REVIEW PAPER

Is positive education too positive for the UK? Do we require a more nuanced approach to positive education in the UK?

Liz Robson-Kelly MSc MAPPCP[1]

Abstract

Despite the growing evidence base and applied practice of Positive Education globally (Larson, 2017), Positive Education is yet to gain traction in the UK. This article explores a synthesis of the literature around Positive Education and current approaches to mental health in UK schools. The paper explores how coaching can provide a useful approach to developing Positive Education in the UK, concluding with the idea that a more nuanced, integrated and preventative, approach to Positive Education could offer a suitable solution to improving the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and whole school communities in the UK.

Keywords: *Positive education – second wave positive psychology – PP 2.0 – children's mental health – whole school wellbeing – coaching in education*

Abstrait

Malgré la base de données probantes grandissante et la pratique appliquée de l'éducation positive à l'échelle mondiale (Larson, 2017), l'éducation positive n'a pas encore gagné en popularité au Royaume-Uni. Cet article explore une synthèse de la littérature autour de l'éducation positive et des approches actuelles de la santé mentale dans les écoles britanniques. L'article explore comment le coaching peut fournir une approche utile au développement de l'éducation positive au Royaume-Uni, concluant avec l'idée qu'une approche plus nuancée, intégrée et préventive de l'éducation positive pourrait offrir une solution appropriée pour améliorer la santé mentale et le bien-être des enfants. jeunes et toute la communauté scolaire au Royaume-Uni.

Mots clés: *Éducation positive - psychologie positive de la deuxième vague - PP 2.0 - santé mentale des enfants - bien-être dans l'ensemble de l'école - encadrement dans l'éducation*

Corresponding author

Liz Robson-Kelly MSc MAPPCP, Worth-it Positive Education CIC, Limehurst House, Bridge St, Loughborough, Leics LE11 1NH, UK email: Liz.robson-kelly@worthit.org.uk

Affiliation

[1] Worth-it Positive Education CIC, Loughborough, Leics, UK

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There seems to be a climate of stress, pressure and poor mental health in UK schools. Schools in the UK appear to currently face a myriad of challenges such as exam and curriculum changes, teacher recruitment shortages and budget cuts (National Association of Head Teachers, 2017). Teachers are facing increasing amount of stress (National Union of Teachers, 2012). Children and young people in the UK suffering from poor mental health are languishing (Keyes, 2002). The most recent prevalence data states one in ten children and young people in the UK between the ages of five and sixteen years have clinically diagnosed mental illness (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005). Demands on services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) (National Health Service Benchmarking Network, 2015) are increasing. This situation is causing a burden on schools to manage and deal

with the mental health problems of children and young people.

To tackle this problem, schools have also been identified as critical to the prevention of children and young people's mental health problems through improving wellbeing (Department of Health (DoH), 2015; 2017). Preventative whole school approaches to improving mental health and wellbeing are being promoted as an effective solution to this problem (Department for Education (DfE), 2014; DoH, 2015; 2017; Public Health England (PHE), 2015; Thorley, 2016; Weare & Nind, 2011). This further adds to the pressure on schools to deal with children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Currently, within the UK, the focus on tackling this problem lies towards the treatment of illness and end of the dual continuum (Keyes, 2007), largely mobilising schools to increase access to support for those in need of clinical or specialist interventions or through the prevention of these problems by removing risk and increasing resilience (Hart & Heaver, 2013) within the school environment.

Positive Psychology when applied within the field of education, referred to as Positive Education (PosEd) (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011), has been identified as helpful in preventing mental health problems (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009) and promoting mental wellbeing (Green, 2014) within individuals (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013) and through whole school approaches (Waters, 2011). PosEd would appear to be an obvious solution to addressing tackling the problems UK schools are facing. However, PosEd has not yet gained traction in the UK, which leads to several questions: Why not? Is PosEd just too positive for the UK? Do we require a more nuanced approach to PosEd in the UK?

Introducing a Second Wave of Positive Education
As Positive Psychology has been expanded, researched and applied, an evolution of understanding of its potential for positive impact has occurred. As the field moves away from the initial view of polarising 'positivity' and 'negativity' as opposite ends of a spectrum (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, & Worth, 2016; Seligman, 1998; Wong, 2011), a more "nuanced understanding" (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016, p. 1753) of wellbeing is emerging, exploring the complexities of the idea of positive (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016), incorporating the nuances of both the necessity for 'positivity' and 'negativity' in the pursuit of wellbeing (Wong, 2011). This is being heralded as Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP) (Held, 2004). Exploring a nuanced second wave approach to PosEd provides opportunity to redefine a more in-depth understanding

of how PosEd could incorporate the seemingly polarising aspects of wellbeing and mental illness and improve wellbeing for children, young people and whole school communities in the UK.

What's different about the UK?
International approaches to PosEd focus largely on wellbeing and success within individuals (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013) with the development of several PosEd programmes to develop skills and strategies utilising applied Positive Psychology approaches such as strengths, gratitude, optimism and resilience (Seligman et al., 2009).

As the UK has prioritised the need to address children and young people struggling with poor mental health and mental illness, perhaps the first hurdle to overcome is the notion of 'positive' within PosEd. There is a possibility of appearing too 'positive' and perhaps glib or insensitive when addressing children struggling with mental health problems. Resistance to positive approaches could be caused by a mismatch that does not quite fit the UK culture, education or health systems.

The UK currently places emphasis on tackling children's mental health problems through clinical approaches and problem prevention (DoH, 2017); however, there appears to be a gap between PosEd approaches and prevention (White, 2016) possibly contributing to the lack of traction. Emphasising PosEd as a mechanism for mental health problem prevention through improved wellbeing rather than risk reduction (Keyes, Dhingra, & Simoes, 2010) could start to bridge this gap. Evolving a SWPP approach to understanding the nuances of embracing the darker as well as the lighter sides of wellbeing (Ivtzan et al., 2016) possibly offers a more fitting approach for applying PosEd in the UK.

A recurring theme throughout the literature for PosEd and approaches to addressing mental health problems in schools is the need to cultivate a whole school culture that supports the development of wellbeing (Green, 2014; Noble & McGrath, 2008; PHE, 2015; Slemp et al., 2017; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Aarch, & Cotton, 2017). The integration of coaching psychology into PosEd has contributed to a further redefinition of PosEd by Green (2014, p. 402) as "the application of wellbeing science into an educational setting aimed at increasing the resilience and wellbeing of students, staff, and whole school community". Coaching is also becoming increasingly popular within educational leadership in the UK; this is providing an opportunity for the inclusion of coaching as a method of facilitating school cultures of mental health wellbeing

Table 1

Synthesis of PosEd Landscape in the UK

Approach	International PosEd	UK Approaches School Mental Health – guidelines and approaches
Literature	Green (2014) Green et al. (2011) Seligman et al. (2009) Waters (2011) Waters et al. (2017)	DfE (2014) DoH (2015; 2017) Hart & Heaver (2013) PHE (2015) Thorley (2016) Weare & Nind (2011)
Need	Youth distress Depression in youth Increasing academic success At risk population Develop flourishing in children and youth	Crisis affecting children and young people's mental health in UK Negative impact on health and education outcomes Prevention of illness Promote mental health and protect against mental illness
Solution	PosEd classroom interventions. PosEd universal interventions. Whole school approaches to PosEd. Wellbeing science applied to develop flourishing school communities. A range of Positive Psychology approaches applied in schools in varying ways to improve skills for wellbeing, resilience and skills for achievement.	Improve accessibility to a range of clinical or specialist interventions e.g. Counselling and Children's Mental Health Services. Significantly ease pressures on clinical mental health services by developing school-based interventions. Develop a whole school culture within schools that values and promotes mental health and protects against mental illness. Improve teacher's confidence and ability to identify issues and provide preventative strategies. Academic resilience programmes for children and young people, targeted at those who are vulnerable and at risk. Identify evidence-based prevention programmes.
Synthesis	Nuanced and integrated approach to PosEd that provides prevention through • A whole school approach that includes a range of targeted interventions for more at risk children and young people. • PosEd programmes for the whole school community that improve wellbeing, skills for achievement and create a sustainable culture of mental health and wellbeing. • Support for teachers and staff to develop skills for wellbeing that protect against mental health problems, promote wellbeing, develop resilience and contribute to sustainable mental health and wellbeing culture. • Access to a range of clinical or specialist interventions for those that need it. • Coaching schools through the long-term change and system transformation to ensure wellbeing becomes fabric of the school.	

Reviewing Positive Education for the UK

To further understand where PosEd could fit within the UK, we can evolve our understanding of PosEd through a similar process of synthesis of both Positive Psychology and "psychology as normal" approaches that SWPP has taken. Table 1 provides an exploration of the differing approaches to creating school mental health and wellbeing and highlights the current opposing viewpoints.

Reviewing these two approaches to improving school mental health and wellbeing offers an insight into why PosEd possibly has not yet gained momentum in the UK. Although there is some overlap with the health promoting and protective approach to wellbeing and flourishing (Keyes, 2007) championed by PosEd, this has not become mainstream, while the evidence base is seen as limited by key influencers (DoH, 2017).

This synthesis of approaches develops a more nuanced, integrated and balanced understanding of PosEd, which represents the range of support required for those in need as well as the promotion of wellbeing on a universal level with coaching making a valuable contribution to facilitating whole school cultures of wellbeing.

Refining the understanding of PosEd within the context of mental health needs of UK schools could through the application of Positive Psychology interventions, including coaching (van Nieuwerburgh & Barr, 2017).

This integrated approach provides a mechanism to ensure whole school wellbeing is sustained and fulfils the notion that "work to improve the mental health of students can benefit what schools see as their core business" (Weare & Nind, 2011, p. 64). It is, therefore, important to consider that coaching has a valuable contribution to make to developing and applying PosEd in the UK.

raise the profile of PosEd as an effective approach to addressing the mental health challenges that schools face. Therefore, PosEd in the UK has the potential to develop a whole school approach to wellbeing that provides support to those in need and mental health problem prevention, while, at the same time, promoting wellbeing and flourishing within both individuals and whole school communities.

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Biography

Liz Robson-Kelly MSc MAPPCP is Managing Director of Worth-it Positive Education CIC, Limehurst House, Bridge St, Loughborough, Leics LE11 1NH, UK
Phone: 0300 323 3230
Email: Liz.robson-kelly@worthit.org.uk |
Web: www.worthit.org.uk

http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0894-0246

Citation