-Ryan, L. (2011). Pre-school children's attitudes toward older adults: Comparison of intergenerational and traditional day care. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 9(4), 435–444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2011.618381>.
- Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies. *Social Policy Report*, 26(4), Society for Research in Child Development.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1993). Coping theory and research: Past, present, and future. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 55(3), 234–247.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Low, L.-F., Russell, F., McDonald, T., & Kauffman, A. (2015). Grandfriends, an intergenerational program for nursing-home residents and pre-schoolers: A randomized trial. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 13(3), 227–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2015.1067130>.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A new approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY, USA: Penguin Press.
- Manzi, P. A. (1986). Cognitive appraisal: Stress and coping in teenage employment. *The Vocational Guidance Quarterly*, 34, 161–170.
- Muldoon, O. T. (1996). *Stress, appraisal and coping: A psychosocial approach* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Queens University, Belfast.
- Naseem, Z., & Khalid, R. (2010). Positive thinking in coping with stress and health outcomes: Literature review. *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education*, 4(1), 42–61.
- Pang, I., Frydenberg, E., & Deans, J. (2015). The relationship between anxiety and coping in preschoolers. In P. Buchenwald & K. Moore (Eds.), *Anxiety, stress, and coping* (pp. 27–36). Berlin: Verlag.

- Pang, D., Frydenberg, E., Liang, R., Swna, J., & Liying, S. (2018). Improving coping skills and promoting social emotional competence in pre-schoolers: A pilot study of the COPE-R program. *Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 7(2), 362–391.
- Parker. (2009). Helping families with complex needs: Integration of the Strength to Strength and Resources for Adolescents and Parents programs. *Family Relationships Quarterly*, No. 14. [Online]. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Retrieved from: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/newsletter/n14/pdf/n14f.pdf>.
- Priest, N., Baxter, J., & Hayes, L. (2012). Social and emotional outcomes of Australian children from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 36(2), 183–190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-6405.2011.00803.x>.
- Rieffe, C., Ketelaar, L., & Wiefferink, C. H. (2010). Assessing empathy in young children: Construction and validation of an Empathy Questionnaire (EmQue). *Personality and Individual Differences*, 9(5), 362–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.03.046>.
- Rudolph, K., Dennig, M., & Weisz, J. (1995). Determinants and consequences of children coping in a medical setting: Conceptualisation, review and critique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(3), 328–357.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning and teachers. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 137–155. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44219025>.
- Skinner, E. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, J. (2007). The development of coping. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 119–144.
- Skinner, E. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. (2009a). Challenges to the developmental study of coping. *New directions for child and adolescent development*, 2009(124), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.239>.
- Skinner, E. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (Eds.) (2009b). Introduction: Challenges to the developmental study of coping. *Perspective on children's coping with stress as regulation of emotion, cognition and behavior: New directions in child and adolescent development series* (Issue 124, pp. 5–17). New York: Wiley.
- Stirling, S. (2020). Embedding SEL within the curriculum: Partnerships with communities. In Frydenberg, E. Deans, J. & Liang, R. (Eds.), *Promoting well-being in the pre-school Years: Research, applications and strategies* (pp. 141–163). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Stone, A. A., & Neale, J. M. (1984). New measure of daily coping: Development and preliminary results. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 892–906.
- Thorell, L. B., & Nyberg, L. (2008). The Childhood Executive Functioning Inventory (CHEXI): A new rating instrument for parents and teachers. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 33(4), 536–552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87565640802101516>.
- Wu, M. Y. (2020). *Adaptation of a social emotional program to support preschool level curriculum in Taiwan using a model developed in Australia: Key elements establishing the adaptability of this model in Taiwanese system* (Unpublished manuscript).

- Yeo, K., Frydenberg, E., Northam, E., & Deans, J. (2014). Coping with stress among preschool children and associations with anxiety level and controllability of situations. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 66(2), 93–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12047>.
- Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Shemesh, D. (2016). Cognitive-social sources of wellbeing: Differentiating the roles of coping style, social support and emotional intelligence. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17(6), 2481–2501. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-015-9703-z>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 16

## Character Strengths Interventions in Education Systems

Jillian Copley and Ryan M. Niemiec

Our current education systems, as with every other system, are designed to achieve the results they produce. In some instances, those results are cause for celebration, while others give rise to collective despair. Around the world there is a growing realization that many of our existing systems of education—at the classroom, school, state, and national level—are not constructed to produce results relevant to our modern world. The industrial age, one-size-fits-all, assembly line approach with a narrow focus on academics and memorization is mismatched to the needs of the dynamic and demanding information age in which we now live. Examples of this disconnect abound and reflect differences between the former era's demand for uniformity, predictability and independence and the current era's demand for diversity, flexibility, and interdependence (Erickson, 2012).

To explore the gap between current needs and current options, the leading education grantmakers in the United States gathered for a design thinking retreat (Grantmakers for Education, 2010). Through design charettes and immersive learning, they collaborated to articulate the requirements of the modern education system from the learner's perspective. They articulated a vision for learners as follows.

---

J. Copley (✉)

Mayerson Academy, Cincinnati, OH, USA

e-mail: [darwish.jillian@mayersonacademy.org](mailto:darwish.jillian@mayersonacademy.org)

R. M. Niemiec

VIA Institute on Character, Cincinnati, OH, USA

As a learner I need:

1. To feel that I am uniquely valuable in and for the world.
2. To know my value can be realized.
3. To have a map that shows me what is possible in my life and my experience as a learner.
4. To have help navigating that map.
5. To enjoy learning experiences to reflect who I am.
6. To access financial, technical, and socio-emotional resources to follow me on my journey.

Clearly, these leaders are describing an education experience quite different from the dominant, monolithic focus on academic learning in current systems around the world.

To bridge the chasm between the industrial and knowledge age models of education, leaders have energetically implemented “reforms” focused on school finance, standards, assessment, accountability, class size, teacher preparation professional development, and school choice. However, after years of determined effort and billions of dollars (Connel, Martin, & Moore, 2002), very little has changed (Payne, 2008). One reason experts cite for these disappointing results is the fractured, add-on nature of the efforts and a lack of a systems approach to change (Betts, 1992).

As positive education—and within it, the subset of strengths-based interventions—gains momentum and scales to larger audiences, sustained implementation and impact will be supported by a systems approach to change. A systems approach will mitigate the potential for positive education to become yet another disappointing footnote in the story of education reform.

The majority of this chapter will focus on the inductive, practice-based codification of promising practices for a systems approach to strengths-based interventions. Before addressing this topic, a modest history and beginning practice-based categorization of the emerging array of character strengths interventions are presented.

## **Why Character Strengths? the Meeting of Science and Practice**

It is important to note that the concept of character strengths can frequently be combined with a generic use of the word “strengths” that includes a wide variety of heterogeneous approaches (McQuaid & Lawn, 2014). The examples in this discussion are focused on the use of Values in Action (VIA)

Character Strengths and Virtues, which is one of the most highly regarded and widely used tools in the field of positive psychology.

As positive psychology was articulated by Martin Seligman in the late 1990s, the focal point of positive traits, or positive character, was named as one of three central themes for the field (Seligman, 1999). Originally focused on positive youth development, this new focus on positive character evolved into an expansive three-year project involving 55 leading scientists. The group intended to address questions including: What is best about human beings? What have the philosophers, theologians, and other leading thinkers across time and cultures said about what constitutes a good and fulfilling life? How can we understand individual differences? The result of their work was a groundbreaking classification of twenty-four human strengths nesting under six overarching virtues. This is referred to as the VIA *Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). With the new classification, a common language of character strengths was defined for the first time. In addition, measures of character strengths were created and validated for adults and youth, referred to as the VIA *Inventory of Strengths* (colloquially, the VIA Survey) and the VIA *Inventory of Strengths for Youth* (colloquially, the VIA Youth Survey). The VIA Survey is taken by someone somewhere in the world every fifteen seconds, a frequency which has been steadily increasing each year. Eight million people representing every country across the globe have now taken the VIA Survey (Niemiec, 2018).

The research on VIA Character Strengths and Virtues marks a clear departure from prior character efforts in that the previous science on character was scant and widely critiqued for poor research support and inconsistent approaches (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; McGrath, 2018; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). But following the VIA Classification, well-over six hundred studies have been published outlining a variety of positive outcomes, directions for character strengths, applications in different domains and disciplines, and new interventions. Over 50 specific studies relating to schools, children, and adolescents have been published. These studies provide new insights and lay the groundwork for future science. To review short summaries of all these studies, categorized by topics, with full citations, see VIA Institute (2019). A modest selection of studies includes:

- There are a number of positive outcomes connected with particular character strengths in youth. In a study of 196 children taking the VIA Youth Survey, zest, love of learning, perseverance, and social intelligence showed the strongest positive relations to school-related positive affect,

while teamwork, hope, self-regulation, and love showed the strongest negative correlations with negative affect at school (Weber, Wagner, & Ruch, 2016). Character strengths also showed an important relationship to school achievement. Meanwhile, among high school students, other-oriented character strengths (e.g., kindness, teamwork) predicted fewer depression symptoms while transcendence strengths (e.g., spirituality) predicted greater life satisfaction (Gillham et al., 2011).

- In studies looking at school transitioning, parents' intellectual, interpersonal, and temperance strengths related to their child's adjustment to first grade (Shoshani & Ilanit Aviv, 2012). In a longitudinal study of adolescents' transition to middle school, intellectual and temperance strengths predicted school performance and achievement, interpersonal strengths related to school social functioning, and temperance and transcendence strengths predicted wellbeing (Shoshani & Slone, 2013).
- Leading educators are now drawing links between the 24 character strengths and twenty-first century competencies—cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies—identified by the American National Research Council. These interconnections not only offer new mechanisms for developing character strengths, but they also offer new avenues for schools to reach their success goals (Lavy, 2019).
- Multiple studies have found positive outcomes for programs designed to develop character strengths. Eighth-grade students participating in an intervention program involving five, one-hour character strengths classroom activities had significant benefits to wellbeing compared to those in a comparison group (Oppenheimer, Fialkov, Ecker, & Portnoy, 2014). Another study examined a six-session, character strengths program for nine to twelve-year-old students in a classroom setting compared with non-randomized controls. After three months, the strengths group scored significantly higher on class cohesion, relatedness, and need satisfaction. The students in the strengths group also scored lower on class friction and higher on positive emotion, classroom engagement, and strengths use (Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick, 2014). Changes in teacher strengths-spotting (the identification and subsequent explanation of character strengths identified in others) explained the outcomes of classroom engagement, positive affect, and needs satisfaction (Quinlan, Vella-Brodrick, Gray, & Swain, 2019). In a study of 319 adolescent students between the ages of twelve to fourteen, students were divided into two groups in which two-thirds of the students received character strengths-builder activities and strengths challenges within the school curriculum (called Strengths Gym), and one-third did not. Students who participated

in strengths interventions experienced increased life satisfaction compared to the controls (Proctor et al., 2011).

- Character strengths are frequently reported by educators and students as the most memorable and impactful program element within schools implementing positive education programs. While this is anecdotal evidence from several programs across the globe that we have spoken with, some research on positive psychology programming has published similar observations from participants (Huffman et al., 2016).

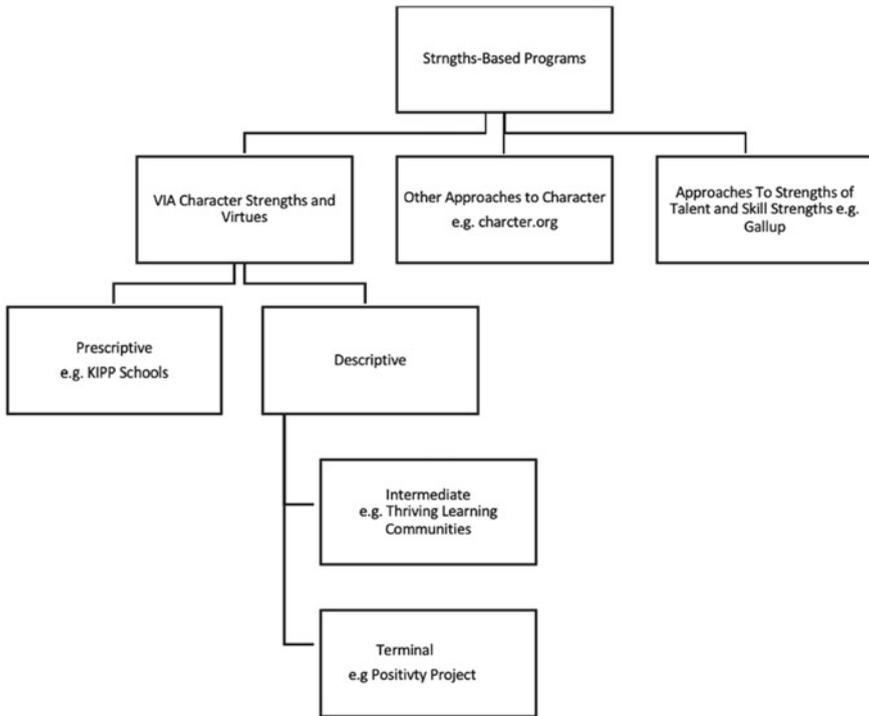
## Defining Character Strengths Programs

The above insights on the needs of learners expressed by philanthropic leaders in education reflect growing advocacy for education systems that consider more than the academic development of learners and create a new normal where social and emotional development is integrated across students' academic learning experiences (Calkins, 2015). Similar calls have come from the World Health Organization, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lavy, 2019), The World Government Summit (Helliwell, 2019), The World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2016), and The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, n.d.).

The interest of leaders around the world has fuelled the growth of character education interventions, which constitute a subset of positive education interventions (Berkowitz, Bier, & McCauley, 2016). However, according to research by McGrath (2018), there is substantial variability in programs identified as character education. Figure 16.1 summarizes different approaches to strengths-based interventions. Two sets of critical distinctions for defining and categorizing programs are offered below.

### Prescriptive Versus Descriptive

The two broadly scoped and alternative aims of character strengths interventions can be considered through the meaning of the two contributing Latin roots of the English word *education*: *educare*, which means to train or to mould, and *educere*, which means to draw out (Craft, 1984). Of note, this etymological root, combining opposing ideas in one word, reflects the needs of the former industrial model of education of inculcating knowledge within the next generation in the mould of the past, and of the information age model, with its demands to develop the current generation to critically analyse and create solutions for challenges we have yet to even imagine. They



**Fig. 16.1** Categorizing strengths-based interventions

are also respectively related to the prescriptive and descriptive categories of program interventions.

The prescriptive category of character strengths interventions is aligned to the educare meaning of education, as these interventions privilege certain character strengths and focus on uniformly instilling them within all learners. Neal Mayerson, chairman of the VIA Institute on Character, suggests that prescriptive character education is analogous to the process of moulding clay (Linkins, Niemiec, Gilham, & Mayerson, 2015). The potter (school, educator, or other authority) works to transform the clay (student's character) into a predetermined form. *Character Counts!*, a well-established program in the United States, is said to help enforce core values and instil the Six Pillars of Character and is a prototype of a prescriptive approach (Josephson Institute, 2013) Another prescriptive example can be found with the 240 KIPP Charter schools which limit their approach to seven character strengths (KIPP Foundation, n.d.). Such approaches are widespread in character programs in education systems (see [www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)). However, one of the challenges to this approach is identifying which traits should be endorsed. This

determination is frequently highly controversial with suggestions of racial, gender, community, and cultural biases.

Descriptive character strengths interventions are more closely aligned with the *educere* notion of education, seeking to draw out the learners' personal narrative around their unique strengths of character. In contrast to the metaphor of prescriptive approaches in which an authority figure/institution is moulding clay, descriptive approaches are analogous to watering seeds. Every student is viewed as a unique seed that will grow and thrive if he or she is provided with the proper conditions in his or her environment and if they are approached with respect to their individual uniqueness. In other words, the approach of the educator is one of discovery and exploration (asking questions about the student, providing opportunities for new discovery), experimenting with strengths, and building the student's unique strengths to help the seed grow into what it was meant to be (Linkins et al., 2015). Descriptive approaches typify the emerging science of *wise interventions*, as defined by Gregory Walton, Carol Dweck, and other scholars at Stanford University (see Walton, 2014). Wise interventions involve the deployment of a simple lever (i.e., the intervention) that is appropriately timed for the individual, highly contextual, and responding to a psychological need within the student. Examples inside and outside the school context are mounting (e.g., Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton, & Gross, 2013; Yeager et al., 2014).

Descriptive approaches, anchored in the robust research of the 24 VIA character strengths, are designed to speak to both our individual and our shared humanity. VIA provides a language that acknowledges the presence of all 24 character strengths within each of us and an understanding that all of the character strengths contribute to positive outcomes and should be valued. Simultaneously, programs based on the VIA character strengths seek to activate each individual's unique strengths' profile.

## Terminal Versus Intermediate

Within the descriptive approach there is another distinction that defines character strengths interventions. This nested categorization is determined by the degree of centrality that character strengths play in the intervention. In the terminal approach, the singular focus of the effort resides in developing the knowledge and use of character strengths. Programs such as Strengths Gym (<http://www.pprc.gg/products/>), described as "a course for children designed to enable students, teachers, and others to learn about, recognize, build upon, and use their character strengths more" (para. 1), is one of the most well-known recent examples.

With the intermediate approach, character strengths are seen as a powerful, appreciative lever to develop other capacities such as the PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) elements of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011) or social and emotional learning competencies (Au & Kennedy, 2018). These approaches activate narrative identity through character strengths in a manner that fuels the development of particular skills (see McGrath, 2018, for more on this distinction). According to Lynn Ochs, Senior Director of Education Programs at Mayerson Academy, Thriving Learning Communities™ (TLC), a robust K-12 character strengths program

uses a strengths-based lens to ground understanding of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision making. The scope and sequence of the curriculum defines the strengths associated with each of the five elements of social and emotional learning in a flexible, easy to follow structure and set of learning experiences. With these skills, students expand engagement, performance and learning that will support their progress well into the future. (L. Ochs, personal communication, August 1, 2019)

Research has found that teaching character strengths with social emotional learning (SEL) competencies is particularly effective in producing positive outcomes with students (Berkowitz, Bier, & McCauley, 2016).

## Implementing Character Strengths Interventions

To date, program evaluation of descriptive classroom interventions using the lens of character strengths to develop social and emotional learning competencies has evidenced positive outcomes related to engagement, learning, attendance, and behaviour (Mayerson Academy, 2018). These encouraging findings result from the smart application of the robust science of character strengths, but practice-based evidence suggests that the success and sustainability of the implementations is equally indebted to the recognition that the intervention requires a systems approach to change. The case of designing character strengths interventions through a systems approach represents a unique and powerful opportunity. As the discussion and practice-based examples below will detail, character strengths are simultaneously the *content* of intervention and an effective *process* element for systems change.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to describing elements of a systems approach to implementation that is emerging from exemplary character strengths interventions around the world. While the concepts have arisen inductively from work with more than one hundred schools, in-depth interviews were conducted with fourteen leaders to detail the stories of practice below. Participating institutions vary in their populations, age groups, locations, and structures. They include K-12, higher education, informal education, and religious education. The economic diversity is considerable with one school having 100% of its population qualify for free and reduced lunch and another with an affluent tuition-paying population. They are located across the United States and in Hong Kong.

To presage the discussion below, critical components of a systems approach that have emerged from this work and are being refined by an ongoing dialectic between research and practice are listed below:

1. **Inviting participation:** Privileging personal choice and engagement where possible in place of mandates and edicts for compulsory participation.
2. **Answering why first:** Getting the order of operations right by postponing the question of “how” to follow the question of “why”.
3. **Building capacity from the inside:** Inspiring internal leadership and change that begins with shifting individual mental models first.
4. **Creating connections, practically and personally:** Embedding, not bolting on, the intervention in the current system to increase prospects for sustainability and strengthen human connection.
5. **Learning continuously:** Sustaining the effort with reflection, a learning community, and feedback loops.

## Inviting Participation

Real change does not happen solely with mandates and edicts from the *top* unless those directives are continually supported by extraordinary effort and resources. *No Child Left Behind* (the name for the reauthorization of the primary U.S. federal law for K-12 general education) unmistakably created change, but it is beyond credulity to believe that U.S. schools could have been permeated so significantly by the high-stakes testing agenda had there not been extraordinary and persistent resources to ensure compliance. Indeed, once external effort and resources disappeared, so did many of the changes (Understood.org, n.d.).

Authentic and sustained change begins with an invitation to participate in the proposed intervention and a commitment to collective engagement. In the name of efficiency, this essential aspect of initiating a new effort is frequently missed. Instead of saving time, the missed opportunity to engage system stakeholders takes more time in the long run. In the words of systems thinking expert Margaret Wheatley:

I've often learned the hard way that participation is not an option. As organizational change facilitators and leaders, we have no choice but to figure out how to invite in everybody who is going to be affected by this change. Those that we fail to invite into the creation process will surely and always show up as resisters and saboteurs. (Wheatley, 2001, para 15)

This is an excellent example of a frequently cited systems axiom, *go slow to go fast*.

Being invitational is particularly important in the context of strengths-based interventions, as each individual is unique in the character strengths they can contribute and bring forth to their own life, the classroom, and the school as a whole. Therefore, each student is a valuable contributor. When individuals are encouraged to utilize their unique strengths (often called signature strengths), research tells us that wellbeing improves (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss 2013; Schutte & Malouff, 2018), passion and interest build (Forest et al., 2012), and thriving is enhanced (Bu & Duan, 2018).

**Inviting participation in practice.** Discovery College is an independent school in Hong Kong that brings together 45 nationalities in its learning community. The school is committed to the development of “independent, critical and creative thinkers, equipped with the skills, attitudes and values to contribute positively in this complex world in which we live” (<http://www.discovery.edu.hk/about-us/>). Educators at Discovery College have committed to creating a unique approach to enabling students to flourish and have integrated character strengths as an essential element of their strategy. The school's unique invitational approach to engagement is what they have come to call *bubbling and brewing*. In a recent phone call with Chris Barr (Head of Primary), Leanne Sercombe (Teacher Librarian), Nerida Kiprotich (Year 1 Teacher) and Tracey Chitty (Student Counsellor), the group described the beginning of their efforts. Barr commented: “We knew this couldn't be mandated and instead people would have to be given space and time to explore and experiment”. The early conversations were a dynamic and organic process of diverging and converging. While an early professional learning opportunity was provided for all colleagues, the follow-up workshop experience allowed educators to select where to *opt-in*. From there, informal leaders

emerged to go deeper with additional rigorous reading and study into their self-identified areas of interest. According to Barr, it was critical to: “go with the flow. Go where people had the most energy”. Ultimately, the guiding team would be comprised of colleagues in formal leadership roles but would also include those whose personal interest was sparked and who subsequently accepted the invitation to engage.

The character strengths implementation at Northern Kentucky University, a growing metropolitan university of more than 14,000 students, shares the same spirit. After a false start with a strengths-based intervention in which participation in a professional learning experience was mandated, a lead team of learners invited colleagues who were curious about the work to attend workshops. If the workshop piqued their interest further, participants were invited to attend advanced training to become training facilitators. According to Carly Rospert, Director for Innovation and Impact at Mayerson Academy, this effort led to hundreds of faculty and staff being trained in the science and application of character strengths across nearly every department in the University inside the first year.

Whitfield School is an independent school in St. Louis, Missouri devoted to cultivating “ethical, confident, and successful students” in a “close-knit academic environment where each student’s strengths are known and cultivated”. John Delautre (Head of School) and Ginny Fendell (Director of Health and Wellness) extend an invitational approach to faculty, staff, and families in their school community. Fendell shared:

with new faculty or new parents, we don’t impose, instead we take a conversational approach. Using the shared language of the character strengths, we discuss the new families’ unique strengths as a unit and how they might contribute to our community. It isn’t onboarding, it is inboarding, inviting them into the community to share what they have to offer.

Interviewed educators consistently asserted that successful beginnings included invitations that were backed by strong leadership support and a compelling research foundation underpinning the work.

## Answering Why First

Change efforts frequently get important questions out of order by attempting to answer *how* we do this before answering *why* we are doing this (Block, 2003). When *how* comes before *why*, we miss the opportunity to welcome individuals as participants and ignite their engagement, ownership, and

passion. When an organization's members explore the specific connection between a proposed intervention and their shared organizational vision, mission, and values, they build a unity of purpose. Purpose is what defines a system and transforms colleagues from co-inhabitants to co-creators, thereby strengthening relationships, critical in the process of creating change. Shared purpose also brings coherence to the independent actions and efforts of individuals, making it possible to meet even the most challenging organizational goals. When colleagues deepen this exploration by connecting the intervention with a personal sense of purpose and unique character strengths, a sense of personal ownership develops (Kim, 2008). This is yet another way in which character strengths can play a role as both the intervention content and the process of the intervention.

**Answering why first in practice.** Answering the question of why can come from an unmet challenge or an aspiration to stretch to a new possibility. At J. P. Parker School in Madisonville, Ohio, an elementary school serving 300 pre-school to sixth-grade students, Kimberly Mack (Principal) and Pamela Knox (School Community Coordinator) talk about a void they sought to fill. Dr. Mack reflected: "The advisory and character strengths are very personal to me. I knew we had a void with our students. We weren't always seeing their empathy, patience and compassion and I saw how implementing this work could help fill that void". Knox elaborated by saying:

It's not that they didn't have these things before but with this work we are giving them voice to bring their strengths to the table. The character strengths empowered learners to bring out the empathy, patience and compassion they already had. We had a gift from Dr. Mack. She could see why this was important and she helped us to see and understand why it was important and she reinforced it. If we are strong, acting with intention and with purpose, we can give that to children.

In an earlier case study, Knox said: "ultimately, the adults are working together toward a common goal of empowering learners to realize their full potential. We've given them permission to sit in their own greatness" (Mayerson Academy, n.d.).

At Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, a vibrant and welcoming Reform Congregation in Short Hills, New Jersey, Senior Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz is passionate about uncovering the tools and practices that lead to meaningful Jewish identity exploration. Tess Levine (Religious School Director) shares this passion, and together they are challenging the status quo of religious education to make it deeper and more relevant to young learners. After reading a number of books and research articles, Gewirtz and Levine invited

other senior leaders in the Congregation into the conversation and began to build a shared sense of purpose through robust dialogue. Gewirtz led the group to expand the boundaries for their work by considering the temple as a *Center for Human Flourishing*. He prioritized the engagement of board members and congregation leaders with language that was meaningful to them in order to build a shared sense of purpose around the concept of flourishing. Levine shared that having this strong sense of purpose was essential in fuelling the perseverance change requires saying: “When it is so powerful and meaningful, you know that no matter the obstacle or barrier, this is our goal”.

The Wellston City School District located in Southeast Ohio has a stated philosophy to serve the whole child. However, Superintendent Karen Boch shared: “When you looked at our strategic plan you would not have known it. The plan was overwhelmingly focused on academics”. Brandi Cupp (Principal) and Beth Duffy (Director of Curriculum and Instruction) agreed, indicating that conversations were surfacing among educators across the district about expanding thinking and planning in a way that reflected the district’s intentions. They knew this expanded perspective could address diverse challenges from student behaviour to teacher and leadership retention. The possibilities to close the gap between the aspiration and the plan became the rallying call and provided a shared purpose for the work.

Fendell shared another perspective in answering the why question. She shared her experience (consistently supported by survey research) that an individual’s choice to become an educator is routinely fuelled by a desire to help others grow. While the demands of the work and the recent challenges and constraints can dull that vision, Fendell shared a story that brought this longing and a shared sense of *why* into full focus again. A senior teacher in the school recounted that at the first parents’ night of the year, he asks parents what they want for their children that year. He indicated that no one ever says I want my child to have these tests or these advanced placement classes. Instead they say “I want them to know who they are”, “I want them to understand and use their strengths”, “I want them to be happy and passionate”. According to Fendell: “In this way they have a shared purpose with parents because that is exactly what this work is about and that is what we must communicate”.

## **Building Capacity from the Inside**

At its core, a systems approach to creating successful strengths-based interventions begins with building a shared knowledge base and language for knowing, seeing, and applying strengths as individuals. Research has

repeatedly documented the essential elements of effective capacity-building professional development (Sprinthall, 1996). There is a persistent call in the research for professional learning to be *context aware*, with research further suggesting that social–psychological interventions are particularly context-dependent. Scaling efforts from the nested systems of classrooms to schools, to districts, and beyond requires more than distributing content, with context-sensitivity playing a large role in determining effectiveness (Yeager & Walton, 2011). For successful and sustained efforts to create a shared knowledge base, language, and practices, a nuanced understanding of environment and culture is required and therefore the effort is best led from the inside, by school-based leaders.

In the work of character strengths interventions there is an interesting double meaning to *lead from the inside*. The work is optimally led from within the organization to ensure context sensitivity, but it also begins with the educator's personal experience. The individual's personal system of thought can be seen as a fractal within the increasingly larger fractals of the classroom, school, district, and beyond. Shifting individual mental models and letting go of existing beliefs to create space for knowing, seeing, and applying personal strengths creates the commitment and sense of authenticity that the successful implementation requires. Capacity-building is not just a matter of direct instruction, but rather requires exploring the concepts in the context of one's own life. Initial in-depth personal exploration is another example of the systems axiom *going slow to go fast*, as it takes time for the required exploration but encourages the in-depth processing that research suggests makes it possible to transfer and apply understanding to new settings (Chase, Chin, Opezzo, & Schwartz, 2009). In this way, the professional learning experience is a mirror of the pedagogical expectation for classroom and school implementation, which includes both explicit instruction and wholistic integration that becomes the default way of acting in the classroom and school. Mathew White and Lea Waters (2015a) report that when teachers operate in this manner with a strengths-based perspective, they create rapport and bonding with students and build a culture which is highly transformational.

**Building capacity from the inside in practice.** Returning to Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, educators acknowledged that external experts can give the work authority and credibility as they share research, expertise, and organizing capacity, while maintaining freedom from possible internal political challenges. However, they indicated that program implementation success was ultimately related to the degree to which there was committed internal leadership and sponsorship. In fact, Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz went so far as to say: "We could have ruined it if we brought an expert in house. We would

have felt like we didn't have to do the work. On our own, we had to live the work ourselves". His colleague, Tess Levine, continued by noting that having the originating leadership team continue to guide the work

forced everyone in the system to get involved and to drive change in their own way. We would have lost some of the creative energy if that hadn't been true. When there are fifteen of us asking how we are going to make something happen, you feel connected to one another and to the work.

Educators also clearly shared the perspective that the work begins within each individual as s/he begin to shift her/his personal mental model. At J. P. Parker School, Community Coordinator Pamerla Knox described the first workshop as: "an awakening of self-understanding", allowing her to understand, "why I see things the way I do". Because of this new understanding, Knox asserted that educators "share themselves in new ways and act differently – in a way that transforms culture. Character strengths are reshaping the way we all behave and interact". As this happens, educators "can say this is how this work can be implemented here – how it would work here. I would do this in my classroom, and this is how you could also implement". Deeply held personal knowledge and shifting mental models have opened up new learning experiences for the entire learning community at J. P. Parker. As an example, a third-grade teacher created a panel of teachers and parents who deeply understood their own character strengths and to whom children could ask questions about how they use their character strengths and what their strengths mean to them.

## Creating Connections, Practically and Personally

Another central axiom of systems thinking is that everything is connected, and careful attention must be paid not to optimize a part of the system at the expense of the whole system (Ackoff, 1986). In practical experience this means that if there is an attempt to simply bolt an intervention onto part of the system, it will be rejected (Schweiger, Stouten, & Bleijenbergh, 2018). To be sustained, new elements must be rooted in the system's existing structures and processes as an expression of internal consistency and coherence grounded in purpose. Embedding the intervention holistically in an organization promotes effective implementation and sustainability, as research suggests that organizational structure defines individual performance (Senge, 1990). Embedded process and structure can provide *guardrails* to support high program fidelity. Opportunities for integration appear in nearly every

aspect of classroom processes, including curricular instruction, community building, communication, assessment, and family and community connections, with similar opportunities at the school level.

**Creating connections, practically and personally in practice.** There is good news and bad news in implementing character strengths interventions. As Tracey Chitty, student counsellor at Discovery College, says: “It is easy to pick up, and easy to put down”. Building shared language and anchoring the character strengths implementation to existing practices were cited as essential to sustain the work and to make it more difficult to put down. Creating *practical* connections had a highly prized secondary impact on developing *personal* connections.

At Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, the work with teachers was treated as a *reframing* of work they were already doing so as not to feel like an add-on. Congregation B’nai Jeshurun connects character strengths to nearly everything they do, including board meetings, staff meetings, the physical environment, holidays, and celebrations. Rabbi Gewirtz made the analogy that connecting the work to existing practices is like planting a garden of beautiful perennials that continue to grow without significant tending, and almost magically, continue to thrive year after year. There is also a second-order effect with young learners. According to Tess Levine, their learning does not just stay in religious school: “Students have a language with which they can take their Jewish values into the world – in their school, sports teams, families, and communities”.

Additional examples of connecting character strengths interventions to existing practices range from athletics, equity and inclusion efforts, dress code, comment writing for students, and advisory meetings to honour council at Whitfield School. At Northern Kentucky University, character strengths have been systemically embedded in the services of the campus Wellness Center and into the University’s matrixed approach to human resources, which is helping the department shift from compliance-driven approach to one of advising and consulting.

Wellston educators identified parent open houses, student journals, daily announcements, newsletters, and persistent visual displays of the character strengths language in classrooms and hallways as points of connecting and embedding. According to Principal Brandyl Cupp, the intersection of character strengths with Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at Wellston has been particularly powerful. Connecting the character strengths work to PBIS has given the school a “common philosophy of discipline”. Brandyl further noted:

PBIS provides an instructional approach to discipline, activating character strengths helps learners make good decisions. PBIS is the *what* and the language of character strengths is the *how*. The character strengths work is about recognizing what is valuable in kids - that is the key right there - let them know they are important, even inside discipline. This sets the stage for relationships which are the foundation for everything. Creating a human connection between students and staff is one of the most important things this work has done for us. It creates a bridge when there is a disconnect and it is a game changer. If you have a relationship it helps to build capacities for children. When the relationship is there anything is possible. If not, very little is possible.

Other educators gave similar primacy to establishing a shared language and the impact of connecting character strengths to existing school practices, noting these practical connections supported strong personal connections. At Whitfield School, Head of School John Delautre shared that: “the common language of character strengths connected us, got us out of our silos and created new relationships and potential”. The educators at Wellston agreed, noting:

the climate is changing. The way our staff interacts with one another has changed. Building Council used to be very popular. It is the place that district leaders hear all the problems occurring in the buildings. Now, we have very few people who attend and we hear the problems have been solved at the school level. In the same way it is empowering to our students, it is empowering to our staff. This is because relationships are being reconstructed in a fundamental way”. Similarly, the team at Congregation B’nai Jeshurun indicated that “there is a deeper level of understanding for one another. We are more open and honest about who they are and what our strengths are so that lends itself to interpersonal relationships being more honest and more truthful. The strengths on your desk don’t feel intimate but the conversations they lead to are. You talk about how you developed them, why they are important. And as the adults do that, it also happens with students and between students.

J. P. Parker has experienced similar impact on relationships with families in the school. Principal Kimberly Mack noted:

Parents know the language. They are more tolerant with staff at school and the teacher-parent relationship is stronger. It is not as defensive. It is more respectful and more trusting. Parents seem to know now that I am here to bring the best out in your kid, and maybe even you. Actually, there is a new level of courtesy and kindness throughout the building.

Educators from Discovery College have had similar experiences, with Teacher Librarian Leanne Sercombe indicating that:

the language from staff, students, and parents has transformed. It is truly now naturally embedded in casual conversations. It's not only language that is used when things are going well. It's heard when redirecting individuals or trying to build understanding.

At J. P. Parker, character strengths are integrated across the school's practices as with the examples above, but they are also embedded in the school's curricular approach to the school's theme of global environmental literacy. Not only does this integration happen during the school day, but also in after-school programs with the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and community partners. Dr. Mack reported that:

embedding character strengths into every aspect that you can is important. Our school, PTO, partners, community...we are all speaking the same language. Students hear it at home, at the rec centre, at the library. We are all a chorus singing the same song perfectly in tune.

## Learning Continuously

Effective character strengths interventions require explicit instruction in the application of character science for both educators and students. This initial introduction must be informed by “the same level of research and planning that currently goes towards developing curricula for traditional academic subjects” (White & Waters, 2015b, p. 113). But initial in-depth, high-quality learning experiences, such as that provided by Mayerson Academy's Thriving Learning Communities Champions Institute (<https://www.mayersonacademy.org/thrivinglearningcommunities/>) are simply the beginning of an ongoing learning journey. Human social systems are dynamic and adapt over time. Engaging in continuous learning is a means to support effective adaptation and is necessarily a requirement within a systems approach to change. Karen Bohlin, head of the Montrose School in Medfield says: “to make virtue one's own, to develop strength in new and challenging contexts, requires personal effort every day” (Bohlin, n.d.). Reflective practice, learning communities, and feedback loops encourage and support required continuous individual and group effort.

While research provides a myriad of descriptions for reflection (Calderhead, 1989), Schoen's (1984) identification of reflective practice as a powerful learning tool and the practice by which professionals become aware of their

implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience is most relevant to this conversation. In other research, reflection has been identified as the means by which educators can find the energy of vitality and self-renewal (Fullan, 1995), which is critically important in the cauldron of change. Yet again, there exists duality with this imperative as the reflection required to build a strengths-based life is a reflection of the larger imperative for system implementation.

The final component of continuous learning is a professional learning community. The potential and importance of professional learning communities for professional development have long been established (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). In the case of strengths-based systems change, they not only provide a conduit to develop and exchange best practices, they also provide the opportunity to strengthen relationships as the learning community becomes the *laboratory* within which strengths-based applications can be tested. As this happens, relationships grow stronger and the community becomes a source of critical encouragement amidst the demands of change (Rospert, 2017).

Strong relationships support robust feedback loops, such as the Deming cycle of *Plan, Do, Check, and Act*, which is a momentous force for continuous learning (Moen, n.d.). The addition of using strengths in the feedback loop for testing strengths-based implementations can be particularly powerful (CIPD, 2017). Yet again, this is a learning experience for educators themselves that reflects expectations for classroom learning (Darwish, n.d.).

**Learning continuously in practice.** Beyond workshops, book studies, persistent prompts such as calendars, newsletters, and embedded meeting conventions, schools are making time for reflection, sharing best practices, and monitoring their work. At Discovery College, teacher Nerida Kiprotich reports that the team leading this work is comprised of a member from each year group. As they review the implementation of the work, and identify new developments and resources in the field, they take those ideas back to their grade level meetings. In this way the work is “kept alive in our team meetings with a constant drip of usable bits of information”. The ideas get implemented and reflective feedback is shared at the team and back to the leading team.

At Wellston, the lead building team for the work also has representation from each grade level. Principal Cupp integrates practices into the building team meeting so teachers experience the practices themselves before taking them to the classroom:

We not only want to recognize and activate strengths in our students but in our staff as well. We are learning by doing and this paves the way to communicate

and work better together. Knowing the strengths of our team supports our learning but it also helps with planning because we understand who to bring into an effort, where we are strong and what we might be missing.

In addition to building their own capacity in order to be reflective and effective coaches, the team is responsible for developing an ongoing calendar for implementation and creating supplemental materials as needed to support classroom implementation.

Grade level teams meet several times a week at Whitfield School. As part of those meetings they build practices for classroom implementation, where they are tested and refined. Director of Health and Wellness Ginny Fendell says in faculty meetings over the course of the year, they “experience the work they want to see in the classrooms, such as strengths spotting and practicing examples of under and overuse of strengths and discuss our experiences”. Not only does this provide teachers with an opportunity for ongoing practice and reflection, according to Fendell, “teachers say it keeps us connected to the work and to one another”.

## Conclusion

After years of narrowing the scope of education to focus on a limited menu of academic priorities, it is encouraging to see the conversation expand to include more of our human capacity as worthy of concern and development. As researchers and practitioners in the field of positive education grow and scale the work in this emerging field, it will be critical to acknowledge the complexity of the endeavour, lest positive education be relegated to the accumulated repository of momentary education reforms. In fact, the challenges within education are excellent examples of what systems thinkers identify as *wicked messes*, meaning they are both technically challenging and socially challenging, and therefore necessitate a systems approach to change.

The critical elements of systems approach to change in implementing character strengths interventions are becoming clear as experts around the world seek to transform their schools. The experiences of these pioneers illuminate a path which is clear but not necessarily simple or easy. The outcomes evidenced with these systems interventions offer a return well worth the investment. Evolutionary evaluation indicates that activating character strengths to develop SEL competencies increases engagement, performance, and learning. Qualitative reports tell stories such as that of a Wellston student who was so deeply impacted by the work she made an impassioned presentation to the high school principal to expand the work beyond middle

school, and the high school seniors whose character strengths were so important to them they wanted them included with their pictures in their school yearbook at Whitfield School.

The question that remains is whether we will have the patience and perseverance to act on what we know. In total, the wisdom emerging from the field suggests that success demands what Jim Collins (2001) says of organizations: “greatness is function of conscious choice and discipline” (p. 11).

## References

- Ackoff, R. (1986). *Management in small doses*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Au, W. C. C., & Kennedy, K. J. (2018). *A positive education program to promote wellbeing in schools: A case study from a Hong Kong school*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1189599.pdf>.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2007). What works in character education. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 5(1), 29–48.
- Berkowitz, M., Bier, M., & McCauley, B. (2016). *Effective features and practices that support character development*. Retrieved from [https://sites.nationalacademies.org/cs/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse\\_173493.pdf](https://sites.nationalacademies.org/cs/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse_173493.pdf).
- Betts, F. (1992). How systems thinking applies to education. *Educational Leadership*, 50(3), 38–41. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov92/vol50/num03/How-Systems-Thinking-Applies-to-Education.aspx>.
- Block, P. (2003). *The answer to how is yes: Acting on what matters*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Bohlin, K., (n.d.). *Virtue: An argument worth rehearsing*. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-3403566061/virtue-an-argument-worth-rehearsing>.
- Bu, H., & Duan, W. (2018). A single-session positive cognitive intervention on first-year students’ mental health: Short-term effectiveness and the mediating role of strengths knowledge. *Journal of American College Health*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1497639>.
- Calderhead, J. (1989). Reflective teaching and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 5(1), 43–51.
- Calkins, A. (2015). *It’s time to trash the terms “non-cogs” and “soft skills”*. Retrieved from <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/its-time-to-trash-the-terms-non-cogs-and-soft-skills>.
- Chase, C. S., Chin, D. B., Oppizzo, M. A., & Schwartz, D. L. (2009). Teachable agents and the protégé effect: Increasing the effort towards learning. *Journal of Science and Educational Technology*, 18, 334–352.

- CIPD. (2017). *Strengths-based performance conversations: an organizational field trial*. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/performance/strengths-based-conversations>.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Connell, C., Martin, J., & Moore, L. (2002). *The Annenberg challenge: Lessons and reflections on public school reform*. Retrieved from <https://www.issueab.org/resource/the-annenberg-challenge-lessons-and-reflections-on-public-school-reform.html>.
- Craft, M. (1984). Education for diversity. In M. Craft (Ed.), *Education and cultural pluralism* (pp. 5–26). London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Darwish, J. (n.d.). *Activating character strengths in the classroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.viacharacter.org/topics/articles/activating-character-strengths-in-the-classroom>.
- Darwish, J., (2001). *Changes in the attitude, knowledge and behavior of beginning teachers engaged in a reflective mentor relationship* (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Cincinnati.
- Erickson, T. (2012). It's time to re-think the U.S. education system. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/08/todays-youth-challenge-us-to-r>.
- Finkel, E. J., Slotter, E. B., Luchies, L. B., Walton, G. M., & Gross, J. J. (2013). A brief intervention to promote conflict reappraisal preserves marital quality over time. *Psychological Science*, 24(8), 1595–1601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612474938>.
- Forest, J., Mageau, G. V. A., Crevier-Braud, L., Bergeron, L., Dubreuil, P., & Lavigne, G. V. L. (2012). Harmonious passion as an explanation of the relation between signature strengths' use and well-being at work: Test of an intervention program. *Human Relations*, 65(9), 1233–1252.
- Fullan, M. (1995). The limits and the potential of professional development. In T. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gander, F., Proyer, R. T., Ruch, W., & Wyss, T. (2013). Strength-based positive interventions: Further evidence for their potential in enhancing well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14, 1241–1259.
- Gillham, J., Adams-Deutsch, Z., Werner, J., Reivich, K., Coulter-Heindl, V., Linkins, M., et al. (2011). Character strengths predict subjective well-being during adolescence. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(1), 31–44.
- Grantmakers for Education. (2010). *Innovation in education: redesigning the delivery system of education in America*. Retrieved from [edfunders.org](http://edfunders.org).
- Helliwell, J. (2019). *World government summit*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/events/annual-gathering/speaker-detail/636843582086451762-john-helliwell>.
- Huffman, J. C., Millstein, R. A., Mastromauro, C. A., Moore, S. V., Celano, C. M., Bedoya, C. A., et al. (2016). A positive psychology intervention for patients with an acute coronary syndrome: Treatment development and proof-of-concept

- trial. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17(5), 1985–2006. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-015-9681-1>.
- Josephson Institute: Center for Youth Ethics. (2013). *TEAM: Teach, enforce, advocate, and model*. Retrieved from <https://charactercounts.org/resources/team.html>.
- Kim, D. (2008). *Transformational dialogue for public education: 50 state strategy*. Manuscript in preparation.
- KIPP Foundation. (n.d.). *Focus on character*. Retrieved from <https://www.kipp.org/approach/character/>.
- Lavy, S. (2019). A review of character strengths interventions in twenty-first-century schools: Their importance and how they can be fostered. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9700-6>.
- Linkins, M., Niemiec, R. M., Gillham, J., & Mayerson, D. (2015). Through the strengths lens: A framework for educating the heart. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 64–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.888581>.
- Mayerson Academy. (n.d.). *Amplifying student strengths*. Cincinnati, OH: Mayerson Academy.
- Mayerson Academy. (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). *Thriving learning communities™ classroom curriculum guides: Grades K-12*. Cincinnati, OH: Mayerson Academy.
- Academy, Mayerson. (2018). *Thriving Learning Communities™ evaluation report: A summary of evaluation data from the Thriving Learning Communities program in 41 urban schools*. Cincinnati, OH: Author.
- McGrath, R. E. (2018). What is character education? Development of a prototype. *Journal of Character Education*, 14(2), 23–35.
- McQuaid, M., & Lawn, E. (2014). *Your strengths blueprint: How to be engaged, energized, and happy at work*. Albert Park, VIC: Michelle McQuaid.
- Moen, R. (n.d.). *Foundations and history of the PDSA cycle*. Retrieved from [https://deming.org/uploads/paper/PDSA\\_History\\_Ron\\_Moen.pdf](https://deming.org/uploads/paper/PDSA_History_Ron_Moen.pdf).
- Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field-guide for practitioners*. Boston: Hogrefe.
- Oppenheimer, M. F., Fialkov, C., Ecker, B., & Portnoy, S. (2014). Teaching to strengths: Character education for urban middle school students. *Journal of Character Education*, 10(2), 91–105.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *Social and emotional skills well-being, connectedness and success*. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/education/school/UPDATED%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20kills%20-%20Well-being,%20connectedness%20and%20success.pdf%20\(web site\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/school/UPDATED%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20kills%20-%20Well-being,%20connectedness%20and%20success.pdf%20(web%20site).pdf).
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006). Moral competence and character strengths among adolescents: The development and validation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 891–905.
- Payne, C. (2008). *So much reform, so little change: The persistence of failure in urban schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press/Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Positive Psychology Research Center. (n.d.). *Strengths gym*. Retrieved from <http://www.pprc.org/products/>.
- Proctor, C., Tsukayama, E., Wood, A., M., Maltby, J., Fox Eades, J., & Linley, P. A. (2011). Strengths gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and well-being of adolescents. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(5), 377–388.
- Quinlan, D. M., Swain, N., Cameron, C., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2014). How ‘other people matter’ in a classroom-based strengths intervention: Exploring interpersonal strategies and classroom outcomes. *Journal of Positive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.920407>.
- Quinlan, D., Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Gray, A., & Swain, N. (2019). Teachers matter: Student outcomes following a strengths intervention are mediated by teacher strengths spotting. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 20*, 2507–2523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-0051-7>.
- Rospert, C. (2017). *Character strengths: Optimizing relationship building for community change*. Retrieved from <http://strongcincinnati.org/character-strengths-optimizing-relationship-building-for-community-change/>.
- Schoen, D. (1984). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schutte, N. S., & Malouff, J. M. (2018). The impact of signature character strengths interventions: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-9990-2>.
- Schweiger, S., Stouten, H., & Bleijenbergh, I. (2018). *A system dynamics model of resistance to organizational change: The role of participatory strategies*. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/sres.2509>.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1999). The president’s address. *American Psychologist, 54*, 559–562.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(3), 293–311.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Shoshani, A. (2019). Young children’s character strengths and emotional well-being: Development of the character strengths inventory for early childhood (CSI-EC). *Journal of Positive Psychology, 14*(1), 86–102.
- Shoshani, A., & Ilanit Aviv, I. (2012). The pillars of strength for first-grade adjustment—Parental and children’s character strengths and the transition to elementary school. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 7*(4), 315–326.

- Shoshani, A., & Shwartz, L. (2018). From character strengths to children's well-being: Development and validation of the character strengths inventory for elementary school children. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 2123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02123>.
- Shoshani, A., & Slone, M. (2013). Middle school transition from the strengths perspective: Young adolescents' character strengths, subjective well-being, and school adjustment. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 14*(4), 1163–1181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9374-y>.
- Sprinthall, A., Reiman, A., & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1996). Teacher professional development. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of teacher education* (2nd ed.). New York: Simon and Schuster/McMillan.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). *Professional learning communities: A review of the literature*. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8>.
- Understood Team. (n.d.). *The difference between the Every Student Succeeds Act and No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved from <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/the-difference-between-the-every-student-succeeds-act-and-no-child-left-behind>.
- VIA Institute. (2016). *VIA assessments*. Available at: <https://www.viacharacter.org/researchers/assessments>.
- VIA Institute (2019). *What the research says about character strengths*. Available at: <https://www.viacharacter.org/research/findings>.
- Walton, G. M. (2014). The new science of wise psychological interventions. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*, 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413512856>.
- Weber, M., Wagner, L., & Ruch, W. (2016). Positive feelings at school: On the relationships between students' character strengths, school-related affect, and school functioning. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 17*, 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9597-1>.
- Wheatley, M. (Spring, 2001). *Innovation means relying on everyone's creativity*. Retrieved from <https://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/innovationmeans.html>.
- White, M. A., & Waters, L. E. (2015a). A case study of 'The Good School:' Examples of use of Peterson's strengths-based approach with students. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.920408>.
- White, M., & Waters, L. E. (2015b). In M. White & A. Murray (Eds.), *Evidence-based approaches in positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools* (pp. 111–134). Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, and London: Springer.
- World Economic Forum. (2016). *Skills stability*. Retrieved from <http://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/skills-stability>.
- World Government Summit. (2019). *Annual gathering speaker detail*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/events/annual-gathering/speaker-detail/636843582086451762-john-helliwell>.

- Yeager, D. S., Johnson, R., Spitzer, B. J., Trzesniewski, K. H., Powers, J., & Dweck, C. S. (2014). The far-reaching effects of believing people can change: Implicit theories of personality shape stress, health, and achievement during adolescence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *106*(6), 867–884. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036335>.
- Yeager, D., & Walton, G. (2011). Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(2), 267–301. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/94c8/d911a73e39511fca0d9cedcde5b79595d5f6.pdf>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 17

## Building Positive Emotions and Playfulness

Louise Tidmand

In most positive childhood memories, fun, playfulness, and positive emotions are present. When we think of such a memory, we might even be able to relive and savour that moment repeatedly, thanks to our ability to collect somatic markers. Somatic markers refer to the juxtaposition of image, emotion, and bodily feelings that we generate during an experience (Damasio, Everitt, & Bishop, 1996; Muñoz, 2017). Through emotions, according to Damasio et al. (1996), we build “innate and acquired knowledge concerning bioregulatory processes and body states and actions” (p. 1414). With reference to Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, emotions as somatic markers are psychophysical processes in which the rational component is influenced by the bodily component (Muñoz, 2017).

Often, we use the words *emotions* and *feelings* interchangeably, but they are different. Emotions are our response to a physiological condition, a reaction to stimulus, whereas feelings are our subjective experience and interpretation of stimuli response (Fredrickson, 2011; Holmgren, Ledertoug, Paarup, & Tidmand, 2019). Our experiences with positive and negative emotions affect our feelings and thoughts, and they may release either a positive upwards spiral or a negative downwards spiral.

---

L. Tidmand (✉)  
Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark  
e-mail: [loti@edu.au.dk](mailto:loti@edu.au.dk)

## Positive Emotions and Somatic Markers

Building positive emotions and collecting positive somatic markers is like filling up your personal account of emotions (as if it were a bank account), aiming at having more positive emotions than negative emotions in that account, and in this way contributing to your own wellbeing. Positive emotions generate positive somatic markers, and our emotions influence our cognition (Kahneman, 2012); in other words, our body remembers the emotions connected to an experience and the emotions influence the way we think about that experience. We may recall the memory of that positive experience from recognizing a smell, a sound, a view, or anything that is part of that memory and we are more likely to repeat the action connected to the positive memory (Damasio, 2004). In education, we may build positive somatic markers through positive emotions and experiences that our students will integrate as part of their resources.

The influence of positive emotions on learning may be explained by the connection between positive emotions and divergent and creative thinking, as well as the connection between negative emotions and convergent thinking (Guilford, Merrifield, & Cox, 1961) or by the Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions influence our mood and our ability to think creatively and generate variable possible solutions to a problem or a task. When experiencing positive emotions, we broaden our mind, we are able to think innovatively, to see things from diverse perspectives, and our thinking is flexible. When experiencing negative emotions, we tend to look for one correct solution only. The Broaden and Build theory argues that the range of our immediate thought and action repertoire—our cognition and our attention—expand when we experience positive emotions, and we generate change from our divergent thinking that builds our personal resources and releases an upwards spiral of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Holmgren et al., 2019). There is a dialectic connection between positive emotions, good mood, and cognitive flexibility. So when developing coping and learning strategies, the coping flexibility denotes cognitive astuteness in formulating coping strategies to meet specific situational demands and the possession of meta-coping skills that foster the implementation of flexible coping strategies (Cheng, Lau, & Chan, 2014).

In short, positive emotions have an invigorating and lasting effect on our personal resources. They facilitate further growth because they influence and change the way our brain works and allow us to develop our thought and action repertoire and expand our field of vision and attention. Research focuses on ten positive emotions: joy, interest, gratitude, hope,

serenity, amusement, pride, awe, inspiration, and love. Fredrickson (2011) suggests that the latter may be seen as a superior emotion as it contains all the other nine emotions.

When building positive emotions and playfulness in positive education, the focus is relevant to every person who spends work hours at the educational institution, whether they are teachers, students, office staff, or administrators.

## Playfulness and Play

There is a distinction between play and playfulness; play is a behaviour and playfulness a personality predisposition that allows the individual to transform a situation or environment to be more enjoyable or entertaining (Barnett, 1990, 2007; Glynn & Webster, 1992; Schaefer, 1993; Trevlas, Grammatikopoulos, Tsigilis, & Zachopoulou, 2003).

One definition of playfulness is: “in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight” (Lugones, 1987 p. 17). In the words of Barnett (2007), playfulness is defined as “the predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humour, and/or entertainment” (p. 955). Research into the correlation between wellbeing and playfulness is only a century old. However, it has become apparent that playfulness is a potent and powerful instrument for wellbeing and even life expectancy (Gordon, 2014). Also, optimism and self-perception are affected positively with students when consciously working with experiencing positive emotions in school (Andersen & Tidmand, 2014; Tidmand, 2018).

**Play as behaviour may be the optimal frame for experiencing and being playful.** The flow that occurs when we play, no matter what strength profile we otherwise possess, makes play an activity we just do because it is fun. Like other top strengths, it does not feel stressful, because we are not associating it with some future reward (Rana, 2018). Play is by nature autotelic and contains in itself the potential for flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

**Play aims to either train us physically, socially, or cognitively.** Playfulness can thus be the unencumbered state that allows you to explore your environment and understand the boundaries that can guide your future experiences. Rana (2018) argued that you spend the first part of your life exploring, seeing, and understanding, but once your curiosity about your

surroundings has levelled to a satisfactory level, you start to exploit the knowledge you have gained.

Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, our surroundings are rapidly changing. In the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world, exploration and exploitation phases melt together and overlap, if you want to succeed. Not making room for play in the modern adult life is a strategic disadvantage—exploration and exploitation are no longer distinct, but continually co-evolving as the world unfolds around us (Rana, 2018), and playfulness is a necessary part of your adult life and your work experience.

However, humans are pruned to lose the playfulness associated with childhood. It is argued that humans are born with an animal nature and through upbringing, *Bildung* (education and formation), and primarily development of language, they acquire a mind, cognitive skills, reason, and a kind of second (human) nature that is often perceived as seriousness, which is understood as the opposite of playfulness (Bakhurst, 2011). Playfulness is thus unlearned through our culture, which explains why it is mostly associated with childhood.

With the rapidly changing surroundings and the fusion of the exploration and exploitation phase, playfulness and humour as a character trait may be construed as an advantage in education as well as in the workplace. Studies show that playfulness in adults correlates with intrinsic motivation (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994), creativity and spontaneity (Barnett, 2007; Glynn & Webster, 1992), positive attitudes towards the workplace or job satisfaction (Yu, Wu, Chen, & Lin, 2007), and academic achievement (Proyer, 2012; Proyer & Ruch, 2011), all highly desirable qualities in a workplace or in education.

Play can facilitate positive emotions and thus broaden the mindset (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001) encouraging novel, varied, and exploratory thoughts and actions, creating the urge to be creative when creativity is needed. So, play can consciously be used to broaden habitual modes of thinking and acting (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Playful people tend to perceive a lower level of stress (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013) and use adaptive coping strategies (Leung Chun Lok, 2014).

In positive psychology, the term *playfulness* is an important part of the Values in Action (VIA) strength of humour (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The VIA Institute on Character describes playfulness as the core of humour and playfulness as a generator for reinvigorating the strength humour, and describes six ways of expressing playfulness (<http://viacharacter.org>):

- **Spontaneous:** Are you ever impulsive, adventurous, carefree, or free-spirited?
- **Expressive:** Are you ever animated and emotional, bouncy and open, or feel as if you are manifesting joy?
- **Creative:** Are you ever actively imaginative and original?
- **Fun:** Are you ever excitable and playful (the opposite of dull)?
- **Silly:** Are you ever childlike and whimsical?

Peterson and Seligman (2004) noted that humour appears in many forms:

The domain of humour is vast and varied, and there exists a huge terminology for describing its types. Some forms are clearly mean (e.g., mockery, ridicule, sarcasm), and others on the border (e.g., parody, practical jokes). We exercise our prerogative by focusing on those forms of humour that serve some moral good – by making the human condition more bearable by drawing attention to its contradictions, by sustaining good cheer in the face of despair, by building social bonds, and by lubricating social interaction. (p. 530)

According to Gordon (2014), playfulness and engaging in play unfolds a number of adaptive and cognitive changes. Many researchers have pointed out aspects of these adaptive and cognitive changes. Table 17.1 identifies some of these.

One may argue that if playing is ignored or under-stimulated, it might have potentially negative biological consequences, much like if sleeping and dreaming is ignored and/or under-stimulated (Brown, 2008). But play also has a purpose; research has established that children engage in make-believe play, where they mimic adults as a tutorial for coping with real-life challenges (Lancy, 2014). Such imitation is emphasized by both Vygotsky and Elkonin (1978), who highlighted that make-believe play develops self-regulation; in agreeing on the details of the play (e.g., casting roles and agreeing on the use of props), some planning is needed (Elkonin, 1978). That planning and learning to adjust actions to the norms associated with the character's behaviour and abstaining from actions that are not consistent with the character's role are steps to self-regulation, self-monitoring, and intentional behaviour (Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong, 2013).

## Vygotsky's View on Play and Playfulness

In *Play and Its Role in the Mental Development of the Child*, Russian psychiatrist Lev S. Vygotsky (1967) stated:

**Table 17.1** Adaptive and cognitive changes impacted by playfulness

Adaptive/cognitive change	Source
Training for the unexpected Problem-solving, divergent thinking	Spinka, Newberry, and Bekoff (2001) Baer (1993, 2014), Barnett (1985), Barnett and Kleiber (1982), Lieberman (1965), and Vandenberg (1980)
Skills for cooperation	Spinka et al. (2001)
The ability to interpret ambiguous social cues	Pellis (2010) and Spinka et al. (2001)
Positive affect	Barnett (1991) and Jenvey and Jenvey (2002)
The ability to find meaning in experiences, or meaning-making	Bruner (1990)
Imagination, creativity, teamwork, and even perceived stress and styles of coping	Barnett (1991), Lieberman (2014), Lurie and Monahan (2015), Magnuson (2011), and Singer, Singer, and Sherrod (1980)
Emotional and self-regulation	Christiano and Russ (1996) and Elias and Berk (2002)
Metacommunication, or communication about communication	Bateson (2006)
Affect-regulation, or emotional stability	Berk, Mann, and Ogan (2006)
Self-transformation, or flexible identity and the ability to pretend	Garvey (1990) and Schwartzman (2012)
Symbolic representation	Piaget (2013)
The ability to communicate coherent narratives	Nicolopoulou (2005)
The ability to be a peaceful, productive member of community	Sutton-Smith (2009)
The social competence it takes to get along with others	Connolly and Doyle (1984)
The ability to express oneself creatively	Singer and Singer (1998)

In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour. (p. 16)

Vygotsky believed that human development was a dialectic play between the processes of natural, biologically determined development, and cultural development created by interactions with other people. The *lower* (biologically determined) mental functions (e.g., involuntary attention, sensory-motor thought) are restructured to *higher* mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Vygotsky (1997) stated that “when the child enters into

culture, he not only takes something from culture ... but culture itself profoundly refines the natural state of behaviour of the child and alters completely anew the whole course of his development” (p. 223).

Vygotsky defined higher mental functions as behaviour that is sign-mediated, intentional, and internalized. The development of higher mental functions is a gradual process from interindividual, or shared, to individual. Therefore, Vygotsky viewed early childhood to be the stage allowing children to make a transition from *slaves of the environment* to becoming *masters of their own behaviour*. Put in other words, education in preschool years should take aim at overcoming the child’s impulsive, reactive behaviour and supporting children to become capable of intentional behaviour (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). This context is important to understand Vygotsky’s view on play.

Vygotsky focused on sociodramatic play or make-believe play typical for pre-schoolers and children of primary school age. Vygotsky believed the sociodramatic play had three features—an imaginary situation, roles, and rules—that served to develop higher mental functions. He identified the creation of an imaginary situation and the casting of roles as the child’s emerging ability to perform external and internal actions. In play, identifying internal actions is the equivalent of understanding dependence on external factors and their influence on their character/role and the situation, and that, to Vygotsky, was evidence of the emergence of more advanced symbolic thought and higher mental functions (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Play promotes intentional behaviour because it requires children to understand the mutual relationships between the roles they play and the rules they need to follow when playing these roles. Vygotsky (1967) noted:

At that critical moment when a stick becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of a horse from a real horse, one of the basic psychological structures determining the child’s relationship to reality is radically altered. (p. 12)

At this stage, the child understands that a prop does not have to look like the object it symbolizes in the game but has to have similar properties to the real object; for example, a bucket can be a ship because it can float. The symbolic train of thought unconstrained by reality and the child’s ability to assign new meaning to objects is a transitional stage for achieving mastery of the object and furthering symbolic ability (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Vygotsky (1967) similarly regards play as a transitional stage in developing imagination, thus opposing the common understanding that imagination is a prerequisite for play. Imagination is not a formation in the consciousness of

a young child, totally absent in animals and is thus a formation closely linked to consciousness and higher mental function:

Play continually creates demands on the child to act against immediate impulse ... Why does the child not do what he wants, spontaneously and at once? Because the play promises much greater pleasure than the gratification of an immediate impulse. (p. 14)

Play is autotelic; it is engaged in for its own sake, with the reward intrinsic to the activity itself. Although the activity is not essential for survival or profit, play commands a person's entire attention.

Vygotsky (1967) further explained that:

play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. (p. 16)

Vygotsky's learning precedes development. He argued that our present state of development is enhanced when presented with tasks just out of reach of our present abilities. The gap between our pre-existing development and what we can accomplish with the help of others is called the *Zone of Proximal Development*. He does not limit this to one-on-one situations of teaching or tutoring, but sees play as a means of assistance provided by a group of peers. This group appears collectively as a *more knowledgeable other*, although none of the group members are more knowledgeable than other children in the group (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

So, in Vygotsky's understanding of play, playfulness, or the strength humour is a resource in a learning environment and a lever for learning or academic performance, thus opposing the common understanding that some strengths are less suitable for learning environments like schools (e.g., the VIA virtue category of Transcendence) and reinforcing that idea that all strengths are equal.

## What Happens in the Brain During Play

To understand how playfulness, positive emotions, and humour affect our performance, it is important to understand how the brain is affected by these experiences. According to Willis (2016), laughter and smiles trigger a network

of subcortical structures, including the ventral tegmental area, hypothalamus, nucleus accumbens (NAcc), and amygdala—key components of the mesolimbic dopaminergic reward system. Therefore, the chemical reward system and the positive emotions trigger the Broaden and Build process that enables us to broaden our mindset, think more creatively, and be innovative in solving our assignments. To best process information and learn, there is heavy traffic from sensory receptors (visual, auditory, touch) to memory storage regions of the brain. These bits of data are carried from one nerve cell to another by neurotransmitter. But neurotransmitters are in limited supply at each gap between the nerve cells and deplete in as little as ten minutes when you stress that particular neural network (i.e., continue) the same type of learning activity (e.g., attentive listening, taking notes, etc.). Thus, using *Brain Breaks*<sup>1</sup> to shift the type of mental activity, shifts brain communication to networks with fresh supplies of neurotransmitters. This intermission allows the brain's chemicals to replenish within the resting network.

Similarly, the laughter generated from a prank or joke activates a different network than listening to a conversation, a lecture, solving a problem, or writing a report, and forces you to focus on positive emotions, thus shifting the neural network. The laughter is involuntary and cannot be dismissed, and can serve to interrupt your routines, and improve your emotions during the workday. Diamond, Krech, and Rosenzweig (1964) tied play to increases in certain neural functions. Diamond was inspired by research in 1960 that contested that the brain is immutable, subject only to genetic control. This led her to perform an experiment with rats, one group in boring, solitary confinement and another group in exciting toy-filled colonies.

Diamond found that rats raised in stimulating environments developed bigger brains and were able to find their way through mazes more quickly. Furthermore, she found that stimulated rats showed increased levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) in their brains. BDNF is a protein that protects existing brain cells and stimulate growth of new brain cells and their mutual connections. In a later experiment, she expanded the experiment to include older rats with the same result (Diamond, 2001).

Sylva, Bruner, and Genova (1976) documented a positive relationship between a play versus training experience and divergent problem-solving abilities, thus indicating that play experiences are beneficial for a task that requires innovative transfer (Smith & Dutton, 1979).

---

<sup>1</sup>Brain breaks are mental breaks designed to help students stay focused and attentive. Brain breaks are often hand-eye coordination exercises. The brain breaks get students moving to carry blood and oxygen to the brain. The breaks energize or relax (The Watson Institute).

Individuals with humour as their top strength often earn a reputation for that characteristic in social networks or organizations where they use the role as the class (or organizational) clown to emphasize signs of hubris in leaders, address taboo topics, and help calm strained situations. The *class clown* can thus satirize leaders, followers, and venture into otherwise forbidden territories. The person can work as a corrective force against the leadership in organizations or as a mediator between leaders and followers (Wagner, 2019).

Neoteny is the retention of immature qualities into adulthood (Brown, 2008) and that retention unlocks the above potentials in adulthood. Playfulness increases positive emotions and decreases negative emotions (Chang, Qian, & Yarnal, 2013) and university students characterized as more playful were more reluctant to seek companionship (Qian & Yarnal, 2011) thus implying that playful people have more positive relationships. Positive relationships contribute to flourishing (Seligman, 2011). The autotelic actions, like playful activities, make flow experiences more likely (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), inducing long-lasting happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Pepler and Ross (1981) described how children who played with convergent materials prior to the problem-solving task performed better on convergent problems, whereas play experience with divergent materials appeared to transfer both to divergent and convergent problems, and the divergent playgroup appeared more flexible in abandoning ineffective strategies in seeking solutions (Pepler & Ross, 1981). Convergent problems are problems with one and only one solution (e.g., puzzle pieces). Divergent problems have no single correct solution, but a variety of possible solutions (e.g., building blocks). Smith and Dutton (1979) repeated the experiment but extended the play versus training paradigm to direct and innovative problem-solving. Given a more complex assignment, not directly trained with the training group, the playgroup outperformed the training and control groups, thus indicating that play experiences improved the ability to solve tasks that required innovative transfer. Subsequent studies indicated a causal and reciprocal connection between pretend play and divergent problem-solving skills (Wyver & Spence, 1999); children given training in pretend play showed increased ability to solve divergent problems and children trained in solving divergent problems displayed increased rates of pretend play.

## Positive Emotions and Playfulness as Part of the Educational and Work Culture

An educational institution is a workplace for both staff and students. Implementing positive education helps create a school culture and environment conducive to positive emotions for both staff and students. Often, when we as educators implement a pedagogical and/or didactical framework into our practice, the focus is on applying an approach to the students. Positive education is a broader approach, addressing everyone associated with the educational enterprise, from students to teachers to staff. Building the positive emotions and playfulness of staff will not only improve their wellbeing and job satisfaction, but it will also multiply so that educators will build positive emotions and playfulness of students and in classrooms. Other types of organizations may provide examples of how a more playful working environment may be established.

Companies that promote positive emotions allow their employees to express themselves as individuals, talking with their customers/students in informal ways rather than reading from a script. Apart from the positive impact on innovation and productivity (Pentland, 2012), such environments also have been linked to enhanced job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006) and decreased absenteeism (Meyer, 1999). Within this context, the personality of each employee surfaces, and thus playfulness empowers the employee to exercise autonomy and, with colleagues' and students'/customers' immediate responses (e.g., laughter), promotes a sense of competence and relatedness, thus addressing the basic psychological needs described by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As such, workplace playfulness can be helpful in generating wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Some companies and philosophies in practice that may inform educational institutions on how to build positive emotions and playfulness at the workplace include:

- **Fish! Philosophy.** The Fish! Philosophy was created in 1997 by John Christensen (<https://www.fishphilosophy.com/fish-philosophy-story/>). He visited the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, Washington, and noticed employees at one particular fish stall who—to his surprise—were laughing, shouting, and tossing trout and salmon through the air, while joking with the customers as if they were old friends. He later learned that the fish sellers' job was exhausting and repetitive, and that these employees in this particular stall had chosen a playful attitude when coming to work that made the job more enjoyable not only to themselves, but also to customers.

Fish! Philosophy later became an entire management theory in the corporate world and has revolutionized the rigid attitude to customer service. The Fish! Philosophy theory taps into the benefits of playfulness in the employees, invigorates the workplace, helps position the corporation, and generates customer satisfaction and retention.

- **The rapping flight attendant.** David Holmes worked as a flight attendant with Southwest Airlines. One of his jobs was to make the tedious security announcement before take-off. David began rapping this security announcement when he was in a good mood and wanted to inject some fun into work, and especially when flying back to his hometown, Las Vegas, Nevada (<https://youtu.be/68pSH1sWzOU>). In some companies, that kind of behaviour would have resulted in termination on the spot, but David worked at Southwest Airlines, which encourages playfulness in the workplace as a strategy to stand out from other airlines. Customers enjoyed it and colleagues found it fun and entertaining. David is now only one of many mostly Southwestern flight attendants that joke around and make humorous announcements.
- **Google.** Google prides itself as being on top of Fortune's list of "Best Companies to Work For" for six consecutive years and has regularly been on Glassdoor's annual "Best Places to Work" list. One of a number of philosophies that Google has implemented in the workplace is "Despite rigorous tasks, Google keeps things fun". Google's former HR-boss, Laszlo Bock, stated that "keeping things fun in a hive of activity, constant innovation, and experiment discharges employees' creativity juice. What's beautiful about this approach is that a great environment is a self-reinforcing one: All of these efforts support one another, and together create an organization that is creative, fun, hardworking, and highly productive".
- **Teacher morning handshake.** At Wichita Public Schools' Mueller Elementary in Kansas, one teacher starts every morning by giving playful and individually designed handshakes to her students (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VzOmZ4bdTw>). This way she connects with every student and starts both her and their day building positive emotions in a playful way.

## Building Positive Emotions and Playfulness in Pedagogical Practice

Having looked at what positive emotions, play, and playfulness are and why positive emotions and playfulness are fundamental to positive education, it is now time to look at the *how* of building positive emotions and playfulness.

The following examples and suggestions demonstrate how positive emotions and playfulness may be built explicitly and implicitly in teaching, including in preparation and lesson planning, pedagogical practices in the classroom, and evaluation of the lesson.

When preparing a lesson plan, the first thing to do should be to think of the group of students. How well do you know them and what may create a positive and safe learning environment? What has gone well in your previous lessons or lectures? You might want to introduce and make use of Brain Breaks, handshakes, music, or YouTube clips that will engage the students to laugh and create a positive environment. You may also explore your own approach to being playful. When and where are you playful? And what would happen, if you were more playful and used humour when teaching? The idea is not that educators need to become stand-up comedians, but that taking small actions to demonstrate our own playfulness will have positive benefits for students, even when we are introducing academic subjects or lesson content or in activities connected to a learning task.

When planning and teaching, we may be aware of how we can involve and engage students, and build positive emotions and playfulness using the model in Table 17.2. The model illustrates how we are able to adjust our teaching so as to focus on enabling students to experience not only playfulness and positive emotions, but also autonomy, competence, and relatedness in connection to lesson content and/or lesson activities. We may choose to have fixed content, but choose to have an open activity where students themselves give input as to how they will learn the content/solve a problem/work with the material. We might have a fixed idea about the structure of activity and at the same time be open as to what content this activity structure has to be applied. We might have an open activity structure and an openness to the content to which the activity is connected. Finally, we might have a fixed content and a fixed activity connected to the content. The latter scenario may leave less room for experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as well as playfulness.

The model depicted in Table 17.2 is inspired by a Danish project from 1986 working with student involvement in physical education (Fibæk Lauersen, 1994; Rønholt & Peitersen, 2008). An example may be around a

**Table 17.2** Model for planning for student positive emotions and playfulness in teaching

Fixed content/Open activity	Open content/Fixed activity
Fixed content/Fixed activity	Open content/Open activity

Source adapted from Fibæk Lauersen (1994) and Rønholt and Peitersen (2008)

language subject, where the subject curriculum requires that students read a fiction novel and work with describing characters in the novel, as depicted in Table 17.3. The model may also be used to differentiate content and activity in the class, and to adjust the didactic choices when planning.

During teaching, awareness about how the brain works can inspire us to change activities and/or content during a lesson. As mentioned before, Brain Breaks offer a means to incorporate variety in activities, but other types of breaks may serve the purpose of building positive emotions as well as refreshing the brain. Other types of breaks may focus on lowering the energy level in the classroom, and the break could be a short mindfulness exercise or a short meditation or listening to a calm piece of music while focusing on the breath. Another type of break could be savouring a somatic marker by taking a moment to go down memory lane and revisit positive experiences. Such a trip down memory lane may be a guided one, where the teacher guides the students to revisit for instance their best memory from a day at the beach, a day in the forest, a play experience, a favourite moment with the family or with a friend, a favourite school day, or other contexts that the teacher might find suitable for the specific group of students.

Playfulness and play during teaching curriculum of any subject may be implemented by using different kinds of building materials such as LEGO, play dough, blocks, paper, cans, centicubes, etc., where students of any age individually or in groups either build a dilemma/situation/task that needs solving and solve it by making changes in their building, or simply use the building aspect as a way to communicate and illustrate divergent thinking. When using divergent building materials, the students experience working with representations by choosing props to look like or symbolize a specific object. Many academic problems, challenges, and tasks that we normally

**Table 17.3** Example of the model's application in language arts class

<p><b>Fixed content/Open activity:</b> All read the same novel/Each student chooses two characters that they will describe and how they will do this (in writing, role-playing, painting, riming, singing, etc.)</p>	<p><b>Open content/Fixed activity:</b> Each student freely choose a fiction novel/All describe the two main characters of the novel in a 250 word written assignment</p>
<p><b>Fixed content/Fixed activity:</b> All read the same novel/All describe the two main characters in a 250 word written assignment</p>	<p><b>Open content/Open activity:</b> Each student freely chooses a fiction novel/Each student chooses two characters that they will describe and how they will do this (in writing, role-playing, making a short movie, painting, riming, singing, etc.)</p>

teach through dialogue or in writing, might just as well be scrutinized using divergent (building) materials.

Encourage the students to take pictures of their building process and final construction. This is a way to celebrate good work and the pictures may become a representation of an important somatic marker for the student as well as contribute to the student developing self-efficacy.

When evaluating teaching, educators should focus on what went well and on evaluating progress on goals that were set before the teaching session. Before actually teaching a lesson, educators should ask: What do I plan for? What do I hope will happen? What criteria do I set for my self-evaluation? When, during your teaching, did you feel positive emotions or playfulness? How might this motivate you when planning your next teaching lesson? When evaluating students, ask them the same questions: When during your learning process do you feel the most positive emotions, the most playful, or the most motivated? How may this inspire your learning in the future?

## Conclusion

The positive emotion and playfulness experiences that we experience during our time in education have the potential to create important positive somatic markers that become a lifelong resource for the individual person and for the educational institution.

## References

- Amabile, T. M., Hill, K. G., Hennessey, B. A., & Tighe, E. M. (1994). The work preference inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 6, 950–967.
- Andersen, F. Ø., & Tidmand, L. (2014). Hvordan børn lærer sig nye handlemuligheder og kompetencer - en undersøgelse af indsatser i folkeskolen baseret på positiv psykologi. *Pædagogisk Psykologisk Tidsskrift*, 51. årgang (2).
- Baer, J. (1993, 2014). *Creativity and divergent thinking: A task-specific approach*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315806785>.
- Bakhurst, D. (2011). *Formation of reason*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barnett, L. A. (1985). Young children's free play and problem-solving ability. *Leisure Sciences*, 7(1), 25–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490408509512106>.
- Barnett, L. A. (1990). Playfulness: Definition, design, and measurement. *Play and Culture*, 3(4), 3.

- Barnett, L. A. (1991). Characterizing playfulness: Correlates with individual attributes and personality traits. *Play and Culture*, 4(4), 371–393.
- Barnett, L. A. (2007). The nature of playfulness in young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43(4), 949–958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2007.02.018>.
- Barnett, L. A., & Kleiber, D. A. (1982). Concomitants of playfulness in early childhood: Cognitive abilities and gender. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 141(1), 115–127.
- Bateson, G. (2006). A theory of play and fantasy. In K. Salen & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *The game design reader: A rules of play anthology* (pp. 314–328). Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.
- Berk, L. E., Mann, T. D., & Ogan, A. T. (2006). Make-believe play: Wellspring for development of self-regulation. *Play = learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth* (pp. 74–100). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bodrova, E., Germeroth, C., & Leong, D. (2013). Play and self-regulation: Lessons from Vygotsky. *American Journal of Play*, 6, 111–123.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2015). Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian views on children's play. *American Journal of Play*, 7(3), 371–388.
- Brown, S. (2008). *Play is more than just fun: TED Ideas worth spreading*. [https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart\\_brown\\_says\\_play\\_is\\_more\\_than\\_fun\\_it\\_s\\_vital#t-18449](https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital#t-18449).
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning* (Vol. 3). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chang, P.-J., Qian, X., & Yarnal, C. (2013). Using playfulness to cope with psychological stress: Taking into account both positive and negative emotions. *International Journal of Play*, 2(3), 273–296.
- Cheng, C., Lau, H.-P. B., & Chan, M.-P. S. (2014). Coping flexibility and psychological adjustment to stressful life changes: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1582–1607. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037913>.
- Christiano, B. A., & Russ, S. W. (1996). Play as a predictor of coping and distress in children during invasive dental procedure. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 25(2), 130–138.
- Connolly, J. A., & Doyle, A.-B. (1984). Relation of social fantasy play to social competence in preschoolers. *Developmental Psychology*, 20(5), 797.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Play and intrinsic rewards. In *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 135–153). Springer.
- Damasio, A. R. (2004). Emotions and feelings - A neurobiological perspective. In A. S. R. Manstead, N. Frijda, & A. Fischer (Eds.), *Feelings and emotions - The Amsterdam symposium* (pp. 49–58). UK: The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge.
- Damasio, A. R., Everitt, B. J., & Bishop, D. (1996). The somatic marker hypothesis and the possible functions of the prefrontal cortex [and discussion]. *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, 351(1346), 1413–1420. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069187>.

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01).
- Diamond, M. C. (2001). Response of the brain to enrichment. *Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências*, 73, 211–220. Retrieved from [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0001-37652001000200006&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0001-37652001000200006&nrm=iso).
- Diamond, M. C., Krech, D., & Rosenzweig, M. R. (1964). The effects of an enriched environment on the histology of the rat cerebral cortex. *Journal of Comparative Neurology*, 123(1), 111–119.
- Elias, C. L., & Berk, L. E. (2002). Self-regulation in young children: Is there a role for sociodramatic play? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(2), 216–238.
- Élkonin, D. B. (1978). *Psichologija igrj*. Pedagogika.
- Fibæk Lauersen, P. (1994). *Idrætsdidaktikkens modernisering*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychiatry*, 2(3), 300–319.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Fra American Psychologist*, 56, 218–226.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2011). *Positivity: Groundbreaking research to release your inner optimist and thrive* (New ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion*, 19(3), 313–332.
- Garvey, C. (1990). *Play* (Vol. 27). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glynn, M. A., & Webster, J. (1992). The adult playfulness scale: An initial assessment. *Psychological Reports*, 71(1), 83–103.
- Gordon, G. (2014). Well played: The origins and future of playfulness. *American Journal of Play*, 6(2), 234–266.
- Guilford, J. P., Merrifield, P. R., & Cox, A. B. (1961). *Creative thinking in children at the junior high school levels*. Los Angeles: The Psychological Laboratory, The University of Southern California.
- Holmgren, N., Ledertoug, M. M., Paarup, N., & Tidmand, L. (2019). *The battle against boredom In Schools*. Copenhagen: The Strength Academy.
- Jenvey, V. B., & Jenvey, H. L. (2002). Criteria used to categorize children’s play: Preliminary findings. *Social Behavior and Personality: an International Journal*, 30(8), 733–740.
- Kahneman, D. (2012). *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Karl, K., & Peluchette, J. (2006). How does workplace fun impact employee perceptions of customer service quality? *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 13(2), 2–13.
- Lancy, D. F. (2014). *The anthropology of childhood: Cherubs, chattel, changelings* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Leung Chun Lok, R. (2014). Adult playfulness and its relationship to humour, subjective happiness and depression: A comparative study of Hong Kong and Mainland China. *3*, 105–141. Retrieved from [ssweb.cityu.edu.hk/download/RS/E-Journal/Vol3/journal4.pdf](http://ssweb.cityu.edu.hk/download/RS/E-Journal/Vol3/journal4.pdf).
- Lieberman, J. N. (1965). Playfulness and divergent thinking: An investigation of their relationship at the kindergarten level. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *107*(2), 219–224.
- Lieberman, J. N. (2014). *Playfulness: Its relationship to imagination and creativity*. New York: Academic Press.
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, “world”-travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, *2*(2), 3–19.
- Lurie, A., & Monahan, K. (2015). Humor, aging, and life review: Survival through the use of humor. *Social Work in Mental Health*, *13*(1), 82–91.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. London: Penguin.
- Magnuson, C. D. (2011). *The playful advantage: How playfulness enhances coping with stress* (Master Monograph). University of Illinois, USA.
- Magnuson, C. D., & Barnett, L. (2013). The playful advantage: How playfulness enhances coping with stress. *Leisure Sciences*, *35*, 129–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.761905>.
- Meyer, H. (1999). Fun for everyone. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *20*(2), 13–17.
- Muñoz, J. M. (2017). Somatic markers, rhetoric, and post-truth. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*(1273). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01273>.
- Nicolopoulou, A. (2005). *Play and narrative in the process of development: Commonalities, differences, and interrelations*. *Cognitive Development*, *20*, 495–502.
- Pellis, S. M. (2010). Conservative motor systems, behavioral modulation and neural plasticity. *Behavioural Brain Research*, *214*(1), 25–29.
- Pentland, A. S. (2012). The new science of building great teams. *Harvard Business Review*, *90*(4), 60–69.
- Pepler, D. J., & Ross, H. S. (1981). The effects of play on convergent and divergent problem solving. *Child Development*, *52*(4), 1202–1210. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1129507.pdf>.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues - A handbook an classification*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Piaget, J. (2013). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*: London: Routledge.
- Proyer, R. T. (2012). Examining playfulness in adults: Testing its correlates with personality, positive psychological functioning, goal aspirations, and multi-methodically assessed ingenuity. *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling*, *54*(2), 103–127.
- Proyer, R. T., & Ruch, W. (2011). The virtuousness of adult playfulness: the relation of playfulness with strengths of character. *Psychology of Well-Being: Theory, Research and Practice*, *1*(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2211-1522-1-4>.

- Qian, X., & Yarnal, C. (2011). The role of playfulness in the leisure stress-coping process among emerging adults: An SEM analysis. *Leisure/Loisir, 35*, 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2011.578398>.
- Rana, Z. (2018, November 28). Why playfulness is the key to success in the 21st century. *Personal Growth*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/personal-growth/why-playfulness-is-the-key-to-success-in-the-21st-century-201a626fe18>.
- Rønholt, H., & Peitersen, B. (2008). *Idrætsundervisning - en grundbog i idrætsdidaktik*. Copenhagen: Institut for Idræt, Museum Tusulanums Forlag, University of Copenhagen.
- Schaefer, C. E. (1993). *The therapeutic powers of play*. Lanham: J. Aronson.
- Schwartzman, H. (2012). *Transformations: The anthropology of children's play*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A new understanding of happiness and well-being - and how to achieve them*. London: Nicholas Brealey Pub.
- Singer, J. L., & Singer, D. G. (1998). *Barney & Friends as entertainment and education: Evaluating the quality and effectiveness of a television series for preschool children*.
- Singer, J. L., Singer, D. G., & Sherrod, L. R. (1980). *A factory analytic study of preschoolers' play behavior*. *Academic Psychology Bulletin*.
- Smith, P. K., & Dutton, S. (1979). Play and training in direct and innovative problem solving. *Child Development, 830*–836.
- Spinka, M., Newberry, R. C., & Bekoff, M. (2001). Mammalian play: Training for the unexpected. *The Quarterly Review of Biology, 76*(2), 141–168.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (2009). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sylva, K., Bruner, J. S., & Genova, P. (1976). The role of play in the problem-solving of children 3–5 years old. *Play: Its role in development and evolution, 244*–257.
- Tidmand, L. (2018). *My happy book in school*. Denmark: The Strength Academy.
- Trevlas, E., Grammatikopoulos, V., Tsigilis, N., & Zachopoulou, E. (2003). Evaluating playfulness: Construct validity of the children's playfulness scale. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 31*(1), 33–39.
- Vandenberg, B. (1980). Play, problem-solving, and creativity. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 1980*(9), 49–68.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1967). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology, 5*(3), 6–18.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1997). The historical meaning of the crisis in psychology: A methodological investigation. In R. W. Rieber (Ed.), *Problems of the theory and history of psychology, the collected works of L. S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 3, pp. 233–242).
- Wagner, L. (2019). The social life of class clowns: Class clown behavior is associated with more friends, but also more aggressive behavior in the classroom. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*(604). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00604>.
- Willis, J. (2016). *Using brain breaks to restore students' focus*.

- Wyver, S., & Spence, S. (1999). Play and Divergent Problem Solving: Evidence Supporting a Reciprocal Relationship. *Early Education & Development, 10*. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1004\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1004_1).
- Yu, P., Wu, J.-J., Chen, I.-H., & Lin, Y.-T. (2007). Is playfulness a benefit to work? Empirical evidence of professionals in Taiwan. *International Journal of Technology Management, 39*(3–4), 412–429.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 18

## Engaging Education: The Foundation for Wellbeing and Academic Achievement

Mette Marie Ledertoug and Nanna Paarup

John Dewey (1947) famously wrote “if we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow” (p. 167). His words remind us that we have long known the importance of preparing students for the future by ensuring that their academic, personal, and social skills will remain relevant and meaningful well beyond the context of everyday school life and the current political agenda.

The term “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” was first coined in the 1980s in various U.S. reports on education and labour market needs (Action for Excellence, 1983; High Schools and the Changing Workplace, 1984; What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000, 1991). These reports raised concern regarding the need for a new generation of students with the required knowledge, attitudes, and abilities for the twenty-first century. It was and still is a common belief that current educational practice in schools might not sufficiently equip students for contemporary life and work—and certainly not for the future. For children starting school in 2021, the chances that when they are an adult, they will get a job that does not exist today are high. Some current jobs will no longer exist, others will have morphed almost beyond recognition, and new jobs will emerge. What knowledge will these children

---

M. M. Ledertoug (✉)  
Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark  
e-mail: [mele@edu.au.dk](mailto:mele@edu.au.dk)

N. Paarup  
Solve-It ApS, Copenhagen, Denmark

need? What academic, personal, and social skills? And how do we equip them with those skills?

Educational researchers and professionals worldwide have sought to clarify the skills and competences necessary for the twenty-first century. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018) offered a somewhat complicated learning framework to tackle the environmental, economic, and social challenges of a rapidly changing world, positioning those students who are best prepared for the future as change agents. Contemporary school curricula must evolve, or even radically change, to support students in embracing the challenges and changes the future will bring. Fadel, Bialik, and Trilling (2017) have developed a simpler model focusing on four key dimensions: knowledge, skills, character, and meta-learning. Fullan and Scott's (2014) model offers *six C's of deep learning*: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

Each attempt to describe what is needed and/or to create a model of twenty-first-century skills differs in its foundation and content, but they all seem to agree on the following points:

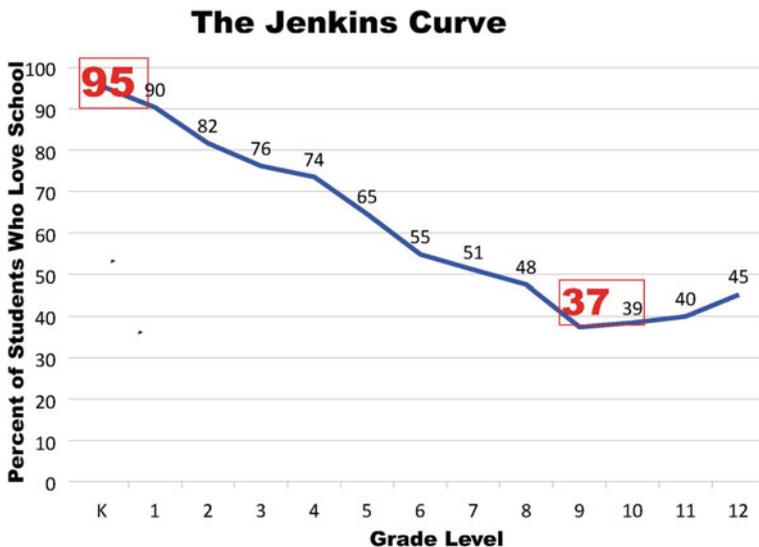
- The current educational practices in schools do not sufficiently address twenty-first century learning needs.
- To develop twenty-first-century skills among students, education will need to focus not only on academic skills, but also on personal and social skills and on wellbeing.
- The students of today—and tomorrow—will need to keep on learning in order to face and adapt to a rapidly changing world.

A willingness and aptitude for lifelong learning will be necessary to meet the ever-changing demands for skills, knowledge, and competences. But as Fullan (2013, p. 5) argues, “education has reached a point where we have squeezed all that is good out of a school system which is by now outdated. The present system is too expensive, too inefficient and, as too many students will tell us, too boring”. How can we teach students to become lifelong learners? How can we motivate them and engage them in learning? This chapter offers a framework to meet the twenty-first-century demand for lifelong learning, which focuses on active, involved, and engaging learning combined with wellbeing.

## From Boredom to Engaging Education

Research shows that engaging students in learning and education is a difficult task. Figure 18.1 illustrates how levels of American student enthusiasm drop dramatically while in school. The vast majority (95%) of students' express engagement and joy in learning when they start school, but this level of enthusiasm and engagement drops steadily to 45% of students by the final year of schooling—bottoming out at 37% just a few years before students leave school.

In a Danish study, 26% of students aged 10–16 reported they often or very often experienced boredom at school (Knoop, Holstein, Viskum, & Lindskov, 2016). Boredom was more prevalent among boys (29.6%) than girls (22.6%) and among older students (36% of those aged 13–16) than younger students (26% of those aged 10–12). The more bored the students were at school, the more likely they were to score poorly when measured in terms of parameters including academic attainment, social connections, and self-efficacy. In an international study, Larson and Richards (1991) found that on average, students experienced boredom 32% of the time, and in a study of students in German high schools, as many as 58% of students reported



**Fig. 18.1** Loss of American student enthusiasm for school by grade level (Adapted from Jenkins [2019]. Original image published in Jenkins, L. [2019]. *How to create a perfect school: Maintain students' love of learning from kindergarten through 12th grade*, by LtoJ Press, Scottsdale, Arizona. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

experiencing boredom—albeit specifically and exclusively in relation to maths lessons (Nett, Goetz, & Hall, 2011).

Boredom is a condition that entails unpleasant and unwanted emotions. It feels unpleasant because our bodies and our minds inform us—like an alarm going off—that what we are doing is uninteresting. We need to pay attention to the indicators of boredom; they tell us that what we are doing is meaningless and of no benefit to us (Holmgren, Ledertoug, Paarup, & Tidmand, 2019).

Although many teachers strive to minimise students' boredom in their teaching, these efforts cannot prevent boredom altogether. Nett et al. (2011) research suggest that dispositional factors are the cause of 26% of boredom, which is to say factors that depend on the student, such as attitude, interest, abilities, etc. Still, 74% of boredom may be ascribed to situational factors, such as teaching methods and content, and classroom interactions and relations. In other words, in the majority of cases, the causes of boredom are to be found in the educational context.

According to the OECD (2006), upper secondary qualifications are the baseline for successful entry into the labour market. Among OECD countries, an average of 39% of adults have upper secondary qualifications as their highest educational level (OECD, 2017). The reasons for leaving school and not continuing with tertiary-level education include personal reasons and socio-economic reasons. Given the decreases in enthusiasm and high rates of student boredom, we find it highly relevant to find ways to develop engaging education that supports improved learning outcomes and lifelong learning. It is not just a question of *minimising* boredom, but also a question of *creating* better learning and greater wellbeing.

Even though there might be differences in students' levels of engagement, levels of boredom in schools and educational attainment levels, all countries will need to improve students' engagement in learning to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Each country has its own educational culture and traditions—ranging from traditional teacher-centred instruction to active and experiential student-centred learning. Dewey (1947) further argued in favour of “learning by doing”—entailing more active, student-centred teaching methods, which will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. We urge our readers to link the theories and empirical findings we present to local educational contexts and thereby consider how current and future students can be engaged in learning in support of twenty-first-century skills.

## Student Engagement

An important factor in creating twenty-first-century *learners* is engagement in learning and education as a whole. We begin by taking a closer look at student engagement, focusing on identifying teaching strategies that support greater involvement of students. To emphasise the focus on learning, “the learner” will be used synonymously with “the student” for the remainder of the chapter.

Student engagement is difficult to define due to its complex construction, influenced by multiple factors, including personal factors (e.g., attention, interest, vigour, abilities, motivation, experience of meaning) and factors in relation to the teaching (e.g., subject, content, method, interaction, relations). As such, engaging students is not just a matter of active participation in lessons. It also involves internalisation of learning, meaningful learning activities, and relevant content.

Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who identified three dimensions of educational engagement, developed a common model of engagement:

- **Behavioural engagement:** Students’ participation in education; e.g., involvement in the school’s academic, social, and extracurricular activities.
- **Emotional engagement:** Students’ emotional reactions in the classroom and at school; e.g., a sense of belonging or of being connected to the school.
- **Cognitive engagement:** Students’ investment in their learning; e.g., motivation and self-regulation.

Reviewing literature related to student engagement Trowler (2010) developed an extended model, combining the aforementioned three dimensions of engagement with different types of engagement: positive, negative, and non-engagement, as summarised in Table 18.1.

**Table 18.1** Trowler’s extended model of engagement

	Positive engagement	Non engagement	Negative engagement
Behavioural	Attends lessons and participates with enthusiasm	Skips lessons without excuse	Disturbs or disrupts lessons
Emotional	Interest	Boredom	Rejection
Cognitive	Meets or exceeds assignment requirements	Assignments submitted late, rushed, or absent	Redefines parameters for assignments

Trowler's model suggests that engagement in education is much more than participating in class and being involved in a variety of activities. A deeper understanding of the teacher's intention (goal), assessment (learning outcome) and teaching and learning activities (content/method) is needed.

- The teacher's intention refers to what the learners should learn—the learning goal.
- Assessment focuses on measuring what students have learnt—the learning outcome.
- Teaching activities concern what the teacher does.
- Learning activities concern what the students do.

From this perspective, an important goal in engaging education is to promote students' learning and performance by striving to maximise intrinsic motivation and thereby reach learning goals.

Biggs' (2003) theory of constructive alignment connects the abstract idea of a learning outcome with the teachers' actions to help students learn and with what students actually do to learn, merging teaching and learning to promote all participants' achievement of deep learning, rather than mere surface learning. Biggs defines the learning outcome as a result or consequence of an action or process, and suggests that the key factors supporting learners' progress from surface learning to deep learning are their level of engagement, the learning activities, and their approach to learning. According to Biggs, students have a preference for either deep learning or surface learning. The deep learner finds learning exciting, while the surface learner cuts corners and only learns the bare minimum required to complete an assignment or pass a test. The students' approach in class affects their behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. This learner perspective helps in understanding why some students learn easier and more deeply than others do.

Biggs (2003) further suggests that the teacher's perspective includes three levels. Level 1 focuses on what students are. The teacher assesses the students quite categorical as either good or bad, without looking more deeply into their motivations. Level 2 focuses on what the teacher does. Attention is on the teaching methods and tools that are used. What is being taught—and how? Level 3 focuses on what the student does before, during, and after teaching, and what the student learns. At this level, it is crucial to understand how students learn.

## SOLO Taxonomy

To better understand students' learning, Biggs and Tang (2011) introduced the SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome) taxonomy—a model of learning progression ranging from “no learning” to “surface learning” to “deep learning”. The SOLO taxonomy includes five different levels, as summarised in Table 18.2. At level 1, the student demonstrates no learning; at levels 2 and 3, the student demonstrates surface understanding; and at levels 4 and 5, the student demonstrates deep understanding. The recommendation from Biggs and Tang is for teachers to use constructive alignment: describe the learning objectives using the SOLO taxonomy and share them with students with a focus on strategies for moving towards the next level to train the necessary skills and competences.

Building upon the SOLO taxonomy, Gibson (2017) suggested rubrics as a framework for implementing the SOLO taxonomy, translating each subject or theme into categories drawn from the SOLO taxonomy. The rubric gives each student autonomy in choosing levels of ambition, visual support showing how to progress, and offering the opportunity to receive formative and summative feedback (see Table 18.3 for an example of a rubric). Rubrics can be created for academic content, wellbeing content as well as combining

**Table 18.2** Biggs and Tang's (2011) Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy of learning progression

No learning	Surface learning		Deep learning	
Level 1: Pre-structural	Level 2: Uni-structural	Level 3: Multi-structural	Level 4: Relational	Level 5: Extended abstract
The learner has no understanding, uses irrelevant information, and misses the point	The learner focuses on one relevant aspect only. He or she will be able to identify, do a procedure, recite	The learner focuses on several relevant aspects, considered independently. He or she will be able to classify, combine, and enumerate	The learner focuses on linking and integrating several parts into a coherent whole. Details are linked to the conclusion He or she will be able to relate, compare, and analyse	The learner focuses on linking beyond the information given. He or she will be able to generalise, hypothesise, and theorise

**Table 18.3** Example of a rubric for teachers in a teacher-training program for a PhD project in strength-based learning (Ledertoug, 2016)

Level	Uni-structural	Multi-structural	Relational	Extended abstract
Strengths	<p>You can identify strengths: You know the 24 VIA strengths.</p> <p>You can identify the strengths of a child using the Strength Compass by either the child's self-survey, or the teacher's survey.</p> <p>You can spot strengths in a child. You know to look for visual, auditory signs, and signals, e.g., body language, tone of voice.</p> <p>You know the list with strength questions and you know which strength questions to ask in order to spot strengths</p>	<p>You can explore strengths: You know the PhD project' strength-based learning's purpose and goals. You know of the intervention program from the PhD project, You have introduced pupils/classes for strengths, and you can tell about pros and cons in working with strengths.</p> <p>You have tested a few of the strength exercises or you have just started the intervention program</p>	<p>You can explore and inspire others on strengths: You have great knowledge about the PhD project's intervention program and you can explain to pupils, parents, and colleagues about it. You also have knowledge about other strength exercises, interventions, or programs, You have introduced pupils/classes and parents for strengths and you can tell and explain why and how you can work with strengths.</p> <p>You have tested a full intervention program in classes—either the intervention program from the PhD project or similarly</p>	<p>You can apply strengths and put them into perspective: You have a great knowledge of strengths in relation to pupils and to teachers and you are able to apply strengths both in the academic content and in the everyday life at school.</p> <p>You can apply strengths in plans for the pupil, action plans or developmental plans.</p> <p>You can apply the strengths in the yearly traditions of the school.</p> <p>You can inspire your colleagues work with strengths and find new methods and ways to develop strength-based learning</p>

them. The pre-structural level is not included in the rubrics, because this level has no understanding of the learning content. Combining the SOLO taxonomy and rubrics with twenty-first-century skills helps in organising and facilitating subjects and lessons.

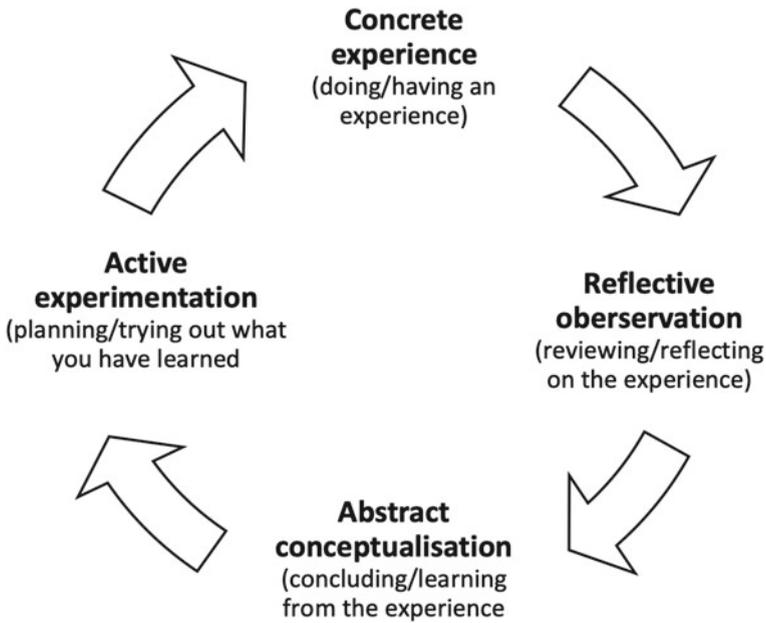
## Learning Theories

Traditional learning theories can be divided into four overarching paradigms: behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism, and constructivism. However, new paradigms are emerging, including design/brain-based learning and twenty-first-century skills. Within these paradigms, there are many different theories and methods promoting engaging education, including action learning, experiential learning, progressive education, project-based learning, abductive learning, adaptive learning, brain-based learning, involvement in learning, and co-creation-based learning (Illeris, 2006, 2015; Masethe, Masethe, & Odunaiké, 2017).

Various learning theories have established a correlation between experience and learning, claiming experiential learning leads to deeper learning and understanding (Illeris, 2015). Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration. As early as 1960, the National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, U.S. found that students who were taught using traditional teaching methods subsequently only remembered 5–10% of the new information they had encountered, while those employing methods such as learning by doing or peer learning remembered 75–90% (Sousa, 2015).

In 1984, Kolb introduced experiential learning theory, building on the work of Dewey, Levin, and Piaget on topics including experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour. According to Kolb, all learning is in fact experience-based, and the learner must demonstrate the following skills to succeed:

- Experiencing and exploring: Conduct concrete experiences by “doing”.
- Sharing and reflecting: Reflect on observations by asking: “What happened”?
- Processing, analysing, and generalising: Translating observations and experiences into abstract concepts by asking questions like: “What’s important”? “So what”?
- Applying, planning, experimenting with, and trying out new knowledge by asking: “Now what”?



**Fig. 18.2** The learning circle of experiential learning (inspired by Kolb, 1984)

Students learn by experiencing, reflecting, concluding, and applying. As illustrated in Fig. 18.2, these four steps result in a new concrete experience and the learning circle continues. Building upon this experiential learning circle, the next section introduces the 5E Model as an example of an effective, research-based instructional model aimed at promoting engaging education.

## The 5E Model

Bybee and his colleagues originally designed the 5E model for science education in the early 1980s (Bybee et al., 2006); however, the model has since been widely applied in educational settings in non-science subjects. Bybee (2009) argues that the 5E model has potential as a general model for effective teaching to develop twenty-first-century skills. The model is research-based, has strong evidence-based, and is grounded in the psychology of learning, stating that learning is an active process occurring within and influenced by the learner. The model assumes that learning is active, explorative, and fosters the transfer of knowledge and skills from one setting to another, making it possible for the student to apply the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Activities are structured so that students are able to engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate their progress. Subjects, content, and ideas

are best introduced when students see a need or a reason for their use, as this helps students understand the relevance and makes learning meaningful.

The 5E model includes five phases: engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation. As summarised in Table 18.4, each phase has a specific function and contributes to student learning. These phases together

**Table 18.4** The five phases of the 5E Model, based on Bybee (2009)

Phase	Summary
Engagement	Aims to capture the students' attention and interest by introducing a short activity to promote curiosity and elicit prior knowledge. The activity should connect between past and present learning experiences, expose prior conceptions, and direct students' thinking towards the learning outcomes of current activities
Exploration	Provides students with a common foundation of activities within which current concepts (misconceptions), processes, and skills are identified, and conceptual change is facilitated. The exploration lesson or lessons provide concrete, hands-on experiences and activities that help students use prior knowledge to generate new ideas, explore questions and possibilities, and design and conduct a preliminary investigation
Explanation	Focuses students' attention on a particular aspect of their experiences during the engagement and exploration phases and provides opportunities to demonstrate their conceptual understanding, process skills, or behaviours. The concepts, practices, and abilities with which students were originally engaged, and which they subsequently explored, are made clear and comprehensible. Academically relevant concepts are briefly and explicitly introduced and explained. A verbal explanation might be elicited from the teacher; however, other resources, such as video, the internet, or software, may also provide excellent explanations and may guide learners towards a deeper understanding
Elaboration	Teachers challenge and extend students' conceptual understandings and skills and encourage interactions with other students and with sources such as written material, databases, simulations, and web-based searches. Through new experiences and additional activities, the students develop deeper and broader understanding, gather more information, and gain relevant skills. The intention is to facilitate the transfer of concepts and abilities to new but related situations. Key to this phase is the use of activities that the students find challenging but achievable
Evaluation	Encourages students to assess their understanding and abilities and allows teachers to evaluate student progress towards achieving the intended learning outcomes. The evaluation could be formative, summative, or both

provide a framework for teachers to structure sequences of learning and to organise lessons, units, or programs.

In constructing the 5E model, Bybee and colleagues also considered the actions of the teacher (what the teacher does) and students (what the student does)—which correspond, respectively, with levels 2 and 3 in the theory of constructive alignment proposed by Biggs (2003), as highlighted in Table 18.5.

After introducing important elements of learning and the 5E model, it is essential for teachers to plan their teaching taking into consideration how to involve, engage, and activate students during the different learning phases. Together, the 5E model provides a structured approach for cultivating learning.

## Wellbeing in Education

Models of learning have arisen in education, with a greater focus on academic development rather than social and emotional development. Recent years have brought a growing emphasis on the need to focus on student wellbeing. Drawing on theory and research arising from positive psychology, we consider how the five elements in Seligman's (2011) PERMA model and character including strengths can be combined with the 5E model as a framework for engaging education activating, involving students in learning activities, and supporting student wellbeing.

### Positive Education and the PERMA Model of Wellbeing

The term *positive education* was first coined by Seligman, Ernst, Gillian, Reivich, and Linkins (2009), based on their work at Geelong Grammar School, defining positive education as education in traditional academic knowledge and skills as well as wellbeing and happiness. From this perspective, academic performance and wellbeing go hand in hand and coexist in an equal relationship. Similarly, Knoop (2016, p. 453) noted: "Education ideally is fully aligned with the Aristotelean eudemonic ideal of happiness being the joy we feel striving for our potential". Positive education is based partly on knowledge about effective and engaging teaching and learning and the best way to practice effective pedagogy, and partly on knowledge and methods derived from positive psychology and its branches, such as motivation theory, flow theory, broaden and build theory, etc.

**Table 18.5** Intersections between the 5E model and the second and third levels of Biggs' (2003) theory of constructive alignment (based on Bybee et al., 2006)

	What the teacher does	What the student does
Engagement	Creates interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generates curiosity</li> <li>• Raises questions</li> <li>• Elicits responses that reveal what the students already know or think</li> </ul>	Shows interest in the topic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks questions such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What do I already know about this?</li> <li>– What can I find out about this?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Exploration	Encourages the students to work together without direct instruction from the teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observes and listens to the students as they interact</li> <li>• Asks probing questions to redirect the students' investigations when necessary</li> <li>• Provides time for the students to puzzle their way through problems</li> <li>• Acts as a consultant to the students</li> </ul>	Thinks freely, within the limits of the activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tests predictions and hypotheses</li> <li>• Forms new predictions and hypotheses</li> <li>• Tries alternatives and discusses them with others</li> <li>• Records observations and ideas</li> <li>• Asks related questions</li> <li>• Suspends judgment</li> </ul>
Explanation	Encourages the students to explain concepts and definitions in their own words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks for justification and clarification from students</li> <li>• Formally clarifies definitions and explanations when needed</li> <li>• Uses students' previous experiences as the basis for explaining concepts</li> <li>• Assesses students' growing understanding</li> </ul>	Explains possible solutions or answers to others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens to others' explanations</li> <li>• Questions others' explanations</li> <li>• Listens to and tries to comprehend explanations that the teacher offers</li> <li>• Refers to previous activities</li> <li>• Assesses own understanding</li> </ul>
Elaboration	Expects the students to use explanations provided previously <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages the students to apply or extend the concepts and skills in new situations</li> <li>• Reminds the students of alternate explanations</li> <li>• Refers the students to existing knowledge: What do you already know? Why do you think?</li> </ul>	Applies acquired knowledge and skills in new but similar situations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses previous information to ask questions, propose solutions, make decisions, and design experiments</li> <li>• Draws reasonable conclusions</li> <li>• Checks for understanding, own and peers</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 18.5 (continued)

	What the teacher does	What the student does
Evaluation	<p>Observes the students as they apply new concepts and skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses students' knowledge and skills, formative/summative</li> <li>• Looks for evidence that the students have changed their thinking or behaviour</li> <li>• Allows students to assess their own learning and group-process skills: What do you now know about x? How would you explain x?</li> </ul>	<p>Answers open-ended questions using observations, evidence, and previously accepted explanations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates an understanding or knowledge of the concept or skill</li> <li>• Evaluates his or her own progress and knowledge</li> </ul>

There are many subjects, curricula, and programs for students that apply positive education in schools, several of which are based on Seligman's PERMA model of wellbeing (e.g., Norrish, 2015; White & Waters, 2015). According to this model, wellbeing is comprised of five elements: **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishment. Character strengths are embedded in each element. This means that bringing our strengths to bear creates positive emotions and engagement, improves our relationships, provides us with meaning, and develops our accomplishments. As the British researcher, Alex Linley puts it: "Realising our strengths is the royal road to optimal development and performance" (Linley, 2008, p. 47). Even though the elements are conceived of as independent dimensions, theoretically, the more PERMA a person has, the higher their level of wellbeing is.

## Using PERMA as a Framework for Engaging Education

While PERMA is only one of the many wellbeing models and frameworks that exist within positive education, the PERMA model provides a framework for engaging education as an implicit and explicit teaching method, which can facilitate optimal learning, engagement, and wellbeing, and reduce boredom (Holmgren et al., 2019). Across subjects and grade levels, PERMA can inform planning, conducting, and evaluating lessons. Table 18.6 highlights questions to consider for using PERMA while preparing for teaching.

When the PERMA model is used as a framework for teaching, teachers must consider which methods and tools are best suited to promoting each of

**Table 18.6** Questions to ask for preparing to create PERMA through teaching

Domain	Aim	Questions to consider
Positive emotion	Create or support positive emotions in teaching—in the classroom	How can the fostering of positive emotions be directly incorporated in the given subject? How can the fostering of positive emotions be indirectly incorporated in the given subject—in-between activities?
Engagement	Motivate and engage the students	How to promote motivation and engagement directly in the given subject? How to reduce boredom in the given subject?
Relationships	Support relations in the class	How can teacher–student relations be enhanced directly in the given subject? How can student–student relations be enhanced directly in the given subject?
Meaning	Ensure that lessons are meaningful and relevant	How can meaningfulness be increased directly in the given subject? How can relevance be increased directly in the given subject?
Accomplishment	Support students' accomplishments	How to improve the individual student's accomplishments? How to improve the accomplishments of the entire class?

the five elements. The ideal is to combine methods and tools with the best available knowledge of learning and the best available knowledge of well-being. For example, positive emotions might be fostered using “brain breaks” during lessons (Andresen & Paarup, 2015). Engagement can be increased by giving students greater autonomy during lessons in terms of task, technique, team, and timeframe (Pink, 2009). Relationships can be built and maintained by using strategies drawn from cooperative learning approaches (Johnson & Johnson, 1991, 2016; Kagan & Stenlev, 2006). Lessons can be more meaningful and relevant to students by articulating the specific big and small

reasons for the tasks that are done (Holmgren et al., 2019). Accomplishment can be improved by employing strategies for optimising self-efficacy, such as cultivating experiences of mastery, role-modelling, using verbal persuasion, visualising, and creating a tranquil learning environment (Bandura, 1993, 2012).

Importantly, while these examples provide some possibilities for supporting wellbeing, there is no one single method or tool best suited to ensuring student wellbeing, whether at individual or class-level. When focusing on the different PERMA elements, it is important to evaluate whether or not the approaches tried fit with the students. You might consider:

- To what extent did you manage to foster PERMA? What worked and what did not work?
- What would you place greater emphasis on next time? Change? Adapt?

## PERMA and Experiential Learning

Positive education purposes to combine the principles of positive psychology with best-practice educational paradigms (Norrish et al., 2013). We suggest there can be value in combining the 5E model (engaging learning) with the PERMA model (wellbeing). In this section, we highlight the relevance of the PERMA factors for learning, and illustrate how the 5Es can be integrated within each of the PERMA pillars to create engaging learning experiences.

**P for positive emotions.** Learning is affected by our emotions. They affect our motivation, concentration, and learning strategies, and they ultimately affect our learning outcomes and chances for success. As Seligman and colleagues (2009, pp. 294–295) noted: “Positive emotions produce increases in learning, the traditional goal of education”.

Pekrun and Stephens (2010) focus on achievement emotions, differentiating between outcome emotions, which are related to success and failure, and activity emotions, such as the enjoyment and boredom experienced in achievement settings. They state that emotions are central to all human achievement strivings and that these emotions can be divided into positive or negative activity emotions—with corresponding effects on learning. Even though research on positive activity emotions is scarce, initial findings suggest that performance is enhanced, while negative activity emotions inhibit performance by reducing cognitive resources and undermining motivation. There is one exception among negative activity emotions—shame. Research shows that shame can promote tenacity and perseverance, and thereby improve learning outcomes (Pekrun, 2006).

The research on positive and negative activity emotions aligns with the *broaden and build theory* and the *upward spiral theory*, both developed by Barbara Fredrickson (2009, 2013). According to Fredrickson, negative emotions result in a focused, narrow-minded, and intolerant mindset, comparable to *tunnel vision*, while positive emotions result in a broadening mindset, which can have an invigorating and lasting effect on our personal resources. Positive emotions are thought to further growth by changing the way our brain works and develop our thought and action repertoire, as well as generating and expanding our field of vision and attention, thereby affecting our working memory, verbal fluency, and openness to information (Kristjánsson, 2012). When positive emotions prevail over time, Fredrickson's theories suggest that we build helpful resources. To use an analogy, one might say that our positive emotions are deposited in a bank, where they accrue interest in the form of additional positive emotions with potential benefits such as more effective learning strategies and creative, holistic approaches that can be withdrawn at a later time as needed.

The value of positive emotions suggests that facilitating learning and engaging students in learning activities requires consistently positive emotional experiences (Meyer & Turner, 2006). Mastery within the classroom also appears to be linked to positive emotions (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Table 18.7 illustrates how positive emotions can be integrated within the 5E model as an important aspect in the development of engaging education.

**E for engagement.** Illeris (2006, p. 106) noted: “The incentive for learning comprises conditions concerning the extent of—and the character of—the mental energy invested in learning; the motivation, the emotions and the willpower the individual learner mobilizes in a learning situation”. According to self-determination theory (SDT), human beings have three psychological needs that motivate them to initiate actions and provide the essential fuel for learning, mental health, and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 1980, 1985, 2000; Sheldon, 2012):

- *Competence* refers to the need to experience mastery and a sense of control over one's own achievements (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). Competence involves understanding how to achieve different goals and results and how to perform the necessary actions (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).
- *Autonomy* refers to the need to experience volitional action and voluntary allocation of time and energy (Niemi & Ryan, 2009), and self-initiation and self-regulation of actions (Deci et al., 1991).

**Table 18.7** Integrating positive emotions across the 5E learning phases

Learning phase	Connections with positive emotions research
Engagement	Positive emotions broaden our repertoire of thought and action, as well as generating and expanding our field of vision and attention, and preparing us for learning (Fredrickson, 2009)
Exploration	Positive emotions such as love, joy, interest, inspiration, hope, awe, gratitude, serenity, pride, and amusement are possible accelerators for learning (Fredrickson, 2009)
Explanation	When positive emotions prevail, we can build resources and create upward spirals generating further positive emotions. When negative emotions prevail, it can lead to downward spirals and feelings of frustration, doubt, worry, fear, and boredom (Fredrickson, 2009)
Elaboration	By promoting good relationship in class and focusing on teachers' relationship competences, it is possible to promote high-quality interactions in the learning process. Groups that manage to communicate positively function better and are more likely to be effective (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005)
Evaluation	Formative and summative feedback using positive, constructive responses (Gable & Gonzaga, 2006) supports students' engagement

- *Relatedness* refers to the need to interact with others, to feel connected, and to experience care for and from others. It involves the development of safe and satisfying relations with others (Deci et al., 1991).

A foundation based on competence, autonomy, and relatedness promotes academic achievement and positive learning outcomes, whereas the lack of such a foundation inhibits achievement and learning (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Research has found evidence that autonomous motivation is conducive to engagement and optimal learning, deep learning, and the ability to transfer and apply learning (Deci et al., 1991). Research on SDT has shown positive results in relation to perseverance and achievement (Guay, Ratelle, & Canal, 2008). Cognitive benefits include integration of knowledge, deep understanding, and creativity, while emotional benefits include experiencing more positive emotions in the classroom and more feelings of joy and satisfaction in relation to school. Furthermore, studies find a significant correlation between SDT and flow (Kowal & Fortier, 1999). According to Csikszentmihalyi (2005, 2008), flow is the ultimate positive learning experience, where competences and challenges are matched, resulting in an intrinsic motivation for more flow experiences. The process is bidirectional—satisfying the psychological needs from SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) facilitates flow while flow facilitates intrinsic motivation (Kowal

& Fortier, 1999). Table 18.8 highlights how the concepts of motivation and potential flow experiences can be integrated in engaging learning.

**R for relationships.** Roy Baumeister and his colleague Mark Leary conducted a review of research on human needs for belonging, resulting in what they called *the belongingness hypothesis* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to this hypothesis, “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). According to Baumeister and Leary, humans are naturally driven towards building and maintaining relatedness and relationships with other people. And a few significant people will do, if the interactions are frequent and affectively pleasant. Research supports an evolutionary understanding of the need to belong as part of our biological inheritance: human beings establish relationships quite easily; they construct social rituals to secure continuity in relations, such as welcome and goodbye greetings. Evidence suggests that the need for belonging is a significant factor that forms the individual’s thoughts, and that the presence of or potential for relationships of belonging affects the way human

**Table 18.8** Integrating engagement across the 5E learning phases

Learning phase	Connections with engagement research
Engagement	Filling the need for autonomy boosts student engagement (Deci et al., 1991). Pink (2009) suggested the four Ts as a method to increase autonomy. Offer students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of task</li> <li>• Choice of technique</li> <li>• Choice of team</li> <li>• Choice of timeframe</li> </ul>
Exploration	Focus on students’ competences, their mastery experiences, and their sense of control over their own results (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), thereby developing their understanding of how to achieve different goals and results and how to perform the necessary actions (Deci et al., 1991)
Explanation	When explaining subjects or themes to students, take care to ensure a match between students’ competences and challenges in order to promote flow experiences. When the challenges are too great, it causes stress and anxiety among students, while challenges that are too easy result in boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, 2008)
Elaboration	The need for relatedness emphasises the importance of social connection. Promote relatedness within the class via peer learning and group work
Evaluation	The flow zone optimises learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, 2008). Using flow charts to establish optimal learning experiences is a possible way to evaluate lessons

beings think (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Studies find that feelings of happiness are strongly correlated with close personal relationships; being accepted, included, and welcomed causes positive emotions, while being rejected, excluded, or ignored causes negative emotions. Positive relationships have positive effects on our health and wellbeing, while a lack of positive relations has potentially severe pathological consequences (Umberson & Montez, 2011).

With such a strong need to belong, the ways in which we connect and the quality of our connections become a critical aspect of wellbeing. Jane Dutton and her colleagues, John Paul Stephens and Emily Heaphy (2003, 2012) have focused their research on what they term *high quality connections* (HQCs), denoting shorter term moments within the context of ongoing relationships or even with strangers. An HQC is a connection that includes feelings of vitality, positive regard, and mutuality. Evidence suggests that HQCs improve our overall functioning by affecting cognitive, physiological, and behavioural processes (Dutton et al., 2012). Each mechanism includes three elements:

- *Cognitive*: other-awareness (orientation towards others and a willingness to interact), impression-formation (the impressions we form about another person shape the development of the connection), and perspective-taking (the ability to mentally represent the other person).
- *Emotional*: positive emotions (emotions that broaden our thinking and help us build durable social resources), emotional contagion (emotions that influence the interaction between people), and empathy (the ability to experience other people's feelings).
- *Behavioural*: respect (showing respect to others), task-enabling (helping others perform a task), and playing (engaging with others).

Building upon the need for belonging and HQCs, Table 18.9 illustrates how positive relationships can be embedded within engaging learning.

**M for meaning.** Meaning and purpose are often used interchangeably, but according to Steger (2012), meaning contains two dimensions: comprehension—to make sense of and understand one's life—and purpose—to have long-term aspirations. King, Heintzelman, and Ward (2016) argue that there are three central components in a meaningful life: purpose, significance, and coherence. Purpose refers to having goals in life, significance refers to a life of value or importance, and coherence refers to an individual's everyday sense-making routines. Baumeister and colleagues define meaning as “a cognitive and an emotional sense of purpose and value” (p. 506).

**Table 18.9** Integrating relationships across the 5E learning phases

Learning phase	Connections with relationships research
Engagement	Emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions to their school, teachers, and schoolmates (Goodenow, 1993). Positive emotions fuel positive resonance between people (Fredrickson, 2013, 2014) affecting the emotional engagement in interactions
Exploration	A sense of belonging in class and in groups makes it safe to start explorations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
Explanation	HQCs between teachers and students can be supported by focusing on the cognitive element other-awareness and the behavioural elements respect and task-enabling (Dutton et al., 2003, 2012)
Elaboration	HQCs between students can be supported by focusing on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements to promote relations (Dutton et al., 2003, 2012)
Evaluation	Formative or summative evaluations should be based on respect for the student and for the work performed by the student (Dutton et al., 2003, 2012)

An important aspect of a meaningful life is social relationships and the feelings of relatedness, belonging, support, and closeness to others (King et al., 2016). When we experience meaning, we feel part of, or connected to, something bigger than ourselves (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and we are inclined to contribute in a positive way to communities and the lives of others (Fredrickson, 2013). Meaning is anchored in our culture and, when we are asked to communicate this culture, language is paramount. What is meaningful for the individual may be part of a greater meaning, applicable to the culture we live in. Meaning is an experience and hence subjective; it is a cognitive and emotional construction. As such, meaning is constructed on the basis of our thoughts and feelings (Ravn, 2008).

According to Isaksen (2000), we can understand the concept of meaning on four levels:

- A cosmic level: What is the meaning of life?
- A subjective level: What is the meaning of my life?
- A local level: What is the meaning of attending school, going to a club, being part of a family, or some other local context?
- A situational level: What is the meaning of this particular situation or activity?

In our everyday lives, we primarily focus on the situational level. We find meaning in the situation by interpreting the social and linguistic context and

the narratives and negotiations taking place therein. We experience that a phenomenon makes sense when it is part of a larger whole or connection (Ravn, 2008).

Isaksen's four levels of meaning may also be understood as representing either the *small meaning* (the local and situational levels) or the *big meaning* (the subjective and cosmic levels) (Tange, 2017). The small meaning involves grasping all the everyday situations that we constantly interpret in an attempt to understand our experiences. Every day, we construct hundreds of meanings in relation to the small meaning—but the small meaning is in constant interaction with the big meaning and at the same time, the big meaning becomes the reference framework in which the small meaning is created. King et al. (2016) argue that the “strongest predictor of a day's being considered meaningful is the amount of positive mood experienced that day” (p. 213). Table 18.10 illustrates how the concepts of understanding, purpose, and small and big meaning can be integrated with the 5E model.

**A for accomplishment.** Vergil, the Roman poet, noted: “They can conquer who believe they can”. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his or her own abilities and expectations of performing successfully and influencing events that affect his or her life (Bandura, 1993, 2012). Having self-efficacy means that you have positive expectations and faith in your ability to manage the challenges and tasks you face. You view your chances of success in completing a given assignment in a positive light. Your self-efficacy affects your thoughts and emotions and, in turn, influence your motivation, behaviours, and actions. If someone has high self-efficacy, he or she will approach tasks as challenges and take pains to complete them successfully, which may lead to a high level of ambition and achievement. Conversely, someone with low self-efficacy will doubt his or her own abilities—sometimes unnecessarily—and will typically try to avoid difficult tasks and challenges,

**Table 18.10** Integrating meaning across the 5E learning phases

Learning phase	Connections with meaning research
Engagement	Be clear on the purpose, helping to ignite a positive mood among students (King et al., 2016; Steger, 2012)
Exploration	Promote students' social relationships and their feelings of relatedness, belonging, support, and closeness to others in pairs, groups, or class (King et al., 2016)
Explanation	Expand the understanding of the content (Steger, 2012)
Elaboration	Investigate the different levels of meaning: small meaning—big meaning (Isaksen, 2000)
Evaluation	Evaluate the level of comprehension of the content and goal attainment (Steger, 2012)

which may lead to a low level of ambition and less achievement. Those with low self-efficacy are apt to give up whenever encountering opposition.

Bandura concludes in his research that there are four ways of changing a person's self-efficacy:

- Mastery experiences—performing a task successfully.
- Vicarious experiences—role-modelling success by others.
- Verbal persuasion—being encouraged by someone.
- Emotional and physiological states—learning how to minimise stress and elevate mood.

The most efficient way to stimulate higher self-efficacy is through experiences of educational achievement, resulting in the development of a sense of mastery. If a student has once tried and succeeded with a given task or activity, it inspires the courage to repeat the action that led to the success. However, it is important to note that such successes must not be too easy; success can backfire and negatively impact self-efficacy if the student expects a quick and positive outcome every time. Vicarious experiences through the use of role models to show students what can be accomplished are another source of higher self-efficacy. By observing others who succeed with a task or activity, students may be inspired to believe that they can follow suit. The choice of role model is paramount. A superstar or an icon within the given field may be so far removed from attainable success that a quantum leap would be required to reach such a level. A more suitable role model is someone only one or two steps above the student's current level of understanding or skill; it must be a realistic learning goal that can be achieved through a concerted effort. Persuasion, praise and encouragement are provided verbally to show the way and help the other person to believe that he or she may succeed. A positive frame of mind strengthens perceptions of self-efficacy, whereas a negative frame of mind reduces it. For example, stress reactions and physical tension signal that a possible defeat may be lurking ahead and create a negative frame of mind. Reducing stress and experiencing positive emotions can help create a positive frame of mind. When our expectations are positive, we have greater incentive to perform an action, and once this incentive is present, a behaviour is established that can lead to a mastery experience (Bandura, 2012; Manger, 2009). The more successful the outcome of a learning experience, the higher the level of self-efficacy among students, which can then be used to motivate new actions.

Phan, Ngu, and Williams (2016) and Phan and Bing (2017) introduced the concepts of *optimisation*, *realistic best*, and *optimal best* in relation to

**Table 18.11** Integrating accomplishment across the 5E learning phases

Learning phase	Connections with accomplishment research
Engagement	By increasing students' level of self-efficacy, it is possible to increase their willingness to engage (Bandura, 1993, 2012)
Exploration	Use self-efficacy strategies in the form of possibilities for mastery experiences, the use of role models, verbal persuasion, and a classroom promoting positive emotional and physiological states to support student accomplishment (Bandura, 1993, 2012)
Explanation	Encourage students to realise their realistic best achievement by setting learning goals appropriate to their current competence levels (Phan & Bing, 2017; Phan et al., 2016)
Elaboration	Support students in their pursuit of their optimal best achievement by focusing on motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy (Phan & Bing, 2017; Phan et al., 2016)
Evaluation	Evaluating students' mastery experiences and identifying ways to move from realistic best achievement to optimal best achievement (Bandura, 1993, 2012; Phan & Bing, 2017; Phan et al., 2016)

accomplishment and achievement. Optimisation is the process of facilitating and maximising a person's capabilities to their fullest potential and involves both a realistic best and an optimal best achievement. The intensity of optimisation relies on the extent and amount of resources needed, while the volume of optimisation relies on the effort and time needed to reach optimal functioning. The realistic best achievement—whether academic or non-academic—refers to the best that can be achieved in relation to a person's actual competences at a given time, while optimal best achievement refers to a person's quest to achieve full mastery of a given competence at a given time and involves intrinsic motivation. Realistic best and optimal best are based on a person's prior knowledge and experiences. To reach the optimal best accomplishment and achievement requires motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy.

Table 18.11 illustrates how improving self-efficacy and the concepts of realistic and optimal best achievement can be integrated with the 5E model.

## An Example of Engaging Education

To bring this to life, Table 18.12 provides an example of this integration of the 5E learning phases and the PERMA framework. First, an example using the 5E model is provided, with the focus on academic skills. Then,

**Table 18.12** An example of engaging education that supports both academic skills and wellbeing through a Year 8 maths lesson

Phases	5E	PERMA
Engagement	<p>Caspar started the session with a few questions for the class. Please raise your hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many of you have heard of Pythagoras?</li> <li>• How many of you know about different kinds of triangles?</li> <li>• How many of you know how to calculate triangles?</li> </ul> <p>Then he encouraged the students to give examples of the use of triangles in everyday life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are they found?</li> <li>• What are they used for?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Positive emotion:</b> Caspar entered 8B's classroom with a big smile. He accessed the smartboard and <b>funky music</b> started playing as usual, allowing the students time to get settled at their desks ready for class and as a common signal for all students that the maths lesson had begun. He turned off the music, <b>smiled, and greeted</b> the students, <b>promoting positive emotions</b>. He started the session with a few 'how many of you' questions, <b>activating and involving the students</b> and setting the stage for today's content. The class was now ready for a 90-minute maths lesson on Pythagoras' theorem</p>
Exploration	<p>The students were placed in groups of four. Each group had to find/draw/cut out triangles in all kinds of shapes and sizes and to try to calculate if Pythagoras' theorem could be applied to these triangles</p>	<p><b>Engagement:</b> Allowing the students <b>autonomy</b> to choose a method—if they wanted to explore the school and find triangular-shaped objects, if they wanted to draw triangles on paper/computer or if they wanted to cut out paper triangles. Making students work in groups in order to stress <b>relatedness</b> and making sure the necessary <b>competences</b> for accomplishing the task existed in each group</p> <p><b>Relationships:</b> By working in groups, the students <b>create HQCs and build and maintain positive social relationships</b></p>

(continued)

Table 18.12 (continued)

Phases	5E	PERMA
Explanation	<p>Caspar turned on the smartboard and showed the following YouTube clip to the students: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YompsDIEdtc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YompsDIEdtc</a></p> <p>Caspar asked the students to turn to a partner and explain their understanding of what they had just seen and why Pythagoras' theorem is important, as well as to listen to their partner's explanation</p> <p>Afterwards, a brief class discussion took place</p>	<p><b>Meaning:</b> The academic content is explained in a brief animated video to promote <b>understanding</b>. Afterwards, the understanding is further clarified as students in pairs share their ideas and elaborate on the <b>purpose</b> of the content</p>
Elaboration	<p>Caspar told the students to continue working in the same groups, creating videos using their smartphones or tablets explaining Pythagoras' theorem with the help of their collection of triangles</p>	<p><b>Relationship:</b> By working in groups, the students <b>create HQCs and build and maintain positive social relationships</b></p> <p><b>Engagement:</b> Students are given space for <b>autonomy, competence, and relatedness</b></p> <p>If competences match challenges during group work, it can even <b>promote team flow</b></p>
Evaluation	<p>Each group showed their video on the smartboard. The groups demonstrated six different ways of solving the task and explaining Pythagoras' theorem and created learning in many different ways. Caspar gave feedback to the groups, wrapped up the lesson, and identified the visible learning outcome</p>	<p><b>Accomplishment:</b> All groups <b>accomplished the maths task</b> and had a chance to fully explore and understand Pythagoras' theorem. They all received <b>constructive feedback</b>. At the end of the lesson, they talked about where and how to use their new knowledge and experiences</p>

an alternative approach that uses the PERMA pillars illustrates a dual focus on students' achievement of academic skills *and* their wellbeing, creating an engaging maths lesson in a Year 8 class.

## Conclusion

Combining an engaging learning model with an engaging wellbeing theory provides a strong foundation for creating engaging education for twenty-first-century learners. However, it is extremely important that consideration also be given to how to prepare teachers for the task of creating engaging education. Even today, students report that teachers talk for more than 80% of lesson time, leaving their students passive and bored (UPRIGHT, 2019). Changing teachers' approach to engaging education requires changes in the education and training of teachers.

Implementing a positive education approach in schools that acknowledges academic skills and wellbeing as equally important calls for a whole-school approach involving student, teachers, school managers, other school personnel, and parents. Furthermore, policies and regulations are needed at a wider societal and political level in order to make room for and prioritise academic, personal, and social knowledge and skills within an engaging education to fulfil the requirements for twenty-first-century learning.

There are several learning paradigms and many learning theories and methods offering varying degrees of engaging learning. The 5E model provides a framework for engaging education that activates students and involves them in an explorative learning process by letting them do most of the talking and most of the work. This approach stands in contrast to more traditional teaching where the majority of the lesson consists of teacher instruction. But the 5E model focuses on academic knowledge. Engaging education is about much more than academic knowledge and skills—it also concerns the wellbeing of the student while learning and while at school. Positive education—and specifically the PERMA model provides an opportunity to expand the teaching methods of the 5E to also support student wellbeing and flourishing. In combination with the 5E model, the PERMA framework has the potential to create engaging education for all students, regardless of age and subject.

According to Bal, Bakker, and Kallenberg (2006) engagement in education is important because of its contagiousness: an enthusiastic teacher passes it on to the students, and an engaged student passes it on to his or her peers in a reciprocal or circular process. So let us get it started.

## References

- Andresen, S. R., & Paarup, N. (2015). *Samarbejdsøvelser. Trivsel og sociale kompetencer*. Virum, Denmark: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag.
- Bal, P. M., Bakker, A. B., & Kallenberg, T. (2006). Bevlogen voor de klas. *VELON Tijdschrift voor lerarenopleiders*, 27(1), 19–22.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 28(2), 117–148.
- Bandura, A. (2012). Self-efficacy. *Kognition & Pædagogik*, 22, 16–35.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>.
- Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(6), 505–516.
- Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university. What the student does*. Open University Press.
- Biggs, J. B., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university - What the student does*. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Bybee, R. W. (2009). *The BSCS 5E instructional model and 21st century skills*. Colorado Springs, CO, USA: The National Academies Board on Science Education.
- Bybee, R. W., Taylor, J. A., Gardner, A., Scotter, P. V., Powell, J. C., Westbrook, A., & Landes, N. (2006). *The BSCS 5E Instructional Model: Origins and Effectiveness*. Colorado Springs, CO, USA: Office of Science Education. National Institutes of Health.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2005). *Flow: Optimaloplevelsens psykologi* (1 udgave ed.). Virum, Denmark: Dansk psykologisk Forlag.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). *Selvets udvikling: Evolution, flow og det gode samfund* (1 udgave ed.). Virum, Denmark: Dansk psykologisk Forlag.
- Deci, E. (1980). *The psychology of self-determination*. Lexington, USA: Heath.
- Deci, E., Vallerand, R., Pelletier, L., & Ryan, R. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3), 325–346. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2603&4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2603&4_6).
- Department of Labour. (1991). *What work requires of schools: A scans report for America 2000 (1991)*. Washington, DC, USA: Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills.
- Dewey, J. (1947). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan Publisher.
- Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. D. (2003). The power of high-quality connections. In K. Cameron & J. Dutton (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 262–278). Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

- Dutton, J., Stephens, J. P., & Heaphy, E. (2012). High-quality connections. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 385–399). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Fadel, C., Bialik, M., & Trilling, B. (2017). *Four-dimensional education: The competencies learners need to succeed*. Scotts Valley, CA, USA: Createspace.
- Fredericks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109.
- Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity: Top-notch research reveals the 3-to-1 ratio that will change your life*. New York, NY, USA: Three Rivers Press.
- Fredrickson, B. (2013). *Love 2.0: Finding happiness and health in moments of connection*. London, UK: Hudson Street Press.
- Fredrickson, B. (2014). *The science of love*. *AEON Online Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://aeon.co/magazine/oceanic-feeling/barbara-fredrickson-biology-of-love/>.
- Fredrickson, B., & Losada, M. F. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist*, 60(7), 678–686. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678>.
- Fullan, M. (2013). *Stratosphere: Integrating technology, pedagogy and change knowledge*. North York: Pearsen.
- Fullan, M. & Scott, G. (2014). Education Plus. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Whitepaper. *Collaborative Impact SPC*, Seattle, Washington, USA.
- Gable, S. L., & Gonzaga, G. C. (2006). Will you be there for me when things go right? Supportive responses to positive event disclosures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(5), 904–917.
- Gibson, K. M. (2017). *Rubrics: Undervisning med forståelse som mål*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Mindspace.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationship to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13, 21–43.
- Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., & Chanal, J. (2008). Optimal learning in optimal contexts: The role of self-determination in education. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 49(3), 233–240. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012758>.
- Holmgren, N., Ledertoug, M. M., Paarup, N., & Tidmand, L. (2019). *The battle against boredom in schools*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Strength Academy.
- Illeris, K. (2006). *Læring*. Roskilde, Denmark: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.
- Illeris, K. (2015). *Læring* (3rd udgave). København, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.
- Isaksen, J. (2000). *Ensidigt gentaget arbejde og psykisk trivsel?* (PhD dissertation). Institute for Psychology, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Jenkins, L. (2019) How to create a perfect school: Maintain students' love of learning from kindergarten through 12th grade. LtoJ Press, Scottsdale, Arizona, USA
- Johnson, R. T., & Johnson, D. (1991). *Learning together and alone: cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning*. Boston, MA, USA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Johnson, R. T., & Johnson, D. (2016). *The teacher's sourcebook for cooperative learning: Practical techniques, basic principles and frequently asked questions* (Reissue ed.). Skyhorse.
- Kagan, S., & Stenlev, J. (2006). *Cooperative learning*. Denmark: Alinea.
- King, L. A., Heintzelman, S. J., & Ward, S. J. (2016). Beyond the search for meaning: A contemporary science of the experience of meaning in life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25(4), 211–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721416656354>.
- Knoop, H. (2016). The eudemonics of education. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), *Handbook of eudaimonic well-being*. Switzerland: Springer.
- Knoop, H., Holstein, B. E., Viskum, H., & Lindskov, J. (2016). *Fra kedsomhed til trivsel i skolen: Teori og data fra den nationale trivselsmåling*. Randers: DCUM.
- Kowal, J., & Fortier, M. S. (1999). Motivational determinants of flow: Contributions from self-determination theory. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 139(3), 355–368.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2012). Positive psychology and positive education: Old wine in new bottles? *Educational Psychologist*, 47(2), 86–105.
- Larson, R. W., & Richards, M. H. (1991). Boredom in the middle school years: Blaming schools versus blaming students. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 418–443.
- Ledertoug, M. M. (2016). *Strength-based learning. Character strengths as a means to the learning potential*. PhD-thesis. Aarhus University, Denmark.
- Linley, A. (2008). *Average to A + : Realising strengths in yourself and others*. Coventry: CAPP Press.
- Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Achievement goal theory and affect: An asymmetrical bidirectional model. *Educational Psychologist*, 37, 69–78.
- Manger, T. (2009). *Det ved vi om motivation og mestring*. Frederikshavn, Denmark: Dafolo.
- Masethe, A. M., Masethe, D. H., & Odunaike, S. A. (2017, October). *Scoping review of learning theories in the 21st century*. Proceedings of the World Congress on Engineering and Computer Science, San Francisco, USA.
- Meyer, D. K., & Turner, J. C. (2006). Re-conceptualizing emotion and motivation to learn in classroom contexts. *Educational Psychology Review*, 18, 377–390.
- National Research Council. (1984). *High schools and the changing workplace: The employers' view*. Washington, DC, USA: The National Academies Press.
- Nett, U. E., Goetz, T., & Hall, N. C. (2011). Coping with boredom in school: An experience sampling perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 36(1), 49–59.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 133–144.
- Norrish, J. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong Grammar School journey*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Norrish, J., Williams, P., O' Connor, M. & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of wellbeing*, 3(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijwv3.2.2>.
- OECD. (2006). *Education at a glance. Highlights*. Paris, France: Directorate for Education and Skills—OECD.
- OECD. (2017). *Education at a glance. Highlights*. Paris, France: Directorate for Education and Skills—OECD.
- OECD. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030*. Paris, France: Directorate for Education and Skills—OECD.
- Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review*, 18, 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-006-9029-9>.
- Pekrun, R., & Stephens, E. J. (2010). Achievement emotions: A control-value approach. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(4), 238–255. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00259>.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook of classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Phan, H. P., & Bing, H. N. (2017). Positive psychology: The use of the framework of achievement bests to facilitate personal flourishing quality of life and quality of working life. *IntechOpen*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.68873>.
- Phan, H. P., Bing, H. N., & Williams, A. (2016). Introducing the concept of optimal best: Theoretical and methodological contributions. *Journal of Education*, 136(3), 312–322.
- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. Edinburgh, GB: Canongate Books.
- Ravn, I. (2008). Mening i arbejdslivet. Definition og konceptualisering. *Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv*, 10(4), 59–75.
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour*. New York, USA: Plenum.
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY, USA: Free Press.
- Seligman, M., Ernst, R. M., Gillian, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293–311.
- Sheldon, K. (2012). *Motivation*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Mindspace.
- Sousa, D. (2015). *How the brain learns mathematics*. London, UK: Corwin.
- Steger, M. F. (2012). Making meaning in life. *Psychological Inquiry*, 23(4), 381–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2012.720832>.

- Tange, N. (2017). Mening - en vej til robusthed? In F. Ø. Andersen & M. Mygind (Eds.), *Robusthed i praksis – Individuelt og kollektivt* (pp. 117–139). Copenhagen, Denmark: Mindspace.
- Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. (1983). *Action for excellence*. Denver, CO, USA: Education Commission of the States.
- Trowler, V. (2010). *Student engagement literature review*. Lancaster University. Retrieved from [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview\\_1.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview_1.pdf).
- Umberson, D., & Montez, J. K. (2011). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *51*, S54–S66.
- UPRIGHT. (2019). [www.Uprightproject.eu](http://www.Uprightproject.eu). unpublished data.
- White, M. A., & Waters, L. E. (2015). A case study of ‘The Good School’: Examples of the use of Peterson’s strength-based approach with students. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *10*(1), 69–76.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 19

## Creative Learning in Education

Ronald A. Beghetto

Although schools and classrooms have sometimes been characterized as contexts that suppress or even kill student creativity (Robinson, 2006), educational settings hold much promise for supporting students' creative learning. Prior research has, for instance, indicated that there is on an average positive relationship ( $r = .22$ ) between measures of creativity and academic achievement (Gajda, Karwowski, & Beghetto, 2016). This association tends to grow when measures are more fine-tuned to assess creativity and academic learning in specific subject areas (Karwowski et al., 2020). These findings suggest that under the right conditions, creativity and learning can be complementary.

Indeed, creativity researchers have long asserted that creativity and learning are tightly coupled phenomena (Guilford, 1950, 1967; Sawyer, 2012). Moreover, recent theoretical and empirical work has helped to clarify the construct and process of *creative learning* (Beghetto, 2020; Beghetto & Schuh, 2020; Gajda, Beghetto, & Karwowski, 2017). Creative learning in schools represents a specific form of learning that involves creative expression in the context of academic learning. More specifically, creative learning involves a "combination of intrapsychological and interpsychological processes that result in new and personally meaningful understandings for oneself and others" (Beghetto, p. 9).

Within the context of schools and classrooms, the process of creative learning can range from smaller scale contributions to one's own and others'

---

R. A. Beghetto (✉)

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA  
e-mail: [ronald.beghetto@asu.edu](mailto:ronald.beghetto@asu.edu)

learning (e.g., a student sharing a unique way of thinking about a math problem) to larger scale and lasting contributions that benefit the learning and lives of people in and beyond the walls of the classroom (e.g., a group of students develop and implement a creative solution for addressing social isolation in the lunchroom). In this way, efforts aimed at supporting creative learning represents a generative form of positive education because it serves as a vehicle for students to contribute to their own and others learning, life, and wellbeing (White & Kern, 2018). The question then is not whether creative learning can occur in schools, but rather what are the key factors that seem to support creative learning in schools and classrooms? The purpose of this chapter is to address this question.

## What's Creative About Creative Learning?

Prior to exploring how creative learning can be supported in schools and classrooms, it is important to first address the question of what is creative about creative learning? *Creative learning* pertains to the development of new and meaningful contributions to one's own and others' learning and lives. This conception of creative learning adheres to standard definitions of creativity (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004; Runco & Jaeger, 2012), which includes two basic criteria: it must be *original* (new, different, or unique) as defined within a particular context or situation, and it must be *useful* (meaningful, effectively meets task constraints, or adequately solves the problem at hand). In this way, creativity represents a form of constrained originality. This is particularly good news for educators, as supporting creative learning is not about removing all constraints, but rather it is about supporting students in coming up with new and different ways of meeting academic criteria and learning goals (Beghetto, 2019a, 2019b).

For example, consider a student taking a biology exam. One question on the exam asks students to draw a plant cell and label its most important parts. If the student responds by drawing a picture of a flower behind the bars of a jail cell and labels the iron bars, lack of windows, and incarcerated plant,<sup>1</sup> then it could be said that the student has offered an original or even humorous response, but not a creative one. In order for a response to be considered creative, it needs to be both original and meaningfully meet the task constraints. If the goal was to provide a funny response to the prompt, then perhaps it could be considered a creative response. But in this case, the

---

<sup>1</sup>This example is based on a popular internet meme of a humorous drawing in response to this question.

task requires students to meet the task constraints by providing a scientifically accurate depiction of a plant cell. Learning tasks such as this offer little room for creative expression, because the goal is often to determine whether students can accurately reproduce what has been taught.

Conversely, consider a biology teacher who invites students to identify their own scientific question or problem, which is unique and interesting to them. The teacher then asks them to design an inquiry-based project aimed at addressing the question or problem. Next, the teacher invites students to share their questions and project designs with each other. Although some of the questions students identify may have existing answers in the scientific literature, this type of task provides the openings necessary for creative learning to occur in the classroom. This is because students have an opportunity to identify their own questions to address, develop their own understanding of new and different ways of addressing those questions, *and* share and receive feedback on their unique ideas and insights. Providing students with semi-structured learning experiences that requires them to meet learning goals in new and different ways helps to ensure that students are developing personally and academically meaningful understandings and also provides them with an opportunity to potentially contribute to the understanding of their peers and teachers (see Ball, 1993; Beghetto, 2018b; Gajda et al., 2017; Niu & Zhou, 2017 for additional examples).

Creative learning can also extend beyond the walls of the classroom. When students have the opportunity and support to identify their own problems to solve and their own ways of solving them, they can make positive and lasting contributions in their schools, communities, and beyond. Legacy projects represent an example of such efforts. Legacy projects refer to creative learning endeavours that provide students with opportunities to engage with uncertainty and attempt to develop sustainable solutions to complex and ill-defined problems (Beghetto, 2017c, 2018b). Such projects involve a blend between learning and creative expression with the aim of making a creative contribution. A group of fourth graders who learned about an endangered freshwater shrimp and then worked to restore the habitat by launching a project that spanned across multiple years and multiple networks of teachers, students, and external partners is an example of a legacy project (see Stone & Barlow, 2010).

As these examples illustrate, supporting creative learning is not simply about encouraging original student expression, but rather involves providing openings for students to meet academic learning constraints in new and different ways, which can benefit their own, their peers', and even their teachers' learning. Creative learning can also extend beyond the classroom

and enable students to make a lasting and positive contribution to schools, communities, and beyond. In this way, the process of creative learning includes both intra-psychological (individual) and inter-psychological (social) aspects (Beghetto, 2016).

At the individual level, creative learning occurs when students encounter and engage with novel learning stimuli (e.g., a new concept, a new skill, a new idea, an ill-defined problem) and attempt to make sense of it in light of their own prior understanding (Beghetto & Schuh, 2020). Creative learning at the individual level involves a creative combinatorial process (Rothenberg, 2015), whereby new and personally meaningful understanding results from blending what is previously known with newly encountered learning stimuli. Creativity researchers have described this form of creativity as *personal* (Runco, 1996), *subjective* (Stein, 1953), or *mini-c* creativity<sup>2</sup> (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). This view of knowledge development also aligns with how some constructivist and cognitive learning theorists have conceptualized the process of learning (e.g., Alexander, Schallert, & Reynolds, 2009; Piaget, 1973; Schuh, 2017; Von Glasersfeld, 2013).

If students are able to develop a new and personally meaningful understanding, then it can be said that they have engaged in creative learning at the individual level. Of course, not all encounters with learning stimuli will result in creative learning. If learning stimuli are too discrepant or difficult, then students likely will not be able to make sense of the stimuli. Also, if students are able to accurately reproduce concepts or solve challenging tasks or problems using memorized algorithms (Beghetto & Plucker, 2006) without developing personally meaningful understanding of those concepts or algorithms, then they can be said to have successfully memorized concepts and techniques, but not to have engaged in creative learning. Similarly, if a student has already developed an understanding of some concept or idea and encounters it again, then they will be reinforcing their understanding, rather than developing a new or understanding (Von Glasersfeld, 2013). Consequently, in order for creative learning to occur at the individual level, students need to encounter optimally novel learning experiences and stimuli, such that they can make sense of those stimuli in light of their own prior learning trajectories (Beghetto & Schuh, in press; Schuh, 2017).

---

<sup>2</sup>Creativity researchers recognize that there are different levels of creative magnitude (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), which ranges from subjectively experienced creativity (*mini-c*) to externally recognized creativity at the everyday or classroom level (*little-c*), the professional or expert level (*Pro-c*), and even legendary contributions that stand the test of time (*Big-C*).

Creative learning can also extend beyond individual knowledge development. At the inter-psychological (or social) level, students have an opportunity to share and refine their conceptions with teachers and peers, making a creative contribution to the learning and lives of others (Beghetto, 2016). For instance, as apparent in the legacy projects, it is possible for students to make creative contributions beyond the walls of the classroom, which occasionally can be recognized by experts as a significant contribution. Student inventors, authors, content creators, and members of community-based problem solving teams are further examples of the inter-psychological level of creative contribution.

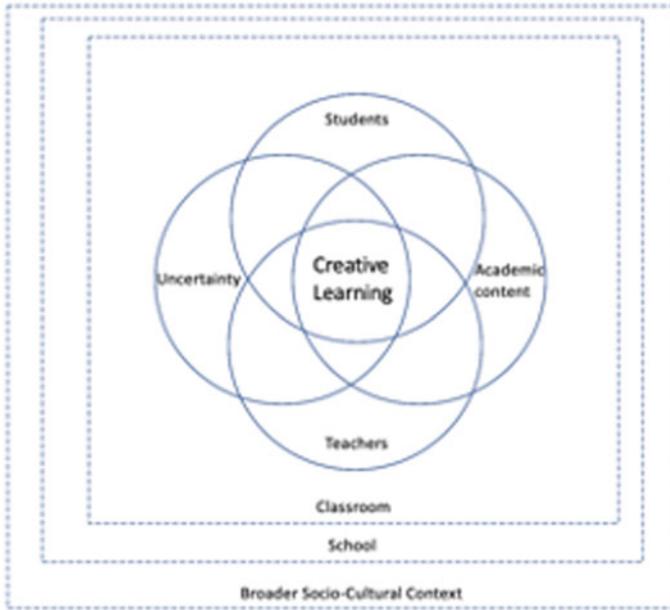
In sum, creative learning is a form of creative expression, which is constrained by an academic focus. It is also a special case of academic learning, because it focuses on going beyond reproductive and reinforcement learning and includes the key creative characteristics (Beghetto, 2020; Rothenberg, 2015; Sawyer, 2012) of being both *combinatorial* (combining existing knowledge with new learning stimuli) and *emergent* (contributing new and sometimes surprising ideas, insights, perspectives, and understandings to oneself and others).

## Locating Creative Learning in Schools and Classrooms

Having now explored the question of what makes creative learning creative, we can now turn our attention to locating the factors and conditions that can help support creative learning in schools and classrooms. As illustrated in Fig. 19.1, there are at least four interrelated components posited as being necessary for creative learning to occur in schools, classrooms, and beyond: students, teachers, academic subject matter, and uncertainty. Creative learning in schools and classrooms occurs at the intersection of these four factors. Further, the classroom, school, and broader sociocultural contexts play an important role in determining whether and how creative learning will be supported and expressed. Each of these factors will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### The Role of Students in Creative Learning

Students, of course, play a central role in creative learning. At the individual level, students' idiosyncratic learning histories will influence the kinds of creative insights, ideas, and interpretations they have when engaging with



**Fig. 19.1** Factors involved in creative learning in schools, classrooms, and beyond

new learning stimuli (Beghetto & Schuh, 2020; Schuh, 2017). Although a case can be made that subjective and personally meaningful creative insights and experiences are sufficient ends in themselves (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Runco, 1996; Stein, 1953), creative learning tends to be situated in well-developed subject areas. Moreover, the goals of most formal educational activities, such as those that occur in schools and classrooms, include making sure that students have developed an accurate or at least a compatible understanding of existing concepts, ideas, and skills (Von Glasersfeld, 2003). Consequently, creative learning in schools—even at the individual level—involves providing students with opportunities to test out and receive feedback on their personal understandings and insights to ensure that what they have learned fits within the broader academic subject area. When this occurs, creative learning at the individual level represents a blend of idiosyncratic and generally agreed upon academic knowledge.

Notably, the idiosyncratic portion of this blend is not merely surplus ideas or insights, but rather has the potential to creatively contribute to the learning and understanding of others. Indeed, the full expression of creative learning extends beyond the individual and also has the opportunity to contribute to the learning and lives of others. At both the individual and social level of

creative learning, students' need to be willing to share, test, and receive feedback on their conceptions, otherwise the full expression of creative learning will be short-circuited. Thus, an important question, at the student level, is what factors might influence students' willingness to share their ideas with others?

Creativity researchers have identified at least three interrelated student factors that seem to play a role in determining students' willingness to share their conceptions with others: *creative confidence*, *valuing creativity*, and *intellectual risk-taking*. Creative confidence beliefs refer to a somewhat broad category of creative self-beliefs that pertain to one's confidence in the ability to think and act creatively (Beghetto & Karwowski, 2017). Creative confidence beliefs can range from more situationally and domain-specific beliefs (e.g., I am confident I can creatively solve this particular problem in this particular situation) to more general and global confidence beliefs (e.g., I am confident in my creative ability). Much like other confidence beliefs (Bandura, 2012), creative confidence beliefs are likely influenced by a variety of personal (e.g., physiological state), social (e.g., who is present, whether people are being supportive), and situational (e.g., specific nature of the task, including constraints like time and materials) factors. Recent research has indicated that creative confidence beliefs mediate the link between creative potential and creative behaviour (Beghetto, Karwowski, Reiter-Palmon, 2020; Karwowski & Beghetto, 2019).

In the context of creative learning, this line of work suggests that students need to be confident in their own ideas prior to being willing to share those ideas with others and test out their mini-c ideas. However, valuing creativity and the willingness to take creative risks also appear to play key roles. Valuing creativity refers to whether students view creativity as an important part of their identity and whether they view creative thought and activity as worthwhile endeavours (Karwowski, Lebuda, & Beghetto, 2019). Research has indicated that valuing creativity moderates the mediational relationship between creative confidence and creative behaviour (Karwowski & Beghetto, 2019).

The same can be said for intellectual risk-taking, which refers to adaptive behaviours that puts a person at risk of making mistakes or failing (Beghetto, 2009). Findings from a recent study (Beghetto, Karwowski, Reiter-Palmon, 2020) indicate that intellectual risk-taking plays a moderating role between creative confidence and creative behaviour. In this way, even if a student has confidence in their ideas, unless they identify with and view such ideas as worthwhile and are willing to take the risks of sharing those ideas with others,

then they are not likely to make a creative contribution to their own and others learning.

Finally, even if students have confidence, value creativity, and are willing to take creative risks, unless they have the opportunities and social supports to do so then they will not be able to realize their creative learning potential. As such, teachers, peers, and others in the social classroom, school, and broader environments are important for bringing such potential to fruition.

## The Role of Teachers in Creative Learning

Teachers play a central role in designing and managing the kinds of learning experiences that determine whether creativity will be supported or suppressed in the classroom. Indeed, unless teachers *believe that they can* support student creativity, *have some idea of how* to do so, and *are willing* to try then it is unlikely that students will have systematic opportunities to engage in creative learning (Beghetto, 2017b; Davies et al., 2013; Gralewski & Karawoski, 2018; Paek & Sumners, 2019). Each of these teacher roles will be discussed in turn.

First, teachers need to believe that they can support student creativity in their classroom. This has less to do with whether or not they value student creativity, as previous research indicates most generally do value creativity, and more about whether teachers have the autonomy, curricular time, and knowledge of how to support student creativity (Mullet, Willerson, Lamb, & Kettler, 2016). In many schools and classrooms, the primary aim of education is to support students' academic learning. If teachers view creativity as being in competition or incompatible with that goal, then they will understandably feel that they should focus their curricular time on meeting academic learning goals, even if they otherwise value and would like to support students' creative potential (Beghetto, 2013). Thus, an important first step in supporting the development of students' creative potential is for teachers to recognize that supporting creative and academic learning can be compatible goals. When teachers recognize that they can simultaneously support creative and academic learning then they are in a better position to more productively plan for and respond to opportunities for students' creative expression in their everyday lessons.

Equipped with this recognition, the next step in supporting student creativity is for teachers to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for infusing creativity into their curriculum (Renzulli, 2017) so that they can teach *for* creativity. Teaching for creativity in the K-12 classroom differs from other forms of creativity teaching (e.g., teaching about creativity, teaching

with creativity) because it focuses on nurturing student creativity in the context of specific academic subject areas (Beghetto, 2017b; Jeffrey & Craft, 2004). This form of creative teaching thereby requires that teachers have an understanding of *pedagogical creativity enhancement knowledge* (PCeK), which refers to knowing how to design creative learning experiences that support and cultivate students' adapted creative attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and actions in the planning and teaching of subject matter (Beghetto, 2017a). Teaching for creativity thereby involves designing lessons that provide creative openings and expectations for students to creatively meet learning goals and academic learning criteria. As discussed, this includes requiring students to come up with their own problems to solve, their own ways of solving them, and their own way of demonstrating their understanding of key concepts and skills. Teaching for creativity also includes providing students with honest and supportive feedback to ensure that students are connecting their developing and unique understanding to existing conventions, norms, and ways of knowing in and across various academic domains.

Finally, teachers need to be willing to take the instructional risks necessary to establish and pursue openings in their planned lessons. This is often easier said than done. Indeed, even teachers who otherwise value creativity may worry that establishing openings in their curriculum that require them to pursue unexpected student ideas will result in the lesson drifting too far off-track and into curricular chaos (Kennedy, 2005). Indeed, prior research has demonstrated that it is sometimes difficult for teachers to make on-the-fly shifts in their lessons, even when the lesson is not going well (Clark & Yinger, 1977). One way that teachers can start opening up their curriculum is to do so in small ways, starting with the way they plan lessons. Lesson unplanning—the process of creating openings in the lesson by replacing predetermined features with to-be-determined aspects (Beghetto, 2017d)—is an example of a small-step approach. A math teacher who asks students to solve a problem in as many ways as they can represent a simple, yet potentially generative form of lesson unplanning. By starting small, teachers can gradually develop their confidence and willingness to establish openings for creative learning in their curriculum while still providing a supportive and structured learning environment. Such small, incremental steps can lead to larger transformations in practice (Amabile & Kramer, 2011) and reinforce teachers' confidence in their ability to support creative learning in their classroom.

## The Role of Academic Subject Matter in Creative Learning

Recall that creativity requires a blend of originality and meaningfully meeting criteria or task constraints. If students' own unique perspectives and interpretations represent the *originality* component of creativity, then existing academic criteria and domains of knowledge represent the *criteria and tasks constraints*. Creativity always operates within constraints (Beghetto, 2019a; Stokes, 2010). In the context of creative learning, those constraints typically represent academic learning goals and criteria. Given that most educators already know how to specify learning goals and criteria, they are already half-way to supporting creative learning. The other half requires considering how academic subject matter might be blended with activities that provide students with opportunities to meet those goals and criteria in their own unique and different ways. In most cases, academic learning activities can be thought of as having four components (Beghetto, 2018b):

1. **The what:** What students do in the activity (e.g., the problem to solve, the issue to be addressed, the challenge to be resolved, or the task to be completed).
2. **The how:** How students complete the activity (e.g., the procedure used to solve a problem, the approach used to address an issue, the steps followed to resolve a challenge, or the process used to complete a task).
3. **The criteria for success:** The criteria used to determine whether students successfully completed the activity (e.g., the goals, guidelines, non-negotiables, or agreed-upon indicators of success).
4. **The outcome:** The outcome resulting from engagement with the activity (e.g., the solution to a problem, the products generated from completing a task, the result of resolving an issue or challenge, or any other demonstrated or experienced consequence of engaging in a learning activity).

Educators can use one or more of the above components (i.e., the what, how, criteria, and outcome) to design creative learning activities that blend academic subject matter with opportunities for creative expression. The degrees of freedom for doing so will vary based on the subject area, topics within subject areas, and teachers' willingness to establish openings in their lessons.

In mathematics, for instance, there typically is one correct answer to solve a problem, whereas other subject areas, such as English Language Arts, offer much more flexibility in the kinds of "answers" or interpretations possible.

Yet even with less flexibility in the kinds of originality that can be expressed in a particular subject area, there still remains a multitude of possibilities for creative expression in the kinds of tasks that teachers can offer students. As mentioned earlier, students in math can still demonstrate creative learning in the kinds of problems they design to solve, the various ways they solve them, and even how they demonstrate the outcomes and solutions to those problems.

Finally, teachers can use academic subject matter in at least two different ways to support opportunities for creative learning in their classroom (Beghetto Kaufman, & Baer, 2015). The first and most common way is to position subject matter learning as a means to its own end (e.g., *we are learning about this technique so that you understand it*). Creativity learning can still operate in this formulation by providing students with opportunities to learn about a topic by meeting goals in unique and different ways, which are still in the service of ultimately understanding the academic subject area. However, the added value in doing so also allows opportunities for students to develop their creative confidence and competence in that particularly subject area.

The second less common, but arguably more powerful, way of positioning academic subject matter in creative learning is as a means to a creative end (e.g., *we are learning about this technique so that you can use it to address the complex problem or challenge you and your team identified*). Students who, for instance, developed a project to creatively address the issue of contaminated drinking water in their community would need to learn about water contamination (e.g., how to test for it, how to eradicate contaminants) as part of the process of coming up with a creative solution. In this formulation, both academic subject matter and creative learning opportunities are in the service of attempting to make a creative contribution to the learning and lives of others (Beghetto, 2017c, 2018b).

## The Role of Uncertainty in Creative Learning

Without uncertainty, there is no creative learning. This is because uncertainty establishes the conditions necessary for new thought and action (Beghetto, 2019a). If students (and teachers) already know what to do and how to do it, then they are rehearsing or reinforcing knowledge and skills. This assertion becomes clearer when we consider it in light of the structure of learning activities. Recall from the previous section, learning activities can be thought of as being comprised of four elements: the what, the how, the criteria for success, and the outcome.

Typically, teachers attempt to remove uncertainty from learning activities by predefining all four aspects of a learning activity. This is understandable as teachers may feel that introducing or allowing for uncertainty to be included in the activity may result in curricular chaos, resulting in their own (and their students) frustration and confusion (Kennedy, 2015). Consequently, most teachers learn to plan (or select pre-planned) lessons that provide students with a predetermined problem or task to solve, which has a predetermined process or procedure for solving it, an already established criteria for determining successful performance, and a clearly defined outcome.

Although it is true that students can still learn and develop new and personally meaningful insights when they engage with highly planned lessons, such lessons are “over-planned” with respect to providing curricular space necessary for students to make creative contributions to peers and teachers. Indeed, successful performance on learning tasks in which all the elements are predetermined requires students to do what is expected and how it is expected (Beghetto, 2018a). Conversely, the full expression of creative learning requires incorporating uncertainty in the form of to-be-determined elements in a lesson. As discussed, this involves providing structured opportunities for students (and teachers) to engage with uncertainty in an otherwise structured and supportive learning environment (Beghetto, 2019a).

Indeed, teachers still have the professional responsibility to outline the criteria or non-negotiables, monitor student progress, and ensure that they are providing necessary and timely instructional supports. This can be accomplished by allowing students to determine how they meet those criteria. In this way, the role that uncertainty plays in creative learning can be thought of as ranging on a continuum from small openings allowing students to define some element of a learning activity (e.g., the how, what, outcomes) to larger openings where students have much more autonomy in defining elements and even the criteria for success, such as a legacy project whereby they try to make positive and lasting contributions to their schools, communities and beyond.

## The Role of Context in Creative Learning

Finally, context also plays a crucial role when it comes to creative learning. Creative learning is always and already situated in sociocultural and historical contexts, which influence and are influenced by students’ unique conceptions of what they are learning and their willingness to share their conceptions with others. As illustrated in Fig. 19.1, there are at least three permeable

contextual settings in which creative learning occurs. The first is the classroom context. Although classrooms and the patterns of interaction that occur within them may appear to be somewhat stable environments, when it comes to supporting creative expression, they can be quite dynamic, variable, and thereby rather unpredictable within and across different settings (Beghetto, 2019b; Doyle, 2006; Gajda et al., 2017; Jackson, 1990). Indeed, even in classrooms that are characterized as having features and patterns of interaction supportive of creative learning, such patterns may be difficult to sustain over time and even the moment-to-moment supports can be quite variable (Gajda et al., 2017).

It is therefore difficult to claim with any level of certainty that a given classroom is “supportive of creativity”; it really depends on what is going on in any given moment. A particular classroom may tend to be more or less supportive across time, however it is the sociodynamic and even material features of a classroom setting that play a key role in determining the kinds and frequency of creative learning openings offered to students (Beghetto, 2017a).

The same can be said for the school context. The kinds of explicit and tacit supports for creative learning in schools likely play an important role in whether and how teachers and students feel supported in their creative expression (Amabile, 1996; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Renzulli, 2017; Schacter, Thum, & Zifkin, 2006). Theoretically speaking, if teachers feel supported by their colleagues and administrators and are actively encouraged to take creative risks, then it seems likely that they would have the confidence and willingness to try. Indeed, this type of social support and modelling can have a cascading influence in and across classrooms and schools (Bandura, 1997). Although creativity researchers have theorized and explored the role of context on creative expression (Amabile, 1996; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014), research specifically exploring the collective, cascading, and reciprocal effects of school and classroom contexts on creative learning is a promising and needed area of research.

In addition to classroom and school settings, sociocultural theorists in the field of creativity studies (Glăveanu et al., 2020) assert that the broader sociocultural influences are not static, unidirectional, or even separate from the people in those contexts, but rather dynamic and co-constitutive processes that influence and are influenced by people in those settings. Along these lines, the kinds of creative learning opportunities and experiences that teachers and students participate in can be thought of as simultaneously being shaped by and helping to shape their particular communities, cultural settings, and broader societies. Consequently, there are times and spaces

where creative learning may be more or less valued and supported by the broader sociocultural context. Although some researchers have explored the role of broader societal contexts on creativity (Florida, 2019), additional work looking at the more dynamic and reciprocal relationship of creative learning in broader sociocultural and historical contexts is also needed.

## Future Directions

Given the dynamic and multifaceted nature of creative learning, researchers interested in examining the various factors involved in creative learning likely would benefit from the development and use of analytic approaches and designs that go beyond single measures or static snapshots to include dynamic (Beghetto & Corazza, 2019) and multiple methods (Gajda et al., 2017). Such approaches can help researchers better understand the factors at play in supporting the emergence, expression, and sustainability of creative learning in and across various types of school and classroom experiences.

Another seemingly fruitful and important direction for future research on creative learning is to consider it in light of the broader context of positive education. Such efforts can complement existing efforts of researchers in positive education (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015), who have endeavoured to simultaneously examine multiple dimensions involved in the wellbeing of students. Indeed, as discussed, creative learning occurs at the nexus of multiple individual, social, and cultural factors and thereby requires the use of methods and approaches that can examine the interplay among these factors.

In addition, there are a variety of questions that can guide future research on creative learning, including:

- How might efforts that focus on understanding and supporting creative learning fit within the broader aims of positive education? How might researchers and educators work together to support such efforts?
- What are the most promising intersections among efforts aimed at promoting creative learning and student wellbeing? What are the key complementary areas of overlap and where might there be potential points of tension?
- How might researchers across different research traditions in positive education and creativity studies collaborate to develop and explore broader models of wellbeing? What are the best methodological approaches for testing and refining these models? How might such work promote student and teacher wellbeing in and beyond the classroom?

Creative learning represents a potentially important aspect of positive education that can benefit from and contribute to existing research in the field. One way to help realize this potential is for researchers and educators representing a wide array of traditions to work together in an effort to develop an applied understanding of the role creative learning plays in contributing to learn and lives of students in and beyond schools and classrooms.

## Conclusion

Creative learning represents a generative and positive educational experience, which not only contributes to the knowledge development of individual students but can also result in creative social contributions to students' peers, teachers, and beyond. Creative learning thereby represents an important form of positive education that compliments related efforts aimed at building on the strengths that already and always inhere in the interaction among students, teachers, and educational environments. Creative learning also represents an expansion of prototypical learning efforts because it not only focuses on academic learning but also uses it as a vehicle for creative expression and the potential creative contribution to the learning and lives of others. In conclusion, creative learning offers researchers in the fields of creativity studies and positive education an important and complimentary line of inquiry.

## References

- Alexander, P. A., Schallert, D. L., & Reynolds, R. E. (2009). What is learning anyway? A topographical perspective considered. *Educational Psychologist, 44*, 176–192.
- Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Amabile, T. M., & Kramer, S. (2011). *The progress principle: Using small wins to ignite joy, engagement, and creativity at work*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Ball, D. L. (1993). With an eye on the mathematical horizon: Dilemmas of teaching elementary school mathematics. *The Elementary School Journal, 93*(4), 373–397. <https://doi.org/10.1086/461730>.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

- Bandura, A. (2012). On the functional properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited. *Journal of Management*, 38(1), 9–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311410606>.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Correlates of intellectual risk taking in elementary school science. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 46, 210–223.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2013). *Killing ideas softly? The promise and perils of creativity in the classroom*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2016). Creative learning: A fresh look. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 15, 6–23.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2017a). Creative openings in the social interactions of teaching. *Creativity: Theories-Research-Applications*, 3, 261–273.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2017b). Creativity in teaching. In J. C. Kaufman, J. Baer, & V. P. Glăveanu (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of creativity across different domains* (pp. 549–556). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2017c). Legacy projects: Helping young people respond productively to the challenges of a changing world. *Roeper Review*, 39, 1–4.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2017d). Lesson unplanning: Toward transforming routine problems into non-routine problems. *ZDM - the International Journal on Mathematics Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-017-0885-1>.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2018a). Taking beautiful risks in education. *Educational Leadership*, 76(4), 18–24.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2018b). *What if?: Building students' problem-solving skills through complex challenges*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2019a). Structured uncertainty: How creativity thrives under constraints and uncertainty. In C. A. Mullen (Ed.), *Creativity under duress in education?* (Vol. 3, pp. 27–40). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90272-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90272-2_2).
- Beghetto, R. (2019b). Creativity in Classrooms. In J. Kaufman & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, pp. 587–606). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316979839.029>.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2020). Creative learning and the possible. In V. P. Glăveanu (Ed.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible* (pp. 1–8). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98390-5\\_57-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98390-5_57-1).
- Beghetto, R. A., & Corazza, G. E. (2019). *Dynamic perspectives on creativity: New directions for theory, research, and practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Beghetto, R. A., & Karwowski, M. (2017). Toward untangling creative self-beliefs. *The creative self* (pp. 3–22). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Beghetto, R. A., Karwowski, M., & Reiter-Palmon, R. (2020). Intellectual Risk taking: A moderating link between creative confidence and creative behavior? *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000323>.

- Beghetto, R. A., & Kaufman, J. C. (2007). Toward a broader conception of creativity: A case for mini-c creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 1*, 73–79.
- Beghetto, R. A., & Kaufman, J. C. (2014). Classroom contexts for creativity. *High Ability Studies, 25*(1), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598139.2014.905247>.
- Beghetto, R. A., Kaufman, J. C., & Baer, J. (2015). *Teaching for creativity in the common core*. Teachers College Press.
- Beghetto, R. A., & Plucker, J. A. (2006). The relationship among schooling, learning, and creativity: “All roads lead to creativity” or “you can’t get there from here”? In James C. Kaufman & J. Baer (Eds.), *Creativity and reason in cognitive development* (pp. 316–332). New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606915.019>.
- Beghetto, R. A., & Schuh, K. (2020). Exploring the link between imagination and creativity: A creative learning perspective. In D. D. Preiss, D. Cosmelli, & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Mind wandering and creativity*. Academic Press.
- Clark, C. M., & Yinger, R. J. (1977). Research on teacher thinking. *Curriculum Inquiry, 7*, 279–304.
- Davies, D., Jindal-Snape, D., Collier, C., Digby, R., Hay, P., & Howe, A. (2013). Creative learning environments in education: A systematic literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 8*, 80–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2012.07.004>.
- Doyle, W. (2006). Ecological approaches to classroom management. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 97–125). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Florida, R. (2019). *The rise of the creative class*. Basic books.
- Gajda, A., Beghetto, R. A., & Karwowski, M. (2017). Exploring creative learning in the classroom: A multi-method approach. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 24*, 250–267.
- Gajda, A., Karwowski, M., & Beghetto, R. A. (2016). Creativity and school achievement: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*, 269–299.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (Ed.). (2016). *The Palgrave handbook of creativity and culture research*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Glăveanu, V. P., Hanchett Hanson, M., Baer, J., Barbot, B., Clapp, E. P., Corazza, G. E., ... Sternberg, R. J. (2020). Advancing creativity theory and research: A Socio-cultural manifesto. *The Journal of Creative Behavior, 54*, 741–745. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.395>.
- Gralewski, J., & Karawoski, M. (2018). Are teachers’ implicit theories of creativity related to the recognition of their students’ creativity? *Journal of Creative Behavior, 52*, 156–167. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.140>.
- Guilford, J. P. (1950). Creativity. *American Psychologist, 14*, 469–479.
- Guilford, J. P. (1967). Creativity and learning. In D. B. Lindsley & A. A. Lumsdaine (Eds.), *Brain function, Vol. IV: Brain function and learning* (pp. 307–326). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Jackson, P. W. (1990). *Life in classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Jeffrey, B., & Craft, A. (2004). Teaching creatively and teaching for creativity: Distinctions and relationships. *Educational Studies, 30*, 77–87.
- Karwowski, M., & Beghetto, R. A. (2019). Creative behavior as agentic action. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 13*, 402–415.
- Karwowski, M., Jankowska, D. M., Brzeski, A., Czerwonka, M., Gajda, A., Lebuda, I., & Beghetto, R. A. (2020). Delving into creativity and learning. *Creativity Research Journal, 32*(1), 4–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2020.1712165>.
- Karwowski, M., Lebuda, I., & Beghetto, R. A. (2019). Creative self-beliefs. In J. C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity* (2nd ed., pp. 396–418). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity. *Review of General Psychology, 13*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013688>.
- Kennedy, M. (2005). *Inside teaching: How classroom life undermines reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 10*(3), 262–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.936962>.
- Mullet, D. R., Willerson, A., Lamb, K. N., & Kettler, T. (2016). Examining teacher perceptions of creativity: A systematic review of the literature. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 21*, 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2016.05.001>.
- Niu, W., & Zhou, Z. (2017). Creativity in mathematics teaching: A Chinese perspective (an update. In R. A. Beghetto & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (2nd ed., pp. 86–107). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Paek, S. H., & Sumners, S. E. (2019). The indirect effect of teachers' creative mindsets on teaching creativity. *Journal of Creative Behavior, 53*, 298–311. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.180>.
- Piaget, J. (1973). *To understand is to invent: The future of education*. Location: Publisher.
- Plucker, J., Beghetto, R. A., & Dow, G. (2004). Why isn't creativity more important to educational psychologists? Potential, pitfalls, and future directions in creativity research. *Educational Psychologist, 39*, 83–96.
- Renzulli, J. (2017). Developing creativity across all areas of the curriculum. In R. A. Beghetto & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (2nd ed., pp. 23–44). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, K. (2006). *Ken Robinson: Do schools kill creativity?* [Video file]. Retrieved from [http://www.Ted.Com/Talks/Ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity](http://www.Ted.Com/Talks/Ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity).
- Rothenberg, A. (2015). *Flight from wonder: An investigation of scientific creativity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Runco, M. A. (1996). Personal creativity: Definition and developmental issues. *New Directions in Child Development, 72*, 3–30.

- Runco, M. A., & Jaeger, G. J. (2012). The standard definition of creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 24(1), 92–96.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2012). *Explaining creativity: The science of human innovation* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schacter, J., Thum, Y. M., & Zifkin, D. (2006). How much does creative teaching enhance elementary school students' achievement? *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 40, 47–72.
- Schuh, K. L. (2017). *Making meaning by making connections*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0993-2>.
- Sirotnik, K. A. (1983). What you see is what you get: Consistency, persistency, and mediocrity in classrooms. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53, 16–31.
- Stein, M. I. (1953). Creativity and culture. *The Journal of Psychology*, 36, 311–322.
- Stokes, P. D. (2010). Using constraints to develop creativity in the classroom. In R. A. Beghetto & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (pp. 88–112). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, M. K., & Barlow, Z. (2010). Social learning in the STRAW project. In A. E. J. Wals (Ed.), *Social learning towards a sustainable world* (pp. 405–418). The Netherlands: Wageningen Academic.
- Von Glasersfeld, E. (2013). *Radical constructivism*. New York: Routledge.
- White, M., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 8(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v8i1.588>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 20

## Shifting Mindsets: Transforming Self, School, and Society

Ash Buchanan and Jack Greig

The word *mindset* was first used at the turn of the twentieth century to mean habits of mind formed by previous experience (Gollwitzer, 1990). In simple terms, mindsets are deeply held beliefs and assumptions that we create about who we are and how the universe works. This includes basic assumptions about what sort of person we are supposed to be, how we are meant to relate with others, and what skills and strategies we should learn in life. Thereafter, mindsets act like a “frame of reference” that shape our capacity for perception and action, and shifting them plays a central role in our ability to “be the transformation” in response to our life circumstances (Meadows, 1999; Mezirow, 1997).

For example, consider a school community which is experiencing increasing levels of trauma. Initially, the school community responds to this experience by organising a trauma-informed training, because they perceive if the teachers can learn new skills and strategies, they will be able to intervene and hopefully improve the situation. However, following the training, the teachers notice that while they are seeing some areas of improvement, the new skills and strategies are not translating into lasting change.

---

A. Buchanan (✉)  
Cohere, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [ash.buchanan@cohere.com.au](mailto:ash.buchanan@cohere.com.au)

J. Greig  
Berry Street, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Curious to learn more, the teachers join a global learning ecosystem which is dedicated to the transformation of self, school, and society. It is in this learning ecosystem that the teachers realise a reason that they were not seeing results from the new skills and strategies was because they were aimed at treating individual symptoms, rather than healing and transforming the underlying root issues, such as the systems of disadvantage and marginalisation in their community. This insight leads to a profound shift in mindset, where the teachers begin to see the trauma that they are experiencing with new eyes. Over time, this shift in mindset catalyses a paradigm shift in culture—from being trauma-informed to being healing-centred—and this shift not only changes the skills and strategies the teachers learn, but it also transforms the school's capacity to care for everyone in their community. In this way, learning new skills and strategies is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to change and transformation. At a deeper level, it is the capacity to shift mindsets that can transform the possibilities we are able to see and actualise in our lives and in our communities.

In this chapter, we explore mindsets in an educational context, with a focus on primary and secondary school education. We begin by exploring the relationship between mindsets and the unfolding of human potential. Next, we look at fixed and growth mindset theory, which is primarily concerned with the development of new abilities and intelligences. Then we look at its evolution towards benefit mindset theory, which is concerned with how we can be the transformation and realise our unique potential in a way that serves the wellbeing of all. To support educators with facilitating mindset shifts in their learning communities, we include a table of 10 mindset transformations, and include practical examples of how each transformation can be facilitated. By shifting our mindsets in ways which are aligned with the wellbeing of all, those shifts can ripple out through our lives and the world in ways that are remarkable.

## Mindsets and Human Potential

Mindsets are associated with the unfolding of human potential in two primary directions. The first direction is what is commonly referred to as *horizontal development*, or informative learning. In horizontal development, we incrementally add new skills, knowledge, and intelligences within our current view of ourselves and the world (Kegan, 1982). It is learning which, over time, enables us to grow, progress, and improve.

The second direction is what is commonly referred to as *vertical development*, or transformative learning. In vertical development, we

transform our view of reality so we can see our lives and the world with new eyes (Kegan, 1982). It is learning which as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe describes “opens up a new organ of perception within us”, and in turn, transforms our way of seeing and making sense towards broader and more inclusive perspectives (Cottrell, 1998, p. 257).

To help make this distinction between horizontal and vertical development, we can draw on the analogy of a caterpillar (see Fig. 20.1). Horizontal development places the emphasis on incrementally *adding* new skills and intelligences to the caterpillar, whereas vertical development creates the conditions for the caterpillar to *transform* into a butterfly. In vertical development, a butterfly is not a stronger, faster, or more intelligent caterpillar. It is a living being that has gone through a transformation, transforming its capacity for perception and action. In effect, the caterpillar has matured into a more complex understanding of itself and the world, with new rules, behaviours, and values it must learn. It is a whole new way of knowing and being in the world.

Jean Piaget (1954) was one of the first researchers to study the way that our perception develops, demonstrating that as children mature, so does their capacity to make meaning about their lives and the world. From there, a variety of scholars have studied how we develop in a vertical direction (e.g., Cook-Greuter, 2013; Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 1996), and their research reveals that our frame of reference matures through predictable and sequential stages that transcend and include each other. While different researchers describe the stages in varied ways, what is common to their findings is that

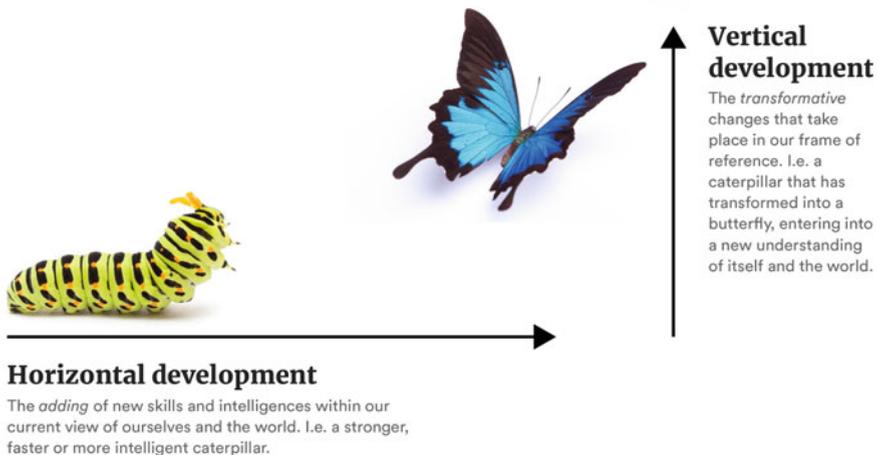


Fig. 20.1 Development in a horizontal and vertical direction

we mature through “dependent” (socialised) stages, to “independent” (self-authoring) stages, to “interdependent” (self-transforming) stages, and beyond (see Fig. 20.2). At each progressive stage of vertical development, the distinctions we make, the language we use, our circle of concern, and the way we make meaning increases in complexity.

Facilitating vertical development is important because we live in extraordinary times, when everyone is facing complex challenges they have not had to face before. From coronavirus to climate change, mental health to racial injustice, what is clear is these are not challenges that can be transformed through the development of new skills and abilities alone. We must also develop vertically into our full humanity, as engaged global citizens who are aware of our interdependency and care deeply for the wellbeing of all.

The issue is, in society and in mainstream education today, most people are only socially supported with developing into a dependent or independent frame of reference. At these stages of vertical development, we are primarily concerned with our own wellbeing and potential as well as the wellbeing and potential of the people closest to us. Whereas, if we continue to develop in a vertical direction, our view of who we are and how we belong transforms, and we are increasingly able to recognise our interdependence with all life. In this more inclusive view, we are increasingly able to see wellbeing and human potential from a global living Earth perspective, and this transforms our capacity to realise our potential in a way which is aligned with the wellbeing of all, including future generations (Goreng Goreng, 2018; Vieten, Schlitz, & Amorok, 2007; Wilber, 1996).

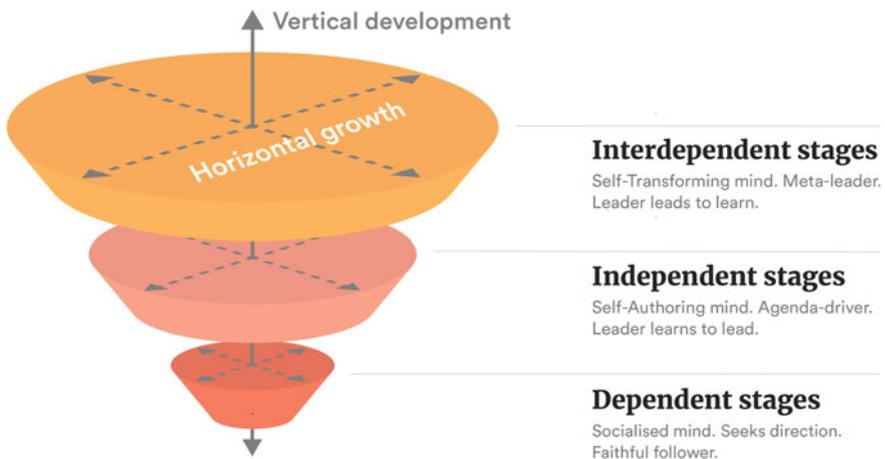


Fig. 20.2 Stages of vertical development. Based on Kegan and Lahey (2016)

This makes the horizontal and vertical developments we can embody—the potential we can mature into—an essential aspect in the creation of a healthy and harmonious world.

## Mindsets in Education

In mainstream education and positive education, Carol Dweck's fixed and growth mindset theory has received the most attention (see Dweck & Yeager, 2019 for a comprehensive review, and see Sisk, Burgoyne, Sun, Butler, & Macnamara, 2018 for a meta-analysis of mindset interventions). Dweck's research originated from self-theory, which is primarily concerned with a person's implicit theories of intelligence and ability. In her early research, Dweck identified an "entity" view and "incremental" view of intelligence, based on whether individuals believe a particular attribute is simply fixed (entity) versus being something that can be developed (incremental). As her research developed, she proposed fixed and growth mindset theory as a way of integrating her research findings into an accessible body of work (Dweck & Yeager, 2019).

The theory suggests two specific mindsets that we can have within different areas of life: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). A fixed mindset is based on the belief that a specific ability or intelligence is a fixed trait. We assume that we either have a natural ability or not. We also believe that effort is for people with deficiencies, and therefore, give up easily when challenged. For example, let's say a young person at some point in their lives had an experience of feeling that they are not creative. This may be because they were explicitly told so, or perhaps they tried something new and found their creativity to be lacking. To protect their feelings of self-worth, this experience leads to the formation of a belief that "I'm just not the creative type". From then on, the young person opts out of anything that invites them to be creative. On the surface, this can look like a student who is resistant to their own growth and change. But at a deeper level, this young person's actions are rooted in a belief that they have formed about their creative abilities.

In contrast, a growth mindset is based on a belief that our abilities and intelligence are malleable and can be developed through hard work, putting in deliberate effort, and using effective strategies. We feel confident to try new things and are less discouraged by the inevitability of failures and setbacks. This leads to a passion for stretching oneself and drawing inspiration from others who are doing the same. For example, a young person might have faced a number of challenging experiences with their creativity but chooses to

persist in the face of them. They understand that challenges they face are not proof of inability, but rather are a natural by-product of learning. This belief drives their behaviours. They are more likely to embrace their creative challenges, engage in intentional effort, and get closer to fulfilling their potential in life.

When you follow a growth mindset to the extreme, it can lead to the development of some incredible skills and abilities. A popular role model of a growth mindset in action is basketball superstar Michael Jordan. Facing multiple failures and setbacks throughout his life, Jordan embraced his challenges, committed to mastering his skills, and became one of the greatest athletes of all time. He mesmerised fans with his gravity-defying dunks, fierce competitiveness, and he inspired an entire generation of young people to “be like Mike”. And he credits much of his success to his unrelenting drive to grow. As Jordan states, “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed” (Dweck, 2006, p. 154).

By limiting the theory’s focus to an individual’s belief about their intelligence and ability, Dweck’s fixed and growth mindset distinctions have helped a great many people form a developmental frame of reference. Its strength is in how it helps individuals activate the malleability of their beliefs such that they can learn and grow. However, the focus is primarily on adding another skill here or learning about another concept there, without facilitating a deeper transformation in a person’s underlying frame of reference. With the result being, growth mindsets largely perpetuate patterns of *horizontal development* and neglect to nurture the *vertical developments* necessary for mature engagement in the living Earth community.

Similar comments can be offered about the paradigm of positive education. Broadly speaking, positive education represents a paradigm shift in the field of psychology, evolving beyond a focus on pathology to a focus on wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Yet, most positive education programs attempt to achieve this aim of promoting wellbeing through the lens of horizontal development. The primary focus is on *adding* new skills and knowledge, such as the ability to implement positive psychology interventions, not on developing vertically and *transforming* our capacity to care for people and planet as an undivided whole. As a result, positive education would also benefit greatly from a more complete mindset theory which nurtures human potential in both a horizontal and vertical direction.

Another comment we can make here is that there seems to be this implicit assumption in fixed and growth mindset theory, that growing through effort

is a good thing; that a person who is driving their own growth is healthy; and from that growth, good things will follow. While the theory is good at telling the stories of people who persevered to overcome their life challenges, it remains relatively silent on the shadows of constant striving, for instance a parent who is so busy achieving at work they hardly see their children, or the person who burns out in their unrelenting efforts to progress. The theory also remains relatively silent on the collective shadows of growth, such as the reality that what we are learning and progressing most of the time are powerful colonial mechanisms of privilege, exploitation, and infinite growth which are perpetuating intersecting forms of violence and are destroying the systems of life on the planet. Finally, very little attention is paid to the deeper roots behind why someone might be in a fixed mindset, such as a lived experience of trauma, marginalisation, or socioeconomic disadvantage, where the formation of a fixed mindset might be a protective response against living in an oppressive and inequitable society.

This is why we as authors believe that there are grounds to evolve Dweck's mindset theory, such that it can support us with making the more transformative and inclusive shifts associated with vertical development, and flourish into our full humanity as authentically engaged global citizens.

## **Benefit Mindset as a Compassionate and Transformative Evolution of Fixed and Growth Mindset Theory**

Developing into our full humanity as authentically engaged global citizens is at the heart of benefit mindset. A benefit mindset builds on a growth mindset, when we understand that our abilities can be developed—and we also understand we can transform towards a more caring, inclusive, and interdependent perspective. It is called “benefit” mindset because it is concerned with the lifelong process of learning how we can be the transformation and realise our unique potential in a way that serves the wellbeing of all (Buchanan & Kern, 2017).

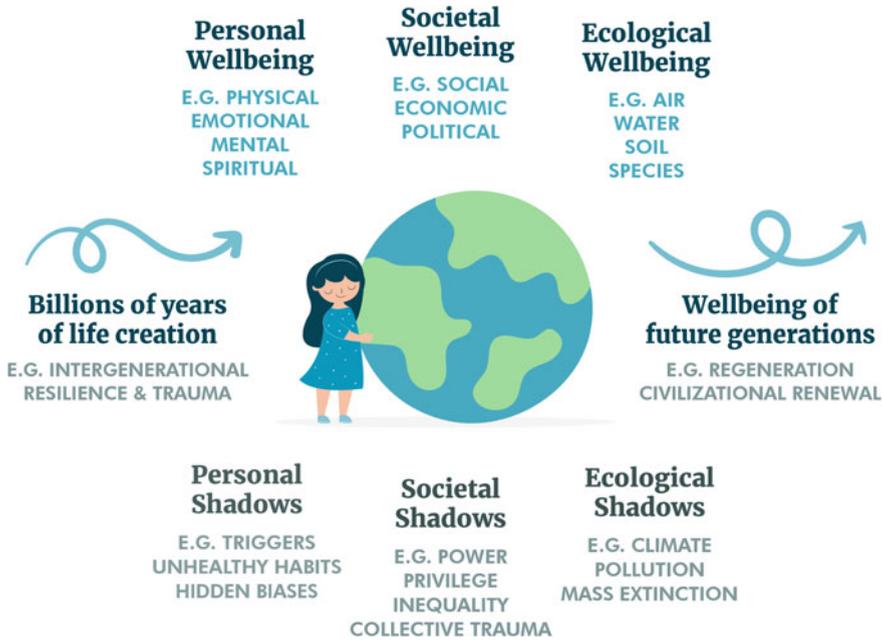
Central to this development in perspective is the understanding that we are not separate individuals going it alone. We are interdependent beings who belong to a massive global ecosystem—the community of life—and every one of us has a role to play in creating healthy conditions on the planet, no matter our interests, passions, or expertise. Therefore, while it is important we learn how to develop new abilities in different areas of our lives, it is also important we take responsibility for transforming how we come to understand our place

in the world, and realise our potential in a way that affirms life and supports others with doing the same.

For example, a benefit mindset is evident in a young person who not only commits to developing their capacity for creativity, but chooses to step into their full creative potential in a way that benefits others and society more generally. In a benefit mindset, a young person would commit to widening their circle of care and inclusion, such that they can become more fully themselves in a way that brings out the best in themselves *and* everyone around them.

When we commit to a lifelong process of transformation and compassionate care, we not only learn new skills and abilities, but we can open up to a healthier and more coherent life orientation which is serving the whole. A person whose life journey embodies this way of being is Jane Goodall. From humble beginnings, Jane was an unlikely scientific pioneer when she first set foot in Gombe Stream National Park in the 1960s to study wild chimpanzees. She was 26 years old, had no academic credentials, and was living at a time when women were expected to be housewives rather than scientists. Yet with a great love for animals and a strong belief in herself, Jane returned with more compelling information about chimpanzees than anyone before her. Then, these profound experiences of connectedness with the living world began to transform Jane's life. She began to work tirelessly to protect the environment so that all living beings might continue to have a future on the planet. This has included founding Roots and Shoots, a global education program that empowers young people to affect positive change in their communities ([www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org)). The program has since grown to include approximately 150,000 youth in nearly 140 countries. In this way, Jane's lifelong commitment to growth and transformation has strengthened her capacity for compassionate action in the world and is supporting a new generation of engaged global citizens with doing the same (Goodall, 2010).

As we develop towards an interdependent view of life and human potential, we begin to see our lives and the world from an increasingly inclusive perspective, and this inclusive perspective brings with it a maturation in how we practise wellbeing. Whereas in today's mainstream education and positive education paradigm, the focus is largely on the development of new wellbeing skills (e.g., kindness and gratitude), in a benefit mindset we increasingly learn how to practise these skills from the perspective of people and planet as an undivided whole. As illustrated in Fig. 20.3, this means caring for the wellbeing of the whole person—our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health, including our thoughts and feelings, our strengths and shadows, what we find meaningful, and being true to our uniqueness. It also means



**Fig. 20.3** An example view of serving the wellbeing of all

caring for the wellbeing of the whole of humanity—including all people, as well as caring for the collective wellbeing of our schools and organisations, our communities and cities, and our states and nations. It means caring for the wellbeing of the planet as a whole—the community of life, including the birds and bees, the rivers and trees, the climate, and all the other species we co-inhabit this amazing planet with. And it includes the understanding that in this very moment, each of us has billions of years of life creation acting through us, and how we choose to use the gifts of this life creation has profound implications on the wellbeing of future generations.

In a benefit mindset, we would also understand that in our attempts to live in harmony and balance with the living Earth community, we will also encounter a shadow landscape of unhealthy patterns and unjust dynamics in ourselves and the world. Therefore, it becomes our duty to do the often uncomfortable work of paying careful and compassionate attention to any shadow material we may be denying, dissociating from, or absent to, and move towards healing and transforming this material as an act of service. This includes turning towards any societal shadows that we may be complicit in perpetuating, such as systems of power, privilege, and inequity, and the role they play in marginalisation, collective trauma, and socioeconomic disadvantage. It includes turning towards the unprecedented ecological shadows of our

time, such as the climate emergency, the mass extinction of species, and the mass contamination of air, water, and soil. It includes turning towards any personal shadows we may be projecting onto others, such as personal triggers, unhealthy habits, and hidden biases. It also includes turning towards any intergenerational shadows we have been born into and have been passing on from generation to generation, such as racism, colonisation, and intergenerational trauma. We are all shareholders in these shadows, although some people and living communities are suffering disproportionately because of their existence, and our capacity to respond requires something more of us than the addition of new skills alone. They are shadows that require us to see more deeply into the many ways we may be contributing to and passing on the deep suffering of the world, such that we can move towards healing and transforming these patterns, and open up to a healthier and more inclusive life orientation which is serving the whole (Hübl, 2019; Scharmer, 2020; Williams, Owens, & Syedullah, 2016).

In attempting to describe the wellbeing of all in words, it might seem like this diverse ecology of concerns is a collection of separate issues. But when we hold them with an interdependent view, we see that all of these concerns cannot be separated. They *inter-are* (Hanh, 1987; Hooks, 2003). This is the compelling realisation that more than simply being interconnected—everything relies on everything else in order to be. The difference is akin to the contrast between that which is interconnected, and that which is interdependent. Interconnected things can be taken apart and put back together again, whereas interdependent things cannot be separated. They co-arise and flow together as part of an interdependent process of becoming.

This means, in every moment of our life, we are intimately participating in the wellbeing and unfolding of all life. Where everything we do impacts the wellbeing of everything else. In this interdependent view, we realise that *being well* is more completely understood as *interbeing well*. Where more than being interconnected, our wellbeing interdependently co-arises with the wellbeing of others and the wellbeing of the oceans, the forests, the birds, the bees, and the climate. We are all in this together, and if we are serious about caring for the wellbeing of all, it is our responsibility to develop a perspective which is inclusive of all people and all beings, including acknowledging and transforming the ways we may be overshadowing the wellbeing and liberation of others, such that we can live together in greater harmony and balance.

Herein lies one of the main limitations of many modern wellbeing and positive education programs. Too often we are conditioned to see wellbeing through an individualistic and positivistic lens that privileges personal concerns such as “self-care” and neglects the more collective concerns of

“community care,” “planetary care,” and “intergenerational care,” as well as neglecting the many ways our inattention to the “mutual care” of all beings may be contributing to the overlapping suffering of the world. Thus, we arrive at the result today where there is now a strong belief that the whole of wellbeing can be more or less understood in individualistic and positivistic terms. All around us are self-help books, self-improvement strategies, and training programs suggesting a simple formula: just try this psychological strategy, use this lifestyle intervention, learn this new skill and you can be well. It is not that these things are unimportant. All these techniques can improve an individual’s wellbeing for a short while. However, they are an incomplete approach that excludes much of what there is to include and fails to recognise our shared responsibility to create a world that truly cares for and includes all of us.

Therefore, the intention at the heart of a benefit mindset is nothing less than a lifelong commitment to transform our way of seeing and being in the world towards a more caring, inclusive, and interdependent perspective that is wide enough to include the wellbeing of all.

This interdependent view of life and wellbeing is not intended as something new, but as a remembering of a sacred understanding of our kinship and deep interbeing with the living world, which many traditions and lineages of practice have long been aware of. Our ancestors and First Nations People took great care to live in harmony with the rhythms and processes of the living world, and their cultures were grounded in practices which were holistic, loving, reciprocal, and engaged. They understood that belonging to a living Earth community comes with responsibility. Nobody can simply act on his or her own behalf. We are all participants in the community of life, and our actions and practice of wellbeing must be attentive to the dynamics of how life functions as a harmonious whole (Atkinson, 2002; Capra & Luisi, 2014; Elgin, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2019).

To summarise, benefit mindset is concerned with maturing into the understanding that our capacity to realise our full potential is about more than how smart, driven, or growth-oriented we are. More completely, it is also about how well we are able to honour our interdependency, compassionately attend to our individual and collective shadows, and become partners in the wellbeing of all people and all living beings. While a growth mindset has many advantages over a fixed mindset, what truly makes us thrive is our capacity to realise our potential in a way that nurtures our uniqueness and serves the wellbeing, not only of humans, but the entire community of life.

## Ten Example Transformations of a Benefit Mindset

In our action research, a number of mindset-shifting distinctions are emerging, which describe how we can tap into the transformative potential of vertical development in everyday life. Ten of these distinctions are summarised in Fig. 20.4 and are described in more detail below. The table builds on the horizontal distinctions typically used in fixed and growth mindset theory by evolving them in a vertical direction. In some cases, the benefit mindset distinctions build on a fixed and growth mindset in intuitive ways, such as by adding an extra dimension of considerations, so you get the advantages of a growth mindset and more. In other cases, the transformation introduces a paradox, meaning the evolution is somewhat counter intuitive and non-linear. To help bring these distinctions to life, we provide examples of how they practically show up in an education context. We also provide references to a range of transformative life practices, many of which have their roots in lineages which are hundreds or even thousands of years old, and we encourage you to engage in in-person learning in the communities who have preserved and carried these traditions into modern times to support a respectful way of applying these practices.

In considering these distinctions, it is important to recognise that the mindsets are not identities. They are pointers to how our perception (i.e., the way we look at an ability or life circumstance) shapes our actions in different areas of life. The mindsets are also not binary states. Rather, every one of us has our own kaleidoscope of unique and ever-changing perspectives, as do the schools and communities to which we belong. So, the point in sharing these distinctions is not to imply they are rigid categories that represent some truth about you or your mindset. Rather, they are being offered as light handholds to help you to be more discerning around how a shift in perception creates a shift in action, and be alert to the possibility of how you can practise wellbeing and unfold your potential in a more caring and inclusive way.

### Engagement

In a fixed mindset, we presume we either have a natural ability or we do not, and there is little we can do to change or improve. We prefer to engage in activities where we can look talented and resist activities where we believe there is little point in trying. For example, a young person might do the least amount of work required on an assignment about climate change because they have formed a belief that “I am too small to make a difference”.

	<b>Fixed</b> MINDSET	<b>Growth</b> MINDSET	<b>Benefit</b> MINDSET
Engagement	<b>Resistant to change</b> Shows up resistant to growth and change.	<b>Learning by Doing</b> Shows up with an open mind. We are ready to learn.	<b>Being of benefit</b> Shows up with an open heart. Contributes to collective action.
Development	<b>Entity</b> Believes intelligence and ability can't be developed.	<b>Incremental</b> Believes intelligence and ability can be developed.	<b>Participatory</b> Creates the conditions for everyone's development.
Focus	<b>What</b> Focus on maintaining what is familiar.	<b>How</b> Focus on improving how we do what we do.	<b>Who &amp; Why</b> Focus on who we are being and why we do what we do.
Effort	<b>Reduced</b> Reduces effort when ability does not come easily.	<b>Necessary</b> Sees effort as necessary for learning and mastery.	<b>Flow</b> Align ourselves with the natural flow of life.
Relationships	<b>Inflexible</b> Hold set expectations about our relationships.	<b>Adaptable</b> A practice of learning and growing together.	<b>Emergent</b> A practice of flowing together in deep resonance.
Challenges	<b>Avoids</b> Gives up when challenged. Failure as proof of inability.	<b>Embraces</b> Persists when challenged. Failure as opportunity to learn.	<b>Transforms</b> Uses learnings to transform view of self and world.
Feedback	<b>Selective</b> Selective about the feedback we pay attention to.	<b>Constructive</b> Actively seeks out feedback that helps us grow.	<b>Dialogical</b> Values collective inquiry in an ecology of deep reflection.
Others' success	<b>Insecure</b> Likely to feel insecure by the success of others.	<b>Inspiring</b> Likely to feel inspired by the success of others.	<b>Partners</b> Engages as a partner in everyone's flourishing.
Trauma	<b>Inducing</b> Reacting with quick fixes. Passing on trauma.	<b>Informed</b> Intervening in such a way that learning can still happen.	<b>Collective Healing</b> Holding space for a process of collective healing.
Culture	<b>Expert</b> A culture of authorities and gurus.	<b>Learning System</b> A culture of growth and learning opportunities.	<b>Regenerative System</b> A culture of collective transformation and co-evolution.

Fig. 20.4 Ten example distinctions between fixed, growth, and benefit mindsets

In a growth mindset, we show up with an open mind and are ready-to-learn. We drive ourselves to continuously improve and draw on effective strategies to allow growth and development to occur. For example, a young person might work hard on their climate change assignment, asking their teacher for help when they are stuck, and even challenge themselves to explore new questions in areas where they are improving. To foster a ready-to-learn attitude in young people, educators might set learning goals and success criteria and support students to progress towards them through feedback, practice, and deliberate effort (Dweck, 2006).

In a benefit mindset, we show up with an open heart and are ready-to-lead as part of engaged communities who are putting their practices to work in the world. We understand leadership is not a job title or something reserved for a special few people. Leadership is the distributed capacity of an entire community to respond to its life circumstances. This means responsibility for the wellbeing of all starts with every one of us showing up and contributing something as part of a larger social movement for healing and transformation. For example, a young person might widen their circle of concern, and consider how their climate change assignment can actively contribute to something in their lives, such as improving the sustainability of their home. More broadly, they might choose to start a permaculture garden, act in solidarity with marginalised people who are disproportionately impacted by climate change, or join one of the many grassroots groups leading transformative change in their local community. They might also choose to join Greta Thunberg and the millions of young, engaged global citizens who are turning our climate emergency into a learning and leadership opportunity (Thunberg, 2019). To foster a ready-to-lead attitude, educators can connect young people with personal practices such as compassionate action (e.g., Dalai Lama, 2004), engaged citizenship (e.g., Hanh, 2016), radical dharma (e.g., Williams et al., 2016), and mindfulness-based character strengths (e.g., Niemiec, 2014), as well as collective leadership practices such as awareness-based collective action (e.g., Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), sacred leadership (e.g., Goreng Goreng, 2018), and evolutionary activism (e.g., Patten, 2018; XR, 2019). Educators can also activate their school's capacity for collective action by hosting what we call a 21-day challenge, where everyone in the school community is invited to practice a courageous and compassionate act, every day, for 21 days (Buchanan, 2018; Mehta, 2014).

## Development

In a fixed mindset, we hold an “entity theory” of development, where we believe that we have a set level of intelligence and ability, which cannot be improved. For instance, a student might believe that they do not have a natural ability to play an instrument, and as a result, they avoid engaging in music class.

In a growth mindset, we hold an “incremental theory” of development, believing that our intelligence and abilities can be developed through deliberate effort and effective strategies (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). For instance, a student might be unsure about how well they will be able to play an instrument, but they are willing to try anyway, practising and improving over time. A way educators can support young people with finding their way into an incremental frame of reference is by providing lessons and opportunities to practise and by talking about how the brain is like a muscle that grows through determination and effort (i.e., brain neurons wiring and firing) (Blackwell, Rodriguez, & Guerra-Carrillo, 2015).

In a benefit mindset, our beliefs expand further such that we hold a “participatory theory” of development, where we understand that we are inseparable participants in each other’s becoming. Accepting this means taking responsibility for how we show up in life and how we participate in the lives of others and the life of society. This is when, more than forming new neural connections in our *heads* (e.g., brain neurons wiring and firing), we seek to become ourselves in a way that strengthens relational bonds through our *hearts* (e.g., hearts interconnecting and coalescing; Mehta, 2011). For instance, a music student might not only show up to class and be ready to learn, but they also consider how they can be of benefit to their orchestra as a whole by contributing to an inclusive culture and by igniting a shared love of music in the group.

Educators can nurture participatory modes of development with practices such as container building (e.g., Bird, 2020; Issacs, 1999), engaged pedagogy (e.g., Hooks, 2003), culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995), and contextual wellbeing (e.g., Street, 2016), as well as practices that build a generative school climate or social field (e.g., Boell & Senge, 2016) that support young people with building a sense of “we-ness” around what it is they find energising and enlivening. These distinctions are important because when we think of development only in terms of brain activity, it reinforces a view of human beings as separate individuals (Shepherd, 2017). Whereas when we include the heart, and its boundless capacity for love, care,

and interconnection, we get a more complete view of just how inseparable our potential and wellbeing really are.

## Focus

In a fixed mindset, our beliefs focus us on reproducing *what* we already know (e.g., pre-set outcomes and achievements). For instance, some schools provide young people with an industrial-era education, where they teach standardised curriculums and evaluate performance against centralised and pre-set outcomes (e.g., grades).

In a growth mindset, our focus expands to consider *how* we do what we do (e.g., intentional effort and effective strategies). For instance, some schools provide guidance on how certain strategies and practices can be used to drive development and evaluate young people on their willingness to put in effort and make progress towards their goals (Dweck, 2006).

In a benefit mindset, our focus expands even further to also consider *who* we are being (i.e., attention and awareness) and *why* we do what we do (i.e., intention and purpose). We understand more than *what* we do and *how* we do it; it is the deeper impetus behind our actions: *who* we are being and *why* we do what we do, which creates a vertical space for deep transformations in ourselves and the world (Scharmer, 2009). For instance, some schools nurture the development of a young person's way of being by providing them with an education of the heart (e.g., Dalai Lama, 2011) and social, emotional, and systems awareness training (e.g., Goleman & Senge, 2014), as well as by teaching practices such as mindfulness (e.g., Hanh, 1975) and yoga (e.g., Stone, 2011). Such awareness practices build on a traditional knowledge curriculum, to also include learning the basics of how the mind and heart work, cultivating a sense of oneness with humanity, developing the capacity to live by compassionate values, and be present to our experiences as they are. Some schools also use practices such as retreats (e.g., Palmer, 2004) and rites of passage (e.g., Plotkin, 2003; Rubinstein, 2014) that support young people with cultivating an authentic sense of life purpose and place this purpose at the centre of their education. Life purpose often manifests as an embodied knowing that "this is something I must do with my one wild and precious life" and provides young people with a sense of direction of how they can live in greater alignment with who they truly are and realise their fullest potential for the benefit of the whole.

## Effort

In a fixed mindset, we typically reduce effort when an ability does not come easily, because we believe effort will do little to change things. For instance, a young person might put in minimal effort to learn how to hold an *Acknowledgement of Country* (an Australian ritual which is intended to show respect for the Traditional Custodians of the land you are meeting on), and shy away from leading one for their class, because they believe they will not be very good at it regardless of how much they try.

In a growth mindset, we see deliberate effort and effective strategies as necessary for learning and mastery. Effort is not seen as a substitute for ability, but as a way to develop and improve. For instance, if the young person was to shift their mindset towards growth, they would now see their ability to hold an Acknowledgement of Country as something they can learn and keep doing with effort. To encourage deliberate effort in young people, it is common for educators to talk about the importance of hard work, persistence, and grit, to keep progressing, even when we might find it challenging.

In a benefit mindset, we embrace a paradox about effort, and our actions increasingly become *effortless*. We loosen our grip on the need to be constantly driving growth, and instead, slow down and build an authentic connection to what we are trying to do, so we can align ourselves with the natural flow of life, and allow life to act through us in a way which is attuned with the whole (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Scharmer, 2009; Tolle, 2005). For instance, if the young person were to slow down, and physically feel a connection to Country, such as by putting their bare feet on the Earth, and if they were to walk with First Nations People, this would create the conditions for the possibility of an authentic Acknowledgement of Country to emerge through them. In this way, their Acknowledgement of Country flows effortlessly from an authentic connection, rather than something we drive or force with effort. Educators can facilitate this shift in effort by creating space for young people to form a personal connection to what they are being invited to learn and lead at school.

## Relationships

In a fixed mindset, we hold fixed expectations about our relationships. We assume relationships are either a good fit or not and see any issues we may experience as a sign of deficiency in ourselves or others. For instance, a young person might feel like they do not belong at school. If the young person views

this experience through the lens of a fixed mindset, it can lead to feelings of loneliness and helplessness, and cause them to withdraw and disconnect, because they assume it has to do with a fixed shortcoming in themselves or others.

In a growth mindset, our openness to learning means we are more adaptable and flexible in our relationships. We understand all relationships require care and attention, and everyone is capable of growth and change. For example, if the same young person shifts their mindset towards growth, they would now be able to see belonging as something they can work at and build together with the people at their school. Educators can promote growth mindset relationships by teaching young people the social skills and strategies needed to make and maintain their relationships at school (e.g., Allen & Kern, 2019).

In a benefit mindset, we would widen our circle of concern and also consider how we can build our relatedness and our sense of belonging as responsible and authentically engaged global citizens. This is an important development, because we not only belong to our schools, we also belong to the living Earth community. The Earth is our home, so it is vitally important that we, as people and schools, widen our sense of belonging, and cultivate the feeling that everyone is welcomed, accepted, and included as a member of the living Earth community. For instance, what this might look like is a group of young people who not only work together to build their relatedness, but they explore what is incredible about the places they live and strengthen their sense of belonging to the living world around them. This could include connection activities, such as being present to the first bird call they hear in the morning or being attentive to a tree, or a waterway, or any living community that gives them a sense of their place in the world. It might also include connecting with diverse people and cultures in their community to learn how they can build authentic and inclusive relationships, especially in places of marginality and disadvantage. Educators can nurture the building of relationships with deep listening practices (e.g., Scharmer, 2009; Ungunmerr, 1988), nature play and re-wilding practices (e.g., Louv, 2005; Macy & Brown, 2014), inclusion practices (e.g., Hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and with circle practices (e.g., Roffey, 2014), all of which support young people with building a sense of kinship and mutuality around their connection to self, each other and the whole.

## Challenges

In a fixed mindset, we focus on proving ourselves and validating our abilities. We avoid challenges where we might make a mistake or may look untalented. For example, if a young person has mastered a particular skill at sport, they might choose to focus on replicating that skill to *prove* how talented they are, rather than embracing opportunities to *improve* and learn new skills.

In a growth mindset, we not only seek out challenges, we thrive on them. We are aware of our own learning edges and embrace challenges as an opportunity to develop. For example, if the same young person shifts their mindset towards growth, they would now be more likely to experiment with new skills and abilities they have not tried before. Even if they experience failure at times, they are more willing to stick with it, enjoying the challenge of learning something new. To foster a growth mindset, educators might support young people seeking out challenges at their learning edge, such as trialling for teams at higher representative levels, in order to continually progress and expand their potential.

While this shift to a growth mindset represents a clear improvement from a fixed mindset, it is often the case that the challenges we seek out tend to be the ones that make sense within our current view of ourselves and the world. As a result, people with a growth mindset often reach great heights within their current paradigm or field, such as a particular sporting code, but rarely go beyond these boundaries to actively engage in the big global challenges that affect the wellbeing of all, such as the intersectionality of socioeconomic disadvantage.

That is why, in a benefit mindset, we have the courage to open up to the challenges all people face and see them as an invitation to a higher perspective. More than growing or incrementally improving we see all challenges as an opportunity to develop vertically, transform how we come to understand ourselves and our place in the world, and contribute to profound civilisational renewal. For example, a way a young person might facilitate this is by bringing their passion for sport into a global innovation lab, such as the societal transformation lab (e.g., Presencing Institute, 2020) or a global learning ecosystem (e.g., Hall, 2019; Luksha et al., 2018; Smitsman, Laszlo, & Luksha, 2020), which brings together diverse people from across all sectors of society and takes them on a journey from me to we—from a silo view to a systems view. On such a journey, participants use awareness-based systems change practices (e.g., Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013) and collective healing practices (e.g., Hübl, 2019) to incubate new ways of being, generate vertical social prototypes, and lead transformative change. As an outcome, a young

person might offer to become a coach of a junior team or offer to use their skills to support the development of others in a way which is responsive to socioeconomic disadvantage and other important global issues. Educators can facilitate such a transformation by making and maintaining a relationship with a number of innovation labs that nurture the transformation of self and society as an undivided whole.

## Feedback

In a fixed mindset, we tend to be selective about the feedback we pay attention to, preferring feedback that confirms our perceived talents, and avoiding feedback that invites growth and improvement. For example, a young person might be concerned about their performance on a recent written assignment. When the assignment is returned, they look at the mark to see how they went, and if the mark indicates they did not perform well, they avoid reading the feedback provided by their teacher.

In a growth mindset, we are not only open to receiving feedback, we actively seek it out, because we understand it could help us learn and grow. For example, a young person might ask for feedback on their writing before finalising and submitting an assignment. When the assignment is returned, the young person reads the feedback in detail, learning from each comment made. A way that educators can facilitate feedback-based learning is by providing constructive comments and by encouraging students to focus on their capacity to grow and improve.

In both of these cases, the sharing of feedback is considered to be the transfer of information. While the sharing of feedback as information is an appropriate way to promote horizontal development (i.e., informative learning), it often fails to facilitate vertical development in our underlying frame of reference (i.e., transformative learning) (Isaacs, 1999).

That is why, in a benefit mindset, we would move beyond feedback as the transfer of information and engage in the practice of dialogue (e.g., Bohm, 1996; Issacs, 1999). The word dialogue comes from two Greek roots, *din* and *logos*, suggesting “meaning flowing through”. Thus, in a dialogue, we engage in a free-flowing conversation in the interests of allowing common meaning or collective intelligence to emerge. For example, a teacher and a young person might sit together and find their way into a careful conversation where they can collectively inquire into what the young person is learning about their writing. In such a conversation, the direct sharing of feedback and advice is not encouraged. Rather, it is about asking questions and exploring them together in the spirit of collective inquiry. When well-practised, dialogue leads

to a deeper understanding and can give rise to profound moments of insight and transformation.

## Others' Success

In a fixed mindset, we are more likely to feel intimidated by the success of others and may even seek to undermine them. It can evoke feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. For instance, a young person might socially compare themselves to another in their drama class and feel inferior around them, so much so, they feel too scared to participate for being “not good enough”.

In a growth mindset, our perception of the same people and situations shifts, and we are more likely to be inspired by the success of others. We are now open and available to learn from others to inform our own growth and development. For instance, if the same person shifts their mindset towards growth, they might choose to watch other people with keen interest and model what they learn in their own performance. Educators can foster this view of success by reminding young people that everyone's success is an opportunity for learning.

In a benefit mindset, we understand that all people are exceptional and unique, and rather than driving ourselves to be successful, we allow our lives to naturally unfold. In this view, we not only look outwards to learn from others, but we also look within to learn more about who we truly are. We are successful because we allow our lives to naturally unfold, like a seed organically unfolding in a diverse ecosystem, and we support others with doing the same. For instance, a young person might recognise and learn from the unique strengths other people exhibit, and they would also look within to learn more about their own unique impulse to become, their own unique essence that wants to be expressed, and find ways for that uniqueness to manifest. Educators can nurture this view of success by inviting young people into rites of passage processes (e.g., Palmer, 2004; Plotkin, 2003; Rubinstein, 2014), which create supportive spaces of deep listening, peer learning, and mutual holding, where everyone can feel acknowledged and accepted for who they truly are and become partners in each other's unfolding.

## Trauma

In a fixed mindset, we typically react against the symptoms of trauma. This can include quick fix interventions and it can also include fight, flight, freeze reactions such as hyperactivation and numbness. For example, some schools

routinely reprimand and discipline children who exhibit disruptive behaviour. However, what often goes unacknowledged is that at a deeper level, the child's behaviour is likely a symptom of trauma. As a result, the child's underlying traumas remain unaddressed, and it's possible the school's actions may lead to further traumatising.

In a growth mindset, we are now open to identifying, learning from, and growing through trauma. For example, some schools today are attending trauma-informed training programs, where the focus is on adding new skills and strategies that can be implemented in an education context. Then, if a child exhibits disruptive behaviour, these educators would understand this behaviour is likely a symptom of trauma and they would intervene in an informed way such that learning can still happen, while also connecting the child with care and support.

While the adding of new skills and strategies represents an improvement, such efforts are often blind to how many of today's well-intentioned education traditions, including curriculum, policies, and teaching practices might be traumatising or retraumatising young people. Trauma-informed interventions also remain relatively silent about how communities can move towards healing the roots of trauma, such as the intersectionality of multiple forms of discrimination that combine to create systems of marginalisation in society, and how such systems of marginalisation are linked to internalised patterns within the body. This means that despite educators' best trauma-informed efforts, there is a greater pattern of collective harm which is being left unaddressed (Gaffney, 2019; Menakem, 2017).

That is why, in a benefit mindset, we understand while individual work is important and must continue, the future of trauma-aware practice is collective. That's because many of the challenges we face in the world today are collective issues and they require a collective response (Ginwright, 2018; Hübl, 2019). They require communities who are able to respond to trauma from the perspective of our interdependency. For example, some schools engage in practices such as healing-centred education (e.g., Acosta, 2020), collective healing (e.g., Hübl, 2019), and restorative practice (e.g., Drewery, 2007), where education communities—including young people, teachers, parents, and community members—can come together in a space of trust, mutual witnessing, and relational warmth. These are spaces where everyone can feel held and supported and reach a deeper understanding of the individual and collective traumas which are present in their community and can become partners in conversations about their health. The big difference here is that these spaces are not primarily about adding new skills and strategies. They are about listening deeply, being present to what is, co-regulating and

restoring relationships with kindness and compassion. They are also about widening our circle of concern, such that we can collectively move towards healing our relationships with all people and the living Earth community. As a result, these schools have a clearer sense of the traumas and systemic patterns behind the symptoms they are experiencing, and this awareness increases the likelihood their community as a whole can move towards health.

## School Culture

In a fixed mindset, schools tend to be talent-centred, with a focus on the need to appear successful. The result is an entrenched know-it-all culture that disconnects young people from the natural unfolding of life by insisting they maintain the status quo. For example, some schools have trophy cabinets and promotional material that celebrates their top performers, sending the message that what matters most is each individual's ability to compete and achieve against what has come before.

In a growth mindset, schools become learning systems, where there is an intentional culture of growth. The result is a learn-it-all culture that looks at everything they do through a lens of continuous improvement. For example, some schools create such a culture through education change initiatives, where entire learning communities—including young people, teachers, principals, and even families—are encouraged to be constantly growing and improving together.

The underlying assumption of a growth culture is if we raise children to look at everything they do through a lens of continuous improvement, that they will grow up with the skills they need to succeed in the world, and the world should be getting better, too. But there are limits to growth, and we are living at a time of massive disruption where the world of tomorrow is going to be very different from today. This means the challenges young people face and will continue to face are much more complex than improvement challenges—they are transformative challenges. So more than learning the skills to be *improving together*, young people need to learn the practices and processes they need to be *transforming together* in relationship with a transforming world.

Thus, in a benefit mindset, schools mature beyond the strengths and limitations of a growth mindset culture by building their capacity for *collective transformation*. Collective transformation is when a school can lead their own vertical transformation, upgrading their entire educational operating system to socially support development through dependent, independent, and interdependent stages of life. Robert Kegan and Lahey (2016) refers to such

schools as being “deliberately developmental”. Otto Scharmer (2019) refers to this capacity as building “vertical literacy”. Such a school could also be called a “regenerative system”, because they have become self-determining around their ability to align their own transformative processes with the transformative processes present in society. For example, a school might empower students to identify ecosystem leadership challenges in their lives and in society, especially in places of marginality and disadvantage. Then, the ecosystem leadership challenges they identify are put at the centre of their learning and leadership. This means, a transformative approach to education would create the conditions for everyone to lead as part of engaged communities who are actively participating in the healing and regeneration of their schools and their society. The more a school collectively transforms, the more they are able to take responsibility for their participation in the interdependent processes of life and become a co-evolutionary partner in life’s unfolding (Laloux, 2014; Laszlo, 2019; Roy, 2020; Stein, 2019).

## Educating Planetary Citizens

Awareness of our interdependency awakens us into a caring relationship with all of humanity and the living Earth community. It also awakens us into the realisation that many of the things we consider to be normal and healthy in today’s society are actually destructive and unhealthy, causing deep harm for ourselves, others, and the world. Thus, it is our view that it is vitally important all people are not only given the opportunity to learn new skills and abilities, but they are also given the opportunity to develop vertically, so they can move towards practising wellbeing from the perspective of people and planet as an undivided whole.

This is where education, as a fulcrum of society, can make a big difference. To create a healthy human society that is responsive to the wellbeing of all, we need to attend very carefully to what it means to raise children and support them with developing into their full humanity as authentically engaged members of the living Earth community.

The issue is today’s mass-scale education system is largely enrolling young people into a way of life which is no longer viable and which many do not want to participate in. Instead of learning to regard the living Earth community as kin to be cared for in a way which is holistic, loving, reciprocal, and engaged, young people learn to see the planet as a resource to serve our own aspirations for growth, wealth, and happiness. We have developed powerful colonial mechanisms of domination, exploitation, and oppressive

power, which seduce us into believing we can progress and be well on our own, as we perpetuate intersecting forms of discrimination and violence which are destroying the life conditions upon which our civilisation has been built. The situation is so serious that many of the systems of life on the planet are disintegrating, and some form of civilisation collapse looks inevitable during our lifetime unless we wake up, mature, and change our behaviour on a massive scale (Laszlo, 2017; Read & Alexander, 2019; Yunkaporta, 2019).

Therefore, we believe there is an urgent need to transform our perception of “school” and “education” at the most fundamental level and be more mindful about the mindsets we are role modelling for young people. This means inviting young people into processes that initiate them into their full humanity and give them the opportunity to build an authentic connection with all people and the living world, so they can learn to live together as kin, in harmony and balance. It means learning in partnership with wisdom traditions and lineages of practice that can support us with deepening our experience of interbeing and with expanding our circle of care and concern. It also means being careful with how we initiate young people into the realities of the world in which they are growing up in. We ought to be holding space for compassionate inquiry into the interdependent co-arising of our multiple global crises, such that we can prepare them for the unprecedented challenges they are facing and will continue to face in the coming years.

We also have to pay careful attention to what it means to be an adult or teacher who is committed to lifelong vertical development and can act as a true role model of these perspectives and practices. It is vitally important that we, as adults and teachers, especially those in a position of power in the education system, are socially supported to engage in the life practice of interdependent participation, and are open to having experiences where our frame of reference matures. Experiences that help us see how we are interdependent beings who have been colonised by all of these modern ideologies that separate us from the living world, and as a consequence we have been blindly participating in the destruction of nature, each other, and even ourselves. Our task then becomes to decolonise our minds and learn the transformative practices we need to become a true role model of interdependent participation and socially support the next generation with doing the same.

## Reimagining Wellbeing Education: Towards a Transformative Philosophy

These developmental insights also have profound implications for the way we learn about and practise wellbeing in schools. As illustrated in Fig. 20.5, most traditional positive education programs focus on content delivery, such as the adding of new knowledge, skills, and strategies. In these trainings, the power is typically held by the “experts” or the “leaders” who set the curriculum based on what they think is a good program. Then, students and teachers attend informative trainings and generalised classes which are more about improving wellbeing within the logic of the current system, than they are about including everyone as partners in the transformation of the system.

More progressive programs support schools by building engaged communities of practice and by taking a systems-informed approach (e.g., Kern et al., 2020). In these programs, the power shifts towards nurturing community leadership, collective wellbeing, and systemic responsibility. However, many of these programs are still primarily rooted in horizontal modes of learning. They are trying to improve wellbeing through the addition of more information and by developing more systemic skills within the bubble of their current paradigm. They are not yet engaged in the practice of vertical development and nurturing the possibility of a transformative approach to wellbeing education.



**Fig. 20.5** Horizontal and vertical development across three scales: self, school, and society (Based on Scharmer, 2019)

We suggest that this is the potential of benefit mindset and the examples and practices we have explored in this chapter. They focus on how wellbeing education can mature beyond horizontal modes of learning to include the entire landscape of developmental possibilities. This includes nurturing transformation at the individual level. However, it is also important transformation is nurtured collectively, at a whole school level, and even at a whole societal level. Such a maturation in wellbeing education would aim to give rise to an ecosystem of mutually catalytic practices and processes, which are oriented towards cohesive “whole person”, “whole school”, and “whole system” transformation.

## Conclusion

We are living at a time when it is vital that we not only attend to wellbeing and human potential from our own perspective, but also from the perspective of people and planet as an undivided whole. More than focusing on the development of our *skill sets*, we also need to pay careful attention to our *mindsets*—and commit to an ongoing and lifelong process of transformation.

What is special about a transformative approach to wellbeing and human potential is that the more we develop into a caring and inclusive perspective, the more we show up and participate in life in a different way. We mature from being a collection of separate individuals all seeking to fulfil our potential in relative isolation of one another and create the possibility of consciously and cohesively participating in the collective wellbeing of humanity and the planet.

However, to actualise this possibility in our lives and the world, we must make new choices and engage in new practices. To help us make new choices, here are some reflective questions: What am I noticing about the way I see the world and my place in it? What practices mentioned in this chapter stand out for me as something I might like to explore further? What is something I can do in the next few days to learn more about these practices?

**Acknowledgements** We would like to thank the following people for commenting on draft versions of this chapter: Kesh Sharma, Jessica Taylor, Peggy (Margaret) Kern, Azadeh Rezaeian, Leanna Dey, Nella Garrasi, Viv Sercombe, Megan Corcoran, Dana Kerford, Matt Smith, Lilli Morgan, Therese Joyce, Christophe Menage, Bernadine Clark, Vadivu Govind, Lisa Barker, Adam Cooper, Karen Bonson, Kavita Bali, Trudi Horler, Joanne Alford, and Lynne Barrington.

## References

- Acosta, A. (2020). *In pursuit of healing-centred education* [Doctoral dissertation]. Retrieved from <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-a7a8-an96/download>.
- Allen, K. A., & Kern, M. L. (2019). *Boosting school belonging: Practical strategies to help adolescents feel like they belong at school*. New York: Routledge.
- Atkinson, J. (2002). *Trauma trails, recreating song lines*. North Geelong, VIC, Australia: Spinifex Press.
- Bird, K. (2020, March). Containers [blogpost]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/containers-458a26083f00>.
- Blackwell, L. S., Rodriguez, S., & Guerra-Carrillo, B. (2015). Intelligence as a malleable construct. In S. Goldstein, D. Princiotta, & J. A. Naglieri (Eds.), *Handbook of intelligence: Evolutionary theory, historical perspective, and current concepts* (pp. 263–282). New York, NY, US: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Boell, M. M., & Senge, P. (2016). *School climate and social fields—An initial exploration*. Garrison, NY: The Garrison Institute.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On dialogue*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Buchanan, A. (2018, December). Creating ecosystems of kindness and wellbeing at St Francis Xavier College [blogpost]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/benefit-mindset/creating-ecosystems-of-wellbeing-at-st-francis-xavier-college-83a384769ba9>.
- Buchanan, A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). The benefit mindset: The psychology of contribution and everyday leadership. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 7(1), 1–11.
- Capra, F., & Luisi, P. L. (2014). *The systems view of life: A unifying vision*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook-Greuter, S. (2013). Nine levels of increasing embrace in ego development: A full-spectrum theory of vertical growth and meaning making. Retrieved September 27, 2015.
- Cottrell, A. (1998). The resurrection of thinking and the redemption of Faust: Goethe's new scientific attitude. In D. Seamon & A. Zajonc (Eds.), *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature* (pp. 255–276). New York, NY: New York Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Dalai Lama. (2004). *Worlds in Harmony: Compassionate Action for a Better World*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Dalai Lama. (2011). *Beyond Religion*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Drewery, W. (2007). Restorative practices in schools: Far-reaching implications. In G. Maxwell & J. H. Liu (Eds.), *Restorative justice and practices in New Zealand* (pp. 199–213). Wellington, NZ: Institute of Policy Studies.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.

- Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2019). Mindsets: A view from two eras. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(3), 481–496.
- Elgin, D. (2009). *The living universe*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Gaffney, C. (2019). When schools cause trauma [blogpost]. *Teaching Tolerance*. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2019/when-schools-cause-trauma>.
- Ginwright, S. (2018, June). The future of healing: shifting from trauma informed care to healing centered engagement [blogpost]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>.
- Goleman, D., & Senge, P. (2014). *The triple focus: A new approach to education*. Florence, MA: More Than Sound.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1990). Action phases and mind-sets. In E. T. Higgins & R. M. Sorrentino (Eds.), *The handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior* (Vol. 2, pp. 52–92). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Goodall, J. (2010). *Jane Goodall: 50 years at Gombe*. New York, NY: Stewart, Tabori & Chang.
- Goreng Goreng, T. (2018). *Tjukurpa Pulka: The road to eldership how aboriginal culture creates sacred and visionary leaders* [Doctoral dissertation]. Retrieved from <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/149431>
- Hall, R. (2019, November). Weaving learning ecosystems for universal well-being [blogpost]. *Medium*. <https://responsibility.global/weaving-learning-ecosystems-for-universal-wellbeing-5812f94d5be>.
- Hanh, T. N. (1975). *The miracle of mindfulness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (1987). *The heart of understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita heart sutra*. Berkley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (2016). *Good citizens*. Berkley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hübl, T. (2019). *Collective trauma healing: How together we can shift the consciousness of humanity* [interview]. Collective Trauma summit. <https://collectivetraumasummit.com/>.
- Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue: The art of thinking together*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2016). *An everyone culture: Becoming a deliberately developmental organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

- Laloux, F. (2014). *Reinventing organizations: A guide to creating organizations inspired by the next stage of human consciousness*. Brussels, Belgium: Nelson Parker.
- Laszlo, A. (2019). Education for the future: The emerging paradigm of thrivable education. *World Futures*, 75(3), 174–183.
- Laszlo, E. (2017). In search of the purpose of being. In E. Kuntzelman & D. DiPerna (Eds.), *Purpose Rising* (pp. 29–38). London, UK: Bright Alliance.
- Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Luksha, P., et al. (2018). *Education ecosystem for societal transformation*. Global Education Futures 2018.
- Macy, J., & Brown, M. (2014). *Coming back to life*. Gabriola Island, CA: New Society Publishers.
- Meadows, D. H. (1999). *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system*. Hartland, VT: Sustainability Institute.
- Mehta, N. (2011). 5 reasons to serve: What doing things for others does for ourselves. [blogpost]. *Yes!* <https://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/5-reasons-to-serve>.
- Mehta, N. (2014). 4 reasons to join the 21-day gratitude challenge [blogpost]. *Huffpost*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post\\_5959\\_b\\_4228302](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post_5959_b_4228302).
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My Grandmother's Hands*. Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 5–12.
- Niemiec, R. (2014). *Mindfulness and Character Strengths*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing.
- Palmer, P. (2004). *A hidden wholeness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Patten, T. (2018). *A new republic of the heart: An ethos for revolutionaries—A guide to inner work for holistic change*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Piaget, J. (1954). *The construction of reality in the child*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Plotkin, B. (2003). *Soulcraft: Crossing Into the mysteries of nature and psyche*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Presencing Institute. (2020). *Societal transformation lab* [Position Statement]. <https://www.presencing.org/societal-transformation-lab>.
- Read, R., & Alexander, S. (2019). *This civilisation is finished: Conversations on the end of Empire—And what lies beyond*. Melbourne, VIC: Simplicity Institute.
- Roffey, S. (2014). *Circle solutions for student wellbeing*. London, UK: Sage.
- Roy, B. (2020, April). Corona: A tale of two systems. Part Two [blogpost]. *Emerge*. <https://www.whatisemerging.com/opinions/corona-a-tale-of-two-systems-part-two>.
- Rubinstein, A. (2014). *The making of men*. Sydney: Brio Books.
- Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U: Learning from the future as it emerges*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Scharmer, C. O. (2019, April). Vertical literacy: Reimagining the 21st-century university [blogpost]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/>

vertical-literacy-12-principles-for-reinventing-the-21st-century-university-39c2948192ee.

- Scharmer, C. O. (2020, June). Turning toward our blind spot [blog-post]. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/turning-toward-our-blind-spot-seeing-the-shadow-as-a-source-for-transformation-aff23d480a55>.
- Scharmer, C. O., & Kaufer, K. (2013). *Leading from the emerging future: From ego-system to eco-system economies*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.
- Shepherd, P. (2017). *Radical wholeness*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Sisk, V. F., Burgoyne, A. P., Sun, J., Butler, J. L., & Macnamara, B. N. (2018). To what extent and under which circumstances are growth mind-sets important to academic achievement? Two meta-analyses. *Psychological Science*, 29(4), 549–571.
- Smitsman, A., Laszlo, A., & Luksha, P. (2020). Evolutionary learning ecosystems for thrivable futures. *World Futures*, 76(4), 214–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.2020.1740075>.
- Stein, Z. (2019). *Education in a time between worlds*. San Francisco, CA: Bright Alliance.
- Stone, M. (2011). *Awake in the world*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Street, H. (2016). *Contextual wellbeing*. Subiaco, WA: Wise Solutions Books.
- Thunberg, G. (2019). *No one is too small to make a difference*. Sweden: Penguin Books.
- Tolle, E. (2005). *A new Earth*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Ungunmerrm, M. R. (1988). Dadirri: Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness [blogpost]. *Miriam Rose Foundation*. <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri/>.
- Vieten, C., Schlitz, M., & Amorok, T. (2007). *Living deeply: The art & science of transformation in everyday life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Wilber, K. (1996). *A brief history of everything*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala.
- Williams, A. K., Owens, R., & Syedullah, J. (2016). *Radical Dharma*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- XR. (2019). *This is not a drill*. London, UK: Penguin.
- Yunkaporta, T. (2019). *Sand talk: How Indigenous thinking can save the world*. Melbourne, VIC, Australia: Text Publishing.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 21

## School Belonging: The Importance of Student and Teacher Relationships

Kelly-Ann Allen, Christopher D. Slaten, Gökmen Arslan, Sue Roffey, Heather Craig, and Dianne A. Vella-Brodrick

School belonging is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional and behavioural components (e.g., respected, accepted, and included; Arslan & Duru, 2017; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Haugen, Morris, & Wester, 2019; Karcher & Lee, 2002). A student's sense of belonging to school has attracted growing attention from researchers and practitioners in recent years due to its ability to predict a wide variety of educational and developmental outcomes (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Arslan, 2018; Arslan & Duru, 2017;

---

K.-A. Allen (✉)

The Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
e-mail: [kelly-ann.allen@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:kelly-ann.allen@unimelb.edu.au)

C. D. Slaten

College of Education, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA

G. Arslan

Faculty of Education, Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Burdur, Turkey

S. Roffey

University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

H. Craig

The School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

D. A. Vella-Brodrick

Centre for Wellbeing Science, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Osterman, 2000). School belonging also positively contributes to a number of factors that promote student academic functioning, mental health, and wellbeing (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018; Allen & Bowles, 2012; Arslan, 2021; Arslan, Allen, & Ryan, 2020). However, even though scholars and educators are aware of the impact of school belonging on student outcomes, the research on classroom interventions and school environment is relatively sparse. Currently, there are very few strategies and interventions available to schools that specifically target school belonging.

Substantial research has indicated that the student–teacher relationship provides a powerful avenue for schools concerned with increasing perceptions of school belonging among their students (cf. Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). However, creating strong student–teacher relationships is not without its challenges. Teachers may feel pressured by schedules, constrained by various responsibilities associated with their positions, and inhibited by systemic issues. Nevertheless, we suggest that building relationships within a school provides an attainable, cost-effective, and readily available strategy for building a culture of school belonging.

In this chapter, we first highlight the importance of relationships, and then focus specifically on school belonging. We highlight how school belonging can be assessed, and the limited interventions to support school belonging. We identify the importance of teachers in supporting a sense of belonging, and present some of the challenges associated with student–teacher relationships. We point to the role that school leaders can play in supporting belonging within the school. We then consider belonging and relationships in the context of higher education, suggesting that building strong relationships with teachers for students at both schools and universities should be a core consideration in positive education. Finally, we highlight potential future directions.

## Relationships Matter

Relationships are integral to who we are as human beings. Studies and reviews repeatedly point to interpersonal relationships being a core human need (Allen, Kern, McNerney, Rozec, & Slavich, 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Some of the earliest studies in developmental psychology focused specifically on the role that relationships—particularly between a child and their primary caregiver, have on subsequent life experiences. The Internal Working Models of Attachment Relationships suggests that attachments during the formative years have a significant influence upon

the quality of relationships later in life (Bowlby, 1958, 1969). Generally, a secure relationship is characterized by warmth, supportiveness, trust, involvement, and responsiveness, whereas insecure relationships are characterized by mistrust, fear, and avoidance (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Poor attachment has a range of implications, including neurological, behavioural, psychological, and social effects, and results in an insecure sense of self and conflicting relationships. In contrast, it has now been well established that warm and responsive early connections result in a more optimistic outcome of good psycho-social functioning (Gerhardt, 2015). While early attachment research focused specifically on primary caregivers, subsequent studies have clearly found that extended family members and others in the community can promote a positive sense of self and make a significant difference in a young person's resilience and life trajectory (e.g., Goldstein, 2016). For instance, Obsuth et al. (2017) found that the relationship a student has with a teacher at 10 or 11 years of age influences attitudes and behaviour towards other adult relationships four years later.

For school-age children, good social relationships support social and emotional wellbeing (Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2017; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007), and are important for helping students to succeed at school (Johnson, 2009). Roffey (2012) identified the power of positive relationships across many contexts, including schools, organizations, and families. Positive emotionally literate interactions have been found to be healing in challenging circumstances such as family breakdown (Dowling & Elliott, 2012) and conflict (Edmund, 2012). Relationships also impact significantly on health and wellbeing outcomes (e.g., O'Connell, O'Shea, & Gallagher, 2016; Warren & Donaldson, 2018). As Huppert (2012) noted:

The foundation of what makes lives go well is not the individual but the quality of our relationships; the development of trust, the giving and receiving of love and support and the myriad ways in which relationships can be life-enhancing.  
(p. vii)

Indeed, Peterson (2006) summarized the essence of positive psychology as: "other people matter" (p. 249).

Importantly, the mere presence of positive social relationships is insufficient; the quality of those relationships, the context in which relationships occur, and the emotional experiences arising through interactions with others also matter (Allen, 2020; Baxter, Weston, & Qu, 2011; Lim, Allen, Craig, Smith, & Furlong, 2021). This quality aspect has been described in different ways over the past several decades. For example, in their Social Development Model, Hawkins and Weis (1985) suggested that it was the sense of

being socially bonded with a student's family, school, peers, and community that influenced behaviour. The model suggests that opportunities to connect are necessary but insufficient for social bonds to form; the social bonding experience must also be positive. In other words, pro-social relationships will not singlehandedly develop a feeling of belonging. Social skills and positive experiences during one's interactions with others are also important elements (Allen, Boyle, Lachlan, & Craig, 2020).

Similarly, guided by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, and McGregor (2006) suggested that it is the combination of positive relationships that support a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, combined with positive environmental experiences that encourages students to be concerned about school and to be proactively involved with their academic pursuits. One important variable of this model is the way students feel about their teachers and peers. In particular, Zimmer-Gembeck et al. suggest that school belonging serves as a mediator between relationships and engagement at school. That is, when students feel that they have good relationships with their teachers and peers, they gain a sense of belonging, which results in greater school engagement. This engagement in learning, fuelled by a sense of school belonging, in turn has been linked to better academic performance and achievement (Dweck, 1999; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, Connell, Eccles, & Wellborn, 1998). Therefore, a model of school belonging should consider a student's relationships with his or her teachers and peers (Osterman, 2000) and the extent to which the relational quality creates an encouraging environment that fulfils the student's need for autonomy, competence, and belongingness (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006).

## School Belonging

Within this background on the importance of relationships in mind, we turn specifically to the primary context of relationships within school communities—captured through the concept of school belonging. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019) reports that one in three students around the world do not feel a sense of belonging to their school, and these numbers are steadily rising (2019). Locally and internationally, this trend is a cause for concern. Students who lack a sense of belonging are more likely to engage in problematic behaviour, suffer from mental illness, and experience low achievement (Allen & McKenzie, 2015; Abdollahi, Panahipour, Tafti, & Allen, 2020; Anderman, 2002; Arslan &

Coşkun, 2020; Henrich, Brookmeyer, & Shahar, 2005; Simons-Morton, Crump, Hayine, & Saylor, 1999; Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009). The most at-risk students are the ones who are already vulnerable (Aerts, Van Houtte, Dewaele, Cox, & Vincke, 2012; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008), and these effects can continue into adult life (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002). We begin with an illustration of *not* belonging, before unpacking what school belonging is and the important role that teachers play in supporting belonging.

## Dianne's Allergy Story

Bringing the importance of school belonging and the power of student–teacher relationships to life, Fig. 21.1 provides a personal story experienced by one of the co-authors. This story illustrates how important quality relationships and a sense of belonging are and how a lack of these can lead an individual to behave in uncharacteristic ways such as being deceitful. Could there have been a different outcome if she had stronger relationships with her teachers? What if her teachers had truly known her as an individual in a way that they could detect the mild nuances of her visible affect and body language in the same way a good friend may detect an unhappy child even if they are wearing a smile on their face? What if Dianne was provided with a safe place and support from her teachers to express her feelings, rather than permission to stay away from school? Based on an extensive and growing literature, we can deduce that Dianne's school experience may have been improved through forming stronger school-based relationships and greater support to build her sense of belonging to school. We turn to that literature now.

## Defining School Belonging

The terms used to describe school belonging vary considerably in the literature (e.g., Allen & Bowles, 2012; Anderman, 2002; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Ma, 2003; Nichols, 2006; Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, & Waters, 2016). The definition presented by Goodenow and Grady (1993, p. 60) remains the most frequently utilized: “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment”. This notion has been supported in a wide range of work demonstrating that the central themes of school belonging are related to teacher supportiveness, the presence of good friends, engagement

It all started when I was transitioning from primary to high school. After a highly rewarding Year 6 at my primary school where I felt socially connected, academically capable, and sporty, I now felt isolated and alone at high school, especially as I was the only person from my primary school to attend this school. Every school morning and before each class, I would feel anxious about who I was going to sit next to. I felt like the teachers never really got to know me and the fact that I was shy and seldom said anything didn't seem to help. I felt invisible and worthless.

I was grateful for weekends and school holidays, as this meant I could spend time with my family in a warm and supportive environment. I spent most of my school holidays with my auntie who spoils me with attention, outings, and treats and I cherished spending time with her. She was my saving grace. When the school term commenced again, I had trouble containing my sadness. I missed my auntie and I did not want to go to school. I was sitting in English class with uncontrollable tears streaming down my face. Despite efforts to wipe away my tears the teacher noticed and asked if I was alright. Totally embarrassed, I said "Yes, I'm not sure why my eyes are watering up". The teacher moved on but after a few minutes noticed that my tears had not subsided. She brought me a box of tissues which I used to wipe away my tears. This aggravated the skin around my eyes which became red and puffy. Again, the teacher asked if I was alright. to which I responded, "I'm not sure why my eyes are so watery". She asked if I had any allergies and I said I didn't know. She advised me to go home to see if my condition would settle down.

My mum was contacted, and I was sent home for the day. Everyone was concerned about the redness around my eyes. The next day I was sent to school again, but the experience of being back at school and feeling completely isolated seemed unbearable and the tears returned. Because I didn't admit there was a problem, the tears were interpreted by school staff to be a physical condition, an allergic response to some of the bushes in the school yard. I was sent home again. No one really asked me any specific questions about what was troubling me, so I just went along with it. I was too embarrassed to express how I was feeling, and I was enjoying the newfound attention and the absence from school. Once my sadness and crying settled, and my eyes were no longer red I realised I would have to go back to school. I decided to use makeup, rouge, to make the skin around my eyes look irritated. This worked well. I stayed home from school for over a week. I ended up going to the doctor, who after examining me (with makeup around my eyes) recommended I get a full allergy test at the hospital. My concerned parents immediately organized for me to have this test at the hospital. I turned up with rouge around my eyes, was pricked numerous times on my hands to test for allergic reactions and all this time, teachers, parents and medical staff did not suspect a thing. Unsurprisingly no allergies were detected. Nearly three months later with the help of make-up, I had not attended school except for a one-week trial at the local technical school which did not go well. This took me to the end of the year where I then stopped applying make-up to the skin around my eyes and instead enjoyed the Summer holidays with my family.

**Fig. 21.1** Dianne's allergy story: An illustration of the challenge of fostering school belonging and the power of student-teacher relationships

in academic progress, and fair and effective discipline (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Libbey, 2004; Wingspread Declaration on School Connections, 2004). Despite a lack of consistency in definitions of school belonging and a variety in the terms used to describe belonging, researchers have generally focused on three key components of this construct: school-based experiences and relationships, student–teacher relationships, and student general feelings about school as a whole (Allen & O’Brien, 2013; Allen et al., 2018).

Interestingly, several definitions of school belonging implicitly include teacher support. For example, Blum and Libbey (2004) noted that school belonging involves students believing that the adults involved at their school care about their learning, are interested in them as individuals, and maintain high academic expectations of them. The literature also points to school belonging necessitating positive teacher–student relationships and a feeling of safety at school (Anderman, 2002; Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012; Rowe & Stewart, 2009).

## Measurement

The measurement of school belonging is a critical step to understand and develop prevention strategies in fostering student healthy development and wellbeing. Several measurement tools have been developed (Allen & Kern, 2017; Arslan & Duru, 2017). For example, the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993) is one of the most widely used measures for assessing the sense of belonging among children and adolescents (Goodenow, 1993). The PSSM measures student feelings of belonging, or psychological membership, within the school environment and has been applied in various academic and cultural contexts (e.g., Anderman, 2003; Cheung & Hui, 2003; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006). The School Belongingness Scale (SBS) assesses the school belonging of children and adolescents (Arslan & Duru, 2017). The SBS has sound psychometric properties, and includes two components: school inclusion and school exclusion. School inclusion refers to social acceptance within the school environment while school exclusion refers to social rejection. Slaten and colleagues (2018) developed a youth belonging measure that captures several salient domains in a youth’s life: family, school, and peer belonging. This 9-item measure includes 3-items for each subscale and a total scale score, this abbreviated measure is seen as an efficient tool and utilized by scholars in multiple disciplines. In addition to these measures, there are many smaller sets of questions that have been used to assess school belonging (Allen & Kern,

2017). However, measures have been criticized for being too brief to assess the complexity and multiple features of school belonging (Allen & Kern, 2017; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Given the limited number of scales used to measure school belonging, there is a need to further identify the best way to capture school belonging.

Regardless of what the measure of school belonging should be, it is clear across the literature that the student–teacher relationship is a critical component. As described in more detail below, the student–teacher relationship provides a powerful resource in both assessing and promoting students’ sense of school belonging (Allen et al., 2016, 2018; Arslan, 2020; Arslan & Duru, 2017; Osterman, 2000; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). As such, most measures of school belonging have emphasized the importance of good quality student–teacher bonds (Allen et al., 2016; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). For example, Goodenow and Grady (1993) include “students’ subjective feelings of being accepted, included, respected, and supported by others, especially teachers and friends, in the school social environment” (p. 66), asking for instance “the teachers here respect me”. Similarly, the School Connectedness Scale (SCS) for adolescents includes questions such as “My teachers give me extra help when I need it” (Lohmeier & Lee, 2011). Arslan and Duru (2017) include questions such as “I have close/sincere relationships with my teachers and friends”. Clearly, measures of school belonging see the student–teacher relationship as an important resource in measuring and understanding of students’ sense of belonging in school.

## Teacher Support

In a large-scale synthesis of research, Hattie (2009) found a strong ( $d = 0.52$ ) effect for the teacher–student relationship in enhancing academic outcomes in students. Similarly, through a meta-analysis of school belonging, which included 51 studies and 67,378 students Allen et al. (2018) found a large ( $r = 0.46$ ) effect between teacher support and school belonging. Numerous other researchers have widely supported the importance of the teacher–student relationship for numerous academic and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016).

Numerous studies find that teacher relationships positively influence young people’s feelings about their schools, and that the role of a teacher extends beyond providing opportunities for improved academic outcome (e.g., Cernalcilar, 2010; Hallinan, 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004). For instance, Klem and Connell (2004) noted: “students who perceive teachers as

creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are fair are more likely to report engagement in school” (p. 270). In a sample of 3,238 students from Hong Kong, students were more likely to have high expectations about their educational experiences if they had positive relationships with their teachers and felt like they belonged at school (Wong, Parent, & Konishi, 2019). Similarly, Wallace, Ye, and Chhuton, (2012) showed that support, fairness, and lack of conflict with teachers predicted a sense of belonging in adolescence. Further, students’ perceptions about the relationship with their teacher were found to be contextual and influenced by how effective the teacher was at ensuring the pedagogy and content resonated with the students and whether the students thought their teacher cared for them.

Across studies, good relationships arise when students feel cared for, accepted, and respected by their teachers. For example, in a longitudinal study of 714 elementary school students who were academically at risk, Hughes (2011) found that children were more likely to see themselves as academically capable and had a sense of school belonging when students perceived their teacher as being warm and accepting and had a sense of social support that reflected care, respect, and cooperation. Crouch, Keys, and McMahan (2014) found that teachers fulfilled an important social function for students if they respected and valued students, offered social support, and developed a good rapport while teaching the curriculum. Anderman (2002) found that students reported greater belonging when they perceived their teachers provided mutual respect in the classroom. Moreover, pointing to the school as a community, rather than the sole responsibility of a single teacher, Roffey (2012) found that students reported a greater belonging when staff members generally (not necessarily the students’ teachers) were perceived as being available to students, showed that they cared about them, and positively interacted with them.

While social support is important as this addresses students’ need for relatedness and care, academic support also matters, as this supports their need for competence. For instance, across 434 twelve-year-old students, students achieved more *and* felt a greater sense of school belonging when their teachers used a mastery goal orientation involving assisting students to acquire new skills and master new situations through the development of personal goals, combined with academic pressure (Stevens, Hamman, & Olivárez, 2007). These teachers were more likely to challenge students, encourage their ideas, and ask them to explain their work. The pressure was for students to go beyond their comfort zones and engage in their learnings.

And the more that teachers promoted learning over performance, the more school belonging students felt.

It is clear that the student–teacher relationship matters. Research has demonstrated that the relationship remains important as a young person progresses through secondary school (Longobardi, Prino, Marengo, & Settanni, 2016). Of course, other relationships, including those with parents and peers, also impact upon a students' sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018; Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013; Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013), and other adult connections may become more important as a student progresses through secondary school. However, the support provided by teachers may fulfil a specific set of needs, such as autonomy and competence. Perhaps the best teachers are not simply imparters of knowledge on a particular subject nor counsellors providing social and emotional care, but *educators* caring about the holistic development of their students.

## The Current Context

It is clear that the student–teacher relationship matters for cultivating a sense of school belonging, good psychosocial functioning, and academic outcomes. Yet OECD (2019) data have revealed some disturbing statistics about student perceptions of relationships with their teachers. A significant portion of students believed their teachers gave them the impression they were less intelligent than they were, their teachers disciplined them more harshly than others, or their teachers ridiculed or insulted them in front of others. Clearly, many students do not feel their relationships with their teachers are supportive.

There are signs of inequity in terms of who is at risk for poor outcomes, with the vulnerable and disadvantaged at higher risk. For instance, while international data suggest that a sense of belonging for Australian students has declined across students (OECD, 2019), De Bortoli (2018) found that several groups were less likely to feel like they belong including indigenous students, those with disability, and those from the LGBT community. Students in remote communities also reported feeling more like an outsider than those in metropolitan areas. It is clear that there needs to be more effort made to include those who are at risk. Although it is now widely recognized that school belonging is relevant to engagement, academic outcomes, and mental health, there continue to be difficulties at the local and national levels in implementing strategies that promote positive teacher–student relationships.

For example, since 2010 in the U.K., state education has increasingly focused on academic subjects at the expense of creative subjects and humanities. This has been coupled with expectations on teachers to account for everything they and students do in the classroom. Schools are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, who rate them from inadequate to outstanding. This rating includes the results of tests that students take at the end of years 2, 6, and 9. This approach to education has led to several unwanted consequences. Firstly, a teacher's time is consumed with paperwork and getting through the demands of the curriculum that there is little time to establish and maintain relationships. The priority for teachers, especially in the secondary sector, is on delivering their subject, rather than responding to the needs of the young people who they are teaching and taking account of their individual contexts. While this may have little consequence for students from strong, supportive families, for young people where school is their primary source of consistency, security, and welcome, this can leave them marginalized, resulting in further disadvantage. The grading system also sets schools up in competition with each other. Senior managers and school governors may put pressure on teachers to ensure the school gets an "outstanding" rating. Students feel pressure to meet the high academic standards, and place pressure on teachers to help them meet those standards. Behaviour also deteriorates where students no longer feel they matter and school becomes an irrelevance. Rather than trying to promote a sense of inclusive belonging, many schools have resorted to exclusion and "off-rolling", a practice where parents are persuaded to remove their child from the school so that these children do not bring down the school's exam average.

While this illustrates the experiences of one country, similar practices and pressures are occurring worldwide (e.g., Hirschfield, 2008; Sargeant, 2016) teachers are leaving the profession in significant numbers. In 2018, nearly 10% of teachers in the U.K. left the profession, with slightly more in the secondary sector. The retention rate of newly qualified teachers has fallen considerably since 2011 (National Foundation for Educational Research [NFER], 2019). There are increasing concerns about young people's mental health, school violence, and gang-related activity indicating that more conversations and actions need to occur in this space.

## **Interventions to Support Belonging**

Although this paints a rather depressing picture, many teachers and schools are doing their best to support students, often under challenging circumstances. There are signs that different approaches are gaining traction. In

the wake of burgeoning systemic pressures on the teaching profession, interventions for relationship building with students that can be immersed into day-to-day school life and embedded in existing practices are beneficial (Allen & Kern, 2019).

Very few empirically tested interventions are available that specifically address school belonging through the student–teacher relationship. This may be because the student–teacher relationship is expected to occur naturally. Still, in a school climate of competing interests, teacher stress, and job dissatisfaction, even seemingly obvious interventions have a need and place for increasing school belonging. Cook et al. (2018) found that something as simple as a personal greeting can have merit: a teacher who greets students at the door can increase student engagement by 20%.

Another seemingly simple intervention devised by Gehlbach et al. (2016) allowed for teachers and students to know each other better based on the assumption that when people perceive themselves as similar, greater liking, and closer relationships result. Students in the treatment condition received feedback on five similarities that they shared with their teachers; each teacher received parallel feedback regarding similarities. The study found improved relationships and higher course grades for students and teachers who shared similarities. This brief intervention appeared to close the achievement gap at this school by over 60%. Vidourek and King (2014) similarly found that those who felt positively connected to their students felt significantly more likely than their counterparts to use school connectedness strategies and felt significantly more confident than teachers who reported low use of strategies to connect students to school.

Cornelius-White (2007) found that positive student outcomes were associated with learner-centred teacher practices, which honour student voices, promote higher-order thinking, align teaching with individual needs, and adapt instructions that have been associated with positive student outcomes. Researchers have found that these teaching practices increase mastery and performance goals in adolescents, and promote motivation and academic engagement (Meece, 2003; Meece, Herman, & McCombs, 2003). Shanghai, Akgul, Cokamay, and Demir (2016) found that students perceived their teachers as being more supportive if the teachers were aware of the specific characteristics of individual students. Supportive teachers considered different learning levels and kept students' views in mind when conducting activities in the classroom and assigning homework.

Having social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that give students agency for the emotional climate of their class and mix everyone up to discuss issues (not incidents) is another way of promoting connectedness

(Dobia, Parada, Roffey, & Smith, 2019). SEL can also provide opportunities for teachers to get to know their students in informal activities and to develop their understanding of what promotes or inhibits their engagement with others. This is especially critical in the secondary sector where school belonging is most likely to decline.

Bringing many of the different strategies and interventions together, Megan Pedlar (2018) suggested the following strategies for building student–teacher relationships :

- Prioritize high-quality teacher–student relationships
- Create a supportive and caring learning environment
- Offer emotional support to students
- Be sensitive to students’ needs and emotions
- Show interest in students
- Try to understand students’ point of view
- Be respectful and provide fair treatment
- Foster positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates to establish a sense of community
- Engage in positive classroom management

While many of the features within Pedlar’s list may be intuitively provided by teachers and school leaders , there is room within this body of work for more rigorous empirical evidence. Research on student–teacher relationships appear paramount to school belonging and require future research to reveal the precise mechanisms for increasing school belonging. In addition, an important area for further study involves strategizing ways schools can foster teacher support and helping schools specifically pay attention to cultivating teacher–student relationships, despite the broader cultural pressures that might exist.

## The Role of School Leadership

Although individual teachers can do a lot to support a sense of belonging with the young people they interact with on a regular basis, this will not be sustainable unless it is prioritized across the whole school. The vision, direction, and priorities of the school generally are set by a senior leadership team, such that the role of school leaders is central (Roffey, 2007). If leaders are passionate that each child has the opportunity to do as well as they can in all

dimensions of their development, then the leaders are more likely to emphasize and support an inclusive sense of belonging across the school community (Roffey, 2007). In contrast, when school leaders singularly focus on “academic success”, then students who do not “fit” are more at risk (Dulfer, Polesel, & Rice, 2012). Further, many people find themselves in leadership roles with little training or support for how to lead well and manage the many demands, stakeholder voices, and priorities of the community. Without a clear vision for the school, the priorities of the broader education system tend to take priority, leaving behind the social and emotional needs of the community.

Effective school leaders have the intellectual capacity and relevant knowledge set for their roles, as well as necessary emotional knowledge and skills (Scott, 2003). Studies (e.g., Ma, 2003; O’Keeffe, 2013) point to several practices that effective leaders engage in that support belonging:

- They appreciate that some children will only achieve when the learning environment is safe and supportive, and work hard to create a school environment that is both physically and psychologically safe.
- They ensure that there is time and/or flexibility in the school day for teachers to establish positive relationships with their students.
- They organize professional development so that staff know the importance of this and how to do it.
- They support a behaviour policy that is relational rather than based in reward and punishment and they will be aware of some of the issues that may undermine connectedness, such as an inflexible focus on uniform infringements.
- They encourage teachers to provide pastoral support to students.
- They ensure that time is allocated to get to know and understand their students and show that this is a valued part of their role in the school.

School leaders have both the opportunity and the responsibility to create an environment that can enable wellbeing in those they lead. Considering the importance of belonging for so many desired outcomes (Allen et al., 2018), we suggest that it is crucial that creating environments of belonging are prioritized.

## Relationships and Belonging in Higher Education

Most of the research on belonging has focused on the primary and secondary levels, with limited focus within higher education. Existing studies and

theoretical models consistently include belonging as an integral construct in understanding university student retention and academic performance (e.g., Strayhorn, 2018; Tinto, 1987). For instance, the widely accepted *Tinto Model of College Student Retention* points to the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging on campus and being able to relate to other students on campus as well as university personnel, including faculty and staff. Similarly, emphasizing students on the margin, Strayhorn (2018) posits that student social context and feeling unsupported or unwelcome may contribute to a more heightened level of importance to feeling a sense of belonging on campus.

## Assessing Belonging Within Higher Education

One reason that there has been limited empirical research on belongingness in higher education is the lack of sound measurement of the construct. In the few studies where belongingness has been examined, higher education scholars have largely adapted K-12 school belonging scales, such as the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993). But students in higher education environments have vastly different experiences compared to K-12 schools. The higher education experience often involves living at or near the educational institution, engaging in activities and group activities outside of the classroom, living with peers, and taking courses in a variety of different disciplines in different buildings. These are just a few of the many differences in the educational environment when transitioning to higher education.

Notably, Slaten and colleagues (2018) created a belongingness measure to be utilized specifically in higher education settings. Through qualitative research, consulting experts in the field, and performing an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on an initial item list, they identified and confirmed a three factor structure that encompasses belonging in higher education: university/school affiliation (pride in being part of the university), university/school support (feeling accepted, valued, and supported by the university), and faculty/staff relations (feeling psychologically safe and comfortable in interacting with faculty and staff). A valid and reliable measure of belonging that is specific to the higher education environment can help aid university personnel and higher education scholars in more accurately understanding the impact belonging may have on college student outcomes, as well as serve as a starting point to designing interventions that could enhance belonging on campus.

## Impact of and Approaches to Belonging in Higher Education

Existing studies on belonging in higher education identify promising areas of intervention and support. University students with a higher sense of belonging are more engaged in the classroom and generally have more successful academic outcomes (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2012), and a sense of belonging has been linked to positive psychosocial and behavioural outcomes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Osterman, 2000; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Recently, Gillen-O'Neel (2019) examined the relationship between belonging on campus and student engagement for both first-generation collegess students and continuing-generation college students. The results suggest that, with few exceptions, belonging was associated with all types of student engagement. Further, for first-generation students, the concept of belonging appeared to be more powerful, confirming Strayhorns' (2018) theoretical assertions that for those students experiencing a more difficult time on campus, sense of belonging is even more important.

Relationships with faculty members may be particularly important for cultivating a sense of belonging at the university. For instance, Slaten et al. (2018) examined the potential factors that make up belonging in higher education settings, finding that one of these salient factors was the importance of students having positive relationships with faculty. Walton and Cohen (2007, 2011) designed an intervention for college students that focused on statements related to social difficulties in college and problem-solving solutions to these concerns. Results suggested that the intervention successfully increased students sense of belonging and their academic performance. Upon examining the impact of instructional adjustments, Gilken and Johnson (2019) found that classrooms that engaged in peer review and feedback from their classmates felt a greater sense of belonging by the end of the semester, suggesting that faculty should provide opportunities for students to connect with one another in the classroom. Perhaps the most promising intervention research has been conducted by Patterson Silver Wolf and colleagues (2019), who examined a brief intervention curriculum for community college students, specifically focused on underrepresented minorities and mattering in higher education settings. The results of multiple randomized control trials found that the intervention improved both students' sense of belonging and retention. Additional studies focusing on best approaches for prioritising and cultivating a sense of belonging and good student-professor relationship at the higher education level will be an important area to focus on in the coming years.

## Future Directions

We end with consideration of some of the future directions for belonging research. Many researchers have studied school belonging and teacher support by investigating bivariate relationships. For example, most studies reported a correlation between two variables (e.g., belonging and teacher support), which can establish relational inferences, but say little about causation (Thompson, Diamond, McWilliam, Snyder, & Snyder, 2005). While this has provided a homogenous understanding of concepts related to school belonging, this offers little information about what schools can do to increase belonging in their unique environments. Considering the dynamic nature of social relationships, simple causation most likely does not occur, but greater understanding of specific strategies and actions teachers and others in the school community can take to increase a sense of belonging is needed.

Due to the tendency to focus on student perspectives about belonging, the voices of school leaders and teachers are often absent from this research (Shochet, Smyth, & Homel, 2007; Uwah et al., 2008). Likely, teachers and other staff who feel a greater sense of school belonging are more committed to the school and perhaps better educators, but how a sense of belonging plays out for adults in the school community, and the impact of that on students is unknown.

While studies find that the student–teacher relationship is instrumental to belonging, less is known about how to improve those relationships, as are the most effective types of supports that teachers can offer and the interplay between the variables that comprise teacher support. Future work might empirically consider characteristics of good student–teacher relationships and consider specific strategies for improving relationships, across different school contexts.

## Conclusion

In what has been called a “loneliness epidemic”, the past decade has brought an alarming rise in loneliness for people worldwide, with adolescents and senior citizens particularly at risk (Australian Psychological Society, 2018). Schools are essentially micro-societies that represent our broader societies. As such, if we can learn how to build a sense of belonging within our schools, perhaps these lessons can be applied across other communities, including assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Further, if young people develop the skills and capabilities to connect well with others, perhaps we

can cultivate a more connected community within a currently disconnected world.

Within schools, there are some barriers to the connections that adults have with students, such as the organizational structure of schools, teacher instructional practices, the transitions that are a part of schooling, and discipline policies. Adults play a role in promoting student growth and development, such as through addressing the social conditions within a school. Students need the opportunity to feel accepted, cared for, and affirmed in their school. There is no greater way to achieve this than by utilizing the school personnel that they are around the most: teachers.

## References

- Aerts, S., Van Houtte, M., Dewaele, A., Cox, N., & Vincke, J. (2012). Sense of belonging in secondary schools: A survey of LGB and heterosexual students in Flanders. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *59*(1), 90–113.
- Abdollahi, A., Panahipour, S., Tafti, M. A., & Allen, K. A. (2020). Academic hardness as a mediator for the relationship between school belonging and academic stress. *Psychology in the Schools*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22339>.
- Akgul, G., Cokamay, G., & Demir, E. (2016). Predictors of teacher support: Turkey and Shanghai in the Programme for International Student Assessment, 2012. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, *63*, 115–132.
- Allen, K. A. (2020). *The psychology of belonging*. Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group).
- Allen, K. A., & Bowles, T. (2012). Belonging as a guiding principle in the education of adolescents. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, *12*, 108–119.
- Allen, K. A., Boyle, C., Lachlan, F., & Craig, H. (2020). How multi-systemic social skills training can pave the way for inclusive practices for students with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. In C. Boyle, S. Mavropoulou, J. Anderson, & A. Page (Eds.), *Inclusive Education: Global Issues & Controversies*. Brill.
- Allen, K. A., & Kern, M. L. (2017). *School belonging in adolescents: Theory, research and practice*. Springer Social Sciences.
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, *30*(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>.
- Allen, K. A., & Kern, P. (2019). *Boosting School Belonging in Adolescents: Interventions for teachers and mental health professionals*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

- Allen, K. A., Kern, M., McInerney, D., Rozec, C., & Slavich, G. (2021). Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research. *Australian Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409>.
- Allen, K. A., & McKenzie, V. (2015). Adolescent Mental Health in an Australian Context and Future Interventions. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 44, 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2015>.
- Allen, K. A., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2016). Fostering school belonging in secondary schools using a socio-ecological framework. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 33(1), 97–121.
- Allen, K. A., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. (2017). School belonging and the role of social and emotional competencies in fostering an adolescent's sense of connectedness to their school. In E. Frydenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific: Perspectives, Programs and Approaches* (1st ed., pp. 83–99). Singapore, Singapore: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3394-0_5).
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(4), 795–809.
- Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 72(1), 5–22.
- Arslan, G. (2018). Exploring the association between school belonging and emotional health among adolescents. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 7(1), 21–41. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2018.3117>.
- Arslan, G. (2020). Loneliness, college belongingness, subjective vitality, and psychological adjustment during coronavirus pandemic: Development of the College Belongingness Questionnaire. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*. Retrieved from <https://journalppw.com/index.php/JPPW/article/view/240>.
- Arslan, G. (2021). School bullying and youth internalizing and externalizing behaviors: Do school belonging and school achievement matter? *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00526-x>.
- Arslan, G., Allen, K., & Ryan, T. (2020). Exploring the Impacts of School Belonging on Youth Wellbeing and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study. *Child Indicators Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09721-z>.
- Arslan, G., & Coşkun, M. (2020). Student subjective wellbeing, school functioning, and psychological adjustment in high school adolescents: A latent variable analysis. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 4(2), 153–164. <https://doi.org/10.47602/jpsp.v4i2.231>.
- Arslan, G., & Duru, E. (2017). Initial development and validation of the School Belongingness Scale. *Child Indicators Research*, 10(4), 1043–1058.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2007). *Australia's welfare 2007* (Cat. no. AUS 93). Author.

- Australian Psychological Society. (2018). *Australian loneliness report*. APS. <https://psychweek.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report-1.pdf>.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *11*(3), 497–529.
- Baxter, J., Weston, R., & Qu, L. (2011). Family structure, co-parental relationship quality, post-separation paternal involvement and children's emotional wellbeing. *Journal of Family Studies*, *17*(2), 86–109.
- Blum, R. W., & Libbey, H. P. (2004). Executive summary. *Journal of School Health*, *74*(7), 231–232.
- Bowlby, J. (1958). The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *39*, 350–373.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Volume 1*. Basic Books.
- Bretherton, I., & Munholland, K. A. (1999). Internal working models in attachment relationships: A construct revisited. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 89–111). The Guilford Press.
- Cemalcilar, Z. (2010). Schools as socialization contexts: Understanding the impact of school climate factors on students' sense of school belonging. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *59*(2), 243–272.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Cheung, H. Y., & Hui, S. K. F. (2003). Mainland immigrant and Hong Kong local students' psychological sense of school membership. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *4*(1), 67–74.
- Connell, J. P., & Wellborn, J. G. (1991). Competence, autonomy and relatedness: A motivational analysis of self-system processes. In M. R. Gunnar & L. A. Sroufe (Eds.), *Minnesota symposium on child psychology*, *22* (pp. 43–77). L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Cook, C. R., Fiat, A., Larson, M., Daikos, C., Slemrod, T., Holland, E. A., et al. (2018). Positive greetings at the door: Evaluation of a low-cost, high-yield proactive classroom management strategy. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *20*(3), 149–159.
- Cornelius-White, J. H. D. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*, 113–143.
- Crouch, R., Keys, C. B., & McMahon, S. D. (2014). Student-teacher relationships matter for school inclusion: School belonging, disability, and school transitions. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, *42*(1), 20–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2014.855054>.
- De Bortoli, L. (2018). *PISA Australia in Focus Number 1: Sense of belonging at school*. ACERResearch. <https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/30/>.

- Dobia, B., Parada, R., Roffey, S., & Smith, M. (2019). Social and emotional learning: From individual skills to group cohesion. *Educational and Child Psychology, 36*(2), 79–90.
- Dowling, E., & Elliott, D. (2012). Promoting positive outcomes for children experiencing change in family relationships. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive Relationships: Evidence Based Practice across the World* (pp.109–126). Springer.
- Dulfer, N., Polesel, J. & Rice, S. (2012). *The Experience of Education: The Impact of High Stakes Testing on Students and their Families*. Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development*. Psychology Press.
- Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 109–132.
- Edmund, L. (2012). Conflict and confrontation. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive Relationships: Evidence Based Practice Across the World* (pp. 261–276). Springer.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59–109.
- Gerhardt, S. (2015). *Why love matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Gilken, J., & Johnson, H. L. (2019). Supporting belongingness through instructional interventions in community college classrooms. *Community College Enterprise, 25*(1), 32–50.
- Gillen-O'Neel, C. (2019). Sense of Belonging and Student Engagement: A Daily Study of First- and Continuing-Generation College Students. *Research in Higher Education, 62*, 45–71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09570-y>.
- Goldstein, H., (2016). *The relationship between grandparents and the caring, resilience, and emotional intelligence of grandchildren*. ETD Collection for Pace University. AAI10182953. <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/dissertations/AAI10182953>.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*(1), 79–90.
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 62*(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>.
- Gutman, L. M., & Midgley, C. (2000). The role of protective factors in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 29*(2), 223–249.
- Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., & Oe, H. (2002). Childhood antecedents of adult sense of belonging. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 58*(7), 793–801.
- Hallinan, M. T. (2008). Teacher influences on students' attachment to school. *Sociology of Education, 81*(3), 271–283.

- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Haugen, J., S., Morris, C., W., & Wester, K. (2019). The need to belong: An exploration of belonging among urban middle school students. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling* 5(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2018.1556988>.
- Hausmann, L. R., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(7), 649–669.
- Hawkins, J. D., & Weis, J. G. (1985). The social development model: An integrated approach to delinquency prevention. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 6(2), 73–97.
- Henrich, C. C., Brookmeyer, K. A., & Shahar, G. (2005). Weapon violence in adolescence: Parent and school connectedness as protective factors. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 37(4), 306–312.
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison: The criminalisation of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79–101.
- Hughes, J. N. (2011). Longitudinal effects of teacher and student perceptions of teacher-student relationship qualities on academic adjustment. *The Elementary School Journal*, 112(1), 38–60.
- Huppert, F. A. (2012). Forward. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive relationships: Evidence base practice around the world* (pp. vii–ix). Springer Social Sciences.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324–345.
- Johnson, L. S. (2009). School contexts and student belonging: A mixed methods study of an innovative high school. *The School Community Journal*, 19(1), 99–119.
- Jose, P. E., Ryan, N., & Pryor, J. (2012). Does social connectedness promote a greater sense of well-being in adolescence over time? *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 22(2), 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00783.x>.
- Karcher, M. J., & Lee, Y. (2002). Connectedness among Taiwanese middle school students: A validation study of the Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 3(1), 92–114.
- Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 262–273.
- Knifsend, C., & Graham, S. (2012). Too much of a good thing? How breadth of extracurricular participation relates to school-related affect and academic outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 379–389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9737-4>.
- Korpershoek, H., Harms, T., de Boer, H., van Kuijk, M., & Doolaard, S. (2016). A meta-analysis of the effects of classroom management strategies and classroom

- management programs on students' academic, behavioral, emotional, and motivational outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(3), 643–680. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626799>.
- Libbey, H. P. (2004). Measuring student relationships to school: Attachment, bonding, connectedness, and engagement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 275–283.
- Lim, M., Allen, K. A., Craig, H., Smith, D., & Furlong, M. (2021). Feeling lonely and a need to belong: What is shared and distinct? *Australian Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883411>.
- Lohmeier, J. H., & Lee, S. W. (2011). A school connectedness scale for use with adolescents. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 17(2), 85–95.
- Longobardi, C., Prino, L. E., Marengo, D., & Settanni, M. (2016). Student-teacher relationships as a protective factor for school adjustment during the transition from middle to high school. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1988. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01988>.
- Ma, X. (2003). Sense of belonging to school: Can schools make a difference? *Journal of Educational Research*, 96(3), 340–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670309596617>.
- Meece, J. L. (2003). Applying learner-centered principles to middle school education. *Theory into Practice*, 42(2), 109–116.
- Meece, J. L., Herman, P., & McCombs, B. L. (2003). Relations of learner-centered teaching practices to adolescents' achievement goals. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39(4–5), 457–475.
- National Foundation for Educational Research [NFER]. (2019). *Education Inspection Framework 2019 NFER Response: Teacher Voice Data*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3428/teacher\\_views\\_on\\_ofsted\\_proposed\\_education\\_inspection\\_framework.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3428/teacher_views_on_ofsted_proposed_education_inspection_framework.pdf).
- Nichols, S. L. (2006). Teachers' and students' beliefs about student belonging in one middle school. *Elementary School Journal*, 106(3), 255–271.
- Obsuth, I., Murray, A. L., Malti, T., Sulger, P., Ribeaud, D., & Sulger, P. (2017). A non-bipartite propensity score analysis of the effects of teacher–student relationship on adolescent problem and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46(8), 1661–1687.
- O'Brien, K. A., & Bowles, T. V. (2013). The Importance of Belonging for Adolescents in Secondary School Settings. *The European Journal of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 5(2), 976–984.
- O'Connell, B. H., O'Shea, D., & Gallagher, S. (2016). Enhancing social relationships through positive psychology activities: A randomized control trial. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11, 149–162.
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605–613.
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*. Author.

- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 323–367.
- Patterson Silver Wolf, D. A., Taylor, F., Maguin, E., & Asher BlackDeer, A. (2019). You are college material—You belong: An underrepresented minority student retention intervention without deception. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 1521025119848749.
- Pedlar, M. (2018). Teachers play a key role in helping students feel they 'belong' at school. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/teachers-play-a-key-role-in-helping-students-feel-they-belong-at-school-99641>.
- Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2007). Academic and psychological functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(4), 270–290.
- Quinn, S., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2013). Is the igeneration a 'we' generation? Social networking use among 9- to 13-year-olds and belonging. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 31(1), 136–142.
- Roffey, S. (2007). Transformation and emotional literacy: The role of school leaders in developing a caring community. *Leading and Managing*, 13(1), 16–30.
- Roffey, S. (2012). *Positive relationships: Evidence base practice around the world*. Springer Social Sciences.
- Rowe, F., & Stewart, D. (2009). Promoting connectedness through whole-school approaches: A qualitative study. *Health Education*, 109(5), 396–413.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78.
- Sargeant, J. (2016). Are we expelling too many students from Australian schools? *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/are-we-expelling-too-many-children-from-australian-schools-65162>.
- Scott, G. (2003). *Learning Principals: Leadership Capability and Learning Research*. New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate.
- Shochet, I. M., Dadds, M. R., Ham, D., & Montague, R. (2006). School connectedness is an underemphasized parameter in adolescent mental health: Results of a community prediction study. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 35(2), 170–179.
- Shochet, I. M., Smyth, T. L., & Homel, R. (2007). The impact of parental attachment on adolescent perception of the school environment and school connectedness. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 28(2), 109–118.
- Simons-Morton, B. G., Crump, A. D., Haynie, D. L., & Saylor, K. E. (1999). Student-school bonding and adolescent problem behavior. *Health Education Research*, 14(1), 99–107.

- Skinner, E. A., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Connell, J. P., Eccles, J. S., & Wellborn, J. G. (1998). Individual differences and the development of perceived control. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, i-231.
- Slaten, C. D., Ferguson, J. K., Allen, K. A., Brodrick, D.-V., & Waters, L. (2016). School belonging: A review of the history, current trends, and future directions. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 33(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2016.6>.
- Slaten, C. D., Rose, C. A., Bonifay, W., & Ferguson, J. (2018). Milwaukee youth belongingness scale: item response theory analysis. *School Psychology Quarterly*. Advanced online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000299>.
- Stevens, T., Hamman, D., & Olivárez, A., Jr. (2007). Hispanic students' perception of white teachers' mastery goal orientation influences sense of school belonging. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 6(1), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348430709336677>.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.
- Thompson, B., Diamond, K. E., McWilliam, R., Snyder, P., & Snyder, S. W. (2005). Evaluating the quality of evidence from correlational research for evidence-based practice. *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), 181–194.
- Tillery, A. D., Varjas, K., Roach, A. T., Kuperminc, G. P., & Meyers, J. (2013). The importance of adult connections in adolescents' sense of school belonging: Implications for schools and practitioners. *Journal of School Violence*, 12(2), 134–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2012.762518>.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Uslu, F., & Gizir, S. (2017). School belonging of adolescents: The role of teacher-student relationships, peer relationships and family involvement. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 17(1), 63–82.
- Uwah, C. J., McMahan, H. G., & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(5), 296–305.
- Van Ryzin, M. J., Gravely, A. A., & Roseth, C. J. (2009). Autonomy, belongingness, and engagement in school as contributors to adolescent psychological well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(1), 1–12.
- Vidourek, R. A., & King, K. A. (2014). Enhancing School Connectedness: Teachers' Perceived Confidence in Positively Connecting Students to School. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, 2(2), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683603.2013.876949>.
- Wallace, T. L., Ye, F., & Chhuon, V. (2012). Subdimensions of adolescent belonging in high school. *Applied Developmental Science*, 16(3), 122–139.
- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 82–96.

- Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, *331*, 1447–1451.
- Wang, M. T., & Eccles, J. S. (2012). Social support matters: Longitudinal effects of social support on three dimensions of school engagement from middle to high school. *Child Development*, *83*(3), 877–895.
- Warren, M. A., & Donaldson, S. I. (2018). *Toward a positive psychology of relationships: New directions in theory and research*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Wingspread Declaration on School Connections. (2004). *Journal of School Health*, *74*(7), 233–234.
- Wong, T. K. Y., Parent, A.-M., & Konishi, C. (2019). Feeling connected: The roles of student-teacher relationships and sense of school belonging on future orientation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *94*, 150–157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.01.008>.
- You, S., Ritchey, K. M., Furlong, M. J., Shochet, I., & Boman, P. (2011). Examination of the latent structure of the psychological sense of school membership scale. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *29*(3), 225–237.
- Zimmer-, M., Chipuer, H., Hanisch, M., Creed, P., & McGregor, L. (2006). Relationships at school and stage-environment fit as resources for adolescent engagement and achievement. *Journal of Adolescence*, *29*, 911–933.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 22

## Helping Students Find Their Way to Meaning: Meaning and Purpose in Education

Michael F. Steger, Maeve B. O'Donnell, and Jessica L. Morse

### Introduction

In some ways, youth is a time for dreaming, and growing up is a time for pruning dreams. Granted, not all dreams make a lot of sense. Long-abandoned dreams of being a freelance time-traveller or heavy metal guitar hero are no great loss. Other dreams may have held the aspirations that could have blossomed into our meaning and purpose. Those bits of childhood are sad to see forfeited. As parents and educators, we play an inevitable part in the pruning of young dreams. Would we consider learning how to better guide youth in discerning which of their passions and aspirations can be nurtured to become the foundation for their meaning in life?

The role of educators in bolstering meaning may be a vital one. Meaning in life is a fundamental cornerstone of wellbeing and flourishing. Even a couple of decades ago, the empirical research needed to support such an audacious statement was just beginning to build. Now, though, the surge in research makes it impossible to ignore meaning in any endeavour directed at improving the human condition, including in the burgeoning field of positive education.

---

M. F. Steger (✉) · M. B. O'Donnell · J. L. Morse  
Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA  
e-mail: [Michael.F.Steger@colostate.edu](mailto:Michael.F.Steger@colostate.edu)

M. F. Steger  
North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, Viktor Frankl was arguing that the need for meaning was a fundamental human drive, perhaps the most human of all our drives (Frankl, 1963). Frankl fused the terms meaning and purpose, and despite differences we will review below, research on meaning and purpose has grown together. The first claim that meaning was a core part of wellbeing came from Carol Ryff, who included the highly goal-directed construct of *purpose* in her influential psychological wellbeing theory in the late 1980s (Ryff, 1989). Yet it was not until the mid-2000s that a sufficiently robust body of research began to build a strong case for the importance of meaning and purpose.

By including a dedicated chapter on meaning, this *Handbook* recognizes that meaning in life will only grow in importance among those interested in helping others cultivate happy, fulfilling lives. How are we so confident that meaning in life will continue to gain influence? According to the scholarly publication indexing service *Web of Science*, the number of papers published each year on “meaning in life” did not reach 200 until the mid-2000s. Compare that to the nearly 5,000 papers published on meaning in life in 2019 alone. In fact, more research papers have been published on meaning in life in the past four years than in all the preceding years combined. This research has shown that meaning in life is a positive indicator of happiness, psychological wellbeing, better mental health, greater kindness, more frequent use of character strengths, healthier adaptation to stress, greater resilience, more frequent volunteering, more positive social interactions, higher gratitude, more robust physical health, more proactive utilization of health care resources, and, as has been shown many times over, longer life (for reviews, see O’Donnell et al., 2014; Steger, 2012b; Steger, 2019). Cutting edge research continues to explore the benefits of meaning in life around the world, among young and old, on the scale of nations and of neurons. Meaning in life is, truly, a fundamental cornerstone of wellbeing and flourishing.

The conundrum seems to be that as awareness and scientific grounding of the importance of meaning to our functioning as people grows, so too does an anxiety about the dissolution and disappearance of the grand sources of meaning that once provide steady footing for understanding who we are and what we are supposed to do in this life. Several sources document a rise in psychological distress among younger people. For example, an analysis of two large national datasets of American undergraduate students showed that depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts all heightened profoundly from 2007 to 2018 (Duffy, Twenge, & Joiner, 2019). Our stressed young people grow into a world that has seen

the government, marriage, social clubs, service leagues, religious institutions, corporations, and athletic organizations come up wanting as guides to navigate life. Where once people could unquestioningly rely on their leaders, neighbours, parents, clubs, religious leaders, and coaches for stability and reliable advice, these institutions are frequently waning in numbers of participants, revealed as arenas for corruption, or simply challenged on the truth or goodness of their message. At the same time, there are indications that young people are more blatantly interested in meaning than previous generations, especially in their work lives (Gallup, 2016).

There is a gap, then, between what young people want and what we appear to offer them as a society. Given the high levels of distress among young people and the large body of research showing that meaning in life is related to better wellbeing and mental health, it appears worthwhile to seek more effective ways of encouraging and supporting the search for meaning among youth. More than ever, schools appear to be an important resource. Hence, this chapter aims to point towards some ways to understand the meaning in life and integrate it into positive education curricula.

## **Research on Meaning in Life in Youth, Development, and Education**

Oft and inaccurately cited as a primarily adult endeavour, finding and making meaning in life is built into the fabric of human existence from a very young age. One need only gaze into the confused expression of an infant, endure a never-ending string of *why* questions from a 4-year old, or converse with a teenager just cut from the varsity basketball team to determine that meaning matters. Undoubtedly, the search for and experience of meaning in youth is commensurate with cognitive development and endurance. Our attentions, our goals, our strivings, and our interpersonal interpretations in our youth help to form the basis for our meaning-making endeavours in adulthood. Developmental research has only recently begun to answer questions about a typical path for a highly nuanced and personal journey. Although meaning in childhood is guided by curiosities, wonderings, and emerging understandings of the self in the world, adolescence is marked by identity formation, strivings, and the protective role of meaning as a buffer against the common trappings of the teenage years.

## Childhood

Globally, experiencing life as meaningful during one's youth is associated with many of the benefits that persist through adulthood. Youth and adolescents who report that their lives are meaningful report better psychological health, higher life satisfaction, and better emotional wellbeing (Brouzos, Vassilopoulos, & Boumpoli, 2016; Burrow, O'Dell, & Hill, 2010; Cavazos Vela, Castro, Cavazos, Cavazos, & Gonzalez, 2015; French & Joseph, 2009; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006). Youth who endorse that their lives are meaningful also navigate their worlds with an increased sense of hope (Feldman & Snyder, 2005) and are more likely to believe that they have the agency to make change in the world (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). On the flip side, youth who report that their lives lack meaning are more likely to report worse mental health and difficulty with adjustments in psychological and social domains as they get older (Shek, 1992). In sum, youth whose lives are less meaningful may be adrift—having difficulties finding emotional and social footing—while those who report a life imbued with meaning are more likely to operate with hope, satisfaction, and sound mental health.

The childhood years lend themselves naturally to a focus on coherence, with an emergent understanding of how the world works and how one fits into their surroundings. Qualitative research suggests that children as young as seven years old can describe trying to make meaning from difficult experiences inconsistent with an orderly and predictable world, such as recovering from a car accident or being diagnosed with cancer (Kang, Im, Kim, Song, & Sim, 2009; Salter & Stallard, 2004). In fact, the majority of youth who had experienced a traumatic event in childhood described parallel processes consistent with meaning-making, such as experiencing a shift in expectations about the world and its inherent safety and taking stock of what is important to them (Park, 2010). Quantitative efforts have followed suit, and Shoshani and Russo-Netzer (2017) developed and validated a measure to assess the presence and sources of meaning in the lives of children. They found that meaning in childhood is centred around three facets: (1) creativity, which revolves around making a difference in the child's surroundings, (2) experience, which is focused on what inspires the child about the world, and (3) attitude, which reflects how the child perceives the world, including difficult events. These three facets roughly translate to the modern tripartite view of significance, purpose, and coherence, respectively (Martela & Steger, 2016), and may set the stage for identity formation, cognitive interpretations consistent with meaning-making, and strivings in adolescence and adulthood.

## Adolescence

In adolescence and young adulthood, there appears to be a fundamental shift from primarily self-in-world focused endeavours to a clearer emphasis on purpose and striving in pursuit of one's passions. Striving may be so foundational to meaning in adolescence that adolescents seem to experience difficulty distinguishing the cognitive and motivational components of meaning. When high school and college students were randomly assigned to write about purpose, meaning, or a control topic, there were no identifiable differences between the purpose and meaning conditions, and many young people assigned to the meaning condition explicitly mentioned purpose (Ratner, Burrow, Burd, & Hill, 2019). This sense of mission or purpose is associated with greater psychological wellbeing in young adulthood, and people report higher life satisfaction, positive affect, self-esteem, emotional processing, emotional expression, and fewer depressive symptoms if they can identify a clear mission in their lives (Chen, Kim, Koh, Frazier, & VanderWeele, 2019). A robust body of literature suggests that meaning and purpose are also linked to achievement in adolescence. Meaning and purpose have been found to influence adolescents' aspirations and life trajectories, predict better academic performance, feelings of connectedness to school, career curiosity, and career confidence (Bailey & Phillips, 2016; Martin Sanz, Rodrigo, García, & Pastrana, 2017; Yuen & Yau, 2015). Finding passions during adolescence and young adulthood may provide solid ground with which youth can navigate the uncertainty of the world around them and work towards what matters to them.

It is unsurprising, then, that adolescents and young adults who report that their lives are meaningful are less likely to engage in risky health behaviour, are more likely to take steps towards proactive health care and behaviours, and are generally more resilient. Adolescents and young adults with a strong sense of purpose may be naturally drawn to envision a future they want to enact. As such, there may be an increased commitment to making healthy choices for a life worth protecting, and people may be driven by the fact that who they are and what they do matters. In addition, a life imbued with purpose may provide a stronger lens with which to interpret difficult experiences.

Early studies of meaning and resilience found a clear connection between the two (Bernard, 1991; Masten & Reed, 2002), and more recent studies have highlighted the profound protective role of meaning in the context of difficult experiences. In a large study of youth aged 10 to 21 of whom nearly 90% had reported being victimized, a sense of purpose emerged as the most robust predictor of resilient mental health (Hamby, Taylor, Mitchell, Jones, &

Newlin, 2018). In essence, a strong connection to something beyond the self was extremely important in navigating difficult life experiences (Gonzalez-Mendez, Ramírez-Santana, & Hamby, 2018; Hamby et al., 2018). In a corroborating line of work, after the terrorist attacks of September 11th in the U.S., students with high levels of meaning were more likely to report post-traumatic growth, whereas those with low meaning in life experienced higher levels of posttraumatic distress (Steger, Frazier, & Zacchanini, 2008), which suggests that operating from a foundation of meaning may have psychological benefits. Further, in a sample of Filipino high school students, those with higher grit had a decreased likelihood of depression and that relationship was explained by meaning in life, suggesting a highly influential role of meaning in reducing mental health symptomatology (Datu, King, Valdez, & Eala, 2019). Meaning and purpose may provide an adaptive cognitive lens and behavioural goals consistent with one's mission, which proves useful when interpreting and bouncing back from some of life's most difficult experiences.

Meaning also appears to be highly influential in terms of adolescent and young adult health behaviour. Multiple studies have found that adolescents who report that their lives are highly meaningful are less likely to use substances (Aloise-Young, Hennigan, & Leong, 2001; Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011) and are more proactive with maintaining their health (Fitch-Martin, Steger, Fitch-Martin, Donnelly, & Rickard, 2015). Meaning in life is associated with decreased lifetime odds of experiencing suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Kleiman & Beaver, 2013; Tan, Chen, Xia, & Hu, 2018), and researchers have found that adolescents living in poverty who reported having a sense of purpose were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviours (Machell, Disabato, & Kashdan, 2016). Navigating a life filled with meaning and the requisite behaviours associated with meaning may be a protective pathway by which adolescents and young adults operate.

## Education/Learning

Multiple school-based programs have been implemented to directly or indirectly foster meaning in life for school-aged youth. Some meaning-focused curricula in schools include meaning as one tool among many positive psychological skills, such as those based on the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement (PERMA) framework (Seligman, 2011). PERMA-based programs have taken place in wrap-around school-based efforts, such as the Geelong Grammar School in Australia (Williams, 2011), and in programmatic ways such as the *Flourishing Life Program* in Hong Kong (Au & Kennedy, 2018), and the *Maytiv Program*

in Israel (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014). Emerging results show indirect pathways to meaning, such as an increase in enjoyment and engagement in school, increased focus and mindfulness, use of character strengths and a rise in meaningful conversations among students, although very few studies have specifically assessed meaning in life as a malleable target in and of itself (Au & Kennedy, 2018; Shoshani & Slone, 2017; Shoshani, Steinmetz, & Kanat-Maymon, 2016; Williams, 2011). Some programs, such as the *My Precious Life* program in Korea (Kang, Shim, Jeon, & Koh, 2009) and the *Make Your Work Matter* pilot program (Dik, Steger, Gibson, & Peisner, 2011) directly target logotherapeutic and purpose-driven efforts to enhance meaning in life and meaning in work. Across these meaning-focused programs, the experimental groups reported higher meaning in life, a clearer sense of career direction, more insight into themselves, and better preparedness for the future (Dik et al., 2011; Kang et al., 2009). Although meaning-focused intervention efforts have been at the forefront of many positive education programs, many aspects of what enhances meaning remain elusive in the intervention literature.

## A Primer on Meaning in Life Theory

Meaning in life is thought to be a necessary part of human psychological and spiritual life. Viktor Frankl, a pioneer in the study of meaning in life, observed the necessity of having a sense of meaning to survive imprisonment in World War II concentration camps. Frankl (1963) observed that his fellow Holocaust survivors were able to endure suffering and persist under the most atrocious conditions if they held onto a reason for living, whereas those who lacked a strong sense of mattering or lost their grasp of what made life worth living perished. Research supports Frankl's observations, as people who experience their lives as meaningful tend to be resilient and experience post-traumatic growth (e.g., Weathers, Aiena, Blackwell, & Schulenberg, 2016). People who report their lives as meaningful also experience better physical and psychological health as compared to individuals who report low levels of meaning in life (e.g., Ryff, 1989; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Before delving further into meaning in life theory, it is important to distinguish between the topic considered here, meaning *in* life, and a related topic, the meaning *of* life. Beginning centuries before Frankl, philosophers, psychologists, religious personnel, and lay people pondered existential questions regarding the meaning *of* life. The philosophical question, "what is

the meaning *of* life?,” differs from psychological research focused on people’s sense of meaning *in* life. Whereas the meaning *of* life question is too broad and abstract to be answered via empirical investigation, the aim of psychological research on meaning *in* life is to examine factors that contribute to people’s experience of meaning in their lives and the consequences of experiencing meaning.

The core components of meaning in life have been investigated by psychologists for decades. From Frank’s pioneering publications until recently, numerous potential dimensions of meaning have been proposed; however, three dimensions of meaning in life appear central in recent theoretical papers (e.g., Martela & Steger, 2016; George & Park, 2016). These three dimensions include (1) **coherence**: a cognitive component determined by one’s experiences, self, and world making sense; (2) **purpose**: a motivational component that denotes pursuing and attaining core goals; and (3) **significance**: an evaluative component defined by a sense of mattering (e.g., Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela & Steger, 2016). The coherence and purpose components appeared in the early works of Battista and Almond (1973) and Reker and Wong (1988, 2012). To round out their tripartite model, Reker and Wong (1988, 2012) proposed an affective component, consisting of feelings of satisfaction and happiness related to attaining goals. This affective component has not received much further attention; however, the coherence and purpose facets they defined have been retained in current theoretical conceptualizations. Heintzelman and King (2014), George and Park (2013), Steger (2012a) and perhaps others mention “significance” as a third dimension; however, significance was not elaborated upon until Martela and Steger (2016) and George and Park’s (2016) tripartite models of meaning.

These authors (George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steger, 2016) propose that the three dimensions tap into different facets of the human experience of meaning and fulfil diverse functions. Thus, here we describe each of the dimensions independently and identify their potential relevance to students’ paths to meaning. Coherence refers to the sense that oneself and one’s experiences in the world make sense. Humans innately seek out environments that make sense to them as such environments provide predictability and stability, requiring less adaptation and work. When reliable patterns can be detected and expected relationships between things in the world exist, humans experience an evolutionarily based sense of reward. The sense of stability and coherence that comes from things being as they should contributes to a sense of meaning (Heintzelman & King, 2014). When something is out of place or something unexpected occurs, we experience a disruption, a sense of lacking

coherence, which can trigger efforts to make sense of the situation. We inherently seek to resolve these discrepancies so that we can perceive of our world and ourselves as comprehensible, predictable, and stable (e.g., Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Heintzelman & King, 2014). We strive to understand how we fit in the world to maximize our chances for survival, thus we seek to maintain coherence and re-establish it when it is lacking.

Coherence is a natural partner to learning. At perhaps the most basic level, coherence is both a propellant and product of learning about oneself (e.g., identity development) and the world. Children and adolescents often ask “why” questions that reflect their curiosity about the world and who they are to try to make sense of their experiences. When they experience a discrepancy or recognize a deficit in understanding, they seek information and strive to learn to re-establish a sense of coherence. Many of these discrepancies can be resolved via independent learning, exploration, and reflection; however, there may be times when guidance from external sources (e.g., parent, teacher, counsellor) may be warranted.

As an example, let’s consider the case of Jane, a high school senior at the top of her class who just received rejections from the five colleges to which she applied. Prior to these rejections, she considered herself a well-rounded, strong student who expected to be admitted to her preferred college and go on to attend medical school to become a paediatrician. After receiving rejections from all of these schools, Jane’s beliefs about herself (e.g., capable, smart), her world (e.g., competitive, successful student), and her ability to do what she wants in the world (e.g., become a doctor) all waiver. These rejections make Jane question her understanding of the world and how she fits into it. As she struggles to make sense of this experience, she may feel disoriented. Helping Jane reflect upon this experience, building upon her abstract thinking and perspective-taking capacities, as she strives to make sense of this experience may be crucial in supporting her self-efficacy and resilience. Additionally, providing Jane with tools to deepen and expand upon her knowledge about herself and the world may be helpful. For example, encouraging Jane to formally assess her strengths and values with a career or guidance counsellor may be beneficial to furthering her understanding of herself. Organizing informational interviews for Jane to talk with students who have experienced college rejection initially but have gone on to pursue their dream careers may also be beneficial in enhancing Jane’s sense of efficacy as well as her understanding of the world and how to overcome such challenges. Developmentally, many students experience these types of junctures that inform the picture they build of who they are and how they fit in the world around them. Helping students develop reflective and abstract

thinking so they can thoughtfully consider who they are, make sense of the world around them, and navigate challenges and discrepancies is crucial to building and maintaining the coherence dimension of meaning.

The second dimension, purpose, has been used synonymously with meaning in life (e.g., Reker & Peacock, 1981); however, there is empirical support for purpose as a construct distinct from meaning (e.g., George & Park, 2013). When conceptualized as a distinct component contributing to meaning in life, purpose refers to “values in action”, future-oriented goals that provide a sense of direction to one’s actions in life (e.g., Martela & Steger, 2016). Purpose is a natural partner to achievement and striving. When students are motivated by a sense of purpose, they are more likely to take actions (e.g., attend classes, study, etc.) to move towards their goals. Students who experience high levels of purpose are more motivated by academic achievement (Damon, 2009), are more intrinsically motivated (Bailey & Phillips, 2016) and perform better academically (Bailey & Phillips, 2016; Martin Sanz et al., 2017) than their peers who report lower levels of purpose. Yet, many students experience periods of “drifting,” wherein they are not engaged in purposeful goals nor do they have strong intentions to pursue purposeful activities. Youth who report higher levels of exploration are more likely to experience higher levels of commitment to purpose as they age (Burrow et al., 2010). Encouraging exploration of purpose and identity may promote coherence, growth, and engagement in valued actions that result in greater intrinsic motivation, approach orientation, and achievement (e.g., Lawford & Ramey, 2015).

Let’s return to the case of Jane. Not only did receiving college rejections challenge Jane’s sense of coherence, but they also may have triggered questioning of her purpose. Prior to receiving rejections, Jane thought that her actions (e.g., obtaining good grades, volunteering at a children’s hospital) would help her move towards her valued goals of attending college and then medical school to become a paediatrician. Now, she questions her place in the world and wonders if she can achieve this aim. Helping Jane engage in reflection about her purpose is critical: Why does she want to become a paediatrician? How does this purpose align with her strengths and values? Are there other careers that would fit with her strengths and values? Are there other avenues towards her goal? What steps can Jane take now to continue moving towards her valued aims? As Jane reflects on these questions, it may be helpful for her to discuss her thoughts with a counsellor or mentor. She may also benefit from help identifying and considering options that may be unfamiliar to her like taking a “gap year” to focus on learning medical skills or working with children or attending a year of community college to

strengthen her application. Helping Jane identify options that would enable her to move towards her ultimate career goal may enable her to maintain a sense of purpose and facilitating exploration of other avenues towards valued goals may encourage greater flexibility in how she pursues her purpose.

The third dimension, significance, is defined by people's sense that their lives inherently matter, are worthwhile, and have value beyond their achievements (e.g., George & Park, 2016). For example, cultivating close relationships with family members may contribute to one's feeling of mattering and one's sense that life is meaningful, but cultivating relationships may not necessarily be perceived of as an explicit goal or accomplishment. Evaluating one's life as mattering is positively associated with students' psychological wellbeing and health and negatively associated with anxiety, depression, and suicidality (see Flett, Khan, & Su, 2019 for a review). Significance is a natural partner to self-worth, when we feel like our lives matter, we inherently experience a sense of worth. Further, when we feel like our lives matter, we tend to make choices to safeguard our lives and promote our wellbeing. Youth who report that their lives are meaningful also report better psychological health (Brouzos et al., 2016; French & Joseph, 2009; Shochet et al., 2006). Additionally, a sense of mattering appears to buffer against suicidality, self-harm, and engagement in other unhealthy or risky behaviours (e.g., Aloise-Young et al., 2001; Flett et al., 2019; Kleiman & Beaver, 2013). Thus, it appears meaning and specifically the significance component of meaning, serves an adaptive role in promoting wellbeing and resilience.

Students may experience reductions in their sense of mattering when they encounter challenges or go through transitions. Let's return to the example of Jane. Prior to receiving college rejections, Jane felt as though she mattered to many people in her life and experienced a stable sense of self-worth. Although she still feels as though her life matters and inherently has value, her sense of significance is not as strong and stable as it was. She begins to question if her life will mean anything if she cannot go to college, wondering how she can contribute to the world. As Jane's worldview and view of herself is shaken (coherence) and she questions if she can make a difference in the way she once imagined (purpose), her sense of self, her sense of value, and her sense of mattering (significance) are shaken. Jane will likely need time and support in the aftermath of this meaning-shattering experience. To support her sense of significance, it may be beneficial to remind Jane of her inherent worth and point out the ways in which her existence positively impacts the lives of those around her.

## The Many Roles of Meaning in Life in Positive Education

Coherence, purpose, and significance each create opportunities for educators to create specific activities, lessons, examples, and labs. A class session could focus on helping students take knowledge about themselves, such as character strengths or gratitude, and engage in abstract thinking to imagine a thriving future life, including the types of environments, people, and activities that would surround and support them. This would be a lesson on coherence. Similar lessons could be developed specific to purpose, which might build on existing teaching about goals and choices expanded to include a consideration of matching goals with one's values, or learning to use long-term motivations to propel short-term motivations. Finally, significance lesson plans could focus on integrating information on bullying, kindness, compassion, belongingness, and social contribution to help students see how they can matter in the larger world by helping build a more inclusive and appreciative school environment for others.

In addition to the potentially exciting lesson plans mentioned above, the three dimensions of meaning in life offer many opportunities for integration into core academic curricula. There are natural affinities of each of the three dimensions with certain disciplines:

- **Math and the Sciences can be discussed in terms of coherence.** One of the remarkable elements of these disciplines is the universality of their aims and models. Math is not just about one calculation working out in a particular way, it is about universal laws of quantity and relationship. Physics is not about my kicking a ball and it travelling 20 m and you kicking the same ball and it travelling 25 m and we leave it at that. Instead, physics is about universal laws of force, friction, and specific applications to legs, shoes, spin, and weather conditions during our kicking contest. In other words, mathematics and the sciences are about exploring, articulating, and testing the underlying rules of the world around us. This really is another way of trying to explain what coherence is about. Coherence also is about exploring, articulating, and testing the rules we believe are true about ourselves, the world, and life. There is ample evidence that math and science instruction and testing are more effective when contextualized in students' lives (e.g., Bottge & Hasselbring, 1993; for a review, Perrin, 2011). Perhaps contextualizing these disciplines beyond familiar or useful scenarios and positioning them within the broader scope of how students

encounter the world around them could yield both wellbeing and learning benefits.

- **Economics and Finance classes can be discussed in terms of purpose.** Both economics and finance tackle the matter of how we understand, quantify, and allocate our resources toward particular outlets. Just as individually almost all of us have a limited and finite financial budget, all of us have a limited and finite time budget in our lives. Learning to keep track of that budget helps us prioritize future goals, even when we might really be craving that second round of drinks, that second streaming entertainment service, or that second car. Learning to keep track of how we spend our time, in light of our future goals, also helps us prioritize the actions that keep us moving toward the future that will be fulfilling for ourselves and others. Economics can be viewed in not-so-dissimilar terms, with ideas about rationality, market participation, competition, and incentives mapping onto the way in which we maintain our purposes for our lives and see the factors that influence our degree of commitment toward them. Especially in light of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, economics and finance instruction seems to have sought ways to integrate ethics as a way to shape consequential decisions (e.g., Ramirez, 2017) as well as ways to present a less orthodox view of established economic “truths” (e.g., Olesen & Madsen, 2017). Both of these efforts seem to create opportunities to open discussions about why we make choices in life and toward what ends, which is a competency that is central to living with purpose.
- **History and other Social Studies can be discussed in terms of significance.** Both courses lend themselves to learning tools for viewing experiences from multiple perspectives, which is a coherence-oriented skill, but both also carry within them implicit assumptions about the stories and events worth relaying, worth learning. The selection of events to be included in history lessons, as well as the way in which those events are portrayed and linked are, themselves, lessons in how we make decisions on what matters, what is of value, and what is worthwhile. The way in which commonalities and differences are chosen and portrayed in social studies courses offer similar decision points. Making these decisions explicit may help students understand that they too are engaging in selection, editing, and framing of their life experiences. Hopefully they can apply their selection and editing skills to their experiences in ways that strengthen their commitment to lives that have value, are worthwhile, and that matter. There may be a dual benefit for both wellbeing and content learning objectives, as preparing students to live in a globalized world requires

competencies of perspective-taking, discourse, and valuing (e.g., Agbaria, 2011).

These are overly simplistic generalizations, of course, but the point here is to illustrate what it might look like to infuse a Math, Economics, History, and other lessons with meaning in life. The intent of such an infusion is primarily to help students create lives of greater meaning, but as noted, there are possibilities that periodically framing core academic content in terms of the three dimensions of meaning could assist in pedagogical goals and student learning as well. No research has been presented demonstrating this, however, so much of what has been put forth here is optimistic and speculative.

Just as there may be natural affinities among the dimensions of meaning and certain academic content areas, there is a great deal of freedom and creativity with which these connections can be made. The connections simply need to be translated and elaborated. Perhaps the most useful mindset to accomplish the aim of infusing meaning into a variety of curricula and content areas is to view meaning as a living thing; one that has highly idiosyncratic expression in individuals but otherwise relies on quite common processes. As a teacher, my portfolio of meaning might differ from my students' portfolios, but we each used the same processes to create them. Here are some examples of how meaning might be translated into messages that are compatible with a greater variety of subjects. A living, breathing meaning will focus on processes and themes rather than conclusions and "right answers". Thus, from a purely meaning-centric view, we might argue:

- **Math, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Earth Sciences:** It's really about understanding hidden, fundamental truths and learning how to detect them (coherence).
- **Social Studies and Languages:** It's really about viewing the world and life from different perspectives (coherence), and learning to understand what people judge truly matters and why they feel it is important (significance).
- **Finances, Economics, and other Numbers:** It's really about working towards an important outcome, and understanding how choices and incentives help or interfere with that work (purpose).
- **Writing and Literature:** It's really about how people navigate their circumstances and how their choices reflect who they are and the lives they are seeking to lead (purpose).
- **History and Environmental Studies:** It's really about how we impact the world around us, about seeing the interconnections among events and

people, about whose stories we choose to tell, and how those determinations change over time (significance).

- **Music and the Arts:** It's really about learning structures and forms, the benefits of practice, and finding a creative expression of the self (coherence) with a particular eye toward how art can and does reach out to and affect the audience (significance).
- **Psychology** is of course about all of these!

Hopefully these light-hearted examples contain kernels of a deeper truth. Meaning, in fact, is all around us, always being constructed, changed, applied, recycled, and renewed. It provides both a profound framework for engaging students in a more thorough consideration of content material and also numerous hooks for using core academic curricula to teach students vital competencies for cultivating a meaningful, purposeful life.

## Meaning as a Standalone Topic

Meaning in life can also be taught as a specific topic on its own. The three facets of meaning (coherence, purpose, significance) lend themselves to students utilizing their own personal experience to bring these abstract concepts to life and to understand the intertwined nature of meaning. In its most basic sense, educators can start by asking what makes their students' lives meaningful. Beginning a conversation in this way may allow students time to reflect, and ultimately share, that which feels most important to them. Educators may also enlist the use of visual means, such as requesting that their students take pictures of what is meaningful in their lives—thereby capitalizing on different sensory experiences to tap into meaning and allowing students to present one to two photos to the larger group/class (Steger et al., 2013). In six to ten people “meaning workshops” delivered at our home institution, participants reported benefit of not only sharing what is meaningful to them, but in also hearing the stories shared by others in their group.

For an extended emphasis on meaning in the classroom, it may be helpful to present an age-appropriate, developmentally suitable model for students while adapting the language to terminology that students can understand (e.g., see Park's, 2010 meaning model). Students could be asked to discuss or write about an experience which did not seem to make sense to them, elucidate which expectations about themselves or the world this experience seemed to violate, and note the strategies they used to come to a resolution. For example, a middle school student may note that they have a classmate who was diagnosed with cancer, that this violated the expectation that people

their age do not get critically ill, and their worldview shifted, such that they know that young people can get sick and that it is important to make the most of each day.

Students can also be challenged to identify and discuss their passions, their strivings, and future goals and how their current time spent does or does not reflect these goals. In the past, we have asked students to log their daily activities, to decide if these activities feel purposeful (with the acknowledgement that not every task feels that way), and to identify ways in which they may be able to schedule more purposeful activities into their calendar. Further, since purpose is a natural partner to experiential learning, school-based programming can be directed towards providing opportunities for students to participate in activities aligned with what they are passionate about (e.g., charity or community events). Students can also be prompted to reflect on both the connection they felt to the activities that they participated in, how they have come to understand themselves or the world around them in a different way, and the way(s) in which what they did mattered to other people. Although theoretical models may encourage a strict interpretation of meaning, encouraging self-reflection and providing instrumental support for experiential activities for youth can help students to engage with a personal, dynamic and ever-evolving sense of what makes life meaningful for them.

## **Meaning as a Framework for Positive Education**

Meaning is a higher order, abstract, and integrative construct, and therefore should have utility as a framework for positive education. Many positive educational institutions offer their stakeholders models that speak to the nature or identity of the institution itself. Often these models evoke the style, values, guiding principles, or way of the institution. Linking positive education to the identity of a school is an important contribution to stakeholder investment. From a meaning perspective, this would seem to be a key step to take in that it builds coherence for the positive education curriculum. However, it is hard to escape the “grab-bag” impression that the wider field of positive psychology typically offers educators. Among the most prominent topics in positive education are mindfulness, positive emotions, character strengths, kindness, meaning and purpose, growth and optimistic mindsets, goals, and gratitude. These are all worthy components in positive education and in personal growth. But what theory points towards these specific topics? What theory helps us understand why certain topics are included and others

are excluded? More importantly, when we look past the valuable contribution of a positive educational institution's identity, what holds these topics together and weaves them into an integrated tapestry?

Unlike many of these standalone topics, meaning is by its very nature integrative. When we develop meaning in life, we integrate our self-understanding, past events, future goals, and current state into one notion of who we are and why we are here. We suggest that meaning can serve a similar integrative function for positive education programs. When we say to students that we want education to be a generative part of their creation and pursuit of a meaningful life, we pave the way for talking about strengths, optimistic outlooks, belonging, generosity, learning, resilience, and understanding. Rather than risking coming off as a string of loosely related lesson plans, each topic in positive education is provided with a common mission: to help students build and pursue meaningful lives.

The three dimensions of meaning in life also offer specific categories into which common positive psychology topics readily fit:

- **Coherence:** Current common positive education practices include emotions (e.g., gratitude), emotion regulation, mindfulness (e.g., serenity), and character strengths (Norrish & Seligman, 2015; Waters, 2011). Each of these can be addressed within coherence (self-understanding and self-management) and there would still be room to integrate additional concepts. For example, the basics of positive relationships with others can be explained in terms of coherence. That is, as we understand ourselves through introspection and analysis of how our behaviour succeeds or fails in the world, we also work to understand that other people, too, will introspect and will judge events as successful or unsuccessful. We begin to model and forecast how we can be a part of others' successes and which kinds of people might inhibit or promote our own success. A coherence framework may elegantly link the idea that we want to understand and modulate our emotions and our attention in order to participate more effectively in the lives of other people.
- **Significance.** The effort of schools to create models of positive education that are grounded in the institutional identity shows the potential value in rooting what is important in what is right for us. One way to look at such efforts is that schools are working to express who they are and what is important to them in a way that mobilizes and inspires their stakeholders among parents and in the community. This process can be seen as a way to ground significance in coherence. Many of the topics included in positive education also speak to ways in which the who we are strives to matter to

the wider world. For example, belonging, kindness, prosocial behaviour, and service offer students ways to make a difference, contribute, and ultimately see that they matter. Significance also answers the question of if “it” is worth it, whether the “it” refers to school or even life. By taking on this scary question, significance can offer a way in which concepts like growth mindset and optimistic explanatory style enable us to stay engaged despite difficulty because we know that striving for a better future is “worth it.”

- **Purpose:** It is impossible to speak of striving without mentioning purpose. Purpose is our vision of what might be, a vision we may commit ourselves to and work towards. Striving for a purpose requires the coherence of knowing who we are and what the world needs, and it requires the ability to identify what is significant and what matters. In addition, the pursuit of purpose requires the ability to both formulate intermediary steps that give us a sense of progress and to maintain motivation in the face of obstacles, fatigue, distractions, or even simply feeling blasé about our identified purposes. Other common positive education practices that focus on mental toughness, grit, and goals can be addressed and united within purpose. Because purpose is both about the pursuit of purpose (which is motivational and self-regulation) and about the capacity to discern an appropriate purpose, it works well with the self-knowledge base of coherence and the evaluation base of significance. We would ideally like to find purposes for ourselves that speak to our uniquely best natures and will also make a positive contribution to the world. Therefore, even within purpose there still is room for teaching about values, character strengths, positive relationships, connectedness, selflessness, and many other prosocial elements of positive education.

## Meaning as a Common Language Within Education

Because meaning has such rich potential as an integrative concept, it is possible to use the idea of meaning in life as a way of helping students, educators, administrators, support staff, parents, communities, and governing bodies frame the importance of education itself. It can be integrated across curricula to provide a common language for the importance and mission of education.

In many ways, articulating the importance and proper role of education is an extremely pressing matter. Scholars argue that in response to the global financial crisis, the fundamental nature of some disciplines, such as entrepreneurship and finance, need to change in order to better prepare students to understand and address the ethical and environmental crises that

seem endemic to the modern world (e.g., Rae, 2010). Others have argued that the entire endeavour of higher education needs to intentionally work towards the public good (e.g., Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2015). Such calls accompany other movements that seem diametrically opposed, such as the increasing influence of for-profit corporations in schools (e.g., Roberts-Mahoney, Means, & Garrison, 2016) and amplified calls for education to refocus on preparing students for work and career (e.g., Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011). Unless the public good can be defined as helping create productive workers and free-spending, brand-loyal consumers for corporations, then educators are caught between multiple driving imperatives.

For schools facing budget crunches, teacher shortages, greater student needs, and escalating classroom populations, it can be appealing to partner with businesses looking to fund, and brand, part of the educational experience. And the answer “So that you can get a good job” is a simple and effective rejoinder to the perennial student moan of “why do I need to know this?” Framing education in purely extrinsic or transactional terms has its risks for student motivation, whereas helping students find intrinsic reasons to value education should help boost their motivation in school (see Niemiec & Ryan, 2009 for a review). It may be possible to use meaning in life as a framework for why education is intrinsically important.

First, meaning in life is inherently about building and enacting a life worth living. This is a journey that research resoundingly shows has strong implications for our emotional, psychological, physical, and social wellbeing. Embedding education within the student pursuit of meaning in life offers students an invitation to personalize and take ownership over their learning.

Second, the key dimensions of meaning in life are each present within education. As meaning in life theory elaborates, there is heavy emphasis on each person gaining greater understanding of one’s self and the broader world around us, and to creating internalized models of how self and world co-exist and co-operate. Education, too, emphasizes the tools of understanding, and positive education in particular highlights tools for self-understanding. Education sets forth numerous goals for students, ranging from content knowledge to skill acquisition and on through graduated “levels” of immersion, mastery, and expertise within a range of topics leading to a variety of opportunities for employment and contribution. Thus, education can be seen as an inherently purposeful endeavour.

Finally, education is embedded within a whole host of conclusions and judgements about the worthwhileness, value, and significance of human achievement. Each content area, each curricular decision, each exam, example, and assignment, is an exercise in choosing what matters more and

passing on what matters less. Making each of these choice points more transparent and elaborating on the processes by which they are made can also offer students the chance to apply similar processes to their own lives, while humanizing the educational endeavour.

## Meaning-Focused Educational Activities

Meaning in life is somewhat of a paradox. It is considered to be a fundamental psychological need, yet there also is the perception that we live in a critical time of meaninglessness. Meaning has a universal shape and form, yet its expression in each of us is ornately idiosyncratic. We look to wisdom, science, or the example of others for clues about how our lives can be more meaningful, yet unless we make such answers our own they will not deliver their promises. Throughout this chapter, the question of what meaning is has received extensive attention. However much we understand about what meaning is, the more pressing question for most is how to get it. Meaning is coherence and significance and purpose, so at least in the abstract we should just get ourselves a bunch of coherence and significance and purpose, right? But in this sense, meaning is like a river. We can learn that a river is water, but that does not mean that if we need a river in our lives, we just need to get some water. Like a river, meaning in life is always moving, and while it may follow a similar path, it is always changing. Meaning in life is not about what we have, it is about how we live.

Another way to say this is that meaning in life is a process not an outcome. If the ultimate goal of positive education is to empower and equip students to build lives worth living, then our students will need a process for living meaningfully. In this section, two tools are presented that can be used as living metaphors for the process of infusing meaning ever more profoundly in one's life. Ideally, both of these tools satisfy a basic set of requirements: they can change over time, they can be used with a wide range of sophistication depending on the student, and they can integrate insights and information from students' lives on an ongoing basis. Essentially, what we need are iterative, scalable, personal activities for travelling on the pathway of a meaningful life. In our experience and practice, *Life Narratives* and *Meaning Maps* satisfy these three requirements.

## Life Narratives

There are stories that speak to us today that have their origins thousands of years in the past. Battles among gods and humans, great floods and fires, love and family, devotion and betrayal, futile quests, all of these themes are explored in our oldest stories as well as modern media. The flexibility of stories makes them ideal partners for exploring meaning (e.g., McAdams & McLean, 2013). Like meaning, they are integrative by nature, in that they can pull in vast amounts of many types of information, and link into a common structure. Narrative stories also are in motion, they are suitable for showing how growth, success, mistakes, and setbacks can flow together to make the present interpretable.

Narrative stories can be used to help students capture the three dimensions of meaning in life in an intuitive and natural fashion. Coherence can be seen as the characters and setting, the way in which a student makes sense of their relationships and interactions, and in the themes, students discern in their life experiences. Significance can be expressed through episodes in which students grapple with difficult issues, describe how and why they worked to overcome hardship, and can culminate in an overall message that their stories are valuable and worth telling, and that their character and journey really matters. Purpose can be written by students to describe the sense of plot and momentum in their lives, building excitement and clarity over where the story is going next.

**Application.** The narrative story approach to building meaning can be used in multiple ways. Following our overall suggestions in this chapter, meaning could be included as a teaching point where relevant in literature and media studies classes, or it could be used as a framework for understanding the structure of stories that students read. Most importantly, students could be assigned to periodically craft their own narratives to help them draw out themes of coherence, significance, and purpose, and to integrate the other elements of positive education they are learning. For example, the common approach to character strengths of telling a story of one's self at one's best would not need to exist as a standalone assignment, the insights learned through this strengths-based storytelling exercise could be integrated into a larger tale about how students are growing into their own understanding of themselves and their capacities to benefit the world around them.

Regardless of the specific application, the best potential use of the narrative story application would be as a living document that is revisited and added to throughout a student's education. By having students work with their stories

over time, they are able to gain continuity across their positive education and have a common platform for integrating growth and learning. And just imagine what a story each student would graduate with, demonstrating the experiences and maturation from childhood to adolescence.

## Meaning Maps

Our second suggestion is to use maps as a tool for building meaning across a student's education. Maps have highly adaptable characteristics that meld well with meaning in life. Maps show sites of importance and interest, they show routes from one site to another, they show the sites and features that are along the way, they characterize the general landscape both near and far, and they help us locate ourselves in the world around us. Further, maps can help students play with the ideas of coherence, significance, and purpose. Perhaps an example is helpful.

It is difficult to think of an actual map that everyone might know, so for convenience, we will use a map of Manhattan, New York, U.S. Its commercial, advertising, and media influence has made Manhattan the "New York City" most people think of. Its famous landmarks, its simple long shape, and its clear boundaries also make it an easy example to use. Imagine planning a visit to Manhattan. You might hope to see Central Park, the Empire State Building, and the Statue of Liberty, so you highlight their positions on your map and notice how they line up across the length of Manhattan. Seeing where these sites are in relation to each other creates coherence around their relationship. The fact that you have chosen these locations as your desired sightseeing destinations expresses their significance to you. As you plan your journey from one landmark to the next, that creates a sense of purpose. Filling in the map with other sights to see is a process of learning about the world around you, it might create a desire to see other destinations, and you may shape your future plans accordingly.

**Application.** The way we use maps as a tool for meaning is to have people create some symbols representing themselves in the centre of their workspace, whether that's paper, a screen, or whiteboard. Usually, this symbol is a variation on a stick figure, but we do not judge. Then we ask people to start putting important people, ideas, habits, experiences, places, really almost anything that is important to them around their symbol. They can represent these "destinations" in any way they care to. They can include sad destinations or happy destinations, there are really almost no rules. The only rules we suggest are to try to use proximity as an indicator of the importance of the relationship. Usually people put family members in a cluster quite near

their symbols. Although people can add to or revise their maps at any time, when they slow down or feel that it is “good enough for now,” we ask them to use their maps to help us understand who they are, what their world is like, what are the important destinations on their map, what the relationships are like among the many destinations, and where they think they are going to go next. In this way, students’ meaning maps give them a way to visually represent as well as talk about their lives in a highly personal way, and a way in which they are the undisputed experts.

## Conclusion

Whether students use narratives or maps, or whether their core curriculum is infused with the themes and language of meaning, their wellbeing and thriving is likely to rest substantially on their ability to find their way to meaning in life. A vast amount of research clarifies the important and foundational role meaning plays in wellbeing, which can lead to the temptation to simply “add it to the list” of practically infinite services educators feel they need to provide. Our hope with this chapter is not to simply put more jobs on the shoulders of educators. It is our view that the very nature of meaning in life makes it possible to use as an organizing framework for positive education, and so prioritizing meaning makes teaching the other aspects of positive education easier.

As the world seemingly stumbles to its knees on a regular basis, the competencies for building meaning in life can help students make sense of the ever-changing world, discern and support the importance of their own lives in the bigger picture, and formulate and pursue worthy aspirations to the benefit of their selves and their communities. Those seem like admirable dreams to nurture.

## References

- Agbaria, A. K. (2011). The social studies education discourse community on globalization: Exploring the agenda of preparing citizens for the global age. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15(1), 57–74.
- Aloise, P. A., Hennigan, K. M., & Leong, C. W. (2001). Possible selves and negative health behaviors during early adolescence. *the Journal of Early Adolescence*, 21(2), 158–181.

- Au, W. C. C., & Kennedy, K. J. (2018). A Positive Education Program to Promote Wellbeing in Schools: A Case Study from a Hong Kong School. *Higher Education Studies*, 8(4), 9–22.
- Bailey, T. H., & Phillips, L. J. (2016). The influence of motivation and adaptation on students' subjective well-being, meaning in life and academic performance. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(2), 201–216.
- Battista, J., & Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. *Psychiatry*, 36(4), 409–427.
- Bernard, B. (1991). *Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED335781.pdf>.
- Bottge, B. A., & Hasselbring, T. S. (1993). A comparison of two approaches for teaching complex, authentic mathematics problems to adolescents in remedial math classes. *Exceptional Children*, 59(6), 556–566.
- Brassai, L., Piko, B. F., & Steger, M. F. (2011). Meaning in life: Is it a protective factor for adolescents' psychological health? *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 18(1), 44–51.
- Brouzos, A., Vassilopoulos, S. P., & Boumpouli, C. (2016). Adolescents' subjective and psychological well-being: The role of meaning in life. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 13(3), 153–169.
- Burrow, A. L., O'Dell, A. C., & Hill, P. L. (2010). Profiles of a developmental asset: Youth purpose as a context for hope and well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(11), 1265–1273.
- Cavazos Vela, J., Castro, V., Cavazos, L., Cavazos, M., & Gonzalez, S. L. (2015). Understanding Latina/o students' meaning in life, spirituality, and subjective happiness. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 14(2), 171–184.
- Chen, Y., Kim, E. S., Koh, H. K., Frazier, A. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2019). Sense of mission and subsequent health and well-being among young adults: An outcome-wide analysis. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 188(4), 664–673.
- Damon, W. (2009). *The path to purpose: How young people find their calling in life*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks.
- Datu, J. A. D., King, R. B., Valdez, J. P. M., & Eala, M. S. M. (2019). Grit is associated with lower depression via meaning in life among Filipino high school students. *Youth & Society*, 51(6), 865–876.
- Dik, B. J., Steger, M. F., Gibson, A., & Peisner, W. (2011). Make your work matter: Development and pilot evaluation of a purpose-centered career education intervention. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 132, 59–74.
- Duffy, M. E., Twenge, J. M., & Joiner, T. E. (2019). Trends in mood and anxiety symptoms and suicide-related outcomes among US undergraduates, 2007–2018: Evidence from two national surveys. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 65(5), 590–598.
- Feldman, D. B., & Snyder, C. R. (2005). Hope and the meaningful life: Theoretical and empirical associations between goal-directed thinking and life meaning. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24(3), 401–421.

- Flett, G., Khan, A., & Su, C. (2019). Mattering and psychological well-being in college and university students: Review and recommendations for campus-based initiatives. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 17(3), 667–680.
- Frankl, V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- French, S., & Joseph, S. (2009). Religiosity and its association with happiness, purpose in life, and self-actualization. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture*, 2, 117–120.
- Gallup (2016). *How millennials want to work and live*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238073/millennials-work-live.aspx>.
- George, L. S., & Park, C. L. (2013). Are meaning and purpose distinct? An examination of correlates and predictors. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(5), 365–375.
- George, L. S., & Park, C. L. (2016). Meaning in life as comprehension, purpose, and mattering: Toward integration and new research questions. *Review of General Psychology*, 20(3), 205–220.
- Gonzalez-Mendez, R., Ramírez-Santana, G., & Hamby, S. (2018). Analyzing Spanish adolescents through the lens of the Resilience Portfolio Model. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260518790600.
- Hamby, S., Taylor, E., Mitchell, K., Jones, L., & Newlin, C. (2018). Poly-victimization, trauma, and resilience: Exploring strengths that promote thriving after adversity. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 1–20.
- Heine, S. J., Proulx, T., & Vohs, K. D. (2006). The meaning maintenance model: On the coherence of social motivations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(2), 88–110.
- Heintzleman, S. J., & King, L. A. (2014). (The feeling of) meaning-as-information. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18(2), 153–167.
- Kang, K., Im, J., Kim, H., Kim, S., Song, M., & Sim, S. (2009). The effect of logotherapy on the suffering, finding meaning, and spiritual well-being of adolescents with terminal cancer. *Journal of Korean Academy of Child Health Nursing*, 15(2), 136–144.
- Kang, K. A., Shim, J. S., Jeon, D. G., & Koh, M. S. (2009). The effects of logotherapy on meaning in life and quality of life of late adolescents with terminal cancer. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing*, 39(6), 759–768.
- Kezar, A., Chambers, A. C., & Burkhardt, J. C. (Eds.). (2015). *Higher education for the public good: Emerging voices from a national movement*. John.
- Kleiman, E. M., & Beaver, J. K. (2013). A meaningful life is worth living: Meaning in life as a suicide resiliency factor. *Psychiatry Research*, 210(3), 934–939.
- Lawford, H. L., & Ramey, H. L. (2015). “Now I know I can make a difference”: Generativity and activity engagement as predictors of meaning making in adolescents and emerging adults. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(10), 1395–1406.
- Machell, K. A., Disabato, D. J., & Kashdan, T. B. (2016). Buffering the negative impact of poverty on youth: The power of purpose in life. *Social Indicators Research*, 126(2), 845–861.

- Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 11*(5), 531–545.
- Martin Sanz, N., Rodrigo, I. G., Garcia, C. I., & Pastrana, P. A. (2017). Exploring Academic Performance: Looking beyond Numerical Grades. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 5*(7), 1105–1112.
- Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. G. J. (2002). Resilience in development. *Handbook of positive psychology, 74–88*.
- McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(3), 233–238.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(2), 133–144.
- Norrish, J. M., & Seligman, M. E. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong Grammar School journey*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Positive Psychology Series.
- O'Donnell, M. B., Bentele, C. N., Grossman, H. B., Le, Y., Jang, H., & Steger, M. F. (2014). You, me, and meaning: An integrative review of connections between relationships and meaning in life. *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 24*, 69–79.
- Olesen, F., & Madsen, M. O. (2017). Problem-based learning: A non-mainstream way to teach economics. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education, 8*(3), 300–311.
- Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 257–301.
- Perin, D. (2011). Facilitating student learning through contextualization: A review of evidence. *Community College Review, 39*(3), 268–295.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 6*(1), 25–41.
- Rae, D. (2010). Universities and enterprise education: Responding to the challenges of the new era. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 17*(4), 591–606.
- Ramirez, R. R. (2017). Teaching ethics through court judgments in Finance, Accounting, Economics and Business. *Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics, 1*, 61–87.
- Ratner, K., Burrow, A. L., Burd, K. A., & Hill, P. L. (2019). On the conflation of purpose and meaning in life: A qualitative study of high school and college student conceptions. *Applied Developmental Science, 1–21*.
- Reker, G. T., & Peacock, E. J. (1981). The Life Attitude Profile (LAP): A multi-dimensional instrument for assessing attitudes toward life. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement, 13*(3), 264–273.
- Reker, G. T., & Wong, P. T. P. (1988). Aging as an individual process: Toward a theory of personal meaning. In J. E. Birren & V. L. Bengtson (Eds.), *Emergent theories of aging* (pp. 214–246). New York: Springer.

- Reker, G. T., & Wong, P. T. P. (2012). Personal meaning in life and psychosocial adaptation in the later years. *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications*, 433–456.
- Roberts-Mahoney, H., Means, A. J., & Garrison, M. J. (2016). Netfixing human capital development: Personalized learning technology and the corporatization of K-12 education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(4), 405–420.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081.
- Salter, E., & Stallard, P. (2004). Posttraumatic growth in child survivors of a road traffic accident. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17(4), 335–340.
- Schwartz, S. J., Côté, J. E., & Arnett, J. J. (2005). Identity and agency in emerging adulthood: Two developmental routes in the individualization process. *Youth & Society*, 37(2), 201–229.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Fourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Free Press.
- Shek, D. T. (1992). Meaning in life and psychological well-being: An empirical study using the Chinese version of the Purpose in Life Questionnaire. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 153(2), 185–200.
- Shochet, I. M., Dadds, M. R., Ham, D., & Montague, R. (2006). School connectedness is an underemphasized parameter in adolescent mental health: Results of a community prediction study. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 35(2), 170–179.
- Shoshani, A., & Russo-Netzer, P. (2017). Exploring and assessing meaning in life in elementary school children: Development and validation of the meaning in life in children questionnaire (MIL-CQ). *Personality and Individual Differences*, 104, 460–465.
- Shoshani, A., & Slone, M. (2017). Positive education for young children: Effects of a positive psychology intervention for preschool children on subjective well being and learning behaviors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1866.
- Shoshani, A., & Steinmetz, S. (2014). Positive psychology at school: A school-based intervention to promote adolescents' mental health and well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 15(6), 1289–1311.
- Shoshani, A., Steinmetz, S., & Kanat-Maymon, Y. (2016). Effects of the Maytiv positive psychology school program on early adolescents' well-being, engagement, and achievement. *Journal of School Psychology*, 57, 73–92.
- Steger, M. F. (2012a). Making meaning in life. *Psychological Inquiry*, 23(4), 381–385.
- Steger, M. F. (2012b). Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of spirituality, psychopathology, and well-being. In P. T. P. Wong (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning* (2nd ed., pp. 165–184). New York: Routledge.
- Steger, M. F., Fitch-Martin, A. R., Donnelly, J., & Rickard, K. M. (2015). Meaning in life and health: Proactive health orientation links meaning in life to health

- variables among American undergraduates. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 16(3), 583–597.
- Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53, 80–93.
- Steger, M. F., Frazier, P. A., & Zacchanini, J. L. (2008). Terrorism in two cultures: Stress and growth following September 11 and the Madrid train bombings. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 13(6), 511–527.
- Steger, M. F., Shim, Y., Rush, B. R., Brueske, L. A., Shin, J. Y., & Merriman, L. A. (2013). The mind's eye: A photographic method for understanding meaning in people's lives. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(6), 530–542.
- Symonds, W. C., Schwartz, R., & Ferguson, R. F. (2011). *Pathways to prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century*. Cambridge, MA: Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.
- Tan, L., Chen, J., Xia, T., & Hu, J. (2018). Predictors of suicidal ideation among children and adolescents: roles of mental health status and meaning in life. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 219–231). Springer US.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75–90.
- Weathers, L. N., Aiena, B. J., Blackwell, M. A., & Schulenberg, S. E. (2016). The significance of meaning to conceptualizations of resilience and posttraumatic growth: Strengthening the foundation for research and practice. In *Clinical perspectives on meaning* (pp. 149–169). Cham: Springer.
- Williams, P. (2011). Pathways to positive education at Geelong Grammar School. *Integrating positive psychology and appreciative inquiry. AI Practitioner*, 13(2), 8–13.
- Yuen, M., & Yau, J. (2015). Relation of career adaptability to meaning in life and connectedness among adolescents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 91, 147–156.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 23

## Positive Spirituality

Theo D. McCall

In the great mystic traditions of the world's religions, there is a constant call to deeper awareness and an increasing connection with something greater than oneself: the Divine. There is a call to rise into a "new sphere of existence" as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1965, p. 103) puts it: "Beings endowed with self-awareness become, precisely in virtue of that bending back upon themselves, immediately capable of rising into a new sphere of existence".

Yet within the Christian tradition, in particular those denominations influenced heavily by the Reformation, there has long been an emphasis on the unworthiness of the individual to stand before God. We depend utterly on God and "there is nothing that we as human beings can do to bring about our own salvation" (McCall, 2017a, p. 100). The notion that we might somehow improve ourselves is something that western Christians, in particular, have struggled with, believing that "we are helpless before God and only God's grace can release us from these shackles" (Charry, 2017a, p. 8). However, positive psychology has a great gift to bestow on religious traditions, especially Christianity. Christianity has always been concerned with promoting self-examination, so a conversation with psychology can invite "Christian theology to encourage strategies for self-improvement" (Charry, 2017a, p. 16).

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the notion of flourishing under God's guidance and grace is key, tied as it is to the calling of humanity

---

T. D. McCall (✉)

St Peter's College, Adelaide, SA, Australia

e-mail: [TMccall@stpeters.sa.edu.au](mailto:TMccall@stpeters.sa.edu.au)

to the “missional purposes of God” (Harris, 2017, p. 66). Human beings are called to become “healthy and productive members of society” (Charry, 2017b, p. 37). Flourishing and self-improvement is at the heart of education and finds particular focus in positive education. Self-examination, or what Rowan Williams (2016) terms “self-awareness”, is also an integral part of the Christian tradition, including its long-standing engagement with, and development of, formal education. Placing the two in dialogue in the context of spirituality in education is a significant and important step.

Contemporary educational philosophy within secular government educational departments rarely, if ever, addresses the notion of a spiritual life being a part of the educational institutions for which they are responsible. Religious schools, on the other hand, usually have a belief in the importance of prayer and spirituality at the foundation of their educational aims. There is a clear disconnection between the two systems in this respect. Positive education potentially provides a bridge, bringing a focus on a broad notion of spirituality to otherwise secular government/public systems, and scientifically validated approaches to potentially narrowly focussed religious schools.

The challenges are quite different across the two systems. For the secular government system, the challenge is to provide an approach to spirituality which is both accessible to all students and their families, regardless of their religious background (including those from agnostic or atheist backgrounds), as well as being acceptable to the governing bodies. In one sense, though, there is less work for secular institutions to undertake. Mindfulness and non-religiously specific meditation programs are seen as being broadly accessible and acceptable. Even yoga is seen as acceptable within the secular system, despite its deeply religious foundation, possibly because it is usually presented as a form of physical activity, somewhat removed from its religious foundation.

For religious educational systems, the challenge is greater on the surface but perhaps easier at a deeper level. The approach of positive education and its connection with a broad spirituality needs to be seen to fit within the existing faith framework. In Christian schools, the legacy of Augustine, Anselm, Luther, and Calvin, with their development of the doctrine of sin and the need for God’s saving grace, cannot be underestimated. The belief in being saved by grace *alone* (Luther’s interpretation of St Paul’s letter to the Romans) “has become a non-negotiable statement of faith, certainly for churches in the Protestant tradition” (McCall, 2017a, p. 100). Nevertheless, this focus on sin and the need for God’s redemption is balanced by the call to take steps to live a life of holiness (a spiritual life) and a passionate desire among Christians to act within the world for its betterment; many

of the concepts studied through positive psychology appear throughout the scriptures, providing direct points of connection.

Bridging these two systems, this chapter considers *positive spirituality*, which involves acknowledging the personal spiritual growth that can occur through the use of some techniques from positive psychology. This chapter will focus on what positive spirituality might look like by looking at the notion of *Life in the Spirit* and the growth in joy which can come from it. In an educational context, meditative techniques such as mindfulness and stillness can be connected with the Values in Action (VIA) character strengths, the ABC model of self-reflection, and a focus on forgiveness, to lead a person to a heightened awareness of the spiritual life. In educational institutions, a focus on relaxation, including physical stillness, can also help bring spiritual awareness to the fore. This highlights a connection to something larger than oneself: the goal of all mystics and a noble educational objective as teachers strive to inspire a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their students.

## Life in the Spirit

For religious schools, whose underlying faith traditions have a focus on a relationship with God and the subsequent self-knowledge and love of neighbour which flows from that relationship, the connection with positive spirituality is potentially quite life-giving. Using the Christian tradition as an example, the notion of a spiritual life or, as St Paul refers to it, living “by the Spirit” (Galatians 5) provides a clear link with the personal growth model emphasised by positive education (McCall, Waters, & White, 2015, p. 34). The notion of key virtues and the underlying VIA character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) directly connects with the Christian ideals of “self-knowledge” and “growth” (Williams, 2016). The encouragement to live “in the Spirit” (Williams, 2016, p. 76) is to focus on living out of a set of virtues, which St Paul calls the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22, NRSV translation). These virtues are listed as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”. Williams (2016) connects the living out of these virtues with “ordinary kindness and practical generosity” (p. 76).

## Growth

There is a long and noble tradition of the linking of work (action and the living out of key virtues) and prayer. *Laborare est orare*, to work is to pray, is an established part of the monastic tradition, usually associated with the rule of St Benedict (Abbaye Saint-Pierre Solesmes, 2019). The Roman Catholic priest, Bernard Basset (1972), expresses it well when he writes, “the integrity with which one performs each task, the skill that one brings to one’s craft or profession is, in a very true sense, an act of adoration to God” (p. 26). In the Benedictine tradition, the sense of work being described here is usually physical labour. However, this notion can readily be adapted to the notion of positive spirituality within education. Indeed, the very idea of giving glory to God through the achievement of excellence is a key foundational principle of Christian educational institutions. This understanding of excellence is linked to holiness or perfection. Within the Christian tradition, ultimate holiness or perfection comes through the gift of God’s grace, yet, within that framework of dependency on God’s grace, the Christian strives for holiness and perfection. St Paul expresses it as follows in his instructions to his young disciple Timothy: “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11) and he instructs him to “train” himself in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7).

Williams (2016) puts it well, when he writes that for the Christian it is not about achieving some special kind of “goodness” or competing with one another to achieve a “level” of being good. Rather it is “about enlarging the world, and about being involved in the world” (Williams, 2016, p. 52). The notion of holiness which Williams explores is one which involves action in the world: the living out of the virtues. He notes that one of the criteria within the Roman Catholic Church for pronouncing people saints is that “they produce joy around them” (p. 51). Williams writes beautifully in this context about Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Williams suggests that there are two types of egotists in the world: those who leave room only for themselves, such is the size and shape of their ego, and those who “are so in love with themselves that they make it possible for everybody else to be in love with themselves” (p. 51). He asserts that Tutu is the latter: a person who has sensed the joy God takes in him and has learnt to love himself as a result. Yet, that love is so expansive that it embraces all around him, so that others feel they too could one day love themselves as much as Desmond Tutu loves being Desmond Tutu.

The “growth” which Williams writes about is premised on the notion that there is always something ahead for the spiritual person. We should have

the expectation that “we will be gently, and sometimes not so gently, urged towards that new level of life” (Williams, 2016, p. 83). The link with the concept of a “growth mindset” in positive psychology is clear. In every way, including the spiritual life, we are not fixed. Although we might settle on a method of meditation and prayer that suits us, there should nonetheless be an expectation that we will be stretched. Williams reminds us that for the very early Christians, there was a sense of being pulled towards that which is ahead of us: “straining forward to what lies ahead” (Philippians 3:13). Williams (2016) summarises it as follows:

To expect to grow, to approach our prayer and our acts of worship with the quiet assumption that at the end of the exercise there will be slightly more of me than there was at the start, this is what we’re called to do in sustaining ‘life in the Spirit’. (pp. 83–84)

We are being drawn into an “endless mystery”, as Gregory of Nyssa refers to it. In the language of positive psychology, our spiritual life is not “fixed” or static, because there is always more to learn and discover.

## Joy

The outcome of growth, Williams suggests, is “joy”, which he defines as “something boundary-breaking, something uncontainable” (Williams, 2016, p. 84). This is more than a fleeting sense of euphoria or even a basic notion of everything being okay, in what he refers to as a “shoulder-shrugging way”—it is rather that sense of being “connected with something so real, that it will break every boundary or container we try to confine it in” (Williams, 2016, p. 84).

This is what the Dalai Lama refers to as happiness, which is experienced at a deeper level through our mind, “such as through love, compassion, and generosity” (Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, 2016, p. 53). It is a much deeper sense of fulfilment, which is longer lasting than the happiness brought about through the senses. This deeper experience is “true joy” (Lama et al., 2016, p. 53). The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams (2016) identify eight key pillars of joy:

- **Perspective:** There are many different angles.
- **Humility:** I tried to look humble and modest.
- **Humour:** Laughter, joking is much better.
- **Acceptance:** The only place where change can begin.

- **Forgiveness:** Free ourselves from the past.
- **Gratitude:** I am fortunate to be alive.
- **Compassion:** Something we want to become.
- **Generosity:** We are filled with joy.

As we live out these pillars, we cultivate the “qualities of mind and heart” (Lama et al., 2016, p. 193) which allow us to experience greater joy. We do this by “filling our mind and heart with positive thoughts and feelings” (p. 193). Williams (2016) identifies joy, along with self-awareness, stillness, and growth, as being the “building blocks of a life of discipleship” which will assist us in staying “spiritually healthy” (p. 85).

## Authenticity

The growth which leads to joy is really about being authentic. “When one is alone, one is not necessarily a better person, only more genuine” (Basset, 1972, p. 39). The search for one’s authentic self, such a touchstone of the contemplative tradition, can be clearly linked with the search for one’s true identity, as found, for example, in the VIA character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The search to discover one’s authentic or true self is a key notion in both the contemplative life and positive psychology. The deeply spiritual person, who practices a life of contemplative prayer, seeks to discover true sincerity in that prayer-life, which then leads to the person being “more easily themselves” (Basset, 1972, p. 39). Precisely because the life of private prayer encourages, even demands, true sincerity and the abandonment of bashfulness, the person of prayer may become more authentically true to themselves. This is more than the abandonment of pretence or hypocrisy—it is the practice of self-discovery and self-acceptance within the context of a transcendent experience.

## Connections with Values in Action

Clearly, the life in the spirit that arises from positive spirituality links with the VIA virtues and character strengths. Each person who develops and grows using the tools of positive psychology is then better equipped to be a person who produces joy around them. In an educational context, the student who is aware of his or her signature character strengths and plays to them, while also developing the lesser strengths, will be far more likely to change the landscape around them in turn. The focus on character strengths, while of necessity

needing to be focussed on the individual student, need not be limited or selfish. In the school setting, for example, there are links to be made with religion studies, which might then draw the student to a more generous and philanthropic attitude to the world around them. For instance, McCall et al. (2015, p. 35) identified at least four ways this can occur:

1. students exploring their own character strengths and how it is they can use their character strengths to serve Jesus;
2. the use of positive verse to connect students up with the positive behaviours they can adopt, as preached in the Bible, to become wise;
3. an analysis of parables using the character strengths model; and
4. analysing the actions of Jesus towards others from a strength-based perspective.

Encouraging students to explore their own character strengths in order to “serve Jesus” (McCall et al., 2015, p. 35) need not be understood as something only Christian schools or individual Christian students can undertake. The question “why did God give me these strengths?” can be asked in a more general way: “what is my purpose to serve with the strengths I have? How can I cultivate the lower strengths so as to strive for wisdom?” (McCall et al., 2015, p. 36). This is part of the growth and the joy which Williams (2016) identifies as two key components for life in the Spirit.

Presenting Bible verses to students “that encourage positive behaviour and strengths” (McCall et al., 2015, p. 36) can encourage students to continue to work on their own strengths, with the goal of strengthening their faith and their connection to God. This method uses positive psychology as a positive lens with which to interpret Scripture (McCall, 2017b, p. 39). In a secular educational context, this approach could easily be adapted by modifying the goals and stated outcomes. Instead of a “connection to Jesus”, secular educational institutions could substitute the more general idea of being connected to something greater than oneself, which is the meaning of the virtue “transcendence” as described by Peterson and Seligman (2004).

A particularly fruitful approach is the *analysis of the parables using the character strengths model* to bring new life to the parables in a positive education context (McCall et al., 2015). As illustrated in Table 23.1, Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) over-arching virtues can be illustrated in a number of parables and used as teaching materials in class.

Another example is considering the actions of the person of Jesus from a strengths-based perspective (McCall et al., 2015), which involves looking at the actions that are portrayed in the Bible and identifying strengths in

**Table 23.1** Examples of analysing parables using character strengths

Parable	Scripture reference	Links with virtues & strengths	Lesson learned
Parable of the friend at midnight	Luke 11:5–13	Courage, persistence	Sticking with things until it results in action
Parable of the widow and the unjust judge	Luke 18:1–8	Courage, persistence	Sticking with things until it results in action
Parable of the two sons	Matthew 21:28–31	Courage, integrity	Doing what is right, not just saying that you will
Parable about humility and hospitality	Luke 14:7–11	Temperance, humility	Do not take the best seat in the house when invited to dinner
Parable of the unforgiving servant	Matthew 18:23–25	Temperance, forgiveness	Importance of forgiving others, even as we have been forgiven
Parable of the rich man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19–31	Justice, citizenship, fairness, humanity, kindness	The lack of compassion by the rich man, and the fulfilment that comes through kindness

Adapted from McCall et al. (2015)

action. For instance, in a classroom activity in a year 6 class, students searched for and identified accounts of different aspects of Jesus' life (Brooke-Smith, 2014). These included accounts of his humble beginnings in a stable, what little we know of his childhood, and his miracles, parables, and passions. As a picture of him emerged, each child selected three character strengths that they believed to be Jesus' greatest. The three most popular choices were:

- **Bravery:** Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular.
- **Leadership:** Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group.

- **Hope** (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation): Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it.

Brooke-Smith (2014) insightfully noted that “this gives pause for thought as to just how perceptive young minds can be” (p. 1).

In such an activity, the strengths and actions Jesus can be analysed from a non-faith perspective, in the sense of learning from a significant and influential historical figure. The actions of other key religious leaders can also be analysed using the same method. While William Wilberforce was a Christian, his actions in helping end the slave trade, and slavery more generally, in the British Empire’s attitude can be interpreted in a way accessible to students from different or non-existent faith traditions.

## Links with Forgiveness

The VIA strengths and virtues offer a number of areas that can be explored. Former Geelong Grammar Director of Student Welfare John Hendry (2019b) identified five key elements that undergird quality relationships: trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope, and compassion. In St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, in the context of “not grieving” the Spirit of God, he names two significant qualities as forgiveness and compassion or kindness (Ephesians 4:32), along with the overarching virtue of love (e.g., 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 5:1). In St John’s Gospel (John 14:15–17, 15:9–17) and his first letter (1 John 3:11–24, 4:7–21), the virtue of love is connected inextricably with the spiritual life. From the Christian perspective, the listing of transcendence as an overarching “virtue” is a critical step in Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) classification. However, the placement of forgiveness as simply one of the 24 character strengths *implies* (perhaps erroneously) from a Christian perspective that it is less important than Christians believe it actually is. St John links the gift of the Holy Spirit directly with forgiveness (John 20:22–23). Within an educational setting, forgiveness is a key concept, particularly in pastoral care and spirituality. Hendry (2019a) goes so far as to say, “the quality of a person, a family, (a School), a community, a nation is defined by the capacity to forgive” (p. 1). Forgiveness makes a new start possible. In the words of Desmond Tutu (2007), “forgiveness is the grace by which you enable the other person to get up, and get on with dignity, to begin anew” (p. 79). Within the Christian tradition, much has been written about the importance of forgiveness, both the forgiveness which comes from Christ, as well as the forgiveness which is then given to other people, as the Lord’s Prayer models

(Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4). Within positive education, forgiveness is critical. It is connected intimately with dignity, as Tutu maintains, but it is also crucial in changing the cycle of revenge. As the Dalai Lama and colleagues (2016) note:

If we choose to retaliate, or pay back, the cycle of revenge and harm continues endlessly, but if we choose to forgive, we break the cycle and we can heal, renewing or releasing the friendship. (p. 236)

For an educational institution, breaking the cycle of revenge and harm is foundational.

Importantly, forgiveness is not the same as approving of wrongdoing. True forgiveness, which is intimately connected in the Christian tradition with repentance, is not about ignoring destructive behaviour. As Hendry (2015) puts it, “the common good is achieved through people being upstanders, not bystanders” (p. 1). This is not simply to protect the people being harmed, but indeed to assist the wrongdoers as well, because they will also suffer in the future. As the Dalai Lama and colleagues (2016) put it, “it’s out of concern for their own long-term wellbeing that we stop their wrongdoing” (p. 234). From the point of view of the hurt person, forgiveness is not about pretending that the hurt did not occur. “Forgiveness is to acknowledge that the other person did commit an offense against us – for if they did not – we would have nothing to forgive” (Hendry 2019). Forgiveness is not some kind of *laissez faire* attitude that suggests the pain is not real or that the offence doesn’t matter—rather, forgiveness depends absolutely on recognition and acknowledgement.

Critically, forgiveness is crucial for the wellbeing of those who have been hurt. The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and colleagues (2016) express forgiveness as follows:

Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us. We are bound to the chains of bitterness, tied together, trapped. Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, that person will hold the keys to our happiness, that person will be our jailor. When we forgive, we take back control of our own fate and our feelings. We become our own liberator. (pp. 234–235)

Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007) lists some simple techniques to help practise forgiveness. These steps can easily be incorporated into positive education or religion studies lessons, as a model of how students might incorporate forgiveness into their lives:

- **Appreciate** being forgiven: remember a time when you experienced forgiveness;
- **Imagine** putting yourself in the offender's shoes and forgiving him or her;
- **Write** a letter of forgiveness;
- **Practise empathy** by beginning to understand another person's feelings;
- **Consider charitable attributions** about the offender, for example by writing the letter that you would *like* to receive from him or her;
- **Ruminate less**, as this is a barrier to forgiveness;
- **Remind yourself** regularly about forgiveness and make it a habit.

These can be carried out by writing in a journal or letter, imagining undertaking the steps, or role playing scenarios that practise forgiving a wrong.

The challenge for educational institutions is to rewrite behaviour management policies from the perspective of forgiveness, with a focus on the restoration of relationships and ending the cycle of retribution. It is critical, because forgiveness is “one of the most radical ways in which we are able to nourish one another's humanity” (Williams, 2016, p. 39).

## Cognitive Retraining and Self-Awareness

Beyond connections with strengths and virtues, another link arises from some of the resilience training resources that focus on reframing one's thoughts (Gillham et al., 2007; Reivich et al., 2007). From the Christian perspective, the spiritual life involves a discipline of self-awareness. Williams (2016) suggests that this is particularly true in times of crisis, in which we need to examine our motive and internal drivers quite deliberately and consciously. For the Christian, this means bringing these motives and drivers to light, where they can be examined by the individual and by Christ. The believer brings the motives to the “light of Christ” that they might be healed, if necessary. The process involves stepping back, creating space around our feelings, so that the person's reactions are not immediately driven by them. Williams connects this notion of self-awareness with the ancient spiritual notions of “dispassion” or *apatheia* in Greek. Although *apatheia* is the linguistic source of the English word *apathy*, in the spiritual tradition it is about stepping back and observing our desires (and the desires of those around us) and how we are feeling. Several strategies focussed on cognitive retraining that appear in some positive education practices provide several connections between science and spirituality.

## The ABC Model

Arising from cognitive therapy, Albert Ellis (1957) proposed the *ABC technique of irrational beliefs*, which focusses on identifying and purposely shifting irrational beliefs. The technique begins by identifying an **A**dversity that causes distress, thinking through the **B**eliefs that a person has about the event, and the **C**onsequences of those beliefs. Therapeutic approaches attempt to shift how the person thinks about their beliefs, with resulting beneficial consequences. The ABC model depends on challenging the initial beliefs, aided by asking questions or adding tag lines to the belief (e.g., “a more accurate way of seeing this is...” and “that’s not true because”), so that the challenge is valid and softens the initial emotive belief (Reivich et al., 2007). This allows alternative thoughts to emerge, which then help prevent the instinctive, often negative reaction or consequence. That is, the model encourages a person to engage in counterfactual thinking, exploring the consequences of their initial belief, and potential alternative consequences if they choose to believe something different. Reivich et al. (2007) also suggest that several common mistakes should be avoided in the moment and when reviewing one’s beliefs and feelings later: denying that there is *any* truth to what is being said, ignoring the reality of what is actually occurring and then dealing with it, and shirking one’s own responsibility in creating the situation.

In faith-based schools, there are clear links to the ABC model: stepping back and drawing breath so that our instinctive reaction does not dictate our subsequent behaviour. The ABC model is straightforward, but immensely functional, when taught well to adolescents. When a person encounters **A**dversity (any situation or stressor, such as a problem with one’s peers or another crisis), which provokes a reaction or a **C**onsequence (especially with strong emotional reactions such as anger, jealousy, or fear) resulting, for instance, in the person giving up or taking revenge, then the ABC model recommends precisely what the spiritual tradition does: taking a moment to evaluate the **B**eliefs (one’s immediate thoughts about the situation) and to shift those beliefs (what one chooses to believe about the situation). What the ABC model provides to the spiritual tradition is the mechanism to bring these feelings and emotions (**B**eliefs) to the light of Christ in a scientifically validated way.

The ABC model provides the scientifically supported model, and the specific questions, for practising what St Ignatius termed an *Examen of Consciousness*, which may be defined as (Carter, 2010):

The Examen is Spirit-guided insight and a way of praying that opens our eyes to God’s self-disclosure in the midst of our everyday life. It is at the same time

a growing awareness of our own responses to this self-disclosing God. How open am I? How willing? How generous? What in me resists or blocks the gracious movement and invitation of God? God give me courage. (p. 1)

Within the Ignatian model, there are a number of steps that have been identified, which align with the ABC model. Bullen (2010a) comments that the Examen is often assumed to be done at the end of the day, although he prefers to do it at the very start of the day, looking back over the previous day's events and feelings. Bullen (2010a) has developed helpful steps for these examinations based on the Ignatian tradition (see Appendix A).

Within the field of education and the demands placed upon everyone in it, taking the time to take a step back and examine oneself is more important than ever. Although the Ignatian Examen and the ABC model come from quite different traditions, they both provide ways to develop self-awareness. Across both eastern and western religious traditions, numerous practices focus on cultivating self-awareness, which potentially makes it accessible within multi-faith societies, including different educational systems. Self-awareness is also considered as a core social and emotional competency (e.g., CASEL, 2018).

Although he writes as a Christian, Williams' (2016) work on awareness is also transferable across the different educational settings. He writes of the Spirit "peeling off the layers of illusion and defensiveness, so that we see things as they really are" (Williams, 2016, p. 55). In the Christian tradition, what Williams calls "holy people" help us to see the world in a different way, to notice depths and dimensions that we might otherwise miss. This same notion of spiritual people (from all and non-existent faith traditions) leading us to new insights can be used to lead students in secular educational institutions to fresh ways of viewing themselves and the world. Williams (2016, p. 55) suggests that the path to "holiness", which in a non-religious context can equally validly be expressed as the path to "wholeness", begins with two simple (though difficult) steps:

- **Looking:** looking at Jesus, looking at what God is like, looking at the gospel, and all that that means; and,
- **Exploring:** exploring where human beings are, what their needs are, what they are calling us to do, how we may help make them more human.

Within a multi-faith educational context, Jesus can be used as one example alongside other great teachers, such as the Buddha, Mohammed, and others. Educationally, taking care to avoid evangelism in secular schools and being cautious not to overstep educational boundaries within faith-based schools,

using examples of great leaders to look at and understand pathways to wholeness can be powerful.

## Teflon and the Need for Approval

Writing within the Jesuit tradition, the influential spiritual director and writer Anthony De Mello (1990) suggests that “spirituality means waking up” (p. 5). He suggests that most people never do; “they never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence” (p. 5) because they are trapped, not really wanting to wake or be “cured” but rather simply to be given “relief”. He contends that there is the need for us to wake up from the “drugged” state (p. 134) that we have been in since we were young—one that centres around a need for approval of others as the measure of success in life. He argues that we are attached to specific ideas of success, which have been programmed into us from a very young age, and we act throughout life to achieve societal ideals. Of course, the conventions of success vary from culture to culture, but are often grounded in health and wealth. Yet, he writes, he has met very happy people who have been dying of cancer, and very secure people who have practically no money.

De Mello contends that the approval of others, physical health, financial wealth, and material possessions, are illusive. He suggests that what we need is an awakening, to break free of the programming and into “reality”. His technique for doing so is first to become aware of the programming and then to notice (pay attention to) the whole reality, not just the attachments (such as the need for success or approval). This paying attention is also connected with his notion of love, which he sees as sensitivity and consciousness: sensitivity “to the *whole* of life, to *all* persons; a loving heart doesn’t harden itself to any person or thing” (De Mello, 1990, p. 140).

Again, we see some degree of connection with resilience training skills developed within positive education. Reivich et al. (2007) suggested Velcro and Teflon as a metaphor for the “confirmation bias”, suggesting that we have a “tendency for evidence that confirms our initial beliefs to stick to us like Velcro while evidence that contradicts our initial beliefs slides off us like Teflon” (p. 50). The metaphor aims to help students (and staff) recognise that others’ negativity does not need to stick to the individual, doing what De Mello advocates—breaking free of the need for success or approval that we’ve been programmed with as young children.

For instance, a student might believe that he gave a terrible presentation, and everyone else’s was much better. He believes that everyone was laughing

at him, resulting in a desire to cry and run away from the class. To overcome this, Reivich and colleagues (2007, p. 52) outlined a number of simple techniques to overcome the tendency for our initial beliefs (normally negative ones) to stick to us like Velcro and more positive evidence (which contradicts those initial beliefs) to slide off like Teflon. These techniques include:

- **Gain perspective** by asking what a best friend or parent would say (about the presentation);
- **Ask yourself neutral questions** that look at the event from a different perspective;
- **Pretend to be a detective** by looking for evidence that contradicts the initial negative thoughts (for example by asking whether every student did in fact laugh at the presentation);
- **Prove the belief false** by looking for positive evidence which paints a different picture (for example, what went well?).

These simple strategies do not quite do what De Mello is advocating, namely to break out of our childhood programming, with its need for others' approval in order to be successful. Nonetheless, these techniques provide a practical way forward and an accessible starting point.

## Mindfulness, Meditation, Contemplative Prayer, and Stillness

In our increasingly busy world, striving for holiness depends almost completely on stillness. Self-awareness leads us to the closely related practices of meditation and contemplative prayer, as these practices are all about “finding that freedom from the immediate noise of expectations and projections and demands” (Williams, 2016, p. 79). Within the frenetic world that we so often inhabit, the demands on staff, students, and parents are relentless. The pressure to succeed is immense, whether as an academic institution meeting government-imposed testing and required academic standards, or students in achieving university entrance scores. Positive education, as it connects with mindfulness and prayer, can speak into this space.

### Mindfulness and Meditation

One of the gifts of the positive education movement has been the attention given to contemplative practices, including meditation and mindfulness. The

beauty of many approaches to mindfulness and meditation is that they can transcend individual faith backgrounds of the students and be accessible to students of all religious and non-religious backgrounds. At this point, *mindfulness*, in particular, is a helpful term, precisely because it has broken through into the secular educational systems as an acceptable practice. Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally” (p. 4). Within the religious tradition, mindfulness is spoken of more commonly as stillness, which includes “stillness of body as well as of mind and heart” (Williams, 2016, p. 79). Mindfulness practice can be as simple as intentionally being present in the moment and soaking up every part of life. It can be readily practised within educational institutions, but needs to be done so intentionally.

The influence of simple, Eastern meditative traditions can be seen in some of the mindfulness practices, though they are also found in contemplative Western Christianity as well. In the contemplative Christian tradition, mindfulness is more commonly described as attentiveness or awareness. In its most basic form, it simply means “to watch, to observe what is going on within you and around you” (De Mello, 1990, p. 125). De Mello identifies observation as the key strategy to the notion of awareness and breaking out of one’s self-imposed and limited concept of the world. This observation can take the shape of simply looking and noticing the reality around us, by which De Mello means literally anything: “the faces of people, the shape of the trees, a bird in flight, a pile of stones, watch the grass grow. Get in touch with things, look at them” (p. 125). This is the age-old notion of *wonder*. In the educational context, wonder is well known as something that young children naturally do. The challenge for educationalists when working with adolescents, in particular, is to help them rediscover the beauty of wonder. De Mello (1990) categorises this as returning to paradise, by which he means that we have to fall from a stage of innocence and “be thrown out of paradise” (p. 126). This is a reference to the loss of innocence in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2 and 3) but it is also an acknowledgment that children develop concepts and understandings, which help them navigate the world. De Mello is not suggesting a return to some kind of childish, “Garden of Eden” state, but he is arguing that we need to return to wondering, in other words taking delight in the world around us.

There are a number of practical ways that mindfulness has been developed in educational settings. One of the simplest, but very powerful methods to encourage mindfulness in young children is simply a version of what De Mello describes in observing the world around us. For example, in the Early Learning Centre at St Peter’s College, Adelaide, Australia, students were given

the simple task of noticing the different types of birds and their habitats in the expansive school grounds. The sense of wonder, excitement, and delight was palpable as the students observed the birds, kept a simple mental tally of them (with the aid of the teacher), and then enjoyed looking at the photographs afterwards.

De Mello is focussing on observation or attentiveness in the visual sense, but in the school context, gentle aural stimuli also matters. Practical applications include the use of quiet music, combined with either silence or simple meditative phrases, which can easily be used in classroom settings or chapel services. A practised leader can quietly tell a story, or simply lead the students and staff present in imagining their favourite restful place. Other techniques involve painting a picture with words of a specific place known to the leader, which is particularly beautiful.

## The Value of Prayer

Dispelling some of the enduring myths within secular society about contemplative prayer and spirituality needs to be a critical area of focus for positive spirituality. One such myth is the belief that deep spirituality or prayer is solely the domain of the strictly “religious” person. Prayer, in particular, has sometimes been viewed as the domain of the spiritual person. While vague notions of spirituality are prevalent in western societies, encapsulated in the oft-repeated phrase “I’m spiritual, but not religious”, prayer life is arguably less common than it was in the middle of the twentieth century. This is seen most clearly in western societies as significant declines in affiliations with religion have occurred (see for example Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). It is doubtful that religion-based, organised prayer (previously quite widespread through high levels of religious observance) has been replaced in most people’s lives by the regular, *intentional* practice of spirituality or mindfulness. This only makes the practice of contemplation or mindfulness even more critical in contemporary educational institutions.

Part of the reason for the association of prayer with the strictly religious is the recent historical misunderstanding of what contemplative prayer within organised religions might look like. The picture of a prayerful person spending many hours on his or her knees in church at a “mahogany prie-dieu” (Basset, 1972, p. 111) springs to mind. Yet the rich history of the contemplative life paints a far more varied and nuanced picture of prayer and contemplation, into which positive education might yet breathe new life. Building on the work of the fifth-century monk John Cassian, Williams (2014) suggests that “prayer takes for granted the ‘practical’ life ... where you

have been monitoring your reactions and trying to educate your emotions, and also practising justice and generosity” (p. 76). This means stepping back from our instinctive reactions, which might “splurge out in all directions” (p. 68).

St Teresa of Avila (1577) describes this kind of approach to prayer as “Active Recollection”:

However quietly we speak, he is so near that he will hear us. We need no wings to go in search of him, but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon him present within us. (chapter 28)

This prayer is otherwise known as “The Prayer of Simple Regard” which refers to giving “full attention to the person whom we love” (Basset, 1972, p. 124). Of course, St Theresa is writing within the Christian tradition, but such attentiveness, which Basset links with physical relaxation as well as a peaceful mind, transcends religious traditions. This state of relaxed attentiveness elicits an awareness of the divine which increases as the practitioner continues to pray (Basset, 1972); however, it need not be confined to use by religious people of any persuasion—this state of relaxed focus is precisely what the non-religious specific practice of mindfulness tries to achieve.

Indeed, within religious schools, it is not uncommon to find student prayer groups. These groups often use a simple formula, beginning with some socialising, reading a passage of scripture, and then entering a time of extempore prayer. What is far less common, if not almost unknown in schools, is the kind of “Mystics Anonymous” group advocated by Hugh Kempster (2015). These groups have the potential to allow students and staff from all religious and non-religious traditions to begin to explore meditation and contemplation. As described by Kempster and Yaden (2015, p. 289), the structure can be simple:

1. A short introduction by the leader of the session that may include a poem or reading;
2. Sharing stories about religious, spiritual, or mystical experiences without comment or analysis from other participants;
3. Time for contemplative, meditative silence.

A simple Ignatian method of using Bible readings to reflect deeply on the spiritual life is known as *Lectio Divina* (see Appendix B). This method arose within the monastic tradition to reflect on the Bible, but as is the case with many such methods and traditions, it can quite easily be adapted to reflect on other literature.

## Stillness

Basset (1972) suggests that contemplative traditions are like food for the soul or a “fountain from which the weary traveller may drink” (Basset, 1972, p. 29). For the “religious” person, quiet prayer or contemplation might be postponed, but cannot be totally replaced by the “prayer in the midst of busy-ness” approach. Being physically still and enjoying some physical solitude *matter* (Williams, 2014). *Stillness* is, somewhat poetically and dramatically, as important as food or sleep. Within the monotheistic faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, this call to authenticity, is about “being still enough to hear God speaking my name” (Williams, 2016, p. 78).

Eastern meditative techniques and Western monastic traditions converge particularly in the understanding of using stillness. Stillness is about “being aware of our behaviour” in “everyday matters” (Williams, 2016, p. 80). What Williams means is that we begin to be at peace within ourselves, through the intentional practice of stillness, in the midst of our daily activities. This can be as simple as deciding not to be “utterly driven” in everything we undertake, so much so that “I cannot stop and listen” (Williams, 2016, p. 80). Stillness does not necessarily mean the complete absence of noise with the use of music or simple descriptive exercises. It can also include repetitive phrases, which help the meditator to settle down and be still. The key, both with basic descriptions of meditative places and scenes, as well as simpler repeated phrases, is that they do not break the silence. Williams (2016) describes the use of simple phrases as follows:

Like waves on the beach in a calm day; just the beat of a heart; small words, small phrases that keep us steady and hold us when everything else is pushing us around. (p. 80)

Williams describes this as a way of anchoring ourselves where we are. For Christians, the simple meditative words have often taken the form of the “Prayer of Jesus” as it developed in the Easter Tradition: “Lord Jesus, Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner”. The monk John Cassian suggests an even shorter formula: “O God make speed to save me” (Williams, 2014, p. 79). Other approaches that Williams identifies include reciting the words of hymns or psalms, a saying of Jesus from the Gospels, or the “ancient Syriac phrase quoted by St Paul: ‘*Maranatha*, Come, Lord” (Williams, 2016, p. 81). These phrases anchor us by drawing us back to the meditative task at hand. They can be used as focussing chants (a mantra in the Buddhist tradition) which help us set aside distractions, particularly our own distracting thoughts.

Within the meditative tradition, stillness is seen as critical to becoming aware of the transcendent. For people of faith, the problem is not that God is absent, but rather that *we* are absent. In an educational setting, with staff and students from diverse backgrounds, the issue might be rephrased as follows: the issue is not that transcendent experiences are impossible, but rather that we are absent; we are not open to the possibility or still enough to allow it to take place. Williams (2016) puts the following as a question from God:

So, when are you actually going to arrive? When are you going to sit and listen, to stop roaming about, and be present? (p. 81)

This question could just as easily be a question from “the Universe” or from a general notion of “Transcendence”. To express it another way, life is happening *right now*. When are we going to wake up, as De Mello (1990) puts it, and start paying attention? Stillness provides a way of waking up. It connects us with the present moment. It allows us to “connect with the moment of creation, the eternal reality of God speaking, God giving, God calling us into life” (Williams, 2016, p. 82). Williams is not referring to a fixed moment in time, when writing about creation here, but rather the notion of God continually shaping us and helping us to grow.

As has been previously noted, the “great advantage of this type of contemplation is that it is open to students of all religious traditions and none” (McCall et al., 2012, p. 20). Non-religious educational institutions can easily adapt De Mello and Williams’ concepts with a simple change of language. The simple phrases and prayers that Williams refers to, for example, need not be from the Christian tradition per se. Other meditative phrases can be substituted, particularly if there are legislative requirements on inclusion that need to be met.

## **Muscular Relaxation for Mindfulness and Prayer**

Within the Western Christian tradition, the need for “muscular relaxation” (Basset, 1972, p. 100), in achieving a state of mindfulness or prayer, is being rediscovered. Earlier spiritual teachers were well aware of the need for a state of physical relaxation, in order that meaningful prayer might follow. Ignatius of Loyola was well aware of the need for a relaxed state to enable deep prayer. He advised his followers to adopt a variety of physical positions, including being stretched out on the ground in a comfortable position (Ignatius, *trans.* Puhl, 1951, p. 36). Yet in the Western Christian tradition at least, this is a comparatively new rediscovery. Indeed, the long tradition of kneeling for

prayer was almost designed to have the opposite effect: to produce a state of discomfort, with the thought that this would help focus the mind of the penitent sinner on God. From an evolutionary perspective, such discomfort, particularly when it involves the tightening of the muscles, may help focus the mind, but, as Basset points out, we tighten our muscles “only when we want our body to react to a situation, to run, sit, stand, avoid a danger, side-step an accident” (Basset, 1972, pp. 100–101). This is hardly a helpful starting point for mindfulness or prayer.

Attention to the physical environment, then, is not simply a question of ensuring there is helpful lighting, music, or repetitive and meditative phrases—it also needs to include the physical state of the participants. For students of all ages, this is something that needs to be modelled and taught. At a basic level, this can be as simple as ensuring that students are comfortable and not distracted (or distracting others), but not so physically relaxed that they fall asleep (unless that is the aim, as it might be with very young students, for example).

## Yoga

Finally, the place of yoga in educational settings is comparatively new in Western society, but it shows much potential. In conservative Christian circles, there is some nervousness about using a technique which has its roots in another faith tradition, but in fact, throughout its history, Christianity has consistently adopted other traditions and customs to achieve its goals of union with Christ and the transformation of the world.

As a contemplative practice, yoga can be used in at least two main ways. The simplest is an effective way to relax the body and achieve a measure of inner peace. In the context of the frenetic contemporary lifestyle of most people, this is an admirable goal in itself. As Basset (1972) puts it, “the yoga exercises are effective in teaching us how to relax our bodies and many who have small use for prayer or religion take up yoga simply to acquire peace” (p. 101). In a busy school, for example, students and staff who regularly participate in a simple yoga class can achieve a level of peace which is invaluable, particularly given the other pressures of the timetable and academic demands. For example, at St Peter’s College, Adelaide, yoga has been offered as a lunchtime optional activity for students (and staff) using the most basic movements, led by a staff member who was a yoga enthusiast, and as an after-school yoga class for staff only, led by an experienced yoga teacher.

The “higher” level of yoga is one that leads the practitioner on a spiritual journey to prayer and “from the self-conscious to the cosmic conscious and

so to consciousness of the Divine” (Basset, 1972, p. 101). This is the journey an experienced teacher will begin to elicit in their participants. The link with formal prayer is clear; there is an attentiveness and alertness in the practice of yoga, which are two key components of prayer. My own tentative theory is that true prayer occurs towards the end, or indeed following, a yoga class, especially in the way yoga is typically practised in the West. Of course, it is highly individual, but the relaxation initiated in a yoga class can then permit the person to be fully attentive and self-aware, which in turn might “supply a control of the imagination, which is invaluable in prayer” (Basset, 1972, p. 105).

Such imagination in prayer can be as straightforward, but therapeutic nonetheless, as leading the person to a quiet place of stability and peace. It may also enable the participant to imagine themselves in a Gospel scene, for example, seeing themselves as part of the crowd on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, while Jesus teaches from Simon Peter’s boat (Luke 5:30). The possibilities are almost endless. A Christian yoga teacher, for example, could conclude a session with a relaxing meditative scene, in which the class members visualise themselves in a beautiful scene from Jesus’ life. This imaginative contemplation of a Gospel scene can pass, Basset (1972) suggests, “to the deepest forms of mystical prayer” (p. 111).

## Conclusion

An awareness of transcendence, of being connected with something larger than oneself, can happen even when life’s circumstances are difficult. This experience of the mystery of God’s presence, or the imprecise but real sense of being connected to the larger universe, can occur “even in the midst of suffering or pain” (McCall, 2015, p. 201). Indeed, it is possible to imagine a transcendent future, a future where this connection with the universe is even more palpable, in “the ordinary events of life, even the painful and frustrating events of life” (McCall, 2015, p. 201). This is the notion of cosmic consciousness, a kind of deep meditative prayer which transcends religions, in which the person moves above his or her self-centredness and becomes “increasingly identified with life in all its myriad forms” (Basset, 1972, p. 119). The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (Tagore, 1966) puts it eloquently:

The vitality that flows in waves, night and day, through every vein of my body, flows out to conquer the universe; pulsates through the world in amazing rhythm and cadence; inspires every pore of the earth’s soil with the thrill of a million grass-blades growing; blossoms into flowers and young leaves; sways,

year after year, in the ceaseless ebb and flow of the undulating world-wide sea of life and death.

That endless vitality, absorbed into my being, exalts me in every limb. In my veins dances today that vast rhythm of aeons. (p. 80)

## Appendix A: Review of the Day

(An Adaptation of St Ignatius *Examen of Consciousness*)

Grant Bullen (2010a)

### STEP 1: PREPARING

Settle yourself in a quiet, conducive space. Set aside 20–30 minutes. Light a candle. Have your journal ready if it helps to write. Make sure you are comfortable, warm and undisturbed.

Then in the silence, imagine God looking at you in love. Stay with this for a minute or two if you can.

### STEP 2: PRAY FOR LIGHT

Simply ask God for illumination. “What do you want me to see? Reveal to me what is important and let me see clearly.”

### STEP 3: REVIEW THE DAY

Mentally scroll through the events, relationships, encounters of the previous 24 hours. Look for those that stand-out (for any reason). If it helps to write them down, record them in your journal. Dot points are fine as this is an aid to memory and so detail is not required.

St. Ignatius encourages us to do this with a particular emphasis on gratitude, and so we offer simple prayers of thankfulness to God as this feeling flows into our hearts.

### STEP 4: NOTE THE FEELINGS

Our feelings, positive and negative, are clear signals of where the “action” was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all those feelings as they surface, without censorship.

This step will generally occur simultaneously with step 3. It is important that we note the feelings and not push them away.

### STEP 5: CHOOSE AN EVENT AND DISCUSS IT WITH GOD

Our feelings will generally reveal which particular event to focus on. The strongest feeling response is normally the one to choose.

Explore the event and the feelings as deeply as you are able. Allow this exploration to be a conversation/dialogue with God. You might ask:

- Why did I feel so strongly about this?
- Is this a repetitive happening in my life?
- Was I open to your movement in this?
- Did I respond faithfully....healthily....in freedom?

So it is not an exercise in self-analysis, so much as a dialogue with God. If it helps, use your journal for this conversation.

#### **STEP 6: NEW AWARENESS**

If discernment or new awareness comes in this conversation, note it. See if it can be expressed as an invitation—that is, “God invites me to see this differently”...or whatever.

If the awareness is predominantly one of failure, ask for God’s forgiveness straight away. Don’t carry this away with you, for God is present and ready to forgive. Whatever is revealed to us comes as a gift for our life and freedom, not our condemnation.

#### **STEP 7 LOOK TO THE DAY AHEAD**

We look ‘back’ in order to look ‘forward’ and ‘outward’. Briefly consider the day ahead—the tasks, meetings, relationships, challenges. Note any feelings attached and immediately offer them to God and spontaneously ask for whatever grace, insight, strength you may need.

And particularly see if the ‘new awareness’ from yesterday has any application to the coming day.

#### **STEP 8 END IN PRAYER**

Return to the original vision....imagine God looking at you in love. Offer a simple prayer of gratitude. The traditional practice of the Examen ends by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

## **Appendix B: LECTIO DIVINA—“a Way of Reading Scripture Prayerfully”**

Grant Bullen (2010b)

### **Preparing**

Settle yourself in a quiet, conducive space. Set aside 20–30 minutes. Light a candle. Have your journal ready if it helps to write. Make sure you are comfortable, warm and undisturbed. Then in the silence, imagine God looking at you in love. Stay with this for a minute or two if you can.

---

<b>Step 1: "Lectio"</b>	Read the passage slowly to yourself ... several times. (Some people find that it helps to read it aloud.) As you read, notice the words or phrase that catch your attention
<b>Step 2: "Meditatio"</b>	Reflect on the words that catch your attention. Ask God 'why' these particular words speak to you. Where do they connect with your life today? (Don't be in a rush. If the text is a story it might help to imagine yourself as a character ... or simply imagine yourself in the crowd that day ... listening ... watching)
<b>Step 3: "Meditatio"</b>	Ask yourself, "What new and different light is this text shedding on my life today?" (We ask what is 'new' and 'different' in order to hear God's Word to us ... rather than drift back into our own thoughts, assumptions and prejudices) Take your time—there is no rush. If you feel your mind drifting off into 'habitual head-talk', return to the text and ask the question again
<b>Step 4: "Meditatio"</b>	Ask yourself, "From what I have heard/seen in this prayerful reading, what does God want me to do or be this day/this week? How does God invite me to change?"
<b>Step 5: "Oratio"</b>	Compose this insight into a simple, one sentence prayer. ("Dear God, may I ... this day/week") Pray this prayer. Sit quietly, repeating this prayer whenever you feel your mind moving off elsewhere
<b>Step 6: "Contemplatio"</b>	Sit in the silence for a while. Whenever distraction comes, return gently to your prayer. The focus is now simply being in God's presence—not expecting or desiring anything to happen, but simply to sit in God's light

---

### End in Prayer

Return to the original vision....imagine God looking at you in love. Offer a simple prayer of gratitude.

*(Note: We all too often read Scripture for information, or sometimes even to extract "right doctrine". But in this method we simply listen, with no other intent than hearing God speak. This is prayer!)*

## References

Abbaye Saint-Pierre Solesmes. (2019). *Prayer, work and study*. Retrieved from <https://www.solesmes.com/prayer-work-and-study>.

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Type of religion*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0-2016-Main%20Features~Religion%20Data%20Summary~70>.
- Basset, B. (1972). *Let's start praying again: Field work in meditation*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- Brooke-Smith, S. (2014, September). *Engaging students in Jesus' character strengths*. Talk presented at the 2014 Flourishing in Faith conference, Adelaide, SA, Australia.
- Bullen, G. (2010a). *Review of the day: An adaptation of St Ignatius' "examen of consciousness"*. Adelaide, SA, Australia: The Julian Centre.
- Bullen, G. (2010b). *LECTIO DIVINA: A way of reading scripture prayerfully*. Adelaide, SA, Australia: The Julian Centre.
- Carter, P. (2010). *Introduction to review of the day: An adaptation of St Ignatius' "examen of consciousness"*. Adelaide, SA, Australia: The Julian Centre.
- Charry, E. (2017a). Positive psychology and Christian theology: An exchange of gifts. In G. Ambler, M. Anstey, T. McCall, & M. White (Eds.), *Flourishing in faith: Theology encountering positive psychology* (pp. 3–18). Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Charry, E. (2017b). Theology and psychology in conversation. In M. White, G. Slemph, & S. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-Being: Education organization and policy* (pp. 35–38). Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer Press/Dordrecht.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2018). Retrieved from <https://casel.org/>.
- De Mello, A. (1990). *Awareness: The perils and opportunities of reality*. New York, USA: Doubleday/Image Books.
- Ellis, A. (1957). Rational psychotherapy and individual psychology. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 13, 38–44.
- Gillham, J., Reivich, K., Freres, D., Chaplin, T., Shatté, A., Samuels, B., ... Seligman, M. (2007). School-based prevention of depressive symptoms: A randomized controlled study of the effectiveness and specificity of the penn resiliency program. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75(1), 9–19.
- Harris, T. (2017). Shalom, gospel and the mission of god. In G. Ambler, M. Anstey, T. McCall, & M. White (Eds.), *Flourishing in faith: Theology encountering positive psychology* (pp. 65–80). Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Hendry, J. (2015). *The way forward: Stand up do not stand by* (Unpublished essay).
- Hendry, J. (2019a). *Forgiveness and care* (Unpublished staff presentation). Adelaide, SA, Australia: St Peter's College.
- Hendry, J. (2019b). *The way forward*. Retrieved from <https://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/institute/blog/blog-posts/giving-and-relationships>.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, NY, USA: Hyperion.

- Kempster, H., & Yaden, D. (2015). Mystics anonymous: An introduction. In D. Yaden, T. McCall, & J. Ellens (Eds.), *Being called: Scientific, secular and sacred perspectives* (pp. 283–290). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Lama, D., Tutu, D., & Abrams, D. (2016). *The book of joy*. London: Hutchinson.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). *The how of happiness: A new approach to getting the life you want*. London: Penguin Press.
- McCall, T. (2015). Hope and eternity: God as transcendent presence in the ordinary. In D. Yaden, T. McCall, & J. Ellens (Eds.), *Being called: Scientific, secular and sacred perspectives* (pp. 193–202). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- McCall, T. (2017a). Drawn into the inner life of the trinity: A dialogue between theology and positive psychology. In G. Ambler, M. Anstey, T. McCall, & M. White (Eds.), *Flourishing in faith: Theology encountering positive psychology* (pp. 99–110). Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- McCall, T. (2017b). Positive psychology, a new interpretative lens for scripture. In M. White, G. Slemph, & S. Murray (Eds.), *Future directions in well-being: Education organization and policy* (pp. 35–38). Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer Press/Dordrecht.
- McCall, T., Waters, L., & White, M. (2012). Finding similarities and points of connection between positive psychology and Christianity. *Dialogue Australasia*, 27, 17–21.
- McCall, T., Waters, L., & White, M. (2015). A comparison between theological Christian approaches to wisdom and Peterson and Seligman's classification of character strengths and virtues. In M. White & S. Murray (Eds.), *Evidence-based approaches to positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools* (pp. 27–41). Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer Press/Dordrecht.
- New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV)*. (1989). National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: American Psychological Association, Oxford University Press.
- Puhl, L. (1951). *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A New Translation based on studies in the language of the autograph*. Westminster, MD: The Newman Press.
- Reivich, K., Seligman, M., Gillham, J., Linkins, M., Peterson, C., Schwartz, B., ... Duckworth, A. (2007). *Positive psychology program for high school students: Student notebook*. Philadelphia, PA: Positive Psychology for Youth Project.
- Tagore, R. (1966). *One hundred and one poems*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1965). *Hymn of the universe*. New York: Harper & Row. Retrieved from <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-4-pensees/>.
- Teresa of Avila. (1577). *The way of perfection*. Retrieved from <https://www.ourladyswarriors.org/saints/wayperf2.htm>.
- Tutu, D. (2007). *Believe: The words and inspiration of Desmond Tutu*. Colorado: Blue Mountain Arts.

Williams, R. (2014). *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer*. London: SPCK.

Williams, R. (2016). *Being disciples: Essentials of Christian life*. London: SPCK.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 24

## Mindfulness in Education: Insights Towards an Integrative Paradigm

Nimrod Sheinman and Pninit Russo-Netzer

### Introduction

Within the past few decades, an increased interest in the concepts and applications of mindfulness in education has generated an extensive range of initiatives, programs, and delivery approaches worldwide. Explorations, applications, integrations, and research projects of mindfulness in education have become prevalent in schools, kindergartens, schools of education, teacher in-service trainings, and higher education. Mindfulness was introduced into the education field in hopes of enhancing wellbeing, mental health, social and emotional skills, resilience, prosocial behaviour, and academic performance. The number of peer-reviewed publications relating to mindfulness in education is rising exponentially, and the topic is being discussed in international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum.

The interest in mindfulness and its benefits has expanded since it was first introduced into medicine at the end of the 1970s to help people with chronic health issues cope with their pain, stress, and illness. Originally an

---

N. Sheinman (✉)

Israel Center for Mindfulness in Education, Kadima, Israel

P. Russo-Netzer

Achva Academic College, Arugot, Israel

University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

integrated element of Buddhist practices, mindfulness was transformed into a secularized intervention, delivered in groups, and aimed at reducing stress and promoting wellbeing (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013). The research, clinical success, and prevalence of the model led to an expanded interest in mindfulness-based perspectives and inspired subsequent generations of therapeutic and non-therapeutic models.

A sequel to this unfolding evolution has been the rise of mindfulness-based programs within educational settings, which began at the end of the 1990s (Ergas & Hadar, 2019; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Semple, Drouman, & Reid, 2017). Within this domain, initiatives and prototypes were developed, applied, and researched in diverse educational contexts in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, South America, and Africa (Ergas & Hadar, 2019).

Altogether, the collective empirical and published data demonstrate that mindfulness in education can be framed and implemented in a variety of ways, applied towards various aims, deliver a multitude of potential outcomes, and support the betterment of both students and teachers (Ergas & Hadar, 2019; Felver & Jennings, 2016). Embedded in these many approaches are assumptions about the goals of education, the role of mindfulness-based pedagogies in it, how mindfulness should be taught, who should deliver it, and how to evaluate outcomes.

Mindfulness in education is in congruence with many principles and visions of positive psychology. This chapter presents an overview of mindfulness in education around the world and summarizes the knowledge accumulated from various perspectives and practices worldwide. The chapter centres mostly on the learners' domain (school-age children, 6–18 years old), with reference to the role of educators. It describes the evolution of mindfulness in education and its role within a holistic and integrative future education paradigm. Relevant and conceivable relationship with positive education is discussed.

## Mindfulness and Its Origins

The word *mindfulness* is an English translation of the word *sati*, which occurs in Buddhist teachings and texts in a range of meanings, such as recollection, recognition, wakefulness, attentiveness, calling to mind, and alertness (Bodhi, 2011; Ditrich, 2017). In the context of contemplative practices, it refers to a quality of conscious awareness, and the repeated application of this awareness to each experience of life (Bodhi, 2011; Ditrich,

2017). Furthermore, the term relates to the cultivation of wholesome, skilful, wise attention to four domains of existence: body, feelings, cognition, and mental constituents. According to the traditional Buddhist teachings, mindfulness strengthens tranquillity and mental balance and enhances wisdom, insight, loving-kindness, and compassion. Further, the meditation practices are assumed to bring about a reduction of greed, aversion, and ignorance, considered by Buddhist psychology to be at the root of human suffering (Ditrich, 2017).

Many of these perspectives were introduced to the West since the 1960s and 1970s, through Westerners travelling to Asia to study Buddhist practices, and Buddhist teachers from the East visiting the West. Buddhist centres that were subsequently founded, especially in the U.S. and England, integrated various Eastern traditions and offered programs and trainings to the general public (Young, 2016).

The aims of these methods, as conceptualized then, were described as the cultivation of profound insight into mental processes, identity, and reality, and the development of an optimal state of psychological wellbeing and consciousness (Walsh, 1983). Meditations were seen as a family of practices that train attention, heighten awareness, and bring mental processes under greater voluntary control. The discourse of the time identified the methods as potentially beneficial for a variety of “intermediate aims”, such as psychophysiological and psychotherapeutic (Walsh, 1983). Thus, the foundation for the secularization of the original spiritual practices was prepared.

A significant step in the secularization of mindfulness appeared with the introduction of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in late 1970. The model, developed by Kabat-Zinn, was incorporated into the University of Massachusetts’ (U.S.) stress reduction clinic and was targeted to assist patients in coping with their stress, pain, and illness. The MBSR format transforms the Buddhist methods into an eight-week group session protocol (initially nine), integrating guided mindfulness-based practices, psychoeducation, group discussions, and regular home practice. The experiential sessions include various sitting and lying practices, such as breath awareness and body scan, as well as mindful yoga exercises, mindful walking, and mindful eating experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The model modified the ancient principles and practices, reframing and presenting them as a therapeutic protocol.

The secularization of mindfulness, and its introduction into the medical and psychotherapeutic domains, has inevitably been reflected in new conceptualizations. Secular mindfulness is most commonly defined as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment

(Kabat-Zinn, 2003), or as a non-elaborative, non-judgemental, present-centred awareness, in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is (Bishop et al., 2004).

The MBSR model led to the emergence of other clinical models, most notably the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which incorporates cognitive strategies into the MBSR protocol. The MBCT approach uses an 8-week, group-based structure and is advocated mostly for patients with a history of depression (Segal et al., 2013). In addition to MBSR and MBCT, mindfulness-based techniques have also been integrated into several one-on-one psychotherapeutic systems, such as Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2013).

Concurrent adaptations of mindfulness-based approaches across the world led to numerous mindfulness-based modifications, including applications for emotional balance (Cullen & Pons, 2015), medical conditions (e.g., Carlson, 2012; Greeson & Chin, 2019), psychotherapy (Germer et al., 2016; Pollak, Pedulla, & Siegel, 2014; Rappaport, 2008), trauma therapy (Schwartz, 2013; Weiss, Johanson, & Monda, 2015), leadership (Arendt, Verdorfer, & Kugler, 2019), workplace (Bartlett et al., 2019; King, 2019), and politics (Bristow, 2019). Moreover, mindfulness became an investigated topic in neuroscience (Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015), immunity research (Black & Slavich, 2016), epigenetics (Kaliman, 2019; Kaliman et al., 2014), and self-compassion (Ferrari et al., 2019; Germer & Neff, 2013) studies. Accordingly, the number of peer-reviewed papers per year grew exponentially, from zero publications in 1980 to almost 850 publications in 2018 (Black, 2018).

The main arena in which mindfulness-based principles are rapidly growing is the education field, where mindfulness has been integrated to foster children's (and teachers') mental, emotional, and behavioural health, and to promote essential life skills. School-based mindfulness provides a collective community activity with a particular experiential and acceptance-based approach. As such, it may help young people to know themselves better, realize their true capacities, cultivate positive behavioural/internal processes, and build resiliency. Furthermore, it has the potential to promote their sense of safety, psychological wellbeing, social competence, mental health, and academic success (Rawana, Diplock, & Chan, 2018).

The process of education, from this context, can equip learners with agency and a sense of purpose and build competencies that learners would need for contributing to their own lives and the lives of others (OECD, 2018). Schools, in this regard, are recognized as unique long-term settings

for fostering students' wellbeing and resilience, and helping them develop as whole people (OECD, 2018; World Health Organization, 1999).

## Mindfulness in Schools

Parallel to the progression of mindfulness-based models for adults, which began in the late 1970s, a surge of initiatives has emerged since the end of the 1990s relating to the potential benefits of mindfulness in educational settings. Some of these programs mirror the clinical MBSR and MBCT models, albeit with adaptations for children and youth (Felver, Doerner, Jones, Kaye, & Merrell, 2013; Semple & Burke, 2019). However, most of the school-based programs use a non-clinical orientation, designed to enhance children's wellbeing, social-emotional development, coping strategies, and resilience.

The emerging field, most commonly named mindfulness in education, is accompanied by publications, books, and research initiatives. It encompasses implementations and curricula for school-based students, as well as modules for teachers and educators. The number of related peer-reviewed publications per year rose from 2 in 2002 to 101 in 2017, covering conceptual papers, field-based research, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses assessments (Ergas & Hadar, 2019).

In the education field, as in clinical practice, mindfulness can fulfil different roles. The functions in clinical practice can be conceptualized along a continuum, from implicit to explicit (Germer, 2005). At the more implicit end of the continuum are the potential benefits for the practitioner, such as enhancing one's humanity, sensitivity, kindness, and presence. Next, in the continuum, is the execution of mindfulness-informed therapy, where numerous mindfulness-based perspectives, dialogues, inquiries, and practices inspire the therapeutic sessions. And at the explicit end of the continuum, specific principles and practices are tailored to the patient, with personalized guidance in how to apply them in life situations (Germer, 2005).

Similarly, the incorporation of mindfulness into education may diversify into several specific formats and functions:

1. **The teacher's aspect.** This domain involves mindfulness-based trainings for educators, to assist them in self-care and self-leadership. Programs in this domain come to support teachers in cultivating self-awareness, emotional regulation, unconditional presence, self-compassion, and resilience.

2. **The classroom's domain.** Programs in this domain instruct teachers to integrate mindfulness-based principles into a class or curriculum and to introduce mindfulness-based practices to children. The nature and structure of each of these programs determine its distinct benefits and outcomes, such as enhancing socio-emotional functioning, strengthening resilience, improving academic success, or developing gratitude and empathy.
3. **A whole-school approach.** Unlike a classroom-based approach, a whole-school approach to mindfulness involves full integration of mindfulness in the school curriculum, culture, and climate, an engagement of the teachers, and some incorporation of parents (Kielty, Gilligan, & Staton, 2017; Sheinman & Hadar, 2017). The best framework for such an approach is the *Health Promoting Schools* initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO), a defined, applied, and studied framework (Langford et al., 2014; Stewart-Brown, 2006). This multifaceted, long-term approach to mindfulness seems to offer a more transformative and sustainable model, though a more challenging one.
4. **Mindfulness as education.** Mindfulness as education, or education through mindfulness, shifts mindfulness from an add-on practice that may support various aims to a pedagogical method and education per se. Mindfulness as education implies a model in which mindfulness-based pedagogies, principles, and practices are at the core of the teaching and learning process, usually with an emphasis on introspection, self-reflection, experiential knowing, and transformative learning (Ergas & Hadar, 2019).

## Mindfulness and Education's Future Paradigm

The expansion of mindfulness in education corresponds to global discussions concerning the goals of education and the role of schools. The last decade has seen a growing consensus among educators, researchers, education scholars, policymakers, and the public-at-large about the urgent need for a more comprehensive vision of education. From this perspective, education should be a resource for responding to the global challenges we face, and for creating and applying wise alternatives. As a recent UNESCO's *Futures of Education* document states, knowledge and learning are humanity's most significant renewable resources for responding to challenges and for inventing alternatives. Moreover, the document highlights that education should not only

respond to a changing world but transform lives and the world (UNESCO, 2019).

Preparing children for life, according to these principles, requires an approach that does not focus only on the mastery of academic skills, and supports them in becoming responsible adults (Maynard, Solis, & Miller, 2015). Respectively, schools are not only places for learning, but settings which promote positive development. Schools can play an essential role in protecting and promoting health, cultivating wellbeing and competencies, and supporting children's ability to cope with life's adversities and challenges (European Network for Mental Health Promotion, 2009).

UNESCO advocated these educational principles in three reports. The 1972 report, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, warned of the risks of inequalities and suffering, and emphasized the need for continued expansion of education and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 1972). The 1996 report, *The Treasure Within*, proposed an integrated model of education based on a four pillars principle: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together in a lifelong perspective (UNESCO, 1996). More recently, the *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good* document reframed the purpose of education, stating that "sustaining and enhancing the dignity, capacity, and welfare of the human person, in relation to others and nature, should be the fundamental purpose of education in the twenty-first century" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 36).

The OECD's (2018) parallel project, *Future of Education and Skills 2030*, states:

Education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. Education [should] equip learners with agency and a sense of purpose, and the competencies they need, to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others. (p. 5)

The role of education, as defined in this position paper, is to help every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential, and help shape a shared future built on the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the planet (OECD, 2018).

Accordingly, future schools and curriculums should develop life skills (World Health Organization, 1999) and cultivate competencies like self-awareness, self-regulation, resilience, perspective taking, empathy, gratitude, mindfulness, and leadership (OECD, 2018; Schleicher, 2018). There are challenges in accomplishing these goals, asserts Andreas Schleicher (2018), the director of the OECD education task force, because the development

of these cognitive, social, and emotional capabilities requires a very different approach to learning and teaching and a different calibre of teachers.

Furthermore, ample evidence-based data shows that children learn best when treated as human beings with social and emotional needs (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). A growing body of research indicates that academic achievement, social and emotional competence, and physical and mental health are fundamentally and multiply inter-related. The best and most efficient way to foster any of those is to foster all of them (Diamond, 2010).

Social and emotional learning (SEL), in this regard, is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and reduce negative behaviours (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). The need for such a school-based approach is specifically significant for at-risk populations, such as those exposed to adversity, poverty, violence, and divorce (Jennings, Lantieri, & Roeser, 2012).

Recent recommendations from the U.S. National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) boldly states:

It is a mistake to view social and emotional learning as a “soft” approach to education. An emphasis on these capacities is not the sacrifice of rigor; it is a source of rigor. Educating the whole learner cannot be reduced to a simple set of policies or proposals. It is, instead, a mindset that should inform the entire educational enterprise. (p. 7)

More than two decades of research across a wide range of disciplines—psychology, social science, and brain science—demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and traits. These generally fall into three broad categories: (1) competencies and skills, (2) attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets, and (3) character and values (Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

Mindfulness in education is strongly linked to many of the above themes and objectives. Mindfulness-based principles, practices, and pedagogies may provide unique *modus operandi* for building up children’s dispositions, competencies, and healthy development.

## Mindfulness-Based Principles with Children and Youth

There are significant differences between the various school-based mindfulness initiatives (with children and adolescents) and the clinical models designed for adults. The most notable distinctions are the age (children and youth vs. adults) and the context (schools vs. clinics). Accordingly, school-based mindfulness must address developmental issues, children's inner needs, attention capacities, and cognitive and metacognitive abilities, as well as motivation theories, school/classroom contexts, and other factors. There is a general agreement that adaptations of mindfulness for children call for shorter sessions, inclusions of movement and imagery, optional playfulness, stories, songs, and games, and the use of group inquiries and personal diaries (Semple & Lee, 2014). Unlike the structured mindfulness-based models for adults, many education-based versions leave more space for improvisations and creative innovations (see Table 24.1).

Other parameters, relevant in working with children and youth include:

- **Whole-child perspectives.** A whole-child approach to education focuses attention on the emotional, social, mental, physical, and cognitive development of students. At its core, the approach views the purpose of schooling as developing future citizens and providing the basis for children to fulfil their potential (Diamond, 2010; Slade & Griffith, 2013).
- **Children's basic needs.** Mindfulness-based programs should resonate with themes of child development and with students' developmental needs. Olness and Kohen (1996) postulate that working with children requires awareness of each child's urge for mastery, positive experiences, social interaction, wellness, and the inner world of imagination (Olness & Kohen, 1996). Self-motivation theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) postulates three innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—which, when satisfied, yield enhanced self-motivation, mental health, and wellbeing.
- **Age adaptation.** When applying mindfulness with children and youth, it is essential to execute age-appropriate principles. Each program's component, be it a guided experience, explanation, inquiry, or psychoeducation, needs to modify and adapt according to the relevant age. In essence, various programs tend to use 2–3 age adapted versions.
- **Embodied teaching.** The quality of any mindfulness in education program depends on the delivery agent—the teacher/facilitator. A core component of any program is, therefore, not only the instructor's understanding of

**Table 24.1** Mindfulness for adults vs. mindfulness with children and youth

	Mindfulness-based interventions with adults	Mindfulness in education with children and youth
Target population	Adult patients	Children and youth
Context	Hospitals, clinics, and therapeutic institutes	Schools, classrooms, and youth programs
Main models	MBSR, MBCT, MSC	Various models and versions
Special adaptations	Adaptations according to medical or psychological themes	Adaptations according to age, culture, education contexts, and special needs
Moderated by	Qualified facilitators	Professional facilitators or trained school teachers
Program's Duration	8-week	Ranging from a few sessions to an ongoing long-term integration
Length of each session	2.5 hours, once a week	From a few minutes (daily) to 45 minutes (a week), or both
Length of practices	15–45 minutes	3–15 minutes
Home practice	Expected and required	Suggested, not demanded
Integrations with other modalities	Integrations with cognitive modalities or mindful yoga	Integrations with yoga, expressive art, council circles, music, positive psychology, social-emotional learning, imagery, compassion-based themes, and more
Expected outcomes	Symptom reduction. Psychological or physiological clinical-based outcomes	Cultivation of competencies and enhancement of wellbeing. Variety of developmental, emotional, mental, behavioural, and cognitive outcomes, with potential applications and contribution in school contexts and out-of-school life

mindfulness but his or her ability to role model the principles, embody a non-reactive mindset, and demonstrate a “being-mode” and a “beginner’s mind” attitudes (Broderick et al., 2019).

- **Repetitiveness.** We can enhance children’s disposition to learn and apply the practices by repetitiveness, built into the design of the sessions, classes, or curriculums (Semple & Lee, 2014).
- **Variety.** Variety increases children’s interest and balances the repetitiveness. We can create it by using different versions for a specific practice (e.g., using different versions of a breath awareness practice), by inserting several short exercises within a more extended classroom session, by creating gradual challenges (e.g., from two-minute mindful silence to five-minute), or by leaving an expressive-creative time after a meditative practice time (Semple & Lee, 2014).
- **Inquiry and expression.** Creating a safe space for discussing and sharing (in small groups or a whole-class circle) can be introduced to sessions to enhance children’s reflection, cognition, sense of connectedness, listening skills, and insight potential (Semple & Lee, 2014). Written or creative (non-verbal) expression, as in a mindful journal, are other helpful aids in the learning process.
- **The intensity or dose–response.** A few minutes of a mindful practice, sporadically introduced, will leave a smaller imprint compared to a 45-minute class, delivered once a week for a whole year. Factors influencing the “dose–response” are the frequency of the sessions (e.g., once, twice, or five times a week), the number of classes in a given program (or per year), the length of each class (e.g., 15 minute or 45 minute), the duration of each experiential session (a few minute script or a longer one), the balance between explanation, experience, expression, and inquiry, and the repetitiveness of each experience (e.g., Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016).

The above themes and parameters overlap with the positive-activity model, defined and discussed in positive psychology (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). The model addresses activity-based features and person-based features that influence an improvement in wellbeing. According to the model, various elements of the activity (e.g., dosage, variety) and characteristics of the person (e.g., needs, motivation, effort) influence the expected improvement in wellbeing. Thus, an optimal person-activity fit (i.e., the overlap between activity and personal features) predicts an increase in wellbeing (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013).

## Mindfulness in Education Around the World

The worldwide implementation of mindfulness-based programs in schools is escalating, and the number of publications on the topic is rapidly swelling (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). As seen in the literature and publications around the world, mindfulness in education can take many forms, framing styles, components, and integrations (Ergas & Hadar, 2019; Semple et al., 2017; Zenner et al., 2014). The following section presents a sample of mindfulness in education programs from around the world (summarized in Table 24.2).

### Australia

Two Australian-made models can be found in various schools around the country: *Meditation Capsules* and *Smiling Mind*. Some mixed versions of *Mindfulness in Schools Project* (U.K.), *MindUp* (U.S.), and *Mindful Schools* (U.S.) are also present. Most initiatives are executed at the classroom level and are led by schoolteachers who are inspired to incorporate mindfulness within education training.

The *Meditation Capsules* model (Etty-Leal, 2010) integrates a range of meditation-based themes and techniques, designed to enhance wellbeing, compassion, and general academic performance (Ager, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2015). Topics include mindfulness and self-awareness, understanding stress, body and breath awareness, observation of thoughts, mindfulness and the senses, communication dynamics, humour, creativity, and stillness. The model is integrated into a whole-school approach of positive education, as applied by the Geelong Grammar School, Australian institute of positive education (Norrish, 2015).

*Smiling Mind* is a web and app-based program, developed by psychologists and educators. It was launched in 2012 to support the wellbeing of students and teachers, and to help them with the pressure, stress, and challenges of daily life (Smiling Mind, 2017). The model is organized in four age-appropriate versions (ages 7–9, 10–12, 13–15, 16–18), and offers a variety of lesson plans, activities, and guided sessions, adjusted for children, youth, and adults (Bailey et al., 2018; Smiling Mind, 2017).

**Table 24.2** Mindfulness in schools initiatives around the world

Country	Program	Year	Unique themes	Implementation	Facilitated by
Australia	Meditation Capsules	2000	Integration of expressive arts and group dialogues	Depended on teachers' implementation decisions	School teachers
Australia	Smiling Mind	2012	A web-based and app-based initiative	Depended on teachers' implementation decisions	Web-based recordings
Bhutan	GNH in Education	2010	Whole country implementation; part of the national Gross National Happiness (GNH) policy	Depended on teachers' implementation decisions	School teachers, trained by school principals
Israel	Sfat Hakeshev	1998	Whole-School-based model; integration with each grade's annual curriculum	Weekly classes for a whole year, year by year	Professional facilitators, who become part of the school's faculty
New Zealand	PBS	2012	Aligned with Maori-based perspectives and values	Eight weekly lessons, and then ongoing implementation	School teachers
UK	.b	2009	Under a major research project (MYRIAD)	Ten weekly structured classes	School teachers
USA	MindUp	2005	Neuroscience and SEL-based curriculum	15 structured sessions	School teachers
USA	L2B	2002	Adaptation of MBSR to adolescents	6, 12, or 18 sessions	Trained facilitators or trained teachers
USA	Mindful School	2007	Integrative training for teachers	25–30 sessions, 15–minutes each, 2–3 times a week	Mindfulness experts and school teachers

## Bhutan

Mindfulness in education in Bhutan is part of the nationwide implementation of *Gross National Happiness* (GNH), the country's developmental philosophy. According to GNH principles, all government policies match four

pillars: sustainable socio-economic development, preservation and promotion of culture, conservation of the environment, and good governance (Hayward, Pannozzo, & Colman, 2009; Hayward & Colman, 2010).

The country's *Educating for Gross National Happiness* initiative started in 2010 (Drupka & Brien, 2013). Training and a workbook manual were introduced to all Bhutan's school principals, urging them to train their teachers. All schools were requested to infuse values and principles of gross national happiness into their curricular programs and extra-curricular activities (Sherab et al., 2014).

The GNH in Education model adopted mindfulness as an essential element in developing students as GNH graduates (Bhutan's Ministry of Education, 2013). The model's manual incorporates a module on meditation and mind training and offers verbatims for seven guided mindfulness-based practices of a few minutes each. Teachers are instructed to introduce these practices in whole-school assemblies, before class, before or after sports competitions, or at the beginning or end of the day. Although Bhutan is a Buddhist country, the guided scripts emphasize secular mindfulness, designed to enhance stress relief, support positive emotions, and cultivate contemplative and reflective learning (Bhutan's Ministry of Education, 2013).

## Israel

Israel's first mindfulness in education initiative (*Sfat Hakeshev*, The Mindful Language) started in 1998 as a whole-school project (primary school, age 6–12 years), echoing the *Health Promoting School* (HPS) principles of the WHO (n.d.; see also Sheinman & Hadar, 2017). The main goals were to enhance children's self-awareness, improve self-efficacy and resilience, develop social-emotional skills, prevent risk behaviours, and improve learning potential.

The model introduces mindfulness-based sessions as an integral part of each class's curriculum (primary school, age 6–12), presented once a week for a whole year, year after year. Each session (45 minutes) integrates mindfulness-based practices, yoga-based movements and postures, specific imagery-based processes, inquiry time, and a personal journal. Sessions are taught by experienced mindfulness instructors and take place in a "mindfulness room", empty of chairs and desks. The "dose" is enhanced by the homeroom teachers, who weave short mindfulness-based sessions into their classes.

Unlike most mindfulness in education programs around the world, the *Sfat Hakeshev* model offers an ongoing six years process (from age 6–12), with integrations of mindfulness into a school's curriculum, culture, and climate.

The extended duration of the program allows the gradual learning of competencies, insights, and coping strategies (Semple et al., 2017). Although only a few schools maintain the program, the long-term sustainability creates a unique contribution to children's coping strategies and their responses to everyday challenges (Sheinman, Hadar, Gafni, & Milman, 2018).

At least two additional models are currently being applied and researched: The *Call to Care* program (Tarrasch, Berger, & Grossman, 2020), and the *Purple School* initiative (a three years project applying a whole-school approach; Ergas & Avisar, in press). Further, many colleges of education in the country offer mindfulness-based classes as an elective or required course.

## New Zealand

The leading mindfulness in schools' program in New Zealand is the *Pause, Breath, Smile* (PBS) initiative, launched in 2012. Work to date includes the development, application, dissemination, research, and refinement of the model. The program is sensitive to curriculum guidelines of New Zealand's Ministry of Education, as well as to specific principles related to New Zealand's indigenous Maori population (Bernay, Graham, Devcich, Rix, & Rubie-Davies, 2016).

The program consists of a structured eight one-hour weekly classes, taught by trained schoolteachers. After the eight weeks, teachers are encouraged and supported to continue weaving the practices in their classes throughout the school year. The practices include mindfulness of breathing, mindful movements, body scan, mindful listening, mindful eating, a loving-kindness practice called "kind heart, happy heart", and a mindful breathing practice focused on fostering a sense of connection to the natural world (Bernay et al., 2016).

The programs' indigenous principles correspond with *Te Whare Tapa Wha*, "The House with Four Walls", a holistic wellbeing Maori concept. Children are invited to reflect on four domains or "cornerstones" of health—physical wellbeing (*taha tinana*), mental and emotional wellbeing (*taha hinengaro*), family and social wellbeing (*taha whanau*), and spiritual wellbeing (*taha wairua*)—and to apply principles of mindfulness within each of these domains (Devcich, Rix, Bernay, & Graham, 2017).

## U.K.

The most established mindfulness in education initiative in the U.K. is the *Mindfulness in Schools Project* (MiSP), launched in 2009 as a national not-for-profit charity for young people and schools. The initiative's model includes the ".b" program ("dot-b", standing for "stop and be"), designed for 11–18-year-olds, and the "*Paws b*" program, developed in 2013 for 7–11-year old.

The implementation is based on a syllabus of ten weekly 45-minute structured sessions (12 short lessons in *Paws b*), geared to fit into the school curriculum, and taught by classroom teachers trained to deliver the program. Each session focuses on a distinct theme and skill and integrates didactic presentation, film clips and animations, guided practice, and interactive exploration and inquiry. The curriculum synthesizes MBSR and MBCT principles with appropriate age adaptations (Kuyken et al., 2013). Themes include paying attention, taming the mind, working with worry, being in the now, befriending the difficult, and taking in the good. Short experiential practices introduce mindfulness of breath and body, the passing nature of thoughts, mindful eating and walking, and ways for dealing with stress. (See <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/teach-dot-b/dot-b-curriculum>.)

The program is currently part of an extensive multi-year randomized controlled trial project, called *My Resilience in Adolescence* (MYRIAD), conducted in over 80 schools. The project aims to assess whether mindfulness training in schools can shift young adults away from psychopathology and towards improved mental health, resilience, and wellbeing (Kuyken et al., 2017).

## U.S.

Mindfulness in education in the U.S. is diverse and abounds with initiatives, programs, and research projects. For this chapter, we chose three initiatives: the *MindUp* curriculum for elementary school children, the *Learning to BREATHE* curriculum for adolescents, and the *Mindful Schools* teachers training model.

**MindUP.** The *MindUp* program is a classroom-based curriculum for elementary school children, created in 2005 by the Hawn Foundation. The program includes 15 lessons of thirty minutes each, with three age-appropriate curriculums. The teaching units are informed by research findings from cognitive neuroscience, social and emotional learning, positive psychology, and mindfulness training. The program aims to foster children's

social-emotional wellbeing, prosocial behaviour, and academic success (Hawn Foundation, 2011).

The teaching units include information on the brain structure and function, to help students develop an understanding of the brain's role in emotions, behaviour, decision-making, and learning. Topics encompass attention to the senses (i.e., mindful listening, seeing, smelling, tasting), and mindful movement. Other units focus on attitude, perspective taking, optimism, gratitude, kindness, and taking action (Maloney, Lawlor, Schonert-Reichl, & Whitehead, 2016). A few minutes of a mindful breath awareness is integral to the lesson plans, to help students focus, settle, and calm down. Teachers are encouraged to present the lessons at regular intervals throughout the typical 32-week school year and to integrate the short breath awareness practice within their ongoing teaching (Hawn Foundation, 2011).

**Learning to BREATHE.** *Learning to BREATHE* (L2B) is a mindfulness-based curriculum for adolescents, created for classroom settings. The curriculum intends to strengthen attention and emotion regulation, cultivate wholesome emotions like gratitude and compassion, expand the repertoire of stress management skills, and help participants integrate mindfulness into daily life (Broderick & Frank, 2014).

The model consists of six lessons of 45-minute each, with six core themes: (1) body awareness; (2) understanding and working with thoughts; (3) understanding and working with feelings; (4) integrating awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations; (5) reducing harmful self-judgements; and (6) integrating mindful awareness into daily life (Metz et al., 2013). Each lesson includes a short introduction of the topic, several activities for group participation, discussion to engage students in the lesson, and an opportunity for in-class mindfulness meditation practice (Broderick, 2013).

**The Mindful School initiative.** A prevalent mindfulness in education model in the U.S. is the *Mindful Schools* initiative, established in 2007. A central aim of the model is to build attention, self-regulation, and empathy (Mindful Schools, 2015). Initially, the model relied on facilitation executed by the program's trained mindfulness practitioners, but now concentrates on training educators in developing their mindfulness practice, and in adapting mindfulness to their students (Semple et al., 2017).

The training offers two age-adapted curricula: a 30-module version for age 5–12, and a 25-module version for age 12–17. The lessons are structured as a 15-minute increment, delivered two to three times per week. Topics include mindful breath and body exercises, mindfulness in different sensory modes (e.g., listening or eating), mindfulness of thoughts and emotions, and activities to promote gratitude, generosity, and compassion. Discussions about

ways that students might incorporate mindfulness into their daily lives are part of each lesson. Student workbooks are available to support optional 5-minute journaling at the end of each lesson.

## Mapping the Themes

The programs described above, as well as publications, books, reviews, and meta-analyses, reveal a highly heterogeneous composition of methods, implementation principles, age populations, and foci. The diversity of programs, the pilot-character of many studies, and challenges in finding adequate scales (reliable assessment tools) make an accurate impression of effectiveness challenging to get. Variations in programs' structure, duration, chosen practices, and expected results challenge the ability to make conclusions regarding best practices or evidence-based outcomes (McKeering & Hwang, 2019).

A recent thorough mapping of the field assessed 447 peer-reviewed papers published between 2002 and 2017 and identified common recurrent themes (Ergas & Hadar, 2019). The assessment found six different perspectives from which academic papers cover the field: explaining the field, justifying the field, demonstrating implementation principles, studying mindfulness-based effects, analyses and reviews, and critical analysis of the field. In the context of the framing of mindfulness-based programs in schools, the following categories were isolated: (1) wellbeing and mind–body health, (2) social-emotional learning, (3) self-knowing and transformative learning, (4) academic performance and cognitive functions, (5) behaviour and conduct, and (6) spirituality. There were a few other domains relating to teaching, learning, critical pedagogy, and higher education.

Many experts in the field agree on the need for more high-quality quantitative and qualitative research, needed to shed light on better ways of assessing outcomes with children, and means for evaluating fidelity of programs' implementation. As already observed in the field of social and emotional learning, reliable means of assessing fidelity of program implementation can strengthen research, support instructor training, and contribute to program improvement (Broderick et al., 2019).

At present, there are no standardized instruments for assessing the implementation quality of mindfulness in education programs. Broderick et al. (2019) pointed out that such measures require attention to two major domains: the adherence to an existing given program (e.g., explanations and practices), and the quality or process of the implementation itself (e.g., how it was explained, guided, and taught). The cultivation of mindfulness in

schools, akin to teaching adults, requires adherence to the program model, as well as an embodiment of the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

The broad range of versions and the lack of a standardized protocol may represent the strength of the mindfulness in education field, not a shortfall. As expressed by Burnett, founder of the U.K. MiSP program, the multiplicity of options can demonstrate the field's sense of possibilities, presenting a spectrum of potential applications of these perspectives and practices, when applied in educational contexts (Burnett, 2011). Mindfulness in education practices can exist within a range of possibilities, from functional ones (enhancing calmness, reducing stress, improving sleep) to the therapeutic (alleviating restlessness, anger, anxiety), to wellbeing (increasing self-awareness, resilience, wellbeing), through to the more spiritual (introducing mystery, wonder, meaning).

## The Benefits for Children and Youth

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the mindfulness in education field, the positive findings across many studies, examining different models, in different countries, and with diverse age groups, appear promising. The evidence suggests that well-conducted programs appear to be welcomed by students and teachers, have positive impacts on the psychological, mental, and social health of the young, improve the wellbeing of children and adolescents, and reduce the overall burden of health spending by focusing on preventive interventions (Semple & Burke, 2019; Weare, 2019). Beyond that, the teachers' involvement with mindfulness can increase their sense of wellbeing and self-efficacy, contributing to a prosocial classroom and positive student outcomes (Jennings et al., 2012).

As evident through numerous studies, publications, and meta-analysis, school-based mindfulness programs may have positive effects on a variety of measures and outcomes, across multiple age levels:

- Reduces stress and depressive symptoms (Felver et al., 2016; Kuyken et al., 2013; Zenner et al., 2014).
- Promotes positive mental health (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016).
- Improves psychological wellbeing (Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Kuyken et al., 2013).
- Supports psychosocial wellbeing (Felver et al., 2016).
- Supports social-emotional learning (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

- Boost mindfulness-based coping strategies (Sheinman et al., 2018).
- Enhance resilience (Felver et al., 2019).
- Increases positive affect measures, such as a person's sense of happiness and optimism (Sampaio de Carvalho et al., 2017).
- Improves executive functioning (Janz, Dawe, & Wyllie, 2019).
- Impacts aspects of cognition (Dunning et al., 2019; Klingbeil et al., 2017; Maynard et al., 2015).

Although the accumulated findings on the benefits of school-based mindfulness are significant, none of the studies conducted between-programs comparisons, such as comparing PBS to MiSP, or compared outcomes of a long-term plan to a short-term one. There are also no comparative data on the perspective of students, regarding their experiences, insights, or skills acquisition.

Some distinct programs may serve as an effective strategy for specific targeted outcomes, such as aggressive and problematic behaviours (Felver et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2007), executive functioning skills (Parker et al., 2014), and reduction in depressive symptoms (Bluth et al., 2016). Further, empirical research has demonstrated that school-based mindfulness is generally a safe and effective intervention modality that supports psychosocial wellbeing (Felver et al., 2016).

Mindfulness-based programs are more effective when taught by teachers who understand the principles from within. Each teaching thus becomes an opportunity to embody and generate the particular qualities that mindfulness develops, such as attentiveness, kindness, open-mindedness, curiosity, empathy, compassion, acceptance, and patience. In fact, for teachers, these skills and attitudes are essential for any interaction with young people.

As the field of mindfulness in education evolved, the role of teachers and their influence on outcomes became more explicit. Accordingly, specific mindfulness-based trainings for educators were devised and examined.

## Mindfulness for Teachers

Teachers play an essential role in providing the learning opportunities that influence and shape the character and wellbeing of children and youth (NSW Government, 2015). Considered as the most important in-school factor, teachers contribute to students' learning, personal development, and flourishing (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Teaching, however, is a complex and demanding practice, usually loaded with stress, emotional challenges, job

dissatisfaction, and burnout, potentially resulting in teachers' poor mental health and reduced wellbeing outcomes (Beltman & Poulton, 2019; Lomas, Medina, Ivtzan, Rupperecht, & Eiroa-Orosa, 2017; Zarate, Maggin, & Passmore, 2019).

Concurrent with the school-based initiatives around the world, and the growing preference for facilitation by school's teachers (versus led by trained mindfulness practitioners), various mindfulness-based programs for teachers are evolved and researched (e.g., Beshai, McAlpine, Weare, & Kuyken, 2016; Crain, Schonert-Reichl, & Roeser, 2017; Harris, Jennings, Katz, Abenavoli, & Greenberg, 2016; Jennings et al., 2019; Schussler et al., 2018). Accordingly, there is a marked increase in peer-review publications related to mindfulness-based programs for teachers (Ergas & Hadar, 2019).

Generally speaking, two categories of mindfulness-based programs for teachers are prevalent. In the first are programs designated to support teachers' emotional regulation, self-compassion, and wellbeing, in their role as teachers. The second relates to programs designed to train teachers in teaching specific mindfulness in education initiatives. In some programs, the training integrates the two into one long-term gradual learning process, i.e., *Presence, Awareness, and Self-Compassion in Schools* (PAS) in Austria<sup>1</sup> or the *Purple School Project* in Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Both categories acknowledge teachers' stress, emotional challenges and burnout, and seek to improve their coping strategies, resilience, and wellbeing. Some of these initiatives focus on in-service teachers (e.g., Harris et al., 2016), while others focus on pre-service teachers (e.g., Hirshberg, Flook, Enright, & Davidson, 2020). The ultimate aims of the programs are usually dual: to enhance teachers' wellbeing and mental health (Harris et al., 2016), and to enable them to transfer gained skills into their classroom presence and class management (Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Weare (2014) summarized various contributions of mindfulness-based programs for teachers, collected mostly by self-report methodologies:

- Reduction in occupational stress and burnout and increase in coping skills.
- Better mental health and less distress, anxiety, and depression tendencies.
- Greater wellbeing, and enhanced life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
- Increased kindness, empathy, and compassion to others.
- Better physical health and fewer reported health-related symptoms.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://achtsamkeit.univie.ac.at/en/presence-awareness-and-self-compassion-in-schools-pas>.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.mop.education/%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8-%D7%A1%D7%92%D7%95%D7%9C>.

- Increased cognitive performance, including decision-making and response-ability.
- Enhanced job performance, with better classroom management and attentiveness to students.

Three meta-analysis studies (Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Lomas et al., 2017; Zarate et al., 2019) assessed the impacts of mindfulness-based programs on educators' wellbeing. The analyses revealed a wide range of delivery modes, joined by a variety of "satellite" components (e.g., yoga, imagery, breathwork, mental exercises, discussions) in varied proportions. Interventions lasted from as little as three weeks up to 16 weeks, and overall intervention time ranged from 4.5 to 42 hours (Zarate et al., 2019). The results demonstrate beneficial impacts upon several metrics of mental health and emotional wellbeing, including decrease stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout (Zarate et al., 2019) and enhanced wellbeing, emotional regulation, and life satisfaction (Lomas et al., 2017). Most experts agree that more quality research and defined standards are required (see Emerson et al., 2017, Emerson, de Diaz, Sherwood, Waters, & Farrell, 2020).

The expansion of mindfulness in education programs around the world led to various training models aimed at guiding, assisting, or certifying teachers in guiding children. Each program-specific training typically relates to a distinct curriculum, such as the PBS curriculum in New Zealand, the MiSP curriculum in the U.K., or the L2B in the U.S. The training provides a cognitive and experiential understanding of the relevant curriculum and guidelines related to teaching it.

Personal practice is a vital ingredient, especially with mindfulness-based programs, in which the success of the delivery depends on the interior condition of the teachers. There is a consensus among experts about the importance for teachers to acquaint themselves with the experiential non-cognitive qualities (e.g., patience, acceptance, non-striving, kindness) embedded in mindfulness-based practices (Albrecht, 2018). Moreover, mindfulness-based practices may reduce teachers' self-centredness (Berkovich-Ohana, Jennings, & Lavy, 2019), and promote awareness, reflection, and attentiveness (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). These may enable improved social-emotional competence, attunement to students, and a positive classroom climate (Berkovich-Ohana et al., 2019; Roeser et al. 2012).

## Mindfulness and Positive Education

Mindfulness and positive psychology, in their philosophy, assumptions, and intentions, share several common themes, a fact that provides a fertile ground for in-depth dialogue and mutual learning. There are emergent discussions concerning the potential integration of these two fields, albeit mostly regarding adults. Recent attempts have already started to explore possible ways to weave and integrate mindfulness and positive psychology among school-aged children. Still, the evidence-based literature examining the synergy between the two is rather scanty.

As Ivtzan and Lomas (2016) reported, relating to adult populations, research has indicated that mindfulness enhances both hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Furthermore, the synergy between character strength (as defined by positive psychology) and mindfulness, and the potential integration between the two, have been described and discussed (Niemiec, 2013). Investigations of programs with adults have found that mindfulness-based outcomes correlated with higher levels of self-esteem, satisfaction with life, psychological flexibility, happiness, positive affect, and optimism (Shapiro, de Sousa, & Jazaieri, 2016).

Both mindfulness in education and positive education agree that twenty-first-century schooling should enhance social-emotional competencies, psychological health, wellbeing, and resilience. The two approaches seem to differ in the methodologies offered to achieve these desired outcomes. Integrating both perspectives, supported by their accumulative science and practice, can enhance our understanding and application of each, and potentiate both.

Former programs that included mindfulness in positive education executed the integration in varying degrees and styles. For instance, in one initiative in Bhutan, the ratio between the mindfulness-based sessions and the life skills themes in the curriculum was 1:10, and the typical timespan of each mindfulness-based practice was only a few minutes (Adler, 2016). Another positive education initiative in Spain, which studied the *Happy Classroom Program*, combined mindfulness-based themes with character strength themes on a 1:1 ratio (Lombas et al., 2019). However, the average timespan of each mindfulness-based session, implemented twice a week during the 18-week project, was less than 4 minutes each. From a mindfulness in education perspective, and the “dose–response” principle, both initiatives represent a low dose and a low-intensity protocol.

In conceptualizing collaboration and integration between positive education and mindfulness in education, various themes seem to stand out:

- Further explorations can determine and uncover how to best integrate the two systems and generate a more inclusive, holistic, and systematic model.
- Each discipline has its tradition, perspectives, definitions, and terminologies, and there is a lack of a shared language. There is a need for more dialogue and agreements on taxonomy, measures and research methods, and their translation into practice.
- Character strength and developmental assets principles, unique to positive psychology, are lacking in the mindfulness in education pedagogies. Further work is needed to explore how mindfulness, character strength, and assets can work together or enhance each other, for the benefit of children or teachers.
- Further research on mindfulness-based practices can optimize its application for positive youth development.
- The experiential practices of mindfulness, adapted to youth, offer unique “learning from within” methods for positive psychology. Current outcomes with children already demonstrate the power of these practices to enhance self-awareness, serenity, self-regulation, self-compassion, kindness, coping skills, and resilience.
- Mindfulness-based practices can enhance children’s coping strategies, thus complementing the coping skills attained through positive education programs.
- The application of movement-based practices, prevalent in mindfulness in education, may serve positive education pedagogies.
- Mindfulness-based practices, coupled with an inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, create a contemplative pedagogy that deepens insights and self-discovery. The contemplative methods can complement the pedagogies of positive psychology and positive education.
- Comparing whole-school models, which already exist in both systems, can amplify insights on implementation and sustainability.
- Creating a database of what did not work well in each field may fine-tune our approaches and help us in cultivating wellbeing, resilience, and character.

Transforming children, teachers, schools, or education systems is complex and dynamic, and therefore requires joint efforts from different fields. We envision collaborative cooperation between mindfulness in education and positive education, leading to integrative, holistic, creative, and science-based models. We believe that integrating the two perspectives, in research and practice, can contribute to a whole, which is bigger than the sum of the parts, in a way that is applicable, effective, transformative, and sustainable.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Educational leaders, policymakers, teachers, and students worldwide are excited about the growing recognition that we must support the whole learner and ensure children receive the ingredients they need to evolve and thrive. Schools, in this context, provide the most effective and efficient way to reach young people, as well as educators, and to cultivate their life skills and wellbeing competencies. Mindfulness in education offers unique pedagogies, principles, and practices which resonate with these visions and missions.

This chapter focused on critical issues of mindfulness-based practices in the education field: the evolution and proliferation of mindfulness in educational contexts, the place of mindfulness-based pedagogies within education for wellbeing, prototypes of educational models and initiatives from around the world, various outcomes and insights gained from mindfulness-based methods for both students and teachers, and potential meeting points between mindfulness in education and positive education as a foundation for integrative dialogue and collaboration.

The field of mindfulness in education encompasses a broad diversity of models, formats, and functions. Empirical research examining the effectiveness of such programs has increased exponentially, although not always keeping up with the escalation of classrooms and school-based activities. Although there is a need for more maturation in the field, the overall results, accumulated from many countries, are significant and promising. In light of all that has been done, explored, and discovered by empirical and scientific findings, mindfulness in education can be an essential asset in a new education paradigm.

Introducing new initiatives and pedagogies carries new issues. As such, future implementation of mindfulness in educational contexts, including the careful development and introduction of new models, will ideally be accompanied by a simultaneous process of empirical assessment.

Transforming education is not simple or easy. To make a meaningful progress, we need collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, patience, and resilience. We must mobilize changes that are comprehensive and sustainable, and support the transformations of teaching, curriculum, teacher preparation, and school climate and culture. It is time to gather this momentum, ignite transdisciplinary dialogue, and form a unified framework that can shape the lives and performance of children across the world.

## References

- Adler, A. (2016). Teaching well-being increases academic performance: Evidence from Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru. *Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA* 1572.
- Ager, K., Albrecht, N., & Cohen, M. (2015). Mindfulness in schools research project: Exploring students' perspectives of mindfulness—What are students' perspectives of learning mindfulness practices at school? *Psychology, 6*(7), 896–914.
- Albrecht, N. J. (2018). Teachers teaching mindfulness with children: Being a mindful role model. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(10), 1–23.
- Arendt, J. F., Verdorfer, A. P., & Kugler, K. G. (2019). Mindfulness and leadership: Communication as a behavioral correlate of leader mindfulness and its effect on follower satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 667.
- Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2019). From a nation at risk to a nation at hope.
- Bailey, N. W., Owen, J., Hassed, C. S., Chambers, R. H., Jones, A., & Wootten, A. (2018). Evidence-based guidelines for mindfulness in schools: A guide for teachers and principals.
- Bartlett, L., Martin, A., Neil, A. L., Memish, K., Otahal, P., Kilpatrick, M., et al. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of workplace mindfulness training randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 24*(1), 108.
- Beltman, S., & Poulton, E. (2019). “Take a step back”: Teacher strategies for managing heightened emotions. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 46*(4), 661–679.
- Berkovich-Ohana, A., Jennings, P. A., & Lavy, S. (2019). Contemplative neuroscience, self-awareness, and education. In *Progress in brain research* (Vol. 244, pp. 355–385). Elsevier.
- Bernay, R., Graham, E., Devcich, D. A., Rix, G., & Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2016). Pause, breathe, smile: A mixed-methods study of student well-being following participation in an eight-week, locally developed mindfulness program in three New Zealand schools. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 9*(2), 90–106.
- Beshai, S., McAlpine, L., Weare, K., & Kuyken, W. (2016). A non-randomised feasibility trial assessing the efficacy of a mindfulness-based intervention for teachers to reduce stress and improve well-being. *Mindfulness, 7*(1), 198–208.
- Bishop, S. R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N. D., Carmody, J., ... Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 11*(3), 230–241.
- Black, D. S. (2018). *Research publications on mindfulness*. Retrieved from <https://goa.mra.org/resources>.

- Black, D. S., & Slavich, G. M. (2016). Mindfulness meditation and the immune system: A systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1373(1), 13.
- Bluth, K., Gaylord, S. A., Campo, R. A., Mullarkey, M. C., & Hobbs, L. (2016). Making friends with yourself: A mixed methods pilot study of a mindful self-compassion program for adolescents. *Mindfulness*, 7(2), 479–492.
- Bodhi, B. (2011). What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(01), 19–39.
- Bristow, J. (2019). Mindfulness in politics and public policy. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 87–91.
- Broderick, P. C. (2013). *Learning to breathe: A mindfulness curriculum for adolescents to cultivate emotion regulation, attention, and performance*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Broderick, P. C., & Frank, J. L. (2014). Learning to BREATHE: An intervention to foster mindfulness in adolescence. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2014(142), 31–44.
- Broderick, P. C., Frank, J. L., Berrena, E., Schussler, D. L., Kohler, K., Mitra, J., ... Greenberg, M. T. (2019). Evaluating the quality of mindfulness instruction delivered in school settings: development and validation of a teacher quality observational rating scale. *Mindfulness*, 10(1), 36–45.
- Burnett, R. (2011). Mindfulness in schools: Learning lessons from the adults, secular and Buddhist. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 28(1), 79–120.
- Carlson, L. E. (2012). Mindfulness-based interventions for physical conditions: A narrative review evaluating levels of evidence. *ISRN Psychiatry*, 2012.
- Crain, T. L., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Roeser, R. W. (2017). Cultivating teacher mindfulness: Effects of a randomized controlled trial on work, home, and sleep outcomes. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(2), 138.
- Cullen, M., & Pons, G. B. (2015). *The mindfulness-based emotional balance workbook: An eight-week program for improved emotion regulation and resilience*. New Harbinger Publications.
- de Carvalho, J. S., Pinto, A. M., & Marôco, J. (2017). Results of a mindfulness-based social-emotional learning program on portuguese elementary students and teachers: a quasi-experimental study. *Mindfulness*, 8(2), 337–350.
- Devcich, D. A., Rix, G., Bernay, R., & Graham, E. (2017). Effectiveness of a mindfulness-based program on school children's self-reported well-being: A pilot study comparing effects with an emotional literacy program. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 33(4), 309–330.
- Diamond, A. (2010). The evidence base for improving school outcomes by addressing the whole child and by addressing skills and attitudes, not just content. *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 780–793.
- Ditrich, T. (2017). The conceptualisation and practice of mindfulness: Buddhist and secular perspectives. *Mindfulness and Education: Research and Practice*, 3–32.
- Drupka, K., & Brien, K. (2013). Educating for Gross National Happiness: A new paradigm for education in Bhutan. *Antistasis*, 3(2).

- Dunning, D. L., Griffiths, K., Kuyken, W., Crane, C., Foulkes, L., Parker, J., et al. (2019). Research review: The effects of mindfulness-based interventions on cognition and mental health in children and adolescents—A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 60(3), 244–258.
- European Network for Mental Health Promotion. (2009). *Manual for promoting mental health and well-being: The educational setting—ProMenPol Project*: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/resources/toolkit-manuals/manual-for-educational-setting.pdf>.
- Emerson, L. M., de Diaz, N. N., Sherwood, A., Waters, A., & Farrell, L. (2020). Mindfulness interventions in schools: Integrity and feasibility of implementation. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 44(1), 62–75.
- Emerson, L. M., Leyland, A., Hudson, K., Rowse, G., Hanley, P., & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017). Teaching mindfulness to teachers: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Mindfulness*, 8(5), 1136–1149.
- Ergas, O., & Avisar, A. (Ed.). (in press). *Mindfulness and social emotional learning in teachers education*. Tel Aviv: Mofet.
- Ergas, O., & Hadar, L. L. (2019). Mindfulness in and as education: A map of a developing academic discourse from 2002 to 2017. *Review of Education*, 7, 757–797.
- Etty-Leal, J. (2010). *Meditation capsules: A mindfulness program for children*. Melbourne, VIC: Meditation Capsules.
- Felver, J. C., Celis-de Hoyos, C. E., Tezanos, K., & Singh, N. N. (2016). A systematic review of mindfulness-based interventions for youth in school settings. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 34–45.
- Felver, J. C., Clawson, A. J., Morton, M. L., Brier-Kennedy, E., Janack, P., & DiFlorio, R. A. (2019). School-based mindfulness intervention supports adolescent resiliency: A randomized controlled pilot study. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, 7(sup1), 111–122.
- Felver, J. C., Doerner, E., Jones, J., Kaye, N. C., & Merrell, K. W. (2013). Mindfulness in school psychology: Applications for intervention and professional practice. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(6), 531–547.
- Felver, J. C., & Jennings, P. A. (2016). Applications of mindfulness-based interventions in school settings: An introduction.
- Ferrari, M., Hunt, C., Harrysunker, A., Abbott, M. J., Beath, A. P., & Einstein, D. A. (2019). Self-compassion interventions and psychosocial outcomes: A meta-analysis of RCTs. *Mindfulness*, 1–19.
- Germer, C., Siegel, R. D., & Fulton, P. R. (Eds.). (2016). *Mindfulness and psychotherapy*. Guilford Publications.
- Germer, G. (2005). What is mindfulness? In G. Germer, R. Siegel, & P. Fulton (Eds.), *Mindfulness and psychotherapy* (pp. 1–27). New York: Guilford.
- Germer, C. K., & Neff, K. D. (2013). Self-compassion in clinical practice. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(8), 856–867.

- Greenberg, M. T., & Harris, A. R. (2012). Nurturing mindfulness in children and youth: Current state of research. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 161–166.
- Greeson, J. M., & Chin, G. R. (2019). Mindfulness and physical disease: A concise review. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 204–210.
- Harris, A. R., Jennings, P. A., Katz, D. A., Abenavoli, R. M., & Greenberg, M. T. (2016). Promoting stress management and well-being in educators: Feasibility and efficacy of a school-based yoga and mindfulness intervention. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 143–154.
- Hawn, F. (2011). *The mind-up curriculum: Brain-focused strategies for learning and living*. New York.
- Hayward, K., & Colman, R. (2010). *Educating for GNH*. Thimphu, Bhutan: GPI Atlantic. Retrieved from [http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/educatingforgnh/educating\\_for\\_gnh\\_proceedings.pdf](http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/educatingforgnh/educating_for_gnh_proceedings.pdf).
- Hayward, K., PannoZZo, L., & Colman, R. (2009). *Educating for Gross National Happiness in Bhutan: Developing Curricula and Indicators for an Educated Populace: A Literature Review. Document 2, Parts IV-VI*. GPI Atlantic.
- Hirshberg, M. J., Flook, L., Enright, R. D., & Davidson, R. J. (2020). Integrating mindfulness and connection practices into pre-service teacher education improves classroom practices. *Learning and Instruction*, 66.
- Huppert, F. A., & Johnson, D. M. (2010). A controlled trial of mindfulness training in schools: The importance of practice for an impact on well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 5(4), 264–274.
- Ivtzan, I., & Lomas, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Mindfulness in positive psychology: The science of meditation and well-being*. Routledge.
- Janz, P., Dawe, S., & Wyllie, M. (2019). Mindfulness-based program embedded within the existing curriculum improves executive functioning and behavior in young children: A waitlist controlled trial. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2052.
- Jennings, P. A. (2016). Mindfulness-based programs and the American public school system: Recommendations for best practices to ensure secularity. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 176–178.
- Jennings, P. A., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Rasheed, D., Frank, J. L., & Brown, J. L. (2019). Long-term impacts of the CARE program on teachers' self-reported social and emotional competence and well-being. *Journal of School Psychology*, 76, 186–202.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525.
- Jennings, P., Lantieri, L., & Roeser, R. W. (2012). Supporting educational goals through cultivating mindfulness. *Handbook of Prosocial Education*, 2, 371.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. USA: Delta.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.

- Kaliman, P. (2019). Lifestyle and well-being: Potential epigenetic benefits of mindfulness training, healthy eating and physical activity. In *Enhancing resilience in youth* (pp. 39–55). Cham: Springer.
- Kaliman, P., Álvarez-López, M. J., Cosín-Tomás, M., Rosenkranz, M. A., Lutz, A., & Davidson, R. J. (2014). Rapid changes in histone deacetylases and inflammatory gene expression in expert meditators. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *40*, 96–107.
- Kielty, M. L., Gilligan, T. D., & Staton, A. R. (2017). Whole-school approaches to incorporating mindfulness-based interventions: Supporting the capacity for optimal functioning in school settings. *Childhood Education*, *93*(2), 128–135.
- King, A. P. (2019). Mindfulness-based workplace interventions for wellness promotion. *Mental Health in the Workplace: Strategies and Tools to Optimize Outcomes*, 191.
- Klingbeil, D. A., & Renshaw, T. L. (2018). Mindfulness-based interventions for teachers: A meta-analysis of the emerging evidence base. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *33*(4), 501.
- Klingbeil, D. A., Renshaw, T. L., Willenbrink, J. B., Copek, R. A., Chan, K. T., Haddock, A., ... Clifton, J. (2017). Mindfulness-based interventions with youth: A comprehensive meta-analysis of group-design studies. *Journal of School Psychology*, *63*, 77–103.
- Kuyken, W., Nuthall, E., Byford, S., Crane, C., Dalgleish, T., Ford, T., ... Williams, J. M. G. (2017). The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a mindfulness training programme in schools compared with normal school provision (MYRIAD): Study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials*, *18*(1), 194.
- Kuyken, W., Weare, K., Ukoumunne, O. C., Vicary, R., Motton, N., Burnett, R., ... Huppert, F. (2013). Effectiveness of the mindfulness in schools programme: Non-randomised controlled feasibility study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, *203*(2), 126–131.
- Langford, R., Bonell, C. P., Jones, H. E., Poulidou, T., Murphy, S. M., Waters, E., ... Campbell, R. (2014). The WHO Health Promoting School framework for improving the health and well-being of students and their academic achievement. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* (4).
- Lombas, A. S., Jiménez, T. I., Arguís-Rey, R., Hernández-Paniello, S., Valdivia-Salas, S., & Martín-Albo, J. (2019). Impact of the happy classroom programme on psychological well-being, school aggression, and classroom climate. *Mindfulness*, 1–19.
- Lomas, T., Medina, J. C., Ivtzan, I., Rupperecht, S., & Eiroa-Orosa, F. J. (2017). The impact of mindfulness on the well-being and performance of educators: A systematic review of the empirical literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *61*, 132–141.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). How do simple positive activities increase well-being? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(1), 57–62.
- Maloney, J. E., Lawlor, M. S., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Whitehead, J. (2016). A mindfulness-based social and emotional learning curriculum for school-aged

- children: The MindUP program. In *Handbook of mindfulness in education* (pp. 313–334). New York, NY: Springer.
- Maynard, B. R., Solis, M., & Miller, V. (2015). *Mindfulness-based interventions for improving academic achievement, behavior and socio-emotional functioning of primary and secondary students: A systematic review*. Campbell Library. Retrieved from <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/342/>.
- McKeering, P., & Hwang, Y. S. (2019). A systematic review of mindfulness-based school interventions with early adolescents. *Mindfulness*, *10*(4), 593–610.
- Meiklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, M. L., Griffin, M. L., Biegel, G., Roach, A., ... Isberg, R. (2012). Integrating mindfulness training into K-12 education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students. *Mindfulness*, *3*(4), 291–307. A Training Manual.
- Metz, S. M., Frank, J. L., Reibel, D., Cantrell, T., Sanders, R., & Broderick, P. C. (2013). The effectiveness of the learning to BREATHE program on adolescent emotion regulation. *Research in Human Development*, *10*(3), 252–272.
- Mindful Schools. (2015). *Curriculum training*. Retrieved from <http://www.mindfulschools.org/training/curriculum-training>.
- Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan. (2013). Educating for Gross National Happiness.
- National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2019). From a nation at risk to a nation at hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.
- Niemiec, R. M. (2013). *Mindfulness and character strengths*. Hogrefe Publishing.
- Norrish, J. M. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong grammar school journey*. Oxford Positive Psychology Series.
- NSW Government. (2015). *The well-being framework for schools*. Sydney, NSW: Department of Education and Communities. Retrieved 3 February 2020, from [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing/about/16531\\_Wellbeing-Framework-forschools\\_Accessible.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing/about/16531_Wellbeing-Framework-forschools_Accessible.pdf).
- OECD. (2018). The future of education and skills: Education 2030. OECD Education 2030.
- Olness, K., & Kohen, D. P. (1996). Hypnosis and hypnotherapy with children.
- Parker, A. E., Kupersmidt, J. B., Mathis, E. T., Scull, T. M., & Sims, C. (2014). The impact of mindfulness education on elementary school students: Evaluation of the Master mind program. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, *7*(3), 184–204.
- Pollak, S. M., Pedulla, T., & Siegel, R. D. (2014). *Sitting together: Essential skills for mindfulness-based psychotherapy*. Guilford Publications.
- Rappaport, L. (2008). *Focusing-oriented art therapy: Accessing the body's wisdom and creative intelligence*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Rawana, J. S., Diplock, B. D., & Chan, S. (2018). Mindfulness-based programs in school settings: Current state of the research. In *Handbook of school-based mental health promotion* (pp. 323–355). Cham: Springer.

- Rivkin, S. G., Hanushek, E. A., & Kain, J. F. (2005). Teachers, schools, and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, *73*(2), 417–458.
- Roeser, R. W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P. A. (2012). Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice. *Child Development Perspectives*, *6*(2), 167–173.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68.
- Schleicher, A. (2018). *World class: How to build a 21st-century school system*, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education. OECD Publishing.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., et al. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: A randomized controlled trial. *Developmental Psychology*, *51*(1), 52.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Roeser, R. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbook of mindfulness in education: Integrating theory and research into practice*. Springer.
- Schussler, D. L., Greenberg, M., DeWeese, A., Rasheed, D., DeMauro, A., Jennings, P. A., et al. (2018). Stress and release: Case studies of teacher resilience following a mindfulness-based intervention. *American Journal of Education*, *125*(1), 1–28.
- Schwartz, R. C. (2013). Moving from acceptance toward transformation with internal family systems therapy (IFS). *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *69*(8), 805–816.
- Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2013). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression.
- Semple, R., & Burke, C. (2019). State of the research: Physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness-based interventions for children and adolescents. *OBM Integrative and Complementary Medicine*, *4*(1), 1–31.
- Semple, R. J., Droutman, V., & Reid, B. A. (2017). Mindfulness goes to school: Things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences. *Psychology in the Schools*, *54*(1), 29–52.
- Semple, R. J., & Lee, J. (2014). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for children. In *Mindfulness-based treatment approaches* (pp. 161–188). Academic Press.
- Shapiro, S., de Sousa, S., & Jazaieri, H. (2016). Mindfulness, mental health, and positive psychology. In *Mindfulness in positive psychology* (pp. 118–135). Routledge.
- Sheinman, N., & Hadar, L. L. (2017). Mindfulness in education as a whole of school approach: Principles, insights and outcomes. *Mindfulness and Education: Research and Practice*, 77–101.
- Sheinman, N., Hadar, L. L., Gafni, D., & Milman, M. (2018). Preliminary investigation of whole-school mindfulness in education programs and children's mindfulness-based coping strategies. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *27*(10), 3316–3328.

- Sherab, K., Cooksey, R., & Maxwell, T. W. (2014). *Gross national happiness education in Bhutanese schools: Understanding the experiences and efficacy beliefs of principals and teachers*.
- Shonin, E., Van Gordon, W., & Griffiths, M. (2013). Mindfulness-based interventions: Towards mindful clinical integration. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 194.
- Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Winton, A. S., Adkins, A. D., Wahler, R. G., Sabaawi, M., & Singh, J. (2007). Individuals with mental illness can control their aggressive behavior through mindfulness training. *Behavior modification*, 31(3), 313–328.
- Slade, S., & Griffith, D. (2013). A whole child approach to student success. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 10(3).
- Smiling Mind. (2017). *Establishing an evidence base for the Smiling Mind Education Program*. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a2f40a41f318d38ccf0c819/t/5a8e1e78e4966bbc8ab648ff/1519263376896/research-project-report.pdf>.
- Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* World Health Organization.
- Tang, Y. Y., Hölzel, B. K., & Posner, M. I. (2015). The neuroscience of mindfulness meditation. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16(4), 213.
- Tarrasch, R., Berger, R., & Grossman, D. (2020). Mindfulness and compassion as key factors in improving teacher's well being. *Mindfulness*, 1–13.
- The Mindfulness Initiative: Health, Wellbeing and Mindfulness. Retrieved from <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=6e543eb7-c5b6-4d3c-a537-6a2961965887>.
- UNESCO. (1972). Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow. *Report of the International Commission on Education*.
- UNESCO. (1996). *Learning: The treasure within*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Futures of education: learning to become*. Retrieved from <https://www.unesdoc.unesco.org/ark>.
- Walsh, R. (1983). Meditation practice and research. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 23(1), 18–50.
- Weare, K. (2014). *Evidence for mindfulness: Impacts on the wellbeing and performance of school staff*. <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Evidence-for-Mindfulness-Impact-on-school-staff.pdf>.
- Weare, K. (2019). Mindfulness and contemplative approaches in education. *Current Opinion in Psychology*.
- Weiss, H., Johanson, G., & Monda, L. (2015). *Hakomi mindfulness-centered somatic psychotherapy: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- World Health Organization. (1999). Partners in life skills education. *Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, Department of Mental Health*.

- World Health Organization. (n.d.). *School and youth health: What is a health-promoting school?* Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/school\\_youth\\_health/gshi/hps/en/](http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi/hps/en/).
- Young, S. (2016). What is mindfulness? A contemplative perspective. In *Handbook of mindfulness in education* (pp. 29–45). New York, NY: Springer.
- Zarate, K., Maggin, D. M., & Passmore, A. (2019). Meta-analysis of mindfulness training on teacher well-being. *Psychology in the Schools, 56*(10), 1700–1715.
- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychology, 5*, 603.
- Zins, J. E., Bloodworth, M. R., Weissberg, R. P., & Walberg, H. J. (2007). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 17*(2–3), 191–210.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# Part III

## Diversifying Positive Education



# 25

## Positive Education with Disadvantaged Students

Sue Roffey and Denise Quinlan

If anyone needs positive education, it is those young people who struggle with adversities in their lives and for whom school may be their only place of refuge, stability, and welcome. Although schools and teachers often do their best for their students, in many countries globally, educational systems, and government policies focus primarily on academic outcomes. For vulnerable students, such limited approaches to education are not only unsupportive, they may be making things far worse. Too often, vulnerable young people are handed a ‘double whammy’: young people who experience difficult and often ongoing life events at home or in the community do not always succeed or behave well at school, and as a consequence are punished or even excluded from the place that could otherwise provide refuge and support. ‘Strong discipline’ is seen by many as the way to handle challenging behaviour so that children ‘learn’ what is expected. But what pupils often learn is that they are unwanted, worthless, and bad. This is not only tragic for those individuals whose opportunities, mental health, and relationships all suffer directly, but also on what happens in our communities and societies in the future.

---

S. Roffey (✉)

Western Sydney University, Sydney, NSW, Australia  
e-mail: [sue@sueroffey.com](mailto:sue@sueroffey.com)

University College, London, UK

D. Quinlan

New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing and Resilience, Christchurch, New Zealand  
e-mail: [denise@nziwr.co.nz](mailto:denise@nziwr.co.nz)

This chapter outlines some of the issues that young people may face—both acute and on-going. We summarise what typically happens to these students in response; how they feel about themselves, others, and the world around them; their ability to focus and learn; their emotionally driven behaviours; and the social difficulties they may encounter. We next briefly outline the research on protective factors and the role that schools might play in fostering these. We then provide a series of case studies, which provide rich examples of action at school, city, and community levels to address the needs of disadvantaged students. From these, we identify some specific aspects of positive education that may help break the ongoing cycle of disadvantage.

## What Do We Mean by Disadvantage?

Children do not start life on a level playing field. Many face challenges that are often multifaceted across multiple levels of a system (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), ranging from socio/political factors (macro-level) to direct interactions with family, carers, and teachers (micro-level). Many of these disadvantages create chronic adversity, which in turn are passed along to subsequent generations (chrono-level). Many students also experience acute adversity, times when they face issues that undermine their sense of self, feelings of safety, and wellbeing. Sometimes it is clear to schools which students are dealing with disadvantage, but not always. For instance, girls who experience family violence may not attract any attention in school, even though their anxiety level is high and self-esteem is low. Parents who start or end romantic relationships can be challenging for their children, who may express their anger and confusion in school rather than at home. Disadvantage also includes those with special educational needs, who often lack both learning support needs and struggle to experience inclusion and belonging at school. Special needs is a broad field and beyond the scope of this chapter, but is an area where positive education needs a more specific focus in the future.

Each level of the system is affected by other levels. For instance, a single racist comment is made more possible by a political culture that implicitly supports racism. A school that excludes a student for their behaviour reflects a system that values academic excellence over belonging as part of whole child education. School culture is also not static; effects of different factors within the system change dynamically over time (i.e., the chrono-level). While acknowledging these bidirectional influences, it is useful to consider specific experiences at different levels of this model, which we turn to now.

## Micro-Level

At the micro-level, interactions between children and those in their immediate environment can either facilitate positive growth or actively damage a healthy sense of self. This begins at home. Inconsistent or poor parenting often arises from families who either do not know what is required to promote healthy child development, or whose lives and resources do not facilitate this (Gleeson, Hsieh, & Cryer-Coupet, 2016). The parenting style that has the best outcomes is *facilitative* or *authoritative*. Combining acceptance with positive interactions, consistent communication on social values and expectations, facilitative parenting promotes a positive sense of self alongside considerate behaviour towards others (Baumrind, 1989; Clark & Ladd, 2000; Wing Chan & Koo, 2011). Positive and secure early attachment, where carers are attuned to their infants is widely accepted as critical to the healthy development of the child and often through to adulthood (Bowlby, 1988; Gerhardt, 2015).

Secure attachments are at risk for infants in dysfunctional and/or isolated families and those with parents who struggle with mental health issues, resulting in a number of less adaptive parenting styles. For instance, permissive parenting is warm and loving but does not set clear boundaries or expectations for children, which can poorly impact independence, persistence, academic outcomes, and prosocial behaviour (Damon, 1995). Authoritarian parenting is harsh, with little warmth or flexibility. Some families believe their children's 'performance' reflects on their own status in the community. Consequently, parents pressure their children to attain high grades, sometimes to the exclusion of other activities and a more balanced childhood. Yet this often does not lead to higher achievement, but instead can increase depression and alienation (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013).

Although we cannot accurately ascertain figures for child abuse and neglect, figures from the National Society for the Prevention of Child Cruelty (NSPCC) in the U.K. indicate that cases of child cruelty and neglect more than doubled between 2012 and 2017. At the end of March 2019, over 52,000 children in England were the subject of a child protection plan (ONS, 2020). As of 2015, over 700,000 children were reported as being abused every year in the U.S. (National Children's Alliance, 2015). The most recent figures in Australia indicate that 1 in 35 children received child protection services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). These statistics are only the ones we know about—there are most likely many more unreported cases.

While parents and immediate family members play an important role, others also have a significant role in the day-to-day interactions with children

and young people. These include members of the wider family and other carers, people in the local community, and their teachers in school. The relationships that children have with educators depend both on the beliefs and skills of teachers and the context in which the school is operating. Whereas positive interactions with teachers can support those with disadvantage, the opposite can also be true. A quote by a young person captures this well (New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People, 2009):

It feels like you're like you are the only one that can't do it and you feel really sad and empty. And you yeah, you feel like you feel unhappy and you feel like you can't, you can't, you just can't do it. Sometimes you feel sick because you are like so unhappy. (p. 5)

## Meso-Level

The meso-level concerns the relationships between those in the young person's micro-system that directly impact on them, including issues such as family breakdown, violence in the home, alcoholism, and other addictions. For instance, in the U.K., 1 in 20 children are reported to experience sexual abuse, with actual rates most likely much higher (Radford et al., 2011), and at least 130,000 children live in homes with high risk of domestic abuse (ONS, 2015; SafeLives, 2015a). Loss, especially unresolved grief such as in acrimonious parental separation, can lead to children being angry, confused, and/or conflicted. How they respond will depend on many factors, including their age (Dowling & Elliott, 2012). This issue is often poorly recognised or addressed in the school system. Reconstituted families also put pressure on young people, who may find themselves sharing a parent and home with people they barely know.

Within the school, the meso-level reflects how the school's culture and climate impacts upon the young person. Culture can be defined as 'the way we do things round here', the beliefs and values that influence action, whereas school climate usually refers to how people feel about being there. Students who feel marginalised and/or unworthy at school are often those whose psychological needs are not being addressed there. This may be the outcome, for instance, of a school culture that expects conformity rather than valuing the strengths and uniqueness of each student.

## Exo-Level

The exo-level refers to what is happening that impacts on those around the child, such as the working lives of parents, community, and health facilities. For example, organisations that have flexible working hours enable parents to take more responsibility for their families. In environments where facilities for outdoor play are restricted, there is less opportunity for children to engage in regular exercise, often placing pressure on families with energetic children but nowhere to safely expend that energy. Workplace stress and job instability increase family stress, which in turn can impact upon how the parents treat the child, increasing risk for abuse, neglect, and other relational issues.

## Macro-Level

The macro-level involves the broader sociopolitical framework and policies in which schools, families, and young people function, and can have a very significant impact on the opportunities and barriers faced by disadvantaged young people. For instance, in the U.K., years of austerity have meant that there are 4.1 million children living with poverty (Child Poverty Action Group, 2019), being educated in schools that have insufficient resources, located in areas that have experienced cuts to youth and social services. A governmental reward and punishment approach towards ‘discipline’ has led to an unprecedented number of exclusions from school, both formally and informally. Understanding of adverse childhood experiences is thin on the ground, as headteachers promote zero tolerance policies in order to get ‘outstanding’ ratings from government inspectors. Such approaches have been shown not only to be useless in raising ratings, but also cause significant harm to the young people (Skiba et al., 2006). Racism and homophobia have also increased in recent years as public figures denigrate those who are different (Booth, 2019). Regular and social media also have a role to play between the exo- and macro-levels—either giving credence to certain beliefs, behaviours, and policies, or challenging them and offering different perceptions. There appears to be little connection made between the rise in knife-crime and all the issues raised above.

## The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Education

All of the above can result in *adverse childhood experiences* (ACE)—everything that happens to children and young people that impacts negatively on their wellbeing (Giovanelli, Mondy Reynolds, & Ou, 2019). ACEs potentially impact upon learning outcomes. For instance, poverty can raise basal cortisol levels and chronic stress responses, resulting in physical and psychological changes, such as increased anxiety and depression, sleep and digestive impairments, lowered concentration, attention, and memory skills (Suor, Sturge-Apple, Davies, Cicchetti, & Manning, 2015). This will, of course, have further impacts on cognitive functioning, learning, and academic performance. Children with ongoing toxic stress live their lives in fight, flight, or freeze mode—unable to concentrate to learn, responding to the world as a place of constant danger, not trusting adults, and unable to develop healthy relationships with peers. Their concentration is affected, their learning suffers, they are often not compliant, may be looking to assert control, be hyper-vigilant, and not be able to make friends easily. Indeed, it is hard to be confident in yourself when significant adults put you down all the time.

ACEs are interactive and cumulative to create greater risk. For example, a study of 2100 students in Washington State in the U.S. found that the more stressors a child has, the more difficulties they encounter at school (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Students with multiple adversities were three times more likely to fail academically, five times more likely to have attendance problems, six times more likely to have behavioural problems, and four times more likely to experience poor health.

## Resilience and Positive Adaptation

While there are multiple definitions of resilience, here we refer to resilience as the ability to withstand and recover from challenge and adversity. It is a multidimensional construct where resilience may be evidenced in some domains but not others. Some individuals are socially resilient and good at making friends despite challenges that occur in their social relationships, others are resilient in their learning, quickly recovering from mistakes or lower test scores to have another go. Others are resilient to stress and hardship, maintaining a sense of optimism and hope despite challenges and struggles. For simple, acute stressors and challenges, resiliency represents the ability

to quickly recover and press on. For ongoing challenges and chronic adversity, resiliency represents positive adaptation, with the ability to draw on a series of internal and external supports to navigate, make sense of, and grow from those challenges (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003). Importantly, resilience is now widely understood to be a capacity involving behaviours, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed (Cohen, 2013). Further, resilience is not only relevant for vulnerable young people, but also important for educator wellbeing (Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016).

Numerous psychological and social factors across multiple system levels have been identified that support resilience and positive adaptation. For instance, Southwick, Vythilingam, and Charney (2005) found that stress resilience was supported by positive emotions, optimism, humour, mental flexibility, explanatory style, acceptance and reappraisal, spirituality, altruism, social support, and having positive role models. Other studies have identified factors such as self-awareness, optimism, mental agility, perspective taking, knowing and using strengths, and connection (e.g., Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Werner and colleagues (2013) identified the importance of having someone who thinks you are special. As Bronfenbrenner (2005) vividly put it, “Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her” (p. 262). This does not have to be the parent or primary caretaker—studies indicate that it can be a grandparent, an aunt, a sibling, or a teacher. A sense of school belonging also contributes to resilience (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018).

Importantly, schools can play an important role in supporting disadvantaged students and promoting resilience and positive adaptation. Positive education cannot just be about curriculum, pedagogy, and the learning environment, but needs to consider how wellbeing and positive adaptation can be supported across the school. Helen Street (2018) noted that you cannot ‘do’ wellbeing in silos; it needs to be embedded across perceptions, policies, and practices—all aspects of the whole school. There is growing awareness of the importance of embedding wellbeing in education as a long-term culture change, with attention to the processes involved and incorporating multiple stakeholders, include staff, students, families, and the broader community (Quinlan & Hone, 2020). These become even more important for vulnerable students, who can slip through the cracks, creating greater gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Importantly, this work requires practices from many fields contributing to wellbeing in education, including mindfulness, restorative practice, trauma-informed practices, and social and emotional learning (SEL). Factors such as student agency and voice, school belonging, self and social awareness, and supportive peer relationships can

support students living with disadvantage rather than further isolating them or compounding disadvantage by excluding them. School behaviour policies, connection with the community, support for educator as well as students, and cultural responsiveness can all have a positive impact on school climate and interactions with disadvantaged students and their families. This is all part of whole-school positive education.

## Examples Across Multiple Contexts

Clearly, numerous factors place vulnerable and disadvantaged students at risk, while other factors can provide protection and restoration to the students who need it the most. To bring this to life, we consider a series of case studies that illustrate good practice across a range of contexts and levels, including primary and secondary schools, local communities, and broader cities.

### Building Shared Humanity: Rozelle Public School

As society has become increasingly global, connections that children previously had within families, schools, and communities, along with a uniform set of social values and religious and cultural norms are no longer guaranteed. Educators are challenged to provide the time and space for students to learn about each other, develop trust, and enhance skills including building, maintaining, and repairing relationships. Rozelle Public School, a primary school in New South Wales, Australia, implemented and embedded restorative practice as a 'way of being and learning'. Lyn Doppler, Rozelle's Principal for nine years, documented the school's journey and how the whole community, including staff, students, and parents, learned to use restorative language and practice to relate, think, and learn together.

At the school, the time and space for creating connection is provided by daily Circles, a time in the school day where students have a voice, share stories, and are engaged emotionally as well as cognitively. Proactive circles enable everyone to engage in affirmation of themselves and others, enhancing trust, communication, and collaboration. Circles deepen the dialogue about things that matter and bring out the best in everyone. Building community in this way provides the foundation for people to connect in an increasingly disconnected world. This is the basis of restorative practices. The restorative philosophy ensures that everyone has an equal voice regardless of age, ethnicity, religious and socio-economic status, disability, and cognitive ability.

The incorporation of restorative practice positively affected how staff worked with children and how the children related with one another and with their parents. For instance, at a birthday party where children were in a dispute, they were able to say, “*let’s circle up and work it out*”. As Lyn observed: “*At Rozelle everyone understood the vision of the school and could articulate what we stood for in their own words. Keeping the philosophy out there in the community was very important as the language across the school changed*”. Casual teachers visiting the school often stated that the school had a wonderful, different feeling that they could not quite put their finger on. There was laughter and smiling in the welcoming staffroom, sharing of ideas, and working with each other rather than in silos. Two students (names changed for privacy) illustrate the impact that the school’s approach had on disadvantaged students.

**Adam, a boy with severe autism and physical disability.** Adam has autism, a physical disability making walking difficult, and a speech impairment. The inclusive restorative philosophy of the school enabled Adam to be embraced not only by his peers and their parents, but also by students from all years who appreciated his keen sense of humour. There was not a dry eye on the field as Adam ran in his final Athletics Carnival at the school. The students realised by themselves that this might be Adam’s last chance to earn a winner’s blue ribbon. Providing a beautiful example of empathy, all the boys banded together to run in a line, linking arms as they ran through the finishing tape. Today, Adam is 19 years old. His best friend from primary school is now his mentor and companion, a school friendship flourishing into working life.

**Kirra, a First Nations student.** Australia is grappling with issues of reconciliation with First Nations people, but it is hard for that to occur when one side has no voice. When Kirra, an indigenous student, arrived in Kindergarten, she was very shy and quiet. By the time she reached Year 6, Kirra had been elected a leader in the school parliament. She was able to talk about the school’s philosophy in an impromptu way for a video being made on our restorative culture. On the morning of then Prime Minister Rudd’s *Apology to the Stolen Generation*, the First Nations students were leading the assembly of the live screening of the apology. Kirra was buzzing around organising things and Lyn asked her if she was excited about what was about to happen in Parliament House. She answered with a beaming smile, “*Oh yes, Mrs Doppler, this is the best day of my life!*”.

## **Portchester Community School: Every Conversation Is an Investment**

Hampshire is a county in the U.K. that has explored ways to enhance outcomes for disadvantaged learners (Hampshire County Council, 2018). They have considered the extent to which disadvantaged pupils play an active, visible role in the school, whether they feel like they belong at the school, and how they relate to adults at the school. Through their own and other research, they have identified several key ingredients:

- Leadership, culture, and values
- High expectations
- Understanding barriers and targeted, evidence-based activities
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Securing accountability

Portchester Community School is one of their research schools that has successfully brought these ingredients to life. The school is a smaller than average secondary school, driven by a desire to ensure that all students, irrespective of their starting points, are able to be successful learners, confident individuals, and responsible citizens, explicitly stating:

Firmly grounded in the belief that ‘one size does not fit all’, our disadvantaged strategy focuses on students as individuals, with interventions being personalised to ensure they are meaningful.

They have three areas for intervention: teaching and learning, building cultural capacity, and self-confidence and productive partnerships. They recognise that every interaction, with both the student and their families can make a positive difference.

Within the teaching and learning area they have prioritised timely, personal feedback, aimed at both extending a student’s understanding and challenging their thinking. To build cultural capital and self-confidence, disadvantaged students are encouraged to participate in student leadership opportunities, international visits, and extra-curricular activities. The school has invested heavily into building and maintaining positive partnerships with the families of disadvantaged students, with each teaching member of staff allocated three such students. Over the academic year they meet in person at least three times, as well as maintain regular parental contact. Meetings are focused on the student’s individual learning and aspirations. These strategies have

seen improvements in attendance, academic outcomes, parental engagement, behaviour, and engagement in extra-curricular activities for these identified young people.

## **The Aboriginal Girls Circle: Cultivating Respect for Culture**

The Productivity Commission in Australia has measured the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People since 2000. As of 2016, although there were indications of progress such as improved educational outcomes and early childhood health, there were declines in other areas, including increases in the rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders, with rates more than nine times the rate of non-Indigenous children. While the rate of Indigenous juveniles in detention had dropped, it was still 24 times higher than for non-Indigenous youth. The proportion of Indigenous adults reporting high or very high psychological distress rose to 33% in 2014–15, more than triple that for other Australians. The levels of suicide across the community account for at least 5.1% and as many as 10% of Indigenous deaths. Many children are therefore living with trauma and loss as well as other challenging life experiences.

The Aboriginal Girls Circle (AGC) was developed in conjunction with the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Australia in response to a request from a regional high school in New South Wales for a program specifically for Aboriginal girl to address behavioural issues, develop confidence, and improve relationships within the school and community. Girls in Year 7 are invited to join the AGC. The program begins with an overnight camp and then continues in weekly Circles until Year 10, with a new cohort beginning every year. The AGC combines social and emotional learning with community-based projects in order to build social and emotional skills together with a sense of agency, leadership, and community connection.

The AGC is having an impact beyond the everyday. Girls are staying longer in school, with several Circles students going onto higher education. They are also more confident and active in their communities and it is hoped, like many strong women, they will become intergenerational agents of change. The program has achieved these outcomes by incorporating the ASPIRE principles (Roffey, 2017a) of Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect, and Equity across the program.

**Agency.** Young people in schools are often given information, told what to do, what is right, how to think, and how to behave. They are rarely encouraged to reflect and engage with critical thinking, let alone make their own decisions. For indigenous people in Australia, colonisation has stripped away much of their traditional culture so this authoritarian approach mirrors a dark history. In the AGC, student voice and agency are privileged. This empowers the girls to collaboratively make decisions and also to take responsibility for actions. The support of teaching and Aboriginal liaison officers together with Elders from the community has been valuable, especially as the girls' choice of projects has included cultural awareness, anti-racism, 'friendship and fighting', and community health.

**Safety.** For many indigenous students, speaking up is associated with feelings of shame. Individual competition, typical of independently oriented classrooms, does not align with Indigenous cultural norms, which are collective in nature. Safety includes the right to stay silent. Everything in the Circle happens in pairs, small groups, or the large Circle, such that no student is ever singled out or left without support. As the girls gain trust in the process and confidence that their views will be accepted, they are more able to speak up. Safety is also indirectly supported through the ways in which issues are addressed, using games, role-play, stories, and creative activities.

**Positivity.** Girls are encouraged to identify what is working well in their communities and explore what needs to happen to resolve some of the issues, using a strengths-based and solution-focused approach. Positivity is also about experiencing positive emotions; in the AGC this includes a sense of belonging, feeling valued, comfortable, and cared for, as well as excitement and shared humour. One of the most frequent comments about Circles is that it is 'fun', and laughing together in a safe way makes people feel better and promotes resilience. (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). For instance, one girl noted: "*You can go to AGC sad and you'll leave it like really happy*".

**Inclusion.** Indigenous students comprise 6.8% of the student population but 26% of suspensions from school. Inclusion is critical to the AGC. Everyone works with everyone else and there are clear guidelines for ways to address difficult behaviour should it occur. This maximises agency, respect, inclusion, and chances to reconnect. A pilot evaluation indicated that learning to work effectively with others enhanced problem-solving, self-efficacy, empathy, and self-awareness (Dobia et al., 2013). It also showed a strong affiliation with others in the AGC together with an increase in a sense of cultural and community connectedness.

**Respect.** In the AGC girls are given opportunities to speak and the expectation is that others will listen. Putting others down is never acceptable.

Respect is multidimensional, applying to self-respect, how you think about yourself, who you are and who you are becoming, respect for others and respect for culture, where you are from, and your community values and protocols. The girls themselves sought to learn more about their Aboriginal culture and as a result increased their respect for where they came from, an aspect of the intervention that was highly valued by community Elders.

**Equity.** Considering the lack of equity experienced by many Indigenous people, equity is particularly important for helping young people value themselves and their culture. Equity is embedded in all the Circle processes, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and the facilitator(s) engage equally in activities. This changes perceptions and relationships beyond the actual Circle, benefitting the girls and their communities.

## Promoting Holistic Wellbeing in South African Schools

According to World Bank data (World Bank, 2018), South Africa is the country with the highest level of inequality. As the majority of the population are between 5 and 16 years old, the biggest cohort of South Africans whose quality of life is compromised is of school age. Although many policies and innovative approaches have been developed with the aim of individuals reaching their potential in school, most focus on academic achievement. This can lead to the dehumanising of schools, where learners become performance machines who have to produce high test scores, often at the cost of their mental health and wellbeing (Fataar, 2016; Shaughnessy, Galligan, & Hurtardo de Vivas, 2008). It is apparent that, in many instances, schools in need of the most support are labelled as dysfunctional rather than being best placed for positive proactive intervention.

This case study took place in six schools, five of which were classified in the poorest category, and the sixth had many learners who experienced the same levels of financial and social disadvantage. All six schools operated in a social context that included unemployment, inadequate housing, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, and crime. Every school battled with learner absenteeism, limited parental involvement, lack of resources, and high teacher stress.

In initial conversations with staff at these schools, none saw wellbeing as part of their role. Their focus was consumed by the everyday seemingly insoluble problems, resulting in a sense of despondency and despair. Teachers were invited to participate in conversations that explored the small things that already enhanced their wellbeing. These included, for example, small acts of kindness and care, contact with parents who were concerned about their

children, acting as mentors, and pastoral and counselling services for learners with social and emotional needs.

Initial scepticism began to shift. In July 2014, a group of teachers agreed to form an initial wellbeing 'team' in each school, each electing a co-ordinator. Between July and November, these teams expanded to include parents and learners (the term for students/pupils in South Africa). In 2015, funding was obtained to conduct participatory learning and action research on the development of an integrated, multilevel process to facilitate holistic wellbeing. This methodology allows people to work together on complex issues which affect their lives, to learn from their experience and from one another, and to engage in a systematic inquiry into how to address and resolve these issues. The process was iterative and cyclical, including:

1. A 6-hour workshop for all six teams building relationships, sharing perspectives, and then co-constructing a vision for holistic wellbeing in their school. All six visions shifted to a more proactive approach in creating an enabling environment for learning.
2. Over the next two terms, each vision was communicated to others in a variety of ways, including assemblies, posters, and staff meetings. Monthly team meetings were also held. By the end of 2015, teams were focused on how initiatives might be sustained and developed in the next academic year.
3. The beginning of 2016 saw the wellbeing teams develop action plans. It was stressed that wellbeing is an integrative process and needed to be incorporated into existing everyday activities as well as new interventions.
4. A mid-term celebration was held in 2016 to reflect on what had been achieved and to inspire continuation. Participating schools reported back on their actions, activities, and interventions to an audience that included school management teams and members of the larger community. Learners were given an opportunity to present, which both gave them a voice and strengthened their inclusion in the project.
5. The beginning of 2017 saw greater independence for the wellbeing teams as they planned for maintenance and development in the coming year.

What happened? The outcomes for this initiative are reported at three different levels: individual, relational, and collective.

**Individual.** At the individual level, expanded opportunities for personal development were developed, such as participation in sports, outings, cultural events, and meetings with motivational speakers. For example, camps started included learners with low academic achievement, increasing understanding

and empathy between groups in the school. It became clear that more could be done in this area and outside agencies in the community became involved.

A three-hour session on wellbeing and life skills was offered to all learners between grades 4 and 12. Instead of learners only receiving recognition for academic achievements, they were given recognition for ‘value-informed’ behaviours such as kindness, care, and respect. This changed teacher focus from the negative to looking out for strengths in individuals. The recognition also motivated more positive behaviours overall.

Teachers became more aware of the everyday life challenges of many learners: “*I saw a lot of sadness and trauma here and it hit me terribly that young children at the age of 13 or 14 had to carry such tremendous responsibilities on their shoulders*”. Support included the provision of sanitary wear for girls who would stay away from school when they had a period, and sexuality education to those who were badly in need of this.

**Relational.** A growing number of relational activities occurred, offering events for people in the school community to connect with each other, bringing teachers, learners, and parents together for a fun day. For instance, learners organised a games day, celebrating the end of exams. Games were available in the hall on Fridays to promote positive peer relationships. Special days such as Valentine’s Day or Mother’s Day were used to enhance an ethos of kindness, empathy, and care. Schools also developed their own events, such as *Happiness through Kindness day* and a *Kind Kids Month*. One school brought parents of challenging children together to reach out to understand their needs. The impact of promoting these values is summed up by one teacher: “*I can listen with more empathy to children, I have a better understanding of things that we don’t understand, especially in the community where I teach*”.

**Collective.** A variety of activities promoted collective wellbeing. Each teacher had a *Wheel of Wellbeing* poster in their classroom, which illustrated the New Economics Foundation’s (year) five ways to wellbeing (Connect, Notice, Keep Learning, Give, and Stay Active), adding an additional way: Care for the Planet. Teachers often used this as a discussion tool with learners.

Engaging learners in the process was initially a cause for concern but the value of their involvement soon became apparent: “*The children initiate ideas, they come up with activities they think are important*”. Although getting parents on board was a challenge, teachers began to change the conversation at parent’s meetings to include a wellbeing focus as well as talking about academic achievement. The wellbeing teams also increasingly involved other members of staff.

The physical environment of the school was often a focus of change, with efforts to enhance a sense of value in education. This included painting the staff rooms and beginning a vegetable garden. The change of language was also critical, where language was explicitly shifted from deficit to wellbeing focused. One teacher reflected: “*Wellbeing, I believe for me is one of the best things that could have happened in our school. The reason being that you no longer think so negatively, you see the positive side of what is here at the school ... it is not that all is well, but you have hope*”.

## **Towards a Nurturing City: The Story of Glasgow**

Glasgow, Scotland, has had a reputation as being one of the toughest cities in the world, hallmarked by disadvantage, poverty, and violent crime. But for the last ten years, under the leadership of Maureen McKenna, Director of Education, Glasgow has been working towards becoming ‘A Nurturing City’. Much is changing, pointing to the possibilities for positive education on a city-wide scale.

Six Nurture Principles (Scottish Government, 2017) for early years ‘nurture groups’ have long been seen as a way of supporting children from disadvantaged families when they first come to school:

- Children’s learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom/school offers a safe base
- Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is communication
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

Nurture groups had been running in Glasgow for more than 15 years, so people knew this intervention made a difference. It was apparent, however, that there were many more children and young people who needed nurturing approaches beyond these small groups. For the Glasgow initiative, three more principles were added:

- All young people feel they belong
- Young people’s lives and experiences are respected
- Permission for disagreements ensures that staff and children are both heard

The message aimed to be simple and clear—children and young people need care and consistency as provided by the nurture principles. A nurturing

approach includes a belief in the best of the child and having high aspirations for young people.

The initiative further emphasised a whole-school approach, driven by a consistent vision with leaders who walk their talk. Across the city, there is ongoing professional development to support this vision, comprising interactive workshops provided by the educational psychology and school improvement service, but also peer observations and the Education Scotland framework for self-evaluation. It is essential that staff not only understand the nurture principles but also to think through the issues that young people are facing and what this means for their behaviour and learning.

The initiative has changed perceptions, language, and interactions. Children are less likely to be blamed for their behaviour but rather are seen as expressing their distress. Teachers facing challenges are encouraged to think through what might have happened to that pupil, what is their role in ensuring they make things better, not worse, and the importance of relational warmth. More and more teachers see the value of this approach—and commitment to the Nurture Principles is now part of recruitment procedures.

As a result, Glasgow is a different place now than in 2007, with evidence of a 50% reduction in youth crime for children aged 10–16 and less violence. There have been no pupil referral units and an 80% reduction in exclusions from school since 2007, with no permanent exclusions within the last two years. Attendance is 90%. When young people are in crisis there is a solution-focused meeting with the family with the aim of finding a way forward. Exclusion is rarely repeated: over 70% of children are excluded just once. Glasgow has seen a doubling of young people getting ‘highers’—the qualifications are taken at 18—with over two-thirds going onto higher education. As Maureen McKenna says, “*Happy children means happy learning*”.

## Key Elements for Supporting Vulnerable Young People

The case studies above illustrate ways that schools, communities, and cities are working to give disadvantaged young people a positive experience in education. In doing so, others in the community benefit, developing skills in relationships, perspective taking, and prosocial behaviours. There are consistent themes across the stories, as well as factors specific to the different contexts. Below, we discuss factors that emerge from these case studies and other research, with the goal of providing schools with guidance to effectively address disadvantage and support wellbeing.

## Leadership

It takes someone with vision and compassion to get positive education established. This vision is about the needs and potential of whole educational community, with a particular focus on equity and inclusiveness. For students, this means going beyond academic performance, and the recognition that students who struggle to focus, learn, and/or be compliant have good reasons. To provide an even playing field where these young people have a fair chance of success, individual students' needs must be approached flexibly and with care. It means prioritising the wellbeing of teachers and other staff, who bear the brunt of the challenges exhibited by vulnerable students. And it means actively cultivating a culture of care, respect, and acceptance for all.

Good leaders also bring others on board with their vision (Rosenfield, Wall, & Jansen, 2017; Quinlan & Hone, 2020). This is particularly important for creating a school culture and community that feels safe for vulnerable children. Even if a leader is committed to creating a positive, inclusive environment, this will be undermined if others in the school are not committed to the same vision. Especially in a school with deficit-based disciplinary policies, significant shifts may be needed in both the explicit policies and strategies of the school, as well as more implicit expectations and norms, which are communicated by teachers and school leaders. Influential leaders get others on board by clearly communicating their vision, by their own example, by the professional development they endorse, and in every written policy and communication.

## Teacher Wellbeing and Sense of Meaning

Teacher wellbeing predicts student learning and wellbeing (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Roffey, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016). And yet especially with the behavioural problems that disadvantaged students might display, teachers can feel overwhelmed or cynical unless there is consideration also given to their needs (Roffey, 2012). Studies clearly point to the need for teachers to be well, for them to teach well, and embed wellbeing within their class (e.g., Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015). We need teachers with a deep understanding of wellbeing, sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable students, self-awareness of their own reactions and triggers, appropriate coping strategies, and well-informed by educationally appropriate pedagogies and frameworks that are appropriate to the specific needs of their students. When this happens well, teachers describe their work as 'inspiring and revitalising' and that '*it reminded me why I came into teaching*'.

## Student Agency and Belonging

Self-determination is a cornerstone to supporting student wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the case studies, success arose when students felt empowered, having a say in the matters that concerned them. How can we expect young people to become effective leaders and citizens if at school they learn that their voice, ideas, and opinions do not matter? Disadvantaged students easily can become marginalised, reinforcing learned helpless patterns that they have little power of their lives.

Being listened to and having a sense of agency at school is also connected with developing a sense of belonging. As described above, feeling that you belong and the matter is critical to wellbeing. Especially for disadvantaged young people, a sense of belonging can buffer from the challenges and adversities experiences at home or in their community. The problem arises when schools promote an ethos of exclusive belonging, where only certain young people are seen as fit to belong. For students from minority ethnic and disadvantaged communities, it is hard to have a sense of belonging if you do not see yourself reflected in the school's structure, décor, signage, language, and customs. If none of the examples of successful students, leaders, or heroes in any field look like you, and if none of the stories or literature in your school reflects your culture, then it is difficult to feel like you fit into that world.

## Culturally Responsive Work with Parents and Community

Belonging arises in part when schools are culturally responsive to the community (Habib, Densmore-James, & Macfarlane, 2013; Savage et al., 2011). There is a growing understanding that whole-school wellbeing includes students' extended families and community (Dobia & Roffey, 2017). This means working alongside them, respecting them, listening to how they would like to be treated, and what they want for their children. For instance, many countries have indigenous populations who continue to experience multiple and severe disadvantage. For these communities to feel part of their local school community, the school must learn to communicate and work with these populations in a way that honours their knowledge and respects their customs, values, and aspirations for their children (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Penetito, 2009).

## Strengths and Solution-Focused Approaches

Adopting a strengths-based focus is at the heart of positive education (Norrish & Seligman, 2015). There is a significant body of research demonstrating the benefits for adults and children of being able to identify and develop their strengths, and having their strengths seen by those around them—particularly significant others like teachers and peers (e.g., Ghielen, van Woerkom, & Meyers, 2018; Quinlan, Swain, & Vella-Brodrick, 2012; Quinlan, Vella-Brodrick, Gray, & Swain, 2018). When we adopt a strengths focus, we notice what a student does well and where they can contribute to the community. Many vulnerable children have been told their entire life everything that is wrong with them, undermining a sense of self. The strengths-based shift is foundational, altering the way that educators, students, and their families interact. Adopting a strengths focus leads naturally to adopting a solution-focus as the standard approach to resolving challenges. Adopting a strengths focus allows schools to explore the positive and build on this, whether it is for the individual, the school, or the city (Gardner & Toope, 2011; Lopez & Louis, 2009).

While a strengths focus can occur through specific interventions and activities, much is communicated by the language used within the school. It is not only how you speak to students, but how you speak about them (and their family) that matters. Words influence beliefs about the role of the teacher, perceptions of pupils and their families, and what is and is not possible (citation?). For instance, one secondary school teacher noted: “*It is not considered cool in this school to speak negatively about a student*”. In another primary school there is a notice plastered in every room and corridor announcing, “*This is a no put down zone*”. The language of strengths-based approaches means not telling children they are naughty, lazy, or worthless, nor labelling students with ‘disorders’, which puts the problem directly ‘within the child’. Using strengths-based language can help a young person begin to think differently about themselves and who they are becoming. This can build confidence and a more positive self-concept. It also changes perceptions of others.

## Caring, Compassion, and Empathy

It is easy, in a crowded school day with a curriculum to deliver, to lose empathy for students who are not knuckling down to work. But without both a cognitive and empathic understanding of what disadvantage means for young people and the ways this might impact on their education, then

conflict is more likely to ensue, or children will vote with their feet—or at least with their minds and hearts. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, compassion is showing that you care. Positive education has much to say about developing empathy in young people themselves, but there has been less focus on the importance of showing compassion to them. For schools to be caring, compassionate places for everyone, all stakeholders need to acknowledge that everyone has their own story, that we all see the world through our own constructs. We will sometimes need to challenge these constructs, and understand that making assumptions about motivation and intent can be unhelpful. Believing in the best of someone and letting them know they matter may be a more helpful way of showing you care. At the same time, it does not mean that students are not held accountable for their actions. At times, this means tough love—having high but appropriate expectations perhaps encapsulated in the phrase, “*I know you can do this, and I'll help you get there*”.

## Relationships

Overwhelmingly, it is our relationships that matter most to the quality of our lives. In schools, teacher–student relationships make a difference to learning (Hattie, 2009; Murray-Harvey, 2010), promote wellbeing and resilience (Roffey, 2017b), and improve behaviour (Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour, 2013). A positive teacher–student relationship in a school is one where adults show that they care—not just about students' academic results but about the whole person. For instance, several studies (New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People, 2009; Robertson, 2006) found that young people report feeling like their teacher cares about them when:

- They know my name
- They show interest in me—and not just how I am doing at school
- They smile at me
- They listen to me—they don't jump to conclusions
- They encourage me
- They help me
- They make learning fun
- They don't have favourites.
- They know things but don't put themselves above you.

Some students have said that teachers tend to favour the ‘good kids’, those who are clever and compliant. But young people themselves know that some individuals struggle and need more support. Adults who have been through school in challenging times often acknowledge the difference a teacher’s belief in them made to their sense of self and ability to overcome, or at least come to terms with, negative life experiences. It is not unreasonable to say that the warmth and acceptance of teachers sometimes save lives.

Peer relationships are also critical. Unfortunately, young people who most need to have supportive friends are often those who struggle with establishing and maintaining positive relationships. The social dynamics of a school should not be left to chance, where the default mode can be rejection, isolation, and bullying. Social skills training for targeted young people is not enough (Frederickson, 1991). Students need universal input with opportunities to get to know each other and discover what they have in common. The ASPIRE principles used in the AGC described above can be applied across different contexts and have proved to be a valuable pedagogy in promoting class cohesion and a kinder school climate (Dobia, Parada, Roffey, & Smith, 2019; Roffey, 2020).

## From Behaviour Policies to Relationship Management

Finally, many behaviour policies in schools are based on a behaviourist model, where children are expected to be compliant with the rules and punished if they are not. Behaviourism is primarily concerned with observable behaviours rather than motivations, perceptions, emotions, or relationships, let alone prior experiences. As we can see from both the research and case studies, vulnerable students may be anxious, hyper-vigilant, and unable to focus. Their behaviour will be driven by a wide range of emotions and include the need to feel they have some control over what happens to them. The fear of sanctions is unlikely to be at the forefront of their minds when they are responding to a perceived threat—whether that is of failure or social rejection. Positive behaviour policies must therefore provide:

- A high focus across the school on the value of relationships and time to develop these.
- Professional development for teachers on the neurological impacts of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences and the development of emotionally literate responses to challenges, including time to calm down from a crisis.

- Clear expectations, which are best developed with students so they can see the rationale and have an investment in them, and support to meet those expectations, including reminders before reprimands.
- Restorative approaches underpinning all relationships and being used to manage both small and large incidents.
- Support for teachers that does not place their needs in competition with those of the student.

## Conclusion

An unacceptably high number of students from affluent countries live with disadvantage, which has multiple negative consequences for both the students and their societies. If positive education is to deliver on its promise of well-being, it must focus on addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. This means providing and promoting effective strategies to support resilience and wellbeing in the face of chronic disadvantage, as well as advocating for a more equitable system. We need to apply the tools and strategies of our field to reach the schools and students who need it most.

A significant body of research is clear on strategies that can make a difference, including working with the ‘whole child’, creating nurturing social climates, adopting restorative approaches, teaching SEL, demonstrating respect for cultural identity, giving students a sense of agency, and listening to their voice. We have both research and informative practice from case studies across the globe. The strategies that support children living with disadvantage will also support the wellbeing of all young people and create more inclusive environments that can benefit all students and educators.

**Acknowledgements** The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the following for their generosity in providing information for the case studies included in this chapter: Lyn Doppler, Tania Harding, Professor Ansie Kitching, and Maureen McKenna.

## References

- Allen, K.-A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30, 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>.

- Armstrong, H. B. (2012). Spirited leadership: Growing leaders for the future. In S. Roffey (Ed.), *Positive Relationships: Evidence based practice across the world* (pp. 215–226). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). *Child protection Australia 2017–2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2017-18/contents/summary>.
- Baumrind, D. (1989). Rearing competent children. In M. Damon (Ed.), *Child development today and tomorrow* (pp. 349–378). Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.
- Blodgett, C., & Lanigan, J. D. (2018). The association between adverse childhood experience (ACE) and school success in elementary school children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(1), 137–146.
- Booth, R. (2019, May 20). Racism on the rise since Brexit vote nationwide study reveals. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/racism-on-the-rise-since-brexit-vote-nationwide-study-reveals>.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., & Larsson, B. (2013). *Neglect and serious case reviews*. London: NSPCC.
- Briner, R., & Dewberry, C. (2007). *Staff well-being is key to school success*. London: Worklife Support Ltd/Hamilton House.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The developing ecology of human development: Paradigm lost or paradigm regained. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development* (pp. 94–105). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Child Poverty Action Group. (2019). *Child poverty facts and figures*. Retrieved from <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>.
- Children's Society. (2015). *The good childhood report 2015*. Retrieved from <http://goodchildhood2015.childrengovernment.org.uk>.
- Clark, K. E., & Ladd, G. W. (2000). Connectedness and autonomy support in parent-child relationships: Links to children's social-emotional orientation and peer relationships. *Developmental Psychology*, 36, 485–498.
- Cohen, J. (2013). Creating a positive school climate: A foundation for resilience. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (2nd ed., pp. 411–426). New York NY: Springer.
- Crawford, C., Goodman, A., Greaves, E., & Joyce, R. (2011). *Cohabitation, marriage, relationship stability and child outcomes: An update*. Retrieved from <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/comm120.pdf>.
- Damon, W. (1995). *Greater expectations: Overcoming the culture of indulgence in America's homes and schools*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Department for Education. (2014). *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities>.

- Department for Education. (2015). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2015*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015>.
- Dobia, B., & Roffey, S. (2017). Respect for culture: Social and emotional learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. In E. Freydenberg, A. J. Martin, & R. J. Collie (Eds.), *Social and emotional learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 313–334). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Dobia, B., Bodkin-Andrews, G., Parada, R., O'Rourke, V., Gilbert, S., Daley, A., & Roffey, S. (2013). *Aboriginal Girls Circle: Enhancing connectedness and promoting resilience for Aboriginal Girls. Final Pilot Report*. Penrith: Western Sydney University.
- Dobia, B., Parada, R. H., Roffey, S., & Smith, M. (2019). Social and emotional learning: From individual skills to class cohesion. *Educational and Child Psychology, 36*(2), 78–90.
- Dowling, E., & Elliott, D. (2012). *Understanding children's needs when parents separate*. London: Speechmark Books.
- Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., & Weissberg, R. P. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432.
- Fataar, A. (2016). Towards a humanising pedagogy through an engagement with the social-subjective in educational theorising in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change, 5*(1), 10–21.
- Frederickson, N. (1991). Children can be so cruel: Helping the rejected child. In G. Lindsay & A. Miller (Eds.), *Psychological services for primary schools* (pp. 97–106). Harlow: Longman.
- Gardner, M., & Toope, D. (2011). A social justice perspective on strengths-based approaches: Exploring educators' perspectives and practices. *Canadian Journal of Education, 34*(3), 86–102.
- Gerhardt, S. (2015). *Why love matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Ghielen, S. T. S., van Woerkom, M., & Meyers, M. C. (2018). Promoting positive outcomes through strengths interventions: A literature review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 13*(6), 573–585.
- Giovanelli, A., Mondì, C. F., Reynolds, A. J., & Ou, S. R. (2019) Adverse childhood experiences: Mechanisms of risk and resilience in an urban cohort. *Developmental Psychopathology, 1–22*. 10.1017/S095457941900138X.
- Gleeson, J. P., Hsieh, C., & Cryer-Coupet, Q. (2016). Social support, family competence, and informal kinship carer parenting stress: The mediating and moderating effect of family resources. *Children and Youth Services Review, 67*, 32–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.05.012>.
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students.

- Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>.
- Habib, A., Densmore-James, S., & Macfarlane, S. (2013). A culture of care: The role of culture in today's mainstream classrooms, preventing school failure. *Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 57(3), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2013.798777>.
- Hagenauer, G., Hascher, T., & Volet, S. E. (2015). Teacher emotions in the classroom: associations with students' engagement, classroom discipline and the interpersonal teacher-student relationship. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 30, 385–403. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-015-0250-0>.
- Hampshire County Council. (2018). *Improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners*. Winchester: Hampshire County Council.
- Harrison, L., & Harrington, R. (2001). Adolescents' bereavement experiences. Prevalence, association with depressive symptoms, and use of services. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24(2), 159–169.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning, a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Hromek, R., & Roffey, S. (2009). Games as a pedagogy for social and emotional learning. 'It's fun and we learn things'. *Simulation and Gaming*, 40(5), 626–644.
- Jutte, S., Bentley, H., Tallis, D., Mayes, J., Jetha, N., O'Hagan, O., et al. (2015). *How safe are our children? The most comprehensive overview of child protection in the UK*. London: NSPCC.
- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383>.
- Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., Orozco-Lapray, D., Shen, Y., & Murtuza, M. (2013). Does "tiger parenting" exist? Parenting profiles of Chinese Americans and adolescent developmental outcomes. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 4(1), 7–18.
- Kitching, A. E. (2018). Mind-shifts for enhancing the engagement of educational psychologists in the promotion of holistic school well-being. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 35(3), 8–19.
- Kitching, A. E. (2019). The development of an integrated, multi-level process to facilitate the promotion of holistic wellbeing in school communities. In I. Eloff (Ed.), *Handbook of quality of life in African societies* (pp. 45–69). Switzerland: Springer.
- Lopez, S. J., & Louis, M. C. (2009). The principles of strengths-based education. *Journal of College and Character*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1041>.
- Luthar, S. S., & Zelazo, L. B. (2003). Research on resilience: An integrative review. In S. S. Luthar (Ed.), *Resilience and vulnerability: Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities* (pp. 510–550). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 77–87.

- Murray-Harvey, R. (2010). Relationship influences on students' academic achievement, psychological health and wellbeing at school. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(1), 104–115.
- National Children's Alliance. (2015). *National statistics on child abuse*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/media-room/nca-digital-media-kit/national-statistics-on-child-abuse/>.
- New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People. (2009). *Ask the children: Children speak about being at school*. Sydney: NSWCCYP.
- Noble, T., McGrath, H., Roffey, S., & Rowling, L. (2008). *A scoping study on student wellbeing*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR).
- Norrish, J. M., & Seligman, M. E. (2015). *Positive education: The Geelong Grammar School journey*. Oxford Positive Psychology Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NSPCC. (2018). *How safe are our children?* Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1067/how-safe-are-our-children-2018.pdf>.
- NSPCC. (2019). *Looked after children: Statistics briefing*. Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/statistics-briefings/looked-after-children/>.
- Office for National Statistics. (ONS). (2012). *Divorces: Number of divorces, age at divorce and marital status before marriage*. Retrieved from <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180903191659/>.
- Office for National Statistics. (2013a). *What percentage of marriages end in divorce?* Retrieved from <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131108074714/>.
- Office for National Statistics. (2013b). *2011 Census, detailed characteristics for local authorities in England and Wales*. Retrieved from <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20150109125058/>.
- Office for National Statistics. (2015). *Crime survey England and Wales 2013–14*. London: Office for National Statistics.
- Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Child abuse, extent and nature, England and Wales: Year ending March 2019*. London: Office for National Statistics.
- Penetito, W. (2009). Place-based education: Catering for curriculum, culture and community. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, 18. <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/nzaroel/article/view/1544/1389>.
- Productivity Commission. (2016). *Overcoming indigenous disadvantage: Key indicators 2016*. Canberra: Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2016/report-documents/oid-2016-overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage-key-indicators-2016-report.pdf>.
- Quinlan, D., & Hone, L. (2020). *The educators' guide to whole-school wellbeing*. Sydney: Routledge.
- Quinlan, D., Swain, N., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2012). Character strengths interventions: Building on what we know for improved outcomes. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13(6), 1145–1163.

- Quinlan, D., Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Gray, A., & Swain, N. (2018). Teachers matter: Student outcomes following a strengths intervention are mediated by teacher strengths spotting. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *20*, 2507–2523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-0051-7>.
- Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N., et al. (2011). *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.
- Reivich, K. J., Seligman, M. E., & McBride, S. (2011). Master resilience training in the US Army. *American Psychologist*, *66*(1), 25.
- Reivich, K., & Shatté, A. (2002). *The resilience factor: 7 essential skills for overcoming life's inevitable obstacles*. New York NY: Broadway Books.
- Robertson, J. (2006). 'If you know our names it helps': Student perspectives on good teaching. *Qualitative Enquiry*, *12*(4), 756–768.
- Roffey, S. (2007). Transformation and emotional literacy: The role of school leaders in developing a caring community. *Leading and Managing*, *13*(1), 16–30.
- Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing: Teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational and Child Psychology*, *29*(4), 8–17.
- Roffey, S. (2016). Building a case for whole child, whole-school wellbeing in challenging contexts. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *33*(2), 30–42.
- Roffey, S. (2017a). The ASPIRE principles and pedagogy for the implementation of social and emotional learning and the development of whole school wellbeing. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, *9*(2), 54–70.
- Roffey, S. (2017b). Ordinary magic' needs ordinary magicians: The power and practice of positive relationships for building youth resilience and wellbeing. *Kognition und Paedagogik*, *103*, 38–57.
- Roffey, S. (2020). *Circle solutions for student wellbeing* (3rd ed.). Corwin, Sage Publications.
- Rosenfield, B., Wall, G., & Jansen, C. (2017). *Leading sustainable change: Wisdom from textbooks and trenches in post-quake Canterbury*. Christchurch, New Zealand: Grow Waitaha.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- SafeLives. (2015a). *Getting it right first time: Policy report*. Bristol: SafeLives.
- SafeLives. (2015b). *Insights Idva National Dataset 2013–14*. Bristol: SafeLives.
- Savage, C., Hindle, R., Meyer, L. H., Hynds, A., Penetito, W., & Sleeter, C. E. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom: Indigenous student experiences across the curriculum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(3), 183–198.
- Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour. (2013). *Better relationships, better learning, better behaviour*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/Documents/BetterRelationships.pdf>.
- Scottish Government. (2015). *School meals dataset 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/SchoolMealsDatasets/schmeals2015>.

- Scottish Government. (2017). *Applying nurture as a whole school approach*. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/inc55ApplyingNurturingApproaches120617.pdf>.
- Shaughnessy, M. F., Galligan, E., & Hurtado de Vivas, R. (Eds.). (2008). *Pioneers in education: Essays in honour of Paulo Freire*. New York, NY: Nova Publishers.
- Skiba, R., Reynolds, C. R., Graham, S., Sheras, P., Close Conely, J., & Garcia-Vasquez, E. (2006). *Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations*. Zero Tolerance Task Force Report for the American Psychological Association.
- Southwick, S. M., Vythilingam, M., & Charney, D. S. (2005). The psychobiology of depression and resilience to stress: Implications for prevention and treatment. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 1*, 255–291.
- Street, H. L. (2018). *Contextual wellbeing*. Subiaco, WA, Australia: Wise Solutions.
- Suor, J. H., Sturge-Apple, M. L., Davies, P. T., Cicchetti, D., & Manning, L. G. (2015). Tracing differential pathways of risk: Associations among family adversity, cortisol and cognitive functioning in childhood. *Child Development, 86*(4), 1142–1158.
- Taylor, C., Harrison, J., Haimovitz, K., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Schonert-Reichl, K., et al. (2016). Examining ways that a mindfulness-based intervention reduces stress in public school teachers: A mixed-methods study. *Mindfulness, 7*(1), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0425-4>.
- Welsh Government. (2015). *Achievement and entitlement to free school meals*. Retrieved from <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/academic-achievement-free-school-meals/?lang=en>.
- Werner, E. E. (2013). What can we learn about resilience from large-scale longitudinal studies? In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (2nd ed., pp. 87–104). New York, NY: Springer.
- Wing Chan, T., & Koo, A. (2011). Parenting style and youth outcomes in the UK. *European Sociological Review, 27*(3), 385–399.
- World Bank. (2018). *Where do the world's poorest people live today?* Retrieved from <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/stories/where-do-the-worlds-poorest-people-live-today.html>.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 26

## Four Fundamental Distinctions in Conceptions of Wellbeing Across Cultures

Mohsen Joshanloo, Evert Van de Vliert, and Paul E. Jose

Culture plays crucial roles in human groups. It allows us to collectively “meet basic needs of survival, by coordinating social behaviour to achieve a viable existence, to transmit successful social behaviours, to pursue happiness and wellbeing, and to derive meaning from life” (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 5). Thus, there is much to be found in the culture of any human population concerning optimal functioning and wellbeing. As humans necessarily live in culturally specific ways, they also exist, act, and engage in strategies to enhance wellbeing in culture-specific ways to varying degrees (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Indeed, optimal functioning and wellbeing partly depend on the individual’s ability to live in accordance with the values and practices emphasized in one’s culture (Sasaki, Ko, & Kim, 2014).

A fundamental dimension of cultural variability with far-reaching implications for definitions of culturally specific wellbeing is the distinction between independent, individualistic cultures and interdependent, collectivistic cultures (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007). Although independent and interdependent modes of being and acting coexist in all cultures, research

---

M. Joshanloo (✉)  
Keimyung University, Daegu, South Korea  
e-mail: [mjoshanloo@hotmail.com](mailto:mjoshanloo@hotmail.com)

E. Van de Vliert  
University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

P. E. Jose  
Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

indicates that individual independence is more strongly stressed in individualistic cultures (e.g., Western European, Nordic, and Anglo-Saxon cultures) and that social interdependence is stressed more strongly in the rest of the world (e.g., East Asia and Africa). Persons in independent cultures “see themselves as unique, promote their own goals, and seek self-expression. Persons with an interdependent construal of the self seek to belong and fit in, to promote others’ goals, and to occupy their proper place” (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, pp. 101–102). Recent cultural neuroscientific findings suggest that cultural differences in the self-concept may be reflected in neurophysiological functioning. For example, Zhu, Zhang, Fan, and Han (2007) scanned the brains of Chinese and Western participants from Western countries during a self-referential task. They found that the ventral medial prefrontal cortex (associated with the elaborated encoding of self-related information or self-relevance of stimuli) was engaged during both self-reflection and reflection on a close other (e.g., mother) in the Chinese, but only during self-reflection in the Westerners, indicating that there is an overlapping neural representation of the self and close others in Chinese, whereas in Westerners there are dissociated neural representations of the self and other (Han, 2017). This cultural and physiological distinction is likely to have consequences for psycho-social functioning and wellbeing.

This chapter focuses on the importance of four fundamental differences in the concepts and predictors of mental wellbeing in independent individualistic versus interdependent collectivistic cultures. The four identified issues are: (1) the importance of hedonic experience, (2) self-enhancement, (3) mastery, and (4) context. These four dynamics are not meant to exhaust the universe of cultural differences concerning wellbeing, but they are instead meant to provide a framework for categorizing and making sense of some basic cross-cultural variations in this domain. We note also that the four issues are interconnected and overlapping rather than distinct and mutually exclusive. The chapter will conclude with a brief section on the theoretical and empirical implications of the insights emerging from the cross-cultural analyses for international measurements of wellbeing. We argue and provide some evidence that, given the differences in how wellbeing is conceptualized by people across cultures, various markers of wellbeing may function differently in different global regions. This insight has crucial implications for how we rank countries based on wellbeing.

## The Tension Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Experience

Considerable controversy exists within theory and empirical research regarding the relative contributions of hedonic (i.e., pleasurable living) and eudaimonic (i.e., meaningful living) dynamics to a sense of wellbeing. Since the Enlightenment, Westerners have believed in the importance of mood and affective experience as an ingredient of a good life (Christopher, 1999; Tatarkiewicz, 1976). In the contemporary Western outlook, wellbeing is defined predominantly based on the absence and presence of certain emotional experiences and subjective outlooks (Bellio, 2004). Hedonic happiness has “grown into a fundamental part of our commonsensical understanding of ourselves and the world, a concept so familiar that we take it for granted. It feels and rings so natural today that to call happiness into question is odd if not audacious” (Cabanis & Illouz, 2019, p. 3). With the current “Western hedonistic outlook, it is not surprising that the pursuit of happiness is top of the agenda” (Van Deurzen, 2008, p. 70). The prominent happiness researcher Layard (2005) recognized happiness as the ultimate human goal:

We naturally look for the ultimate goal that enables us to judge other goals by how they contribute to it. Happiness is that ultimate goal because, unlike other goals, it is self-evidently good. If we are asked why happiness matters, we can give no further, external reason. It just obviously does matter. As the American Declaration of Independence says, it is a ‘self-evident’ objective. (p. 113)

A hedonistic conceptualization of wellbeing is consistent with the values of modern Western culture, namely liberal modernity, hedonism, and individualism, and thus is celebrated in Western cultures (e.g., McMahon, 2008).

The modern science of wellbeing and positive psychology also seems to favour a hedonic concept of wellbeing. Not only do virtually all large-scale international surveys of wellbeing use hedonic measures of wellbeing (e.g., Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2019), some Western psychologists resist accepting eudaimonic wellbeing as a co-equal component with hedonic wellbeing. Instead, they tend to regard eudaimonic wellbeing as subordinate to hedonic wellbeing, for example, by assuming that eudaimonic wellbeing is a predictor of hedonic wellbeing (e.g., Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Although eudaimonic skills are considered to be indispensable, “the experience of pleasure and the achievement of a subjective sense of wellbeing remain at the centre of the story” (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999, p. x).

However, the hedonic conceptualization of wellbeing is not considered to be the superordinate goal in many collectivistic cultures (e.g., Joshanloo, 2019a; Lee et al., 2012). In these cultures, positive emotions and pleasures are considered too temporary and peripheral to be the criterion against which wellbeing is measured (Joshanloo, 2014). For example, Buddhism dismisses any kind of hedonism because it may engender selfishness (Ricard, 2011). Asceticism has always been considered a key method for the purification of the soul in many religions. Some traditional religions are suspicious of bodily pleasures and promote desire control techniques to prevent individuals from pursuing pleasures at the expense of embracing collectivistic or spiritual virtues (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014).

Considering hedonic happiness as the supreme goal of wellbeing striving is far from universal (see Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014 for a review). In many cultures, suffering and negative affect are seen as inevitable elements of life that may not be eliminated and instead are considered enabling, enriching, and necessary for developing virtues (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014). Collectivistic cultures take a more balanced approach towards subjective happiness and believe that other values (e.g., harmony, justice, truth, wisdom, and goodness) are more important than hedonic happiness. Suh (2000) argues that while Westerners feel a strong pressure to experience happy mood, East Asians tend to feel pressure to belong, and thus their life is more guided by the need to have good interpersonal relationships than to be individually happy. Similarly, Kitayama and Markus (2000) point out that a more esteemed value for collectivistic cultures is mutual sympathy, and this state may well arise from the “nonpursuit” of personal happiness.

Empirical results show that individualistic cultures value pleasure as a guiding value for life more strongly than collectivistic cultures do (Schwartz, 2009). Lu and Gilmour (2006) found that American participants were more likely than Chinese participants to conceive personal happiness as a natural and personal right and a supreme value. People from individualistic cultures are more likely to strive to maximize positive affect than are people from collectivistic cultures (Sims et al., 2015). Although the mood-related personality trait of neuroticism is a stronger predictor of subjective wellbeing in Sweden and the United States, satisfaction with relationships is a stronger predictor of subjective wellbeing in India (Galinha, Garcia-Martin, Oishi, Wirtz, & Esteves, 2016). People from collectivistic cultures pursue happiness mainly in socially engaged ways (Ford et al., 2015), showing that happiness-seeking endeavours cannot be divorced from more important values such as harmony with other people.

In many collectivistic cultures, experiences and events (including happiness and unhappiness) are seen to be in a constant state of change, i.e., to be transient and cyclical (Wong & Liu, 2018). For example, a common theme in many non-Western schools of thought is that “happiness is rooted in misery. Misery lurks beneath happiness” (<https://terebess.hu/english/tao/gia.html>), which leads to the idea that happiness should not be actively sought, and unhappiness should not be avoided. Geertz’s (1973) anthropological study of the Javanese ethnic group in Indonesia indicates that in this culture happiness is not always preferred over unhappiness, and instead, a more balanced view is taken:

Happiness and unhappiness are, after all, just the same. You shed tears when you laugh and also when you cry. And, besides, they imply one another: happy now, unhappy later; unhappy now, happy later. The reasonable, prudent, “wise” man strives not for happiness, but for a tranquil detachment which frees him from his endless oscillation between gratification and frustration. (p. 136)

Therefore, rather than pursuing continuous high levels of positive affect and happiness, a culturally appropriate strategy in collectivistic cultures is “maintaining a state of balance, embracing both pleasant and unpleasant experiences and being content with their coexistence, and avoiding extreme positivity and negativity” (Wong & Liu, 2018, p. 550). Consistent with the preference for emotional moderation, empirical evidence demonstrates that Asian participants value low-arousal emotions (e.g., feeling calm and relaxed) more than do Westerners, whereas Western participants value high-arousal emotions more (e.g., feeling excited) (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006).

Joshanloo and Weijers’ analysis of non-Western cultures (2014) suggests that some of these cultures are averse to the experience of emotional happiness in certain contexts, particularly immoderate degrees of happiness. They provide examples from many cultures that reflect a suspicion about emotional happiness. Their theoretical view is that four broad cultural conceptions seem to underlie happiness aversion in various cultures: (1) Being happy makes it more likely that bad things will happen to you, (2) being happy makes you a worse person, (3) expressing happiness is bad for you and others, and (4) pursuing happiness is bad for you and others. Joshanloo (2013b) has created a self-report measure to capture fear of happiness beliefs. He and his colleagues (2014a) investigated the distribution of these beliefs across 14 countries and found that fear of happiness (or “happiness aversion”) beliefs were more prevalent in collectivistic countries than in individualistic countries. Other lines of research have found that Asians are more likely than Westerners to believe that the experience of happiness may be fraught with

negative consequences (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Sheldon et al. (2017) found that Russians reported greater inhibition of the expression of happiness to strangers than Americans, and this degree of happiness inhibition was unrelated to hedonic wellbeing in Russia, whereas it was negatively correlated with hedonic wellbeing in the United States.

Given the higher value attached to hedonic wellbeing and hedonism in individualistic cultures, it is not surprising that hedonic values and experiences have a stronger association with wellbeing in individualistic cultures. In a comparative study across 19 countries, Joshanloo and Jarden (2016) found that hedonism was more strongly related to happiness in more individualistic cultures. Similarly, in a 147 country study, Joshanloo (2019a) found that the frequency of positive and negative emotional experiences was a less important determinant of life satisfaction in religious/traditional cultures than in secular/modern cultures. And last, in a study among Chinese Singaporeans, researchers found that participants who endorsed Asian dialectical beliefs reported less positive hedonic affect (Wong, Ho, Shin, & Tsai, 2011).

In sum, a hedonic understanding of wellbeing that seems to be dominant in individualistic cultures does not seem to be the dominant way of construing wellbeing in all places in the world. In collectivistic cultures, values such as interpersonal harmony and religious conduct seem to be pursued with more commitment than hedonic wellbeing. Thus, in many collectivistic cultures, finding a balance between happiness and unhappiness rather than pursuing happiness and avoiding unhappiness is a preferable strategy for achieving wellbeing. A single-minded pursuit of positivity is viewed with caution, if not suspicion. Hence, in many of these collectivistic cultures, practising interpersonal and spiritual virtues may be more instrumental than striving to maximize individual hedonistic experiences in accomplishing wellbeing. Thus, it can be argued that non-Western conceptualizations of wellbeing are more consistent with eudaimonism than with hedonism (Joshanloo, 2014).

It is noteworthy that eudaimonic skills are also considered crucial in individualistic cultures. The cultural difference is in their relative priority in the hierarchy of values. Furthermore, we are not arguing that radical, egotistic, and amoral versions of hedonism are dominant in individualistic cultures. Instead, we are recognizing the centrality of personal positive affective valence and the priority of hedonic experience as defining features of wellbeing in individualistic cultures and the Western social sciences.

## The Tension Between Self-Enhancement and Modesty

Self-enhancement involves maintaining a positive self-regard by focusing and elaborating on positive information about the self (Tsai et al., 2015). Consistent with the value of building and maintaining an independent self-concept, self-enhancement (e.g., self-esteem, self-promotion, and having a strong ego) is considered crucial to wellbeing and optimal functioning in individualistic cultures (Joshanloo, 2014; Markus & Hamedani, 2007). However, the emphasis on self-enhancement has been criticized by collectivistic perspectives as being too self-focused, egocentric, and self-promotional (Joshanloo, 2014). In some non-Western schools of thought (such as Buddhism), the self is considered to be an artificial construct (Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2017) and thus the pursuit of self-gratification, egotism, and self-enhancement are considered vices and causes of suffering (Shiah, 2016). Accordingly, constantly striving to enhance the self is considered detrimental to wellbeing.

Empirical research suggests that self-enhancing motivations are weaker among East Asians than in European Americans (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Rosenmann & Kurman, 2019). Studies show that American self-descriptions are predominantly positive, whereas Japanese self-descriptions include more negativity (Kitayama & Markus, 2000), which suggests that collectivist cultures promote a more balanced view of the self in contrast to individualist cultures that value a more uniformly positive self-concept. Whereas personal achievements are more emphasized by individuals as a means to boost self-esteem in individualistic cultures, in collectivistic cultures, failures are more likely to be remembered, considered meaningful, and utilized as a base for self-improvement (Jose & Bellamy, 2012; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). For example, Endo and Meijer (2004) asked participants to remember incidents from their lives and found that, whereas the Americans recalled considerably more success stories, the Japanese recalled slightly more failure stories than success stories. Farh, Dobbins, and Cheng (1991) found that Chinese employees rated their job performance less favourably than did their supervisors, showing a modesty bias. Evidence exists that some Asians are reluctant to conclude that their performance is better than average even after they receive positive feedback (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000). Similarly, Asian employees who self-enhance are more likely to receive a negative evaluation from their bosses (Cullen, Gentry, & Yammarino, 2014). Indeed, self-enhancers may be socially sanctioned in some East Asian cultures (Rosenmann & Kurman, 2019).

In addition to the cultural differences in self-enhancing tendencies, the link between self-enhancement and wellbeing is also culturally variable. For example, negative self-descriptors were found to be a positive correlate of depression in the United States but not in Japan (Arnault, Sakamoto, & Moriwaki, 2005). Generally, self-esteem is a stronger predictor of wellbeing in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 2009). Harmony-related variables are a better predictor of wellbeing than self-esteem in more collectivistic cultures. For example, relationship harmony is a better predictor of wellbeing than self-esteem in Hong Kong, whereas self-esteem is a stronger predictor in the United States (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

Self-critical sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others at the cost of ignoring the inner, private aspects of the self partially explains why hedonic wellbeing in Asian cultures is lower than expected from their economic indices (Suh, 2007). Negative feedback from others and the associated unpleasant feelings of shame and embarrassment serve as a stimulus for self-improvement in collectivistic cultures. For example, Heine, Kitayama, and Lehman (2001) found that Americans who failed on a task persisted less on a follow-up task, whereas Japanese who failed persisted more than those who succeeded. In a longitudinal study, Tsai et al. (2015) examined whether self-enhancing and self-improving content in participants' expressive writings (i.e., reflections on negative personal experiences) were related to anxious and depressive symptoms differentially among Asian and European Americans. They found that among European Americans, self-enhancing content predicted better outcomes, whereas, for Asian Americans, self-improving content predicted better outcomes. In another study, Tsai, Chiang, and Lau (2016) examined the effects of self-enhancement and self-improvement reflections on recovery from distress among Asian and European Americans. They found that the level of emotional and physiological benefits from self-reflection depended on whether the self-reflection processes were consistent with individuals' cultural backgrounds. For example, Asian Americans exhibited considerably greater reductions in negative affect than European Americans in the self-improvement condition, and European Americans benefitted more from self-enhancement than from self-improvement.

It is noteworthy that Asians do not dislike themselves as individuals. Research with implicit measures of self-esteem shows that Asians feel implicitly positive about themselves (Kitayama & Rarasawa, 1997). Asians also enhance self-evaluation not directly but by making group-serving attributions (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). It seems that in a collectivistic context, receiving positive evaluations from others is more salient and instrumental than constructing and maintaining positive self-evaluations. The collectivistic

self-critical tendency serves the function of motivating self-improvement, which can facilitate harmonious interpersonal relationships (Sasaki et al., 2014). Although there may be some hedonic costs associated with the self-critical and socially sensitive tendencies prevalent in collectivistic cultures (as suggested by Suh, 2007), these tendencies may contribute to important eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing. As mentioned before, eudaimonic conceptualizations of wellbeing are emphasized over hedonic ones in collectivistic cultures. Eudaimonic wellbeing is more consistent than hedonic wellbeing with a long-term emphasis on skill-building and striving for self-improvement as opposed to seeking immediate gratification (Joshanloo, Jovanović, & Park, in press).

In sum, in many collectivistic cultures, striving to increase positive feelings towards the self is not promoted. In contrast, self-transcendence and even self-abnegation are endorsed (Joshanloo, 2014). For instance, from a Buddhist perspective, Dambrun and Ricard (2011) argue that an individualistic notion of happiness can lead only to insubstantial and fleeting positive states as well as numerous negative ones (e.g., hostility, jealousy, anger, and hatred). These authors suggest that a conceptualization of happiness based on selflessness can lead to a higher frequency of compassion, empathy, care, respect, and similar values which are signifiers of psychological maturity in collectivistic cultures. Accordingly, psychological models of mental wellbeing in collectivistic cultures need to consider measuring self-transcendence and self-improvement in addition to self-enhancement. If self-enhancing tendencies become so prominent that they come to disrupt social harmony, they can hardly be considered to be indicators of wellbeing in harmony-oriented cultures.

## The Tension Between Autonomy and Harmony

Although autonomy and relatedness are universal needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012), they are variably emphasized across different cultures (Wang & Senzaki, 2019). In particular, their desirability and centrality in models of wellbeing differ from culture to culture. Autonomy, agency, mastery, self-sufficiency, self-directedness, and self-determination are among the hallmarks of Western conceptualizations of wellbeing. Jahoda (1958) provided a thorough overview of all the theories and models related to mental health up until that time. Her analysis showed that many of these models “regard an individual’s relation to the world as mentally healthy if it shows what is referred

to variously as autonomy, self-determination, or independence” (p. 45). According to Jahoda, two aspects of these concepts have been highlighted in Western classic notions of mental health: regulation of behaviour from within as well as independent behaviour. Likewise, Ryff’s (2016) comprehensive analysis of the Western literatures of developmental, clinical, existential, and humanistic psychology resulted in the identification of autonomy as a key component of wellbeing. Ryff highlights several aspects of the concept such as resistance to enculturation, having an internal locus of evaluation, avoidance of approval-seeking, evaluating oneself by personal standards, and gaining freedom from the norms of everyday life. The satisfaction of autonomy needs is also regarded as a fundamental component of wellbeing in the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (2012). The Western formulations and measurement instruments of wellbeing seem to de-emphasize the interpersonal and communal aspects of wellbeing (e.g., the relationship between the person and society) beyond personal relationships (Keyes, 1998).

Decades of empirical research have demonstrated that autonomy and mastery are more strongly valued in individualistic than collectivistic cultures. Evidence has been accumulated in multinational studies on values (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995), locus of control (Smith, Trompenaars, & Dugan, 1995), and socialization processes (Keller, 2019), to name a few. In contrast, a sizable body of research indicates that interpersonal harmony, rather than mastery and autonomy, is paramount in collectivistic cultures (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Suh, 2000). For example, evidence on control orientations indicates that in individualistic cultures, people favour using direct personal control to nurture their sense of autonomy and mastery in life. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures tend to rely more on indirect, proxy, and collective control (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). This preference for indirect ways of control in collectivistic cultures is consistent with the collectivistic ideals of avoiding interpersonal conflict, facilitating interpersonal harmony, and relying on collective over personal agency.

One key virtue in collectivistic cultures is to adjust oneself to the ebb and flow of the surrounding environment (i.e., things, people, and the universe at large). These cultures emphasize the importance of adjustment to the situation, i.e., employing gentleness and humility towards other people and conditions of life rather than trying to control and dominate people or things in one’s environment (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014). Accordingly, models and assessment tools of wellbeing originating from collectivistic cultures de-emphasize mastery and emphasize relationship harmony and adjustment (e.g., Brockman & Dudgeon, 2020; Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015; Kan, Karasawa, & Kitayama, 2009; Wang, Wong, & Yeh, 2016). In a study on lay

conceptualizations of happiness, Lu and Gilmour (2006) found that Chinese participants were more likely to endorse socially oriented conceptions (e.g., emphasizing role obligations in one's family and other groups), whereas American participants were more likely to endorse individually oriented conceptions (emphasizing personal responsibility, striving for success, and engaging in instrumental behaviour). Tellingly, although a sense of personal control has been found to be a strong predictor of wellbeing and health in the United States, the absence of relational strains is a stronger predictor in Japan (Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Ryff, & Markus, 2010).

The ideal affective states seen to be instrumental in fostering wellbeing are also culturally variable. Given the centrality of adjustment and harmony goals in collectivistic cultures, low-arousal, passive positive emotions, such as peace and relaxation, are more valued in these cultures. In individualistic cultures, in contrast, where mastery and influence goals are salient, high arousal, active positive emotions (such as enthusiasm and excitement) are more strongly valued (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007). Interpersonally disengaged, independent emotions (such as feelings of personal pride and superiority) are highly correlated with general positive mood in the United States, whereas in Japan interdependent emotions (such as feelings of respect and close feelings) manifest higher correlations with general positive mood (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Similarly, Joshanloo and Weijers (2019) have found that in collectivistic cultures positive affect is aligned with positive relational experiences, whereas, positive affect more likely co-occurs with the experience of autonomy in individualistic cultures.

It is likely, given the salience of autonomy and mastery in the pursuit of happiness in individualistic cultures, that actively pursuing happiness may lead to detachment from others and a heightened sense of loneliness in these cultures (Mauss et al., 2012). In contrast, in collectivist societies, the pursuit of happiness is balanced against the value of interpersonal harmony and is executed through more socially engaged ways (Ford et al., 2015). In collectivistic cultures, it is ensured that mastery and autonomy do not disrupt interpersonal harmony. For example, there is evidence that the Japanese are more likely than Americans to be concerned about whether their personal success has troubled others (Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010). One of the reasons that people of collectivistic cultures are less likely to openly express their happiness is that they are worried that such expressions may disrupt social harmony (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Therefore, although personal achievement and the accompanying sense of mastery are universally valued, there is a stronger pressure on the members of

collectivistic cultures to pursue, celebrate, and express them more cautiously, to avoid conflict with other salient goals.

In sum, one of the fundamental differences in individualistic and collectivistic notions of happiness and a good life is that in the former, attempting to change, master, and control the world (including various aspects of one's life, relationships, and nature) is prioritized, whereas in the latter, adjustment to the environment, achieving harmony with others and the cosmos is more highly valued. In individualistic cultures, directly causing desired changes in the environment can lead to higher wellbeing through boosting the cultural ideal of autonomy. In contrast, to meet the cultural ideal of harmonious adaptation, fitting well with the environment is a more culturally suitable wellbeing strategy in collectivistic cultures (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). Current Western models and measures have largely been developed based on the mastery model, ignoring the significance of harmony and adjustment in collectivistic contexts.

## The Tension About the Importance of Context

Wellbeing has been largely conceptualized as an individual-level approach in modern Western cultures. In this understanding, wellbeing is personal and private, and internal feelings, personal control, and personal accountability are emphasized over contextual determinants of wellbeing. According to Cabanas and Illouz (2019), wellbeing and illbeing in these societies are regarded mainly as products of our personal choices and behaviours. Happiness is predominantly “seen as a mindset that can be engineered through willpower; the outcome of putting into practice our inner strengths and authentic selves” (p. 3). Positive psychology (which is deeply influenced by and is contributing to the pervasive processes of individualization and psychologization of wellbeing) has been criticized for putting excessive emphasis on internal states and failing to adequately consider contextual factors and the interplay between personal actions/emotions and contextual factors (Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, & Parker, 2016). For example, Seligman (2004) concludes that changing “circumstances is usually impractical and expensive” (p. 50), and he calls instead for focusing on individual and psychological factors in achieving wellbeing. As noted by one of positive psychology's founding fathers (Gruner & Csikszentmihalyi, 2018), the field has largely focused on micro-level interventions at the personal level, largely ignoring socio-political environments that shape individual lives.

When coupled with the focus on hedonic wellbeing, these individualization processes may lead to demonizing negative feelings and demanding the pursuit of positivity while ignoring social contexts that may rightfully call for negativity (e.g., anger/frustration in reaction to traumatic or oppressive social contexts) (McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Yakushko, 2019).

However, research indicates that collectivistic cultures are more prepared and equipped to admit the importance of the context (or field) when explaining events including wellbeing outcomes (see Nisbett, 2003 for a review). European and North Americans tend to focus on a few salient objects in the environment and their attributes while discounting the role of general contextual factors, whereas Asians see “a great deal of the field, especially background events; they are skilled in observing relationships between events; they regard the world as complex and highly changeable and its components as interrelated” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 109). In other words, Westerners see the world analytically, and Asians see the world holistically. A consequence of the holistic style of thinking for Asians is that they

attend to objects in their broad context. The world seems more complex to Asians than to Westerners, and understanding events always requires consideration of a host of factors that operate in relation to one another in no simple, deterministic way. (Nisbett, 2003, p. xvi)

The holistic outlook on life is also endorsed in other collectivistic cultures outside of Asia. For example, from a Sub-Saharan perspective, the Western worldview is negligent in ignoring or downplaying the importance of invisible forces that affect life events and the interconnection of world phenomena. This perspective posits that humans are part of a complex and interconnected system of forces that are organized in three levels: the visible material world, the world of the ancestors, and the spirit world (Bains, 2015). Illbeing is a function of disharmony or the influence of evil spirits. Achieving wellbeing is impossible if insight into the interdependence of these forces is not gained. Likewise, ethnographic studies demonstrate a heavy reliance on the use of communal networks and acknowledgement of the spiritual plane of existence in indigenous systems of healing across cultures (Sue & Sue, 2008). Based on many indigenous philosophies, the Western conceptualization of wellbeing can be criticized on the grounds that it does not provide a holistic outlook on wellbeing by ignoring the unity between the mind, body, community, spirit/god, and nature. To these indigenous systems, enhancing wellbeing requires acknowledgement of this interconnectedness between internal and external forces, restoring the balance between them, and utilizing them in the

process of healing (e.g., by connecting to the spiritual forces and mobilizing one's social support group).

Research shows that the fundamental attribution error (the tendency for people to discount situational explanations and over-emphasize dispositional explanations for behaviour) is more common in individualistic than collectivistic cultures (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). People from collectivistic societies are more likely to explain life events, outcomes, and behaviour in terms of situational factors rather than dispositions inherent in individual actors (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Thus, the causal power of the situation is better recognized and acknowledged in collectivistic cultures. A study measuring eye movements while viewing focal objects placed within complex backgrounds demonstrated that Easterners were more likely to pay attention to contextual elements surrounding a focal object than Westerners (Chua, Boland, & Nisbett, 2005). It is difficult for some people in collectivistic cultures to pay attention to an object while ignoring its context, whereas this is relatively easier for Western participants (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Young and middle-aged adult Japanese have been found to make greater use of "wise reasoning" strategies than their American counterparts (Grossmann et al., 2012). These strategies are theorized to reflect a greater appreciation of context and interrelatedness between events, including,

acknowledgment of other people's points of view, appreciation of contexts broader than the issue at hand, sensitivity to the possibility of change in social relations, acknowledgment of the likelihood of multiple outcomes of a social conflict, concern with conflict resolution, and preference for compromise. (p. 1059)

Consistent with the emphasis on context, research also shows that Asians are more likely to engage in social comparison in evaluating their achievements and wellbeing (Sasaki et al., 2014). Recent cultural neuropsychological results also confirm these cultural differences (Han, 2017). For example, Asians' brain activity is more sensitive to relative income, whereas brain activity in Westerners' brain activity is more sensitive to absolute income (Kang, Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2013). Suh and Choi's (2018) review of available evidence indicates that extrinsic goods (income, educational level, and physical appearance) are stressed more in the collectivistic understanding of wellbeing (even in rich East Asian cultures) than they are in individualistic cultures, where the internal, private aspects of the self are more emphasized. Researchers have found that, whereas internal feelings are more important predictors of wellbeing in individualistic cultures, social cues such

as perceived appraisals of others and group standards are more important in determining wellbeing in collectivistic cultures (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). An important part of the context is the social networks within which one is embedded. For example, Ortiz (2020) pointed out that in the Latino/Hispanic culture, self-actualization is regulated through collective values, and the family plays a central role in defining self-actualizing for an individual.

A holistic style of thinking comes with greater expectations for change and the perceived fragility of states of being. The world is seen to be in constant flux. Ji, Nisbett, and Su (2001) presented linear (i.e., straight lines) and nonlinear (i.e., curved lines) trends to their American and Chinese participants and asked them to select the trend that best represented the trajectory of their happiness through their lifetime, from the beginning to the end. The Chinese endorsed nonlinear choices more than the Americans, suggesting that Chinese people are more likely than Americans to predict a reversal in their happiness status, which is consistent with regarding happiness as fragile and under the influence of a broad set of internal and external factors. The same results were found with Chinese and Canadian children (Ji, 2008). Endorsing beliefs concerning the fragility of happiness (the idea that happiness is fleeting and may be easily and quickly replaced by less favourable states) is associated with appreciating the power of context in determining our happiness (Joshanloo et al., 2014b). Endorsing fragility beliefs is positively associated with attributing one's level of happiness to such external factors as luck and fate and de-emphasizing personal control over one's level of happiness (Joshanloo, 2019b). In a study comparing 15 nations, Joshanloo et al. (2014b) found that fragility of happiness beliefs were more prevalent in more collectivistic and religious countries that endorsed the importance of fate and other external factors in determining life outcomes.

De Vaus, Hornsey, Kuppens, and Bastian, (2018) argued that the holistic way of thinking leads to the perception that emotional states, including sadness and happiness, can and do change, a realization that encourages the individual to enact more effective emotion regulation. Viewing negative emotions as malleable and temporary facilitates their acceptance and enables self-distancing (e.g., thinking "this too shall pass"). In contrast, the decontextualized Western views of emotion that highlight the ability of the person to exert control over external circumstances consider emotions mainly as the individual's responsibility. This perspective may lead to the notion that experiencing negative emotions is a personal/moral failure, resulting in ineffective emotion regulation. De Vaus and colleagues argued that the holistic versus analytical styles of thinking may partly explain the relatively lower prevalence

of mood disorders in Asian versus Western nations. Thus, these holistic and dialectical beliefs may reduce the frequency of positive affective experience or life satisfaction, but they also may come to hinder the escalation of negative affect into serious clinical disorders in Asian cultures.

Scientific models of wellbeing originating from collectivistic cultures take a holistic stance and note the importance of a broader set of determinants and components (e.g., Chan et al., 2014; Ng, Yau, Chan, Chan, & Ho, 2005; White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014). Given the relatively harsh conditions of life in many developing countries, achieving wellbeing goes far beyond internal quests for creating more positive affect or mastering subjective skills such as mindfulness. Instead, dramatic improvements in socio-political conditions are required.

Accordingly, in collectivistic cultures, researchers tend to include a broader array of contextual factors in addition to the variables usually included in Western wellbeing research, such as self-esteem, optimism, and personality traits (Pavot & Diener, 2008), to be able to adequately explain individual differences in wellbeing. For example, factors such as features of the natural environment, flood risk, and sanitation cannot be ignored in Bangladesh (Gruebner et al., 2012). In Thailand, community relationships, water supply, infrastructure and public services, food security, and land for farming are among the contextual determinants of wellbeing (Jongudomkarn & Camfield, 2006). Likewise, historical trauma, forced acculturation, loss of culture, language, and religion, and traditions of caring for older adults at home matter for wellbeing in Native Americans and Alaska Natives (Roman, Jarvis, & Manson, 2012), as do forest activities, fishing, cattle rearing, cattle grazing in rural India (Mishra, 2017). And in Rural China, one cannot adequately explain wellbeing if one ignores mountainous versus hilly terrain, degree of harmony among lineages, and degree of harmony in villages (Knight, Lina, & Gunatilaka, 2009).

In sum, whereas individualistic cultures emphasize internal loci of control and internal explanations for affective experience and wellbeing, it is easier for collectivistic cultures to acknowledge the importance of contextual factors, external forces, and interconnectedness between internal and external determinants of wellbeing. Further, non-Westerners are more likely to endorse notions of externality and fragility of wellbeing.

## Implications for Measuring Wellbeing at the Country Level: A Cautionary Remark

Markers of wellbeing can be studied at the individual and/or cultural levels. The preceding sections focused on individual-level models and results. At the cultural level, the unit of analysis is usually national cultures (or countries), and we usually consider aggregate attributes such as gross domestic product (GDP) and income inequality that describe groups of people who reside within a given country. The average individual assessments within a group can be used as an aggregate attribute for that group (such as national life satisfaction). It is important to note that results at the individual and national levels can be different. For example, a positive correlation exists at the national level between country-level individualism and job satisfaction, whereas the relationship between individualistic values and job satisfaction at the individual level within a certain culture (e.g., Hong Kong) may be negative (Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). Given the existence of cultural differences in wellbeing at the individual level (as reviewed above), it is worth examining whether various markers of wellbeing function variably at the national level and yield differential associations with other country-level variables.

One of the consequential, yet largely ignored, insights that have emerged in the country-level analyses of wellbeing is the strong correlation between life satisfaction (also called life evaluation or happiness, Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell et al., 2019) and economic indicators such as GDP (Joshano, Jovanović, & Taylor, 2019; Van de Vliert, 2012). This correlation has been found to be as high as  $r = 0.82$  (Joshano, 2018). Besides, life satisfaction is so strongly associated with indicators of socio-economic progress such as urbanity, globalization, individualism, democracy, education, religiosity, and nationally averaged age (negatively) that it is almost redundant when we have access to a large portion of these variables in country-level analyses (Joshano et al., 2019). One important repercussion of this substantial overlap between life satisfaction and economic and socio-political indices is that life satisfaction indices are largely biased against poor developing countries (at least in some regions). What is repeatedly found (e.g., Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell et al., 2019; Joshano, 2018) is that national indicators of wellbeing paint a dark picture of the status of wellbeing in some developing regions (e.g., Africa, Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia). For example, none of the African countries can be considered to have high wellbeing if we base our analysis of national wellbeing merely on life satisfaction. This outcome may be interpreted as a lack of wellbeing in many developing countries.

Joshanloo (2018) found that eudaimonic wellbeing was considerably less strongly associated with GDP than was life satisfaction. Other researchers have also shown that collectivistic measures of wellbeing (e.g., with a focus on the happiness of the family) manifest weaker correlations with individualism than the commonly used measures (Krys et al., 2019). In their comprehensive analysis of 20 country-level subjective and objective indicators of wellbeing, Joshanloo et al. (2019) identified three distinct factors: socio-economic progress (including economic, social, political indicators plus life satisfaction), psycho-social functioning (including eudaimonic wellbeing, positive affect, and social support), and negative affect. Notably, they demonstrated that psycho-social functioning and positive and negative affect were less strongly associated with national income and socio-political progress than was life satisfaction. These findings suggest that these wellbeing indicators paint a more promising picture of the status of wellbeing in some of the developing nations than one would think based on the traditional indicator of life satisfaction alone. For example, the Philippines scores highly on eudaimonic wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2018), Uzbekistan scores highly on psycho-social functioning, and Belarus and Mongolia score lowly on negative affect (Joshanloo et al., 2019). Hence, we suggest that indicators of wellbeing other than life satisfaction alone may be more suited to capture differences in wellbeing between countries exhibiting high, medium, and low development. For example, we see more variability in eudaimonic wellbeing scores than in life satisfaction scores in Africa, with some of the African countries exhibiting relatively high levels of eudaimonic wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2018).

The findings reviewed suggest that life satisfaction cannot be used as a proxy for all wellbeing variables such as eudaimonic wellbeing, (presence of) positive affect, and (lack of) negative affect at the country level. If a comprehensive assessment of wellbeing at the country level is intended, the diverse array of wellbeing variables available to researchers needs to be used in cross-cultural comparisons (Joshanloo et al., 2019). Using the whole arsenal of wellbeing measures will enable us to go beyond simple facts such as wellbeing is lower in developing than developed countries. The orders of countries in wellbeing rankings are partly determined by the wellbeing variable chosen.

## Concluding Remarks: Measuring Wellbeing and Applying Wellbeing Interventions in Diverse Countries

Since most research on wellbeing is conducted by Western researchers at this time, the research findings are likely to be biased in favour of western measures of wellbeing that privilege conceptions of wellbeing based on individualistic principles. Therefore, wellbeing researchers need to be acutely mindful of the consequences of the cultural differences in how wellbeing is construed. We highlighted four of these fundamental differences in this chapter, an oversimplified summary of which is presented in Fig. 26.1. Without taking these cultural differences into account, a fair and comprehensive understanding of worldwide wellbeing is not possible. Ignoring cross-cultural differences in the measurement of wellbeing may lead to a one-sided, incomplete, or unfair assessment of wellbeing across regions of the world.

Perhaps even more important is that without an adequate appreciation of cultural differences, individualistic measurement tools and wellbeing enhancement strategies are more likely to be imposed on collectivistic cultures. We encourage groups who propose wellbeing interventions and policies to give greater attention to the culturally specific realities of the context. Proposed strategies and policies that are inconsistent with the fundamental mores and ethos of a target group may come to harm their wellbeing rather than help them. Evidence is accumulating for the contention that some of

	Hedonic experience	Self-enhancement	Autonomy	Context
More common in individualistic cultures	Positive affect balance is among the most important markers of well-being	Maintaining positive self-regard is a central feature of well-being	Autonomy, mastery, and primary control are essential for well-being	Emphasizing internal feelings, personal choices, and will-power in determining well-being
More common in collectivistic cultures	Communal or spiritual virtues are prioritized over hedonic experience	Self-improvement and self-transcendence are more suitable strategies than self-enhancement	Autonomous goal pursuit is balanced against central values of interpersonal harmony and adjustment	Appreciation of the importance of contextual factors in determining well-being

Fig. 26.1 Four fundamental cultural differences in conceptions of wellbeing

the wellbeing enhancing activities that are being widely proposed are culture-bound and may be ineffective or even backfire in some cultures (e.g., Shin & Lyubomirsky, 2017).

In particular, interventions founded on enhancing personal happiness may turn out to be detrimental to the broader community's wellbeing in collectivistic cultures, for example, by exacerbating inequality (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017). Individualistic orientations are associated with lower wellbeing in some collectivistic cultures (Jose & Schurer, 2010; Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). In collectivistic contexts, wellbeing should not be understood

as the result of the actions taken by an out-of-context individual but by a person who is socially embedded and whose identity implies the existence of a social context. As a result, social action aimed at increasing people's wellbeing must recognize the importance of the social context. Wellbeing should not be promoted with an individualistic viewpoint but with a social view. (Rojas & García Vega, 2017, p. 242)

Culturally biased measurement tools that may accompany culturally inconsistent wellbeing interventions are incapable of fully capturing potentially unpleasant repercussions of these interventions over the long term. Furthermore, the potential of commercialization of research findings and the attractiveness of expansion of the market into new territories may be a barrier to a thorough and comprehensive cultural analysis of models and tools prior to making cultural generalizations. The unsurprising existence of such pitfalls reinforces our contention that wellbeing research will undoubtedly benefit from developing a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of cross-cultural differences in the bases for key wellbeing components.

## References

- Adams, G., & Estrada-Villalta, S. (2017). Theory from the South: A decolonial approach to the psychology of global inequality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 18, 37–42.
- Bains, G. (2015). *Cultural DNA: The psychology of globalization*. Wiley.
- Belliotti, R. A. (2004). *Happiness is overrated*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Berry, J. W., Poortinga, Y. H., Segall, M. H., & Dasen, P. R. (2002). *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brockman, R., & Dudgeon, P. (2020). Indigenous clinical psychology in Australia: A decolonising social-emotional well-being approach. In P. Rhodes (Ed.), *Beyond the psychology industry: How else might we heal?* (pp. 83–93). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

- Cabanas, E., & Illouz, E. (2019). *Manufacturing happy citizens: How the science and industry of happiness control our lives*. Wiley.
- Chan, C. H. Y., Chan, T. H. Y., Leung, P. P. Y., Brenner, M. J., Wong, V. P. Y., Leung, E. K. T., ..., Chan, C. L. W. (2014). Rethinking well-being in terms of affliction and equanimity: Development of a holistic well-being scale. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 23*(3–4), 289–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2014.932550>.
- Choi, I., Nisbett, R. E., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). Causal attribution across cultures: Variation and universality. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*(1), 47.
- Christopher, J. C. (1999). Situating psychological well-being: Exploring the cultural roots of its theory and research. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 77*(2), 141–152.
- Chua, H. F., Boland, J. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (2005). Cultural variation in eye movements during scene perception. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 102*(35), 12629–12633. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0506162102>.
- Ciarrochi, J., Atkins, P. W. B., Hayes, L. L., Sahdra, B. K., & Parker, P. (2016). Contextual positive psychology: Policy recommendations for implementing positive psychology into schools. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01561>.
- Cullen, K. L., Gentry, W. A., & Yammarino, F. J. (2014). Biased self-perception tendencies: Self-enhancement/self-diminishment and leader derailment in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. *Applied Psychology, 64*(1), 161–207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12026>.
- Dambrun, M., & Ricard, M. (2011). Self-centeredness and selflessness: A theory of self-based psychological functioning and its consequences for happiness. *Review of General Psychology, 15*(2), 138–157.
- De Vaus, J., Hornsey, M. J., Kuppens, P., & Bastian, B. (2018). Exploring the East-West divide in prevalence of affective disorder: A case for cultural differences in coping with negative emotion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 22*(3), 285–304.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 416–436). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249215.n21>.
- Diener, E., & Diener, M. (2009). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. In E. Diener (Ed.), *Culture and well-being* (pp. 71–91). The Netherlands: Springer.
- Diener, E., & Tay, L. (2015). Subjective well-being and human welfare around the world as reflected in the Gallup World Poll. *International Journal of Psychology, 50*(2), 135–149.
- Endo, Y., & Meijer, Z. (2004). Autobiographical memory of success and failure experiences. *Progress in Asian Social Psychology, 4*, 67–84.
- Farh, J. L., Dobbins, G. H., & Cheng, B. S. (1991). Cultural relativity in action: A comparison of self-ratings made by Chinese and US workers. *Personnel Psychology, 44*(1), 129–147.

- Ford, B. Q., Dmitrieva, J. O., Heller, D., Chentsova-Dutton, Y., Grossmann, I., Tamir, M., ..., Mauss, I. B. (2015). Culture shapes whether the pursuit of happiness predicts higher or lower well-being. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *144*(6), 1053–1062.
- Galinha, I. C., Garcia-Martin, M. Á., Oishi, S., Wirtz, D., & Esteves, F. (2016). Cross-cultural comparison of personality traits, attachment security, and satisfaction with relationships as predictors of subjective well-being in India, Sweden, and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *47*(8), 1033–1052.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.
- Grossmann, I., Karasawa, M., Izumi, S., Na, J., Varnum, M. E. W., Kitayama, S., & Nisbett, R. E. (2012). Aging and wisdom. *Psychological Science*, *23*(10), 1059–1066. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612446025>.
- Gruebner, O., Khan, M. M. H., Lautenbach, S., Müller, D., Krämer, A., Lakes, T., & Hostert, P. (2012). Mental health in the slums of Dhaka: A geoepidemiological study. *BMC Public Health*, *12*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-177>.
- Gruner, D. T., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2018). Complexity: Towards a new measure of societal well-being. In N. J. L. Brown, T. Lomas, & F. J. Eiroa-Orosa (Eds.), *Routledge international handbooks: The Routledge international handbook of critical positive psychology* (pp. 377–391). Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group.
- Han, S. (2017). *The sociocultural brain: A cultural neuroscience approach to human nature*. Oxford University Press.
- Heine, S. J., & Hamamura, T. (2007). In search of East Asian self-enhancement. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *11*, 4–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868306294587>.
- Heine, S. J., Kitayama, S., Lehman, D. R., Takata, T., Ide, E., Leung, C., & Matsumoto, H. (2001). Divergent consequences of success and failure in Japan and North America: An investigation of self-improving motivations and malleable selves. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*(4), 599.
- Heine, S. J., Takata, T., & Lehman, D. R. (2000). Beyond self-presentation: Evidence for self-criticism among Japanese. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*(1), 71–78.
- Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2019). *World happiness report 2020*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Hitokoto, H., & Uchida, Y. (2015). Interdependent happiness: Theoretical importance and measurement validity. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *16*(1), 211–239.
- Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. Basic Books.
- Ji, L. J. (2008). The leopard cannot change his spots, or can he? Culture and the development of lay theories of change. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*(5), 613–622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207313935>.
- Ji, L. J., Nisbett, R. E., & Su, Y. (2001). Culture, change, and prediction. *Psychological Science*, *12*(6), 450–456.
- Jongudomkarn, D., & Camfield, L. (2006). Exploring the quality of life of people in North Eastern and Southern Thailand. *Social Indicators Research*, *78*(3), 489–529.

- Jose, P. E., & Bellamy, M. A. (2012). Relationships of parents' theories of intelligence with children's persistence/learned helplessness: A cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *43*(6), 999–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111421633>.
- Jose, P. E., & Schurer, K. (2010). Cultural differences in coping among New Zealand adolescents. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *41*(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022109348783>.
- Joshanloo, M. (2013a). A comparison of Western and Islamic conceptions of happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *14*(6), 1857–1874.
- Joshanloo, M. (2013b). The influence of fear of happiness beliefs on responses to the satisfaction with life scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *54*(5), 647–651.
- Joshanloo, M. (2014). Eastern conceptualizations of happiness: Fundamental differences with western views. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *15*(2), 475–493.
- Joshanloo, M. (2018). Optimal human functioning around the world: A new index of eudaimonic well-being in 166 nations. *British Journal of Psychology*, *109*(4), 637–655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12316>.
- Joshanloo, M. (2019a). Cultural religiosity as the moderator of the relationship between affective experience and life satisfaction: A study in 147 countries. *Emotion*, *19*(4), 629.
- Joshanloo, M. (2019b). Lay conceptions of happiness: Associations with reported well-being, personality traits, and materialism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02377>.
- Joshanloo, M., & Jarden, A. (2016). Individualism as the moderator of the relationship between hedonism and happiness: A study in 19 nations. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *94*, 149–152.
- Joshanloo, M., & Weijers, D. (2014). Aversion to happiness across cultures: A review of where and why people are averse to happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *15*(3), 717–735.
- Joshanloo, M., & Weijers, D. (2019). A two-dimensional conceptual framework for understanding mental well-being. *PLoS ONE*, *14*(3).
- Joshanloo, M., Jovanović, V., & Park, J. (2021). Differential relationships of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being with self-control and long-term orientation. *Japanese Psychological Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12276>.
- Joshanloo, M., Jovanović, V., & Taylor, T. (2019). A multidimensional understanding of prosperity and well-being at country level: Data-driven explorations. *PLoS ONE*, *14*(10), e0223221. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0223221>.
- Joshanloo, M., Lepshokova, Z. K., Panyusheva, T., Natalia, A., Poon, W. C., Yeung, V. W. L., ..., Tsukamoto, S. (2014a). Cross-cultural validation of fear of happiness scale across 14 national groups. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *45*(2), 246–264.
- Joshanloo, M., Weijers, D., Jiang, D.-Y., Han, G., Bae, J., Pang, J. S., ..., Natalia, A. (2014b). Fragility of happiness beliefs across 15 national groups. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *16*(5), 1185–1210. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-014-9553-0>.

- Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwarz, N. (1999). Preface. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. ix–xii): Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kan, C., Karasawa, M., & Kitayama, S. (2009). Minimalist in style: Self, identity, and well-being in Japan. *Self and Identity*, 8, 300–317.
- Kang, P., Lee, Y., Choi, I., & Kim, H. (2013). Neural evidence for individual and cultural variability in the social comparison effect. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 33, 16200–16208.
- Kashdan, T. B., Biswas-Diener, R., & King, L. A. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3(4), 219–233.
- Keller, H. (2019). The role of emotions in socialization processes across cultures: Implications for theory and practice. In D. Matsumoto & H. Hwang (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 209–232). Oxford University Press.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (1998). Social well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 61(2), 121–140.
- Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (2000). The pursuit of happiness and the realization of sympathy: Cultural patterns of self, social relations, and well-being. In E. Diener & E. Suh (Eds.), *Subjective wellbeing across cultures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kitayama, S., & Rarasawa, M. (1997). Implicit self-esteem in Japan: Name letters and birthday numbers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(7), 736–742.
- Kitayama, S., Duffy, S., & Uchida, Y. (2007). Self as cultural mode of being. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 136–173). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kitayama, S., Karasawa, M., Curhan, K. B., Ryff, C. D., & Markus, H. R. (2010). Independence and interdependence predict health and wellbeing: Divergent patterns in the united states and japan. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2010.00163>.
- Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Kurokawa, M. (2000). Culture, emotion, and well-being: Good feelings in Japan and the United States. *Cognition & Emotion*, 14(1), 93–124.
- Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., Matsumoto, H., & Norasakkunkit, V. (1997). Individual and collective processes in the construction of the self: Self-enhancement in the United States and self-criticism in Japan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(6), 1245.
- Knight, J., Lina, S. O. N. G., & Gunatilaka, R. (2009). Subjective well-being and its determinants in rural China. *China Economic Review*, 20(4), 635–649.
- Krys, K., Zelenski, J. M., Capaldi, C. A., Park, J., van Tilburg, W., van Osch, Y., ..., Igbokwe, D. O. (2019). Putting the “we” into well-being: Using collectivism-themed measures of well-being attenuates well-being’s association with individualism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 22(3), 256–267.

- Kwan, V. S., Bond, M. H., & Singelis, T. M. (1997). Pancultural explanations for life satisfaction: Adding relationship harmony to self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(5), 1038.
- Layard, R. (2005). *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*. London: Allen Lane.
- Lee, Y.-C., Lin, Y.-C., Huang, C.-L., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2012). The Construct and Measurement of Peace of Mind. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(2), 571–590. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9343-5>.
- Lu, L., & Gilmour, R. (2006). Individual-oriented and socially oriented cultural conceptions of subjective well-being: Conceptual analysis and scale development. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 9(1), 36–49.
- Markus, H. R., & Hamedani, M. G. (2007). Sociocultural psychology: The dynamic interdependence among self systems and social systems. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 3–39). Guilford Press.
- Martela, F., & Sheldon, K. M. (2019). Clarifying the concept of well-being: Psychological need satisfaction as the common core connecting eudaimonic and subjective well-being. *Review of General Psychology*, 23(4), 458–474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268019880886>.
- Matsumoto, D. (2009). Teaching about culture. In R. A. R. Gurung & L. R. Prieto (Eds.), *Getting culture: Incorporating diversity across the curriculum* (pp. 3–10). New York: Stylus.
- Mauss, I. B., Savino, N. S., Anderson, C. L., Weisbuch, M., Tamir, M., & Laudenslager, M. L. (2012). The pursuit of happiness can be lonely. *Emotion*, 12(5), 908.
- McMahon, D. M. (2008). The pursuit of happiness in history. In M. Eid & R. J. Larsen (Eds.), *The science of subjective well-being* (pp. 80–93). New York: Guilford.
- McNulty, J. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). Beyond positive psychology? Toward a contextual view of psychological processes and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 67(2), 101–110.
- Mishra, R. C. (2017). Meaning of happy life for the Kharwars in India in their journey towards development. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 29(2), 221–245.
- Miyamoto, Y., Uchida, Y., & Ellsworth, P. C. (2010). Culture and mixed emotions: Co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions in Japan and the United States. *Emotion*, 10(3), 404–415.
- Ng, S. M., Yau, J. K., Chan, C. L., Chan, C. H., & Ho, D. Y. (2005). The measurement of body-mind-spirit well-being: Toward multidimensionality and transcultural applicability. *Social Work in Health Care*, 41(1), 33–52.
- Nisbett, R. (2003). *The geography of thought: How Asians and westerners think differently and why*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Norenzayan, A., & Nisbett, R. E. (2000). Culture and causal cognition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(4), 132–135.

- Ogihara, Y., & Uchida, Y. (2014). Does individualism bring happiness? Negative effects of individualism on interpersonal relationships and happiness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00135>.
- Ortiz, F. A. (2020). Self-actualization in the Latino/Hispanic culture. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 60(3), 418–435.
- Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (2008). The satisfaction with life scale and the emerging construct of life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3(2), 137–152.
- Ricard, M. (2011). The Dalai Lama: Happiness from within. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(2), 274–290.
- Rojas, M., & García Vega, J. J. (2017). Well-being in Latin America. In R. Estes & J. Sirgy (Eds.), *The pursuit of human well-being* (pp. 217–255). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Roman, S. P., Jervis, L. L., & Manson, S. M. (2012). Psychology of older American Indians and Alaska natives: Strengths and challenges to maintaining mental health. In E. C. Chang & C. A. Downey (Eds.), *Handbook of race and development in mental health* (pp. 127–146). New York, NY: Springer, New York.
- Rosenmann, A., & Kurman, J. (2019). *The culturally situated self*. In D: Matsumoto, &.
- Ryff, C. D. (2016). Beautiful ideas and the scientific enterprise: Sources of intellectual vitality in research on eudaimonic well-being. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), *Handbook of eudaimonic well-being* (pp. 95–107). Switzerland: Springer.
- Saint Arnault, D., Sakamoto, S., & Moriwaki, A. (2005). The Association Between Negative Self-Descriptions and Depressive Symptomology: Does Culture Make a Difference? *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 19(2), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2005.02.007>.
- Sasaki, J. Y., Ko, D., & Kim, H. S. (2014). Culture and self-worth: Implications for social comparison processes and coping with threats to self-worth. In Z. Krizan & F. X. Gibbons (Eds.), *Communal functions of social comparison* (pp. 230–251). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz, S. H. (2009). Culture matters: National value cultures, sources, and consequences. In C. Y. Chiu, Y. Y. Hong, S. Shavitt, & R. S. Wyer Jr. (Eds.), *Understanding culture: Theory, research and application* (pp. 137–160). New York: Psychology Press.
- Schwartz, S. H., & Sagiv, L. (1995). Identifying culture-specifics in the content and structure of values. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 26(1), 92–116.
- Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Sheldon, K. M., Titova, L., Gordeeva, T. O., Osin, E. N., Lyubomirsky, S., & Bogomaz, S. (2017). Russians inhibit the expression of happiness to strangers: Testing a display rule model. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 48(5), 718–733. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022117699883>.
- Shiah, Y.-J. (2016). From self to nonself: The nonself theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(124). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00124>.

- Shin, L. J., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2017). Increasing well-being in independent and interdependent cultures. In S. I. Donaldson & M. A. Warren (Eds.), *Scientific advances in positive psychology* (pp. 11–36). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Sims, T., Tsai, J. L., Jiang, D., Wang, Y., Fung, H. H., & Zhang, X. (2015). Wanting to maximize the positive and minimize the negative: Implications for mixed affective experience in American and Chinese contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*(2), 292–315.
- Smith, P. B., Trompenaars, F., & Dugan, S. (1995). The Rotter locus of control scale in 43 countries: A test of cultural relativity. *International Journal of Psychology, 30*(3), 377–400.
- Suh, E. M. (2000). Self, the hyphen between culture and subjective well-being. In E. Diener & E. M. Suh (Eds.), *Culture and subjective well-being* (p. 63–86). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Suh, E. M. (2007). Downsides of an overly context-sensitive self: Implications from the culture and subjective well-being research. *Journal of Personality, 75*(6), 1321–1343.
- Suh, E. M., & Choi, S. (2018). Predictors of subjective well-being across cultures. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of well-being*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF Publishers. <https://nobascholar.com>.
- Suh, E., Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Triandis, H. C. (1998). The shifting basis of life satisfaction judgments across cultures: Emotions versus norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(2), 482–493. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.2.482>.
- Tatarkiewicz, W. (1976). *Analysis of happiness*. Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers.
- Triandis, H. C., Chen, X. P., & Chan, D. K. S. (1998). Scenarios for the measurement of collectivism and individualism. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 29*(2), 275–289.
- Tsai, J. L., Knutson, B., & Fung, H. H. (2006). Cultural variation in affect valuation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 288–307.
- Tsai, J. L., Miao, F. F., Seppala, E., Fung, H. H., & Yeung, D. Y. (2007). Influence and adjustment goals: Sources of cultural differences in ideal affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1102.
- Tsai, W., Chiang, J. J., & Lau, A. S. (2016). The effects of self-enhancement and self-improvement on recovery from stress differ across cultural groups. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 7*(1), 21–28.
- Tsai, W., Lau, A. S., Niles, A. N., Coello, J., Lieberman, M. D., Ko, A. C., ..., Stanton, A. L. (2015). Ethnicity moderates the outcomes of self-enhancement and self-improvement themes in expressive writing. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21*(4), 584.
- Uchida, Y., & Kitayama, S. (2009). Happiness and unhappiness in east and west: Themes and variations. *Emotion, 9*, 441–456.

- Van de Vliert, E. (2012). Climate, cash and culturally embedded happiness. In H. Selin & G. Davey (Eds.), *Happiness across cultures: Views of happiness and quality of life in non-western cultures* (pp. 399–416). New York: Springer.
- Van Deurzen, E. (2008). *Psychotherapy and the Quest for Happiness*. Sage.
- Van Gordon, W., Shonin, E., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Buddhist emptiness theory: Implications for psychology. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 9*(4), 309.
- Wang, Q., & Senzaki, S. (2019). Culture and cognition. In D. Matsumoto & H. C. Hwang (Eds.), *The handbook of culture and psychology* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, S. Y., Wong, Y. J., & Yeh, K. H. (2016). Relationship harmony, dialectical coping, and nonattachment: Chinese indigenous well-being and mental health. *The Counseling Psychologist, 44*(1), 78–108.
- White, S. C., Gaines, S. O., & Jha, S. (2014). Inner wellbeing: Concept and validation of a new approach to subjective perceptions of wellbeing—India. *Social Indicators Research, 119*(2), 723–746.
- Wong, Y. J., & Liu, T. (2018). Dialecticism and mental health: Toward a yin-yang vision of well-being. In J. Spencer-Rodgers & K. Peng (Eds.), *The psychological and cultural foundations of East Asian cognition: Contradiction, change, and holism* (pp. 547–572). Oxford University Press.
- Wong, Y. J., Ho, R. M., Li, P., Shin, M., & Tsai, P.-C. (2011). Chinese Singaporeans' lay beliefs, adherence to Asian values, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*(6), 822–827. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.01.003>.
- Yakushko, O. (2019). *Scientific pollyannaism: From inquisition to positive psychology*. Springer.
- Yamaguchi, S., & Sawaumi, T. (2019). Control orientations in the East and West. In D. Matsumoto & H. C. Hwang (Eds.), *The handbook of culture and psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 509–537). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Zhu, Y., Zhang, L., Fan, J., & Han, S. (2007). Neural basis of cultural influence on self-representation. *NeuroImage, 34*(3), 1310–1316.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 27

## Implementation of Positive Education Projects in Hong Kong

Sylvia Kwok

Positive education, in part, refers to the application of positive psychology concepts to education settings so as to foster positive wellbeing and adaptive functioning (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; Seligman, 2012). Over the past decade, various activities and approaches have been developed to enhance the wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents in schools. Character strengths are foundational in positive psychology, and wellbeing has been delineated in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2012) as: positive Emotions (to build positive emotional experiences and cope with negative emotions), positive Engagement (to live a life high in interest, curiosity, and absorption), positive Relationships (to develop social and emotional skills and foster nourishing relationships with self and others), positive Meaning (to engage in activities that serve a greater cause and act in accordance with individual values), and positive Accomplishment (to develop confidence and competence through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes). These five domains supplement and interact with one another, supporting people to build a happy and flourishing life, and, as such, preventing them from developing mental health problems (Seligman, 2012).

Character strengths are the psychological processes or mechanisms that define a set of virtues, which are the core and universal characteristics valued by moral philosophers (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The Values in Action framework (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), suggests that there are 6

---

S. Kwok (✉)

City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

e-mail: [scykwok@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:scykwok@cityu.edu.hk)

virtues, together comprised of 24 character strengths, and provides a helpful approach to character strengths within positive education. The six virtues are: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Wisdom and knowledge are cognitive strengths that include creativity, curiosity, love of learning, judgement, and perspective. Courage involves emotional strengths incorporating bravery, persistence, integrity, and zest. Humanity refers to interpersonal strengths that comprises love, kindness, and social intelligence. Justice refers to civic strengths that consist of teamwork, fairness, and leadership. Temperance involves strengths that protect us against excess, such as forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation. Transcendence is comprised of strengths that connect us to the larger universe and provide meaning in our lives, and includes appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality.

In view of the need for preventive and developmental programs to promote the positive mental health of people, in 2012 we established a positive education laboratory in the Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the City University of Hong Kong. Throughout these years, we have been launching a number of positive education projects for the kindergarten, primary, and secondary (high) schools, as well as universities in Hong Kong.

## Six Level Implementation Process

The positive education projects in the Hong Kong schools are guided by a six-level implementation process described as *learn it*, *live it*, *reflect it*, *conceptualize it*, *apply it*, and *embed it*. This process was developed by integrating experiential learning theory (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001) and the applied model of positive education in the Geelong Grammar School in Australia (Norrish et al., 2013). *Learn it* refers to regular learning opportunities provided to students, teachers, and parents to understand the science of wellbeing. *Live it* encourages participants to enact evidence-based wellbeing practices in their unique ways, both in schools and in their daily lives. *Reflect it* and *conceptualize it* means that individuals are assisted to reflect on what they have learned and experienced so as to conceptualize their experiences with a deeper understanding of the concepts and principles of positive education. The process of *apply it* implies the actual application of designing and conducting positive education programs or activities in schools and communities. Finally, *embed it* advocates building long-term, school-wide policies, and a positive culture which support and nurture wellbeing within individuals, schools, and the community. The *embed it* component captures the

macro level initiatives in a school, and, in combination with other processes, represents a critical process for successful and sustainable implementation (Hoare, Bott, & Robinson, 2017).

This six-level implementation process serves as a guide for delivering positive education and can be repeated in cycles. It is not just a pedagogy, but a way of life within the school and in daily activities. More importantly, when designing and implementing the interventions with schools, the unique needs of a school will be assessed to ensure that the initiatives are tailored to be context-specific to individual schools. We leverage existing practice and build on a school's unique strengths, while providing opportunities for individual schools to activate changes in the school system.

### **Pioneering Positive Education Projects in Pre-primary Schools**

Focusing on the character strengths of creativity, bravery, hope, love, altruism, honesty, gratitude, and forgiveness, a one-year positive education project was launched in five nurseries and three kindergartens. A whole school positive education approach was adopted. Teacher training on positive education and parents' workshops on positive parenting were conducted. The schools also adopted the above-mentioned themes in their monthly programs (e.g., birthday parties, celebration of Mid-autumn Festival, Ching Ming Festival, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Mothers' Day, and Fathers' Day). A positive education curriculum was designed for 368 Kindergarten K2 and K3 students aged 4–6 (187 in the experimental group, 181 in the control group). Two lessons, 45 minutes per lesson, were designed on each theme, resulting in a total of 16 positive education lessons. The lessons were taught by a psychologist with training and experience in early childhood education and positive education programs, with assistance from the teachers. There were about 15 students in each group. A wait-list randomized controlled trial research design was adopted. The students were randomized into experimental and control groups, with the commitment that the lessons would be offered to children in the control group after the study ended. Parents completed the same set of questionnaires on their children before and after the intervention. The questionnaires consisted of measures such as an anxiety and depression scale, a children's hope scale, a gratitude questionnaire, an altruism scale, a forgiveness scale, an honesty attitudes scale, and a courage measure.

Results showed that students in the experimental group increased significantly in forgiveness, while decreasing significantly in anxiety, when compared with the control group. This suggests that positive education

is effective in enhancing positive attributes and decreasing mental health problems in pre-primary school students.

## **Pioneering Whole School Positive Education Project in Primary Schools**

Whole school positive education was launched in six primary schools in a two-year period to enhance the wellbeing of students and teachers. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the schools were analysed, while recommendations on positive education development were made to the schools. The school boards were contacted, and school management teams all showed support for the implementation of the project. Principals formed core positive education teams in the schools, comprised of guidance teachers, counsellors, and social workers so as to facilitate implementation. Teacher training and parent workshops were conducted, while positive education elements were integrated within student activities, such as in school assemblies, sporting events, swimming events, leadership camp, study tours, school carnivals, and so forth. Special parent–child activities were implemented, such as candle-night dinner and joint video games to promote parent–child relationship. The positive education curriculum was designed for 500 Grade 1 to Grade 6 students aged 6–13 with the PERMA themes. A total of 16 lessons were designed for each grade, with each lesson lasting for about 45 minutes. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted with pre- and post-intervention questionnaires completed by the students, teachers, and parents. The questionnaires consist of measures such as the PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), an academic motivation scale, a parent–child conflict tactics scale, and a hospital anxiety and depression scale.

Results showed that positive education was effective in decreasing students' negative emotions and anxiety, increasing their motivation in completing tasks, developing their positive personality, and alleviating perceived inappropriate parenting methods such as parental abuse and neglect. For parents, positive education was effective in enhancing positive emotions, engagement, growth mindset and alleviating communication problems and family difficulties. Positive education also helped to improve teacher–student relationship and constructive teaching for teachers. Hence, whole school positive education was effective at enhancing wellbeing and decreasing psychopathology for primary school students; promoting the growth mindset of parents and decreasing parent–child communication problems; and improving teacher–student relationships.

## Pioneering Positive Education Projects in High Schools

Focusing on optimism, hope, and character strengths, the positive education project was launched in ten high schools for a two-year period to help decrease the anxiety of students. A six-session positive education curriculum was designed by a team of social workers and educational psychologists with reference to the above-mentioned themes for 1,290 Grade 10 to Grade 12 students aged 14–18. Each lesson lasted for one hour and was taught by a social worker in class. There were 30 students in each class. A wait-list randomized controlled trial research design was adopted. Two classes of students in one grade were randomly selected as the experimental group, while the remaining two classes acted as the control group. There was a total of 670 students in the experimental group, and 620 students in the control group. The students in the control groups were provided with the positive education lessons after the study ended. All students completed the same set of questionnaires before and after the intervention. The questionnaire consisted of measures such as the hospital anxiety and depression scale, a subjective happiness scale, a children's hope scale, and an optimism scale. Results showed that students in the experimental groups had significant increases in subjective happiness, hope, and life orientation, and significant decreases in anxiety after the intervention. This suggests that positive education is effective in increasing positive attributes, such as optimism, hope, and subjective happiness, while decreasing mental health problem, such as anxiety, in high school students.

## Pioneering Positive Education Projects in Universities

A joint university positive education project was launched in five universities in Hong Kong for three years. The project aimed to nurture and enhance the development of students' positive emotions, relationship, purpose, accomplishment, engagement and health, and to increase students' life satisfaction, strengthen their resilience in the face of difficulties, and enhance understanding and support teaching of positive education for academic staff at the tertiary level.

To facilitate acquisition of knowledge in positive education, a number of training camps, workshops, and seminars were organized for students and staff at the universities. Students were encouraged to write gratitude journals and gratitude letters, record their memorable moments in the book of blessing, practice mindfulness at home, and set their own goals and devise strategies to achieve the goals so as to live out the concepts in their daily lives.

They were required to write reflective journals or reflective notes in a web-based platform, have regular meetings with and presentations to the project officers to share and reflect what they have learned. They were encouraged to present their learning and reflections at the International Conference on Positive Education, hence reflection and conceptualization of positive education were attained. To apply the positive education concepts, students were divided into small groups and launched different community projects under the supervision of the project officers. They also organized positive education festivals at their own universities and held a study tour to Taiwan to learn and share their experiences. To embed the positive education elements into their universities, they set up *what went well* boards; distributed pamphlets, cards with mottos, and gave souvenirs to other students; organized exhibitions; and established a positive education website to disseminate positive education messages to students and the public.

Surveys were administered before and after students' participation in the activities. Different measures were used to examine the change in students' emotions, relationships, meaning of life, accomplishments, engagement, and resilience. Results indicated that students had significant increases in college life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, adaptive coping, and decreases in anxiety and stress arising from time pressures. It appears that positive education was effective in enhancing the wellbeing and decreasing mental health problems of university students.

## Characteristics of the Positive Education Projects

Several characteristics can be identified from the above-described projects. Applying a positive education and experiential learning framework, the projects aimed to enhance the wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents; to prevent mental health problems; and to promote a positive culture in the schools. The project objectives are concrete, measurable, and achievable, with the development of localized positive education curricula that incorporate Chinese cultural and moral values for students of different age groups. The teaching pedagogy was comprised of six steps that included *Learn, Live, Reflect, Conceptualize, Apply, and Embed*. A whole school approach to positive education was adopted in the schools, rather than fragmented group or program interventions. Involvement of school management personnel (e.g., school board members, school administrators), parents, and teachers was emphasized. Under the positive education and experiential learning framework, some additional programs were tailor-made for individual schools.

The framework was integrated with the mission and vision of the individual schools and integrated into the school development plan and school policy. The lessons or programs were designed with multiple formats, including experiential exercises, mindfulness activities, games, role play, video show, drama, arts, and music with detailed debriefing that met the needs and characteristics of the students, teachers, and parents.

In addition, the projects were implemented by a multi-disciplinary team comprised of academics, social workers, psychologists, ex-teachers, and research fellows with doctorates in social work, psychology, and education. The projects had both research and knowledge transfer elements. The participating schools were encouraged to share their experiences with other schools, creating a ripple effect while sustainability is maintained. Joint advocacy with the funding bodies was made such that positive education messages could be promoted to other professionals, schools, parents, the media, and the public.

## **Factors Affecting Effectiveness of the Positive Education Projects**

The effectiveness of the whole school positive education approach is influenced by school, teacher, classroom, and student factors. The underlying mechanism impacting effectiveness of the whole school positive education approach is impacted by an array of variables. Teachers' implementation quality can be affected by the school atmosphere, their social-emotional competence, their attitudes towards positive education, their training, and the consultation they received. A flexible school policy, placing less emphasis on students' academic performances and more on students' wellbeing, will facilitate the implementation of positive education. A harmonious relationship among students, teachers, and parents is also a facilitating factor for effective implementation. In addition, teachers' implementation quality may interact with classroom climate, which in turn impacts students' wellbeing. At the same time, students' wellbeing may be affected by their engagement in class, as well as their perceived parenting and friendship quality.

## **Future Directions for Positive Education in Hong Kong**

The emphasis for future implementation of positive education in Hong Kong (and elsewhere) includes:

1. Positive education should be embedded in formal/informal school curriculum and school activities.
2. The themes of positive education should be integrated into school development plans and policies.
3. More evidence-based research is needed to systematically examine the conceptual framework and implementation approaches of positive education and to provide evidence of the effectiveness of positive education for individual and collective wellbeing in schools and the communities.
4. Multiple teaching pedagogies should be developed for the explicit and implicit teaching of positive education (e.g., mindfulness training, expressive arts, music, art, drama, movement, etc.) that can be incorporated in the positive education curriculum.
5. Positive education should be extended to different target groups (e.g., students with special education needs).
6. Continuous discovery and innovation in positive teaching and learning, positive training, positive research, positive organization, positive resources (including online materials), positive knowledge development should be promoted.
7. Students, teachers, and parents should all be involved in the design and implementation of positive education.
8. Collaboration among local and international academics and educators in promoting positive education should be encouraged.
9. An interdisciplinary platform should be established to enhance collaboration among schools, social welfare agencies, business sectors, government, and universities in promoting positive education.

## References

- Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). The PERMA-Profler: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *6*, 1–48. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i3.526>.
- Hoare, E., Bott, D., & Robinson, J. (2017). Learn it, live it, teach it, embed it: Implementing a whole school approach to foster positive mental health and wellbeing through positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *7*(3).
- Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. (2001). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. *Perspectives on Thinking, Learning, and Cognitive Styles*, *1*(8), 227–247.

- Norrish, J. M., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3(2).
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Seligman, M. E. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 28

## Teacher and Staff Wellbeing: Understanding the Experiences of School Staff

Faye McCallum

Around the world, schools have the mandate to prepare children and young people for the future, in a global context that is challenging and ever-changing (Global Happiness Council, 2018). Even as teachers attempt to prepare students for academic success, instil core academic skills, and prepare them for an unknown future, they also must navigate the many mental health challenges that students present. Across the world, the prevalence of mental illness—including anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, and externalising disorders—has increased at alarming rates, with first occurrences increasingly occurring at younger ages (Birmaher et al., 1996; Kessler & Bromer, 2013). These pressures not only impact young people, but also can have deleterious effects on teachers, leaders, and non-teaching staff. If students are to be well, then positive education must be inclusive of the staff that engage with children and young people on a daily basis.

This chapter highlights the importance of teacher and staff wellbeing as a critical determinant in the achievement of positive social and academic learning outcomes. I begin by situating the extent of staff wellbeing within existing literature, considering influences on teachers' work and wellbeing. Next, I consider what wellbeing means in the context of education. I then offer two case studies from Australia and Canada, which point to the importance of teacher wellbeing. I conclude by drawing together the key findings

---

F. McCallum (✉)

University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia

e-mail: [faye.mccallum@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:faye.mccallum@adelaide.edu.au)

from both studies with a view to advance the wellbeing of teachers, leaders, and non-teaching staff for employers, policymakers, and government.

## Teacher Quality and Wellbeing

It is well acknowledged that teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to student success, satisfaction, and achievement; for all children regardless of their circumstances, location, or social status (Hattie, 2009). In Australia, for instance, the 2015 Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report declared that enhancing the capability of teachers is vital to raising the overall quality of Australia's school system and lifting student outcomes. Teacher quality, retention, satisfaction, and wellbeing are key elements for a sustained profession, to maintain motivation, and prepare teachers to fulfil aspirational outcomes as leaders (McCallum & Price, 2016). Yet for a number of reasons, quality, retention, and satisfaction are all being challenged, with consequences for both teachers and students.

### Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is an important contributor to quality student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009) and a main driver affecting variations in student learning (Harding et al., 2019). Teachers are a precious asset to schools and the communities in which they work (Flores, 2019; Mingren & Shiquan, 2018). Hattie (2015) found that teachers with high expectations of their students had the greatest influence on student learning. Research on teacher quality points to the importance of teacher selection, performance, and accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

It is an important time to recruit, develop, and retain great teachers (Edge et al., 2017). Increased global accountability and scrutiny and surveys such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study have created greater transparency for policymakers, education leaders, and teachers to critique as well as reflect on educational outcomes and performance (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2018). There is a growing body of evidence regarding the roles that teachers play in enhancing educational outcomes. For example, teacher quality, attitude, effectiveness, and motivation are found to be essential in high-performing systems, and teacher wellbeing is closely related to teacher quality (Mingren & Shinquan, 2018).

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Worryingly, there are global concerns about teacher supply for maintaining a stable and effective workforce. A survey of 25 countries across the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that about half of the countries are struggling to maintain an adequate supply of good quality teachers (OECD, 2005, 2018). A shortage of teachers exists in England (House of Commons, Education Committee, 2017) and similar issues have been reported in the United States (Aragon, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016), with shortages in some sectors within Australia (Mason & Matas, 2015). Fewer people are attracted to teaching as a career option (Heidmets & Liik, 2014; OECD, 2014; Schleicher, 2018), and for those that do enter the profession, retention is a major issue. Many graduates are leaving the profession within the first five years (Hugo, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Tang et al., 2018). In the United States, a decade ago, 33% of teachers left their schools in the first three years, and 46% after five years (Brill & McCartney, 2008), with this trend continuing across the last decade. While there are localised variations in attrition rates, in general the rate of loss to the profession in many countries is around 40–50% over the five years post entry (den Brok, Wubbels, & van Tartwijk, 2017; Gallant & Riley, 2014).

These trends and statistics revealing concerns in maintaining a quality workforce are at a time where forecasts of an increase in student numbers is expected. The projected demands for schoolteachers between 2016 and 2030 show an estimated 100% growth in demand in China and India, 50–99% in Germany, and 25–49% in Mexico (Manyika et al., 2017). In Australia, student numbers are projected to increase to 255,756 students by 2031 (McCrinkle, 2017). If the average classroom caters 24 students, schools will need to find space and resources for approximately 710 additional classes per year over this period. Thus, the demand for teachers is likely to increase in the foreseeable future.

Clearly, high-quality teachers and staff must be attracted to and retained within the profession. The extent to which this is achieved is highly dependent on their wellbeing. Teacher stress, whether perceived or actual, is a key factor that impacts the recruitment of new teachers and their intention to stay or leave. Reports on teacher safety by students, and in some cases parents, have been increasingly published since Day and Qing's (2009) finding that "many teachers work in environments that are hostile to their wellbeing" (p. 16). In a study on teacher wellbeing in Australia (McCallum, Price, Graham, & Morrison, 2017), it was found that teacher wellbeing was

not considered a concern in the then-current sociopolitical climate. Teachers in that study commented that the focus was on student results, and teachers were struggling to manage the competing interests and demands placed upon them. Teachers experienced burnout and early career teachers considered leaving the profession.

Teacher quality is being challenged in part due to a failure to shift patterns of poor educational outcomes and extensive emphasis on standardised testing and academic achievement, at the expense of the holistic development of young people. These challenges are resulting in the large numbers of teachers leaving the profession early (e.g., Craig, 2017; den Brok et al., 2017), and high rates of emotional burnout, stress, and physical and mental health issues for those within the profession (e.g., Burns & Machin, 2013; Cook et al., 2017; Mattern & Bauer, 2014; Scheuch, Haufe, & Seibt, 2015; Vazi et al., 2013; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014; Yang, Ge, Hu, Chi, & Wang, 2009). It is critically important that policymakers, employers, and other stakeholders take seriously the wellbeing of staff.

## Teacher Wellbeing

McCallum and Price (2010, 2016) advocate that for children and young people to be well, teachers must also be well. The education of children and young people is at the core of teachers' work, and their success underpins their daily effort, enthusiasm, and commitment. Well teachers are able to contribute to the social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hattie, 2009, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2014; Wyn, 2009). They also contribute to the academic development of their students. And research is now beginning to acknowledge the important role that non-teaching staff have in this goal, and increasingly recognising the role of school leadership. The whole school ecosystem is important for our children and young people to complete their schooling years in a well and happy state, ready to contribute as productive and positive citizens.

Well teachers also contribute to the school as a whole. In organisations, numerous studies find that employee wellbeing and effectiveness are connected, with greater productivity and performance by the employee, and better outcomes for the organisation (Roffey, 2012; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). While less work has been done in the education space, the studies that do exist find that teachers with higher wellbeing report greater commitment and satisfaction (e.g., Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014), and high teacher wellbeing correlates with better student academic outcomes (e.g.,

Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Ostroff, 1992; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). For example, Briner and Dewberry (2007) found that 8% of the variation of Standard Assessment Test scores in the U.K. were accounted for by teacher wellbeing. Teacher motivation has also been linked to student achievement, for “when teachers become burned out, or worn out, their students’ achievement outcomes are likely to suffer because they are more concerned with their personal survival” (Watt & Richardson, 2013, p. 272).

Coleman (2009) aptly noted that “schools are communities containing not just children and young people, but adults as well”. As such, he suggested that:

It might even be argued that the quickest way to promote student wellbeing in schools would be to promote high staff morale, enhance staff awareness of emotions, and provide high quality training and support for all the adults working in the school. (p. 290)

McCallum and Price (2010) purported a similar argument, suggesting that teachers need a wellbeing strategy in place for their wellbeing and effectiveness in the classroom. Sisask et al. (2014) found that teachers with high wellbeing are more likely to assist children with mental health challenges. Similarly, other studies conclude that the preconditions for teachers to improve the mental health of their students include providing them with a good school environment, valuing the subjective psychological wellbeing of the teachers, and providing adequate training to fulfil their gatekeeper role (Opfer, 2016; Roffey, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012; Sisask et al., 2014; Tyson, Roberts, & Kane, 2009).

Unfortunately, despite the potential benefits of focusing on teacher and staff wellbeing, it is not seen as a central priority in most schools. In their interviews with teachers on wellbeing, McCallum and Price (2016), illustrated the reality faced by many teachers, with some stating that wellbeing is overall probably not very good due to the demanding nature of work, face-to-face hours, etc. Wellbeing is of general concern to many professionals in varied contexts. However, the work of teachers faces several unique challenges compared to many other professions. For example, their work is subjected to many government legislative requirements and reforms. Indeed, in the U.K., Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell (2012) found that teachers rated their wellbeing significantly lower than other professional occupations such as health, social work, finance, and human resources.

Factors that support and enhance teachers’ wellbeing are important in encouraging greater sustainability within the profession (Acton & Glasgow,

2015). In a study of teachers in Flanders, Aelterman, Engels, Van Petegem, and Verhaeghe (2007) found that support by others is needed, including support by the principal, support for professional learning, and support from colleagues specifically related to school culture. In turn, this influences relationships with parents and attitudes towards innovation. In Italy, Gozzoli, Frascaroli, and D'Angelo (2015) examined the complex and challenging school world of rapid reforms, reorganisations, resource reallocations, general social and productive change, as well as internal and external demands on teachers' work. They found three situations that influenced teacher wellbeing: (1) "manifested malaise" situations, where the professional role of teachers feels devalued or where there is a perception of a lack of organisational support; (2) "defensive or in-retreat" situations, where there is weak motivation despite feeling valued in the role but there is perceived loneliness in the organisation; and (3) "generative" situations, where teachers express feeling renewed motivation, of value to the professional role, and have good interpersonal bonds. This allows teachers to feel support and the ability to make plans individually or collectively.

While these studies provide some hints of ways to support teachers, further studies are needed to better understand how to best support teacher wellbeing. An important starting point is to better understand what wellbeing means in the context of education, and key contextual aspects that impact upon one's opportunity for and understandings of wellbeing.

## Defining Wellbeing in Education

An extensive literature review by McCallum et al. (2017) investigated teachers wellbeing by using thematic analysis by searching terms in the Google Scholar, Trove, and Scopus databases, searching for terms related to wellbeing (e.g., self-efficacy, job satisfaction, job climate, and stress). The review analysed 191 studies from 2001 to 2017. A range of issues was identified including: the complexity of defining wellbeing; the importance of teacher wellbeing, resilience, and self-efficacy; social-emotional competence; personal responses to teachers' work; specific topics such as burnout, fatigue, exhaustion, stress, and relationships with others; interventions like mindfulness, positive psychology, whole school initiatives, work-life support, professional learning communities, and positive school ecology; leadership; professional development; induction; and mentoring. Clearly, wellbeing touches a lot of areas of teachers' lives.

Indeed, wellbeing is a term commonly used in education, with over forty years of research resulting in various projects, initiatives, models, and strategies to improve wellbeing. However, Fraillon (2014) emphasised that there remains a lack of specificity around notions of wellbeing; while it is essential to consider, monitor, and respond to wellbeing, there is little sector-wide consensus on what it actually is. There has been a steep increase in scholarly discussions of wellbeing since the 1960s and since the World Health Organization (1946) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (p. 1), but little consensus of what it means, with differences within and across fields, scholars, practitioners, laypeople, and more, or even whether it should be “well-being” or “wellbeing” (Kern et al., 2020).

Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, and Seligman (2011) suggested that across fields, wellbeing can be considered within two broad categories: (1) objective wellbeing, reflecting what can be objectively measured and observed by others, such as economic resources, political circumstances, physical health conditions, number of social relationships, and literacy; and (2) subjective wellbeing, reflecting the subjective experience of individuals, such as happiness, emotion, engagement, purpose, life satisfaction, quality of social relationships, competence, and accomplishment. Teacher wellbeing generally is considered from the subjective perspective.

Yet the focus on subjective wellbeing brings further complexity. Forgeard et al. further noted that “the multiplicity of approaches in the study of wellbeing has given rise to blurred and overly broad definitions of wellbeing, with researchers using the construct of ‘wellbeing’ synonymously with ‘happiness’, ‘quality of life’, or ‘life satisfaction’” (p. 81). Various attempts have been made to define and clarify terms (e.g., Bricheno, Brown, & Lubansky, 2009; Day & Qing, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2015; Ragnarsdottir & Asgeir Johannesson, 2014). McCallum et al’s (2017) analysis of the literature revealed that few definitions of wellbeing are specific to teachers, school leaders, or employees. Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) conceptualised wellbeing as a scale in which there is balance “between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced”, such that wellbeing occurs when:

individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice versa. (p. 230)

Acton and Glasgow (2015) defined teacher wellbeing as “an individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness, constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students” (p. 101).

Wellbeing is not purely about having fixed individual traits; it is fluid and dynamic in nature, and is influenced by relationships, situatedness, productivity, and engagement in life experiences (McCallum & Price, 2010). Wellbeing is different for each individual and their communities (McCallum & Price, 2012). As captured by McCallum and Price (2016), wellbeing is

diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected. (p. 17)

There are also cultural aspects of wellbeing (White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014; Zhu, Devos, & Li, 2011). For instance, Uchida, Ogihara, and Fukushima (2015) distinguished between an East Asian view of wellbeing, which tends to be derived from social harmony, seen in adapting to social norms and fulfilling relational obligations, as opposed to European-American views, where wellbeing is more focused on individual achievement and self-esteem. Other impacts upon teacher and employee wellbeing include:

1. Staff gendered experiences (e.g., Cui & Richardson, 2016; Salimirad & Srimathi, 2016; Tang et al., 2018);
2. School structures and types (e.g., Cook et al., 2017; Hobson & Maxwell, 2016; Kidger et al., 2016; Paterson & Grantham, 2016; Yin, Huang, & Wang, 2016; Zinsser, Christensen, & Torres, 2016);
3. Stages of the teaching career (Carter, 2016; Hobson & Maxwell, 2016; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016; McCallum & Price, 2015, 2016); and,
4. Subject specializations (De Pablos-Pons, Colás-Bravo, González-Ramírez, & Camacho Martínez-Vara del Rey, 2013; Mattern & Bauer, 2014; Turner, Zanker, & Braine, 2012).

In summary, there is no single agreed-upon definition of wellbeing for teachers and staff. Numerous factors impact upon understandings of and experiences of wellbeing. But regardless of these inconsistencies and lack of coherence, it is clear that teacher and staff wellbeing is vitally important to the educational community. To provide greater insights on teacher wellbeing, I

turn to two case studies, one focused on teachers in Australia, and the second focused on teachers in Canada.

## Insights into Teacher Wellbeing: Two Case Studies

Both cases involved a mixed-methods consideration of the wellbeing within the respective contexts. The first case was undertaken in one state in Australia with 806 teachers using an appreciative focus to explore the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the nature of teachers' control over their work and how does this impact their wellbeing?
2. What styles of leadership and management promote teacher wellbeing?

Findings suggested that teacher wellbeing was most highly associated with: schools that prioritised teacher wellbeing, teacher's perception of their degree of autonomy over their work, and the influence of school leadership/management.

The second case study focused on understanding the state of wellbeing of 183 staff from an all-boys Canadian school. Staff wellbeing was most highly associated with prioritising employee wellbeing in the workplace, employee's perception of their degree of autonomy over their work, and the impact of school leadership.

## Wellbeing in Australia: An Exploration of Teachers' Perceptions

The first case focused on Australian teachers. Participants completed an online survey, which included a number of existing wellbeing measures, along with open text comments. As summarised in Table 28.1, participants came from varied backgrounds, representing a broad range of experiences across Australia.

Participants completed an online survey through SurveyMonkey during a three-week period in term four of 2017. A random sample of 3,000 educators were selected and invited to participate via email; additional respondents were recruited through social media including Twitter, Facebook, and my research website's landing page. The 47-item survey included three parts, which

**Table 28.1** Australian participants characteristics ( $N = 806$ )

Location	Metropolitan	62%
	Regional	30%
	Remote/Rural	8%
Level	K-12	60%
	Early Learning Centre	1%
	Primary	17%
	Secondary	22%
Religious affiliation	With affiliation	71%
	Non-denominational setting	21%
	Not identified	8%
Gender mix	Co-educational	70%
	Single sex	30%
School size	Less than 200 students	10%
	200–600 students	19%
	601–1000 students	27%
	1001–2000 students	39%
	More than 2000 students	5%
Gender	Male	24%
	Female	75%
	Not identified	1%
Role	Teaching role	66%
	Specialist teacher	15%
	Leadership role	17%
	Principal	2%
Teaching experience	0–5 years	16%
	6–10 years	25%
	11–15 years	19%
	16+ years	40%
Employment status	Full time	83%
	Part time	16%
	On leave	.5%
	Permanent position	89%
	On contract	10%
Highest education qualification	Casual employment	1%
	Diploma	3%
	Bachelor	38%
	Post-graduate certificate	22%
	Masters or equivalent	35%
	PhD or equivalent	2%

asked about the respondent and their school, perceptions about current well-being, and perceptions about the wellbeing of the school. 600 respondents completed all of the quantitative questions, which are included here. The survey included 16 open-ended questions, completed by 806 respondents.

The responses were analysed using a thematic approach. Here I consider what arose from the analysis across the qualitative and quantitative responses.

**Definitions of wellbeing.** An open-ended question asked participants to define wellbeing, which were categorised into four themes: *health*; *life/work balance*; *feelings of happiness*; and, *being free of stress*. Table 28.2 provides examples of responses representing the four themes. Responses showed heightened awareness of personal and professional factors that impacted their wellbeing.

Some teachers also made reference to professional development and the theoretical works of researchers in the field. For example, one teacher explicitly referenced Seligman's PERMA theory, Duckworth's concept of grit, and the resilient yet pessimistic attempts by self and colleagues to be sustainable in their work:

One of the constituents of wellbeing is resilience - that is - are teachers afforded the time and resourcing to accommodate and accomplish the tasks that they have to complete on a day to day basis. While teachers are continuously demonstrating 'grit' in the face of ever-increasing demands - the reality is that even the most resilient teachers are breaking down or allowing aspects of their personal lives to suffer under this burden (that is in no way reflected by the remuneration). If we were to use Seligman's PERMA model it is clear that being a teacher causes damage to Personal Relationships through the

**Table 28.2** Example teacher definitions of wellbeing categorised across four themes

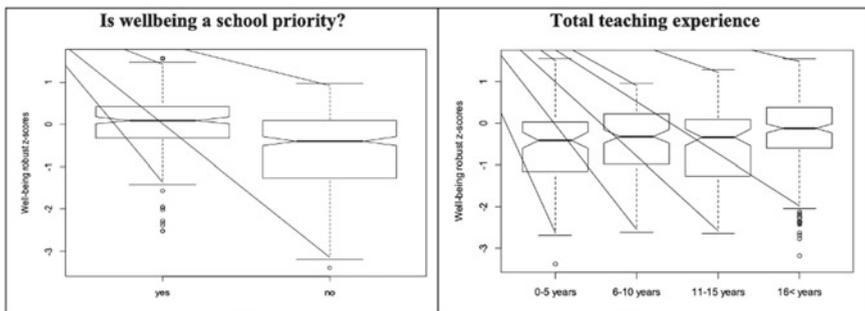
Theme	Example quotes
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability of teachers to juggle the demands of school with family</li> <li>• Balancing health (mental, emotional, physical); support (inside and outside of school); time, resources, networks</li> </ul>
Life/work balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having balance and autonomy, time, and freedom to do the work</li> <li>• Teacher which has time to finish work within school hours</li> </ul>
Feelings of happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that teachers are happy at work</li> <li>• Being happy in your role</li> <li>• The degree of collegiality within the staff body, respect for one's professional expertise</li> <li>• Teachers being comfortable, happy, satisfied, with their work</li> </ul>
Free of stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being aware of how you are feeling</li> <li>• Being aware of your stressors and have strategies to deal with them</li> <li>• Have support when needed to overcomes issues</li> <li>• NOT impacting me socially, emotionally, and physically</li> </ul>

increasing demands upon educators non-teaching time and the sheer tokenistic preparation times that are afforded to teachers.

Another participant highlighted being cognizant of the need to prioritise teacher wellbeing:

Wellbeing is something that does not get a lot of time dedicated to its active maintenance. I would imagine that teacher wellbeing is overall probably not very good due to the demanding nature of work, face to face hours etc. A teachers wellbeing would directly impact students' wellbeing and is thus worth investing in.

**Factors influencing wellbeing.** The survey questions asked teachers to consider their own wellbeing across a range of wellbeing dimensions, i.e., social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual. As a whole, participants perceived their wellbeing as relatively high, with a mean response of 75 on a 0–100 scale. However, wellbeing scores significantly differed across all demographic variables, including school location, type, religion, gender, approximate enrolment; gender, role at school, current year level of teaching, total teaching experience, current employment status, and attendance at professional learning about wellbeing. Specifically, teachers were more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing when wellbeing was a priority at the school, when they had greater experience, when they attended professional development focused on wellbeing, and when they were in a single-sex school. As a whole, the factors that most influential differences in teacher wellbeing scores were whether or not the school prioritised teacher wellbeing ( $F(1,584) = 72.31, p < .001$ ), and teachers' years of experience in the role ( $F(3,584) = 4.40, p = .004$ ). As illustrated in Fig. 28.1, teachers reported significantly



**Fig. 28.1** Comparing teacher wellbeing based upon whether the school prioritised teacher wellbeing ( $n = 384$ ) and number of years of teaching experience ( $n = 241$ )

greater wellbeing when wellbeing was a school priority, and teachers with 16 + years of experience reported greater wellbeing.

The results point to the possibility that less experienced teachers might benefit from opportunities for mentorship from teachers with more years of experience. Indeed, teachers that attended formal professional development valued interaction and learning from more experienced teachers. For instance, one participant reflected: *“It was good to spend time with teachers in a similar situation and to learn some tools that can be used to make my teaching experience more bearable. Always good to hear tips from more experienced teachers”*. Another participant recognised the role that they could play in assisting others: *“I picked up some very useful strategies on how to assist colleagues through discussion about wellbeing and mentor teachers progressing to Proficient Teacher status”*. Still, even experienced teachers continue to need the support of leaders and the sector. For example, one participant noted:

I never used to think I was going to be one of ‘those’ teachers who burned out or who reached a point where I needed a career change. But it turns out I am. ... I can see here so many mid-career teachers who need care. Those with young families, people who are carers or who just need some flexibility in how they spend their time. The young ones will sort themselves (although we need to not burn them out) but it’s us in this age (20-25 years) who need the care to keep going lest they end up like those snarky teachers who hide in the back and do the minimum. (we all know who they are)

**Strategies for supporting wellbeing.** Teachers also suggested strategies and initiatives that can help support different aspects of wellbeing. Table 28.3 provides some examples. Teachers pointed to the need for support from leadership and management in prioritising wellbeing. Notably, teachers with 11–15 years of teaching experience reported greater support from leadership/management, whereas teachers with 0–10 years’ experience reflected reduced support from leadership and school management, which further undermined feelings of wellbeing. Teachers also insightfully reflected that schools that had wellbeing initiatives in place needed to maintain these and others should consider adopting strategies specific to their school needs and context.

**Summary.** Through a survey of Australian teachers, insights arise about how teachers perceive wellbeing and factors that influence wellbeing. Definitions included health, balance, happiness, and freedom of stress dimensions. A number of strategies, suggestions, and policies related to maintaining, sustaining, and improving the wellbeing of the teaching workforce in this state in Australia can be derived from this research. It was identified that

**Table 28.3** Teacher wellbeing strategies, as suggested by the teachers

Dimension	Suggested Strategy
Physical	Wellbeing week—a range of activities to improve staff mindfulness, taking time out of a busy schedule to make time for ourselves. Activities included, book club, badminton, colouring, walking, and Yoga. Staffroom has fruit, biscuits to allow Teachers to meet in one space and take some time out of the classroom, which is nice, they have also started doing staff lunches to allow groups of teachers to get together on a fortnightly basis
Social	The staff choir was established in 2016 and is slowly growing in number. We meet weekly at a lunchtime and sing together. It is a big laugh, wonderful to make music together, and encourages mindfulness. It is also a wonderful break from the inevitable student onslaught that happens at lunchtime
Cognitive	The school has started a teacher-learner community that runs twice a term and looks at formative assessments and pedagogy. These community sessions are generally pulled down to a discussion on how to juggle the work-life balances and operate at best practice
Spiritual	Spirituality Day is a day the whole staff get together and take time to reflect on three previous terms. There is a lot of effort put into this day, so teachers have permission to reflect, meditate and reconnect with ourselves and each other in an authentic way
Emotional	“Honourable mentions” box at morning tea where colleagues can anonymously put praise/thanks for each other for doing something special. There is also some sort of counselling that we can access if we need to, but I can’t remember the details—was publicised a number of years ago

when teacher wellbeing is prioritised at school, teachers show higher levels of wellbeing. Professional learning on wellbeing was useful, but it needs to be sustained, contextual, and authentic both at the school and system level. Teachers across all levels need support from leadership. Making teacher wellbeing a priority contributes to sustained best practice and needs to be specific, contextual, and part of whole school culture. As a whole, teachers reported relatively being levels of wellbeing, but it was clear that ongoing action is needed to support teacher’s wellbeing, due to the demands felt across the profession.

## Wellbeing in Canada: A Whole School Case Study

The second case focused on Canadian teachers. The collection was part of a broader whole-school study at an all-boys school, which included both students and employees. Here I focus on the responses from 183 staff, collected in December 2018 (see White, 2019 for the student data).

**Table 28.4** Canadian participants characteristics ( $N = 174$ )

Gender	Female	53%
	Male	39%
	Not disclosed	8%
Role	Teaching staff	48%
	Leadership role	21%
	Non-teaching staff	31%
Teaching experience	0–5 years	44%
	6–15 years	31%
	16+ years	25%
Employment status	Full time	94%
	Permanent employment	82%
	On contract	18%
Highest education qualification	Diploma	7%
	Bachelor	37%
	Masters or equivalent	51%
	PhD or equivalent	3%
	Other	3%

Out of the 183 employee responses (99% completion rate), nine responses were incomplete (4.9%), thus, only complete responses are included here. Table 28.4 summarises demographic information. In addition, professional learning on wellbeing had been undertaken by 68% of respondents, with an overall 84.5% rating the learning as being of value.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, involving an online survey that included quantitative and qualitative questions, consisting of three sections: (1) basic demographic information (2) employees' current wellbeing, and (3) open-ended questions aimed at further exploring employee's perceptions of wellbeing. broken into three sections. Qualitative data recorded increased awareness about wellbeing issues, pointed to practical strategies and tips for direct application to the classroom, and factors were identified to enable employees to work in a positive and productive manner with colleagues to assist students' wellness.

**Definitions of wellbeing.** An open-ended question asked participants how they define wellbeing. Figure 28.2 visualises words that were mentioned, with size indicating the frequency that words were mentioned (range = 3–42 mentions).

Responses pointed to multiple dimensions of wellbeing, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual aspects. For example, participants noted:



**Fig. 28.2** Words mentioned by teachers in defining wellbeing

- *“Feeling good, functioning well and caring for others”.*
- *“State of being in which physically, emotionally, mentally functioning at the optimal level with deep rooted satisfaction in all aspects of life”.*
- *“Having the energy to do day to day activities with mostly positive feelings and being able to manage the ups and downs of life in constructive ways”.*
- *“Wellbeing means balance, resilience, the ability to manage stress and recover from setbacks”.*
- *“Fulfilment with the relationships I have with others. Pride in the work that I do. A sense that I am respected and treated with dignity”.*
- *“Feeling healthy and connected to community and having resources for comfort, choices, self-development”.*

**Factors impacting on employee wellbeing.** On a 1–5 scale, average wellbeing was 3.5, indicating a moderate level of wellbeing. Notably, when wellbeing was perceived to be prioritised, staff responded with a higher rate on the wellbeing scale. Of staff, 62% agreed that wellbeing was a priority at the College, but it was also challenging to turn that priority into action. For instance, one respondent noted:

I think it is a priority because our leader (Principal) cares about it genuinely. I worry it is hard to actually execute with success because some people take advantage or think it means they don't have to work hard or somehow their personal issues become more important than work - there is a balance and it's hard to achieve.

Employees pointed to numerous factors that positively impact on their wellbeing, which would be categorised into four areas: social, physical, emotional, and cognitive.

Social wellbeing was illustrated by a strong sense of belonging, feeling valued for the work that they do, and having a collegial workplace. For instance, one participant noted:

Collaborating with colleagues on developing curriculum, connection to best practices, working with the boys and having them feel a sense of agency for their work, working with different faculty members to create rich meaningful learning experiences for students. Working as part of a team, having a home from class and being around young people, being part of a vibrant community, being inspired by my colleagues.

Physical wellbeing included fitness, healthy eating, and getting rest. For instance, one participant mentioned “*Permission to work out during spare time, leave campus on breaks, socialize with co-workers*”. Another noted “*Having time to exercise during the workday. Having reasonable hours that allow you to leave work on time and not work on the weekends*”.

Emotional wellbeing was closely aligned to the nature of teachers work and reflects employees having the ability to be motivated and do a good job. For instance, one participant pointed to the value of positive feedback, being included in activities, and “*the sense of feeling that my role really makes a difference in the lives of the employees at the College*”. Similarly, another participant noted:

Informed and prepared guidance by leadership team as relates to my work, being heard without prejudice, proactive oversight of my professional needs. Meaningful interactions with students and colleagues when it is clear that I have had an impact.

Cognitive wellbeing related to having autonomy over one’s work, being prepared for the classroom, attending conferences, having adequate time to attend to all the work, and to learn new aspects. For instance, one participant pointed to: “*the autonomy provided by the job, my colleagues in the department, lots of the small details that get missed - salary, lunches, snacks, resources, students, etc*”.

Professional learning on wellbeing had been undertaken by 68% of employees with 57% of employees finding it “valuable”. Those employees that attended professional learning felt a greater sense of autonomy in their work and this was reflected in their overall sense of wellbeing. Employees with 15+ years’ experience appeared happier at work and reported better relationships with leadership and being able to solve daily problems.



Fig. 28.3 Factors that challenge employee wellbeing

Figure 28.3 illustrates factors that challenge employee wellbeing. Clearly, the biggest challenges are workload and time. Workload encompassed many elements: marking, email communication, administrative responsibilities, unrealistic deadlines, adherence to data and measurement, unnecessary work expectations, serving too many initiatives, unjustified criticism, uncooperative colleagues, indecisiveness of leadership, being stretched, inconsistent documentation, curriculum changes, meetings, balancing core tasks, trivia, learning new systems, co-curricular, negative colleagues, lack of control over work, miscommunication, time restraints, parents, out-of-hours work, and box-ticking. Some employees also indicated personal stressors that impacted their sense of wellbeing at work which included family, childcare, finances, weather, and lack of time for optimum fitness.

Several quotes specifically sum up the overwhelming sense of challenges incorporating both personal and professional features:

- “Feeling unappreciated or undervalued at work. Feeling pressure to constantly exceed expectations in order to keep up with colleagues. Job insecurity. Having to be away from home for work (e.g. late hours, weekend work commitments, evening work commitments.)”.
- “Massive increase in workload after returning from parental leave; feeling that there literally is not enough prep time to accomplish all necessary meeting, planning, clean-up and other administrative work. Feeling like the only option for getting caught up is to use weekend time to do work, which also impact wellbeing, as it takes limited time away from family”.
- “Lack of oversight and planning or understanding by leadership at work, too much to do in too short a timeline, cultural issues around student behavior and professional practices. Coping with being effective at work while dealing with challenges in other aspects of my life. Rate and pace of change at work and in society”.

**Summary.** A survey of staff at an all-boys Canadian school provides further insight into teachers' understanding of wellbeing, as well as points to factors that support and prevent wellbeing. The sense of wellbeing at this College was moderate as a whole, although 43% of respondents rated their current wellbeing at 4 on a 5-point scale. But it is clear that employees experienced numerous stressors in the workplace, which challenge wellbeing. The barriers point more to the role and the work, rather than a reflection of this particular setting.

## Conclusion

The quality of teaching is a crucial global issue in determining the quality of our education systems. As such, it is critical that issues that undermine quality teaching are recognised and urgently dealt with (House of Commons, 2017). Evidence shows that individuals and schools play a significant role in improving and sustaining positive teacher and employee wellbeing. Teachers have a certain degree of responsibility for their own wellbeing (McCallum & Price, 2016; Price & McCallum, 2015; Spilt et al., 2011). However, a myriad of factors on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis can have a deleterious impact on one's wellbeing, some within one's control and some not. As Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) caution:

making changes in individuals when the system is part of the problem leaves basic structures intact and is unlikely to affect the problem ... therefore, policymakers should consider making changes for teachers rather than in teachers. (p. 9)

McCallum and Price (2016) further observe that “educator and learner wellbeing is an individual, collective and community responsibility” (p. 128).

This suggests that the issue of employee wellbeing is complex and best addressed holistically. The case studies provided here illustrate the complexities of supporting wellbeing within schools, as well as point to possible areas that can be targeted to support teachers better. Approaching wellbeing not only as an individual responsibility but also as a shared one creates opportunities for schools and sectors to work in partnership with relevant authorities and professional associations to keep wellbeing a key feature of teacher preparation, induction, mentoring, and professional learning (McCallum & Price, 2012).

As a whole, this chapter supports the views presented by Seligman and Adler (2019), who stress that a case can be made for an education that raises

wellbeing in its own right. A positive approach to wellbeing offers a new educational model, in addition to academic learning, emphasising wellbeing as a buildable lifelong resource.

**Acknowledgements** I acknowledge the NSW Australian Independent Schools Association for funding and the work of Dr. Debbie Price in co-researching the Australian case study. I acknowledge Upper Canada College, Toronto Canada, for funding and the work of Associate Professor Mathew White in co-researching the student wellbeing aspect of the Canadian case study.

## References

- Acton, R., & Glasgow, P. (2015). Teacher wellbeing in neoliberal contexts: A review of the literature. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(8), 6.
- Aelterman, A., Engels, N., Van Petegem, K., & Verhaeghe, J. P. (2007). The wellbeing of teachers in Flanders: The importance of a supportive school culture. *Educational Studies*, 33(3), 285–297.
- Aragon, S. (2016). *Teacher shortages: What we know*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
- Berryhill, J., Linney, J. A., & Fromewick, J. (2009). The effects of educational accountability on teachers: Are policies too stress provoking for their own good? *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 4(5), 1–14.
- Birmaher, B., Ryan, N. D., Williamson, D. E., Brent, D. A., Kaufman, J., Dahl, R. E., ... Nelson, B. (1996). Childhood and adolescent depression: A review of the past 10 years. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35(11), 1427–1439.
- Bricheno, P., Brown, S., & Lubansky, R. (2009). Teacher wellbeing: A review of the evidence. *Teacher Support Network*, 55. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/25759578/Teacher-Wellbeing-A-research-of-the-evidence>.
- Brill, S., & McCartney, A. (2008). Stopping the revolving door: Increasing teacher retention. *Politics & Policy*, 36(5), 750–774.
- Briner, R., & Dewberry, C. (2007). *Staff wellbeing is key to school success: A research study into the links between staff wellbeing and school performance*. London: Worklife Support.
- Burns, R. A., & Machin, M. A. (2013). Employee and workplace wellbeing: A multi-level analysis of teacher personality and organizational climate in Norwegian teachers from rural, urban and city schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(3), 309–324.
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic

- achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44(6), 473–490.
- Carter, S. (2016). *Holding it together: An explanatory framework for maintaining subjective wellbeing (SWB) in principals*. University of Southern Queensland.
- Coleman, J. (2009). Wellbeing in schools: Empirical measure, or politician's dream. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 281–292.
- Cook, C. R., Miller, F. G., Fiat, A., Renshaw, T., Frye, M., Joseph, G., & Decano, P. (2017). Promoting secondary teachers' wellbeing and intentions to implement evidence-based practices: Randomised evaluation of the achiever resilience curriculum. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(1), 13–28.
- Craig, C. (2017). International teacher attrition: Multiperspective views. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(8), 859–862.
- Cui, B., & Richardson, A. (2016). *Factors influencing Australian teachers' intent to leave the teaching profession*. Australian Computer Society, Inc. Fourteenth Australasian Data Mining Conference, Canberra, ACT, Australia, p. 170.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). *Teacher education around the world: Changing policies and practices*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Day, C., & Qing, G. (2009). Teacher emotions: Wellbeing and effectiveness. In P. A. Schutz & M. Zembylas (Eds.), *Advances in teacher emotion research* (pp. 15–31). Dordrecht: Springer.
- De Pablos-Pons, J., Colás-Bravo, P., González-Ramírez, T., & Camacho Martínez-Vara del Rey, C. (2013). Teacher wellbeing and innovation with information and communication technologies: Proposal for a structural model. *Quality & Quantity*, 47(5), 1–13.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 1–11.
- Den Brok, P., Wubbels, T., & van Tartwijk, J. (2017). Exploring beginning teachers' attrition in the Netherlands. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(8), 881–895.
- Dodge, R., Daly, A. P., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L. D. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 2(3), 222–235.
- Edge, K., Dapper, E., Stone-Jonson, C., Frayman, K., Terwindt, R., Townsend, J., & Jeevan, S. (2017). Securing the 21st century teacher workforce: Global perspectives on teacher motivation and retention. *WISE Research Series*. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/2017wise-research-21st-century-teacher-workforce>.
- Flores, M. A. (2019). Unpacking teacher quality: Kei sues for early career teachers. In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & M. Simons (Eds.), *Attracting and keeping the best teachers: Issues and opportunities*. Springer Singapore: Singapore.
- Forgeard, M. J., Jayawickreme, E., Kern, M. L., & Seligman, M. E. (2011). Doing the right thing: Measuring wellbeing for public policy. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(1), 79–106. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v1i1.15>.
- Fraillon, J. (2014). *Measuring student wellbeing in the context of Australian schooling*. Paper presented for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Carlton South, VIC.

- Fullan, M., & Pinchot, M. (2018, March). The fast track to sustainable turnaround: How one principal re-energized a struggling elementary school by focusing on coherence and distributed leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 48–54. Retrieved from <https://michaelfullan.ca/articles/>.
- Gallant, A., & Riley, P. (2014). Early career teacher attrition: New thoughts on an intractable problem. *Teacher Development*, 18(4), 562–580.
- Gillett-Swan, J. K., & Sargeant, J. (2015). Wellbeing as a process of accrual: Beyond subjectivity and beyond the moment. *Social Indicators Research*, 121, 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0634-6>.
- Global Happiness Council. (2018). *Global happiness policy report 2018*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Gozzoli, C., Frascaroli, D., & D'Angelo, C. (2015). Teachers' wellbeing/malaise: Which resources and efforts at individual, group and organisational levels? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, 2241–2245.
- Grenville-Cleave, B., & Boniwell, I. (2012). Surviving or thriving? Do teachers have lower perceived control and wellbeing than other professions? *Management in Education*, 26(1), 3–5.
- Harding, S., Morris, R., Gunnell, D., Ford, T., Hollingworth, W., Tilling, K., & Kidger, J. (2019). Is teachers' mental health and wellbeing associated with students' mental health and wellbeing? *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 242, 180–187.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses to achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Hattie, J. (2015). *What works best in education: The politics of collaborative expertise*. London, UK: Pearson.
- Heidmets, M., & Liik, K. (2014). School principals' leadership style and teachers' subjective wellbeing at school. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 62, 40–50.
- Hitt, D. H., & Meyers, C. V. (2018). Beyond turnaround: A synthesis of relevant frameworks for leaders of sustained improvement in previously low-performing schools. *School Leadership and Management*, 38(1), 4–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1374943>.
- Hobson, A. J., & Maxwell, B. (2016). Supporting and inhibiting the well-being of early career secondary school teachers: Extending self-determination theory. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(1), 68–191.
- House of Commons—Education Committee. (2017). *Recruitment and retention of teachers. Fifth report of session 2016–17*. London: House of Commons.
- Hugo, G. (2007, October 4). *Attracting, retaining an empowering quality teachers: A demographic perspective*. Kevin Majoribank Memorial Public Lecture, University of Adelaide.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30–33.

- Kern, M. L., Waters, L., Adler, A., & White, M. (2014). Assessing employee well-being in schools using a multifaceted approach: Associations with physical health, life satisfaction, and professional thriving. *Psychology, 5*(6), 500–513.
- Kern, M. L., Williams, P., Spong, C., Colla, R., Sharma, K., Downie, A., Taylor, J. A., Sharp, S., Siokou, C., & Oades, L. G. (2020). Systems informed positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*, 705–715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799>.
- Kessler, R. C., & Bromer, E., J. (2013). The epidemiology of depression across cultures *Annual Review Public Health, 34*, 119–138.
- Kidger, J., Brockman, R., Tilling, K., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Araya, R., ... Gunnell, D. (2016). Teachers' wellbeing and depressive symptoms, and associated risk factors: A large cross sectional study in English secondary schools. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 192*, 76–82.
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 54*, 77–87.
- Manyika, J., Lund, S., Chui, M., Bughin, J., Woetzel, J., Batra, P., & Sanghvi, S. (2017). *Jobs lost, jobs gained: Workforce transitions in a time of automation*. New York: McKinsey Global Institute.
- Mason, S., & Matas, C. P. (2015). Teacher attrition and retention research in Australia: Towards a new theoretical framework. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(11), 45–66.
- Mattern, J., & Bauer, J. (2014). Does teachers' cognitive self-regulation increase their occupational wellbeing? The structure and role of self-regulation in the teaching context. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 43*, 58–68.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2010). Well teachers, well students. *The Journal of Student Wellbeing, 4*(1), 19–34.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2012). Keeping teacher wellbeing on the agenda. *Professional Educator, 11*(2), 4.
- McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2016). *Nurturing wellbeing development in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McCallum, F., Price, D., Graham, A., & Morrison, A. (2017). *Teacher wellbeing: A review of the literature*. Sydney, NSW AIS.
- McCrindle. (2017). *NSW student enrolments 2031*. Report for the AISNSW.
- Mingren, Z., & Shiquan, F. (2018). Rural teacher identity and influencing factors in western China. *Chinese Education & Society, 51*(2), 91–102.
- OECD. (2005). *Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2014). *TALIS 2013 results: An international perspective on teaching and learning*. Paris: TALIS, OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2018). *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

- Opfer, D. (2016). *Conditions and practices associated with teacher professional development and its impact on instruction in TALIS 2013* (OECD Education Working Papers, No. 138). Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Ostroff, C. (1992). The relationship between satisfaction, attitudes, and performance: An organisational level analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77(6), 963–974.
- Parker, P. D., Martin, A. J., Colmar, S., & Liem, G. A. (2012). Teachers' workplace well-being: Exploring a process model of goal orientation, coping behavior, engagement, and burnout. *Teaching and Teacher Education: an International Journal of Research and Studies*, 28(4), 503–513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.01.001>.
- Paterson, A., & Grantham, R. (2016). How to make teachers happy: An exploration of teacher wellbeing in the primary school context. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 33, 90–104.
- Price, D., & McCallum, F. (2015). Ecological influences on teachers' wellbeing and "fitness". *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 195–209.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2007). *Independent study into school leadership*. Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham.
- Ragnarsdottir, G., & Asgeir Johannesson, I. (2014). Curriculum, crisis and the work and well-being of Icelandic upper secondary school teachers. *Education Inquiry*, 5(1), 24045.
- Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing—teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(4), 8–17.
- Rubie-Davies, C. (2014). *Becoming a high expectation teacher: Raising the bar*. Florence: Taylor and Francis.
- Salimirad, F., & Srimathi, N. L. (2016). The relationship between, psychological wellbeing and occupational self-efficacy among teachers in the city of Mysore, India. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(1), 14–21.
- Salter-Jones, E. (2012). Promoting the emotional wellbeing of teaching staff in secondary schools. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(4), 18.
- Scheuch, K., Haufe, E., & Seibt, R. (2015). Teachers' health. *Deutsches Aertzteblatt Online*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2015.0347>.
- Schleicher, A. (2018). Valuing our teachers and raising their status: How communities can help. *International Summit on the Teaching Profession*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Seligman, M., & Adler, A. (2019). Positive education. *Global happiness and wellbeing report 2019* (pp. 53–70). Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing.
- Sisask, M., Värnik, P., Värnik, A., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Balint, M., ... Cosman, D. (2014). Teacher satisfaction with school and psychological wellbeing affects their readiness to help children with mental health problems. *Health Education Journal*, 73(4), 382–393.
- Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., & Thijs, J. T. (2011). Teacher wellbeing: The importance of teacher–student relationships. *Educational Psychology Review*, 23(4), 457–477.

- Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the US*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Tang, Y., He, W., Liu, L., & Li, Q. (2018). Beyond the paycheck: Chinese rural teacher well-being and the impact of professional learning and local community engagement. *Teachers and Teaching, 24*, 825–839.
- TEMAG. (2015). *Action now, classroom ready*. Report of The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group. Dept of Education, Australia. <https://www.education.gov.au/teacher-education-ministerial-advisory-group>.
- Turner, S., Zanker, N., & Braine, M. (2012). An investigation into teacher wellbeing during the teacher training year. *Design and Technology Education, 17*(2), 21–34.
- Tyson, O., Roberts, C. M., & Kane, R. (2009). Can implementation of a resilience program for primary school children enhance the mental health of teachers? *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 19*(2), 116–130.
- Uchida, Y., Ogihara, Y., & Fukushima, S. (2015). Cultural construal of wellbeing: Theories and empirical evidence. In W. Glatzer, V. Møller, L. Camfield, & M. Rojas (Eds.), *Global handbook of quality of life* (pp. 823–837). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Vazi, M. L., Ruiter, R. A., Van den Borne, B., Martin, G., Dumont, K., & Reddy, P. S. (2013). The relationship between wellbeing indicators and teacher psychological stress in Eastern Cape public schools in South Africa. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 39*(1). Retrieved from [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S2071-07632013000100011&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2071-07632013000100011&lng=en&nrm=iso).
- Vesely, A. K., Saklofske, D. H., & Nordstokke, D. W. (2014). EI training and pre-service teacher wellbeing. *Personality and Individual Differences, 65*, 81–85.
- Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2013). Teacher motivation and student achievement outcomes. In J. Hattie & E. M. Anderman (Eds.), *International guide to student achievement* (pp. 271–273). New York: Routledge.
- White, S., Gaines, S., & Jha, S. (2014). Inner wellbeing: Concept and validation of a new approach to subjective perceptions of wellbeing—India. *An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement, 119*(2), 723–746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0504-7>.
- World Health Organisation. (1946). *WHO definition of health (preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19–22 June, 1946)*, World Health Organisation, New York, NY.
- Wyn, J. (2009). *Youth health and welfare: The cultural politics of education and wellbeing*. Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press.
- Yang, X., Ge, C., Hu, B., Chi, T., & Wang, L. (2009). Relationships between quality of life and occupational stress among teachers. *Public Health, 123*(11), 750–755.
- Yin, H., Huang, S., & Wang, W. (2016). Work environment characteristics and teacher wellbeing: The mediation of emotion regulation strategies. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 13*(9), 907.

- Zhu, C., Devos, G., & Li, Y. (2011). Teacher perceptions of school culture and their organizational commitment and wellbeing in a Chinese school. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 12*(2), 319–328.
- Zinsser, K. M., Christensen, C. G., & Torres, L. (2016). She's supporting them: Who's supporting her? Preschool center-level social-emotional supports and teacher wellbeing. *Journal of School Psychology, 59*, 55–66.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





# 29

## Applications of Positive Organizational Scholarship in Institutions of Higher Education

Kim Cameron

A broad and well-developed literature has been produced over the last two decades demonstrating the beneficial effects of positive psychology and positive practices in educational settings, primarily focusing on student well-being and student academic performance (e.g., Adler, 2016; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Cotton, & Arch, 2015; White & Murray, 2015). This volume is a testament to the impact of positive educational interventions across multiple cultures. However, these interventions have focused primarily on students and staff members as individuals. What has received less attention is the effect of positive practices on the educational institutions themselves, and especially on institutions of higher education—colleges and universities. The scholarly literature examining organizations and the relationship between positive practices and institutional performance is much less well-developed (Cameron, 2014).

This is not only because student wellbeing and student academic performance are such important outcomes in education, but also because of the difficulty in measuring organization-level outcomes in higher education (Cameron, 1978, 1980). Colleges and universities are primarily loosely coupled systems whose units frequently operate in a semi-autonomous fashion and whose criteria for indicating effectiveness are ambiguous. Desirable outcomes are frequently independent and even conflicting. Relevant constituencies often have contradictory or mutually exclusive goals. A typical

---

K. Cameron (✉)

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

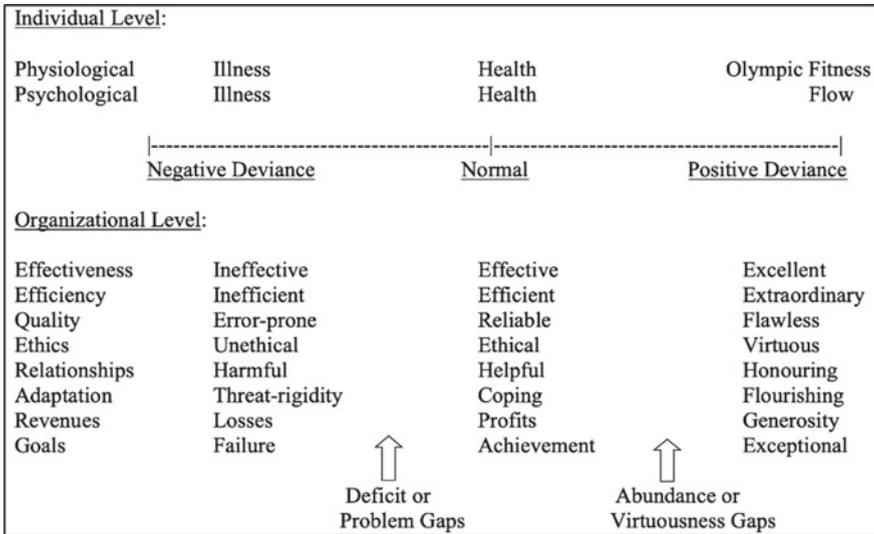
e-mail: [kim\\_cameron@umich.edu](mailto:kim_cameron@umich.edu)

university, for example, is in the business of competing for research grants and improving teaching, elevating student retention and maintaining exclusive entrance requirements, elevating annual giving and fostering fiscal efficiency, generating high starting salaries for graduates and pursuing public service, maintaining desirable student housing and investing in competitive intercollegiate athletics, providing a conducive social environment and carefully monitoring underage drinking and sexual harassment. Maximizing one outcome may mitigate the attaining of other outcomes, so identifying an overall set of indicators of institutional performance is difficult. Identifying overall institutional effectiveness in higher education has long been a conundrum in the academic literature (Cameron, 1981, 2010).

The development of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), however, has helped to put focus on the positive practices of institutions themselves rather than on individual members or the activities in subunits of the university. To explain this assertion, POS is first described, and then the application of POS to institutions of higher education is discussed. Two case studies highlight that POS has an important influence on the performance of colleges and universities as entities.

## Positive Organizational Scholarship and Organizational Performance

Positive organizational scholarship is an umbrella framework used to unify a variety of concepts in organizational studies, each of which incorporates the notion of the positive. One way to illustrate the approach taken by POS to organization-level performance is to locate it on a continuum, represented in Fig. 29.1. This continuum depicts a state of expected or effective performance in the middle (meeting expectations and goals), with a condition of negatively deviant performance on the left (missing targets, making mistakes, offending constituencies) and a state of positively deviant performance on the right (extraordinary success, far-exceeding goals, and aspirations). Negative and positive deviance refer to aberrations from effective functioning or expected performance, harmful on one end and virtuous on the other end. The figure portrays performance ranging from ineffective, inefficient, and error-prone performance on the left side, to effective, efficient, and reliable performance in the middle, to extraordinarily positive organizational performance (e.g., virtuous, excellent, flawless, flourishing) on the right side. The extreme right and left points on the continuum do not merely represent



**Fig. 29.1** A continuum illustrating positive deviance (Adapted from Cameron [2003])

a greater or lesser quantity of the middle attributes. They are qualitatively distinct from the centre point.

A large majority of published studies on organizational and institutional performance have focused on the middle of the continuum—goal achievement, obtaining necessary resources, solving problems, satisfying constituencies, attaining quality, generating revenues, engaging employees, and so forth. In higher education, in particular, the dominant emphasis has been on criteria such as accreditation, graduation rates, faculty publishing, research grants, teaching quality, and student ratings (e.g., Bowen, 1977; Cameron, 1978; Makhoul, 2019; Pursglove & Simpson, 2007). Achieving basic organizational effectiveness at the centre of the continuum dominates evaluations, and little attention has been given to the flourishing or spectacular aspects of organizations. The criteria for enabling the achievement of the right end of the continuum have largely been ignored (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Too little is known about positively deviant performance and the criteria that represent it. Well-developed concepts are still under-developed to explain performance on the right side of the continuum. A POS approach centres on these ill-defined and nascent phenomena—namely, positive deviance and extraordinary performance.

The concepts describing the right end of the continuum have frequently been associated with non-scholarly prescriptions or uncritical ecumenicalism (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Virtuousness, for example, has often been rejected as saccharine, anti-intellectual, or morally dogmatic (Sandage &

Hill, 2001). Flourishing has been interpreted as wishful thinking or naiveté (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Prosocial behaviour and an abundance approach to performance have been dismissed as merely disguised motives for manipulating others and obtaining personal gain (Cialdini, 2000). On the other hand, some POS research has begun to tackle the definition and measurement issues associated with these concepts, and empirical evidence has begun to emerge linking certain organizational dynamics to extraordinarily positive levels of performance (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Cameron & Lavine, 2006; Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011; Dutton & Glynn, 2008).

## Origins of POS

Unlike positive psychology, POS did not emerge as an attempt to rebalance the prodigious emphasis on illness and languishing in organizations. Organizational research has not been focused overwhelmingly on failure, damage, and demise. In fact, studying organizational decline was first introduced in organizational studies in 1980 (Whetten, 1980) because most organizational theories focus almost exclusively on growth. Big has almost always been assumed to be better than small; getting more is preferable to getting less; growth is better than stability (or, worse yet, stagnation). Negative phenomena do not dominate organizational studies literature as they did in psychology, even though plenty of attention has been paid to alienation, stress, injustice, and the evils of bureaucracy in traditional organizational studies (e.g., Weber, 1997).

Rather, POS arose because an array of organizational phenomena was being ignored; consequently, such phenomena were neither systematically studied nor valued. It was usually not considered legitimate in organizational studies, for example, to discuss the effects of virtues in organizations or to use terms such as flourishing or positive deviance to describe outcomes. Studies of compassion and forgiveness—two of the early studies in the POS literature (Cameron & Caza, 2002; Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006)—diverged from mainstream organizational science. Similarly, certain kinds of organizational processes—for example, generative dynamics—remained largely un-investigated, including high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005), connectivity (Losada & Heaphy, 2004), and positive energy networks (Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003).

To be sure, ample research has been conducted on positive factors such as subjective wellbeing, corporate citizenship, prosocial behaviour, positive affect, positive identity, engagement, psychological capital, and satisfaction (e.g., Diener, 2009; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008). Investigations of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) have uncovered relationships, for example, between OCB and sales performance and human resource practices (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Most of the outcomes in these studies, however, focus on the individual level of analysis rather than on the organization's performance per se (Moore & Beadle, 2006).

Relationships between positive organizational dynamics and individual outcomes have been verified but appear much more frequently than relationships with organizational outcomes. For example, evidence exists that positive practices (e.g., respectful treatment, personal development) produce positive affect in employees (e.g., satisfaction, wellbeing), which, in turn, produces positive individual behaviour (e.g., retention, engagement), which, in turn, is assumed to produce organizational effectiveness (e.g., profitability, productivity) (see Cameron et al., 2011; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). But, the last link in this chain is, as yet, underexamined. The connection between positive practices and organizational effectiveness needs much more empirical confirmation (Chun, 2005; Wright & Goodstein, 2007). This is especially true regarding educational organizations and, more particularly, institutions of higher education where the research is especially sparse.

POS also arose because the outcome variables that dominated the organization literature focused mainly on profitability, competitive advantage, shareholder value, and economic efficiency (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Goshal, 2005; Jensen, 2002). Granted, outcomes such as job satisfaction, justice, and teamwork also appeared throughout the organizational studies literature (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Kramer, 1999; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969), but alternative outcomes such as psychological, social, and eudaemonic wellbeing (Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009; Keyes, 2005)—including social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance—as well as human sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010), have been largely outside the purview of mainline organizational science. The best of the human condition—what people care about deeply and profoundly—was almost invisible in organizational scholarship. The famous statement by Robert Kennedy in an 18 March 1968 speech at the University of Kansas is particularly illustrative:

The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the

beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate, or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

## Early Foundations of POS

Positive psychology might be argued to have a long history, dating back to William James' (1902) writings on what he termed "healthy mindedness", Allport's (1960) interest in positive human characteristics; Jahoda's (1959) emphasis on prevention-based community psychology; Maslow's (1968) advocacy for studying healthy people in lieu of sick people; Diener's (1984) investigations of happiness and subjective wellbeing; and Organ (1988) and Batson's (1994) consideration of "citizenship behaviours" and "prosocial" activities.

Similarly, POS could be argued to have roots in a "new attitude of optimism and hope" (Bennis, 1969, p. 3) as emphasized in *The Human Side of Enterprise* (McGregor, 1960). This was a reaction to the dehumanizing and economically directed emphases in work organizations. Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) introduction of *appreciative inquiry* spotlighted the positive dynamics associated with planned change and organizational development efforts. POS, therefore, is not as much a new field of investigation as it is a coalescing force that brings together themes, perspectives, and variables that have been dispersed in the literature and underdeveloped or ignored in scientific investigation.

Most importantly, most of this earlier positively themed work was not based on scientific research and empirical investigations. It largely focused instead on advocacy and promoting a value-based approach to addressing problems, overcoming ills, and resolving difficulties (e.g., Bennis, 1963; Maslow, 1965). Moreover, little of this work explicitly addressed organizations as the entities of interest. The emergence of POS, therefore, does more than merely construct a repository for earlier work. It highlights the organization as a context for study and, at the same time, emphasizes the importance of multiple levels of analyses including individuals, groups, and societies. As such, POS highlights processes and practices that occur in organizations that are associated with positive outcomes in ways that build upon prior work and perspectives, but with a specific focus that opens up new possibilities for organizations.

## Key Attributes of POS

The key characteristics of POS can be captured by four elements: a positive lens, a focus on the extraordinary, an affirmative bias, and the examination of virtuousness at the organizational level.

The first element relates to the interpretation or approach to the term “positive”. Positive refers to adopting *a unique lens or an alternative perspective*. Adopting a POS lens means that the interpretation of phenomena is altered. For example, challenges and obstacles are reinterpreted as opportunities and strength-building experiences rather than as tragedies or problems (Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006; Lee, Caza, Edmondson, & Thomke, 2003; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Variables not previously recognized or seriously considered become central, such as positive energy (Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003); moral capital (Godfrey, 2003); flow (Quinn, 2002); inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003); compassion (Dutton et al., 2006); elevation (Vianello, Galliani, & Haidt, 2010); and work callings (Wrzesniewski, 2003) in organizations. Adopting a POS lens means that adversities and difficulties reside as much in the domain of POS as do celebrations and successes, but a positive lens focuses attention on the life-giving elements or generative processes associated with these phenomena. It is the positive perspective—not the nature of the phenomena—that situates an issue into the POS domain.

The second element of POS is *a focus on extraordinarily positive outcomes or positively deviant performance in organizations* (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). This means that outcomes are investigated that dramatically exceed common or expected performance. A number of studies have investigated spectacular results, surprising outcomes, and extraordinary achievements (e.g., Gittell et al., 2006; Hess & Cameron, 2006; Tutu, 1999; Worthington, 2001), with each treating “positive” as synonymous with exceptional performance. Reaching a level of positive deviance, in other words, extends beyond achieving effectiveness, or ordinary success. Instead, it represents “intentional behaviours that depart from the norm of a reference group in honourable ways” (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209). For example, Cameron and Lavine (2006) investigated the closure and clean-up of the Rocky Flats Nuclear arsenal, the most polluted site on the North American continent, which had produced the triggers that went into nuclear weapons produced during the Cold War. It was estimated that the clean-up of the site would take 70 years and cost \$36 billion dollars. The project exceeded federal clean-up standards by a factor of 13, was completed 60 years early, and was \$30 billion under budget. Baker and Gunderson (2005) examined how the number-one-rated delicatessen in America—located in Ann Arbor, Michigan—achieved

that distinction. Tutu (1999) highlighted the cultural and organizational transformations that occurred in South Africa upon the release of Nelson Mandela from 27 years in prison on Robben Island. Other studies have illustrated the extraordinary success of some financial services organizations that adopted POS as a corporate strategy (Cameron, 2012; Cameron & Plews, 2012; Cameron & Powley, 2008). Such studies have investigated the indicators of and explanatory processes accounting for positively deviant performance, identifying what leads to the extraordinary over the usual.

A third element represents *an affirmative bias that fosters resourcefulness*. POS presumes that positivity unlocks and elevates resources in individuals, groups, and organizations, so that capabilities are broadened and capacity is built and strengthened (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Fredrickson, 2009). POS is unapologetic in emphasizing affirmative attributes, capabilities, and possibilities more than problems, threats, and weakness, so that strengths-based activities and outcomes are highlighted (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Notably, this affirmative approach does not exclude consideration of negative events. Rather, these are incorporated in accounting for life-giving dynamics, generating resources, and flourishing outcomes (e.g., Dutton et al., 2006; Dutton & Glynn, 2008; Weick, 2003). This affirmative bias leads to resourcefulness rather than scarcity.

Resourcefulness means that individuals and organizations experience an amplifying effect when exposed to positivity, such that resources and capacities expand (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). In addition, all living systems have a heliotropic inclination (Erhard-Seibold, 1937). That is, every human being has a tendency towards positive, life-giving energy and away from negative, life-depleting energy (Cameron, 2012). In the scholarly literature, human energy is classified as taking one of two forms—(1) *activation potential*, or the capacity to do work, indicated by the amount of glucose/glycogen and adenosine triphosphate (ATP) in the body, and (2) *energetic stimulation*, or the feeling of aliveness, enthusiasm, and vitality. Abundant empirical evidence suggests that exposure to positive phenomena is, literally, life-enhancing in that it strengthens and enhances this second form of energy (Cooperrider & Srivastara, 1987; Diener, 2009; Loeb & Northrup, 1917; Northrop & Loeb, 1923). Adopting an affirmative bias, therefore, enhances positive energy in organizations (Cameron, 2012, 2013), and increases the capacity of organizations to effectively address difficult challenges and negative events (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Losada & Heaphy, 2004; Worline & Quinn, 2003).

A fourth element refers to the *examination of virtuousness or the best of the human condition* at the organizational level. POS is based on a eudaemonic

assumption—that is, the postulation that an inclination exists in all human systems towards achieving the highest aspirations of humankind (Aristotle, 2018; Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009). Studying virtuousness in organizations means examining excellence and goodness for its own sake—captured by the Latin *virtus* and the Greek *arête*. Although debate has arisen regarding what constitutes goodness and whether universal human virtues can be identified, all societies and cultures possess catalogues of traits that they deem virtuous, that represent what is morally good, and that define the highest aspirations of human beings (Comte-Sponville, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Positive organizational scholarship examines the development of and the effects associated with virtuousness and eudaemonism specifically in organizations (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Cameron, 2003; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), or “that which is good in itself and is to be chosen for its own sake” (Aristotle, 2018, p. 3). Studies of virtuousness *in* organizations focus on individuals’ behaviours in organizational settings that help others flourish (Fowers & Tjeltveit, 2003), including investigating character strengths, gratitude, wisdom, forgiveness, hope, and courage (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Luthans, et al., 2008). Studies of virtuousness *through* organizations focus on practices and processes that represent and perpetuate what is good, right, and worthy of cultivation by organizations (McCullough & Snyder, 2001; Park & Peterson, 2003). This includes, for example, investigating profound purpose and transcendent objectives (Emmons, 1999); healing routines (Powley & Piderit, 2008); institutionalized forgiveness (Cameron & Caza, 2002); and human sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010).

These four elements of POS—adopting a positive lens, investigating extraordinarily positive performance, espousing an affirmative bias, and exploring virtuousness or eudaemonism—are not exclusively the domain of POS, but they do identify the scholarly territory that POS scholars are attempting to map. Similar to other concepts in organizational science that do not have precisely bounded definitions (e.g., culture, innovation, core competence), this mapping provides the conceptual boundaries required to locate POS as an area of inquiry.

Applying POS in higher education, therefore, implies that the entire institution is the target of investigation—the culture, the processes, the goals, and the interaction patterns. Affecting the institution as a whole, in turn, would be expected to positively influence individual students, staff, faculty, and external constituencies. Not only should outcomes such as test scores, student wellbeing, and classroom activities be enhanced, but evidence should indicate that the institution itself has adopted a positive lens and an affirmative bias, has achieved extraordinary performance, and is typified by eudaemonism.

## Applications of POS in Higher Education

The investigation and application of POS in colleges and universities has, unfortunately, rarely been documented. Most studies in higher education have focused on individual student learning outcomes or the effectiveness of specific functions such as career counselling or student placement (e.g., Allan, 1996). Individual outcomes rather than collective level performance have been the primary focus.

Recently, two investigations were conducted in higher education institutions in which POS had been adopted as the core foundation upon which the future culture and strategy of each institution were to be based. These two investigations are presented as illustrations of the potential of POS to enhance the performance of institutions as a whole as well as to enhance student success. One case represents a very large, multinational consortium of universities that adopted POS as the basis upon which their strategy, culture, and approach to higher education would be based going forward. A second case represents a university in Mexico that adopted POS as the core philosophy designed to help the institution overcome a major decline in performance. Each case is described briefly, and the outcomes and lessons learned are summarized. The intent of presenting these two cases is to highlight certain positive organizational practices that affected institutional performance.

### Laureate

A first example of the application of POS at the institutional level emerged from a study of the world's largest university consortium—Laureate—which, in 2017, owned 69 universities in 12 regions throughout the world (<https://laureate.net>). At the time, Laureate represented more than one million students and approximately 135,000 staff members.<sup>1</sup> These institutions are located in Central and South America, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, India, and Africa, and several of them are considered to be the most prestigious in their respective nations. Many of these institutions are located in economically underdeveloped places in the world, so the oft-cited criticism that positive practices, positive psychology, and POS are relevant only in

---

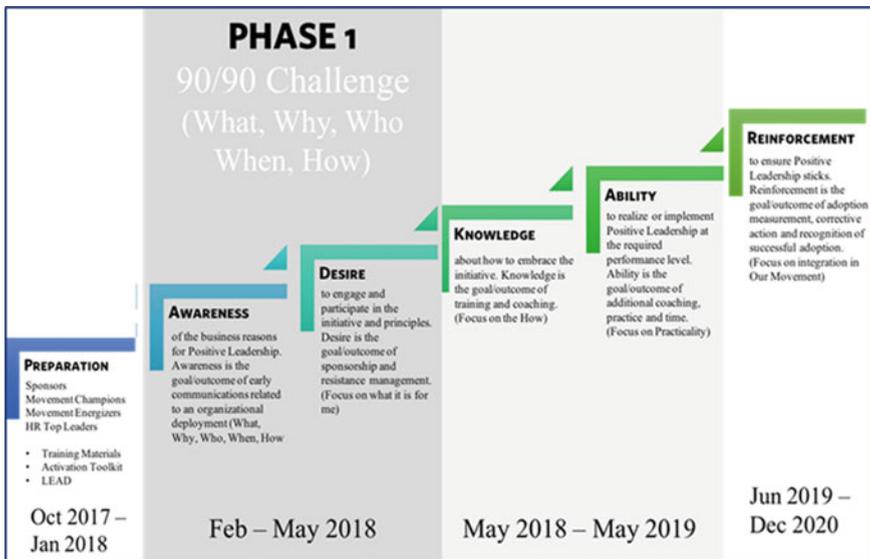
<sup>1</sup>In 2019, stock market pressures and demands for increased profitability, as well as influence from the non-resident founder of the company, pressured Laureate into selling off all of their universities worldwide except those located in South. These financial pressures resulted in the senior leaders at Laureate focusing almost exclusively on the task of consolidating and downsizing the organization. As of this writing, the organization is still going through retrenchment and is shedding universities in order to pay down debt and increase stock price.

economically well-developed areas of the world is countered by the experience of these universities.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Eilif Serck-Hanssen) and the president (Ricardo Berckemeyer) of Laureate determined that a focus on POS would be the core principle around which innovation and culture change would be based in the future. Laureate was facing significant financial pressures and senior executive turnover, so the status quo, it was determined, was not a viable strategy for future success. These two leaders had become exposed to POS through interactions with Jim Mallozzi—a former CEO of one of the Prudential Financial Services businesses and an ardent practitioner of POS leadership—as well as with the author.

A systematic process was developed by the Laureate senior team, including the human resource staff, in which it was determined that the leadership of the entire worldwide organization and all its colleges and universities would be trained in POS. The particular emphasis was to be on positive leadership practices. Figure 29.2 illustrates the stages that were developed by senior executives in Laureate to expose the entire university system to the POS approach and the implementation of positive leadership.

The first step was to bring together the senior leaders in the Laureate organization, as well as presidents, chancellors, and chief academic officers of the various universities throughout the world, for a three-day intensive



**Fig. 29.2** Framework used at Laureate to expose the university to positive organizational scholarship and positive leadership

workshop. The workshop centred on reviewing the empirical research that established the credibility for a POS approach to institutional performance as well as identifying practical tools and applications that leaders could institutionalize in their various universities (e.g., Cameron, 2012, 2013; Whetten & Cameron, 2020).

Participants were exposed to empirical evidence that demonstrates the impact of positive organizational practices on bottom-line institutional performance as well as on students, staff, and faculty members. In addition, a variety of practical tools including those related to leader–subordinate relationships, supportive communication, culture diagnosis and change, gratitude, contribution and generalized reciprocity, high-quality connections, and positive energy were discussed and demonstrated.

As part of the workshop, participants identified “positive energizers” in each of the 12 geographic regions. Positive energizers are individuals who engender positive relationships, convey enthusiasm, help other people flourish, and can be relied upon to uplift and elevate the climate of their units. The senior executives from each institution worldwide identified 46 positive energizers. These positive energizers were brought together for a three-day intensive workshop on positive leadership and positive organizational practices. Similar to the senior executives in each institution, they were exposed to a variety of positive leadership practices and given a *90-in-90 Challenge*. The challenge was stated as: “90 percent of all staff members throughout the world will be infected with positive leadership and POS in 90 days”. To *infect* meant that individuals could teach or explain POS and positive leadership practices, and they would have attempted a 1% improvement aimed at implementing POS.

After returning from the workshop to their various locations, positive energizers selected additional positive energizers in their various universities to assist them with the 90-in-90 challenge. No centrally prescribed agenda was mandated for how this 90-in-90 challenge was to be approached, and energizers were free to approach the task in whatever ways they felt appropriate. Figure 29.3 illustrates a variety of approaches these various groups used to accomplish the task.

In 90 days, ending in May 2018, 93.3% of the 135,000 staff members had been infected with positive leadership, and more than 120,000 hours of training and workshops had been conducted. Forums, seminars, celebrations, task forces, classroom instruction, coaching, and theatrical productions were developed to accomplish the task. Almost all (99%) of contractors, interns, and temporary employees joined with full-time employees in participating in the activities. In follow-up surveys conducted after the events, 95% of



Fig. 29.3 Approaches developed by the positive energizers to accomplish the 90-in-90 challenge

participants indicated that they would recommend the training to others, and 98% indicated that they gained new knowledge on how they could enhance their institution's performance.

Eight dimensions of positive practices were assessed at the end of the 90-day intervention, which assessed attributes of the overall Laureate organization as rated by staff members. These dimensions include: *Dignity and Respect* (the extent to which the institution fosters dignity and respect for employees), *Meaningfulness and Purpose* (the extent to which the institution emphasizes the significance and higher purpose of the work), *Trust and Integrity* (the extent to which the institution expects and fosters integrity among employees), *Gratitude and Appreciation* (the extent to which the institution demonstrates and encourages gratitude and appreciation of employees), *Caring and Concern* (the extent to which the institution helps employees feel valued and cared for), *Support and Compassion* (the extent to which the institution provides emotional and social support to employees who are struggling), *Forgiveness and Understanding* (the extent to which the institution demonstrates forgiveness and understanding when mistakes are made), and *Inspiration and Positive Energy* (the extent which the institution energizes and inspires employees). Figure 29.4 shows the scores on these dimensions after the POS training compared to the previous benchmark scores. On each dimension, scores had slightly improved in the three-month period.

In addition to the overall institutional strategies that were implemented, 14 different experiments were conducted to assess the impact of POS on

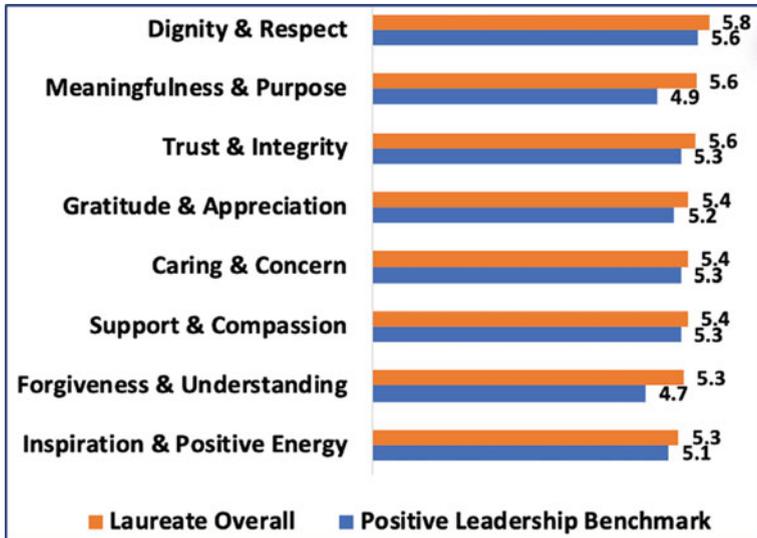


Fig. 29.4 Scores on eight dimensions of positive practices

students in classrooms. In several Laureate universities located in India, Peru, and Spain, instructors across a variety of disciplines volunteered to participate in the study. They agreed to implement a variety of POS practices in their classrooms, but no prescribed curriculum or approach was designated. The disciplines in the study included Accounting, Analytic Design Methods, Architecture, Art, Economics, Education, Human Resources, Nutrition, Physiology, and Statistics. Instructors were exposed to positive leadership practices in a workshop and then asked to incorporate whatever practices they desired in their classrooms. Data were collected comparing the POS classes to previous classes taught by the same instructors the year before. Figure 29.5 provides the comparisons.

In a university in India, student satisfaction scores in the courses that used POS practices were almost a full point higher on a 1–5 scale than courses without a POS approach the year before. In another analysis of six separate classrooms at the same university, average student test scores and grades were significantly higher compared to the year before, and student attendance was 10% higher compared to the instructors' courses the year before. In four separate classrooms in a Spanish university, average student test scores and course grades were half a point higher in the POS classes compared to the previous non-POS classes.

These are not rigorously controlled experiments and clearly a variety of other factors may be at play in accounting for the results. The outcomes do

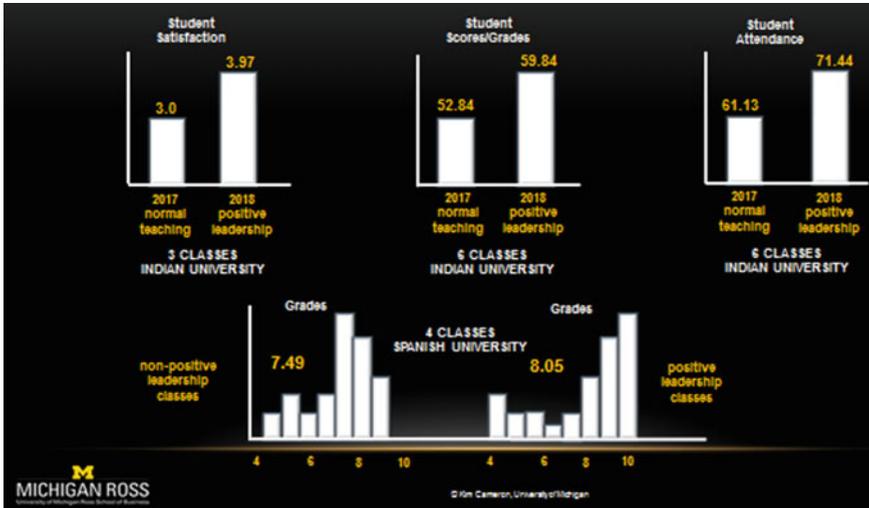


Fig. 29.5 Effects of positive leadership classes on students at universities in India, Peru, and Spain

suggest, however, that positive practices had a non-trivial impact on the institutions and on students in the classroom even across different disciplines and cultures.

## Tecmilenio

A second institutional example of the effects of POS on performance is Tecmilenio University in Monterrey, Mexico (<https://tecmilenio.mx/es>). This institution was founded in 2002 as a spin-off from Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey. Tec Monterrey was created in 1943 with an aspiration to become the MIT of Mexico. Over the years, it achieved the status as the fifth highest ranked university in Latin America (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/monterrey-institute-technology>). As tuition was high and acceptance standards exclusive, a large percent of the Mexican and Central American population did not have access to such a university. Therefore, Tecmilenio was established as a less expensive alternative. The goal was to make higher education, especially technical education, available to a broader portion of the population. Tuition at Tecmilenio was set at 62% below that of Tec Monterrey.

Between its founding in 2002 and 2010, Tecmilenio gradually increased enrolments to approximately three thousand students. The trouble is, after these first few years of successful operation, Tecmilenio's enrolment began to

decline. In 2010, for example, enrolment totalled 3120 students; in 2011, enrolment was 2991 students (−4%); and in 2012, enrolment had fallen to 2844 students (−5%). The institution had a reputation as a low-cost, second-class institution, and annual staff turnover averaged almost 100%. Student retention was only 40%.

The president of Tecmilenio, Hector Escamilla, determined that to turn the institution around, a dramatically different strategy would be required than had been pursued in the past. He hired several key staff members to help him develop and achieve this new strategy. Between 2012 and 2016, the Tecmilenio staff aggressively pursued exposure to experts in positive psychology and POS, including Tal Ben Shahar, Martin Seligman, James Pawelski, Sonja Lyubomirsky, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, David Cooperrider, Jane Dutton, and the author. This exposure led to a new model for the university where students, staff, faculty, and alumni would pursue personal and institutional wellbeing and happiness as the primary outcomes of their higher education experience.

Tecmilenio's formal mission was stated as: "We prepare people to flourish, have a purpose in life, and prepare the skills that can help them achieve their purpose in order to benefit society". This new university model—the creation of the world's first wellbeing and happiness university—was based on three primary characteristics: (1) a customized education experience where students could choose up to 40% of their coursework (which provided substantial flexibility to pursue marketable competencies); (2) learning by doing approach supported by a competency-based education model, co-op semester, laboratories, faculty members from industry, and industry advisory boards for the campus; and (3) providing practical tools that produced wellbeing, life satisfaction, and happiness in the entire Tecmilenio as well as the Monterrey community. The goal was to reflect positive principles in all facilities, messages, products, services, rituals, and behaviours associated with the institution.

Twelve teams were organized that included representatives from each of the major stakeholder groups of the university (students, staff, faculty, alumni, corporations). As a result of an appreciative inquiry process, teams were charged to develop strategies to achieve the following "how might we" questions:

- How might we increase the positive environment that keeps our students motivated and engaged throughout their studies?
- How might we create day-to-day experiences that are consistently positive for our students?

- How might we define and implement the behaviours associated with a culture of wellbeing that is lived by all stakeholders of Tecmilenio?
- How might we engage parents to become more committed to living their lives in a way that is consistent with the principles of POS and positive psychology?
- How might we ensure that all subcontractors to the university interact with us according to the principles of POS, positive psychology, and our ecosystem of wellbeing and happiness?
- How might we design and implement our culture so as to be the best place to work for staff and teachers?
- How might we define and implement a set of behaviours we expect our teachers to adopt as they interact with all our stakeholders?
- How might we develop a strong alumni network peopled with those who continue to support the school, each other, and society as a whole?
- How might we define and measure activities that align with the individual elements of our ecosystem?
- How might we ensure that teachers and staff feel a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the students?
- How might we develop positive deviance in our alumni who will challenge and lead society for the better?

A variety of positive practices were implemented in pursuit of these questions. For example, all students at Tecmilenio are now required to register for two semester-long classes—one on positive psychology and one on positive organizations. All faculty and all staff members engage in two courses on the same topics and must earn a certificate in those two areas. The campus ecosystem has been redesigned so that rooms are named with positive terms (e.g., compassion room, thriving room, innovation room, energy room) rather than numbers. The menu in the cafeteria was changed to reflect positive eating habits and physical wellbeing. A gratitude wall and interactive spaces were created in the central administration building. A happiness week was sponsored for the entire Monterrey community. An alumni association was created and is gathering 100 inspirational stories representing the achievement of happiness and wellbeing of Tecmilenio graduates (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ferlop89/?originalSubdomain=mx>). Ongoing and frequent assessments are conducted to measure the wellbeing and thriving of the community, the institution, and the university's members. Weekly leadership meetings are conducted to review the empirical data gathered on multiple aspects of the university's functioning.

**Table 29.1** Evidence of Tecmilenio's transformation: indicators of success in 2018

Outcome	Percentage (%)
Increase in institution revenues (five years)	1,379
Students employed in a job that fulfils their purpose in life	95
Students who recommend Tecmilenio (net promoter score)	98
Companies that recommend the Tecmilenio internship program	98

In addition, all students receive a personal coach or mentor in their first two years at Tecmilenio, and with the assistance of that personal coach, all students develop a purpose in life statement during their first semester on campus. This statement is revised during the students' second year, and during their senior year, students put the statement into action by engaging in a full-time 480-hour co-op (internship) project. This project requires students to create an intervention for the organization in which they conduct their co-op assignment. The intervention has two primary purposes: (1) It must fulfil the student's purpose in life, and (2) it must apply a positive organizational change in the organization itself.

The results of implementing positive practices and operationalizing a POS philosophy at Tecmilenio have been dramatic. In the last five years, not only has enrolment increased more than 11% per year—as of now enrolment is now 58,000 students—but revenue growth has been significant. As a private university, Tecmilenio produces a return of between 20 and 40%, approximately four times the return of the stock market at its best. Table 29.1 exemplifies the results of Tecmilenio's transformation at the end of the 2018 academic year.

## Key Practices

While these cases occurred in very different institutions, there were several elements that are generalizable across settings and organizational types. The successful implementation of POS and the subsequent improvements in performance at the institutional level are associated with several common practices. Examples include:

- **Visible and enthusiastic support from senior leaders.** These major initiatives require complete dedication from the top of the organization.
- **A challenging, positive, and time-bound goal for implementing POS.** The 90-in-90 challenge, for example, gave the institution a special target and a specific time frame in which to achieve the goal. This was a major

motivating factor. The challenge is to identify the next steps after the initial target is achieved.

- **Immersive training in POS and positive practices that includes large portions of organizational members and strategic constituencies.** As many individuals as possible—especially senior leaders—need to be exposed to evidence supporting the credibility of POS. Examples of practices that have been successfully implemented in other organizations are helpful, but no specific, orchestrated architecture for implementation is needed. Members of the organization are far more innovative and effective than a centralized plan for implementation.
- **The availability of empirical research to bolster the veracity and credibility of the POS principles to be implemented.** It is not unusual for constituencies to initially interpret POS as soupy, touchy-feely, irrelevant, feel-good advice. Providing empirical evidence that positive practices significantly affect bottom-line performance is helpful for gaining acceptance and involvement in implementation.
- **The discretion to try a variety of practices depending on the situation or constituency.** No single prescribed process or set of procedures is universally applicable. Organizations themselves are remarkably adept in determining what works in what circumstances. Costa Rica did not implement POS principles in the same way as did Mexico or New Zealand.
- **The embedding of POS into the culture of the institution (including vision, values, and the physical environment).** This cannot be seen as a program-of-the-month, a fad, or the top leadership's new craze. The reward system, the articulated values, the processes, the physical ecosystem, and the hiring criteria must reflect POS aims.
- **The ongoing collection of data for guiding the implementation of POS practices.** Not only does data gathering help maintain accountability for progress, but decision-making must be informed by ongoing data trends. The data should be made widely available to all constituencies involved in the implementation of POS practices.
- **Unleashing the power of positive energizers.** Selecting individuals who exude enthusiasm, vigour, and passion to help lead the effort helps spread the positive virus much faster. Positive energizers should be used as members of the change team.
- **A central coordinating entity.** At least one individual or office should be the central gathering place for data collection, on-going reporting of best practices, identifying needed resources, and dissemination of progress on an ongoing basis. Keeping the entire community informed on a regular basis is crucial.

## Conclusion

These case studies illustrate the potential benefits of incorporating POS within educational institutions. In interviews and public presentations, leaders in both of these institutions have been clear in attributing the adoption of POS and positive practices to their institutions' positive performance.

Of course, no one intervention or approach to institutional improvement can account for all positive changes in institutions of higher education; a variety of factors are always at play. These two positive examples are not described in order to propose that POS and positive practices are the only important factors that enhanced Laureate's and Tecmilenio's effectiveness. But the cases do provide examples of how, in a relatively short amount of time, dramatic improvement can occur at the organization level of analysis. This is in addition to the impact on students' experience and learning (which has been documented by many others [e.g., Adler, 2016]).

A key message that emerged from these two investigations is that, in addition to the effects of positive psychology on individuals—especially students—the outcomes of entire institutions can be substantially affected in positive directions by adopting POS practices. This means that all constituencies—from contractors and interns to board members and corporations—can be positively influenced by the application of POS in the institution. Because of this institution-level change, therefore, the reach and impact can extend far beyond the effects of an individual classroom.

## References

- Adler, A. (2016). *Teaching well-being increases academic performance: Evidence from Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania). Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3358&context=edissertations>.
- Allan, J. (1996). Learning outcomes in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 21*, 93–108.
- Allport, G. W. (1960). *Becoming: Basic considerations for a psychology of personality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Aristotle. (2018). *Metaphysics XII, 7, 3–4*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Baker, W., Cross, R., & Wooten, L. (2003). Positive organizational network analysis and energizing relationships. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 328–342). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

- Baker, W. B., & Gunderson, R. (2005). *Zingermans community of businesses*. Ross School of Business, Case Center for Positive Organizations, University of Michigan.
- Batson, C. D. (1994). Why act for the public good? Four answers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20, 603–610.
- Bennis, W. (1963). New role for the behavioral sciences: Effecting organizational change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 8(2), 125–165.
- Bennis, W. (1969). *Organizational development: Its nature, origins, and prospects*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Bowen, H. (1977). *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bright, D. S., Cameron, K. S., & Caza, A. (2006). The amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness in downsized organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 64, 249–269.
- Cameron, K. S. (1978). Measuring organizational effectiveness in institutions of higher education. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23, 604–632.
- Cameron, K. S. (1980). Critical questions in assessing organization effectiveness. *Organizational Dynamics*, 9, 66–80.
- Cameron, K. S. (1981). The enigma of organizational effectiveness. In D. Baugher (Ed.), *New directions for program evaluation: Assessing effectiveness* (pp. 1–13). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cameron, K. S. (2003). Organizational virtuousness and performance. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 48–65). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Cameron, K. S. (2008). Paradox in positive organizational change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 44, 7–24.
- Cameron, K. S. (2010). *Organizational effectiveness*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Cameron, K. S. (2012). *Positive leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.
- Cameron, K. S. (2013). *Practicing positive leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.
- Cameron, K. S. (2014). Advances in positive organizational scholarship. In A. B. Bakker (Ed.), *Advances in positive organizational psychology* (pp. 23–44). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Cameron, K. S. (2017). Paradox in positive organizational scholarship. In M. Lewis, W. Smith, P. Jarzabkowski, & A. Langley (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of Paradox (Chapter 11)*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Cameron, K. S., Bright, D., & Caza, A. (2004). Exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47, 766–790.
- Cameron, K. S., & Caza, A. (2002). Organizational and leadership virtues and the role of forgiveness. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9, 33–48.
- Cameron, K. S., & Lavine, M. (2006). *Making the impossible possible: Leading extraordinary performance—The rocky flats story*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.

- Cameron, K. S., & Powley, E. (2008). *Implementing positive organizational scholarship at Prudential*. Ann Arbor, MI: WDI Publishing.
- Cameron, K. S., Dutton, J. E., & Quinn, R. E. (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Cameron, K. S., Mora, C., Leutscher, T., & Calarco, M. (2011). Effects of positive practices on organizational effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47, 266–308.
- Cameron, K. S., & Pews, E. (2012). Positive leadership in action: Applications of positive organizational Scholarship by Jim Mallozzi. *Organizational Dynamics*, 41, 99–105.
- Cameron, K. S., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2012). *Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chun, R. (2005). Ethical character and virtue of organizations: An empirical assessment and strategic implications. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 57, 269–284.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2000). *Influence: The science of persuasion*. New York: Allyn Bacon.
- Clifton, D. O., & Harter, J. K. (2003). Investing in strengths. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 111–121). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Comte-Sponville, A. (2001). *A small treatise of the great virtues* (Trans., C. Temerson). New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In W. Pasmore & E. Woodman (Eds.), *Research in organization change and development* (Vol. 1). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Davis, G. F., & Marquis, C. (2005). Prospects for organizational theory in the early twenty-first century: Institutional fields and mechanisms. *Organization Science*, 16, 332–343.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542–575.
- Diener, E. (2009). *The collected work of Ed Diener—The science of well-being, culture and well-being, and assessing well-being*. New York: Springer.
- Dutton, J. E., & Glynn, M. (2007). Positive organizational scholarship. In C. Cooper & J. Barling (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational behavior*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dutton, J. E., & Glynn, M. (2008). Positive organizational scholarship. In C. Cooper, & J. Barling (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational behavior* (pp. 693–711). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. (2003). The power of high quality connections. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 263–278). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Dutton, J. E., & Sonenshein, S. (2009). Positive organizational scholarship. In S. Lopez (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of positive psychology* (pp. 737–742). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dutton, J. E., Worline, M. C., Frost, P. J., & Lilius, J. M. (2006). Explaining compassion organizing. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 51, 59–96.

- Emmons, R. A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Erhard-Seibold, E. V. (1937). The heliotrope tradition. *Orisis*, 3, 22–46.
- Fowers, B. J., & Tjeltveit, A. C. (2003). Virtue obscured and retrieved: Character, community, and practices in behavioral science. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(4), 387–394.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2009). *Positivity*. New York: Crown.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. *American Psychologist*, 13, 172–175.
- Gallagher, M. W., Lopez, S. J., & Preacher, K. J. (2009). The hierarchical structure of well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 1025–1049.
- Gittell, J. H., Cameron, K., Lim, S., & Rivas, V. (2006). Relationships, layoffs, and organizational resilience: Airline industry responses to September 11. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 42(3), 300–328.
- Godfrey, P. C. (2003). The relationship between corporate philanthropy and shareholder wealth: A risk management perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(4), 777–796.
- Goshal, S. (2005). Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4, 75–91.
- Grant, A. M., & Schwartz, B. (2011). Too much of a good thing: The challenges and opportunity of the Inverted-U. *Perspectives in Psychological Science*, 6(1), 61–76.
- Guzzo, R. A., & Dickson, M. W. (1996). Teams in organizations: Recent research on performance and effectiveness. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47, 307–338.
- Hess, E. D., & Cameron, K. S. (2006). *Leading with values: Positivity, virtue, and high performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ilies, R., Nahrgang, J. D., & Morgeson, F. O. (2007). Leader-member exchange and citizenship behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 269–277.
- Jahoda, M. (1959). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. New York: Basic Books.
- James, W. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. Washington, DC: Library of America.
- Jensen, M. C. (2002). Value maximization, stakeholder theory, and the corporate objective function. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 12, 235–256.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2005). Mental illness and/or mental health? Investigating axioms of the complete state model of health. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 539–548.
- Kramer, R. M. (1999). Trust and distrust in organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 569–598.
- Lee, F., Caza, A., Edmondson, A., & Thomke, St. (2003). New knowledge creation in organizations. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 194–206). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Liu, O. L. (2011a). An overview of outcomes assessment in higher education. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 30, 2–9.

- Liu, O. L. (2011b). Value-added assessment in higher education: A comparison of two methods. *Higher Education*, *61*, 445–461.
- Loeb, J., & Northrop, J. H. (1917). Heliotropic animals as photometers on the basis of the validity of the Bunsen-Roscoe Law for Heliotropic Reactions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *3*, 539–544.
- Losada, M., & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams: A nonlinear dynamics model. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *47*(6), 740–765.
- Luthans, F., Norman, S. M., Avolio, B. J., & Avey, J. B. (2008). The mediating role of psychological capital in the supportive organizational climate–employee performance relationship. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *29*, 219–238.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*(6), 803–855.
- Makhoul, S. (2019). Higher education accreditation, quality assurance and their impact to teaching and learning enhancement. *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, *35*, 235–250.
- Maslow, A. (1965). *Eupsychian management: A journal*. Homewood, IL: Irwin-Dorsey.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- McCullough, M. E., & Snyder, C. R. (2001). Classical sources of human strength: Revisiting an old home and building a new one. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *19*, 1–10.
- McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Moore, G., & Beadle, R. (2006). In search of organizational virtue in business: Agents, goods, practices, institutions, and environments. *Organization Studies*, *27*, 369–389.
- Northrop, J. H., & Loeb, J. (1923). The photochemical basis of animal heliotropism. *Journal of General Physiology*, *5*, 581–595.
- Organ, D. W. (1988). *Organizational citizenship behavior: The good soldier syndrome*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. M. (2003). Virtues and organizations. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 33–47). San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pfeffer, J. (2010). Building sustainable organizations: The human factor. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *8*, 34–45.
- Podsakoff, P. M., Mackenzie, S. B., Paine, J. B., & Bachrach, D. G. (2000). Organizational citizenship behaviors: A critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature and suggestions for future research. *Journal of Management*, *26*, 513–563.
- Powley, E. H., & Piderit, K. (2008). Tending wounds: Elements of the organizational healing process. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *44*(1), 134–149.

- Pursglove, J., & Simpson, M. (2007). Benchmarking the performance of English universities. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *14*, 102–122.
- Quinn, R. W. (2002). Flow in knowledge work: High performance experience in the design of national security technology. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *50*, 610–642.
- Sandage, S. J., & Hill, P. C. (2001). The virtues of positive psychology: The rapprochement and challenges of the affirmative postmodern perspective. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, *31*, 241–260.
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A reevaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *67*(6), 1063–1078.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, *35*, 293–311.
- Smith, P. C., Kendall, L. M., & Hulin, C. L. (1969). *The measurement of satisfaction in work and retirement*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization Science*, *16*(5), 537–549.
- Spreitzer, G. M., & Sonenshein, S. (2003). Positive deviance and extraordinary performance. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 207–224). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Sutcliffe, K. M., & Vogus, T. J. (2003). Organizing for resilience. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 94–110). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Thrash, T. M., & Elliot, A. J. (2003). Inspiration as a psychological construct. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(4), 871–889.
- Tutu, D. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.
- Vanette, D., Cameron, K. S., & Powley, E. (2006). *Implementing positive organizational scholarship at Prudential*. Michigan: Ross School of Business, Center for Positive Organizations.
- Vianello, M., Galliani, E. M., & Haidt, J. (2010). Elevation at work: The effects of leaders' moral excellence. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, *4*, 105–127.
- Waters, L., Sun, J., Rusk, R., Cotton, A., & Arch, A. (2015). Well-being and positive functioning in students. In M. Slade, L. Oades, & A. Jarden (Eds.), *Wellbeing, recovery, and mental health* (pp. 245–264). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Weber, M. (1997). *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York: Free Press.
- Weick, K. E. (2003). Positive organizing and organizational tragedy. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 66–80). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

- Whetten, D. A. (1980). Organizational decline. *Academy of Management Review*, 5, 577–588.
- Whetten, D. A., & Cameron, K. S. (2020). *Developing management skills* (10th ed.). London: Pearson.
- White, M., & Murray, S. (2015). *Evidence based approaches in positive education*. London: Springer.
- Worline, M. C., & Quinn, R. W. (2003). Courageous principled action. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 138–158). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Worthington, E. L. (2001). Unforgiveness, forgiveness, and reconciliation and their implications for societal interventions. In R. G. Helmick & R. L. Petersen (Eds.), *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Religion, public policy, and conflict transformation* (pp. 161–182). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Wright, T. A., & Goodstein, J. (2007). Character is not dead in management research: A review of individual character and organization-level virtue. *Journal of Management*, 33, 928–948.
- Wrzesniewski, A. (2003). Finding positive meaning in work. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 296–308). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# Part IV

## Conclusion



# 30

## Conclusion

Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer

What is positive education? Is it a refocusing of the intentions of education? Is it the application of positive psychology in education? Is it a program, curriculum, or broader perspective? Is the focus on students or others in the educational community? Is it about bringing out the optimal functioning and development for each individual within a learning community? What role does pedagogy play? Is it a movement, an intriguing fad, a possibility, or something else? The chapters in this Handbook have wrestled with these questions—perhaps not providing answers but at least providing thoughtful and critical discourse. Embracing plurality, chapters have included insights, perspectives, research, models, and applications of scholars, educators, and practitioners who are shaping the dynamic positive education areas across a diverse range of topics.

As noted in the Introduction (Chapter 1), this Handbook arose from efforts to create a community around positive education and to begin to fulfil the mission and vision of that community. The educational division of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPAed) has the mission to:

---

M. L. Kern (✉)

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

e-mail: [Peggy.kern@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Peggy.kern@unimelb.edu.au)

M. L. Wehmeyer

University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

e-mail: [wehmeyer@ku.edu](mailto:wehmeyer@ku.edu)

bridge research and practice related to the application of positive psychology in formal and informal educational settings at all levels and all ages, including early education, primary, secondary, tertiary, and beyond. The Division strives to facilitate collaboration amongst members from around the world, support high quality research, translate research into practice in an ethical manner, foster open dialogue, and promote the sharing of knowledge and resources amongst academics, researchers, practitioners, educators, and students worldwide.

We hope that this Handbook begins to address this mission. Moving forward, we pose a series of questions that can both illustrate our progress and document future needs:

1. Has positive education been promulgated in formal and informal educational settings at all levels and all ages, including early years, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational training, and lifelong learning?
2. Has the plurality of theories, models, methods, and perspectives relevant to positive education been considered, developed, and accepted?
3. Is there a clear integration of the strengths of *both* positive psychology and education?
4. Are knowledge and resources available that empower *all* individuals and educational communities worldwide to create and shape people and environments that flourish?
5. Is there ethical, high-quality research that translates research into practice, safeguarding the science from illegitimate uses?
6. Does research adequately address the lived reality of educators?
7. Does the field include scholars and practitioners interested in education from diverse, interdisciplinary backgrounds?
8. Is consideration given to the broader cultural, political, and ethical paradigms shaping educational practice?

The answer to most of these questions is, clearly and somewhat unhelpfully, yes *and* no. The chapters included in this Handbook amply illustrate that positive education efforts are underway in educational settings across ages and grades, though perhaps with more of an emphasis in primary and, to a slightly lesser degree, secondary settings. As the curriculum becomes increasingly specialized and complex as students get older, does a focus on wellbeing give way to a focus primarily on grades and test scores? Given the well-established importance of early education, there is an opportunity for the field to consider in greater depth the role of positive education in early

education years. Benefit may also arise by further incorporating parents, policymakers, and other community members into positive education efforts. And, as was discussed in the opening chapter, to what degree are public schools, and particularly from larger or urban school districts, enabled to implement positive education?

Certainly, the chapters in this Handbook provide evidence of a plurality of theories, models, methods, and perspectives relevant to positive education. Several themes arise through the chapters. Multiple chapters speak to the complexity of positive education. It is not simply positive psychology applied to education. Any efforts to do so immediately must wrestle with the reality of the educational environment. Well-established interventions fall apart in light of the diverse needs of students and teachers. Adaptations are needed—at times well studied and documented, at other times ad hoc in nature, speaking to the need for ongoing intersections of research and practice. Early advances were made in specific populations, but the area is moving to consideration of questions around equity, inclusivity, and contextualization. We are wrestling with challenging issues, requiring creativity, interdisciplinary dialogue, diverse perspectives, and the willingness to explore, be wrong, and keep testing what works, for whom, under what conditions, and how.

Pointing to the emphasis of positive education on the “science” of positive psychology, issues of assessment, evaluation, and measurement repeatedly arose. This suggests a commitment to positive education not simply comprising the ad hoc application of different activities, curricula, or approaches, but the need to continually, systematically, and rigorously study and evaluate the impact of the actions that we engage in. As methodologies continue to evolve, new opportunities arise from technology, and the need to address the needs of diverse populations increases, it will be important to continue to draw upon approaches that maintain rigour, while being flexible to the context and people involved.

Although each chapter has a particular focus, many of the chapters repeatedly emphasized the importance of incorporating, supporting, and focusing on several common characteristics, including basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), mindset, character strengths, coping skills, empathy, engagement, gratitude, social relationships, emotions, kindness, meaning and purpose, mindfulness, school culture, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and wellbeing literacy, along with a number of more specific topics. These can be considered core ingredients of positive education—the skills that we hope to develop within our educational communities. These topics consistently appear within various positive education curricula, and

chapters point to their value in not only supporting the holistic development of young people, but the wellbeing of all within the community.

These various ingredients, for the most part, focus on the skills and attributes of the person, which various positive education efforts aim to cultivate. Priority is given to human agency and characteristics within the person that are changeable and controllable. Yet we must not forget the importance of the social and environmental context in which individuals exist. An overemphasis on individual skills and attributes can negate the significant impact that external situations and experiences create. Even the most skilled individuals will breakdown under enough pressure. If ignored, then experiences of mental illness and breakdown result in victimizing the person. Multiple chapters speak to the impact of trauma, disadvantage, cultural contexts, socio-economic pressures, and broader systemic pressures. True inequities exist throughout our educational systems. As positive education matures, it must wrestle with these challenges.

Research and application in positive education is in its early days. The chapters included here speak to the possibilities and potential of the positive education perspective, and together speak to the yet unimagined future of what positive education might become. From the work included in this Handbook, we are excited about what that future might be.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



# Index

## A

- academic performance 23, 30–32, 63–65, 70, 123, 231, 274, 281, 282, 284, 286, 287, 428, 452, 528, 539, 540, 555, 609, 620, 626, 650, 662, 741
- accomplishment 80, 127, 402, 462, 464, 561, 705, 709, 710, 721
- appreciative inquiry 37, 746, 756
- assessment 10, 29, 30, 59, 64–67, 69, 70, 129, 130, 172, 215, 260, 297–301, 303–309, 316, 318, 319, 338, 348, 386, 396, 410, 446, 626, 633, 684, 692, 693, 771
- autonomy 9, 13, 82, 88, 227, 229–231, 233–240, 244, 245, 276, 358, 359, 431, 433, 447, 455, 457, 458, 480, 484, 528, 534, 617, 683–686, 723, 731, 771

## B

- benefit mindset 12, 494, 499–501, 503, 504, 506–515, 519
- brain breaks 216, 217, 429, 433, 434, 455
- broaden and build 157, 277, 422, 429, 452, 457

## C

- capabilities 1, 3, 6, 10–12, 26, 110, 112, 113, 123, 124, 325–327, 330, 335, 336, 339, 340, 347, 352, 359, 464, 541, 616, 748
- career guidance 9, 252, 253, 256, 257, 259–262, 265, 266
- character education 6, 7, 24, 27, 29, 50, 52, 66, 88, 90, 91, 95, 97, 111, 168, 169, 281, 339, 399, 400
- character strengths 11, 29–31, 35, 38, 42, 50, 51, 58, 66, 80, 142, 166, 168, 175, 206, 212, 213, 216, 217, 279, 280, 283, 302, 396–406, 408–412,

414, 454, 506, 552, 557, 562,  
566–568, 571, 583, 586–589,  
705, 707, 709, 749, 771

civics education 95–97

classroom culture 174, 209, 210,  
215

coaching 7, 22, 24–27, 31, 34–42,  
128, 142, 143, 217, 752

Collaborative for Academic Social  
and Emotional Learning  
(CASEL) 28, 116, 123

competence 9, 28, 83, 123, 124,  
229–231, 233, 234, 236, 237,  
239, 244, 276, 346, 349, 351,  
356, 358, 359, 423, 431, 433,  
457, 458, 464, 483, 528, 533,  
534, 612, 616, 617, 630, 705,  
711, 720, 721, 749, 771

complexity 4, 7, 9, 12, 125, 129,  
131, 132, 171, 251, 253, 255,  
414, 496, 532, 720, 721, 771

contemplative practices 12, 27, 281,  
595, 610

coping 10, 32, 110, 124, 255, 263,  
347, 348, 350–353, 355,  
357, 361, 370–378, 381–383,  
386–388, 422, 424, 425, 611,  
613, 623, 628, 629, 632, 662,  
710, 771

COVID-19 pandemic 5, 21, 22,  
110, 129, 131

creative learning 11, 473–487

creativity 169, 424, 432, 442, 458,  
473, 474, 476, 479–482,  
485–487, 497, 500, 554, 564,  
620, 633, 706, 707

culture 13, 25, 36, 40, 131, 218,  
264, 287, 348, 369, 424, 444,  
461, 494, 507, 594, 622, 646,  
651, 656, 657, 662, 663, 675,  
677, 679, 683, 689–691, 694,  
749–752, 772

## D

disadvantaged students 13, 646,  
651–654, 662, 667, 772

## E

emotional intelligence 61, 126, 275,  
276, 281, 370

emotion regulation 92, 315, 567,  
625, 689

empathy 27, 116, 126, 257, 328,  
375, 383, 388, 406, 460, 591,  
614, 615, 625, 628, 629, 653,  
656, 659, 664, 683, 771

engagement 26, 30, 35, 36, 38,  
40, 41, 50, 62, 63, 80, 95,  
98, 123, 127, 143, 146, 150,  
156, 219, 230, 235, 239, 276,  
279, 301, 358, 370, 388, 398,  
402–405, 407, 414, 443–446,  
451, 454, 457, 458, 467, 482,  
498, 528, 531, 534, 536, 537,  
540, 557, 560, 561, 582, 614,  
655, 705, 708–711, 721, 722,  
745, 771

eudaimonic wellbeing 275, 276,  
301, 677, 683, 692

## F

fixed mindset 11, 31, 155, 497, 499,  
503, 504, 507–509, 511–513,  
515

flourishing 3, 10, 21–23, 25–27, 29,  
33, 66, 80, 113, 167, 168,  
229, 274–277, 279, 282–284,  
287, 301, 309, 327, 340, 354,  
407, 430, 467, 551, 552, 581,  
628, 653, 705, 742–744, 748

flow 423, 430, 452, 458, 509, 747

## G

- Geelong Grammar School (GGS)  
2, 22, 58, 62, 285, 302, 452,  
556, 620, 706
- gratitude 5, 30, 38, 80, 111, 112,  
156, 169, 173, 276, 278, 280,  
301, 307, 338, 422, 500, 552,  
562, 566, 567, 614, 615, 625,  
706, 707, 709, 749, 752, 753,  
757, 771
- growth mindset 7, 11, 24, 27, 31,  
32, 36, 42, 155, 156, 216,  
494, 497–499, 503, 504,  
506–515, 566, 568, 585, 708

## H

- hedonic wellbeing 4, 275, 301, 677,  
678, 680, 682, 683, 687
- higher education 13, 14, 30, 207,  
260, 262, 403, 526, 538–540,  
569, 609, 626, 655, 661,  
741–743, 745, 749, 750, 755,  
756, 760
- High Quality Connections (HQCs)  
304, 307, 460, 744, 752
- holistic development 6, 12, 111,  
534, 718

## I

- International Positive Psychology  
Association (IPPA) 14, 40, 52,  
769

## K

- kindness 114, 156, 169, 398, 500,  
515, 552, 562, 566, 568,  
583, 589, 611, 613, 623, 625,  
628–630, 632, 657, 659, 706,  
771

## L

- life design 9
- life satisfaction 61, 63, 80, 81, 84,  
273, 275, 276, 280, 283, 285,  
301, 303, 304, 354, 358, 398,  
399, 554, 555, 629–631, 680,  
690–692, 709, 710, 721, 756

## M

- mastery 28, 31, 70, 231, 234, 276,  
335, 348, 354, 358, 427, 456,  
457, 463, 464, 509, 533, 536,  
569, 615, 617, 676, 683–686
- meaning and purpose 9, 50, 80, 215,  
460, 551, 552, 555, 566, 583,  
705, 709, 721, 771
- meaning in life 4, 12, 275, 276, 460,  
461, 551–553, 556–558, 560,  
562, 564, 565, 567–573, 710
- measurement 61, 62, 67, 298, 299,  
302, 310, 337, 388, 531, 539,  
684, 693, 694, 732, 744, 771
- meditation 12, 434, 582, 585, 595,  
598, 611, 620, 622, 625
- mental toughness 7, 21, 27, 33, 34,  
36, 42, 568
- mindfulness 5, 12, 27, 50, 51, 58,  
61, 66, 68, 70, 111, 112, 139,  
141, 142, 156, 206, 216, 281,  
307, 328, 330, 335, 378, 434,  
506, 508, 557, 566, 567, 583,  
595–598, 600, 609–615, 617,  
620, 622–633, 651, 690, 709,  
711, 712, 720, 771

## N

- negative emotions 275, 277, 279,  
351, 353, 354, 358, 374, 421,  
422, 430, 457, 460, 689, 705,  
708, 771

## P

pastoral care 111, 205, 339, 589  
 pedagogy 6, 8, 9, 12, 32, 60, 111, 126, 138–144, 155–158, 165–167, 169, 171, 199, 226, 302, 326, 335, 337, 339, 452, 507, 533, 626, 632, 651, 666, 707, 710, 769  
 PERMAH 23, 33, 37, 302, 304  
 playfulness 11, 329, 421, 423–425, 428, 431–433, 435, 617  
 Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) 6  
 Positive Education Schools Association (PESA) 40, 301, 318  
 Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) 23, 28, 38, 80, 143, 277, 301, 402, 452, 454, 456, 464, 467, 556, 705, 708, 725  
 positive emotions 11, 28, 112, 157, 215, 276–278, 280, 283, 351–355, 358, 374, 402, 421–424, 428–435, 454–458, 460, 463, 566, 622, 651, 656, 678, 685, 705, 708, 709, 771  
 Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) 14, 742  
 positive psychology interventions 3, 4, 34–36, 60, 167, 206, 213, 217, 327, 335, 498  
 positive spirituality 12, 583, 584, 586, 597  
 Positive Youth Development (PYD) 7, 50, 75, 123, 397, 632  
 Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement, and Resilience (PROSPER) 277, 302  
 professional practice 34, 165–172, 174, 175, 199  
 psychological safety 91, 656

## R

reflective practice 8, 166, 168–171, 173, 174, 412  
 relatedness 9, 82, 229–231, 233, 234, 236, 237, 239, 356, 358, 359, 398, 431, 433, 458, 459, 461, 510, 528, 533, 617, 683, 771  
 relationships 12, 25, 27, 29, 34, 39, 58, 79, 80, 83, 87, 90–92, 100, 127, 128, 130, 139, 140, 142, 152, 157, 158, 169, 208–211, 213–215, 218, 231, 233, 236, 239, 278, 280–283, 304, 339, 346, 350, 353, 356–358, 361, 381, 388, 402, 406, 411, 413, 430, 454, 459–461, 509, 510, 515, 526–529, 531–538, 540, 541, 561, 567, 568, 571, 589, 591, 616, 645, 646, 648, 650–652, 655, 657–659, 661, 665–667, 678, 683, 684, 686, 687, 690, 705, 708–710, 720–722, 731, 745, 752, 771  
 resilience 6, 7, 10, 21, 27, 30, 33, 34, 40, 50, 124, 156, 256, 281, 283, 315, 346–350, 352, 353, 355, 357–362, 370, 527, 552, 555, 559, 561, 567, 591, 594, 609, 613–615, 622, 624, 627–629, 631–633, 650, 651, 656, 665, 667, 709, 710, 720

## S

school belonging 12, 358, 525, 526, 528, 529, 531–534, 536, 537, 539, 541, 651  
 school climate 61, 62, 68, 70, 89, 282, 507, 536, 614, 633, 648, 652, 666  
 school culture 23, 30, 37, 39, 41, 57–59, 126, 128, 170, 174,

- 282, 284, 286, 387, 408, 409,  
431, 515, 526, 614, 622, 633,  
648, 653, 654, 662, 706, 710,  
720, 728, 757, 771
- school leaders 5, 24, 25, 35, 37, 38,  
111, 124, 171, 199, 206, 526,  
537, 538, 541, 662, 721
- school leadership 37, 38, 40, 42,  
128, 718, 723
- school policy 205, 711
- self-awareness 28, 116, 208, 239,  
402, 582, 586, 591, 593, 613,  
615, 620, 622, 627, 632, 651,  
656, 662
- self-compassion 612, 613, 629, 632
- self-control 38, 83, 282, 350–352,  
355, 358–361, 371, 583
- self-determination 9, 82, 87, 226,  
228, 229, 231–234, 238–240,  
243, 244, 261, 358, 359, 457,  
683
- Self-Determination Theory (SDT)  
82, 228, 229, 431, 528, 684
- self-efficacy 30, 34, 93, 116, 350–  
353, 355, 356, 382, 435, 443,  
456, 462–464, 559, 622, 627,  
629, 656, 720, 771
- self-regulation 30, 31, 35, 78, 87,  
141, 169, 209, 230, 239, 243,  
281, 398, 425, 445, 457, 568,  
615, 625, 632, 706, 771
- service learning 91, 97–99
- Social and Emotional Learning  
(SEL) 6, 24, 27, 28, 50, 87,  
88, 111, 211, 281, 339, 357,  
370, 388, 402, 536, 616, 624,  
626, 627, 651, 655
- staff wellbeing 40, 41, 715, 719, 722
- student wellbeing 5, 14, 23, 26,  
137–142, 144, 147, 155, 166,  
167, 239, 283, 337, 338, 456,  
467, 486, 663, 741, 749
- systems informed approach 6–8,  
10, 11, 111, 113, 116, 123,  
125–127, 129, 131, 157, 306,  
308, 309, 315, 336, 339, 396,  
402, 403, 407, 409, 412, 414,  
508, 518, 748, 772
- Systems Informed Positive  
Psychology (SIPP) 60,  
113, 157
- T**
- taught and caught curriculum 6, 50,  
59
- teacher wellbeing 13, 26, 217, 219,  
486, 715–718, 720, 722, 723,  
726, 728
- thriving 3, 7, 8, 40, 83, 85, 86, 301,  
354, 404, 562, 573, 744, 757
- trauma informed 8, 11, 141, 209,  
514, 772
- Trauma-Informed Positive Education  
(TIPE) 27, 142, 206, 213,  
214, 218, 219
- 21<sup>st</sup> century skills 169, 441, 442,  
444, 449, 450
- V**
- Values in Action (VIA) 8, 29, 166,  
279, 396, 424, 583
- Visible Wellbeing (VWB) 67, 142,  
144, 302
- Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and  
Ambiguous (VUCA) 21, 42,  
424
- W**
- wellbeing literacy 10, 165, 275, 309,  
325–327, 329, 330, 335–340,  
771