HE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN EDUCATION: HOW DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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ABSTRACT

This review was conducted to highlight the vital role of the positive psychology integration in education. Positive psychology plays an important role in all levels of education. Studies found out that children’s academic performance and comprehensive development are associated with their positive psychology. Positive psychology integration in education field was initially established by United State and United Kingdom and further developed to other countries. However, Malaysia is considered in infancy stage where positive psychology is concerned. This study aims to showcase the importance of the positive psychology integration in education system in order to channel policymaker’s attention into considering this integration into Malaysian educational system.

Key Words: Positive psychology, happiness, positive thinking, useful techniques, student’s achievement, Educational performance

INTRODUCTION

The importance and techniques of positive psychology have been examined carefully by many researchers. Positive psychology brings a good effect towards education field. It will encourage students to have positive emotions and enhance their motivation.

Seligman (2006) is credited with creating the field of positive psychology while positive psychology was introduced to rehabilitation as early as the 1960s. Nowadays, positive psychology already started being used in western countries. It is an advantage if Malaysia starts to use it as soon as possible.

What is Positive Psychology?

According to Peterson (2013), positive psychology is an umbrella term that describes the scientific study of what makes life most worth living. He emphasized that positive psychology falls into four different categories:

1. Positive psychologists are concerned with positive experiences such as happiness, positive emotions, and the psychological state of flow which mean being highly engaged in what individuals do.

2. Encouraging more enduring features of the individual, especially positive traits. This certainly includes strength of character such as kindness, curiosity, and the ability to form relationships with other people. It also includes talents and abilities.

3. Relationships between and among people. It would be “other people matter” if positive psychology reduces it is only one sentence. Every line of work brings us back to the importance of other people.

4. Positive psychologists pay lip service to the importance of larger institutions such as families, schools, communities, whole nations.

Why is Happiness related to Positive Psychology?

Happiness was a very important element of positive psychology. Seligman (2002a) stated that “happiness” is too worn and too weary a term to be of much scientific use, and the discipline of Positive
Psychology divides it into three very different realms.

First, it is hedonic positive feeling such as joy, love, contentment, and pleasure. It means a life led around having as much of this good feeling as possible, is the ‘Pleasant Life’. Second, it is the state of flow, and a life based on it is the ‘Engaged Life’. Flow, a major part of the engaged life, consists in a loss of self-consciousness, timelessness, or being “one with the music” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Once one is completely absorbed, recently, although there are one speaks “that was fun” but no opinions or emotional stated (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2005). However, there are no shortcuts to flow. Flow only occurs when individuals organize their highest strengths and talents to meet the challenges that arise, and it is clear that flow enables learning.

Third, the framework in the outline of constructive psychology is the one with the finest knowledgeable attribution which is the expressive life. Flow and optimistic feeling can be found in solipsistic chases, but not sense or determination. It is because flow is like an engagement and happiness more like an emotion; people will engage with the stage but it will not be a purpose.

Meaning consists in determining what individuals’ highest assets are, and then using them to help individuals believe they are larger than the self when seen from the positive psychology perspective (Seligman, 2002a). Seligman et al. (2009) stressed that in the framework of positive psychology, experimental investigation is encouraged and not mere common sense. There are some research results in positive psychology:

- Positive people are much less likely to die of heart attacks than neurotics, controlling for all known physical risk factors (Giltay, Geleijnse, Zitman, Hoekstra, & Schouten, 2004).
- Ladies who present honest (Duchenne) smiles to the photographer at age eighteen go on to have less separations and more marital pleasure than those who show fake smiles (Keltner, Kring, & Bo-nanno, 1999).
- Cultural biases will reduce encouraging feeling. For example, though individuals commonly are better at identifying expressions of their particular race than faces of other ethics, compared by enhancing remembrance of expressions of people from other ethics (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005).
- Money, well-being, marital, belief added together interpretation for no more than 15% of the discrepancy in life fulfillment (Diener et al., 1999).

- The search for meaning and commitment are much more representative of life fulfillment than the chase of pleasure (Peterson et al., 2005).
- It is better that individuals rejoice worthy happenings that predict of upcoming love and loyalty to their partner than how they react to bad happenings (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).
- More ‘flow’ at work was finding by individuals compare than at home (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). These states are precious for individuals because they battle hopelessness (Seligman et al., 2005), more life gratification are produced (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Seligman et al., 2005), and certified learning, mainly creative knowledge (Fredrickson, 1998).
- Discipline is double as good than high school marks an commentator for IQ (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).
- Satisfied teenagers, 15 years later, go on to receive significantly more than less happy, after accounting for income, grades and other understandable factors (Diener et al., 2002).

**Why Positive Psychology is Important in Education?**

Mah-Ngee (2012) assessed the problems faced by students in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Systematic theoretical knowledge was emphasized by the department of psychology and counseling of the university. Paper-pencil examination required of almost all courses in the psychology and counseling department.

Dzakira, Mustafa, and Abu Bakar (2006), pointed out overall of Malaysian students have social configurations to education which make educational experiences problematic to understanding. Students are used to being “spoon fed” by the lecturers. For example, students will feel lost if lecturers did not provide clear instruction for the assignments.

Seligman et al. (2009) specified that the existence of unhappiness amongst teenager is outrageously high globally. Until the end of high school, nearly one in five teenager experience an episode of clinical depression (Lewinsohn, Rohde, Seeley, & Fischer, 1993). Researchers debated of these findings duplicate rises in rates of sadness, increased consciousness of unhappiness, or procedural problems such as remembrance biases (Costello, Erkanli, & Angold, 2006); almost all researchers are discouraged by the number of hopelessness there is now and how typically it goes untreated (Costello et al., 2006; Twenge & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2002). Individual and regular nationwide pleasure, which has been monitored adeptly for half a life span has not distantly
kept up with developments worldwide. If at all, pleasure has gone up only spottily.

If individuals refused to face depression, it will develop be a serious problem. Positive psychology used to enhance people positive emotions. It was useful to growth positive emotion of people. Nowadays, in other countries such as the United States and Britain, positive psychology was common used in their schools, colleges and universities.

Kids and youngsters dedicate much of their developing period in school; therefore, schools are an outstanding place for comfort creativities. For instance, in the United States, 6–17 year-olds naturally spend 30–35 hours per week in school (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). Thus, students’ daily communications and practices with peers, educators and trainers are essential to their welfare and are significant goals for well-being programs. In addition, Cohen (2006) stated that most parents and teachers see the formation of well-being and character as a significant aspect of teaching. The vital goal for schooling was to ensure students become an loyal residents proved by studies of American parents completed the previous 30 years (Cohen, 2006). The majority of schools are at present involved in this work to some extent. There has been increasing regard of this objective in recent years.

American schools are a main provider of mental health facilities (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004; Foster et al., 2005). Schools also have huge resources which mean largely unused possibilities for deterrence and well-being initiatives (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004; Pfeiffer & Reddy, 1998; Weist, 2005). Most states in the United States now make compulsory or encourage character education, and many have standards related to social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2009; Cohen, 2006). Moral or character development is also promoted in Britain’s education policy (Arthur, 2005). Many parents are anxious that programs will teach values advocated by educators or politicians and that have little similarity to values they hope to inculcate in their children (Arthur, 2005). Researchers have noted that most programs are not backed by empirical evidence (Spence & Shortt, 2007). However, parents, educators and legislators often fear that programs will drain money or reduce student performance by drawing time and money away from educational subjects (Benninga et al., 2006).

Snyder et al. (2011) suggested that teachers must see their struggles as a calling rather than work. A calling is defined as a strong motivation when a person repeatedly takes actions that are essentially satisfying. Snyder and coworkers (2011) believed that when instructors behave as if they had callings they demonstrate a profound and strong love for teaching when positive psychology was applied to education.

In the education field in Malaysia, positive psychology is still new for educators. Government, educators and parents should run this as soon as possible to enhance the happiness and self-esteem of the children. Besides, it also can improve relationship between people, enhance student academic performance and increase happiness. Positive psychology brings many advantages for the students. In the future, therefore, researchers can conduct more research about this.

Positive Psychology Techniques

Many techniques can be used in the schools to enhance happiness of the students. The following techniques are suggested:

i) Positive Introduction/You at Your Best

The Positive Introduction or You at Your Best is an excellent tool to use as an ice-breaker in the pre-practicum or practicum class. Positive Introductions are one-page papers where students and the instructor bring up a time in their lives when they were at their best. Strengths of character versus personal achievement or performance should be the focus in the introduction (Peterson, 2006). Students can be reminded that appreciative listening is required so comments to the reader are focused on the student’s strengths rather than disagreeing with or dismissing what was said, as suggested by Peterson (2006). The reader, in addition, should be reminded not to make comparisons between or devalue his or her own Positive Introduction and the other students’ introductions (Peterson, 2006). Students read their Positive Introductions to the class. When using this exercise, some student introductions are so powerful that listeners were moved to tears by the strength of character of fellow students.

ii) ABCDE

Albert Ellis’s ABCDE technique has been adapted in positive psychology to change explanatory style and help the individual learn optimism. Using optimism when the cost of failure is low was suggested by Seligman (2002a). First, recognizing a pessimistic thought and then viewing this thought as if it were suggested by someone else who wants to make your life miserable. This recognition of the negative thought helps an individual to eventually dispute it (Seligman, 2002a). The ABCDE approach as a way to help individuals restructure irrational, negative beliefs into more positive thoughts and behaviors was also viewed by Ellis (1974). The fundamental goal is contentment and sub goals can include happiness and vocational goals (Ellis, 1991).
According to this method, individuals can experience adverse events (A) and the thoughts or beliefs (B) that surround to their happiness. Emotional or behavioral consequences (C) follow the irrational thoughts and beliefs (Ellis, 1974; Seligman, 1998, 2002a). The individual needs to dispute (D) these irrational thoughts and beliefs, these consequences also can be negative. This process of disputing irrational beliefs and behaviors will have positive effects (Ellis, 1991). Seligman (1998) advised the results will be significant when individuals focusing on and recording adversities from the beginning, nonetheless their life events and the emotional or behavioral incomplete record a day or two, by. They should appraisal their record and note the relationship between belief and consequences (Seligman, 1998). Reivich and Shatté (2002) recommend that individuals learn the ABCDE technique to assist in impulse control by helping people connect thoughts to emotions and behaviors in their resilience training.

iii) Three Blessings/Three Good Things

“Three Blessings” is an exercise that has decreased depression and increased positive emotions and pleasure (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman et al., 2006). People tend to focus their lives on what is wrong rather than what is right, and, remember failures more than successes (Seligman, 2002b). Good things in life encourages awareness of blessings (Seligman et al., 2006) and helps develop an explanatory style that promotes optimism about the future (Seligman, 1998).

Thinking about and ideally writing down three things that went well today and reflecting on why these good things happened were required by the Three Blessings or Three Good Things exercise. These three things can be very small (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman et al., 2006) such as thanking a colleague for lending you a text book or a dictionary. Performing the three good things exercise at night helps to reduce or eliminate rumination and focusing on negative thoughts (Seligman et al., 2006). Rather than just grading the students, this technique could be used in all classes to help students focus on the positive aspects of their education.

Conclusion

Positive psychology focuses on positive emotions of people. It will teach people how to enhance positive emotions and stay optimistic when facing problems. When an individual has positive emotion and high motivation, he or she will have a goal-directed mindset. Therefore, positive psychology helps to enhance performance.

Positive psychology also will affect relationship among people. A person with positive emotions will have more friends than a person who is always with negative emotions. Of course, a positive person will also have good relationships with their spouse, children, relatives and friends compared with a negative person.

Figure 1 has been drawn to show the importance of the positive psychology for educators and students.

Figure 1 Effects of Positive Psychology on students

Figure 1 shows that, nowadays, depression and stress of students keep increasing. After applying positive psychology in the education field, educators know how to increase happiness among students. In addition, the negative emotions decrease and positive emotions are enhanced. This will influence student academic performance. Through positive psychology, educators can enhance the interest of students in many ways such as learning, doing assignment or homework. It brings many advantages in education.

Finally it must be mentioned that positive psychology can be positively integrated into education system. However, it must be mention that Malaysia is considered as a new runner in the field and this study hope policy makers and educators will consider to use this approach holistically to improve the learning outcomes in our education system. Happiness is an important element in life, and needs to be encouraged in students for their well-being.

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