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Conclusion

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What is positive education? Is it a refocusing of the intentions of education? Is it the application of positive psychology in education? Is it a program, curriculum, or broader perspective? Is the focus on students or others in the educational community? Is it about bringing out the optimal functioning and development for each individual within a learning community? What role does pedagogy play? Is it a movement, an intriguing fad, a possibility, or something else? The chapters in this Handbook have wrestled with these questions—perhaps not providing answers but at least providing thoughtful and critical discourse. Embracing plurality, chapters have included insights, perspectives, research, models, and applications of scholars, educators, and practitioners who are shaping the dynamic positive education areas across a diverse range of topics.

As noted in the Introduction (Chapter 1), this Handbook arose from efforts to create a community around positive education and to begin to fulfil the mission and vision of that community. The educational division of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPAed) has the mission to:

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bridge research and practice related to the application of positive psychology in formal and informal educational settings at all levels and all ages, including early education, primary, secondary, tertiary, and beyond. The Division strives to facilitate collaboration amongst members from around the world, support high quality research, translate research into practice in an ethical manner, foster open dialogue, and promote the sharing of knowledge and resources amongst academics, researchers, practitioners, educators, and students worldwide.

We hope that this Handbook begins to address this mission. Moving forward, we pose a series of questions that can both illustrate our progress and document future needs:

1. Has positive education been promulgated in formal and informal educational settings at all levels and all ages, including early years, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational training, and lifelong learning?
2. Has the plurality of theories, models, methods, and perspectives relevant to positive education been considered, developed, and accepted?
3. Is there a clear integration of the strengths of *both* positive psychology and education?
4. Are knowledge and resources available that empower *all* individuals and educational communities worldwide to create and shape people and environments that flourish?
5. Is there ethical, high-quality research that translates research into practice, safeguarding the science from illegitimate uses?
6. Does research adequately address the lived reality of educators?
7. Does the field include scholars and practitioners interested in education from diverse, interdisciplinary backgrounds?
8. Is consideration given to the broader cultural, political, and ethical paradigms shaping educational practice?

The answer to most of these questions is, clearly and somewhat unhelpfully, yes *and* no. The chapters included in this Handbook amply illustrate that positive education efforts are underway in educational settings across ages and grades, though perhaps with more of an emphasis in primary and, to a slightly lesser degree, secondary settings. As the curriculum becomes increasingly specialized and complex as students get older, does a focus on wellbeing give way to a focus primarily on grades and test scores? Given the well-established importance of early education, there is an opportunity for the field to consider in greater depth the role of positive education in early

education years. Benefit may also arise by further incorporating parents, policymakers, and other community members into positive education efforts. And, as was discussed in the opening chapter, to what degree are public schools, and particularly from larger or urban school districts, enabled to implement positive education?

Certainly, the chapters in this Handbook provide evidence of a plurality of theories, models, methods, and perspectives relevant to positive education. Several themes arise through the chapters. Multiple chapters speak to the complexity of positive education. It is not simply positive psychology applied to education. Any efforts to do so immediately must wrestle with the reality of the educational environment. Well-established interventions fall apart in light of the diverse needs of students and teachers. Adaptations are needed—at times well studied and documented, at other times ad hoc in nature, speaking to the need for ongoing intersections of research and practice. Early advances were made in specific populations, but the area is moving to consideration of questions around equity, inclusivity, and contextualization. We are wrestling with challenging issues, requiring creativity, interdisciplinary dialogue, diverse perspectives, and the willingness to explore, be wrong, and keep testing what works, for whom, under what conditions, and how.

Pointing to the emphasis of positive education on the “science” of positive psychology, issues of assessment, evaluation, and measurement repeatedly arose. This suggests a commitment to positive education not simply comprising the ad hoc application of different activities, curricula, or approaches, but the need to continually, systematically, and rigorously study and evaluate the impact of the actions that we engage in. As methodologies continue to evolve, new opportunities arise from technology, and the need to address the needs of diverse populations increases, it will be important to continue to draw upon approaches that maintain rigour, while being flexible to the context and people involved.

Although each chapter has a particular focus, many of the chapters repeatedly emphasized the importance of incorporating, supporting, and focusing on several common characteristics, including basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), mindset, character strengths, coping skills, empathy, engagement, gratitude, social relationships, emotions, kindness, meaning and purpose, mindfulness, school culture, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and wellbeing literacy, along with a number of more specific topics. These can be considered core ingredients of positive education—the skills that we hope to develop within our educational communities. These topics consistently appear within various positive education curricula, and

chapters point to their value in not only supporting the holistic development of young people, but the wellbeing of all within the community.

These various ingredients, for the most part, focus on the skills and attributes of the person, which various positive education efforts aim to cultivate. Priority is given to human agency and characteristics within the person that are changeable and controllable. Yet we must not forget the importance of the social and environmental context in which individuals exist. An overemphasis on individual skills and attributes can negate the significant impact that external situations and experiences create. Even the most skilled individuals will breakdown under enough pressure. If ignored, then experiences of mental illness and breakdown result in victimizing the person. Multiple chapters speak to the impact of trauma, disadvantage, cultural contexts, socio-economic pressures, and broader systemic pressures. True inequities exist throughout our educational systems. As positive education matures, it must wrestle with these challenges.

Research and application in positive education is in its early days. The chapters included here speak to the possibilities and potential of the positive education perspective, and together speak to the yet unimagined future of what positive education might become. From the work included in this Handbook, we are excited about what that future might be.

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