

Pathways to well-being

A Collection of Evidence-Based Approaches from Leading Education Experts.



Foreword

Angela Milliken-Tull

Chameleon PDE



Well-being like many other important issues has become an increasingly global discussion. Many of the well-being themes brought to our attention are framed in 'post-pandemic language' whether it is in relation to changes in eating and exercise habits, mental health or any other measure of well-being.

Children and young people are regularly the focus, particularly in relation to mental well-being and the challenge for educators is to have a clear understanding of what their student's well-being needs are to plan an engaging and effective curriculum that enables pupils to thrive. This in turn tends to lead to better academic attainment and schools are increasingly placing well-being at the heart of school life.

The publication of the 2024 World Happiness Report has resulted in US Surgeon General, Dr Vivek Murthy speaking out about his concerns for young people. The United States did not perform well, and Murthy asserts that social media is front and centre of this decline alongside reduced communication and 'in-person' connections amongst young people, so it's more important than ever that we are supporting young people to thrive through effective personal development education.

International schools are often leading the way in this area and a good measure of this is student voice data collected through Chameleon PDE's student voice survey. The results from international schools working with Chameleon PDE regularly show less risk-taking and better mental health data compared to the amalgamated data set that results are benchmarked against. One of the areas where international schools performed very favourably was students reporting that teachers were good role models. We know that respectful relationships and good communication are fundamental components to well-being, so this measure is a good temperature check of how well-embedded personal development and PSHE are within a setting. This is also likely to have a positive impact on teacher well-being as we find that good role modelling scores are very closely linked to both peer-to-peer and peer-to-staff respect.

Foreword

Angela Milliken-Tull

Chameleon PDE



Using student voice data to gain insight into well-being can go further than simply looking at the universal picture within a year group or key stage. Information can be viewed by gender or ethnicity. This can support schools to ensure that lessons and strategies to implement well-being are inclusive and potentially identify groups that may need additional interventions. Triangulating results with other data sources, verbal feedback and discussions can further inform and contextualise findings. This is an ongoing process as many factors impact on well-being, many of which are external and beyond our control. There's also the well-known but completely inexplicable issue of some year groups just being a bit less resilient than usual.

Chameleon PDE supports schools to deliver high-quality lessons that positively impact on well-being by providing a comprehensive online student voice survey allowing you to fully consult with pupils to ascertain their personal development needs. This is supported by an extensive and fully editable resource library of lesson plans covering the full PSHE curriculum as well as wider themes that support careers and personal development education enabling teachers to design a truly bespoke programme that can easily be mixed with other well-being resources. Staff CPD needs are also supported with emphasis on programme leadership and management together with sessions to build knowledge and confidence in delivering the topics that teachers find most challenging in PSHE and well-being.

Ref: 2024 World happiness report:

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/happiness-and-age-summary/>

Social media and happiness of young people, Dr Vivek Murthy US Surgeon General:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2024/mar/20/vivek-murthy-us-surgeon-general-social-media-youth-happiness>

This Report

In the dynamic landscape of international education, the well-being of practitioners and students is a cornerstone for fostering a thriving global learning community. This short report, crafted with the invaluable insights of four distinguished international educators, is a testament to our collective commitment to have more conversations and awareness around well-being.

As the demand for a global education experience grows, so does the responsibility to ensure the holistic well-being of international educators and students. This report delves into the multifaceted dimensions of well-being, offering analysis and interpretations of different themes in well-being that range from physical health, mental resilience, professional fulfilment, to community support.

Our subject specialists offer a wealth of experience and knowledge and thus provide nuanced perspectives that shed light on the challenges faced by practitioners and students in international schools, offering actionable strategies to enhance their overall well-being.

We are incredibly grateful to those who have contributed their research and insights. We are confident that this report will provide support and guidance for educators, school administrators, and policymakers alike, as we collectively strive to prioritize and elevate the well-being of both students and practitioners.

Chapters

1

Improving staff and student well-being: an exploration of interventions and coping mechanisms.

Dr Kevin House

Group Education Futures Architect at Education in Motion (EiM), Singapore

2

Elevating Education: Nurturing Teacher Well-being and Identity for Enriched Learning

Lianne Dominguez

Secondary School Principal & College Counseling Director at Shattuck-St. Mary's Forest City International School, Malaysia

3

What is well-being and how do we measure it?

James Mattiace

Consultant at BIG Questions Institute, Mexico
Previously Upper School Principal at American School in Taichung

4

Nurturing student well-being in schools: the pursuit of sustainable happiness

Mark Atkinson

Learning and Innovation Leader and Physical Education Teacher at The Alice Smith School, Malaysia

5

The good air to breathe: Personally defining professional development

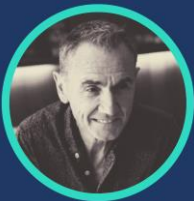
Paul Magnuson,

Instructor at Moreland University and Director of Educational Research at Leysin American School in Switzerland.

Jennifer Carlson,

Professor of Education at Hamline University, United States.

Improving staff and student well-being: an exploration of interventions and coping mechanisms.



Kevin House

Group Education Futures Architect at Education in Motion (EiM), Singapore

Trends & Themes

- Educators should employ emotion-focused, meaning-based, and problem-focused coping strategies, to overcome the stresses associated with their role.
- Practical interventions such as assessing staff well-being and maximising institutional resources are vital.
- Educators and school leaders can support children's mental health and well-being by prioritising universal interventions related to social and emotional skills development.

Practical Applications

- How to improve resourcing and training for student and staff well-being and inclusivity.
- The best way to promote strategies which overcome stresses associated with problems, and strategies which promote meaning, purpose and growth.
- Establish a practice framework for monitoring and developing student and staff well-being, centred on self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

The recent pandemic has cast a huge spotlight on the importance of well-being and has led to the growing demand for strategies and approaches to improve the well-being of staff and students across the globe. This article explores a range of innovative interventions and coping mechanisms designed to empower educators to navigate these turbulent times with resilience and efficacy. By delving into practical strategies and evidence-based approaches, we aim to offer valuable insights for teachers seeking to mitigate the emotional toll of teaching and the intensified levels of stress and anxiety they may face today.

What does the research tell us?

The first article, by Brooks, Creely and Laletas (2022) explores the well-being of three teaching staff from an Australian Primary School, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article highlights the effectiveness of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, devised by Lazarus and Folkman, as a framework to explore teacher well-being during the pandemic. Brooks, Creely and Laletas (2022) describe the positive coping strategies used by participants to manage stress which was induced by fear of the 'unknown' during the pandemic era. The specific coping strategies which relate to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping include:

- Emotion-focused coping strategies, which involve managing the emotional response to a stressor rather than directly addressing the stressor itself.
- Meaning-based coping strategies, which involve finding purpose, personal growth, or positive meaning in the face of stressors, and
- Problem-focused coping strategies, which involve addressing the stressor directly by taking action to change the situation or reduce its impact.

Similarly, the second article, by Reynolds et al. (2020) focuses on staff well-being in schools and offers a number of practical interventions to overcome the stressors which contribute to a teachers' poor mental health. The practical interventions that school leaders should consider when attempting to deal with the growing problem of teacher burnout include: assessing staff well-being through surveying, assessing and maximising available institutional resources; scheduling a programme which encourages staff participation, offering incentives to further participation; and encouraging staff to control the process, while taking ownership of their own well-being within the support framework provided at institutional level.

Finally, with regard to interventions and coping mechanisms which support the mental health and well-being of children, Patalay et al. (2017) examine the role of schools in providing community-based support for children's mental health and well-being across ten European countries. Despite limited data, they found that schools generally target more universal provision than targeted provision and there was greater reported focus on children who already have difficulties compared with prevention of problems and promotion of student well-being. The most common interventions implemented relate to social and emotional skills development and anti-bullying programmes which typically focus on five core competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, which includes evolving one's focus beyond the individual person as the primary focus of enquiry, while looking more deeply at the groups, systems and organisational culture in which people are embedded. Therefore, suggesting ways to foster collaboration and cohesion in order to develop and enhance relationships.

Practical strategies for educators

- Improve resourcing and training for student and staff well-being and inclusivity.
- Promote strategies which overcome stresses associated with problems, and strategies which promote meaning, purpose and growth.
- Establish a practice framework for monitoring and developing student and staff well-being, centred on self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

References

Improving staff and student well-being: an exploration of interventions and coping mechanisms.

- Brooks, M., Creely, E., & Laletas, S. (2022). Coping through the unknown: School staff well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International journal of educational research open*, 3, 100146.
- Reynolds, L. W., Bruno, A. J., Ross, K. M., Hall, J. M., & Reynolds, J. (2020). Bolstering staff well-being in schools. *Journal of School Health*, 90(5), 425-428.
- Patalay, P., Gondek, D., Moltrecht, B., Giese, L., Curtin, C., Stanković, M., & Savka, N. (2017). Mental health provision in schools: approaches and interventions in 10 European countries. *Global Mental Health*, 4, e10.

Elevating education: nurturing teacher well-being and identity for enriched learning.



Lianne Dominguez

Secondary School Principal & College Counseling Director at
Shattuck-St. Mary's Forest City International School, Malaysia

Trends & Themes

- Teacher evaluation should be focused on improvement, transcending the role of performance assessment to develop open conversation and reflective practices.
- The impact of transformational leadership on teacher commitment: It ignites motivation and deep commitment, nurturing a sense of purpose within educators
- Autonomy is more than professional privilege; it's intertwined with a teacher's self-identity

Practical Applications

- Teacher evaluations should emphasise collaboration, improvement roadmaps, and fostering a culture of continuous learning to transcend the role of performance assessment.
- Create spaces where shared values thrive, communication flourishes, and empowerment becomes a priority.
- Schools must empower educators as curriculum architects, weaving their voices into the educational fabric. Creativity must be celebrated by schools.

What does the research tell us?

In the world of education, where the shaping of young minds is a shared mission, teacher well-being and professional identity plays a central role. Through the lens of various studies, a story unfolds, illuminating a path towards empowering educators and cultivating an environment that fosters growth and satisfaction.

Embedded within these studies is the transformative potential of teacher evaluation. Janet Looney's "Developing High-Quality Teachers: teacher evaluation for improvement" sheds light on how evaluation transcends the role of performance assessment. Instead, it evolves into a tool for growth, where constructive feedback illuminates the path toward enhancing well-being and establishing a clearer professional identity. This transformation calls for dialogues between teachers and evaluators that draw upon relevant professional standards. Emphasizing collaboration, improvement roadmaps, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, these dialogues become a pivotal aspect of practical implementation.

Complementing this, Lance D. Nielsen's exploration in "Teacher Evaluation: Archiving Teaching Effectiveness" introduces a comprehensive evaluation framework. This framework is not confined to quantitative metrics; it embraces qualitative insights that encourage reflective practices among educators. In effect, it aligns with teachers' evolving self-perception, thus enriching their professional identity through a process of ongoing refinement. As such, both studies underline the power of evaluation as a mechanism for growth, well-being, and the cultivation of a robust professional identity.

Yet, the transformation of education extends beyond evaluation. The concept of transformational leadership, discussed by Xavier Dumay and Benoît Galand in "The multilevel impact of transformational leadership on teacher commitment: cognitive and motivational pathways," emerges as a guiding principle. It ignites motivation and deep commitment, nurturing a sense of purpose within educators. This finds resonance in real-world application, urging school leaders to create spaces where shared values thrive, communication flourishes, and empowerment becomes a priority.

Another important thread is autonomy, as illustrated in L. Carolyn Pearson and William Moomaw's study "Continuing Validation of the Teaching Autonomy Scale." Autonomy isn't just a professional privilege; it's intertwined with a teacher's self-identity. Practical application calls for schools to empower educators as curriculum architects, weaving their voices into the educational fabric. This connection between autonomy, job satisfaction, and a vibrant professional identity is tangible in classrooms where creativity is celebrated.

However, the journey isn't solely about individual growth. The interplay of self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, as explored in "Self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment: exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity" by Esther T. Canrinus and colleagues, forms the foundation. Schools play a pivotal role by offering tailored professional development that amplifies belief in oneself, ignites motivation, and fosters a confident professional identity.

An unexpected note arises from "High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations" by Abraham Carmeli and Jody Hoffer Gittel. While not inherently tied to education, the principle of psychological safety finds relevance. Fostering an environment where innovation is celebrated and mistakes are viewed as stepping stones cultivates well-being, deepens professional identity, and encourages growth.

Collectively, these studies form a unified narrative. Within this narrative, the intricate connection between teachers' well-being and their professional identity becomes evident. This connection thrives through the development of a supportive environment, the cultivation of inspiring leadership, and the fostering of autonomy. Each of these factors contribute to the overarching process of growth within the educational sphere. Through this collective effort, the landscape of education evolves into a harmonious space where empowered educators and enriched learning experiences converge, becoming the defining elements of this journey.

References

Elevating Education: Nurturing Teacher Well-being and Identity for Enriched Learning.

- Looney, J. (2011). Developing High-Quality Teachers: Teacher Evaluation for Improvement. *European Journal of Education*, 46(4), 440-455. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41343393>
- Dumay, X., & Galand, B. (2012). The multilevel impact of transformational leadership on teacher commitment: Cognitive and motivational pathways. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(5), 703-729. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23263775>
- Pearson, L. C., & Moomaw, W. (2006). Continuing validation of the Teaching Autonomy Scale. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(1), 44-51. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27548158>
- Nielsen, L. D. (2014). Teacher Evaluation: Archiving Teaching Effectiveness. *Music Educators Journal*, 101(1), 63-69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43289093>
- Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, A. (2012). Self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment: Exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 27(1), 115-132. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43551089>
- Carmeli, A., & Gittell, J. H. (2009). High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(6), 709-729. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41683863>

What is well-being and how do we measure it?



James Mattiace

Consultant at BIG Questions Institute, Mexico

Previously Upper School Principal at American School in Taichung

Trends & Themes

- Establishing parameters to define and measure well-being is half the battle.
- What is needed to support student well-being, including the idea of educating the 'whole-child'.
- The role of the PERMA model, Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

Practical Applications

- Teacher-led programs that focus on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making have a positive correlation with outcomes and well-being.
- How to educate the 'whole-child'
- The five key aspects of the PERMA model can be measured in a variety of ways and provide a baseline of information to identify students most at risk

What does the research tell us?

A fascinating 2022 study by Hossain, O'Neill, & Strnadová looked at how we are measuring well-being and concludes that we have no universal understanding or measurement of well-being. They narrowed down 1200 research articles to thirty-three for study and found that different studies measured eight key things (although the mix and match as to which eight was, seemingly, arbitrarily chosen). They identified:

- Positive emotion,
- (lack of) Negative emotion,
- Relationships,
- Engagement,
- Accomplishment,
- Purpose at school,
- Intrapersonal/Internal factors (emotional regulation, depression, agency etc),
- Contextual/External factors (school and home conditions, safety etc).

Their conclusion is that A. we have not identified what we mean by well-being (although positive emotion and joy were nearly universal), B. we have not found an agreed upon method for how we measure well-being, we largely rely on quantitative methods excluding student voice, and predominantly focus on Western cultural contexts. With that in mind, here are some ideas for getting schools and practitioners on the same page.

The first and most important agreement is that we must have standards and be aligned to those standards. The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (widely known as CASEL) has the most often recognized and cited set of standards. There are mountains of evidence that suggest teacher-led programs that focus on those five domains (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) have a positive correlation with the outcomes schools and employers want and lead to success in academics, careers, and personal happiness.

A 2023 report by the Learning Policy Institute begins with an overview of the CASEL standards and a review of 12 meta studies on effect sizes when teacher led SEL strategies are used. It then goes on to weigh the most effective SEL strategies (broad programs over narrow and embedded rather than stand-alone). The report then goes on to kick it up one level to regional government public health policies to support the school-based initiatives and concludes with an impressive list of recommendations for future study.

There is a small focus/mention on looking out for educators' well-being while developing strategies for student mental well-being as well. As the report states "This broad notion of educating the "whole child" generally includes at least the abilities to: (1) develop healthy personal relationships, (2) treat others with respect and dignity, (3) develop the cognitive capacity to solve problems and think creatively, (4) succeed in postsecondary education and the labor market, and (5) be a contributing citizen in a democracy." (Greenberg 2023) These are clearly key desirable outcomes and provide a solid foundation for the why.

The how, or the implementation advice comes from CASEL itself. They have created a how-to manual, focusing on the 6 steps to create high quality SEL programs. For each strategy there are multiple links to existing policies and programs which are 100% grab n' go. The six strategies form a continuum and should not be done in isolation from each other, but when looked at holistically they should result in a comprehensive and effective program.

Another strategy that is easy to implement is to give your school a baseline measurement. While the Hossein, O'Neill, and Strnadová study rightly points out that we have not agreed on what or how we measure, there is a lot of support for the PERMA+ measurement. The PERMA model stands for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. The "+" opens the model to other aspects like Nutrition, Sleep, Optimism etc. However, the five key aspects of the PERMA can be measured in a variety of ways. At my two previous schools I combined a variety of survey tools to produce this simple survey that can be used by counselors or the dean of students to get a baseline and identify students most at risk.

While we are collaborating and developing a common set of what we will measure and how it will be measured for student well-being, it is important to keep in mind the educators in the building or on the virtual Zoom calls. A 2022 article by Dr. Helen Kelly looks at teacher and leadership burnout as a follow-up to her article on student resilience. Her most striking finding is that schools need to shift the focus from teacher burnout being a personal failing to an institutional one, particularly when the two main causes, workload, and community, can be addressed and mitigated by the school. She identifies some opportunities for schools to shift system wide and the impacts of burnt-out/stressed teachers on students, thus creating an imperative to get it done.

References

What is well-being and how do we measure it?

- Greenberg, M. T. (2023). Evidence for social and emotional learning in schools. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/928.269>
- Hossain, S., O'Neill, S. & Strnadová, I. What Constitutes Student Well-Being: A Scoping Review Of Students' Perspectives. Child Ind Res 16, 447–483 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-022-09990-w>
- Kelly, H. (2022, March 11). 'Teachers are not to blame for their own burnout' School Management Plus: School & Education News Worldwide. www.schoolmanagementplus.com/heads-governors-school-leadership-governance/teachers-are-not-to-blame-for-their-own-burnout/
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Key Features of High-Quality Policies and Guidelines to Support Social and Emotional Learning; Recommendations and Examples for State Policy Leaders (June 2022) <https://casel.org/key-features-state-guidelines/>
- Mattiace, J (2020) Secondary Engagement Survey <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1QLfsHN5BT132iVqCUVsA-FdXi7YFM-o5kRka7kjEDZc/copy>

Nurturing student well-being in schools: the pursuit of sustainable happiness.



Mark Atkinson

Learning and Innovation Leader and Physical Education Teacher at
The Alice Smith School, Malaysia

Trends & Themes

- Exploration into positive psychology techniques and impact.
- Third-wave positive psychology, evolving from the individual to groups and systems.
- The quest for sustainable happiness.

Practical Applications

- Promoting admiration, joy and general positivity through good deeds and gratitude tasks.
- Increase collaborative and cooperative tasks to develop close positive relationships.
- Provide opportunities for reflection and goal setting to appreciate personal growth.

For a number of years now, schools around the world have increasingly acknowledged the importance of a student's overall well-being. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on student well-being like never before. While students continue to deal with the aftermath of multiple bouts of unprecedented disruptions, lockdowns, and virtual learning, the demand for research into the wider intricacies of a student's overall sense of well-being is greater than ever.

There is growing recognition that well-being and happiness are intertwined, and while the term well-being remains a broad concept, this article aims to conceptualise and explore one of the key factors of student well-being in schools: sustainable happiness. This article will examine a number of successful initiatives undertaken by schools that contribute towards sustainable happiness, prior to offering recommendations to educators to promote and foster an environment that supports students' in achieving and sustaining happiness.

What does the research tell us?

It's quite common to hear phrases such as 'focus on your well-being', or simply 'cheer up' or 'be happy', but what does the research tell us about how happiness can be achieved?

Alam's (2022) research suggests that successfully implemented positive psychology programs and initiatives are linked to students' health, relationships, happiness, and academic success. An alternative study by Alam (2022) explores the effects of positive psychology interventions on what he describes as 'sustainable happiness', focusing on cultivating positive emotions, resilience, and positive character strengths to prioritise students happiness and well-being as a focus of learning in the 21st century. This further highlights the demand for a good education which contributes significantly towards personal and collective happiness as a focus of learning in the 21st century.

Lambert, Passmore and Joshanloo (2019) report on the effects of a positive psychology intervention programme (Happiness 101) which attempts to build one's well-being, beyond the traditional task of simply reducing ill-being by focusing on positive relationships and social interactions, such as undertaking good deeds and expressing gratitude. Results found a significant increase in hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, including a reduction in fear of happiness. Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006) support claims that students who changed their activities to those such as setting new personal goals or aspirations brought about an increase in positive experiences; while expressing gratitude and kindness created a culture of positivity and hedonism.

Lomas et al. (2021) explore the intricacies of what they perceive to be the third wave of positive psychology, offering recommendations for educators which includes evolving one's focus beyond the individual person as the primary focus of enquiry, and looking more

deeply at the groups, systems and organisational culture in which people are embedded. Therefore suggesting ways to foster collaboration and cohesion in order to develop and enhance relationships.

Strategies for educators

While a lot of research identifies a number of interventions and programmes which have positively impacted upon one's well being, specifically in achieving sustainable happiness, an important question to ask is: what might that look like to us as educators in a school-based setting?

Compton and Hoffman's (2019) research in particular provides an insight into the practical strategies that educators could implement in order for their learners to achieve sustainable happiness. By embedding a number of the principles which feature in the Fordyce Happiness Training Programme, educators can promote a culture of positivity by seeking ways to increase the ratio of positive to negative emotional thoughts, they include:

- Incorporating reflective practice to increase learners' understanding of compassion, empathy and emotional intelligence
- Promoting admiration, joy and general positivity through good deeds and gratitude tasks
- Increase collaborative and cooperative tasks to develop close positive relationships
- Provide opportunities for reflection and goal setting to appreciate personal growth

By incorporating these principles into their teaching practices, educators can create a culture of positivity that supports and nurtures the sustainable happiness of their students.

References

Nurturing student well-being in schools: the pursuit of sustainable happiness.

- Alam, A. (2022) 'Positive Psychology Goes to School: Conceptualizing Students' Happiness in 21st Century Schools While 'Minding the Mind!' Are We There Yet? Evidence-Backed, School-Based Positive Psychology Interventions', ECS Transactions, 107.
- Alam, A. (2022). Investigating sustainable education and positive psychology interventions in schools towards achievement of sustainable happiness and well-being for 21st century pedagogy and curriculum. ECS Transactions, 107(1), 19481.
- Compton, W. C., & Hoffman, E. (2019). Positive psychology: The science of happiness and flourishing. Sage Publications.
- Lambert, L., Passmore, H. A., & Joshanloo, M. (2019). A positive psychology intervention program in a culturally-diverse university: Boosting happiness and reducing fear. Journal of Happiness Studies, 20, 1141-1162.
- Lomas, T., Waters, L., Williams, P., Oades, L. G., & Kern, M. L. (2021). Third wave positive psychology: broadening towards complexity. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 16(5), 660-674.

The good air to breathe: personally defining professional development.



Paul Magnuson and Jennifer Carlson

Instructor at Moreland University and Director of Educational Research at Leysin American School in Switzerland & Professor of Education at Hamline University, United States.



Trends & Themes

- How international educators define and view uplift
- The shared experiences of uplift provide recognition, inspiration and gratitude.

Practical Applications

- A model to develop your communities for shared uplift, inspiration and gratitude.
- Exchanges created energy and that energy influenced creativity and momentum.

What does the research tell us?

We invited a half dozen educators, from Malaysia to Minnesota, to be involved in a self organizing professional development experience on the theme of education and Uplift. We had been researching and employing Uplift, loosely defined as positive experiences (Neils, et al, 2018), and “real-world” uplifting experiences (e.g., enjoying a hobby, receiving positive feedback, or having a pleasant social interaction)” (Starr & Hershenberg, 2017, p. 1443). We began to wonder “How do other educators from around the world define and view Uplift?”

We self-organized and agreed to contribute to an education focused discussion that included three Zoom meetings, each two weeks apart, and the use of WhatsApp for ongoing discussion and sharing. This free app provided a text messaging format where we could exchange ideas topic from anywhere in the world. The participants were educators from around the world, including current and former teachers, student teachers, educational consultants, and university professors.

What is self organized PD?

This professional development allowed us the freedom to choose a topic of common interest and invest as much or as little time in the discussions as we chose. This investment offered the opportunity to learn from educators with a broad range of experiences with a single topic at its center. We participated when we wanted and had choice in what we wanted to share, thus individualizing and personally interpreting the PD. WhatsApp provided the platform for uploading photos, links, and ongoing discussions. The goal was for the professional development to be an authentic experience that was self-directed and self-organized.

Definitions of Uplift

The focus of the first Zoom meeting was to understand more of what we thought Uplift is. Participants shared stories of Uplift, as well as thoughts on education and professional learning. Then, over six week's time, photos were uploaded, events described, resources shared, and stories told. We shared moments where we witnessed, experienced, or created Uplift.

Some sharings of Uplift were in-the-moment. For example, one member posted a photo of the sunrise over the Alps and another shared a photo of a blooming plum tree. Other sharings were defining moments (Heath & Heath, 2019) in teaching, for example, a high school engineering class where students collaborated on problem-solving and creative thinking while designing boats. Another shared his process for responding to students in a graduate course. He described the process as purposefully slow which lead to increased enjoyment, thinking, and exploration. He described the experience as “really enjoyable ...The theme is ‘slow[ing] down today...I may ”

be further behind on student work, but happier. We discovered that self-organized professional development can influence education by engaging in free-flowing discussions about impactful moments in teaching and living through storytelling and connections where “the small group produces power when diversity of thinking and dissent are given space...and the gifts of each person and our community are acknowledged and valued” (Block, 2009, p. 180).

The freedom to share when, where, why, and what was inspiring. It was the noticing, the experience, and the wisdom of each individual member in the group that benefited the group, opening minds to new ideas. This exchange created energy and that energy influenced creativity and momentum.

What did participants have to say about Uplift and self-organization?

Participants had much to say about their experience. One participant reflected on creating an environment that encourages independent learning and how it leads to Uplift. He shared, “you really have to remember that people have to feel happy and safe from their perspective. If you don’t have that then nothing else much matters. It is the foundation. It is the good air to breathe” (Group meeting, April 2, 2022). In the group meeting a few weeks later, another shared “...even a speck of uplift is important” and “I look forward to the [WhatsApp] messages. I become more aware of the uplifting...positive moments...the messages on the group kept me going” (Group meeting, April 16, 2022).

Professional development is perhaps most commonly thought of and approached as professional learning to continually develop professional skills. Imagine if there were a shift in the belief and approach to professional development where its acronym “PD” changed to mean “personally defining”. How Uplifting!

References

The good air to breathe: Personally defining professional development.

- Block, P. (2009). Community: The structure of belonging. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2019). The power of moments: Why certain experiences have extraordinary impact. Corgi.
- Nelis S, Bastin M, Raes F, Bijttebier P. (2018). When do good things lift you up? Dampening, enhancing, and uplifts in relation to depressive and anhedonic symptoms in early adolescence. Journal of Youth Adolescents. Aug 47(8):1712-1730. doi: 10.1007/s10964-018-0880-z. Epub 2018 Jun 20. PMID: 29926335.
- Starr, L. R., & Hershenberg, R. (2017). Depressive symptoms and the anticipation and experience of uplifting events in everyday life. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 73(10), 1442–1461. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22447>

Summary

Thank you to all our educators who contributed such insightful and practical advice to support well-being for both international students and educators.

The impact of the pandemic, paired with developments in technology, continue to represent challenge and change. Awareness of current pressures is essential for understanding the impact and in turn, developing strategies to support well-being.

We hope you have enjoyed reading some of the strategies our educators have researched and implemented into their practice to develop a greater culture of support and well-being.

Thank you for reading

Join ISN today and....

Get Inspired

It's completely free for educators to join. Discover innovative solution-focused content & resources, by topic, created by peers & experts from around the world



Share Your Insights

Showcase your ideas & insights through publishing articles, raising discussions, asking for advice, joining community events, roundtables & much more



Build Your Network

Join a collaborative global community of educators that are passionate about sharing their experiences, insights & expertise, & stay on top of the latest trends in education





This series of articles are sponsored by Chameleon PDE.

Chameleon Personal Development Education (PDE) is a proven provider of resources, training, pupil voice and consultancy, helping schools enrich the personal development of their students. Their experienced and supportive team has over 25 years' experience in this field of education

Their flexible and editable resources are ideally suited to international schools who need to create a bespoke personal development curriculum.