School Psychology: A Positive Psychology Approach

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The ultimate goal of schools is to educate young people to become responsible, critically thinking citizens who can succeed in life. Understanding the factors that stimulate them to become active agents in their own learning is critical. Positive psychology is a relatively new field of psychology. Positive psychology can be used to unravel factors that facilitate a student's sense of agency and active school engagement.

Positive psychology is an emerging applied science that is just beginning to have a significant impact on schools and school-based interventions. Positive psychology is also used in school-based interventions from the point of view of public health. Interventions are given to students at different levels based on their individual needs.

An inordinate number of students report high levels of boredom, anger, and stress in schools. This scenario often leads to their disengagement from critical learning and school development. Positive psychology has gained immense popularity within many areas of the behavioural sciences, including applied psychology. Most of the interest in positive psychology, however, has been disproportionately focused on adults. (Diener & Diener, 2009). Child development and the structures that support that development have received less attention within positive psychology. The attributes of interest to positive psychologists are Optimism, Hope, Creativity, Self-Efficacy, Virtues of various types like Forgiveness and Gratitude, and Subjective Well-being are likely to begin in childhood. It is, therefore, imperative that childhood and those organisations that are most pertinent to the developing child-family, child, peers, and school—be of high interest to positive psychologists. The development of a child is facilitated by primary group and secondary group socialization processes.

The agents of primary group socialisation are the parents and other family members of a child, including the immediate neighborhood. The agents of secondary group socialisation are teachers in the school, peers, playmates, etc. In most of the schools in our country, counsellors and school psychologists are required to indulge in corrective measures, like making the undisciplined children into disciplined ones, improving the scholastic achievement, especially of the weaker students, etc.

The scope of positive psychology in schools is much wider and more relevant for the academic and personal development of children and adolescents. An individual's quality of life can be conceptualised within an ecological perspective, which reflects the notion that individuals live in a number of interlocking systems that influence the development of their physical, social, health, emotional, and cognitive competencies. Schalock and Alonso (2002) have developed an integrative model of quality of life. Four major system levels are considered: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. The microsystem consists of immediate settings, such as home, a peer group, and school, which directly influence a person's life. The mesosystem, and its extension, the exosystem, refer to more distal conceptual factors such as the neighbourhood social organisations and interactions between micro-system variables (e.g., parent-school interactions). The macrosystem is comprised of the "overarching institutional patterns of the culture or sub-culture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal,

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and political systems, of which the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem are concrete manifestations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that indirectly affect one's life.

Positive mental health is the pre-requisite for a school going child or adolescent to develop into a good, competent, and critical thinking student. If a child or adolescent is unhappy, stressed, tense, or worried, he or she is not able to understand and grasp the subject-matter that is being discussed in the classroom. A student who is happy, free of worries, stress, and tension, and who has good mental health, is more likely to be an efficient and competent learner who can understand and grasp the material effectively and meaningfully.

Noddings (2003) said, happy people are rarely mean, violent, or cruel. She further remarked, "Children learn best when they are happy." Thus, happiness and education are interrelated, and happiness should be a major goal of education. Nodding further concluded that the discussions regarding this nexus (between happiness and education) should shape future educational reform efforts. One major component of happiness in children and youth is life satisfaction.

A lot of research has been done on life satisfaction, but most of the studies have been conducted on adults. However, life satisfaction research using child and adolescent samples began only recently (Suldo, & Shaffer, 2007). Students' life satisfaction reports have been found to be associated with specific individual characteristics and their interaction with multiple environmental contexts. One of the most robust findings in child and adolescent satisfaction research is that youth who hold positive evaluations of their self-worth and/or personal characteristics (i.e., self-efficacy) often perceive the highest levels of global satisfaction (Huebner, Gilman, & Laughlin, 1999; Nevin et al., 2005). Such findings also extend to domain-specific self-efficacy, that is, youth who report high confidence in their emotional regulation, as well as their social and educational abilities also report elevated levels of satisfaction.

If the ultimate aim of the school is to educate young people to become responsible, critical thinking citizens who can succeed in life and contribute meaningfully to the nation they live in, school psychology, guidance psychology, and counselling psychology can contribute a lot to achieving these goals. The importance of school

and counselling psychology has been accepted the world over. In India, too, the state and the different boards imparting education at the primary, secondary, and senior secondary levels have accepted this. However, in most of the schools, utilization of the services of school psychologists and educational counsellors is not up to par. Appointments for educational counselors, for example, are required in public schools. Most of the educational counsellors are appointed on a contractual basis for a meagre fixed salary. It is also reported that many educational counsellors get only two to three periods a week for educational counselling purposes. In other periods, they are assigned substitution work. One important reason is that the administration is not sensitive to the role that school psychologists and counsellors play in making the teaching and learning process and the overall development of the learners effective.

As per the American Psychology Association (APA), "school psychology is a general practice and health service provider specialty of professional psychology, that concerns the science and practice of psychology with children, youth, families; learners of all ages; and the schooling process." School psychologists are trained for intervention at the individual student level and also at the system level. They also develop, implement, and evaluate preventive programmes (APA). In this regard, school psychologists differ from counsellors in that the latter usually intervene when students have a problem, and the intervention ends as soon as the problem is solved, whereas school psychologists' interventions continue over time and they constantly make efforts to promote the growth of learners and systems. There is a need , therefore , to redefine and remodel school psychology with a view to developing young children and adolescents into effective, competent, and productive citizens of the country. In this respect, formulations of positive psychology can play a pivotal role. A child or adolescent who is tense, anxiety-ridden, and stressed is not likely to grasp and assimilate the subject matter discussed in the classroom. He may feel a high level of boredom, anger, and stress in school, which may lead to disengagement from learning and social development.

The theories, assumptions, and research findings of positive psychology can help school psychologists be more effective in the following areas:

Positive mental health: youth is the future of illumination. If this is true, then there is too much mental illness to look forward to in the future. Uncertainty about the future outcome (education, job, etc) may lead to stress and depression. Depression is common among young people all over the world. About 10% of youth experience depression before the age of 14 (Garrison, Schlucther, Schoenbsch, and Kaplan, 1989). Between 10 and 20 percent of youth suffer from an anxiety or mood disorder, or some form of disruptive or substance use disorder by the age of 18 (Lewinsohn, Hops, Roberts, & Seeley, 1993; Sheffer et al., 1996). These results are from American studies, but they appear to be relevant under Indian conditions as well, as due to the impact of education, industrialization , westernization, and urbanization, the Indian youth are also likely to suffer from these disorders. Adolescence is a critical period of development. Developmental success during this period has implications throughout adulthood. Poor mental health can impede academic and social success during adolescence.

Gilman, Scott, Huedner, and Furlong (2009) advocated for the use of students' internal assets as a factor in positive student development.They also recognise the role of contextual resources and school-based applications for positive student development.

In their internal assets, these writers have given importance to Life Satisfaction, Promoting Hope, Optimism, Strength of Character, Gratitude in School, Positive Self-Concepts, Emotional Regulation, Empathy and Prosocial Behaviour. These authors have emphasised positive psychology of academic motivation, orientation toward mastery by promoting positive motivational goals, school satisfaction, student engagement, peer relationships, parent-child relationships, and so on in their contextual resources.These authors have prioritised positive psychology and school-based interventions for positive student development; the positive in positive models of discipline, holistic wellness, and exercise among adolescents; promoting positive adaptation during the early childhood years; and nutrition: the foundation of health, happiness, and academic success.

It is not possible to discuss all the factors of internal assets, contextual resources, and school based applications in the limited scope of this paper. However, attempts have been made to discuss the most relevant factors in all three areas. There is no intention to say that these factors have not been taken into consideration by school psychologists, and thus there is no intention to undermine the efforts made by school psychologists. The only intention is that if contributions made by positive psychologists are also relevant for the promotion of school psychology, that should be acceptable to all.

Internal Assets and Positive Student Development

Life Satisfaction: There is a developing body of research related to Noddings' (2003) contention that schools should pay greater attention to the life satisfaction of their students, and that school professionals can do well to make systematic efforts to facilitate current and future life satisfaction in their students as a fundamental aim of education. In this manner, schools could provide a firm foundation in basic academic skills and at the same time provide a broader array of curricular options, instructional methods, and evaluation procedures to promote global and domain-specific satisfaction. In this direction, additional research is clearly needed, but there is preliminary evidence to support Noddings' notion that educational experiences and happiness among students do go together.

Hope and Optimism: Promoting hope among schoolchildren and adolescents can be enhanced by (a) helping students set goals, (b) helping students develop pathways of thinking, and (c) helping students enhance their agency.

When working with individual students, school psychologists and counsellors may use a variety of standard testing instruments aimed at tapping interests and aptitudes. In addition to these instruments for measuring interests and aptitude, a school psychologist considers giving the CHS to the younger children and the Hope Scale to those who are 15 years of age or older.

Students with the least hope can benefit the most from hope interventions. Lopez, Bouwkant, et al. (2000) advocate school hope programmes for raising hope levels. They also suggest that for those students who are identified as having low levels of hope, special approaches may be tailored to raise their hopeful thinking.

The foundation of imparting hope rests on helping students set goals. The goals must be calibrated to the student's age and specific circumstances. School

psychologists and counsellors can help students select their goals by identifying their potential. They may also help adolescents select alternative goals when they face profound blockages and obstacles in achieving one goal. School psychologists and counsellors may first measure values, interests, and abilities before specific goals can be designed for each given student.

High-hope students also appeared to be interested in other people's goals, in addition to their own. Synder, (1997) see advantages in instructing students to think in terms of "we" goals in addition to their own "me" goals. This has the benefit of helping students get along with their peers, and it makes for easier and more fulfilling interpersonal transactions. Thus they have the pleasure of feeling good about themselves as they think of and attend to the welfare of others, thus fulfilling natural human altruism needs.

School psychologists and counsellors can also help students develop pathways of thinking. They can help students break down large goals into smaller subgoals. The idea of such "stepping" is to take a long-range goal and separate it into steps that are undertaken in a logical, one-at-a-time-sequence.

School psychologists and counsellors can also help students enhance their agency. Results of several studies conducted in this area evince that goals that are built on internal, personal standards are more energising than those based on external standards. Intrinsic motivation appears to be more important than extrinsic motivation in enhancing agency.

It has been found through several studies and observations that hopeful teachers enhance Goals, Pathways, and Agency among their students in a more effective manner than their counterparts who are low on hope. As a result, it is critical that schools organiseprogrammes to raise the hope levels of teachers on a regular basis.Positive teachers are likely to enhance positive traits among their students.

Sir Winston Churchill, a great ex-Prime Minister of England once remarked, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, and an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Optimism can play a vital role in helping children adapt to new situations and can ultimately protect them from depression and a range of other mental health issues. However, it is important to understand that optimists' lives are not perfect and that they also have negative events in their lives. It is their ability to recover from these events

and dissolve problems more quickly. Building children's levels of optimism will not prevent them from encountering problems and trauma in their lives, but it will make sure that they deal with them well and adjust psychologically in the best possible way. School psychologists and counsellors can contribute meaningfully in this direction.

Alena Slezackovaand AndreasKrafft (2016), consider hope as the driving force of optimum human development. They consider hope to be the key to a happier future, and if one loses the key, the door remains closed, and if a person loses hope, he or she remains locked in adversity and helplessness.

Monika Gautam (2018) found a relationship between hope and two other positive psychology variables: forgiveness and gratitude. Students who were found to be high on the Adult Hope Scale were also found to be high on forgiveness and gratitude, and vice versa.

Character strength: They are a family of positive traits that manifest in a range of thoughts, feelings, and actions. They are the foundation of healthy, lifelong development. Character strengths are also important for the overall well-being of society.Character strengths play an important role in positive youth development, not only as broad protective factors preventing the onset of psychological problems but also as enabling conditions that promote thriving and flourishing. Children and youth with certain sets of character strengths are happier, do better at school, are more popular among peers, and have fewer psychological and behavioural problems. These strengths can be cultivated and strengthened by appropriate parenting, schooling, and various youth development programmes.

Emotional Regulation: Emotional regulation, including the ability to modulate emotion arrousal and manage emotional expression, facilitates adopted coping. Emotional regulation skills play a role in developmental outcomes. Children with well-developed emotional regulation skills, particularly in terms of strong negative emotions, do better socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. They are more likely to manage their feelings in a manner that facilitates goal attainment.

Studies conducted in the field of emotional regulation suggest that both direct and complex relationships exist between emotion regulation and developmental outcomes. There is increasing evidence that problematic behavioural outcomes are associated with a

combination of negative emotionality and the inability to sustain attention. A school psychologist can investigate the various channels through which emotional regulation may exert its influence, such as its relationship to academic attitudes and behaviours (e.g., attitudes, motivation, and attention) and its relationship to social support (e.g., relationships, teachers, and peers). SEL (Social Emotional Learning) has been found to be very effective in emotional regulation. For over a decade, CASEL (the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) has worked to establish effective, evidence-based social and emotional learning as a fundamental element of education from preschool through high school.

Empathy and Prosocial Behaviour: The ability to respond appropriately to others' distress is an important topic in child development. Prosocial behaviour has been defined as voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another. (Eisenberg &Fabes, 1998). Hoffman (2000) outlined a series of phases in the development of empathy, shifting from self-concern to more empathetic, other-oriented concern. During infancy, empathetic responses are rudimentary reactions, typically marked by reactive or contagious crying in response to the crying of other infants. In the second year of life, toddlers are capable of experiencing concern for another rather than simply seeking comfort for themselves.

Children's appropriate responses to others' distress have important implications for school success. Empathy and prosocial behaviour have been linked with children's social competence and lower problem behaviours, and in much of the work on these constructs, they have been measured in the school context (i.e., as reported by teachers). Empathy and prosocial skills have been shown to contribute to academic functioning, although children's social competence and problem behaviours may mediate the relation between empathy and prosocial behaviour and a child's academic achievements. Researchers have shown considerable interest in understanding the contribution of the social environment to the development of children's empathy and prosocial behaviours (Knafo& Plomin, 2006). Although the majority of work in this area has focused on parental socialisation, one might expect similar processes for other socialising agents, such as peers, teachers, and the school environment. The quality of the parent-child relationship may be an important factor in understanding children's empathy-related responses. A high-quality parent-child relationship is characterised as secure with low conflict, and it may facilitate the child's sense of connection or partnership with others (Stauv 1992).

School-based programmes have also been found to promote empathy and prosocial behaviour (Solomon et al., 2000). They developed a programme that promoted positive teacher-child relationships and provided opportunities for children to engage in collaborative interactions. Teachers were trained in child-centered approaches. There is a need to develop programmes designed to improve children's prosocial behaviour and empathy and to test the complexities involved in supporting children's positive development.

Contextual Resources and Positive Student Development

Promoting positive motivational goals for students: One very important area where positive psychology interventions can enhance the quality of school psychology is promoting positive motivational goals for school-going students. The role of schooling in promoting knowledge and learning often gets lost behind the strong emphasis on success in examinations that is prevailing today. Overbearing parents and teachers can lead to depression in children.Motivational goals should be realistic and attainable. Goal settings should be based on the intellectual level of the students. Educators play a critical role in influencing the types of goals that students adopt in schools and classrooms (Ames, 1992a, 1992b; Anderman et al., 1999).

The development of goal-orientation theory has led to a wealth of empirical research on students' motivation over the past two decades. This theoretical framework is particularly notable in its emphasis on the interplay between students' personal goal orientations and the characteristics of the educational and achievement-related contexts in which they work. An orientation toward mastery has positive implications for a range of academic and affective outcomes for students. The research evidence is quite clear that educators at all levels have a role in influencing the personal goals students adopt; by promoting an emphasis on understanding, improvement, and self-referenced evaluation, teachers and administrators can assist their students in becoming oriented towards mastery.

School Satisfaction and Children's Positive School Adjustment: Several studies have found that

there is a relationship between school satisfaction and children's positive school adjustment. School satisfaction in children is a subjective, cognitive assessment of the quality of school life. It derives from a substantive line of research within personality and social psychology and sociology-related subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, 1984). SWB is an individual's perceived experience of the positive aspects of his or her life. The roots of SWB are within personality psychology; the SWB literature has included a focus on individual differences and personality, such as variables associated with life satisfaction. Some of the individual variables associated with school satisfaction are student academic ability, student mental health, peers, family contexts, and culture.

Student Engagement and Positive School Adaptation: A lot of research has been done in the area of student engagement and positive school adaptation. Student engagement has been studied using a variety of terms, including school bonding, school connectedness, teachers' support, school climate, school engagement, and student engagement (Blum & Libbey, 2004; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003). Fredericks et al. (2004) and Gimerson et al. (2003) have conceptualised engagement into three subtypes: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional or affective. However, Appleton et al. (2008) made a convincing argument for four components of students' engagement: academic, behavioural, cognitive, and psychological.

Academic engagement includes variables such as marks obtained, homework completion, and time on task in classroom activities.The behavioural engagement variable includes attendance, punishment, extracurricular participation, and class room participation (Appleton et al., 2008). Fredericks et al. (2004) described behavioural engagement in three ways. The first include positive conduct, defined as following the rules of the school and adhering to norms, as well as the absence of disruptive behaviours. The second component involves the student's participation in learning and academic tasks, and the last component involves taking part in school-related activities.

Emotional engagement is the students' affective reactions at school that include interests, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety. Emotional engagement is also known as psychological engagement, and this may include relationships with teachers and peers as well as feelings of belonging (Appleton et al., 2008).

Cognitive engagement includes indicators such as self-regulation, personal goals, the relevance of school work to future goals, and the value of learning. The cognitive area requires the student to think about or evaluate the quality of his or her relationships within the school. According to Fredericks et al. (2004), cognitive engagement can be described as the students' investment in learning, self-regulation, and use of strategies to acquire knowledge and skills.

Peer Relationships and Positive Adjustment at School: Positive peer relationships have also been found to be related to positive adjustment in schools (Kathryn Wentzel, Sandra Baker, and Shannon Russell, 2009). Relationships with peers are of central importance to children throughout childhood and adolescence. They provide companionship and entertainment, help with problems, provide personal validation and emotional support, and, especially during adolescence, provide a foundation for identity development (Parker and Asher, 1993). Positive peer interactions tend to promote the development of perspective-taking and empathetic skills that serve as the basis for cooperative, prosocial, and nonaggressive types of behaviour (Youniss&Smollar, 1989). Positive peer relationships have also been consistently linked to a variety of academically related achievements (Wentzel, 2005). The underlying premise of the conceptualization of peer relations and adjustment is that having friends and establishing positive interactions with the larger peer group have the potential to support and facilitate the development of other positive social competencies at school.

Parent-Child Relationships: Positive parent-child relationships are crucial to positive development during infancy, childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and youth. Individual characteristics of parents (e.g., expectations of their child, personality, personal developmental history) and children (e.g., temperament, gender, physical appearance) unquestionably influence the parent-child relationship (Luster & Okagaki, 2005).

The opportunity for positive interaction between parent and child is plentiful during infancy, the developmental period during which children are dependent on their parents for survival. In addition to ensuring safety, a primary goal of parenting during infancy is to facilitate the development of secure attachment (Lamb & Lewis, 2005). Parent-infant relationships during infancy have two dimensions: responsiveness and shared affection (warmth).

Responsiveness involves prompt, reliable, and accurate attention to a baby's signals (Bornstein, 2002). Responsive caregiving ensures that an infant develops a secure attachment. Kochanska (1998) states that secure attachments promote harmonious interactions and positive affect with mothers. Secure attachment during infancy has also been linked to positive social and cognitive outcomes later in life (Lamb & Lewis, 2005).

Physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth occurs rapidly between infancy and entry into preschool. According to Edwards and Liu (2002), the primary tasks of toddlerhood are sixfold: increase independence in daily living; develop a self concept; regulate emotions and impulses; learn empathy; identify with one's gender; and connect socially. Social competence becomes salient among pre-school peers (Lamb & Lewis, 2005). Results of the studies conducted in this area found a positive, linear relationship between mothers' use of positive parenting practises (nurturance, responsiveness, consistency, and control) and their children's social skills (cooperation and self-control; Koblinsky, Kuvalanka, & Randolph, 2006). This study also found an inverse relationship between positive parenting and children's poor mental health.

Whereas parenting during infancy and early childhood involves ensuring children's basic needs are met through extensive hands-on caregiving, parenting during middle childhood (ages 5–11) involves monitoring children's increasingly independent attempts to become contributing members of social systems (e.g., families, teens, friendships) and to focus on academic achievement.

The research results in the area of parenting evince the positive developmental outcomes associated with specific parental practises like warmth and involvement during each stage of child development. Parents who exude affection and emotional support while remaining actively aware of their children's needs and whereabouts are most likely to create the type of positive family institutions that support children's competence. Parental counselling by counsellors, school psychologists, and other school-based professionals can promote positive parenting practises through universal prevention and intervention strategies. Parents have also been found to be important partners for fostering students' learning outcomes. Henderson & Matt (2002) observed that "the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a measure of influence on their children's achievement in school and through life." When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.

School-based Applications for Positive Student Development

Positive Psychology and School-based Interventions: School based applications have also been found relevant for positive student development. In this context, school-based interventions have been particularly found to facilitate positive student development. One universal intervention that has been implemented in schools, however, is School-Wide Positive Behaviours Support (SWPBS). However, in most of the schools in our country, SWPBS programmes are not effectively organised.

Horner et al. (2004) described seven key features inherent in the SWPBS intervention:

• Define 3–5 school-wide expectations for appropriate behaviour;

• Actively teach the school-wide behavioural expectations to all students;

• Monitor and acknowledge students for engaging in behavioural expectations;

• Correct problem behaviours using a consistently administered continuum of behavioural consequences;

• Gather and use information about student behaviour to evaluate and guide decision making;

• Obtain leadership of school-wide practices from an administrator committed to providing adequate support and resources; and

• Procure district-level support.

• SWPBS intervention programmes need to be successfully and faithfully implemented in the school system for the positive development of the students. These intervention programmes have been accepted universally, but very little progress has been made in our country in this regard.

Positive models of discipline

A positive approach to school discipline is student-centered and responsive to the individual needs and goals of students. The development of self-discipline is the primary goal of discipline. A positive approach to discipline is democratic and caring, with an emphasis on a positive classroom climate and encouragement.

A positive approach is also teacher-centered, and teachers should provide a balance between structure

and caring. Behavioral expectations or classroom rules should be very clear and few in number. They are to include only observable behaviours and apply throughout the entire school day.

To conclude, the utilisation of positive psychology principles, if applied prudently and generously in the school system, will prove to be a milestone in promoting not only the academic performance in schools but will also help the school-going children become responsible and critically thinking citizens with a brighter future. Collaborative efforts of school psychologists, educational counselors, and positive psychologists will create a healthy school climate conducive to academic achievement and the global development of school-going children and adolescents.

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