

# Foreword

In one or two words, what do you most want for your children?

If you are like the thousands of parents I've polled you respond, "Happiness," "Confidence," "Contentment," "Fulfillment," "Balance," "Good stuff," "Kindness," "Health," "Satisfaction," "Love," "Being civilized," "Meaning," and the like. In short, well-being.

In one or two words, what do schools teach?

If you are like other parents, you respond, "Achievement," "Thinking skills," "Success," "Conformity," "Literacy," "Math," "Work," "Test taking," "Discipline," and the like. In short, how to succeed in the workplace.

Notice that there is almost no overlap between the two lists.

I am all for success, literacy, perseverance, and discipline, but the chapters that follow let you imagine that schools could, without compromising either, teach both the skills of well-being and the skills of achievement.

This book lets you imagine the possibility of *positive education*.

There are three good reasons that well-being should be taught in schools along with achievement skills. The first is the current flood of depression among young people and the second is that happiness has not increased over the last two generations in spite of wildly increased abundance. A third good reason is that greater well-being enhances learning, the traditional goal of education. Positive mood produces broader attention and more creative thinking. This, in contrast to negative mood, which produces narrowed attention, more critical thinking, and more analytic thinking. Both positive and negative ways of thinking are important in the right situation, but all too often schools emphasize critical thinking and following orders rather than creative thinking and learning new stuff. The result is that children rank the appeal of going to school just slightly above going to the dentist. In the modern world, I believe we have finally arrived at an era in which more creative thinking, less rote following of orders—and yes, even more enjoyment—will succeed better.

I conclude that well-being should be taught in school because it would be an antidote to the runaway incidence of depression, a way to increase life satisfaction, and an aid to better learning and more creative thinking.

What follows is the story of a pioneering vision of positive education in one of the great schools of the world.

Martin Seligman  
University of Pennsylvania  
December 2013

# Preface

Positive education is an umbrella term used to describe empirically validated and scientifically informed interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student well-being. Public interest in well-being, and more specifically, the applications of positive psychology to education, has grown in recent years. Since the launch of the positive psychology movement, advances have been made in discovering what makes individuals flourish. However, there has been a substantial gap in the literature about the “how to” of positive psychology’s application at the institutional level.

Summaries of institutional responses to well-being have been made that focus on what schools have done; however, this book is the first large-scale evidence-based publication that outlines systematically the implementation of positive psychology and well-being principles at a whole school level, from strategy, to the classroom, the sporting field and psychological services.

This book has been a collaborative effort. It focuses on the development of a scientifically informed approach in the application of positive psychology at St Peter’s College, Adelaide, South Australia, undertaken from 2011–2014. The backdrop during the well-being developments at St Peter’s College was Professor Martin Seligman’s residency advising the Government of South Australia on a strategy for well-being. St Peter’s College was a lead partner in Professor Seligman’s residency in the State and over 2000 people heard him speak at the school.

Our approach in this publication is multidisciplinary. We draw on the fields of positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship and management, psychology, and evidence-based teacher-practice as they have been incorporated at one of Australia’s oldest schools. This book has been organized into three parts: why well-being is necessary, positive psychology programs and interventions, and future directions. Overall, we suggest a framework and strategy focusing on how principals and schools leaders could integrate a scientifically informed, whole-school, well-being approach for staff and students. We focus on how to do this from an evidence-based perspective that informs the decision-making process. Our topics include:

- The why, what, and how of well-being in schools
- How to lead whole-school change
- How to measure well-being in staff and students
- How to develop strengths-based approaches

We have included examples of the integration of positive psychology principles in the classroom, religious instruction, the counselling setting, the teaching of literature, and sports coaching. Each chapter has been co-authored and adopts a practitioner-researcher lens. Our ideas are grounded in best educational practice. Authors and collaborators include teachers at the chalk face from the early years of education to the senior years, members of the St Peter's College Senior Leadership Team (Executive), and academics from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne and The University of Pennsylvania.

St Peter's College, Adelaide, South Australia, is an Anglican K-12 private, boys' school (enrolment  $n=1334$ ). It started as a proprietary school at the Holy Trinity Church, North Terrace, on July 15th 1847. The school moved to its present site (where it still remains) in 1849, where Old School House was built from limestone. The school grew with little and big quadrangles. The school educates both day and boarding students, and is a non-selective school that is aligned to its Anglican values, with a long tradition of service to the public good.

In 2011, the Headmaster, Simon Murray, and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), in consultation with the Council of Governors, made the decision to adopt positive psychology as a key approach to underpin their new strategic direction. The school aimed to be a world-class school where boys flourish, and the leadership team, school council, and staff drafted a strategic plan.

This book documents aspects of the integration of this well-being approach. Since 2011 all the authors were able to consult key leaders who visited St Peter's College, and collaborated with faculty, including Professor Roy Baumeister, Professor Michael Bernard, A/Professor Rufus Black, Professor Jane Burns, Dr. Michael Carr-Gregg, Professor Felicia Huppert, Professor Hans Henrik Knoop, Professor Patrick McGorry AO, Professor Peter Railton, Dr. Karen Reivich, Matthew Scholes, Professor Martin Seligman, Professor Chandra Sripada, Professor Rob Moodie, and Professor Toni Noble. Each has influenced this publication in small and large ways. We were able to discuss our plans with Dr. Ilona Boniwell and Dr. James Pawelski.

### **The Organization of This Book**

Given that this is one of the first publications focusing on integrating well-being concepts from a positive psychology perspective in educational institutions, we have decided to structure this book around 9 chapters. They are designed to guide school leaders through the 'how to' aspect of change. We do not claim to have created a definitive list. We document the growth of the approach at St Peter's College, Adelaide. What we do believe is that it provides the reader with a useful overview of a tactical approach to well-being at a systems level in schools. The chapters have been organized to reflect the process we used to integrate well-being at St Peter's College. This publication is an example of applied theory in practice. Each chapter commences with a short review of the literature, and we provide relevant examples throughout the book.

Each chapter explores original concepts. They have been presented at various conferences to improve our thinking and strengthen our approach (2011–2013)

including: 2nd and 3rd World Congresses on Positive Psychology, Australian Association for Research in Education, Hobart, International Baccalaureate Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, 3rd Australian Positive Psychology Conference, APS Educational and Developmental Psychology Conference, Values-in-Action (VIA Pioneer Speaker Series), South Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association, Anglican Schools Professional Development Group, APS International Congress on Coaching Psychology, Psychology and Well-being Conference, 6th European Conference on Positive Psychology, Young Minds Conference, 48th Australian Psychological Association Conference, Positive Schools Conference, Positive Education Schools Association Conference, Well-being Before Learning Conference: Adelaide Thinker in Residence Program and The Science of Well-being: Adelaide Thinker in Residence Program.

### **Positive Institutions**

Why well-being? Chapter 1 sets the scene and focuses on an approach to the central theories of positive organizational scholarship in an educational context. In this chapter, we define key terms including well-being, positive psychology, positive institutions, and positive education used throughout the book. We place the development of positive education in the context of educational developments over the past 15 years. We have been mindful of developments focusing on the twenty-first century learner and the challenges faced by educators and schools. Throughout this chapter, we adopt a systems-wide approach to well-being. This chapter does not aim to be an exhaustive account of the case for well-being in schools; rather, it focuses on providing key learnings at St Peter's College and suggests a theoretical framework for positive institutions based on consultation and collaboration with hundreds of employees and students at the school from 2011–2013.

### **A Christian Positive Psychology**

The majority of positive psychology developments take place within the cultural context of existing systems. Our setting is an Anglican school. We expand Seligman's original theoretical framework of positive institutions and focus on the existing culture of institutions. Some scholars have noted that positive psychology research highlights the similarity between psychology and religion to some of life's most challenging questions. This chapter is ground-breaking and explores the intersection and relationship between positive psychology and theology. This chapter builds on the early thinking and exploration of the school's Chaplain, the Rev'd Dr. Theodore McCall in conversation with Professor Lea Waters from the University of Melbourne and Dr. Mathew White to define a Christian positive psychology. It was enriched deeply by Father Theo's opportunity to participate in the Canterbury Retreat, organized by Martin Seligman and held in the shadow of Canterbury Cathedral. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, it involved theologians and psychologists from Harvard, Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, the Union Theological Seminary (New York), Ingeus, the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, St Peter's Eastern Hill, Melbourne, and St Peter's College, Adelaide. Participants gathered to discuss the topic of Prospective Psychology: Being Called into the Future. In many peer-reviewed journals, it is rare to find specific dia-

logue between these two distinct areas of investigation: psychology and theology. We have provided the theoretical and applied examples that have taken place within St Peter's College. In this chapter, we stress the development of our well-being approach is grounded in an Anglican positive psychology, recognizing we encourage students to develop their virtues and strengths from within the cultural context of our institution.

### **Positive Change**

The one certainty in life is that there will be change; however, change in educational institutions tends to be top-down and management-driven rather than having specific engagement from staff from the bottom up. In this chapter, we focus on the process adopted by the school management to introduce leadership and change from a positive psychology perspective. This focuses on the strategies and significant changes in approach that were enacted to instigate the change process. Specifically, the chapter will reflect critically on the application of David Cooperrider's Appreciative Inquiry-based approach to managing change. We highlight a positive psychology based process, put it into context and outline the intersection between traditional approaches to human resource management in schools and culture development. This chapter provides an example of the integration of contemporary human resource and employee engagement using positive psychology principles.

### **Measuring Well-Being**

Measurement matters. Seligman often quotes the Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz: "what you measures affects what you do. If you don't measure the right thing, you don't do the right thing". This chapter focuses on group measurement of well-being at an institutional level, focusing on staff and students. We outline whole-school measurement strategies, aligned with Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing.

### **Positive School Psychology**

Positive psychology asserts that the traditional approach to psychological services has focused for too long on what is wrong with people and provides strategies that only bring people to a position of mitigating their suffering. Seligman and his colleagues asked which scientifically demonstrated practices can be applied in therapeutic settings to teach and equip individuals and groups with the skills to flourish. This chapter outlines a framework and strategy to evolve school psychological services from a welfare-based model to a well-being model. It considers the integration of traditional psychological service and well-being principles. This chapter outlines the application of Caplan's preventative mental health model and systems approach to demonstrate a framework for schools to manage the growth of psychological services; moving from focusing on student crisis and interventions towards a more proactive and inclusive well-being-based framework, in the context of more positive student behaviour management systems.

### **Strengths in Schools**

The character strengths profile is a foundational aspect of positive psychology. Applications of Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman's strengths-based approach

to schooling have been previously published; however, this chapter documents a number of integrated strategies that complement the whole school approach outlined in Chap. 1 linked with the introduction of positive education at the school (cf. Chap. 3). It demonstrates the creativity unleashed at St Peter's College following the systematic training of staff in well-being concepts. The chapter outlines 23 strengths-based interventions over 36 months, springing both from the grass-roots of the classroom, sporting field, and drama department, and the top-down perspective on the integration of this context into school life.

### **Positive Psychology and English Literature**

James Pawelski and Donald J. Moores have called for a positive turn in the humanities. While developments in literary criticism will take time, there is a natural synergy between well-being concepts, including resilience, joy, love, strengths, and optimism, and the study of literature in all cultures. After all, literature focuses on what it means to be human, and many of the canonical works of literature provide us with the ability to express and describe our emotions, thoughts, and feelings. This chapter provides examples of the integration of positive psychology principles in the study of English literature and, more specifically, hope theory, to enrich the study of characterization in literature.

### **Student Leadership and Positive Psychology**

This chapter is an example of a student initiative instigated by the School Captain and Vice-Captain of St Peter's College, who developed a two-and-a-half day student summit, combining appreciative inquiry-based approaches and strengths-based exercises for students to develop their vision, mission, and goals for the year.

### **Future Directions in Positive Psychology and Education**

Chapter 9 was inspired following our experiences at the remarkable Positive Education Summit from 2–4 October 2013, held at No. 10 Downing Street hosted by Dr. David Halpern, Director of the Behavioural Insights Team in the Prime Minister's Office and at Wellington College hosted by the Master of Wellington College, Dr. Anthony Selton. We were honoured to present twice at this Summit at the invitation of Professor Martin Seligman and James O'Shaughnessy, Founder and Director of Floreat Education. James was Director of Policy and Research for Prime Minister David Cameron between 2007 and 2011, most recently in No. 10 Downing Street, and prior to that Deputy Director at the leading think tank Policy Exchange. He significantly enriched our thinking about well-being at a policy level. We were inspired by presenters including Dr. Angela Duckworth Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Jane Gillham the Co-Director, Penn Resiliency Project, University of Pennsylvania, Professor Felicia Huppert the Founding Director of the Well-being Institute, University of Cambridge, Yang Lan, Professor Lord Richard Layard the Director of the Wellbeing Programme in the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, Steve Leventhal the Executive Director, CorStone, David Levin the Co-Founder and Superintendent, KIPP, Gary Lewis the Headteacher, Kings Langley School, Dr. Douglas North the Head of School, The Albany Academies, Dr. Kaiping Peng Chair, Department of Psychology, Tsinghua University and Dominic Randolph the Head of School, Riverdale Country School.

Finally, we argue that decision makers must focus systematically on well-being at an institutional level to herald educational reform that transforms lives for twenty-first century learners. We argue that universities should begin to train educators in this way of teaching and learning. This chapter considers blue sky thinking on the developments of pre-service teacher training, professional and leadership development, and professional governance in schools.

Mathew A. White and

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**St Peter's College**

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA



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