

Personal Well-Being Lessons for Secondary Schools

Personal Well-Being Lessons for Secondary Schools

Positive psychology in action
for 11 to 14 year olds

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Introduction

The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families into which they are born.

(UNICEF 2007)

What is well-being education and why should we have it?

It is likely that the first decade of the twenty-first century will be viewed by historians as a landmark decade for the explicit development of children's well-being. Once implicit in the education of children, well-being has now become an overt government agenda in many countries across the world. For instance, the primary objective of the UK Government's 'Every Child Matters' initiative, underpinned by the Children's Act (2004), is to 'Safeguard children and young people, improve their life outcomes and general well-being' (DfES 2007b, p. 35). More recently, the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families published *The Children's Plan*, setting ten new targets to improve children's well-being by 2020, through nurturing 'happy, capable and resilient children' (DCSF 2007, p. 5).

The reasons for the focus on the development of well-being in children are twofold. We are forced to recognize that Western countries are currently facing an unprecedented increase in childhood and adolescent depression. At any point in time, approximately 2 per cent of children aged 11–15 and 11 per cent of youth aged 16–24 in the UK are suffering a major depressive disorder (Green et al. 2005). Anxiety disorders, which often precede and co-occur with depression, are found in approximately 3 per cent of children aged 5–15 and 15 per cent of youth aged 16–24 (Green et al. 2005). In the USA, approximately one in five adolescents has a major depressive episode by the end of high school (Lewinsohn et al., 1993), with a similar picture observed in Australia (Noble and McGrath 2005). Children and adolescents who suffer from high levels of depressive symptoms or depressive disorders are more likely to have academic and interpersonal difficulties. They are more likely to smoke, use drugs and alcohol, and attempt suicide (Garrison et al. 1991; Covey et al. 1998). The wealth of the countries appears to provide relatively little protection for their youth. Recent international attempts to directly measure child well-being offer a worrying picture. The 2007 UNICEF report, which presents an overview of child well-being in rich countries, sees the UK occupying the bottom third in the list of 21 industrialized countries (UNICEF 2007). Of primary importance to this report is Dimension 6 – Subjective Well Being – in which children ranked their opinion of their health, their liking for school and their subjective view of their personal well-being. The United Kingdom came last in this dimension, causing a rich debate on the success of current welfare and education policies.

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Bob Reitemeier, the Chief Executive of The Children's Society, reported in *The Guardian* on February 14, 2007: 'Unicef's report is a wake-up call to the fact that, despite being a rich country, the UK is failing children and young people in a number of crucial ways.'

Although the case for well-being education can be made purely on the basis of prevention of ill-health, depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders, there is at least as much value in appreciating the benefits that well-being can bring. Already in 1947 the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in terms of wellness, that is: physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease (WHO 1947). A substantial body of research documents the advantages of well-being and positive individual characteristics. For instance, research demonstrates that happy people are successful across multiple life domains, including marriage, relationships, health, longevity, income and work performance. They are more creative, able to multi-task and endure boring tasks, are more trusting, helpful and sociable (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Those able to identify, develop and use their strengths, and are more likely to be high achievers (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999), while higher levels of grit or self-discipline in children predict academic success over and above their IQ levels (Duckworth and Seligman 2005).

Well-being education aims to develop the skills of well-being, flourishing and optimal functioning in children, teenagers and students. In so doing, it focuses on both the preventative and enabling or developmental functions. Importantly, well-being education is underpinned by principles and methods of empirical validation, which is what differentiates psychological science from self-help initiatives.

Well-being education from a historical perspective

Since the late 1800s, educators have been divided about education's purpose and its potential for the academic, moral, emotional and social development of learners. For much of the twentieth century, Western countries have focused on traditional conceptions of knowledge based on academic subject groups, e.g. maths, geography and music. Increasingly educators felt the emotional aspects of learning were neglected, prompting school leaders to reconsider the curricular needs of young people. Programmes were developed to meet particular needs arising as new social issues arose or 'soft skills' were needed. Schools in the USA, the UK, Australia and across the world have for some time included work on social and emotional issues in the curriculum (e.g. Personal, Social and Health Education, Service Learning, Citizenship) and helped pupils reflect on the importance of good social and emotional skills. This section provides a brief overview of the prominent frameworks for positive education that have been implemented over the past half a century, positioning this book in multi-faceted approaches to well-being education as broadly defined.

This section will also mention a number of discrete programmes currently prominent in English-speaking countries, including the UK, the USA and Australia (although some of these have been translated into other languages and introduced in other countries).

The self-esteem movement

The social and emotional lives of school-aged young people became a focus in education in the 1970s with the emergence of the self-esteem movement. This movement was derived from the core principles of Humanistic Psychology, and began to impact on teachers' practices in the classroom and parents' child-rearing practices. Classroom self-esteem programmes typically focused on the importance of helping children gain a sense of achievement in a relatively non-competitive and failure-free learning environment, and to engage in self-expression. Children were encouraged by both teachers and parents to see themselves as special and unique. 'Low self-esteem' was widely regarded as an explanation for many social 'ills' such as juvenile crime, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and low academic achievement. Yet Twenge (2007) documents increases in anxiety among young people since the 1970s that she associates with systematic techniques used in schools to 'boost' self-esteem.

Nowadays, concerns about the self-esteem movement's focus on 'feeling good' and individualism are also shared by Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology. He claims that the movement has probably contributed to the increase in depression in young people:

Armies of . . . teachers, along with . . . parents, are straining to bolster children's self-esteem. That sounds innocuous enough, but the way they do it often erodes children's sense of worth. By emphasizing how a child feels, at the expense of what the child does – mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom and meeting a challenge – parents and teachers are making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression.

(Seligman et al. 1995, p. 27)

Seligman argues that if children are not allowed to fail or be disappointed with themselves, and if they receive less-than-genuine praise, then they are deprived of opportunities to develop frustration, tolerance and persistence and are less motivated to work harder.

Various reviews of the self-esteem literature have found little evidence that developing young people's self-esteem makes a significant difference to student academic achievement, their mental health or societal problems (e.g., Kahne 1996; Baumeister et al. 2003; Emler 2003). Baumeister, a former proponent of the self-esteem movement, concluded from the results of his own research and a meta-review of earlier studies that the widespread assumption that artificially enhancing self-esteem would reduce young people's problems and increase their achievement was plainly false. Despite these findings, the self-esteem movement continued for many years and is only now beginning to fade:

While the self-esteem movement has been largely debunked, we are just now reaping what it has sown. The generation raised under these conditions is entering the workforce and has been described as difficult and that their expectations far exceed those of their predecessors in entry level positions. The praise they have

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been given all of their lives is still expected, even if they have not done anything to earn it and they lack the resiliency to deal with real disappointment and the realities of life.

(LaPorta, 2009, p. 5)

Resilience education

There are many different definitions of resilience but all of them, in one way or another refer to the capacity of the individual to ‘overcome odds’ and demonstrate the personal strengths needed to cope with some kind of hardship or adversity. Resilience has been described as the ability to persist, cope adaptively and bounce back after encountering change, challenges, setback, disappointments, difficult situations or adversity and to return to a reasonable level of well-being (McGrath and Noble 2003). Benard (2004) suggests resilience is also a set of qualities or protective mechanisms that give rise to successful adaptation by a young person despite high risk factors during the course of their development.

The construct of resilience emerged about 40 years ago, almost by accident, from longitudinal developmental studies of ‘at risk’ children. This research showed that, despite encountering many major life stressors as they grew up, some children survived and even thrived (Werner and Smith 1992). The well-being and resilience research has shifted the focus from those children who are casualties of these risk factors to those children who manage to bounce back from stress, trauma and risk in their lives. The resilience construct is thus a dramatic change in perspective from a deficit model of young people ‘at risk’ to a model that focuses on teaching the personal skills and developing the environmental contexts that help young people withstand high levels of ‘risk’. Research has now been able to identify the most significant coping skills and protective life circumstances that help young people to become more resilient (e.g., Benard 2004). After families, schools are the most likely place where students can experience the protective environmental conditions and learn the social-emotional skills that enhance resilience. In fact, for young people who do not experience family support, school may be the only place where they can learn those skills. Teaching these skills can also inoculate them against the possibility of not coping when faced with future difficulties or adversity, just as vaccinations can inoculate them against the possibility of being adversely affected by exposure to future disease. A substantial number of school-based programmes emerged following the development of these ideas.

The Penn Resiliency Programme (PRP) is a schools-based intervention curriculum designed to increase resilience and promote optimism, adaptive coping skills and effective problem-solving through the applications of the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy to normal populations. Based on the seven ‘learnable’ skills of resilience, the programme teaches children: how to identify their feelings; tolerance of ambiguity; the optimistic explanatory style; how to analyse causes of problems; empathy; self-efficacy; and how

to reach out or try new things. The PRP, therefore, educates adolescents to challenge a habitual pessimistic explanatory style by looking at the evidence and considering what is realistic, while avoiding unrealistic optimism. The PRP has been developed and researched for over 16 years and consequently has acquired a solid base of evidence (Seligman 2002, 2007; Reivich and Shatté 2002; Reivich et al. 2007). A meta-analysis of 17 controlled evaluations of the programme found participants reported fewer depressive symptoms up to one year after the programme in comparison to young people who had received no intervention (Brunwasser et al. 2009). However, the PRP is essentially preventative in nature with the expressed aim of reducing depression among teenagers. For students whose future functioning is more positive, the programme is beneficial, however, it is difficult to see whether it is beneficial for students not at risk of depression.

A further applied classroom resiliency programme is *Bounce Back!* Devised by two Australian psychologists, Dr Helen McGrath and Dr Toni Noble (McGrath and Noble 2003), it is a highly practical, teacher-friendly programme. It is based on the conclusions, reached by a meta-review of school-based programmes, that the benefits of the vast majority of short-term programmes are, in fact, not sustainable. *Bounce Back!* is delivered in both primary and secondary schools, revisiting fundamental concepts in developmentally appropriate ways over time. Emerging research evidence indicates beneficial effects of the programme on depression (McGrath and Noble 2003).

An alternative programme, *Zippy's Friends*, is an international 24-week school curriculum that teaches all students a set of coping skills designed to improve future relationships and mental well-being. Meta-analysis of the programme's evaluation reports at least small positive effects for each implementation of the programme (Durlak and Wells 1997). However, evaluated programmes tend to have small sample sizes and use 'expert' teachers for implementation (Mishara and Ystgaard 2006). Given that research clearly shows that the quality of a teacher impacts on student well-being and achievement regardless of the subject, it is difficult to discern whether positive student outcomes from *Zippy's Friends* are due to the content of the lessons on coping skills or due to students receiving the attention of a high-quality teacher (Hattie 2003).

Finally, the *SPARK Resilience Programme* is a new addition to the world of preventative positive education. Developed for and piloted in deprived neighbourhoods of East London, the programme builds on research findings from four relevant fields of study: cognitive-behavioural therapy, resilience, post-traumatic growth, and positive psychology. Organized around the SPARK acronym, it teaches students to break simple and complex situations into manageable components of a Situation, Autopilot, Perception, Reaction and Knowledge. Through the use of hypothetical scenarios informed by consultations with students in pilot schools, students learn how an everyday *Situation* can trigger in them an *Autopilot* (feelings and emotions). These *Autopilots* vary for different people and different circumstances because of the unique way we *Perceive* these *Situations*. We then *React* to the *Situation* and learn something from it, that is, we acquire *Knowledge*

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about the way we are, or others are, or the world is. To help students understand these concepts, they are introduced to ‘parrots of perception’ – imaginary creatures representing common distortions of human cognition and thinking. The programme teaches students how to challenge their interpretation of any life situation and consider other alternatives by putting their parrots ‘on trial’, understanding their automatic emotional responses and learning to control their non-constructive behavioural reactions. Alongside, they are introduced to the skills of assertiveness and problem-solving, and are helped to build their ‘resilience muscles’ through identifying their strengths, social support networks, sources of positive emotions and previous experiences of resilience. The statistical data analysis showed significantly higher resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy scores in the post-assessment compared to the pre-assessment data. A marginally significant decrease was also observed in depression symptoms (Boniwell et al. in preparation).

Although being able to decrease depression and anxiety in children and adolescents is a striking achievement that cannot be understated, the above programmes may be charged with not going far enough in enhancing well-being, rather than simply alleviating possible psychological problems. Well-being is not a mere absence of depression, just as the person who is not ill is not necessarily in good physical shape. Development of well-being needs to include skills over and above successful coping, including the enhancement of positive emotions, flow, positive relations and meaningfulness.

The SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) movement

Over the past 15 years the social and emotional learning (SEL) movement has been slowly replacing the self-esteem movement. Daniel Goleman popularized the notion of emotional intelligence in the 1990s. In his best-selling book (*Emotional Intelligence*, 1996), he drew on Howard Gardner’s earlier work on the multiple intelligences model (Gardner 1983, 1999) and Salovey et al.’s (2004) work on emotional intelligence. The social and emotional learning (SEL) model developed by CASEL (Collaboration for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning) at the University of Illinois is based on Goleman’s framework. SEL differs from the self-esteem movement in many ways but, most importantly, there is some research evidence to support the claim that school-based SEL programmes can increase student achievement, build their connection to school, improve their interpersonal attitudes and behaviours, and decrease negative behaviours, such as violence and substance abuse, and that these outcomes occur across a wide range of diverse students and settings and persist over time (Zins et al. 2007). Social and emotional learning programmes have been described as among the most successful interventions ever offered to school-aged young people (Payton et al. 2008).

The following social and emotional skills have also been identified by the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL 2010) as the foci of intervention programmes: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

The *Primary SEAL* (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme is a UK social and emotional whole-school initiative for primary students, which involves classroom teachers introducing social and emotional skills in order to enhance student relationships, attendance, behaviour, learning and emotional well-being (DFES 2005). It has been adopted in 80 per cent of British schools (Humphrey et al. 2008). SEAL is a universal approach but also includes early intervention with small learning groups for students who are deemed to need extra support and follow-up individual interventions with those students who do not appear to have benefited from either the whole-class programme or the small groups for early interventions. The themes in the program are New Beginnings (emotional literacy), Going for Goals (self-regulation and empathy), Getting On and Falling Out (social skills), Say No to Bullying, and Good to Be Me. The results of extensive evaluation look to be promising (Humphrey et al. 2008), and the programme is now supplemented by *Secondary SEAL*.

Positive psychology movement

Positive psychology (PP) is the science of positive aspects of human life, such as happiness, well-being and flourishing. Often contrasted with the medical model, this approach places an explicit emphasis on the potential of individuals and on researching things that make life worth living (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). PP poses slightly different questions, such as ‘What works?’ rather than ‘What doesn’t work?’; asks ‘What is right with this person?’ rather than ‘What is wrong?’; asks ‘Why do some individuals succeed when faced with unfavourable circumstances?’ instead of ‘Why do people some fail?’. In a nutshell, PP can be summarized as drawing on what is strong, rather than dealing with what is wrong.

A stronger focus on well-being in general and on student well-being in particular has evolved from the positive psychology movement. Like the self-esteem movement, positive psychology incorporates some of the principles of humanistic psychology. However, unlike the self-esteem movement, positive psychology is significantly supported by research (Seligman 2007). Positive psychology, as the name implies, focuses on positives, namely those strengths and behaviours that enable people to have robust levels of well-being and enable individuals, groups and organizations to thrive. Positive psychology researchers study the positive effects of a range of factors on well-being/happiness including: positive emotions (Frederickson 2001); engagement and ‘psychological flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 2000); the identification and building of personal character strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and intellectual strengths (Gardner 1999; McGrath and Noble 2003); optimistic thinking (Seligman et al. 1995), and having a sense of meaning and purpose (Seligman 2002).

With the expansion of the positive psychology field, the past decade has seen a surprising wealth of curricula being developed around the world to address different aspects of positive functioning. For example, the *Wisdom Curriculum* encourages the intellectual

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and moral development of children through the medium of mainstream subjects (Reznitskaya and Sternberg 2004). A number of projects accentuating hope in schoolchildren include *Making Hope Happen* and *Making Hope Happen for Kids* (Lopez et al. 2004). A strengths-based development programme, developed by the Gallup Foundation, has been found to significantly improve academic performance (Hodges and Clifton. 2004). In the UK, the *Celebrating Strengths* approach, targeting the development of strengths through storytelling, has been widely implemented in primary schools in the North of England (Eades 2008). Emotional intelligence has been widely used as an umbrella concept for various programmes that teach social and emotional learning, the most successful of which are *Self Science* and *The South Africa Emotional Intelligence Curriculum* (Salovey et al. 2004). Some of the programmes, such as *Going for the Goal*, that teaches adolescents the skills of positive goal setting and facilitation of goal attainment, have been carried out on a very large scale (Danish 1996). Key School, in Indianapolis, in the USA, aims to cultivate pupils' experience of flow (full engagement in an activity). Their programme provides opportunities for pupils to challenge their abilities, and the school has a Flow Activities Center, where pupils have the time and space to engage in activities related to their own interests. The Culver Academies, a group of boarding high schools in Indiana, have integrated character strengths and positive emotions throughout the school. Teaching staff have been trained in strengths and positive emotions, and staff performance reviews are based on the strengths approach (Yeager 2007). The Hawn Foundation, a US charity, has developed a mindfulness education curriculum that was being piloted in schools in Canada and the USA in 2008.

In September 2006, Wellington College – a private, co-educational school in the UK – embarked on a two-year *Skills of Well-Being* programme for its pupils. The course was designed by Ian Morris and Dr Nick Baylis and is delivered fortnightly to Years 10 and 11 (ages 14–16) with the specific aim of 'redressing the imbalance in modern education caused by an emphasis on exam results and measured outcomes' (Baylis and Morris 2006, p. 3). The ultimate outcome of the course is to give Wellington College pupils practical skills for living well that are useful, easily understood and can be applied on a daily basis. Although the course is still developing, the passionate desire to deliver these skills is driving an ongoing review of the course. This is coupled with an intention to avoid a 'myopic' approach and broaden the breadth and depth of the course to include knowledge from positive psychology, drawing on the latest evidence-based research and practical interventions. Skills of Well-Being has, at present, very limited scientific validation. Despite this fact, it has attracted unprecedented media coverage, placing the well-being debate firmly at the heart of the British political agenda.

In the USA, a programme of 17 lessons, each two hours in length, was developed to introduce positive psychology to high school students. Developed on ideas in Martin Seligman's (2002) book, *Authentic Happiness*, and including a substantial resilience component, the programme incorporates several tested and innovative positive psychology interventions, such as savouring (Bryant and Veroff 2006), gratitude letters and counting

blessings (Seligman et al. 2005), and forgiveness and letting go of grudges (McCullough and Witvliet 2000).

Our book is based on the *Well-Being Curriculum* for primary and secondary schools that has been piloted in the UK for at least three years at the time of printing. The Well-Being Curriculum is a joint project of the partnership between the Haberdashers' Aske's Academies Federation and the University of East London (UEL). The partnership has developed a comprehensive well-being curriculum based on the principles and findings of positive psychology and taught weekly to students from Year 1 to Year 13. The curriculum targets every known major predictor and correlate of well-being, using individually tested interventions to enhance learning. The emphasis of the curriculum in Years 1–9 is on positive interventions, targeting areas that have a substantial evidence base such as happiness, positive emotions, flow, resilience, achievement, positive relationships and meaning. The emphasis in Years 10–13 is on positive education, enabling young people to reflect upon and make choices about their well-being and development. This four-part curriculum spans four years, focusing on the areas of self, being, doing and relationships. Pilot evaluation of the programme showed increases in various aspects of well-being (i.e. positive affect, satisfaction with friends, and satisfaction with oneself) consistent with the areas targeted (Boniwell and Osin, in preparation).

Effective planning for well-being education

Although it is difficult to define what makes a good school, researchers agree that it is a type of school that encourages students to be engaged with and enthusiastic about learning. Common features of such schools include a safe environment, an articulated and shared vision of the school's purpose, explicit goals for students, emphasis on the individual student, and rewarding their efforts or improvements (Peterson 2006). Student satisfaction with the school, feelings of security and belonging play a crucial role in their engagement in learning and achievement (Brand et al. 2003). Furthermore, the available research evidence strongly indicates the following seven principles for the effective implementation of well-being lessons in schools (Noble and McGrath, in press).

1 Programmes that are taught by class teachers are more likely to be effective

Academic, social and emotional improvements are more likely to occur when teachers (rather than external consultants or professionals) implement a relevant programme (Weissberg and O'Brien 2004; CASEL 2010).

2 The programme should be acceptable to teachers

A school-based programme that is actually liked by the teachers who teach it is more likely to be effective (Elliott et al. 1991; Eckert and Hinze, 2000; McDougal et al. 2000). Teacher acceptance reflects their perception that the programme seems to be worth their time

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and effort, feasible, socially valid (Gresham and Lopez 1996) and consistent with their educational, psychological and social perspectives and classroom practices. It also reflects their perception that they have the necessary competencies to teach the programme (Nastasi 2002). This is the reason why both the PRP and SPARK Resilience Programmes focus on teaching adult resilience skills to teachers first to ensure their buy-in.

3 Universal programmes are more effective

A universal programme is delivered to all students, not just those who are identified as 'at risk' for mental health problems. A universal programme reflects the paradigm shift in education, social welfare and psychology from just targeting students at risk to giving some protective skills to all students (Greenberg et al. 2001; Benard 2004; CASEL 2010). Universal programmes can also incorporate options for additional targeted learning with indicated students. This book is a good example of such a programme.

4 Programmes that are long-term and even multi-year have more chance of success

Short-term preventive interventions produce time-limited benefits. Whole-year or multi-year programmes are more likely to produce enduring benefits and are more sustainable especially when taught across age levels (Greenberg et al. 2001; Greenberg et al. 2003; Wells et al. 2003). The programme offered by this book is one-year long, but can potentially be split into two years.

5 A multi-strategic approach is more effective than a single highly-focused approach

A multi-strategic approach involves the inclusion of a collection of coordinated 'active ingredients' rather than a single focus (Kellerman et al. 1998; Greenberg et al. 2001; Catalano et al., 2003). The proposed programme contains six major subject streams, all underlined by research evidence regarding their respective contribution to well-being.

6 Effective programmes include a significant component of skills derived from cognitive behaviour approaches (CBT)

There is substantial research support for the efficacy of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) in constructively changing feelings and behaviour (e.g., Andrews et al. 2001; Andrews et al. 2002; Scheckner et al. 2002). CBT, which was originally developed by Aaron Beck (Beck et al. 1979), is based on the understanding that how you think affects how you feel which in turn influences how you behave. The premise is that by adopting more positive and rational thinking, you can help yourself to change your behaviour. A number of lessons in this book (e.g. Lesson 20, Hope, and Lesson 24, Think Yourself Happier) involve some elements of CBT.

7 The programme should incorporate evidence-based teaching strategies

If a programme is to be successfully embedded in the curriculum, then it must include not only evidence-based psychological approaches but must also incorporate evidence-based teaching strategies. Cooperative learning techniques, suggested throughout this book, have extensive evidence support for improving academic outcomes as well as building positive relationships, class cohesion and social-emotional learning (e.g. Marzano et al. 2001; Roseth et al. 2008; Hattie 2009). The use of high quality literature as an entry point for discussions on well-being topics can also serve to meet literacy outcomes. Other teaching strategies such as educational games, where students work in pairs or small groups against other pairs in the class (e.g. Hattie 2009), and participation in class discussion (Lowen, 2003) also actively engage students in learning, develop positive relationships and teach social-emotional skills.

Organization of this book

The aim of the book is to provide educators with a grounded and flexible resource for teaching 11–15-year-olds through a series of up to 36 well-being lessons. Each lesson contains:

- a suggested 60-minute outline Lesson Plan;
- How To instructions on running the lesson;
- handouts for students that can be downloaded from the website, www.openup.co.uk/positivepsychology;
- PowerPoint slides when suggested by the lesson (located on the dedicated website);
- references and resources.

The website address is www.openup.co.uk/positivepsychology and in the text, a mouse icon will indicate that the relevant handout is to be found on the website.

Following the basic premise of the book, all lessons are grounded in scientific discoveries related to well-being. Therefore, notes running alongside the How To part of the lessons are designed to inform teachers of the psychological theory and empirical findings behind suggested activities and interventions.

We believe that the need for flexibility when running such a curriculum is paramount. Educators have many demands on their time and while running a full 36-hour positive psychology programme may be desirable, a ‘dip-in’ resource for a smaller-scale programme gives it a unique edge. Therefore, the book is divided into six subject headings (as per the model delineated below) with six lessons offered per each subject stream. This means the reader can run a programme consisting of 6, 12, 18, 24 or 36 lessons, taking either

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1, 2, 3, 4 or 6 lessons from each subject heading. Alternatively, one may choose to run one or two streams in their entirety.

The six subject streams are as follows (see the Positive Psychology in Action Lessons Grid):

1. Positive Self
2. Positive Body
3. Positive Emotions
4. Positive Mindset
5. Positive Direction
6. Positive Relationships

Positive Self

This stream combines lessons related to the nature of happiness and well-being (Happy Talk (Lesson 1)) with lessons on confidence and self-efficacy (Me, Inc. (Lesson 2) and Confident You (Lesson 4)). My Best Possible Self (Lesson 5) is centred on an exercise that is known to enhance well-being in the long term, while the My Strengths Portfolio (Lesson 3) and The Strengths Songbook (Lesson 6) play out the idea of strengths – our positive traits, the exercise of which is also known to contribute to the life well lived.

Positive Body

Not surprisingly, our physical state plays a major part in the way we feel psychologically. In fact, recent advances in research demonstrate that exercise, for example (The Power of Exercise (Lesson 12)) is a much better antidote for depression than any anti-depressant medication. Our diet is, without doubt, another important contributor (see Supersize Me! (Lesson 8) and The Nutrition Quiz (Lesson 9)). However, the flipside to healthy eating is dieting for the sake of body image, which can sometimes be taken to extreme (hence Image Matters (Lesson 7)). This stream also addresses healthy sleep and some strategies for getting it (Go to Bed, Sleepyhead! (Lesson 11)), as well as the basics of mindfulness and meditation – ancient techniques of balance that have a surprising recent history of scientific discoveries associated with them (Mindfulness for Life (Lesson 10)).

Positive Emotions

Emotions are inseparable from the very notion of happiness, since well-being is often defined as the presence of positive and the absence of negative emotions. This stream focuses on the important adaptive functions of both positive and negative emotions (Understanding Emotions (Lesson 13)), the main enemy of positivity – the Negativity

Bias (Lesson 14) – our tendency to easily notice negative events, things and people, and ways of dealing with it. Other lessons teach students the value of positive emotions (Boost your Positive Emotions! (Lesson 15)) and humour (Just for Fun (Lesson 17)), as well as ways to enhance them through savouring (Surprising, Spontaneous Savouring!) and positive reminiscence (Mental Time Travelling (Lesson 18)).

Positive Mindset

The psychology of well-being is not short of techniques helping us to train our minds to actually see the world as a glass that is half-full, such as Hope (Lesson 20), Creative Problem-Solving (Lesson 21) or other activities we consciously embark upon (Think Yourself Happier (Lesson 24)). But first of all, it is important to challenge our fixed ways of thinking (Fixed or Flexible? (Lesson 19)), our preconceptions about the importance of money (Money, Money, Money (Lesson 22)) and even choice (The Tyranny of Choice (Lesson 23)).

Positive Direction

This stream is all about motivation (Egg Yourself On (Lesson 25)), self-regulation or will power (Nail, Nag, Nudge (Lesson 26)) and goal setting (Big Hairy Goals (Lesson 28)) on the way to achieve optimal engagement (The Flow Zone (Lesson 27)). An essential element of being able to direct oneself is time management (Five Little Pigs (Lesson 29)) and achieving balance between freely chosen and necessary activities (The Balancing Act (Lesson 30)).

Positive Relationships

It is well known that relationships are at the very core of our well-being, regardless of whether we are introverts or extraverts. This stream focuses on the basic relationships skills, such as being able to form and maintain friendships (Tonic or Toxic? (Lesson 31)), being able to listen and, even more importantly, to hear (Listening and Empathy (Lesson 33)) and negotiation skills (Sweet Trading (Lesson 34)). Forgiveness (Lesson 32), Kindness and Gratitude (Lesson 35) are also included, as the main relationship strengths. The stream finishes with Happiness across Cultures (Lesson 36) – a lesson that highlights factors that allow countries to flourish, taking the scope of relationships to the planetary level.

Working on the ground: delivering well-being lessons

Lessons in this book are designed to be delivered in the spirit of participation, open-mindedness and inquiry. Most of activities are fun and engaging, and have already been tried and enjoyed by students of relevant age.

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However, there are certain behaviours that can be disruptive and not facilitative to the classroom atmosphere. We feel that it may be helpful to make some suggestions how such behaviours can be confronted in a constructive way. Of course, these are not 'rules', and teachers are encouraged to use their own experience in dealing with such situations.

Disruptive behaviour (being late, chatting to others, using mobile phone, etc.)

Before beginning these series of lessons, it might help to agree on the ground rules with the whole class, occasionally reminding participants about these ground rules when disruptive behaviour occurs. When a student is late, the teacher should first finish something that has already been started before acknowledging the newcomer, inquiring about the reasons for being late and summarizing in a brief form what has been done so far. If students are chatting, one may invite them to share their comments with the whole class. If disruptions continue, it might be worth having a talk with the participant(s) after the session to inquire about the reasons for disruptions. Some possible consequences of such behaviour may need to be outlined at this point. These, ultimately, may involve a student's removal from the class (better to lose one person than the whole class).

Expressing hostility, criticizing everything, questioning to 'catch' the presenter

In this situation, the first rule is to keep calm. However, this does not mean tolerating abusive behaviour (otherwise it will grow). The student may be confronted calmly and asked why they behave in such a way. Another solution is to acknowledge the point and agree to differ, without engaging in an argument about it, or offer to discuss the issue after the lesson. If the teacher does not know the answer to a question, others can be asked for suggestions or opinions. In any case, bluffing is not a good solution. It is better to admit not knowing and promise to find out.

Attention seeking (making too long, too frequent or irrelevant comments)

The teacher may need to request to finish what she is saying first. When listening, the body language can be used to indicate urgency (e.g. by looking at the clock), the student may be directly reminded that time is limited or asked to let others contribute ('Let's hear what others think . . .'). If an irrelevant comment is made, it is important to try to find in this comment something that is connected to the actual topic and use it to return to the point. If the issue is wrong timing, the teacher can acknowledge that the comment is valid and suggest returning to it later on, when a relevant subject is addressed.

Non-co-operation (e.g., refusing to do an exercise) and non-participation

The teacher might need to discuss the reasons for refusing to participate. It may be worth asking the student to try anyway, and see if they feel the same after. The teacher can also ask others if it is OK that one of them is not participating. If they are uncomfortable, the student in question can either turn their back or temporarily leave the room. If a number

of students feel uncomfortable doing an exercise, it is probably best to leave it for later. If a student does not participate in a discussion, for example, this may simply be due to shyness. It is important to watch out for any signs that the student wants to communicate, to ask a non-intrusive question now and then, without pushing too hard or too often.

Dealing with sensitive issues

The nature of these classes is such that exceptionally some sensitive issues may be brought up or outward emotional reactions, such as crying, may be experienced. Some teachers might feel out of their depth in this situation, not knowing what to do. The important thing to bear in mind is that, although such experiences may appear hard and even painful, they are rarely harmful and the outcome is frequently beneficial. The other thing to keep in mind is that in these situations it is more important to be with the student involved rather than attempting to do something. This means giving the student time and space to express their emotions, offering sympathy and a sense of safety through body language (e.g. remaining calm); and making sure that other students do not interfere (by, for example, making some unwarranted remarks). If it is deemed that the issue may require further attention, the teacher may suggest to the student, after the session (not in front of others), to see a school counsellor. If counselling is not available, the teacher may want to organize a one-to-one chat.

Let the journey begin

This comprehensive introduction has hopefully served the purpose of boosting both the knowledge and the confidence of educators eager to engage with the well-being lessons. We wish you, the reader, a lot of fun and challenge on the way.

