EDUCATION & POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Skills of Achievement

Skills of Well-Being

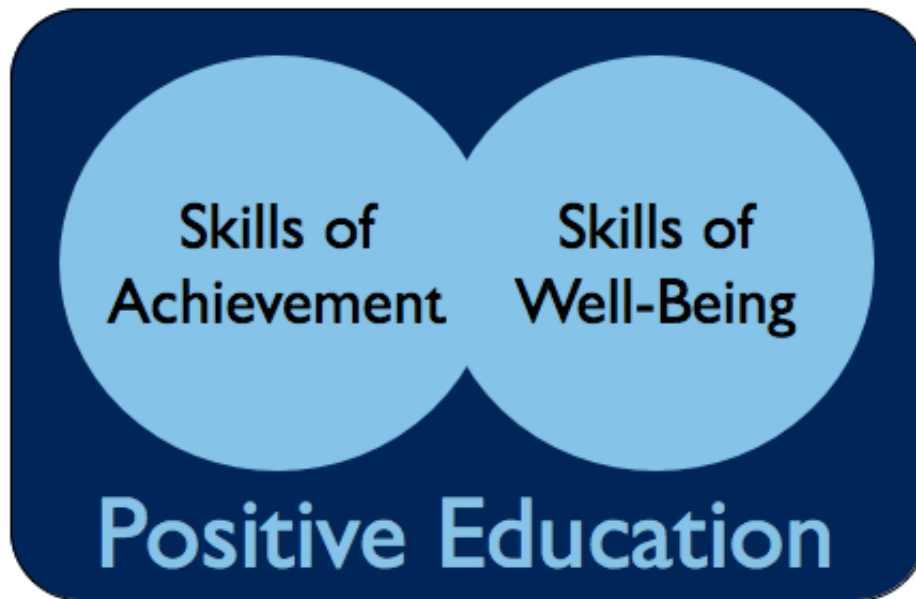Positive Education

Positive Psychology has so far been very enthusiastic about implementing their techniques into education. Seligman stated that schools are a great place to teach children about positive psychology since they spend much of their time there and they're easy to reach. However, Positive psychology is far from revolutionizing the school system, as many of the "new" techniques offer little improvement on anything that came before. Noddings (2003) stated that there is nothing new about claiming happiness is a fundamental aim of education. Other researchers claim that happiness cannot be taught at all. However a few of the implementations of positive psychology in education are debatably original.

Seligman's Techniques

Within education Seligman has so far implemented two techniques into education, in order to teach happiness and well-being. These were developed through a study of several different positive methods developed by Seligman and colleagues (2005), and were the only two found to have empirically significant positive results in decreasing depressive symptoms.

-        Three good things: The students were instructed to each day write down and elaborate upon three good things which had happened during that day.

-        Using signature strengths in a new way: The students were encouraged to identify and develop their key strengths by using them in novel ways.

In their 2009 report Seligman et al. showed that these techniques did reduce depressive symptoms and produced lasing happiness. However they failed to justify how this was relevant to education and there was a lack of rigorous data analysis. Whilst these are original techniques developed from within the positive psychology movement, their real effectiveness is still debated as most findings have been found by those who developed them and further falsification is needed. These techniques also tie into gratitude Positive Psychology's theory on gratitude, which in itself has roots far beyond the origin of the field.

Virtues in Action (VIA)

The VIA is an implementation which aims to teach "moral intelligence", and to help people use and develop their own key virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004), claim that there are six broad virtue

classics (the "High Six"), which are ubiquitous and universal. Yet the way they found these "High Six" was to sift through religion, philosophy, as well as fiction, and older psychological theories (developed by for instance, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Gardiner). So whilst the theory behind VIA already draws on concepts and resources which have been there for in some cases hundreds of years, it also draws on older techniques such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Goleman 1995), and Character Education (Lickona 1991). These these techniques, whilst being derived from very similar theories were long at odds with each other. However the founder of SEL has said that the two techniques are working towards cooperation (Cohen, 2006). Between these two, there is nothing new positive psychology can offer (Kristjanson, 2012).

VIA Character Strengths & Virtues
(Peterson and Seligman, 2004)
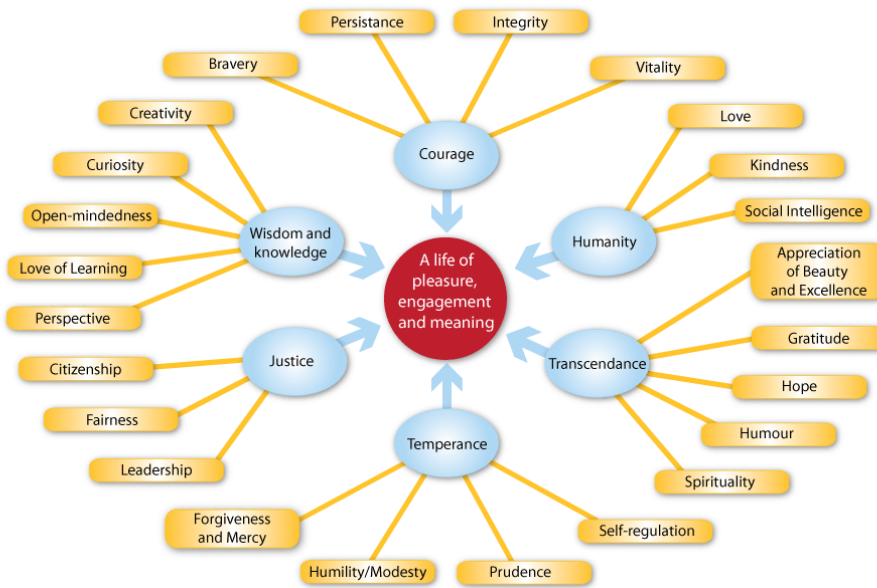
Resiliency

Resiliency has so far been widely implemented into schools in the United States (Kristjanson, 2012), mainly using the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP), developed by Seligman and his team. Whilst it is said to be effective, the most positive results have originated from the team that developed it. The PRP also draws on theories which have been around for a long time. Such theories include CBT, Ellis's (1962) belief about events, and mindfulness techniques (Kristjanson, 2012). So again, positive psychology adds nothing new. Furthermore, many positive education programs such as the SEAL initiative in the UK, have been criticized to undermine resiliency (Craig, 2011). By ignoring negative emotions young people cannot learn how to deal with them.

Flow

Even flow (concept developed by Csikszentmihalyi), which has been one of the key terms within positive psychology was around before 2000. Research on how to induce flow into classrooms existed before positive psychology existed as a movement (Tomlinson 1999). Positive education has contributed to an increase in this research and has discovered many different uses and effects of flow within a classroom setting, which improves engagement, general mood and learning experience (Kristjansen, 2012). However, ultimately flow is older than Positive Psychology and is also criticized from being derived from older methods; it is, for instance, very similar to Maslow's "Self-Actualization".

Broad-and-build

Broad-and-Build, developed by Barbara Fredrickson (2001), is not an implementation but rather a theory which states that a positive mood is beneficial to the learning experience. When people experience positive emotion, they can broaden peoples' thoughts and actions in a way which is conducive to learning (Fredrickson 2001). Whilst this is not a technique on its own, supporting empirical evidence shows that despite being a new theory which can be improved, it still empirically holds up as a theory. Therefore it can really emphasize the importance of fostering a positive school environment, and some critics even claim that this is the only original contribution from within positive psychology to the implementation of positive education (Kristjanson, 2012).

Conclusively, positive psychology, with the exception of broad-and build theory, does not seem to be offering many new useful techniques for the education system. This is not surprising, since positive education has been researched since long before positive psychology was a movement. Froh et al (2011), conducted a meta-study that found that within the literature for school psychology, which found that the number of articles which focused on positive education had been fairly consistent for 50 years, showing that positive psychology is not breaching new territory in education.

To return to the home page, press backspace or click the back button.

Useful Web-Links:

Authentic Happiness on Positive Education:

http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/newsletter.aspx?id=1551
(http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/newsletter.aspx?id=1551)

Carol Craig and criticisms of SEAL (Positive Education in UK Schools):

http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/projects.php?pid=56
(http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/projects.php?pid=56)

References:

If you could only read one paper:

This is a really good review of some common issues concerning Positive Education

Kristjansson, K. 2012. Positive Psychology and Positive Education: Old Wine in New Bottles? *Educational Psycholoist,* 47(2), 86-105

Link: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00461520.2011.610678
(http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00461520.2011.610678)

Other Useful Papers and Books:

Cohen, J. (2006). Social, emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being. *Harvard educational Review,* 76, 201-242.

Ellis, A. (1962). *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy.* New York, NY: Lyle Stuart.

Fredrickson, B. L. 2001. The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broad-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. *American Psychologist,* 56(3), 218-226.

Froh, J. J., Huebner E. S., Youssef, A. Conte, V. 2010. Acknowledging and Appreciating the Full Spectrum of the Human Condition: School Psychology's (Limited) Focus on Positive Psychological Functioning. *Psychology in the Schools,* 48(2), 110-123.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam.

Lickona, T. (1991). *Thinking in Education.*Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and Education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Peterson, C., Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., Linkins, M. 2009. Positive Education: Positive Psychology and Classroom Interventions. *Oxford Review of Education,* 35(3), 293-311

Seligman, M.E.P., Sten, T.A., Park, N., Peterson, C. (2005). Positive Psychology in Progress:: empirical Validation of Interventions. *Americam Psychologist, 60,* 410-421.

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.