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Incorporating Positive Psychology and Happiness in the Special Education Classroom - the Effects on Academics and Self-esteem

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APPROVED

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Abstract

Twenty-first century schools are not like the schools of last century. The student population brings with it an entirely new set of parameters that the standard teacher-student model of education can no longer accommodate. Special education students along with the general education population enter school with more trauma than students of the past have. This means that new ways of helping these students need to be learned and implemented so students can have successful careers and teachers will stay in the field. Positive Psychology (PP) is an avenue that may provide some of the answers to today's classroom. Positive Psychology interventions (PPI) such as professional learning communities (PLCs), social emotional learning (SEL), and mindfulness are presented as ways for schools to have an environment of well-being, with productive and empathetic students and teachers. Parents number one desire for their children is to be happy and Positive Psychology demonstrates to be the avenue to achieve this.

Finally, this researcher investigated various aspects of PP which helped broaden her knowledge and understanding on the impacts PP can have. Many long-time *researchers* who are now considered experts in the field of PP, have been included to help with this process.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Challenges Facing Today's Schools

Schools today have a challenging job. They no longer look or act as they once did, 50 some years ago, even 30 years ago. Disharmony, bullying, lack of respect and work ethic, the need for immediate gratification, isolation, falling standardized test scores, large class sizes, and overworked teachers and staff are issues that plague many of the schools across America, and even the world.

> Imagine a society in which no child meets the diagnostic criteria for mental illness because treatment and prevention have been pervasively and perfectly implemented. All risks have been purged, and individual suffering due to psychological problems has been eliminated along with staggering societal costs. Is such a society a psychological utopia? No, although it is an obvious step in the right direction.
> (Peterson, 2009, p. 5)

Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan, referenced the fact that when parents talk about what they want for their children, it usually comes down to being safe, happy, healthy, moral, and being productive contributors to their communities (2009). In 2004, a survey was done with over 10,000 adults from 48 countries on six continents. The questions revolved around the hopes the adults had for their children. The consistent answer across the globe was that parents wanted their children to have a high level of happiness for their children, noted by Diener and Lucas, both psychology professors from the University of Utah and Michigan State University respectfully (Diener & Lucas, 2004).

As psychologists and educators started looking at the avenues to attain this, a relatively new scientific area of study came to the forefront, Positive Psychology (PP). In the spring of 2006, the most popular course at Harvard was PP, taught by Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar. The goal of the class was to show the students how to be happy (Harvard's most popular course: How to be happier.2012). How has society gotten to this point, where students are wanting to take classes based on happiness? This researcher believes it is also important and that looking at the journey leading up to modern-day positive psychology is the best place to begin.

History of Positive Psychology

Even though throughout history, the term "positive psychology" was not used as the official name for the study of happiness, people have been applying its principals with success for over a thousand years. The Athenian and Asian philosophers posed questions such as: *What does it mean to be happy?* Even the Declaration of Independence refers to happiness – "they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of independence: A transcription.2015).

One of the first European pioneers was a man by the name of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In 1798, after the ravages of war in Switzerland, many orphaned children had taken to the streets, displaying deceitful and defiant behaviors (Silber, 1960). Pestalozzi, declaring that the essence of education was love, built the foundation for modern democratic education. Students were

enlisted in teaching one another and in showing generosity to others even less fortunate" (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2011, p.6).

In Chicago in 1899 a woman by the name of Jane Addams founded the modern juvenile court where she called for "fresh approaches to tap the spirit of adventure in youth" (Steinebach, Steinebach, & Brendtro, 2013, p. 17). Meanwhile, in Italy, Maria Montessori founded a school for the children of the slums of Rome because she believed that they had highly impassioned minds. Also around the same time in Sweden, Ellen Key declared it the "century of the child" in 1900, which began science and democracy based education (Steinebach, Steinebach, & Brendtro, 2013). Karl Wilker took over punitive institution housing 300 delinquents in Berlin in 1917. These were children whose hearts were filled with hatred and rage. Wilker transformed these children through his belief that he could find and strengthen the positive and healthy elements hidden deep within each of these children (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2011).

Brendtro, Dean of the Starr Institute for Training, and Mitchell, president and CEO of Starr Commonwealth in Albion, Michigan, discovered through their research, that even though people historically were focused on the right ideas, these ideas were short lived. The democratic atmosphere of peer group empowerment programs proved to be more difficult to sustain with children than authoritarian control. "The dominant practices reverted to zero tolerance schools, medication-dominated treatment, and punishment of young offenders" (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2011, p.6). In 1958, humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Marie Jahoda laid out the basis for PP almost a half of century

before it became a significant component in the world of psychology (Peterson, 2013).

In 1998, Martin Seligman became the newly elected President of the American Psychological Association. During his presidential address, he announced the development of a new branch of psychology which he called 'Positive Psychology' (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014). It would be the scientific study of happiness. Educators, Bourner and Rospigliosi from the Brighton Business School at the University of Brighton, United Kingdom, researched work by Seligman and other early researchers of PP. In their article, they cited that Seligman argued: "understanding the causes of psychological dysfunction does not take us very far in understanding the causes of optimal human functioning or, as he terms it, 'flourishing'….an important aspect of which is happiness" (2014, p.5).

Other leaders in this field began emerging, including Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian psychologist whose childhood was impacted by WWII. He observed that after the war many of the adults he knew had changed. Very few of these adults could withstand the tragedies the war inflicted on them. They were not as happy in their everyday lives anymore; nothing was normal for them. This perplexed him so much that he read books on psychology as a teenager and then later moved to the United States to study psychology. Csikszentmihalyi focused his research on "where in our everyday life do we feel happy" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). His research is now a significant part of PP.

Fast forward to the new millennium where a marked dramatic turn took place. The shift from deficit-based perspectives to strength-based perspectives began (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2011). Gielan, founder of the Institute for Applied Positive Research, stated in her book, *Broadcasting Happiness*,

"Since my mentor and subsequent partner, Dr. Martin Seligman, founded the field in 1998, the body of research that has emerged has turned PP into an essential science-based tool for optimal living, especially for leaders in every organization, family, and community" (Gielan, 2015, p.6).

"Happiness research is part of a new subjective revolution within science itself" (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014, p.21). Well-being has become a buzzword with the coming of age of PP. In an article written by professors, Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Saunders, of Cardiff Metropolitan University in Cardiff, United Kingdom, they surmised that "well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social, and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge" (2012, p. 230). Psychologists, Martin-Krumm of the Université de Bretagne Occidentale in Brest, France, Tarquinio of the University of Lorraine in Metz, France, and Delle Fave of the University of Milan in Milano, Italy, found that happiness is commonly referred to as well-being in the world of PP, so both terms will be used throughout this thesis (2011).

As PP becomes more widespread, it means that "the general psychological community is beginning to understand that respectable science can be conducted on the positive side of life" (Seligman, Steen, Park, &

Peterson, 2005, p.413). A more in depth understanding of PP will be addressed in chapter two.

Current Practices

Numerous researchers noted in the article *Positive Psychology school-based PPI: A reflection on current success and future directions,* by psychologists, Chodkiewicz of the University of New England in Australia, and Boyle of the University of Exeter, UK, that **"**Schools are an ideal location for PPI that seek to support the social and emotional development of young people" (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017).

Some educational leaders are taking on this concept of PP and applying its principles in their schools. From a 3rd grade teacher in Iowa to the staff of a high school in Sunnyside, Washington, positive effects can be seen. These effects are the shifting from a deficit-based focus to a strength-based focus.

By refocusing on the positive, identifying the ways Sunnyside High School was already successful, and creating a new story of excellence, the graduation rate went from 41% to 89% in just seven years (Gielan, 2015, p. 57). Ms. Sharon Ketts added positive "morning meetings" to the start of day with her third-grade class in Iowa. It was a fifteen-minute meeting that included announcements, news from students, and a fast-paced group activity. By implementing this small piece into their daily routine, her students scored higher on all the state standardized testing than the other third grade classes (whose teachers had also had the same training on the "morning meetings" but chose not to implement) and even better than her own recent students (Gielan, 2015, p. 48).

This is not only happening in the United States, but across the world in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, China, Israel, Turkey, South Africa, Russia, and Canada. In Scotland, psychologists, Woolfson and Durkin of the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, along with Collins, of the Argyll and Bute Council in Dunoon, used cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques to improve coping skills and produce positive outcomes to reduce anxiety. They also used CBT to increase the use of helpful coping skills by their patients (Collins, Woolfson, & Durkin, 2014).

In Australia and the UK, the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MSBR) program was used to "explicitly teach both informal and formal practices of mindfulness" and which was aimed at cultivating a mindful state, as stated in the article by professors Keenan-Mount of the University of Melbourne, Albrecht, of RMIT University, along with psychologist, Waters, of the University of Melbourne (2016, p. 70). Teschers, from the School of Educational Studies and Leadership, University of Canterbury, UK, highlighted another example in his article. The Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Australia had a "well-being centre" and college students could take happiness classes at Wellington College in Berkshire, United Kingdom (Teschers, 2015).

Another example is the Maytiv School Program in Turkey where the entire middle school students and staff were included. The program focused on promoting adolescent mental health and well-being as highlighted in the article by psychologists, Shoshani and Steinmetz, from the Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology, in Herzliga, Israel (2014).

This researcher's niece spent last year attending a secondary school in Denmark where education is learner-centered. When asked what she liked best about attending school, she stated that they were given more opportunities to work in groups and have more freedom with responsibility in their schedules. The students were assigned a topic and then given a week to research and create projects in groups. Their regular lessons were suspended in order to have the opportunity to study their topics in depth. She felt that she was more in control of her learning which boosted her self-esteem in what she was capable of accomplishing. (A. Shockman, personal communication, July 31, 2017)

These and other examples of science-based PP interventions will be examined more closely in the following chapters.

Thesis Question

Therefore, the following thesis question will be addressed: Does incorporating positive psychology and happiness in the special education classroom have positive effects on academics and self-esteem? It will also look at the impact positive psychology interventions (PPI) can have within a school setting if taken on by the entire school staff and student body. Could the health and well-being of students and staff, along with improved grades and testing scores all be influenced by changing the culture from deficit-based focus to a strengths-based focus by using positive psychology strategies/interventions?

Abbreviations

ACER – Australian Council for Educational Research

CBT - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

EBD – Emotional Behavioral Disorder

MBSR - Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction

OBM – Organizational Behavior Management

OL – Organizational Learning

PERMA - Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life, and

Achievement

PBIS – Positive Behavior Intervention Supports

PLCs – Professional Learning Communities

PP – Positive Psychology

PPI – Positive Psychology Interventions

SEL – Social Emotional Learning

SWB – Subjective Well-being

Definition of Terms

Emotional Behavioral Disorder – a condition exhibiting one or more specific emotional and/or behavioral difficulties over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance. (IDEA)

Evidence based practices – those which have verifiable information supporting the adoption and their continued use

Mindfulness - the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us

Positive Psychology – the scientific study of human flourishing, and an applied approach to optimal functioning

Professional Learning Communities – a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students

Resilience – the ability to bounce back despite adversity

Social Emotional Learning – developing the ability to recognize one's own emotions as well as others' emotions, and developing skills necessary to communicate those emotional understandings

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Instead of a safe place for learning to occur, schools and classrooms have become a significant source of stress for students, teachers, and parents alike" (Malow & Austin, 2016, p. 81). Clonan, of Syracuse University, along with several other psychologists, pointed out that schools are uniquely poised to foster positive development, which is a challenge because most schools across America are not utilizing this uniqueness (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004). These researchers looked at historical and emerging trends in PP and then did a parallel comparison to deficit-focused practices to validate their findings on the benefits of PP interventions in school environments.

It is common knowledge that more than just academics make up the school experience. There are also the social and emotional components which impact the learning environment either positively or negatively. The question remains, can PP impact not only special education classrooms, but also schools in general? What evidence is there that supports this as a viable avenue for education professionals to seriously learn about the interventions and apply them in their schools? Can a state of well-being be achieved in schools, so all students and staff have a fulfilling experience during their time in those buildings? Where does it start, how about with gratitude, hope, and optimism?

Gratitude, Hope, Optimism

Gratitude is generally defined as the state of being thankful which plays a big part in being happy. When someone is in a state of gratitude, feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and hope can ensue (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Three psychologists from across the country teamed up to did further research

on the impact of gratitude. They found:

> Grateful people are higher in positive emotions and
> life satisfaction and also lower in negative emotions
> such as depression, anxiety, and envy. They also appear
> to be more prosocially oriented in that they are more
> empathic, forgiving, helpful, and supportive....Relatedly,
> grateful people are less focused on the pursuit of materialistic
> goals (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002, p.124).

Shawn Achor, former Harvard professor, happiness researcher, and

founder of *GoodThink, Inc*., stated in his book, *The Happiness Advantage*, that

"consistently grateful people are more energetic, emotionally intelligent, forgiving,

and less like to be depressed, anxious, or lonely" (2011, p. 98). He also

commented on how gratitude has been proven to be a primary cause of positive

outcomes (2011, p. 98). When people choose grateful responses to life, it can

lead to serenity, happiness, better physical health, and deeper, more satisfying

relationships (Emmons & Mccullough, 2003).

In the movie, *Knight's Tale*, the main character wrote a letter to the woman

he loved and said, "Hope guides me. It is what gets me through the day and

especially the night" (Black, 2001). Without hope, people perish. One of the

foremost researchers on hope and PP at the University of Kansas, Snyder,

explained hope as a human strength that allows people to set specific goals,

develop strategies to attain them, and then become motivated in the process of

pursuing those goals (1994). Another way hope is defined is that hope focuses

on a person's goals and that person's perceived ability to reach those goals

(Lloyd & Hastings, 2009). In addition to gratitude, hope plays a crucial role in the

well-being of people and is essential for happiness and success. Hope can also be looked at as "expecting the best and working to achieve it" (Park & Peterson, 2008, Table 1).

Educational psychologists, Jenson, Olympia, Farley, and Clark, from the University of Utah, believe that optimism is defined as a person's positive hope for the future which links the two together (2004). "Having a positive outlook on the future has been linked to positive mood, perseverance, effective problem solving, academic success, and a long life" (Jenson, et al., 2004, p.68). The premise for their research was the concern for students with special needs in the classroom who exhibited external behaviors which they felt could be improved upon through PPI. Throughout their article, these psychologists explained in detail, empirically based strategies that created positive experiences of well-being for students and teachers. Students with disabilities that have external effects such as impulsivity, noncompliance, arguing, and aggression, "need a sense of optimism about their future or they will simply give up and drop out" (Jenson, et al., 2004, p.76). Classroom programs and teacher programs that ensure positive successful experiences and high rates of praise can engender this optimism and keep students with disabilities from self-selecting their educational path by dropping out.

Having a positive outlook on the future leads to having a "positive mood and good morale, to perseverance and effective problem solving; to academic, athletic, military, occupational, and political success; to popularity; to good health; and even to long life and freedom from trauma" (Peterson, 2000, p.44). What role

do gratitude, hope, and optimism play in PP and happiness? Looking at the

explanations of PP and happiness is the best place to start.

What is Positive Psychology and Happiness?

There are several definitions out there as to what PP is. The definition that

comes from the two leaders in the field, Dr. Martin Seligman, and Dr. Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi, is that "Positive Psychology is the scientific study of what goes

right in life" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Another definition comes from

school psychologists, Guess and Bowling, from the University of Tennessee,

Chattanooga, who define PP as "the study of the conditions and processes that

contribute to a flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and

institutions" which includes schools (2014, p.103).

> Positive psychology is about rediscovering what the original
> mission of psychology is all about, which was to make the
> lives of normal people more fulfilling, to study talent and ability
> ...go back 2000 years and read what the Athenian philosophers
> had to say, the questions they posed were precisely the [same]
> questions…[asked] today: What is the good life? Is virtue its own
> reward? What does it mean to be happy? Can you pursue happi-
> ness directly or is it a byproduct of other pursuits? If so, what are
> these other pursuits (Peterson, 2013, p. 9)?

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) further explain:

> The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about
> valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and
> satisfactions (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future);
> and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level,
> it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and
> vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility,
> perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness,
> spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about
> civic virtues, and the institutions that move individuals toward
> better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility,
> moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (p.1).

This sums up what living a positive life - filled with happiness and well-being in all areas should look like.

Positive psychology has also been viewed as "an umbrella term that describes the scientific study of what makes life most worth living" (Peterson, 2013, p. 8). "Happiness, gratitude, and life satisfaction are important constructs in positive psychology" according to psychologists for the University of Connecticut, McCabe, Bray, Kehle, and Gelbar, along with Theodore from the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia (McCabe et al., 2011, p. 180). They determined this after reviewing multiple studies in PP, including ones on happiness, well-being, and life satisfaction. The researchers wanted to determine certain techniques which could be applied in schools to increase happiness and well-being in students.

Another aspect of PP is the framework which highlights strengths and capabilities, as opposed to only identifying deficits and pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). "The aim of PP is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5).

Psychology has been hyper-focused on repairing weaknesses for a very long time; attention has finally begun to shift to the enhancement of positive qualities which is exactly what PP is doing (Clonan et al., 2004). Reveley, a professor for the School of Management and Marketing at the University of Wollongong, Australia commented, "In short, positive psychology encourages people to transform themselves into curious explorers" (Reveley, 2013, p. 542),

inwardly as well as outwardly. Through his research, Kashdan, a psychology professor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, found that by being curious, taking risks, being engaged, creative and innovative, a life of well-being is inevitable (2010).

Authentic Happiness was the first book written by Seligman in 2002. Inside, Seligman listed the five elements necessary for authentic happiness and make up the core of PP. They include **P**ositive emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning in life, and **A**chievement/accomplishment, also called the PERMA-concept (Seligman, 2011). *Positive emotion*, the first component, is feeling good and sharing good feelings with others by spending time with them and looking for the positives in life.

The second component is *engagement*, also means being absorbed. It is the ability to cultivate personal strengths, virtues, and talents. When people are engaged, they feel more confident, valued, and productive. *Relationships*, the third component, involves building strong relationship networks which is crucial to well-being. Listening and sharing is important to maintaining strong connections.

The fourth element is a *meaningful life*. This increases through connections to others. It also means knowing what one's highest strengths are and using them to belong to and serve something bigger than oneself. *Accomplishment*, the final key component, is characterized by tangible goals, identified ambitions, and cultivated strengths which ultimately leads to being proud of one's accomplishments in life (Owen, 2016).

Another publication by Seligman and Peterson in 2004, was the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. The authors listed six virtues and the corresponding 24 strengths of character divided among the virtues which can be found in Table 1 found after the references. Something amazing was discovered when they reviewed data from an empirical study of adults around the world and their views on the 24-character strengths.

In 40 different countries and in all 50 US states, the most common character strengths that people felt were most like them were kindness, fairness, authenticity, gratitude, and open-mindedness. This crossed all boundaries, cultural, ethnic, and even religious (the exception being in the southern US) and showed the universal human connectedness in values (cf. Bok, 1995).   Another comparison was looked at between U.S. adults and adolescents, and how they differed in character strengths. Among the adolescents, there was strong agreement about hope, teamwork, and zest; whereas adults were more in agreement about appreciation of beauty, authenticity, leadership, and open-mindedness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This researcher believes these points will be important to keep in mind when looking at teachers and students.

Evidence can be found in multiple articles referencing Seligman's statement from his book, that "authentic happiness is an essential ingredient of human flourishing" (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014; Peterson, 2009). So, what is flourishing? The core features of a flourishing life, include self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination, and positive relationships (Seligman et al*.,*

2009).   This thesis writer will show connections between PPI and these core features of well-being and having a life that is flourishing.

Flow is also a part of this. Csikszentmihalyi coined this phrase as a result of the research he did surrounding the question – "Where in our everyday life do we feel happy?" He found that when artists or composers were "in their element", they were in an effortless, spontaneous state. Dodge shared with the TedTalk audience that when a person is involved in a completely engaging process of creating something new, no attention is given to how the body feels, the problems at home, hunger or even tiredness. It's almost like existence is temporarily suspended. It's having a sense of clarity, of being a part of something larger. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004) "Flow only occurs when you deploy your highest strengths and talents to meet the challenges that come your way, and it is clear that flow facilitates learning" (Seligman, et al., 2009, p. 296).

The concept of happiness is something that most people have as their top priority of what they want most out of life. Argyle, a pioneer in social psychology, and Martin, a professor of Abnormal Psychology at the University of Oxford, believed that happiness is that state of joy or satisfaction that is felt when all is going well (1991). We are hardwired to go after happiness, we are not hardwired to just find it, as pointed out by Professor of Behavioural Science at Newcastle University, Nettle in his 2005 research (Nettle, 2005). Fordyce, a pioneer in empirical happiness measurement and happiness believed that "the achievement of happiness is one of the most important goals of humankind" (Fordyce, 1977, p.511). There are some people that will argue that happiness and human well-

being are synonymous, but the truth comes down to the fact that happiness is the major contributor to human well-being (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014).

In 1998, a study was conducted in 42 countries to collect data on the importance of happiness or subjective well-being (SWB) in college students' lives (see study sample in Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). The results proved very interesting. "Even in societies that are not fully westernized, students reported that happiness and life satisfaction were very important, and they thought about them often…. [and] mean levels of concern about happiness were high in all of the countries surveyed" (Diener, 2000, p. 34). On average, 66% of the respondents ranked happiness and life satisfaction at the top of the importance scale (Diener, 2000). "Happiness and satisfaction are the necessary conditions to experience curiosity, interest, engagement, and to be able to absorb and process information" (Chemi, 2015, p. 8).

It is common knowledge that happy people are healthier, more successful, and more socially engaged. Therefore, if happier employees create more productive environments, (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008), then it would make sense that happier students would be more satisfied and have better performance records (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014).

Schools

Schools in the 21st-century have a tremendous challenge they are facing. It is being able to serve culturally diverse students with varying abilities and motivations for learning (Learning, 2001). In many schools, the emphasis has been on "critical, rather than creative thinking, and the negative mood so often

found in the classroom facilitates only critical thinking" (Seligman et al., 2009, p. 295). The time students spend in school molds and shapes them into the adults they will become and lays the foundation for what their lives are built on (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017). "Schools are important contexts for children's development because of the time children spend there, the degree to which they influence children's experiences and self-perceptions, and their potential to affect children's life courses" (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003). This researcher agrees with the importance schools play in shaping future global citizens.

There are two skills that schools value and recognize – academic abilities and social skills. Research shows students who have a negative learning experience due to repeated failures and disappointments, ultimately have lower self-images (Weiner, 2010). Chodkiewicz and Boyle wanted to write a paper that reflected some of the current practices coming out of PP and show how they could be better implemented more effectively as school-based programs and in the classrooms. In their article, these researchers agreed that "the schools that one attends, the teachers one has, the level of support one receives from parents, the wider community in which one grows and one's own internal abilities, attitudes, and aspirations all play a part" (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017, pg. 62) in molding students.

Schools have two skills that they value and recognize: academic abilities and social skills. They are institutions devoted to students acquiring knowledge and abilities (Jenson, et al., 2004). Something that is often overlooked by schools and is a crucial component to attaining true academic success is psychological

well-being, or happiness of the student (Diener, 2000). The other piece of the

puzzle is social skills which helps students navigate through their school days,

get along with others, problem solve, and form friendships (Jenson, et al., 2004).

The rise of PP is changing the concept of youth, education, and

development. Education and teaching comes with a multitude of complexities. A

new age of student-centric teaching practices which is dedicated to enhancing

student well-being is the perfect setting for integrating PP-based programs into

the learning curriculum (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017). Schools are crucial in

promoting students' well-being because this is where children and adolescents

spend much of their day. "Thus, students' day-to-day interactions and

experiences with peers, teachers and coaches are integral to their well-being and

are important targets for well-being programs" (Seligman, et al., 2009) in schools.

Incorporating PPI is not only beginning to happen in schools in America, but also

in schools around the world. They are programs targeted at improving students'

subjective well-being (Bas & Firat, 2017). The statement in the article by Bourner

& Rospigliosi (2014) sums up what educational institutions desire:

> Institutionally, we want happy students and staff, and we are
> more likely to get these if we can understand, explain, express
> and realise happiness. For staff to feel they are contributing to
> an agenda which benefits people and supports fulfilling lives is
> rewarding. For our students to study and gain a greater under-
> standing of happiness, including its causes and its consequences,
> is likely to make them happier students (p. 20).

Schools can become the environments where individual strengths such as

competence, resiliency, and optimism can be fostered, thus creating a positive

institution (Clonan et al., 2004). Creating an emotionally stable school

environment, helps students and staff develop better social and emotional

competence which leads to positive academic and personal outcomes for

students. It also leads to higher levels of satisfaction in teaching and work for the

staff (Guess & Bowling, 2014). Cohen reported that "recent studies have shown

that research-based social, emotional, ethical, and academic educational

guidelines can predictably promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that

provide [students with] the foundation for the capacity to love, work, and be an

active community member" (Cohen, 2006, p. 202).

Students

A study completed in 1993, found that the prevalence of depression was

shockingly high worldwide at nearly 20% of youth experiencing an episode of

clinical depression by the end of high school (Lewinsohn, Rohde, Seeley, &

Fischer, 1993). By 2015, in the United States alone, an estimated 3 million

adolescents aged 12 to 17 had at least one significant depressive episode in that

past year. This number represented 12.5% of the U.S. population aged 12 to 17

(NIMH, 2015).

Statistics reported on the (Facts and figures | national child traumatic

stress network - child trauma home.2010) showed that almost 40% of students

between the ages of 12 and 17 have experienced some type of trauma in their

lives, including 8% reporting a lifetime of prevalent sexual assault and 17%

reporting physical assault. These statistics are from several years ago, so it is

feasible that this percentage could even be higher.

Brunzell, a senior education advisor at the Berry Institute in Australia, has spent much of his career both in the United States and internationally focusing on transforming school cultures, setting high expectations for differentiated instruction, reinforcing trauma-informed practices, and education on wellbeing and the application of PP (Berry street childhood institute.2015). He, along with Stokes and Waters, professors at the University of Melbourne, Australia, have done extension research on trauma-informed practices, along with PP. Waters founded the PP Centre at the University of Melbourne.

Through their research, they found the symptoms that trauma-effected students may display at school range from peer bullying poor to conduct and oppositional disorders to emotional regulation. These students wake up every morning wanting to be successful students, hoping to succeed, but they soon become frustrated, defiant, or demanding in their classes. Due to their inability to successfully navigate throughout their day, they end up disillusioned and without hope by the end of the school day. (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016)

In the 21st century classroom, numerous students lack social-emotional competencies, which technology and social media could be considered significant contributors to. Many of these students become less connected to school as they progress through their academic careers. This thesis writer has witnessed students becoming more engaged in their technology and social media than in positively communicating face to face. They have not developed these interpersonal skills because of the amount of time spent interacting through social media. This complicates things even more for students with disabilities.

"Students are major stakeholders in the educative process, and because they have agency, they can determine their participation or nonparticipation in school; therefore, their perception of the learning environment is crucial even though it is generally ignored" (Schussler & Collins, 2006, p.1488). "All children, regardless of environmental or demographic variables, have the capacity to experience satisfaction with life and concentrating on bolstering this and other positive psychological competencies serves as an effective, preventative method for academic, social, and personal problems" (McCabe, et al., 2011, p. 183).

The most opportune time for students to develop their cognitive, emotional, and social skills is during childhood and adolescence. This can create a strong foundation for a healthy life of well-being (McCabe et al., 2011). "Social, emotional, academic, and ethical education can help children reach the goals their parents and teachers have for them: learning to 'read' themselves and others, and learning to solve social, emotional, and ethical problems" (Cohen, 2006, p. 202). Students are looking for teachers to be "approachable, creative and interesting, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, set realistic expectations and is fair, and respectful" (McGovern & Miller, 2008, p.279).

When parents are asked what they want for their children to obtain from their academic journey, they will "say, 'I want my child to be responsible,' 'to be a lifelong learner,' 'to get a good job,' and 'to have good friends and a good marriage.' Educators have also long agreed that schools should produce socially responsible, healthy, happy citizens" (Cohen, 2006, p.203). Both students and teachers agree on the qualities of encouraging, caring and being open-minded

(McGovern & Miller, 2008). Ideally, this researcher believes that if the areas mentioned in this section were being met, positive well-being would exist for all students and staff.

Teachers

Most teachers enter the profession of teaching because they want to make a difference. They are passionate about young people. They want to have an impact on the future. Unfortunately, burnout, disillusionment, boredom, and isolation become the reality for many teachers and impacts teachers' well-being. Much of this is due to the new challenges of educating trauma-effected students. These do not only include special education students, but mainstream students as well. This can lead to ineffective classrooms and poor teacher-student relationships. To combat all of this, there needs to be educational approaches for teachers to address the complex needs that trauma-effected students bring to the classroom. (Brunzell, et al., 2016)

"For teacher-scholars, thinking well about doing good requires personal reflection, coupled with interpretative conversations among academic colleagues" (McGovern & Miller, 2008, p.283). Happiness, or well-being, is the key to keeping teachers from leaving the profession (Martin-Krumm, et al., 2011). Currently in the state of Minnesota, 46% of teachers are leaving the profession after three years of teaching, according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

If teachers' well-being is taken care of, this will then be a positive impact on students for the following reasons:

> When teachers make learning meaningful and relevant to
> Their students' lives, students develop a stake in their own

education. When teachers create a clear classroom structure
with consistent expectations for behavior and performance,
they provide a healthy setting in which students can exercise
school connectedness can have a substantial impact on the
measures of student achievement for which schools are currently
being held accountable, autonomy and practice decision-making
skills. Teachers build connectedness in the classroom when they
encourage team learning exercises. Cooperative learning tends
to break down social isolation by integrating student teams across
gender, academic ability, and ethnicity. Rewarding a variety
of student achievements and recognizing student progress—
not only top performance— are also important components
(Blum, 2005, p. 18).

It is this researcher's belief that teachers are crucial in creating positive teacher-student relationships. These relationships can become key factors in students successfully navigating multiple arenas found in the complexities of the daily school environment and to the well-being of teachers as well.

Positive Psychology Interventions

The effectiveness of implementing PPIs can be impacted by limited resources in schools, including jam-packed curriculum, accessibility of information, teacher factors, and the quality of training given (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014). Psychologists and educators have done extensive research, case studies, and implemented PPI in schools over the past couple of decades, but even more so in recent years. Furthermore, "the fields of PP and positive education are conceptually linked to trauma-informed education" (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016, p. 64). This researcher believes that the following theories and applications of these interventions deserve further review.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

In this everchanging world, the intricacies of successful, genuine learning and growth requires educators to rethink how education should be perceived and taught. In 2006, professors at various universities in the United Kingdom, Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas, wanted to address the international needs for educational reform because of globalization and a rapidly changing world. "To be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world, it is suggested that whole school communities need to work and learn together to take charge of change, finding the best ways to enhance young people's learning" (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p.222). One way to do this is through PLCs, teachers working in collaborative teams (Wasta, 2017).

Teacher well-being is also a significant part of PLCs (Owen, 2016) based on the definition of well-being discussed earlier in this paper. Positive psychology's key elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (Seligman, et al., 2009) support the philosophy behind PLCs. When these elements are used to create a positive learning environment, Owen proposed that this can heighten the effectiveness of PLCs and their key characteristics of having a shared vision, collaborating, engaging in practical activities which focuses on student learning, leadership and leadership support, and professional growth and learning. (Owen, 2016)

Other crucial elements include taking an inquiry stance, sharing experiences and being reflective. "Teachers having a shared vision and values possibly linked to positive emotion, feeling good and experiencing pleasure in

working with like-minded others" (Owen, 2016, p. 407) within a mature

professional learning community reflect the connection with PP. Collaboration

then creates meaningful relationships both with colleagues and students.

In this researcher's class, SPED 631 at Bethel University, the instructor

made some valuable points regarding the use of PLCs in school environments

which gave this researcher more credence to the importance of PLCs

development in 21st century schools (Silmser). She referenced the work

completed by Rick DuFour, one of the creators of PLCs. One of those valuable

points was the fact that education must be about learning, not teaching alone.

Collaboration is focusing on learning. "PLCs most often are used to support

teachers in analyzing student performance data, both formative and summative,

and rethinking their learning needs" (Wasta, 2017, p. 67). A proficient

professional learning community addresses four questions when collaborating.

They are as follows:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How will we know if they have learned it?
3. What will we do if they have not learned it?
4. How will we provide extended learning opportunities for students who have mastered the content? (DuFour & Reeves, 2016, p.70)

To address these questions, data collection must be the first step in this

process. Teachers need a baseline for the students before implementing

interventions or teaching strategies. Best practice would mean using a variety of

methods for data collection including formative and summative assessments,

standardized testing, exit slips, checking on work while moving about the

classroom, and by simply asking students direct questions.

As teachers gather evidence of student learning, they use it to determine how to advance instruction. It is important for students to take ownership of their learning by using this evidence to assess their own understanding of what they are learning. This keeps students engaged in their learning and holds them accountable when they have to track their progress.

Once the professional learning community has a clear description of a specific strategy, they agree on shared criteria to determine the consistency and successfulness of its implementation. Then, the teachers can collect data by observing one another teach and tracking frequency/infrequency of using the strategy being incorporated. The team must also agree upon how many observations to conduct (Wasta, 2017).

This ongoing monitoring and making necessary adjustments along the way has repeatedly been proven as a key factor in positive student learning. When this process is implemented deeply and sustained over time, schools can experience dramatic improvement in learning by both students and adults (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Teachers working in PLCs have found the ongoing assessment process and other strategies to be helpful with their meetings and determining their goals for students. If teachers are having difficulties with certain strategies or just want to learn more, there are several different options available. They could include observing the most proficient practitioner, watching videos on strategy implementation exemplars, video a classroom sample then review as a group, and possibly bring in an outside expert (Wasta, 2017).

A Case Study

Owen, a Principal Research Fellow for the Australian Council for

Educational Research (ACER), conducted a case study with three innovative

schools in South Australia. She addressed the notion of positive learning

environments through PLCs. Each of these schools were at different phases of

utilizing PLCs as part of their school culture. One school had started 18 months

prior, the second was at six years, and the last had been using innovative

techniques for nine years. She used multiple data sources including teacher

interviews, surveys, documents, and leader interviews. An insight from one of the

leaders (Leader Interview 2) shows how effective and exciting this can be. The

leader reported the following with regards to participating on the PLCs team:

> … there is professional learning right through the day
> on a daily basis because of our team teaching scenario,
> Where teachers can bounce ideas off each other and
> reflect at the end of the day and for following days. So
> there is that learning from and with one another (Owen,
> 2016, p. 410).

Owen also reported a 90% positive response about the shared vision that

"all students can learn at a reasonably high level, given teacher support" (Owen,

2016, p. 410). Other positive responses from the teacher surveys included there

being a *team* focus on student learning, ongoing improvement and collaboration,

and having shared aspirations. These are all in agreement with the values of

flourishing in a life of well-being. Not only did the teachers report finding their

work valuable and rewarding, they saw it in their students who were achieving

success due to the learner-centered approach. (Owen, 2016, pp. 410-11)

Another area Owen looked at was that of trusting relationships and meaning. Again, in this area, the positive responses on the teacher surveys were high, 85% which supported the PP perspective that people flourish when they have meaningful relationships. The high level of collaboration that ensued allowed teachers to grow their personal strengths and talents, and build strong relationships with like-minded people.

The next area dealt with practical activities and accomplishment. Teachers reported they learned from their colleagues through collaborating and co-teaching, allowing them to grow their strengths and improve their weaknesses. By doing this, they observed improvement in students' academics, social skills, emotional growth, and in becoming independent learners. Seeing their students' successes gave the teachers greater passion and enthusiasm for their jobs. It was also due to the collaboration, shared vision, co-teaching and assessing, and finally the reflecting they did relevant to certain students. Teachers found their experiences and accomplishments through working in PLCs to rewarding, especially when they witnessed their students' accomplishments. (Owen, 2016)

The fifth area looked at in this study include supportive leadership and positive emotion, which another aspect of PP. An interesting comment was made during an interview (Leader Interview 3) about the supportive leadership at their building and included in the article. The teacher stated because their leadership required and supported the PLCs processes, they created safe zones where teachers could challenge each other to become better at what they do through student feedback, peer observations, and video review.

In one of the schools, the principal placed importance on collaborative teams, self-determination, and shared leadership. One of the teachers from this school used words such as "exhilarating" and "incredible" because she could personalize the curriculum, focus it on the students' interests and witness their academic growth and well-being through the process. (Owen, 2016)

The final research topic was collaborative inquiry and learning engagement. Owen found

> that in mature PLCs, teachers feel a strong sense of identity with others in their teams. Teachers develop similar values and beliefs over time but also feel confident and expect to challenge each other's views so that they keep on learning, and changing their teaching practices (2016, pp. 414-15).

This thesis writer gleaned a key point from this study. It appears that PLCs go beyond the students' academics; it involves learning together, students and teachers alike.

The conclusion from this study agrees with other studies in this area. The role of leadership in the schools really had an impact. In one school it was negative, proving how important it is to have supportive leadership that sets expectations and provides support for the teachers. Another interesting point Owen made is "the degree to which improved student learning…was raised by teachers as a positive aspect…of the PLCs teams…. Significantly improved outcomes for students gave teachers a real sense of accomplishment and meaning for their work" (Owen, 2016, pp. 410-11).

This study is important for schools to keep in mind when implementing PLCs in their schools. This researcher agrees that PLCs need to go beyond work

teams, beyond telling war stories and personal preferences, to exploring practices which will lead to high quality results. Wasta found in his team's observations of data teams, that 90% of the time was centered on the students' learning and goals for improvement, and not on finding or creating instructional strategies that were data driven which meant that most data teams were focusing on the wrong things (Wasta, 2017).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

The teaching profession, for most teachers, is more than 40 hours a week and as time has progressed and generations change, so do the demands on teachers, who are becoming overwhelmed, stressed, and burnt out. The 40+ hour weeks are now compounded with an array of students who come from different cultures, varying socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences, and tech-savvy abilities beyond those of many teachers, this researcher being one of them. Disruptive classroom behaviors have been on the rise for many years which adds to the stress and disharmony found in many schools today as well.

Another piece to this jigsaw puzzle are students with special needs who bring their own unique set of complexities to the classroom. Being in special education for over ten years, this researcher has witnessed the roller coaster of emotions these students go through on any given day. The academic demands that increase stress levels, the low self-esteem, the role mental health plays, and the inability to handle social situations are just a few of the daily areas that impact these students. Self-management is also a key factor because it is the difference between an independent learner and a dependent learner.

How do educational professionals help not only students with special needs, but all students navigate through this tangled web of emotional chaos in the 21st century classroom? A window of opportunity to rethink how teachers can positively engage students in academic ownership and to keep teachers from burning out opened up for researchers and educators alike over the past twenty years.

Special Education professors, Sugai from the University of Connecticut, and Horner from the University of Oregon, recognized that behavior in classrooms was becoming a big issue and wanted to address this. Through their research, they realized that learning and teaching environments needed to be redesigned to assist with the complexities of modern classrooms.

Sugai and Horner developed the educational initiative, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), originally called School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS). For purposes of this thesis, the research writer is using PBIS when referencing positive behavior interventions. Sugai and Horner believed that using strong evidence-based practices could be implemented school-wide and at all levels. These would be accomplished through social and emotional learning practices. (Sugai & Horner, 2006)

Malow and Austin, associate professors at Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, completed a six-week investigation into using mindfulness with students diagnosed with emotional-social behavior disorder (EBD). They wanted to determine if incorporating mindfulness techniques into a classroom setting would help with student resiliency. Malow and Austin described social-

emotional learning (SEL) as focusing "on developing within students the ability to recognize emotions, their own as well as the emotions of others, while providing them the skills necessary to communicate this emotional understanding" (Malow & Austin, 2016, p. 83). They also mentioned that by "explicitly embedding SEL goals in educational curriculum can help address ongoing learning in emotional self-awareness and self-management, [thus] teaching students tools to manage their thinking" (Malow & Austin, 2016, p.84).

Roffey and McCarthy, professors for the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, surmised from research they reviewed that learning to be and then learning to live together harmoniously were the foundations of SEL. It is "enabling young students to develop into citizens, capable of negotiating the complex terrain of life in the 21st century, making good decisions, being resilient, establishing and maintaining fulfilling relationships and being responsible members of their communities" (Roffey & McCarthy, 2013, p. 37).

SEL programs have been widely adopted not only in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom and Australia. The belief is that SEL can raise academic acquisition, reduce behavioral issues with students, and improve mental health. When positive, healthy relationships are developed, the incidents of bullying decrease. (Roffey & McCarthy, 2013) A meta-analysis completed by Durlak et al. involving 213 school-based, universal SEL programs and 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school, found significant positive impacts which built on the results from previous researchers.

Some positive impacts included improved: academic performance, prosocial behaviors, social-emotional competencies with regards to attitudes towards themselves, others, and education. SEL leads to breaking down barriers between individuals and finding what they may have in common breaks down barriers and promotes understanding, empathy, and negates bullying (Roffey & McCarthy, 2013). The fact that teachers and schools staff were able to effectively implement and conduct the SEL programs, means that schools don't need to bring in outside personnel to run them, which is another significant realization that came from this meta-analysis. (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011)

This researcher found multiple citations referencing the importance of SEL being embedded in the everyday happenings of a school community (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, & Bloodworth, 2000; Roffey & McCarthy, 2013; Slee et al., 2009). The following evidence-based interventions are some of the successful programs being implemented as SEL solutions.

Meta-analysis Study

Durlak, a psychologist at Loyola University, Dymnicki, researcher and psychologist at the American Institutes for Research, Weissberg and Taylor, University of Illinois psychologists, and Schellinger, clinical psychologist at Rady Children's hospital completed a meta-analysis involving 213 schools with students from kindergarten to high school, a total of 270,034 students in all. They studied the impact of SEL programs in schools. Durlak and his fellow researchers believed the lack of social and emotional connection had negative

impacts on their academic performance, behavior, and health. (Durlak, et al., 2011)

Their findings indicated that schools where implementation of SEL programs were done properly, saw significant improvement in social and emotional abilities among students and an eleven-point percentile increase in positive impact on students. (Durlak et al., 2011)

Mindfulness

Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, founded a stress reduction program called Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in 1979, which continues to be used both in the psychological and educational settings today (Benedek, 2010). Mindfulness can be defined as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 144). Professors, Gardner and Grose from Brock University in Ontario, Canada, referenced that mindfulness is a form of meditation that can be traced back to the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Yoga (Gardner & Grose, 2015).

Meiklejohn, a psychologist in Westfield, MA, along with 13 other researchers, conducted a review of 14 studies done on direct training of students on mindfulness, six being in elementary and eight being in high school. Some of these programs include:

Mindful Schools	www.mindfulschools.org	Ages K-12
MindUP	www.thehawnfoundation.org	Ages Pre-K-8
Stressed Teens	www.stressedteens.com	Ages 13-18

Inner Resilience Program   www.innerresiliencetidescenter.org
                                    K-8, parents, teachers, and administrators

Learning to BREATHE   http://learning2breathe.org   Adolescents
(Meiklejohn et al., 2012)

They believe that meditation is about cultivating "an awareness of the present moment with acceptance, non-judgment, curiosity and compassion for ourselves" (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Gardner and Grose also found through their research, that it is highly possible that by practicing mindfulness, students could see improvement in academic performance by improving their concentration, attention, memory, and stress management (2015).

As the growing interest in mindfulness continues, this researcher believes it is important to recognize the benefits for students and teachers practicing mindfulness. Physically, mindfulness can boost the immune system and create positive changes in the brain such as increasing the gray matter density which is associated with memory, stress, and memory. Psychologically, there have been studies that have shown improvement in memory and attention, reduction in negative emotions and stress, and lessened depression. Finally, the social benefits are enhanced relationships and a fostering of compassion and empathy. (Gardner & Grose, 2015)

Integrating mindfulness activities into education can be beneficial in the classroom to help students focus better, have less aggression towards others, and improve the happiness levels of the students which in turn will also impact the well-being of the teachers (Gardner & Grose, 2015). This researcher believes that utilizing the mindfulness techniques school-wide would create a more compassionate and empathetic building of students and staff where learning could truly take place.

Summary Statement

Students impacted by trauma are not merely relegated to special education. Increasingly, students within in the general school population are dealing with trauma; therefore, the need for PPI has become even more crucial for educators to learn about, acquire training, and then implement. Through the review of literature completed by this researcher, there is strong evidence through scientific studies of PP and PPIs that these are not "rainbows and unicorns" ideas. They have validity and have shown to have a real impact on students and teachers and their abilities to be in a positive state of well-being.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Literature

Through the articles reviewed in this thesis, it is evident that PP holds potential for increasing student well-being, which impacts self-esteem, optimism, resilience, positive relationships, and more. The research not only establishes a foundation for incorporating PP in special education classrooms, but also in all academic settings. Students and staff can benefit from PPIs discussed in this thesis.

Seligman, the man responsible for bringing the study of happiness to the forefront, in our times, as a worthwhile science, has created a mind shift both in psychological and educational communities. His stated definition of PP – the scientific study of goes right in life sums it up. Scientific-based studies and meta-analyses of PPIs give credence to adopting the PP philosophy and interventions in academic settings. It was noted that schools are the perfect setting for fostering positive development.

The last 17-20 years have seen a dramatic shift in the study of PP with an increasing amount of literature being published each year. I believe that the sampling of literature reviewed and referenced in chapter 2 is the evidence needed to support PP as the architect to restructure 21st century education. The fast-paced, instantaneous access, modern day world in which we live has created new challenges that the majority of our 20th century classrooms and teachers have not caught up to yet. PP is not just a North American phenomenon, many of the articles referenced were studies done in other

countries, such as the UK, Australia, and Denmark. Research shows that happiness and well-being cross all cultural barriers. It is something that is innately human.

The focus historically, in the field of psychology was looking at the deficits and determining what caused those. Why were people depressed? Why did people have low self-esteem? Why were people anxious? Seligman, along with others, proposed to look at what makes people happy, optimistic, joyful, and then determine ways to bring this about in everyone's life. Csikszentmihalyi spent the majority of his life finding out what makes people happy, what creates "flow" in their lives. The one question he has been asking for years – Where in everyday life do we feel happy? People are taking college courses in happiness, buying books on happiness and learning mindfulness and yoga to achieve a happy sense of well-being.

There is science behind happiness and well-being. It has been proven in article after article that I read. There is enough evidence already to prove that positive psychology is an actual science that can be studied, interpreted, advanced, and implemented in classrooms.

Professional and School Applications

The topic of happiness has been something that I have been interested in for a long time, so being able to have the opportunity to research happiness and positive psychology was perfect! I have wanted to incorporate PPIs into my classroom, but always felt I only knew enough to be dangerous. After reading

several books prior to doing this research, I decided to implement some of the techniques.

Gratitude and the act of being grateful really struck a chord with me, so last year around this time, I created gratitude booklets for my students in my 8th grade advisory. Each day they needed to pick a person in their family and write three things about why they were grateful for that person. I modeled it for them each day, so I was filling out my own. They finished in time for Thanksgiving and I gave them instructions to share what they wrote with each person over the holiday. I don't have the data to back up whether they did it or not, but I know that it impacted me when I shared what I wrote with my family at the Thanksgiving table. I felt a sense of happiness, love, and peacefulness. It was very interesting.

As I did more research this summer, I read about a couple of other gratitude ideas and decided to implement one of them right away with my 6th grade Time Management classes. Every time the students come to Time Management, which is either the 1st or 2nd hour, they get their gratitude journals and write three things they are grateful for. The room is dimly lit, and relaxation music is playing to give them a calming opportunity as well. Some of my students have Time Management every day, while others have it every other day. We are in our third month of writing and it has been interesting to see how some of the students have expanded what they are grateful for. We get into our community circle at the end of each week and share what we wrote for that morning. The students actually get the chairs for the circle started sometimes before I even tell

them. I will be curious to see how the students change over the next six months since this is now a habit.

There was mention of a gratitude letter and visit, which was reported as having an even stronger impact than the gratitude journal. I am planning to do this with my Resource English students in the near future. I would like to invite the people who they write their letters to, to join us so they can share their letters in person.

Mindfulness is something that our school is implementing, at least on a small scale. We have a calming room where students can learn Mindfulness techniques. My colleague has started using Mindfulness with his Time Management classes. His classes consist of more EBD and impulsive students, so he is hoping that the impacts will start to manifest in their behaviors. Chaotic minds need that break, to just "be". I would actually like to see our entire school take a mindfulness break twice a day. I think the culture of our school would improve immensely.

Our school also has professional learning teams (PLTs) which are another name for PLCs. After my research both in my SPED 631 class and through the articles I read, I believe that there is room for improvement within our PLTs. I feel that they are not true PLCs based on what I know now. The collaboration exists in pockets and it has not become accepted as a school-wide norm. As a new teacher last year, I had no idea what PLCs or PLTs were, and I did not have any training on them, so it was difficult to understand my role. I think for a school to become proficient in true PLCs, everyone needs to be on the same page.

SEL encompasses so much. An entire thesis could have been written on this topic alone. SEL is a great conduit for PP. Our school has two programs, that I am aware of. In our Time Management classes, we are using materials from CASEL and SecondStep. It would be great to have official training on these to ensure they are being utilized properly. When there is constant teacher turnover and inconsistency with what to use now, it leads to letting students down, which is a challenge for many schools. When we are all on the same page, everyone wins.

One PPI that I did not add, but read about is the circle of courage. I wanted to include this because it has a lot of value and is worth being a part of this thesis. It is something I think would work well with our student population. The circle of courage has its foundation in Native American culture and a culture of respect. The four principles for the circle of courage include belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This is in alignment with the philosophy of PP (Brendtro, Mitchell, & Jackson, 2014). Our school has implemented restorative circles and community circles which reflect the circle of courage. I believe they will become an integral part of our school community.

Limit of Research

Much of the research that I read revolved around adults. There were a number of them for elementary level and high school papers as well, but very few for middle school which was disappointing since that is my area of focus as a special education teacher. More research is needed in the area of adolescents

and the long-term impacts PP could have on them as they move into adulthood, in my opinion.

It would have been great to be able to find more research on studies that were longer than several months. I did not come across a longitudinal study with adolescents to see what the long-term effects could be for PPIs. This would be crucial in validating the use of PPIs in school settings. One study did reference schools that had been doing PLCs for multiple years in Australia, but that was about the extent of it. What would happen if mindfulness was practiced daily in an entire middle school, twice a day? How would those 6th graders be by the time they were 8th graders? Would their grades and behaviors have improved? These are questions that I did not find in my research.

Implications of Future Research

Future research should continue to investigate potential benefits of PPIs in schools as a way to increase happiness and student well-being (McCabe et al., 2011). Measuring happiness and well-being are challenging. It will be important to develop a scale that more specifically measures qualities such as loving, kindness, empathy, and joy. This have a huge impact on mindfulness research, as well as broader areas of PP (Kraus & Sears, 2009).

Future research which provides more scientifically-based PPIs could help shape how education is conducted, going from a teaching-centered model to a student-centered model that focuses on well-being and happiness which would have the domino effect in academics and social skills, in my opinion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, education has become a challenging environment for everyone and if tools are available to create a healthier, more positive school environment, there would be less teacher turnover and more students succeeding. Daily stress can lead to trauma for students as well as teachers. PP is a possible solution.

Increasingly, schools are starting to utilize PP intervention/programs like mindfulness, PLCs, courage circles, and SEL curriculum; however, they are sometimes only half-heartedly implemented or fizzle out shortly after they've begun. In order for PP to truly have an impact, there needs to be buy-in, first by the staff and faculty, then by the students. Consistency and open-mindedness are key. It is evident in our schools, that continuing to do things the way "they've always been done" is doing a disservice to our students.

Without PPIs, we will continue to lose students, especially students with disabilities like Emotional Behavioral Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Conduct Disorder. When these students feel unsuccessful, left out, or ignored, they feel that their only option is to drop out. As teachers and administrators, we have to decide if we are willing to pay now by getting out of our comfort zones and learning about PPIs then implementing, or pay later when these students make choices that put them into the system. Implementing most of the PPIs such as gratitude techniques are at no cost, but can have big benefits.

Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, Peterson, Park, and Achor, are all people who have spent their lifetime studying happiness and PP. Their research gives validity to having an attitude of gratitude and hope, focusing on one's strengths, having courage, being authentic and kind, can create an environment where all thrive, whether that be in a school, a health care facility, or a home.

Happiness and well-being are what parents want for their children more than anything else, so isn't it up to the schools to work toward that goal? The nay-sayers would comment that if the "touchy-feely" stuff is all schools focused on, academics would suffer. I beg to differ; the research begs to differ. Schools are communities and should be treated as such – teachers collaboratively working, students being challenged and taking that on with hope and optimism.

Why else do schools exist? As a place for adults to put their time in and get a paycheck? Or as a place to impact future generations? Many teachers out there have forgotten that their students' well-being is their job; that helping them to become curious seekers of knowledge and wonder, to become the best person they can should be their priority every day. On the other hand, there are a lot of great teachers out there that truly want their students to flourish and are willing to learn, get uncomfortable, and grow to make that happen. Those are the teachers our students need more of!

I'll end this thesis with on last thought: people who are grateful have "higher levels of optimism, positive feelings, and life satisfaction, and lower levels of stress and negative affect" (McCabe et al., 2011, p.184).

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Table 1 Classification of 6 Virtues and 24 Character Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Virtue and strength	Definition
1. Wisdom and knowledge	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
Creativity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
Curiosity	Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
Open-mindedness	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
Love of learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
Perspective	Being able to provide wise counsel to others
2. Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
Authenticity	Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
Bravery	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
Persistence	Finishing what one starts
Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy
3. Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others
Kindness	Doing favors and good deeds for others
Love	Valuing close relations with others
Social intelligence	Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
4. Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
Fairness	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
Leadership	Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
Teamwork	Working well as member of a group or team
5. Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess
Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong
Modesty	Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
Prudence	Being careful about one's choices; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
Self-regulation	Regulating what one feels and does
6. Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it

Humor	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
Religiousness	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

(Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005)