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ENHANCING WELL-BEING IN YOUTH

Positive Psychology Interventions for Education in Britain

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INTRODUCTION

Within the U.K., there is a growing concern about the well-being of children and adolescents. For example, a comprehensive assessment of the lives and well-being of children and adolescents in economically advanced nations conducted by UNICEF in 2007 lists the U.K. at the bottom of a list of 21 developed nations on five dimensions (i.e., material and educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviors and risks, subjective well-being) of assessed child well-being (UNICEF, 2007). The Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) agenda stressed schools' responsibility to promote students' well-being (Challen, Noden, West, & Machin, 2011). The Children Act 2004 "[i]ncludes duties to improve well-being and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people" (DfES, 2004, p. 20) until they are 19. Moreover, research on trends in adolescent mental health indicate that the number of children with emotional and behavioral problems in the U.K. substantially increased during a 25 year (1974–1999) period (Collishwa, S., Maughan, B., Goodman, & Pickles, 2004).

The overall state of children's well-being with the U.K. was recently published in *The Good Childhood Report 2012* (The Children's Society, 2012), the first in a series of annual reports on well-being data collected since 2005. This report indicated that although most children are happy with their lives as a whole, approximately 1 in 11 (9%) are not. This equates to approximately half a million children in the U.K. between the ages of 8 and 15 who have low well-being at any given time. Moreover, this research suggests that children's well-being does not vary much according to individual or family characteristics, that there are few differences in well-being for boys and girls and for children living in different types of households, and that well-being declines with age, with approximately

4% of children aged 8 years having low well-being compared to 14% of adolescents aged 15 years—findings that are consistent with those reported in the literature (see Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009, for reviews). Furthermore, these factors have been found to account little for the wide variations that exists.

The research reported in *The Good Childhood Report 2012* was generated by the Children's Society, a charitable organization that campaigns and conducts research on children's well-being in an effort to influence policy and improve child protection. Data presented were gathered using their Good Childhood Index, which includes measurement of overall well-being in 10 key areas: family, home, money and possessions, friendships, school, health, appearance, time use, choice and autonomy, and the future. The reported research findings not only shed light on the state of well-being among Britain's young people but are also in keeping with findings reported in the research literature, suggesting the generalizability of the results. In the paragraphs that follow, these results are summarized and examples of corresponding research literature are presented (see The Children's Society, 2012).

WHAT AFFECTS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING IN BRITAIN?

While all the included aspects are important, similar to findings reported in the literature (see Proctor et al., 2009, for a review), results indicated that children's relationship with parents is the most important component of well-being, irrespective of family structure, and that stability of family structure is of utmost importance; those who experience a change in family structure were found to be twice as likely to experience low well-being (cf. Demo & Acock, 1996; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Grossman & Rowat, 1995).

The home environment also plays a critical role, with safety, poverty, and frequent moves having an adverse impact on children's well-being (cf. Brown & Orthner, 1990; Homel & Burns, 1989). Related to these findings, lack of money and possessions also adversely impacts well-being, with children living in the poorest 20% of households having much lower well-being than average; above average there is little difference in levels of well-being (cf. Wilson et al., 1997). Friends also appear to play an important role in well-being, with number and quality of relationships having an impact. For example, 6% of children reported they felt they did not have enough friends, which was linked to lower well-being, and those who experience bullying are six times more likely to have low well-being than those who have not been bullied at all (cf. Asher & Hopmeyer, 1997; Diener et al., 2010; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Rigby, 2000). Satisfaction with school, schoolwork, and safety at school are also important aspects, with 80% reporting that doing well at school is very important and 7% reporting that they feel unsafe at school (cf. Park, 2005; Valois, Paxton, Zullig, & Huebner, 2006). Children's well-being is also related to their physical health, with those who rate their health as "very bad" being more likely than those who are happy with their health to be living in poor households (cf. Zullig, Valois, Huebner, & Drane, 2005). Satisfaction with appearance is also an important factor, one that increases with age, with 32% of boys and 56% of girls being worried about appearance by the age of 15; children who are unhappy with their appearance are also much more likely to be the victims of bullying (cf. Blom-Hoffman, Edwards George, & Franko, 2006; Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2003).

Results also indicated that children who feel they spend too little time with family and friends or too little time with friends and too much time with family experience low well-being. Also, decreased feelings of autonomy were found to be related to low well-being, suggesting a mismatch between children's wishes and expectations and experience of choice. Finally, although most young children report that they feel positive about their future, 10% do not. Moreover, girls are less likely than boys to be optimistic, and children tend to feel less positive as they grow older; also there is a link between poverty and expectations, with only 40% of children from poor households indicating that they hope to go to university.

Overall, the report notes six key themes to their research findings and suggests that decision makers in Parliament, central government, and local areas use these six priority areas as a checklist in assessing any given policy on children's well-being. On the top of the list of "what children need" is "the conditions to learn and develop," which includes having opportunities for free play, a high-quality and appropriate education, and positive relationships with teachers. Second on the list is "a positive view of themselves and an identity that is respected," which includes being comfortable with their appearance, being physically and mentally healthy, and being respected and valued for who they are. In keeping with the Department of Education's Every Child Matters agenda, schools are an ideal places for initiatives to satisfy these two top priorities.

PROMOTING POSITIVE WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS

Recently researchers of positive psychology have asked, "Should well-being be taught in school?" (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009, p. 294). According to Seligman and colleagues (2009), the answer is yes, not only because increased well-being is synergistic with better learning but also because increased well-being and happiness are outcomes that parents most want for their children. Moreover, although most young people report that they are happy, it is not necessarily the case that they are flourishing—that is, filled with positive emotion and functioning well psychologically and socially (Diener & Diener, 1996; Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000). Indeed, parents want more for their children than just the avoidance of negative behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, violence, bullying, depression); they want their children to be happy and to thrive in all domains of life (Moore & Lippman, 2005). Unfortunately, however, as already noted, there are a significant number of children and adolescents who are unhappy and dissatisfied with life. Because healthy psychological states, such as happiness and well-being, are both the cause and consequence of diverse positive personal, behavioral, psychological, and social outcomes (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), it is vital to understand how to boost those who are languishing and unhappy to a more optimal state of functioning (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) while protecting those with positive levels from diminishing.

Schools are ideal places for well-being initiatives, especially considering that children spend the majority of their weekday in school and much of their day-to-day interactions affecting their well-being occur while at school (Seligman et al., 2009). Indeed, national education strategies, such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), have been implemented so that emotional and personal well-being can be taught overtly through existing curriculum courses such as Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE).

Driven in part by the positive psychology movement, attention is now turning to what might be done to make schools happy places (Linley & Proctor, in press; Noddings, 2003). Unfortunately, however, despite nationwide efforts to promote well-being among young people over the last decade, reports (e.g., as reviewed above) on the state of well-being within the U.K. suggest their effectiveness may be in question.

Concerns over the effectiveness of such nationwide efforts to promote well-being point to many of these initiatives being too prescriptive, with a focus on informing students what to do and what not to do instead of fostering good character through practicing and modeling moral behavior (Park & Peterson, 2009). A promising alternative to increasing well-being among young people in school is through positive psychology interventions (intentional activities that aim to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognitions; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Indeed, exploratory investigations into the teaching of well-being in school through the application of positive psychology interventions and theory have led to reliable improvements in students' well-being and life satisfaction (e.g., Proctor et al., 2011; for reviews see Seligman et al., 2009; Waters, 2011).

The remainder of this chapter reviews school-based positive psychology interventions in Britain, which are outside of the context of national well-being strategies implemented by the U.K. government and are not typically associated with positive psychology. In the section that follows, nine examples of curriculum-based programs implemented in Britain are reviewed in detail, including examples of interventions in Scotland and Ireland.

SCHOOL-BASED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) have been successfully applied in educational settings and resulted in positive behavioral, social, psychological, and academic outcomes among adolescent students. Such interventions and strategies come in various diverse forms and include a wide array of activities. In general, however, PPIs can be conceptualized as either single-component PPIs that focus on one key strength, such as gratitude, or multicomponent PPIs that integrate several positive psychology concepts (Green & Norrish, 2013).

Examples of Curriculum-Based Single-Component PPIs

Making Listening Special

Making Listening Special is a project being run at the Milestone School in Gloucestershire. This project is part of the Listening to Young Children Strategy, which is committed to hearing the voices of young children and enabling these voices to shape services. Milestone School is a special school for children aged 2 to 16 years who have a mixture of special needs. The project uses teaching approaches adapted from *Gentle Teaching* (McGee & Menolascino, 1991), an approach to helping those with special needs that has an explicit focus on well-being (Fox Eades, Proctor, & Ashley, 2013). The project recognizes that children learn to be strong and independent from a base of secure relationships and that for children with autism and complex learning difficulties, creating a safe and secure environment is an important prerequisite to their learning (Thompson, 2009). The class group that took part included six reception children with autism and

severe learning difficulties and involved three staff supporting the children at any one time. The project aimed to achieve the following outcomes for the children:

- To feel happy and safe within their new classroom environment—increasing confidence and self-esteem
- To feel like a valued member of the class group—wanting to be with others and feeling relaxed in interactions with others
- To feel a good sense of self-worth—increasing confidence in participation and cooperation
- To understand they are special and valued through the response of adults to their individual needs—feeling a sense of companionship, having a close circle of friends, and respecting others and being respected by others
- To feel inner contentment—feeling inner harmony, free from traumatic experiences
- To have meaningful daily activities—enjoying daily life and having daily activities that incorporate their special needs and interests
- To begin to experience daily structure—having daily routines and having their individual beliefs and rituals respected by others

The staff skillfully put the individual strengths and abilities of the students at the heart of student learning and created a personalized curriculum rather than making the students fit into an imposed curriculum. Assessment of the project was accomplished using a variety of methods, including photographs, observations, discussions with staff and parents, and school assessment procedures. Results indicated that teaching was enhanced by teacher development of the following abilities:

- Be engaged or "fully present" in all interactions with the children—being there for the children with clarity of mind and fully focused attention
- Be unconditionally accepting—value the children for who they are, which involves giving them space to be themselves
- "Let go" of assumptions and be open to listen. Allocate equal worth to the children and listening with the intent to understand
- Teach not only with mind but also with heart—teaching with love, kindness, and compassion
- Foster a sense of belonging, enabling the children to achieve inner states of harmony and ease
- Provide serenity of approach—giving time for reflection and being sensitive to the inner world of individual children's special needs
- Believing in the children—grounded in respects and understanding

In effectively achieving these outcomes in the classroom, the staff recognized the importance of the students as "experts" in their own lives and focused on individuals' preferred activities to increase positive emotions and improve learning (Fox Eades et al., 2013). Areas of difficulty were approached by drawing on individual strengths and by giving students choice. Overall outcomes included positive changes to both the individual classroom and the wider school environment.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an intentional self-regulated state of attention on the present moment involving an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness meditation is a form of meditation that involves acknowledgment and observation of constantly changing internal and external stimuli as they arise, thereby allowing one to relate opening with one's experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Huppert and Johnson (2010) examined the results of mindfulness training in a classroom setting among adolescent boys from two English private boys' schools. Students in the intervention group participated as part of their religious instruction classes and completed four mindfulness lessons over a 4-week period (Waters, 2011). Groups were compared on measures of mindfulness, resilience, and psychological well-being. Although differences between the two groups failed to reach significance, among the mindfulness group there was a significant positive association between outside-the-classroom individual mindfulness practice and improvements in psychological well-being and mindfulness (Huppert & Johnson, 2010). Overall, most students reported that they enjoyed and benefited from the training, and 74% indicated that they would like to continue to practice mindfulness in the future.

Examples of Curriculum-Based Multicomponent PPIs

Wellington College

Since 2006, Wellington College in Berkshire has been implementing a happiness and well-being course for their fourth- and fifth-form students; courses are also provided for their third- and lower sixth-form students. The aim of the course is to promote flourishing and excellence among young people by educating them on how to capitalize upon their strengths and potentialities (Wellington College, 2012). The course is based on six elements that serve to promote well-being:

1. Physical health—foundations of well-being and physical health
2. Positive relationships—relationships with other people
3. Perspective—building resilience and developing thinking skills to overcome adversity
4. Strengths—identifying character strengths and abilities and applying them in daily life
5. World—living sustainably and considering our place in the world
6. Meaning and purpose—exploring meaning making and our response to the questions life asks of us

Each strand contains examples of dispositions that can be explicitly taught and also reflected across the whole school community (Morris, 2013). During the first 3 years of school, students receive 1 hour every other week of well-being instruction. These lessons involve teaching the students skills and cognitive methods they can use to enhance their well-being in life. The students also benefit from a series of lectures from inspiring speakers designed to help them reflect on making the most of their lives. Moreover,

mindfulness has been an integral part of the well-being program at Wellington since it began, and short meditations form part of the well-being lessons. Overall, the approach to teaching well-being at Wellington is one of activity or habituation, an approach most closely associated with Aristotle—that is, that happiness arises from doing things well, by striving for personal excellence. At Wellington they believe that schools should be "educating for happiness"; that is, they should be providing a formal curriculum that enables children to acquire, develop, and exercise their strengths and talents and foster their decision-making skills so that children can experience what makes them happy.

Celebrating Strengths

At the primary school level, Celebrating Strengths (Fox Eades, 2008) is an approach that takes a holistic school view of well-being. This approach is built on the belief that a flourishing classroom requires a flourishing teacher to create the conditions in which students will flourish. This program links the VIA (Values in Action; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) strengths to specific festivals and events throughout the school calendar and incorporates activities such as the strengths-based classroom (recognizing the strengths of all class members), victory logs (record books noting students' achievements), and celebrations (of "what went well") into the curriculum. The program structure includes three threads—strengths, festivals, and stories—and works at three levels: individual, class, and whole school. The teaching principles within Celebrating Strengths include using the environment to reinforce and highlight strengths and concepts, linking abstract concepts such as hope to durable traditions, exploring abstract concepts through philosophy for children, directly reinforcing strengths and concepts through exercises, and indirectly reinforcing strengths and concepts through stories. To fully imbed all aspects of the program takes approximately 3 years. An evaluation of this program has indicated several positive outcomes, including increases in children's self-confidence and motivation to achieve, improved behavior at home and school, and an overall positive impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development (Govindji & Linley, 2008).

Strengths Gym

At the secondary school level, Strengths Gym (Proctor & Fox Eades, 2009a) is an approach constructed around the character strengths included in the VIA classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The approach aims to combine a focus on the individual (e.g., through specific strengths-based activities) with a focus on the institution (e.g., by providing classroom lesson plans and applications across the curriculum; Fox Eades et al., 2013). The program involves students completing age-appropriate strengths-based exercises on each of the 24 VIA strengths.

The aim of the program is to encourage students to build their strengths, learn new strengths, and learn to recognize strengths in others. The course has three levels for implementation in the British school curriculum: Year 7, Year 8, and Year 9 (i.e., ages 11 to 14), and students are provided with a corresponding student booklet (Proctor & Fox Eades, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d) or worksheet (Proctor & Fox Eades, 2011) depending on which year they are in. The student booklets begin with a self-identification of each

individual's top five strengths. Each booklet then presents 24 lessons, one for each of the 24 VIA strengths. Each lesson contains a definition of the strength being focused on and two "Strengths Builder" and one "Strengths Challenge" exercise. The exercises at each level are unique but designed to be equivalent and age appropriate. The program involves a three-stage learning process: (a) general understanding of strengths and development of a strengths vocabulary; (b) identification of own use of strengths; and (c) recognition and identification of use of strengths by others. Each booklet level concludes by providing students with the opportunity to list any strengths they found difficult but persisted to learn, space to write about things they are proud of accomplishing, and an opportunity to reevaluate their top 5 strengths after they have had a chance to learn about all 24 strengths (Proctor et al., 2011). The program includes a comprehensive teacher's manual (Proctor & Fox Eades, 2009a) containing flexible lesson plans enabling teachers to choose activities that suit the mood and the needs of their class. The manual was designed to provide teachers with as much flexibility as possible and enough material and options to cover all three levels of the course. Each strengths session in the manual contains the following elements: key features, definition, benefits, famous quotes, (philosophical) thinking questions, closing activities, display suggestions, PSHE curriculum links, strengths story, and applications across the curriculum. Results of a preliminary research study examining the impact of the program among 319 adolescent students aged 12 to 14 years by Proctor and colleagues (2011) revealed that students who participated in the program experienced significantly increased life satisfaction compared to adolescents who did not participate in the program, difference = 0.18, $t(14) = 2.20$, $p = .045$, $r_{effect} = 0.51$.

The U.K. Resilience Program (UKRP)

The UKRP is the U.K. implementation of the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP). A 3-year study of the UKRP began in 2007, led by the London School of Economics. During 2007, members of the PRP research team trained approximately 90 teachers to deliver an adapted version of the PRP curriculum to groups of students in three local authorities (South Tyneside, Hertfordshire, and Manchester; University of Pennsylvania, 2007). The PRP is an 18-lesson curriculum designed to prevent depression in young people. The major goal of the PRP curriculum is to increase students' ability to handle daily stressors and adolescent problems (Seligman et al., 2009). The PRP promotes optimism through realistic and flexible thinking techniques and teaches students assertiveness, creative brainstorming, decision making, relaxation, and coping and problem-solving skills (Seligman et al., 2009). In general, the program is an evidenced-based cognitive behavioral program developed within the positive psychology framework that helps students understand their thinking style and how it impacts on how they feel and what they do.

A central element to PRP is Albert Ellis's Activating-Belief-Consequences model—that beliefs (B) about an activating (A) event influence the consequent (C) feelings (Challen et al., 2011). Overall, the program aims to provide young people with the skills to be more resilient in dealing with situations in and out of school.

The UKRP was piloted among Year 7 students in 22 schools, with the aim of building resilience and promoting well-being. Teachers attend a 5- to 8-day training course on how to teach the program to young people. The nature of curriculum is such that adult-level

cognitive behavior therapy skills are required. Thus, during the training teachers develop adult-level resilience skills before learning how to teach the program to students. A large-scale evaluation of the program was conducted by Challen and colleagues (2011) and a report of the findings commissioned by the U.K. government. The research consisted of both quantitative and qualitative elements.

The quantitative results indicated significant improvements in depression and anxiety scores, attendance rates, and attainment in English and math. Overall, the impact varied by student characteristics, with a larger impact for students (a) entitled to free school meals, (b) who had not attained the national targets at Key Stage 2, and (c) who had worse initial symptoms of depression or anxiety.

The qualitative results indicated that teachers were extremely positive about the ideas underlying the program and the training they had received, with most reporting that they used the skills themselves. The students were also positive about the program, and interviews for the First Interim Report suggested that students had applied PRP skills in real-life situations, with some interviewees showing a good understanding of elements of the program. In addition, return visits to nine of the case-study schools in autumn 2009 revealed that seven of the nine schools were continuing to deliver the UKRP to all Year 7 students

Overall, the key findings of the UKRP evaluations included: (a) significant short-term improvements in depression symptom scores, school attendance rates, and academic attainment in English; (b) larger impacts with increased participation (e.g., weekly larger than biweekly); (c) impacts lasting only as long as participation, with effects fading after 1 year, and with no impacts at 2 years; (d) no impacts of workshops on behavior scores or life satisfaction scores; and (e) students reporting generally positive appraisal of the program and that they used skills in real life circumstances. These findings are similar to those of the PRP, which has been demonstrated to reduce and prevent symptoms of depression in young people (for a review, see Seligman et al., 2009).

Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College

Through a unique partnership with the University of East London, the Haberdashers' Aske's Federation, principally sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, has developed its own well-being curriculum devised for Years 1 to 13 based on the research and theory of positive psychology. This program has been implemented at Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College in London. The aim in developing this program was to create a comprehensive positive psychology-based well-being curriculum that targets all of the major predictors and correlates of well-being, using individually tested interventions to enhance learning. In Years 1 to 9, the emphasis is on positive interventions, such as happiness, positive emotions, flow, resilience, achievement, positive relationships, and meaning. In Years 10 to 11, the emphasis is on positive education, such as enabling young people to reflect on and make choices about their well-being and development.

The program spans five different key stages, with different outcomes and focuses for each year group, and the weekly well-being lessons take the form of informal discussions, group work, practical exercises, and role play grounded in the latest positive psychological theory. Examples of the topics covered in Years 1 to 3 during the primary phase of

the program include what is happiness, recognizing emotions, joy, just for fun, interest/curiosity, love, being calm and patient, sadness, anger, flow, good memories, savoring, celebrating, play, noticing good things and being thankful, hope, and mood boosting.

In Years 7 to 9, students participate in one form period of well-being per week, which is delivered by their form tutor. Some of the topics covered in this lower secondary phase of the program include key skills of well-being, measuring happiness, the effects of happiness, optimizing well-being, positive and negative emotions, managing feelings through minimizing negative emotions, enhancing positive emotions, getting on with others, resolving conflict, positive reminiscence, learning to breathe, mindfulness, meditation basics, the power of exercise, nutrition, sleep, and being in charge.

In Years 10 to 11, students also participate in one form period of well-being per week delivered by their form tutor. Some of the topics covered in this upper secondary phase of the program include self-awareness and acceptance, personal change, self-valuation (respect and esteem), feelings, emotions and moods, reasoning, creative thinking, beliefs, courage and confidence, worrying, security, aliveness, pleasure, learning, and death.

The effectiveness of the program has been assessed by standardized questionnaires, measuring self-actualization, global and multidimensional life satisfaction, and affect, administered at the beginning and end of each year. Initial results have been compared to a comparison school in which no well-being intervention took place. Results from data gathered during the first year of implementation (i.e., 2008–2009) have indicated significant increases in positive affect, satisfaction with friends, self, and family, self-actualization, and global life satisfaction and significant decreases in negative affect in comparison to students who did not receive the program.

Examples of Interventions in Scotland and Ireland

Bounce Back

Bounce Back is an Australian well-being and resilience program sponsored by the Young Foundation that has recently been trialed in 16 schools in Scotland. Bounce Back is based on the following acronyms:

- **B**ad times don't last. Things always get better. Stay optimistic.
- **O**ther people can help if you talk to them. Get a reality check.
- **U**nhelpful thinking makes you feel more upset. Think again.
- **N**obody is perfect—not you and not others.
- **C**oncentrate on the positives, no matter how small, and use laughter.
- **E**verybody experiences sadness, hurt, failure, rejection, and setbacks sometimes, not just you.
- **B**lame fairly—how much was due to you, to others, and to bad luck?
- **A**ccept the things you can't change, but try to change what you can first.
- **C**atastrophizing exaggerates your worries—don't believe the worst possible picture.
- **K**eep things in perspective—it's only one part of your life.

The program includes nine units (i.e., core values, people bouncing back, courage, looking on the bright side, emotions, relationships, humor, no bullying, success), which

are repeated in each book with age-appropriate activities (for students in kindergarten to Grade 8). It uses children's literature and literacy activities, and the content is integrated across subject areas. Activities include circle time, cooperative learning, and educational games. The program is integrated with social emotional learning (SEL) and incorporates both positive psychology and cognitive behavior therapy techniques. The incorporated teaching strategies include literacy activities and games, thinking tools and activities, cooperative strategies, drama, multimedia and art, and numeracy activities. For example, a "blame fairly" activity can utilize the "attribution wheel," whereby students explore their attributional style (i.e., how they explain the bad events in their lives) and learn to improve optimistic thinking.

Evaluation of the program in Scotland included comparing quantitative and qualitative data collected before implementation of the program and at 18-month follow-up. Conclusions from the evaluation are as follows:

Students:

- Reported feeling more connected to their school
- Perceived school as a happier and kinder place where fewer students felt lonely or left out and more students were now accepted
- Perceived that they had more control over their feelings and actions
- Felt it increased their sense of confidence and their social skills

Teachers:

- Observed more positive relationships and interactions between students
- Felt more resilient and confident
- Reported more effective skills for dealing with challenging situations in their professional and personal lives
- Had higher levels of overall well-being

Overall results to date have been encouraging, and the program has been evaluated as having a positive impact on both students and teachers.

Blackrock College

In Ireland in 2012, an all-boys school, Blackrock College in Dublin, introduced a Leadership Values and Behavior Policy as part of its future strategic development. An integral part of this strategy was a training program in positive psychology for the 72 House Captains (school prefects from second to sixth year inclusive, aged between 13 and 18 years, approximately). The objective of this positive leadership and well-being program was to facilitate a basic understanding and to promote the creation of the necessary skills for positive leadership, specifically including self-awareness, character strengths, personal values and virtues, growth mind-set, love of learning, true grit and drive, courage and compassion, goals for growth, willpower and intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, self-control, effective decision making, and routine in the creation of authentic self-esteem and a healthy confidence that is necessary for quality leadership.

The aim was optimum engagement through participative interaction and energetic fun and was both task and team oriented, involving games and play designed to be challenging and promote creativity. Visual thinking was also engaged with short videos and illustrations that represent learning through visual senses and humor. Forum theatre or role play to replicate real-school-life scenarios was also utilized to ensure ongoing engagement through variety and novelty. This was also complemented by a popular session of guest speakers.

The learning from these multivaried sessions was concretely reinforced by debriefings and both small- and full-group discussions. In addition, all participants were given preparatory tasks, and ongoing assignments were reviewed and discussed in the next session/workshop. Preparatory tasks included online completion of the VIA-Youth (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and an assessment of personal meaning. Assignments included prescribed book reviews and listing of top lessons. Positive active interventions were also included, such as expressing gratitude, cultivating optimism, committing to your goals, practicing random acts of kindness, learning to forgive, and savoring life's joys. Storyboard posters were also created displaying particular leadership events within the college, which were displayed on the college campus to enhance leadership awareness.

The Positive Leadership and Well-being Program is an individual strengths-based and positive-culture approach to enhancing leadership and personal potential. It is tailored to enhance the environment and culture in which "strength and truth," "fearless and bold," and a "creed of caring" can be nurtured and allowed to flourish. Overall, feedback on the program has been positive and encouraging and a solid start for future development at Blackrock College.

APPLYING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS IN SCHOOLS: CONSIDERATIONS

In considering the application of positive psychology interventions in schools, several points are noteworthy for those wishing to implement or develop well-being programs. First, it is essential to have the support of the head teacher of the school. Second, consultants and others working with teachers and schools need to provide them with "positive psychoeducation"; that is, teachers require genuine insight into the techniques they will be implementing in order to maximize success. As noted in Waters's (2011) review of positive education interventions, most PPIs are implemented by teachers, and thus positive education training needs to be delivered to teachers. Indeed, teachers need to understand the positive psychology approach and value it in order to apply it. For example, research on the success of the PRP program indicated that training was essential, with variability in effectiveness being found to be related to the level of training and supervision that group leaders received (Gillham, Brunwasser, & Freres, 2007; Seligman et al., 2009).

One of the major stumbling blocks to providing adequate positive psychoeducation, however, is lack of funding and resources by the majority of schools who need these programs the most. Indeed, impressive positive outcomes of whole-school applications have been noted in the literature (e.g., Seligman et al., 2009); however, the schools being considered are often privately funded and thus have the ability and resources to implement schoolwide programs (e.g., Wellington College in Berkshire, Geelong Grammar School in

Australia). Therefore, materials supplied to teachers designed to enable them to implement positive psychology programs where training has not been or cannot be provided need to be informative and user friendly. Furthermore, the job of educational consultants is not to teach teachers how to teach but to provide them with the tools to implement positive psychology techniques in their teaching. Those working with schools need to consider what they can give that can be applied once they leave. In the school context, very little is "pure" positive psychology—most of what is taken away is adapted to suit the needs of the institution. Successful application in the school context involves adding positive psychology to existing techniques. For example, art teachers will respond well to creativity applications. Overall, the key is the infusion of positive psychology skills into established school subjects.

Third, schoolwide approaches are required in order that positive psychology becomes part of the wider school culture (Waters, 2011). In order to achieve this, teachers need to know how to implement the techniques across the curriculum and to be provided with ideas and suggestions on how to do this. Moreover, implementation of programs needs to extend throughout the whole school year. Research has indicated that longer interventions produce greater gains in well-being (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Unfortunately, however, many look to positive psychology for quick-fix remedies. Schools need to be reminded that PPI programs are a way of being and doing, not a quick remedy for unhappiness. Thus, interventions need to be built into the whole school curriculum and the focus extended throughout the year, with structure and consistency in order for integration and learning to occur among both staff and students.

Finally, research has indicated that a scattered approach, in which individuals practice multiple and varied PPI activities, is more effective than single approaches (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Therefore, where possible, schools need programs that include multiple activities and techniques for application across the curriculum. Indeed, a variety of PPIs have been found effective in increasing well-being that could be built into individual programs—for example, counting blessings and participating in self-guided gratitude exercises (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008), counting one's own acts of kindness for 1 week (Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Frederickson, 2006), keeping a gratitude journal (Froh et al., 2008), writing down three good things that went well each day and using strengths in a new way every day for 1 week (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), mindfulness training (Huppert & Johnson, 2010), and meditation (Nidich et al., 2011) to name but a few. Teachers will be best placed to adapt these and many more applications to their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Within the U.K., there is growing concern about the well-being of children and adolescents. Recent reports indicate that despite national strategies to increase well-being among Britain's young people, approximately half a million are unhappy at any given time. A major priority in addressing low levels of well-being among young people is through high-quality education, positive relationships with teachers, and fostering children's ability to have positive views of themselves. Recently positive psychology interventions are proving to be beneficial in aiding these endeavors through both independent application and application through existing strategies and curriculum courses. Applied

techniques reviewed in this chapter include allowing those with special needs to become experts in their own lives, thereby enabling them to engage in preferred activities to increase positive emotions; increasing psychological well-being through mindfulness training and meditation; promoting flourishing and excellence through whole-school techniques and a community environment that focuses on teaching students how to capitalize on their strengths and potentialities; creating the conditions in which young students will flourish by linking personal strengths to festivals and celebrations throughout the year; providing lesson plans and activities that enable students to explore and identify with their strengths and learn how to apply these skills in their own lives to increase happiness; promoting optimism through realistic and flexible thinking techniques that focus on enabling students to handle daily stressors and problems; implementing positive education across the whole school, thereby enabling young people to reflect on and make choices about their well-being and development; using cognitive behavior therapy techniques alongside positive psychology application to facilitate resilience; and applying positive leadership to facilitate and promote well-being. Overall, these applications and interventions provide encouraging support for the continued development and application of positive psychology interventions in education.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY: BRITAIN

- Children's perception of their relationship with parents is the most important component of well-being, irrespective of family structure.
- Consistency and stability of family structure is vital to well-being.
- A safe and stable home environment is related to increased well-being.
- Cultivating good friendships along with spending quality time with both friends and family is associated with increased well-being.
- A major priority in addressing low levels of well-being among young people is through high-quality education, positive relationships with teachers, and fostering children's ability to have positive views of themselves.
- Teachers need to understand the positive psychology approach to apply it successfully.
- Successful application in the school context involves adding positive psychology to existing techniques.

- Schoolwide approaches are required in order that positive psychology becomes part of the ethos of the school.
- Interventions need to be applied throughout the whole school year in order for habituation to occur.
- Application of multiple and varied activities and techniques appears to be more effective than focusing on single activities.

SUGGESTED KEY READINGS: BRITAIN

Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

This is a truly excellent book for anyone interested in how happiness and education can coexist in the school system. The author argues that happiness should be the aim of education and that a good education should contribute significantly to happiness.

Proctor, C. L., Linley, P. A., & Maltby, J. (2009). Youth life satisfaction: A review of the literature. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10*, 583–630. doi:10.1007/s10902-008-9110-9

In order to understand how to lift those who are languishing, we must first understand what impacts their life satisfaction. This comprehensive review of the literature provides the foundations for exploration in this area.

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. doi:10.1080/03054980902934563

This review of positive psychology interventions in education is an excellent resource for those wishing to learn more about successful applications and their outcomes to date.

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. doi:10.1002/jclp.20593

This paper addresses the question of the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions through a meta-analysis of these interventions and provides a practical guide for their use by clinicians and others.

Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist, 28*, 75–90. doi:10.1375/aedp.28.2.75

This paper reviews 12 school-based interventions designed to foster student well-being from a positive psychology perspective and offers advice and suggestions for those wishing to develop positive psychology interventions in schools.