

Extracts from **Personal Well Being Lessons for Secondary Schools** by Boniwell & Ryan 2012

It is likely that the first decade of the twenty-first century will be viewed by historians as a landmark decade for the explicit development of children's well-being. Once implicit in the education of children, well-being has now become an overt government agenda in many countries across the world.... The reasons for the focus on the development of well-being in children are twofold. We are forced to recognize that Western countries are currently facing an unprecedented increase in childhood and adolescent depression.

Although the case for well-being education can be made purely on the basis of prevention of ill-health, depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders, there is at least as much value in appreciating the benefits that well-being can bring. Already in 1947 the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in terms of wellness, that is: physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease (WHO 1947). A substantial body of research documents the advantages of well-being and positive individual characteristics. For instance, research demonstrates that happy people are successful across multiple life domains, including marriage, relationships, health, longevity, income and work performance. They are more creative, able to multi-task and endure boring tasks, are more trusting, helpful and sociable (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Those able to identify, develop and use their strengths, and are more likely to be high achievers (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999), while higher levels of grit or self-discipline in children predict academic success over and above their IQ levels (Duckworth and Seligman 2005). Well-being education aims to develop the skills of well-being, flourishing and optimal functioning in children, teenagers and students. In so doing, it focuses on both the preventative and enabling or developmental functions. Importantly, well-being education is underpinned by principles and methods of empirical validation, which is what differentiates psychological science from self-help initiatives.

Boniwell goes on to describe the failure of the self-esteem movement, the growth of resilience education, the replacement of self esteem with the more promising social and emotional learning (SEL) movement and now the positive psychology movement.

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

Extract from **Positive Education** by Seligman, Ernst, Gillam, Reivich and Linkins

Why Positive Education now?

When nations are at war, poor, in famine or in civil turmoil, it is natural that their institutions should be about defence and damage, about minimising the disabling conditions of life. When nations are wealthy, at peace and in relative harmony, however, they, like Florence of the 15th century, turn to what makes life worth living, not just to curtailing the disabling conditions of life, but to building the

enabling conditions of life. What is all our wealth for, anyway? Surely not just to produce more wealth. Gross domestic product (GDP) was, during the Industrial Revolution, a decent first approximation to how well a nation was doing. Now, however, every time we build a prison, every time there is a divorce or a suicide, the GDP goes up. The aim of wealth should not be to blindly produce more wealth, but to produce more well-being.

General well-being—how much positive emotion, how much engagement at work, how much meaning in life our citizens have—is now quantifiable and it complements, and makes sense of, GDP. Public policy can be aimed at increasing general well-being and the successes or failures of policy can be measured quantitatively against this standard. Prosperity-as-usual has been equated with wealth. The time has come for a new prosperity, a prosperity that combines well-being with wealth. Learning to value and to attain this new prosperity must start early—in the formative years of schooling— and it is this new prosperity, kindled by Positive Education, that the world can now choose.

Questions : Does the school have a role to play in teaching well-being and resilience? And if yes, how can such a process be initiated and put into action? How do we know this is not another fad like the self-esteem movement? Does this also mean that SEL is no longer applicable?