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Positive Education: Promoting Well-Being at School

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Recommended Citation

D. Gomez-Baya and Jane Gillham. (2019). "Positive Education: Promoting Well-Being at School". *The Routledge Handbook Of Positive Communication*. 327-337. DOI: 10.4324/9781315207759-34
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology/1130>

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POSITIVE EDUCATION

Promoting Well-Being at School

Diego Gomez-Baya and Jane E. Gillham

The Emergence of Positive Education

Positive education has been developed as an application of positive psychology to the scientific study of the optimal functioning of the human being in the educational contexts. The recognition that good mental and physical health consists not only in the absence of pathologies but also in the presence of well-being, has encouraged the implementation of interventions to promote well-being and resilience in the different settings in which human development happens, such as the school (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013). Positive education is based on the premise that the purpose of education is to help students flourish in a variety of ways, not only academically, but also to develop the skills that allow them to succeed in work and in life, and to become productive citizens who contribute to making society better. Seligman (2011) defines positive education as the union between traditional education focused on the development of academic skills with interventions that nourish well-being and promote better mental health. Although positive education has relevance throughout the lifespan, the focus of this chapter is on children and adolescents at elementary through high school education.

Positive education is relevant to all aspects of education, from interactions between individual teachers and students to classroom interventions to school building level policies to public policy. Peterson noted that positive psychology interventions should not only be applied at the individual level, but also at the institutional level, with the goal of building institutions that allow the optimal development of both students and professionals. Peterson (2006) coined the term "The Good School," which refers to educational institutions in which, in addition to academic pursuits, students are encouraged to share and develop values and strengths that allow them to contribute to the society in which they live. In this "Good School," teachers have a privileged position, both for their psychological and pedagogical training in the instruction of psychosocial skills, and for being a crucial model of attitudes and behaviors that promote greater psychological well-being. While most work in positive education focuses on children and adolescents and their teachers, positive education also aims to develop skills that promote optimal functioning in school administrators, coaches, and other staff members who work in schools and in youths' parents and caregivers (Bonniwell, 2013).

Well-Being Outcomes and Character Strengths as Roots to Well-Being

Positive education emerges especially as a response to a problem consistently shown by research on the well-being of children and adolescents in developed countries. Many students report low levels of well-being. For example, findings from the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Health and Human development program, 2011) indicated that students report low levels of caring relationships and meaningful engagement in school. Epidemiological studies reveal that the prevalence of depression among children and adolescents has been alarming for decades (Costello, Erkanli, & Angold, 2006). Positive education aims to address such challenges by promoting personal qualities and skills and social contexts that foster resilience and well-being (Gillham, Abenavoli, Brunwasser, Reivich, & Seligman, 2013). Positive education has two major overlapping areas of focus. First, it aims to reduce and prevent downward spirals by promoting resilience, the capacities for adapting to stressors and challenges. Second, it aims to promote upward spirals by cultivating character strengths and capacities for creating and experiencing positive emotions, positive relationships, and meaning. In positive education, the focus is primarily on these upward spirals, that is, on directly building positive outcomes such as positive emotion, engagement, good relationships, and meaning (e.g., Seligman, 2017).

Positive education is concerned with a broad range of well-being outcomes. For example, Seligman (2011) proposed a multidimensional approach to well-being, identifying five core areas that comprise the PERMA model. These include *positive emotions* (hedonic feelings of happiness), *engagement* (psychological connection to activities or organizations, i.e. interest, curiosity, and absorption), *relationships with others* (including feeling socially integrated and satisfied with social connections), *meaning* (defined as the believe that one's life is valuable and is connected to something which goes beyond one's own life, e.g., contributing to other people and the good development of the whole community), and *accomplishment* (by reaching meaningful outcomes and developing a feeling of achievement and self-efficacy). In its whole school approach to positive education, Geelong Grammar School has expanded Seligman's model to also include health (i.e. PERMA +H model, which is composed of these outcomes: positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships with others, and the promotion of positive health; Norrish et al., 2013). Other models of well-being also have been proposed. For example, Ryff and Keyes (1995) defined a six-component-model for optimal well-being, composed of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

There are many different routes to these well-being outcomes. Positive education focuses particularly on increasing students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and on building habits and skills that promote flourishing. A central pathway in positive education is the cultivation of character strengths. According to Seligman (2011), strengths are important for each area of area well-being in PERMA. Much of the work in positive education incorporates the Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV) framework proposed by Peterson, Seligman, and their colleagues (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, 2006). Unlike many existing frameworks for character education that focus on promoting a few specific strengths, the CSV framework celebrates the diverse range of strengths and virtues that have been consistently valued across time and across culture. The six general virtues are: *humanity* (composed of the character strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence), *wisdom and knowledge* (composed by creativity, curiosity, open mind, love of learning, and perspective), *courage* (integrated by courage, perseverance, integrity, and vitality), *justice* (integrated by citizenship, sense of justice, and leadership), *moderation* (composed of forgiveness, modesty, prudence, and self-control), and finally *transcendence* (formed by the appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, sense of humor, and spirituality). Peterson and Seligman propose that each of us has signature strengths.

a few top strengths that are closely connected to our deepest values and reflect who we are at our core. According to the CSV model, then, a major goal of character education is to promote well-being by helping students identify and apply their signature strengths.

Evidence That Positive Education Processes Also Matter for Academic Achievement

The development of positive education has been supported by the research on the role of emotions in the teaching and learning processes. Ryan and Deci (2001) explained in their Self-determination Theory how learning is fostered when the students find enjoyment in the academic tasks, especially when these tasks are configured to promote children's and adolescents' feelings of autonomy and competence and to allow for the construction of knowledge in the interaction with peers. Csikszentmihalyi's theory of Flow proposes that engagement, enjoyment, and performance increase when students are appropriately challenged. Thus, as students' skills develop, increasing the level of challenges helps to maintain this flow state and hence optimal engagement and learning (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Research on Fredrickson's Broaden and Built theory has demonstrated that positive emotions broaden students' attention and promote more creative thinking and problem-solving (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Programs that aim to increase social support and skills such as self-regulation and persistence, promote better achievement and completion of school (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Similarly, grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, predicts students' educational attainment over and beyond IQ and conscientiousness (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Similarly, optimism predicts students' educational attainment over and above their past academic performance (Schulman, 1995). Some positive education programs target specific pathways to well-being such as positive emotion (e.g., savoring and attending to positive events), and specific strengths (e.g., gratitude, self-control or GRIT) (e.g., Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014; Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007).

Overlap with Other Traditions

Kristjánsson (2012) has challenged scholars in positive education to consider whether positive psychology (or positive education) makes any unique contribution to the field of education. Many philosophical and educational traditions have emphasized the promotion of engagement, character, and well-being as central goals of education (Cohen, 2006; Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper, 2001). Positive education overlaps with approaches such as character education, positive youth development, and social and emotional learning. Positive education also overlaps with psychosocial approaches to preventing anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems in youth. At a very broad level, all of these approaches aim to promote youths' social and emotional well-being (one or more aspects of PERMA). All promote character strengths or attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are closely related to character strengths. For example, social and emotional learning programs aim to promote several competencies such as awareness of self and others (e.g., awareness of feelings, management of feelings, perspective taking), positive attitudes and values (e.g., personal responsibility, respect for others, and social responsibility), responsible decision-making (e.g., adaptive goal setting and problem-solving), and social interaction skills (i.e. active listening, cooperation, negotiation, and help seeking) (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). These competences are closely related to CSV strengths such as self-control, social and emotional intelligence, fairness, teamwork, and critical thinking. Similarly, positive youth development focuses on engaging young people within their developmental contexts and enhances their strengths, to build positive outcomes, i.e. competence, confidence, character,

connection, and caring (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). School-based programs that aim to prevent psychological difficulties such as anxiety and depression often focus on increasing emotional awareness, optimism, social skills, assertiveness, and problem-solving, as well as the ability to confront difficult experiences (e.g., through exposure). These skills and strategies are similar to character strengths such as social and emotional intelligence, optimism, critical thinking, and courage. As Kern and Kaufman (2017) have argued, the boundaries of positive education are unclear.

Positive education's contribution is, arguably, its emphasis on a broad spectrum of well-being. Much of the work in prevention and in social and emotional learning, for example, has focused on teaching skills for handling difficult emotions and responding adaptively to interpersonal stressors and conflicts. Positive education recognizes the importance of such skills but also aims to promote youth's capacities to experience positive emotions and to develop and sustain caring relationships. Like positive psychology, positive education explicitly focuses on teaching skills that directly promote positive experiences and relationships.

Much of the research in prevention, character education, social and emotional learning, and positive youth development has focused on reducing negative outcomes (e.g., substance use, teen pregnancy, dropping out of school). Positive education stresses the importance of positive outcomes as well. In fact, positive education programs typically focus primarily on helping students to flourish. While this is arguably positive education's primary contribution, it is not new. Scholars and practitioners in these other fields have noted the importance of attending to a wider range of skills and experiences. For example, Karen Pittman, a leading scholar of positive youth development, has argued for the power of focusing on youth's strengths rather than their deficits, noting that "problem-free isn't fully prepared" (Pittman, Martin, & Yohalem, 2006). Still, reviews have noted that empirical evaluations of positive youth development programs focus on reductions in negative outcomes (e.g., Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). One of positive psychology's greatest contributions to education may be the development of tools for assessing strengths and positive aspects of well-being, including measures of PERMA (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015).

Like social and emotional learning, character education, and positive youth development, positive education includes a wide range of interventions and approaches from school curriculum, to after school programming, to whole school approaches, to education policy although, to date, most work has focused on school curricula. Positive education is relevant to all ages, from preschool (and before) to high school (and beyond). Positive education can be taught in a variety of ways—explicitly through curriculum for example; implicitly through modeling. Moreover, professional development/support for teachers and mentors is essential within positive education—for effective teaching, support, and modeling of skills. Positive education focuses primarily on school and other educational settings, including co-curricular activities, while traditionally positive youth development has also focused after school and out of school programs.

Evidence for Positive Education

Experiences in positive education can be classified into curriculum programs and whole school interventions. Curriculum programs consist in the explicit performance of concrete activities during school time, both included in the formal subjects and developed apart from those subjects, with the aim of recognizing and using character strengths and competences to promote well-being. Whole school interventions involves the explicit and implicit learning of character strengths and competences related to well-being in the classroom and throughout many aspects of school life. In whole school approaches, positive education principles and practices become part of the school culture, affecting many aspects of the students' and teachers' experience. Below

we briefly describe a few examples of positive education practices (curricula and whole school approaches) that have been examined in published research. We focus on those that illustrate positive education's origins in positive psychology.

Curricula and Classroom Programs

High School Positive Psychology Curriculum

The High School Positive Psychology Curriculum (aka Strath Haven Positive Psychology curriculum) is one of the first positive education programs developed that is based on positive psychology (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). The curriculum was originally designed for ninth-grade students (the first year of high school) in the United States and consists of 20–25 lessons delivered throughout the school year. It includes three major units, roughly following Seligman's (2002, 2011) model of well being, which focused on three aspects of PERMA: positive emotions, engagement (through strengths), and meaning. The first unit is designed to help students increase positive experiences and emotions (e.g., through savoring, counting blessings, gratitude letters). The second unit focuses on increasing engagement through character strengths. The unit emphasizes the positive psychology approach of helping students to identify and use signature strengths. However, it also encourages students to work another (non-signature) strengths that they value. The third unit focuses on understanding and increasing meaning. Each lesson lasts about 80 minutes and includes activities related to positive psychology and setting up a homework activity that involves practicing a relevant skill or behavior. Students write reflections about their experiences. Each meeting opens with a discussion of students' experiences applying positive psychology in their lives. The curriculum includes many activities that have since become common components of positive psychology and positive education interventions. For example, activities included writing a positive experiences journal (writing about three good things that have happened during the day), writing and delivering a gratitude letter, and developing and implementing strengths action plans (plans to apply a strength to a new situation). In addition to the three units, teachers are encouraged to infuse concepts from the positive education course in their teaching of other academic topics. For example, the curriculum was originally implemented in the context of language arts classes. Teachers were encouraged to bring positive psychology concepts (e.g., positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning and purpose) to their discussions of literature with their students. For example, in discussing the *Odyssey*, teachers might encourage students to think about the characters' signature strengths and also to consider other strengths that could have helped the character to face challenges more effectively.

This curriculum has been evaluated in a randomized controlled study with approximately 350 ninth-grade students. Students were randomly assigned to language arts classes that included the positive psychology curriculum or to language arts as usual. The positive psychology lessons and activities replaced language arts lessons that focused on shorter works of literature. Findings indicated that the positive psychology curriculum increased students' social skills and engagement in learning, compared with controls. These effects endured for two years following the program. No significant intervention effects were found for positive emotions or for feelings of depression and anxiety (Seligman et al., 2009; Gillham et al., 2013).

Strengths Gym

This character strengths-based intervention aims to encourage students to build their strengths, learn new strengths, and to recognize others' strengths, on the basis of 24 lessons (one lesson for each character strength in the CSV model) during three levels of implementation, i.e. Year 7, 8,

and 9 in British curriculum (Proctor et al., 2011). Each lesson focuses on one character strength. The teacher describes the strength, engages the class in two exercises designed to build this strength, and assigns a follow-up activity that encourages students to practice using the strengths. For example, the first lesson in each course is “love of beauty” and students are invited to remember a time when they or someone they know showed this strength and then to write down a story of love of beauty in action. As a challenge, students are encouraged to look for beauty on their way to school and then tell a friend or family member what they noticed.

This intervention program was evaluated in two secondary schools in Great Britain using a quasi-experimental design. Students in the intervention condition were compared to a control group of students, who attended their scheduled class as normal without the inclusion of Strengths Gym activities. Both groups of students completed self-report measures of life satisfaction, positive, and negative affect, and self-esteem before and after the intervention phase. Proctor et al. (2011) found that, following the intervention, the students in the intervention condition reported higher life satisfaction than students in the control group. No significant differences were found for affect or self-esteem, although there was a non-significant tendency for intervention participants to report greater positive affect than controls.

Positive Education in Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru

Adler and colleagues developed positive education interventions in three countries: Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru (Adler, 2016). In each country, the interventions targeted 10 life skills: mindfulness, empathy, self-awareness, coping with emotions, communication skills, interpersonal relationships, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving. The teachers and the principals were trained to practice and teach the ten life skills to infuse positive education into existing academic subjects (e.g. math, reading, science). For example, in Literature classes, students were invited to identify strengths and virtues in characters from novels and encouraged to use those strengths in their daily lives. The interventions also emphasized students’ active and meaningful engagement in learning. Students performed botanic practices, by planting, growing, and harvesting plants in organic gardens. As well as learning about biological concepts, they had the opportunity to reflect on the role of food in local and national economic systems, and to practice skills such as critical thinking and problems solving. Intervention teachers also learned strategies for incorporating positive psychology principles in their work with students. For example, teachers were encouraged to include feedback on what students were doing well.

Adler and colleagues evaluated this positive education approach in each country using randomized controlled designs. In each country, the positive education program focused on the 10 skills but was adapted to fit the local cultural and educational context. The positive education program was delivered over a 15-month period. The average age of students was between 15 and 17. Students in positive education curriculum were compared to students in a placebo control condition that met for a similar amount of time. In which students were taught principles of nutrition, psychology, and human anatomy but did not include the positive education components. The research program began in Bhutan, with replications in Mexico and Peru. In Bhutan, a total of 8,385 students (grades 7 through 12) participated in the study from 18 secondary schools, which were randomly assigned to treatment (11 schools) and control group (7 schools). Bhutan is the first country to nationally implement positive education, as a part of a wider political approach toward Gross National Happiness (GNH), the primary indicator Bhutan uses to assess national progress. In Mexico, a total of 68,762 students (grades 10 to 12) participated. These students came from 70 secondary schools (35 secondary schools in the intervention group and other 35, in the control group). In Peru, a total of 694,153 students (grades 7 to 12)

participated. These students came from 694 secondary schools which were randomly assigned to the intervention or control groups.

Students' well-being was assessed using a measure of the positive outcomes in PERMA, called EPOCH (Kern et al., 2015). This instrument was composed of 20 items that assess engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness. The researchers also examined students' performance on academic achievement tests. Students in the intervention schools reported higher well-being and showed better performance in standardized national exams after the intervention ended, compared to control groups. These benefits endured for 12 months in Bhutan (follow-up information was not yet available for the other countries). An important implication of this intervention is that well-being can be taught in schools on a large-scale in a variety of social, economic, or cultural contexts.

Whole School Approach

Geelong Grammar School (GGS) in Australia has implemented a whole school approach to positive education (Norrish, 2015). Norrish and colleagues (2013) developed a practice-oriented model, which fosters strengths of character, following the definition by Peterson and Seligman (2004), as the processes to promote well-being, as proposed PERMA + H model (Norrish et al., 2013). This model has been followed by many schools and practitioners to guide practice in positive education. Geelong's approach emphasizes four levels of implementation of positive education concepts and skills. These are: 1) Learn it (educators learn the positive education concepts and skills); 2) Live it (educators learn to apply what is learned in daily life and in work in the school context; educators who "live it" are better able to engage in the other levels of performance); 3) Teach it (educators help students to learn skills through explicit instruction (i.e. structured lessons) and through implicit instruction (i.e. by integrating skills into routine during academic life and transversally in other subjects); and 4) Embed it (which refers to implementing the learning outcomes in every day practices). The processes of "learn it," "live it," "teach it," and "embed it" are additive, synergetic, and dynamic, and create a whole school culture and community for well-being (Bott, 2017; Norrish et al., 2013). Thus, this model provides "a sustainable and flexible framework for moving towards flourishing school communities" (Norrish et al., 2013).

Geelong Grammar School was the first school to use a whole school approach to positive education. Seligman and colleagues conducted workshops with staff and then two experts in positive education resided in Geelong during the first year of implementation. Thus, the staff had the opportunity to learn live positive psychology strategies and apply them to their lives before teaching those to students. A positive education curriculum was developed to provide explicit instruction to students at several grades. The curriculum component incorporated Strath Haven Positive Psychology Curriculum (described earlier) and the Penn Resilience Program (Gillham et al., 2013), a program that is designed to promote resilience through teaching skills for handling common stressors during adolescence. School staff also embedded positive education into academic subjects, sports, music classes and pastoral counseling. For example, in geography class students are invited to reflect on the measure of well-being of the nations and why criteria among cultures may be different. Positive education was embedded into school policies and practices to affect the overall school climate, for example by starting the class of each day asking "what went well?"

Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, and Chin (2014) have evaluated Geelong Grammar School's approach with a total of 383 participants enrolled at Years 9, 10, and 11. Using a quasi-experimental design, these students were compared to a control group of 138 students from other private schools in the Melbourne area, with similar socioeconomic status. Students in both groups were surveyed at two

times, approximately 10 months later. At each assessment, they completed measures of mental health and well-being and strengths. Moreover, within the intervention group, a smaller group of 50 students at Year 9 provided reports by tablet devices (by experience sampling methodology, with daily reports of strategies used and the subsequent outcomes), and 79 students at Years 9 and 10 also participated in focus groups in which they responded to questions about positive education program content and delivery.

Although the design of this study includes a three-year follow-up, some preliminary findings after the first year have been reported (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014). Quantitative findings indicate increases in mental health and well-being and strengths knowledge in GGS Year 9 students compared to Year 9 controls (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014). It is important to note that Year 9 is a special year at GGS. In addition to teaching positive education, Year 9 students participate in the Timber-top program, a full academic year that focuses heavily on outdoor education, responsibility, and cooperation in addition to academic subjects. While Timber-top itself is arguably consistent with positive education, it is difficult to separate out the contributions of positive education instruction from the larger Timber-top experience. In focus group and experience sampling reports, GGS students reported applying many of the positive education skills. Saint Peter's College in Adelaide has also implemented a whole school approach to positive education for several years (e.g., White & Waters, 2015). Both schools are actively involved in sharing positive education practices with educators throughout the world.

Discussion

Despite its recent development, many schools around the world have begun to implement positive education practices from stand-alone curricula to whole school approaches. These practices are strongly rooted in positive psychology. They focus less on reducing and preventing difficulties and more on building upward spirals and helping youth to thrive. Many positive education approaches focus on a full range of outcomes included in PERMA (or PERMA+H). They often include activities designed to promote positive emotions, to deepen relationships, and to increase meaningful engagement. Character education, especially identifying and applying strengths, is a core component of these programs.

Research suggests that positive education approaches benefit students' social and emotional well-being (e.g., Adler, 2016; Seligman et al., 2009). Studies have found that, compared with school as usual, positive education programs increase positive social skills (e.g., empathy and leadership), optimism, and happiness. While school teachers and administrators often worry that devoting time to well-being initiatives detracts from students' academic attainment, findings from these studies indicate the opposite. Positive education enhances students' engagement in school and achievement (e.g., Adler, 2016; Seligman et al., 2009). These findings are consistent with recent meta-analytic reviews examining the effects of social and emotional learning programs (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004). Whole school approaches are more difficult to evaluate using rigorous randomized studies; however, quasi-experimental and qualitative studies of whole school approaches suggest an improvement in mental well-being and strengths knowledge (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014; White & Waters, 2015). Multi-year, whole school approaches are likely to have even greater impact than curriculum or classroom-only approaches. Several schools are implementing multi-year programs. For example, Geelong Grammar School includes positive education activities in elementary through high school. The recently developed Happy Classrooms program provides positive education exercises for children ages 3 to 18 (Arguis, Bolsas, Hernandez, & Salvador, 2010). When positive education is embedded into the very fabric of the school over many years, it is likely to affect children's development, engagement, and well-being in a deep and lasting way.

Positive education, like learning, is a process. For each educator and each school, it involves increasing knowledge, skills, and strategies to move along a continuum. Noble and McGrath (2013) have identified several conditions or characteristics that educational interventions must bring together to promote well-being. Interventions should: 1) be incorporated into the school as a whole; 2) be taught by teachers and integrated into normal academic learning; 3) be accepted by students and also accepted by teachers; 4) be universal, involving all students; 5) last several years; and 6) use a multi-strategic approach in which different “active ingredients” in children’s education may incorporate elements of cognitive-behavioral therapy and other evidence-based teaching strategies. However, not all schools are ready or able to implement whole school and multi-year approaches. In moving toward a world in which schools promote well-being broadly (e.g. social and emotional well-being in addition to academic achievement), each school can progress along this path. For some schools, the next step will be training teachers and other staff to use these skills/ideas in their own lives, while in for other schools, it may be embedding positive education throughout their programming implementing a few programs or only implementing a few programs. To enable this training, adequate planning and implementation within the academic curriculum and agenda is needed in schools (White & Waters, 2015). The application of practices in positive education should start from the specific school realities and assume that the time and the efforts of the teachers are limited, so that it would be necessary to prioritize and distribute the tasks properly toward this new roadmap. This is another area in which collaboration with other fields is useful. We can learn about the practices that support effective professional development, training, and implementation. We can learn about the approaches that allow successful programs to be sustained, to thrive, and to grow. We can also share this knowledge, when developed within positive education as several schools are already doing (e.g., Bott, 2017; White & Kern, 2017).

Despite this progress, positive education has yet to mature as a field. Most programs focus on a fairly narrow range of interventions (many are adapted from positive psychology practices with adults). More studies are needed with rigorous designs, including randomized controls, longitudinal designs, and measures that go beyond self-report. It will be important to determine whether positive education produces long-term benefits and how these benefits compare to those found for other types of interventions (e.g., social and emotional learning, character education). It will be important to determine which positive education approaches are most beneficial for which outcomes.

A definition of positive education is needed. A broad and integrative definition may state that positive education aimed to integrate both concrete interventions, curriculum design, and whole-organization programs performed in school context to promote psychological well-being by developing character strengths, adaptive coping, positive thought, and different social and emotional skills. As well as the promotion of well-being, these interventions are expected to improve school adjustment, peer relationships and general health. Still, questions remain. Is positive education simply positive psychology applied in schools, or is it more than this? The field needs to address concerns expressed by Kristjánsson, Kern, Kaufman, and others and clarify whether and how positive education differs from other closely related fields such as positive youth development, social and emotional learning, and character education, for example. What makes an intervention a “positive education” intervention as opposed to an intervention from one of these other fields? Does positive education provide unique contributions to understanding the development and promotion of well-being in young people? If not, positive education’s contribution is likely to be limited and short-lived.

A child of positive psychology, positive education has largely been reared in isolation from these close cousins. Scholars and practitioners in positive education have a great deal to learn from the large bodies of relevant work in these other fields. Important directions for future theoretical,

empirical, and applied work are to identify/clarify areas of overlap as well as unique contributions of each field. Thus, rather than working toward the same purpose in isolation, we underline the need of more collaboration across the different fields. Ultimately, collaboration across these fields will allow us to achieve our common goal of helping schools to promote well-being in youth.

As Kristjánsson argues, even if it turns out that positive education is not new, it could still make a helpful contribution to education. At a minimum, positive education has invigorated this area of work as shown by publications, international conferences, and the increasing number of schools and governments that are embracing this approach. Positive education has provided measures and specific intervention approaches. And positive education continues to grow. Examples of recent initiative include the creation of an education division within the International Positive Psychology Association, and the creation of the International Positive Education Network (www.ipositive-education.net/). These organizations are providing opportunities for educators and researchers who are interested in positive education to share and learn from each other. Thus, positive education has just begun and still has to solve many issues. Important and exciting work remains to address these challenges so that positive education can meet its aim of helping schools promote well-being and academic performance on a wide-scale, ultimately enabling all children and adolescents to thrive.

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