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Approaches to Positive Education

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There has never been a more important time to consider the role of schools and learning institutions in teaching the skills of wellbeing, resilience and flourishing to students and staff. In 2020, the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world that we live in—characterised by rapid environmental, political, economic, technological, and social change—was challenged further through the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no question that the COVID crisis brought the need for wellbeing, resilience, and mental toughness in schools, organisations, and communities to the centre stage, evidenced by national, state, and local policies developed in multiple countries to address mental health concerns, media coverage emphasising mental health challenges in teachers and students, and a myriad of webinars and online conferences and courses that were readily made available throughout the year, as the positive psychology community focussed on upskilling and supporting local and non-local communities.

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Despite the many promising and necessary initiatives, these approaches were primarily reactive in nature. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools in Australia and elsewhere had already adopted various approaches to positive education, not as a result of a crisis per se (albeit we would argue that it was the mental health crisis that contributed to the initial uptake), but for the proactive enhancement of the wellbeing of their communities. In our perspective, supported by discussions with the schools with whom we have engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic, investments in wellbeing began to pay real dividends as they navigated through unprecedented and difficult times and yet still found ways to thrive despite the struggle.

Multiple approaches to positive education exist, some of which we consider in this chapter. We first point to challenges in sustainable implementation, pointing to the need for the strategic integration of approaches and cross-disciplinary collaboration, with a particular emphasis on the benefits of incorporating coaching into the process. We provide a case study to highlight how the successful integration of different approaches can be implemented. Finally, practical recommendations are provided to inform the strategic implementation of positive education. We posit that whatever the approach to positive education that is taken by schools, there appears to be a common theme of proactive, genuine and positive commitments from schools to place wellbeing and flourishing at the very heart of their mission.

An Applied Perspective of Positive Education

We begin by considering the rise of positive education as a practice in schools, identify challenges that arise in implementation within the constraints of schools, and provide a lens for thinking about the application of positive education across educational communities.

The Emergence and Growth of Positive Education

When a seminal paper was published by Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, and Linkins (2009), positive education was identified as a specific sub-discipline of positive psychology. This paper was largely based on the work Seligman and his team had conducted at Geelong Grammar School (GGS). The GGS approach included the explicit teaching of positive psychology to staff (by Seligman and his team), then to students (by the GGS staff) and, overtime, the school took a whole of school approach to embed the science into the

broader school culture (Norrish, 2015). This whole school approach to positive education centred on Seligman's model of wellbeing, PERMA (Seligman, 2011), with an added health (H) dimension (i.e., PERMAH). GGS developed the strategy of 'learn it, live it, teach it, and embed it', whereby staff were first encouraged to learn and apply the science of positive psychology to their own lives, then teach it to students, and then increasingly embed it within their everyday practice. Over time, GGS, also added a focus on establishing school-wide policies and processes to create a culture for wellbeing across the school community, embedding wellbeing into areas such as assemblies, sports, music, chapel services, and parent events.

Over the past decade, numerous schools have been inspired by GGS's proactive approach in equipping students with skills to prevent mental illness, promote student flourishing, and support academic performance. Since that time, there has been a significant uptake of positive education in Australia (Green, 2014; Slemp et al., 2017), with growing uptake worldwide. Many of the schools that first embraced positive education have been private/independent schools, which often have a greater capacity to finance external consultancy and create resources and have greater freedom in designing curricula and timetables than government/public schools. The investments made by these schools helped create an evidence base for positive education (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; White, Slemp, & Murray, 2017), enabled sharing of good practices, and provided inspiration and motivation to many schools and educators around the world to consider the potential benefits of taking a positive education approach.

The Challenge of Sustainable Implementation

While extensions to less privileged schools and more diverse populations is encouraging, the scalability and sustainability of positive education remain questionable. Many schools are either limited by financial constraints and/or are uncertain of whether they wish to commit to a positive education approach wholeheartedly. They might dip their toe in the water, but resist jumping into the sea. For instance, we commonly find that schools will invite external expert consultants to provide one-off keynotes or staff workshops in the science of positive psychology/positive education, with the aim of exploring where and how positive education may align with their own school's mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives, which usually include enhancing student wellbeing and reducing mental health issues.

While learning may take place in these professional development sessions, these learnings are often not transferred into lived practices at the school,

nor are they embedded in school processes. Despite the popularity of this approach, studies show that there is limited 'transfer of training'. For instance, Saks (2002) found that about 40% of trainees failed to transfer knowledge gained immediately after training, 70% faltered in transfer one year after the program, and ultimately only 50% of training investments resulted in organisational or individual improvements. Transferability is more likely when organisations create a positive transfer climate (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993), which facilitates the use of what has been learned in training back on the job. Features of a positive transfer climate include cues that prompt individuals to use new skills, consequences for the correct use of skills, remediation for not using skills, and social support from peers and leaders in the form of incentives and feedback (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993). We believe that this is particularly relevant to positive education efforts that primarily focus on professional development and training initiatives.

Training may also be more effective when it is driven by and championed by educators within the school, who understand the school context, have the skills and knowledge to make sense of the positive psychology literature, and motivate others within the school to incorporate positive education within the school. Some educators, school psychologists, and school leaders have gone on to further education, such as completing a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP), Masters in Coaching Psychology, doctoral study, or other certifications. There has also been the creation of and targeted recruitment to newly created leadership posts with specific briefs and job titles relating to positive education or whole school wellbeing. By building the internal capability of school staff, schools become less reliant on external consultants and better able to embed their approach in a context-specific manner.

Beyond the questionable transfer of training, school efforts can also be limited by ad hoc approaches, often focused on specific programs. For some schools, a program can be a launching pad to which further approaches might follow on as part of a strategic approach to positive education. However, many schools remain committed to a singular program even when it is no longer serving the school community well, failing to fully embrace and embed other key areas of positive education. For example, a school that is committed to a specific social and emotional learning (SEL) program may not offer any specific education to students or staff on growth mindset or character education. Equally, there are schools that embrace coaching to enhance teaching and learning, but not explicitly to support positive education (Lofthouse, 2017). Indeed, we have encountered numerous schools that have defined themselves by labels such as 'Growth Mindset School' or a

'Character School' to highlight their commitment to that approach. While a commitment to the effective implementation of a program is important and should be commended, given many programs often fail to be effectively implemented, it is our belief and recommendation that a school should consider multiple approaches to positive education, ideally underpinned by a coaching approach and the creation of a coaching culture. In this chapter, we review some of the approaches that schools might consider, with the recognition that as a young field, additional useful approaches will continue to be developed in the years to come.

School leaders can also have unrealistic expectations of changes and the timescale needed for the transfer of training and embedding of approaches to occur. From our experience, when schools do engage external experts to support a strategic approach, the process from commencement to the desired individual and collective outcomes (e.g., student, staff, and whole school flourishing) is a four-year minimum commitment. These cultures change not simply through training sessions by experts or the incorporation of a particular approach in the short term, but through a long-term commitment to and prioritising of positive education across the school.

Integrating Positive Education and Coaching

Considering the challenges involved in sustainably implementing positive education within schools, we argue that the objectives of positive education, including the goal of promoting youth wellbeing, are grand challenges that remain to be solved, and as such require cross-disciplinary collaboration. Grand challenges have been defined as having a broad application, an ability to manifest themselves at different levels of scale, and the interest they attract in political and financial support for research in providing a solution (O'Rourke, Crowley, & Gonnerman, 2016). While it may be clear that there are a multitude of disciplines that have relevance to positive education, we believe that one of the most potent and relevant levers for sustainable implementation is evidence-based coaching (EBC).

We argue that the implementation of positive education through a positive transfer climate requires a strategic approach which includes coaching of school leaders, key teams, and champions combined with cultivating a culture of quality coaching conversations (Grant, 2017a, 2017b). Studies find significant gains in productivity of public sector managers and leaders who received coaching alongside training (e.g., Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997). In our experience, our roles as consultants, coaches, and facilitators have enabled the development of longer term ongoing relationships with schools that has

allowed us to coach them through the introduction of positive education, supporting them to set goals; develop strategy; collaborate effectively; implement action plans; review, reflect, evaluate, share, and present outcomes and measures internally and often at international conferences; and embed change over time. We believe that this approach enables the creation of positive transfer climates and supports the development of an overall positive culture that is necessary for sustainable change to occur.

The challenges in sustainably incorporating positive education point to the need for cross-disciplinary collaboration (especially between positive psychology and coaching psychology), the benefits of flexibly incorporating multiple approaches, and the need for broader and more strategic approaches. As such, we suggest that positive education can be thought of as:

> The strategic and sustainable integration and implementation of the complementary fields of positive psychology, coaching psychology, and other relevant wellbeing science into an educational setting utilising multiple evidence-based initiatives aimed at creating flourishing students, staff, and whole-school communities.

As scientist-practitioners, we have been actively involved in and contributed to the growth of positive education in Australia, Asia-Pacific, the United Kingdom, and Europe since its inception in 2009. We have collectively worked with hundreds of private and public schools during this time. A large majority of our engagements have been larger scale and longer term consultancies, as part of ongoing cultural change programs, such as Knox Grammar School and Loreto-Kirribilli (Sydney, Australia), Perth College (Western Australia), St Columba (South Australia), Kurri Kurri High School (New South Wales, Australia), and Taipei European School (Taiwan). At the time of initial engagement, these schools were either interested in increasing student wellbeing without knowledge of the field of positive psychology or they were already attempting to utilise the science of positive psychology to promote student wellbeing, but they were struggling to adopt a strategic approach to enhance 'stickability' (White, 2016). It is our observation that many schools also failed to recognise the powerful role of teacher wellbeing and its associated impact on student wellbeing and hence the initiatives were often mostly student-focused.

The challenge becomes that without a strategic approach or alignment under an overarching framework, these initiatives appear as additional extras to the job of teaching curriculum. Our experiences so far suggest that most schools do offer students and staff (to a lesser degree) opportunities to enhance their wellbeing and personal and social capabilities. But many lack

strategic alignment to the overall school strategy or a strategy focused on the prevention of student mental health issues rather than a broader wellbeing strategy for students, staff, and whole school flourishing. To provide guidance for the sustainable integration of positive education, we first review some of the main approaches that have been used within positive education, before turning to a case study highlighting a sustainable approach.

Some Approaches Used Within Positive Education

A variety of approaches to positive education exist (e.g. Slemp et al., 2017), including:

1. Social and emotional learning (SEL)
2. Character education
3. Growth mindset
4. Resilience and Mental toughness
5. Coaching and Mentoring
6. Mindfulness and Other Contemplative practices
7. Wellbeing practices
8. Restorative Justice
9. School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
10. Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE).

In this chapter, we focus on the first five, as these are the approaches that have been most common across schools that we have worked with. We provide a brief snapshot of each approach, highlighting the relevance to the aims and objectives of positive education, and identify limitations of using the approach on its own, rather than as a broader set of approaches.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been described as 'the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions' (www.casel.org). The root of SEL originates from Plato where he suggested a holistic curriculum, however in recent times, SEL emerged from Yale School of

Medicine in the late 1960s. CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, was formed in 1994 with a mission of integrating evidence-based social and emotional learning into schools.

CASEL includes five key competencies that form part of an integrated SEL framework: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills. These competencies are typically integrated into programs that teachers incorporate into lessons throughout the year. There are many highly effective SEL programs in schools, supported with extensive research, such as the RULER program from Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, Rivers, Maurer, Elbertson, & Kremenitzer, 2011), Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships (RRRR, Cahill et al., 2016), The 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution; Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010), MindUP (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), and Peaceworks: Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids (Pickens, 2009). CASEL also emphasises the broader system in which these competencies are taught, including not only the SEL curriculum and instruction but also creating supportive learning environments through school-wide practices and policies, including the importance of embedding learning within family and community partnerships.

Many SEL approaches have been used throughout schools long before positive education was established. A meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students who participated in evidence-based SEL programs not only demonstrated small to moderate increases in social and emotional skills and positive social behaviours, but also demonstrated an 11% point gain in academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Research also shows effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater wellbeing, and better school performance, whereas those who fail to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Slemp et al. (2017) suggested that 'the vision, scope, and boundaries of positive education are yet to be fully defined, but it both intersects with and complements social and emotional learning' (p. 103). SEL arose through extensive education-based research, whereas positive education arose from positive psychology applied to education. Indeed, currently, there is little acknowledgement or frameworks provided on the significant connections between positive education and SEL (Ng & Vella-Brodrick, 2019), though the connections certainly exist. For instance, the core competencies of SEL support Seligman's PERMA model, with self-awareness needed to identify positive emotions, self-management required in choosing to be engaged in

a task, social awareness helps us build positive relationships, and responsible decision-making is needed to make meaningful contributions to the world around us. We suggest that SEL is a helpful approach that can be used as part of the broader whole-school focus on positive education.

Effective implementation of SEL programs can be challenging by competing demands for curriculum time, often resulting in a fragmented approach to learning (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This occurs, in part, because outcomes of SEL programs are rarely measured, and assessment and reporting are not required. The teacher is often the facilitator of these programs, yet little time is given to teachers to learn and live these competencies themselves (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). What we do know from the research is that SEL programs are only effective if all stakeholders are involved in the implementation process holistically and sustainably (CASEL, 2020). Teaching staff need opportunities for professional development to learn and live SEL, ensuring clear buy-in and involvement before teaching the SEL competencies to students. Research also has shown that regular and ongoing mentoring for teachers can support not only in the development of their own social and emotional competencies, but is effective in helping teachers better implement high-quality SEL programs (Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016).

Character Education

Character refers to personal traits that are admired and respected by others, those qualities that define us, are integral to who we are, who we want to become and the value we can bring to the world (Neimeic & McGrath, 2019). Character education can be traced back to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, which emphasise the explicit and implicit teaching and development that helps young people to discover and build positive personal character strengths or virtues with the aim of leading flourishing lives (Jubilee Centre, 2017).

Numerous perspectives and definitions about what constitute 'good' character exist. The perspectives and approaches most often used within positive education build upon a set of virtues and strengths identified by Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman. Through an extensive review of the qualities that are generally universally considered good about being human, Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggested six virtues and 24 specific character strengths that have been shared by most cultures globally over multiple millennia. To measure and develop character in adults and subsequently young people, they developed the Values in Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths (www.viacharac

ter.org). Hundreds of studies have demonstrated that positive outcomes arise for children, young people, teachers, and parents as they learn to recognise and use their strengths, including enhanced wellbeing, self-efficacy, resilience, engagement, academic attainment, and performance, as well as reductions in anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms (Harzer, Mubashar, & Dubreuil, 2017; Quinlan, Vella-Brodrick, Gray, & Swain, 2019; Waters & Sun, 2016). As a result, the VIA is now a prominent part of most positive education efforts, with the principles underlying the model being creatively applied from the early years through to the higher education sector.

An example of the explicit strategic incorporation of the VIA Strengths is the US-based KIPP (Knowledge is Power) Program (KIPP, 2020), a not-for profit network of over 240 schools that explicitly draws upon seven of the character strengths in particular and 24 associated behaviours which are deemed essential for a happy and successful life at school and beyond: curiosity, gratitude, self-regulation, grit, social intelligence, optimism, and zest. The KIPP approach is based on a deep belief that academic achievement and well-developed character strengths are interconnected and formally integrates strengths development alongside the academic curriculum. Student progress is measured by incorporating a Character Growth Report Card, in which students are scored by teachers on their character performance.

In the United Kingdom, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at Birmingham University has been at the vanguard of bringing character into both the caught and taught curriculum, and a number of schools have trialled requiring incorporating the development of character within their schools (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse, & Jones, 2015). Their *Framework for Character Education* (2017) argues for the development of a whole school ethos and culture that embraces character alongside the explicit teaching of character within classroom subjects (Harrison, Arthur, & Burn, 2016).

Both the VIA Institute of Character and Jubilee Centre are consistently building an evidence-base for character strengths assessment and encouraging innovation and the sharing of resources to support learning and application in schools, with a wealth of freely accessible research papers and resources available on their websites. However, a limitation in our experience is that initial excitement that usually accompanies the completion of the VIA is rarely maintained. Initially, it is commonplace for both staff and students to complete the assessment and then implement a variety of initiatives to raise awareness, such as strengths posters or strengths cards. However, these interventions are not usually a part of a 'strengths strategy' which considers the usage of strengths within the school including inclusion in policy/procedures and the explicit usage of strengths within the curriculum. There have also

been concerns around highly prescriptive approaches taken with strengths and alignment to academic performance whereby the relentless focus on grit and self-regulation can result in higher levels of stress and burn-out to the detriment of wellbeing (Abundis, Crego-Emley, Baker, & Lema, 2017).

We believe the key to maximising the benefits of character strengths lies in the strategic and mindful use in line with the mission and values of the institution (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2018). One way to enhance the stickability of a strengths approach may be through the use of evidence-based coaching and coaching conversations whereby strengths can be regularly applied to facilitate awareness and appropriate use by providing space for individual reflection, strengths-based goal setting, action planning, and accountability (Leach & Green, 2016; Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011).

Growth Mindset

Growth mindset is 'the belief that human capacities are not fixed but can be developed over time' (Dweck & Yeager, 2019, p. 481). Research related to growth mindset examines ways in which one's mindset impact human behaviour. The theory arose from a long history of studies in psychology that assume that human attributes can be developed. Theories such as learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) and attribution theory (Weiner & Kukla, 1970) suggested that how people explained failure could predict their response as one of helplessness or striving for mastery. Goal theory went one step further by attempting to identify the reasons for these responses. From this perspective, students with 'achievement goals' were thought to be trying to 'prove' themselves whereas students with 'learning goals' were trying to 'improve' themselves (Covington, 2000). The research was now shifting from understanding why some people avoid taking on challenges, to focusing on why some people fulfil their potential. This shift formed the foundation of Carol Dweck's work of 'implicit theories of intelligence', which has come to be known as fixed and growth mindset thinking.

The idea of growth mindset arose from decades of research by Dweck and her colleagues, which found that students' mindsets appeared to play a key role in their motivation and achievement. For instance, one study found that for students transitioning to 7th grade Maths, those with a growth mindset had significantly increased over 2 years compared to those with a fixed mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Studies in both education and organisations continue to suggest that one's mindset impacts motivation, behaviour, and outcomes, albeit with small to moderate effect sizes, depending on the sample (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Yeager, 2019).

Building from this work, others have asked whether achievement could improve if educators change students' mindsets from thinking their intelligence was fixed to a mindset where they believe their intelligence could grow (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

While studies have identified that growth mindset interventions can influence the mindset of students to increase academic performance, Dweck and Yeager (2019) are clear to caution educators on oversimplifying the creation of growth mindsets in what has come to be known as 'false growth mindset'. This stems from educators praising effort when this effort is not effective or encouraging the use of growth mindset language from posters on the wall, yet little structure, guidance and direction is given on the process of learning. Indeed, two meta-analyses exploring the extent and circumstances of growth mindset interventions in improving academic performance, little or no significant effect was found (Sisk et al., 2018). In fact, Dweck and Yeager (2019) have shifted their research to question the role environments play on mindset, focusing on the messages that are conveyed in a system to support a growth mindset and how these messages might impact mental health, social coping, and wellbeing.

Growth mindset as a focus for positive education makes sense for many educators. Given that the primary role of schools is learning, including growth mindset interventions within a positive education curriculum provides a bridge between academic priorities and wellbeing related priorities. However, we argue that special consideration must be given to the types of interventions explored and how teachers are expected to embed these within the school. High-quality training of teachers is imperative. Teacher training is not only necessary to ensure the use of evidence-based interventions, but training may also strengthen the mindset of the teachers. Notably, teachers' mindsets are a core contributor to the development of students' mindset (Hattie, 2012). The perspectives that educators have about the potential of students—at both conscious and subconscious levels—have a major influence on how teachers think and behave, the mindsets that students develop, and resulting outcomes (Hattie, 2012). Fortunately, teacher mindset has been shown to shift towards growth mindset thinking with brief training interventions (Seaton, 2018). However, professional development must be considered within a holistic model to ensure reflections on pedagogy mirror the findings of Dweck and colleagues' research.

Resilience and Mental Toughness

Many schools are focused on resilience as a means to address adversity rather than general wellbeing enhancement, although resilience to some extent underpins wellbeing and flourishing (Huppert & So, 2013). There are many approaches and programs available which claim to build resilience in schools. For instance, the Penn Resilience Program (PRP) aims to prevent depression in young people (Gillham, Jaycox, Reivich, Seligman, & Silver, 1990). Research has indicated that PRP produces positive and reliable improvements in students' wellbeing (Seligman et al., 2009). However, while evidence-based, a prohibitive factor to the uptake of this program, like many other proprietary resilience and wellbeing programs, is often cost, which makes it inaccessible to many schools with limited budgets.

Another approach some schools are taking to unpacking resilience is mental toughness (Clough, Earle, & Strycharzcyk, 2002). Mental toughness is defined as 'the quality which determines in large part how people deal effectively with challenge, stressors and pressure…irrespective of prevailing circumstances' (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012, p. 1). In simple terms, mental toughness is described as having a 'can-do' attitude as well as having the skills to be able to navigate change as it occurs. Mental toughness acts as a proactive approach to embracing the challenge, seeking opportunities for growth, and building PERMAH.

The research foundations of mental toughness lie in cognitive hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), sports psychology (Loehr, 1982), and resilience (Masten, 2001). Merging theory and practice, Clough, Earle, and Strycharczyk (2002) developed the 4C model of Mental Toughness:

- **Control**: the degree to which a person believes they can control the things within and around them such as their emotions and their locus of control
- **Commitment:** the degree to which a person can set and achieve goals and manage distractions along the way
- **Confidence:** the degree to which a person believes in their capacity and is able to engage with those around them, including being able to ask for help when needed
- **Challenge:** the degree to which a person can seek new learning experiences and respond to setbacks.

Through understanding and learning these four components, students become proactive in responding to challenge, stress and pressure as learning

opportunities and have the necessary skills to respond to setbacks they experience.

Mental toughness has been applied primarily in the United Kingdom, with increasing interest and uptake in Australia. Mental toughness is a discrete and scientifically based concept which can easily be taught and learned by both teachers and students. It has been shown to provide a useful framework to study the non-cognitive predictors of positive academic outcomes, and correlates positively with greater resilience, perseverance, confidence, and self-efficacy, and correlates negatively with academic stress, test anxiety, and perceptions of bullying (McGeown, St Clair-Thompson, & Clough, 2016). Across three studies, St Clair-Thompson et al. (2015) found significant positive associations between the mental toughness components and academic attainment, school attendance, pro-social behaviour, and peer relationships, and lower levels of drop out, stress, anxiety, and depression.

The 4Cs can help schools to map existing support to students and address potential gaps in pastoral and study skills programs. There is emerging evidence from studies conducted at Blue Coat School, Austin Friars School, and the British Section at Taipei European School suggesting that the application of a range of positive psychology interventions, integrated within life skills or other positive education programs, can increase levels of mental toughness in young people as well as act as a buffer against stressful times such as exam periods. For example, the Blue Coat School study also found increased mental toughness for teachers involved in the delivery of their programs (AQR International, 2015). Still, although the mental toughness approach has benefits, we believe that one limitation is that the term 'mental toughness' can have connotations of machismo and the sporting world, which may disconnect some students and schools.

Coaching

Over the last decade there has been increasing support for and application of coaching in educational contexts. However, the primary focus has been on coaching for teaching and learning rather than wellbeing (Lofthouse, 2017) and aimed at school improvement through leadership development and enhancement of professional practice including management skills and classroom teaching (Campbell, 2016; Knight, 2007). There is an element of mentoring required and expected of the coach. However, although coaching and mentoring are both methodologies for improving wellbeing and performance in personal and professional life (Passmore, Peterson, & Freire, 2016)

and the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' in schools are often used interchangeably, we would argue they are separate concepts. Mentoring reflects the wise senior passing on information to the dutiful junior with a larger focus on telling and providing direction, whereby coaching reflects being the guide on the side with a less directive and more Socratic approach taken through the asking of questions rather providing expert knowledge (Devine, Meyes, & Houssemand, 2013). Here we focus on coaching, which has received greater support for its efficacy across the school as a whole (Ng & Vella-Brodrick, 2019).

As noted earlier, we have long argued that not only is evidence-based coaching a complementary partner to positive psychology, but that it is integral to both maximising and sustaining the benefits of applied positive psychology interventions (Falecki, Leach, & Green, 2018; Green, 2014; Leach & Green, 2016). The approach that we advocate for, and which has a significant evidence-base, is solution-focused cognitive behavioural coaching underpinned by the science of coaching psychology. This approach applies relevant psychological and learning theories and techniques within a collaborative relationship that facilitates wellbeing, engagement, self-directed goal identification, goal striving, goal attainment, personal insight, self-regulation, and accountability within the normal or nonclinical population (Grant, 2007; van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). There has been growing recognition that coaching offers tremendous opportunity to build wellbeing (Falecki et al., 2018; Leach & Green, 2016). Indeed Anthony Grant refers to the emergence of the third generation of coaching, claiming that coaching is evolving towards a more holistic and developmental approach, where the focus is on supporting organisations to flourish, optimising the wellbeing and performance of individuals and the system (Grant, 2017a, 2017b; Grant & Spence, 2009).

Hundreds of peer-reviewed articles and academic books support the benefits of applying coaching in schools (Tee, Barr, & van Niewerburgh, 2019). Research has shown that coaching has the potential to contribute to the hope and hardiness of students (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007) and professional development and wellbeing of school leaders and teachers (Grant, Green, & Rynsaardt, 2010). Madden, Green, and Grant (2011) found that coaching combined with the utilisation of character strengths led to increases in student engagement and hope. van Nieuwerburgh and Tong (2013) found that coaching led to improved attitudes to learning. Several recent studies find that coaching, combined with the purposeful creation of positive affect in the coachee, achieves the most significant positive outcomes for wellbeing, goal striving, and attainment and that solution-focused cognitive

behavioural coaching is more powerful in increasing wellbeing and engagement and reducing stress, anxiety, and depression than positive psychology interventions alone (Atad & Grant, 2020; Grant, 2017a, 2017b).

Despite the benefits of coaching, from our experience, most schools that are applying positive psychology approaches have not specifically utilised coaching as a means to amplify such interventions (Green & O'Connor, 2017). We suggest that evidence-based coaching as an individual or group approach helps to create positive school cultures, positive transfer climates, and environments that enable SEL, character development, growth mindset, mental toughness, and other approaches to be more effective, to leadership development, teacher engagement and wellbeing, goal striving, and hope, while reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. We believe that it is in the strategic integration of positive psychology-based approaches and evidence-based coaching where the most power and potential lies to ensure that individual students and educators along with their wider school communities can flourish.

The limitations of the uptake of a coaching approach within a school include (1) cost of initial training initiatives which can be prohibitive to schools; (2) the variation in coach training offerings many of which are not evidence-based approaches and with a corporate focus which are not suitable for an educational setting; (3) the challenges associated with the creation of a coaching culture, which requires a commitment of time and energy by the leadership and appointed coaching champions; (4) the need for allocation of time required to provide professional development in coaching; and (5) the time required for formal coaching to occur within a school setting.

Strategically Incorporating Positive Education Approaches

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to enhancing the wellbeing of school communities; rather, attention to context with key components is critical for the change process to happen. As schools consider how to integrate one or more of the approaches described above, any school faces pressures in terms of scrutiny, academic expectations, bureaucracy, new government policy and initiatives, competing demands, lack of resources, conflict resolution, and staff retention. With the risk of teacher stress and burn-out are high (Green, 2014; Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014), introducing another educational initiative can be challenging, as teachers struggle to manage an already crowded curriculum. This can bring with it some level of cynicism and

push back from the staff. Therefore, creating the conditions and climate for positive change is important to ensure staff buy-in which includes a comprehensive understanding of how positive education approaches align with each school's unique context. Positive education approaches need to be seen as an added value and something that can be lived, taught, and embedded within a school rather than 'layering' on top of other initiatives (Norrish et al., 2013).

The approaches reviewed above (among others) can often be seen as competing approaches; however, by viewing them as complementary, we believe that it is possible that different approaches can be more flexibly incorporated and meet the needs of students, all within the overarching aim of supporting both academic development and wellbeing and creating a positive school culture. In addition, using an organising framework or model can be helpful in aligning multiple approaches and program. For example, in one of the schools that we have worked with, the school leaders opted to use PERMAH as an organising framework to help school leadership, teachers, parents, and students reflect upon where they and others within the school community might currently be and where they would like to be into the future. This approach facilitated a greater appreciation and understanding of what's working well already and where there is need for improvement, support, or a greater emphasis (Grant & Spence, 2009). It is also important that school leadership buy into and are committed to the implementation of positive education.

While initiatives are often driven by leaders, common understanding and buy-in is often more likely to arise from incorporating the perspectives and voices of people across the educational community. We have found that appreciative inquiry (AI; Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1998) can provide a practical strategy to help kick-start their positive education journeys. AI typically follows a process, known as the 4-D model, which involves discovering existing strengths, dreaming of possible futures, designing pathways to bring that future about, and delivering action. AI might be used at the beginning of incorporating positive education. For example, an AI Summit might be used to allow all the key stakeholders to voice their opinions, not only helping to create a common understanding of positive education but also enhancing intrinsic motivation for taking action. AI may be utilised after a period of implementation to review and re-assess the strategy identifying what's worked well and what is yet to be accomplished. It can also be used throughout implementation, with the additional utilisation of team coaching to ensure accountability and completion of specific projects identified through the AI process. As a whole, rather than positive education being imposed, AI, combined with a coaching approach, can help create a shared understanding

of the purpose and importance of positive education, making the initiative more likely to succeed.

Our experience is that facilitating school leaders and teachers to come together as a faculty and self-reflect when they are at their best helps them to gain a unique and meaningful understanding of what it actually means to flourish. Importantly, these reflections will often help identify the *early adopters*, who often self-select and become change champions for the implementation of positive education. Early adopters are those individuals that buy in quickly to the approach and are keen to see its implementation, and become important steerers of change, liaising with school leadership and ensuring continued commitment and progression of the strategic objectives.

Perth College as a Case Study

To provide an example of a successful strategic approach to positive education, we consider Perth College in Western Australia as a case study. The K-12 school has a 117-year history of educating remarkable women. It is one of the oldest independent girls' schools in Western Australia and prepares young women to think creatively, embrace personal excellence, live generously, and lead (https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/). The school began its positive education journey in 2012, initially to address the inequality of females in leadership roles and increasing concerns about students' pastoral needs. Over time, the *InsideOut* program was developed to help students manage themselves by giving them social and emotional skills and character development skills.

InsideOut is underpinned by positive psychology, is tailor-made for each year group, and dynamically responds to changing needs. As illustrated in Fig. 2.1, the program is underpinned by a self-leadership model, which extends from Professor Martin Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Like GGS, a health dimension was added. Aligning with Seligman's theory, the dimensions are underpinned by character strengths. The program teaches students evidence-based strategies to increase emotional regulation and self-control, encourages the use of character strengths to build meaning and engagement, promotes awareness of self-talk, and allows time for self-reflection on gratitude, goals, actions, and behaviours. It is also based on evidence-based coaching principles, whereby students learn to become solution-focused and self-regulated.

Soon after the initial implementation of *InsideOut*, and helping to create a common understanding, Perth College leadership recognised the need for

Fig. 2.1 The *InsideOut* self-leadership model (Original image published on Perth College Anglican School for Girls. (2012). *InsideOut*. https://www.perthcollege.wa.edu.au/learning/inside-out/, by Perth College Anglican School for Girls. This image is licensed under an All Rights Reserved License, and is not available under a Creative Commons license)

staff to share similar knowledge and gain the accompanying skills so that they could not only teach the skills but also embed them into their teaching, curriculum, and classrooms. As such, while *InsideOut* continues to be a stand-alone student program, there has been a commitment by the college to not only provide students with key psychological skills but also training staff through evidence-based training in the foundations of positive education and positive leadership combined with coaching provided to all staff in dedicated leadership positions. Regular expert consultation has also been provided. Underlying actions is the aim of building a positive school culture where all individuals in the school community become daring leaders and flourish into the best version of themselves.

Further contributing to a shared understanding of positive education, a whole-school AI summit was utilised early in their journey. This helped staff align around positive relationships being at the core of the College. AI has subsequently repeatedly been utilised with parents and staff, helping to ensure a common understanding and ongoing commitment to positive education.

To help identify pockets of success and to enable the sharing and adapting of boundaries, a dedicated team regularly audit the program and broader initiatives that fall under the positive education umbrella. School leadership regularly revise the strategic direction to ensure it is aligned to the school strategy and to encourage innovation and maintain focus on providing the best opportunities possible for the community. For instance, the school has found that it is helpful to identify key levers, or areas of focus to help grow and maintain a thriving organisation. The strategic team revisits these levers regularly and continue to focus on the 'how' to deliver the most positive education possible and create a culture of thriving. The impact of *InsideOut* on students and staff wellbeing is measured routinely via Assessing Wellbeing in Education (AWE; Assessing Wellbeing in Education, 2016) and the Gallup Student Poll (Gallup, 2020). Notably, the Gallup data demonstrated increases in hope, engagement and wellbeing between 2014 and 2019, while AWE data has indicated increased resilience across all cohorts.

Perth College acknowledges that their commitment to positive education is ongoing and evolving with the needs of the school. Their approach, however, is an example of a school that commenced their positive education journey with one existing approach being their SEL *InsideOut* program. Since that time, a commitment to staff training in both positive psychology and coaching psychology, the creation of a positive education team and the embedding of positive education principles both explicitly through teaching and learning and implicitly through internal processes and procedures highlights for us a strategic approach to positive education.

Practical Recommendations

In this chapter, we have reviewed some of the approaches used within positive education and provided some suggestions with regard to a greater strategic approach that might incorporate multiple positive education approaches. We also provided a case study that illustrates an example of the successful strategic implementation of positive education. Based on our experiences, we conclude with a final set of practical recommendations.

- Learn from schools that have been successfully implementing Positive Education. Organisations such as PESA (www.pesa.com.au) and the IPPA education division (https://www.ippanetwork.org/divisions/education/) provide numerous examples, connections with other educators, and ideas to consider as the pioneering educators share their learning and open themselves up to scrutiny and review.

- Ensure your school is abreast of developments and research in the fields of coaching and positive psychology and provide an experiential introduction by experts in the field. Attend national and international conferences and symposia to hear the latest developments.
- Engage senior leaders first to gain buy-in and then for ongoing sponsorship and support. Consider dedicated education in positive leadership.
- Invest in leadership coaching to ensure leaders are role-modelling the principles of positive education and focused on the enhancement of their own wellbeing.
- Consider the unique context and needs of the school, and tailor efforts to fit the context of the school.
- Provide staff with the opportunity to explore the benefits of positive psychology and coaching for their own wellbeing through professional development opportunities. Follow up any professional development sessions with opportunities for quality reflection and feedback on current actions—what worked and did not work and what will happen next.
- Provide ongoing evidence-based initiatives that promote staff wellbeing.
- Establish a positive education team of champions or steering committee who are intrinsically motivated to ensure ongoing commitment. Provide more in-depth training on evidence-based coaching skills so this team can train others.
- Conduct an audit of current activities that are relevant to positive education.
- Engage a positive education expert consultant/coach to support the team to ensure accountable outcomes and to provide expertise and resources over an extended period.
- Adopt appreciative and coaching approaches to engage stakeholders in an action-research model of inquiry that is proactive and builds on what works well.
- Think strategically about how to embed positive psychology and coaching into the culture of the school.
- Engage with parents through briefings, training and opportunities to participate in positive interventions. Consider coaching conversation training for parents as part of the whole school approach.
- Use validated measures to benchmark wellbeing and engagement.

Conclusion

While interest in positive education has grown over the past decade, schools often take a scatter-gun approach rather than a strategic approach. They might focus on a single wellbeing initiative, such as SEL, growth mindset, character strengths, mental toughness, or coaching, but with little integration. This can result in positive education being nothing more than a short-term program, rather than an impactful approach to cultural change aimed at improving school communities to ensure every member of that community can thrive. For those schools committed to a single approach such as strengths, we would recommend that the school leadership and internal thought leaders investigate additional approaches that will broaden the lens of positive education. These approaches can further benefit from evidence-based coaching approaches that create the positive transfer climate required for the sustainable success of positive education.

As Norrish et al. (2013) argued, 'the practical implementation of positive education is complex' (p. 148). The challenge is for the continued recognition, application, and integration of multiple approaches to positive education. To ensure the sustainability of positive education as a field in its own right, there is a pressing need for integration of the multiple and varied approaches to positive education. While the integration of multiple approaches may be complex and time-consuming, the investment over time is necessary to enhance the capacity of our students, staff, and schools to thrive in a VUCA world.

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