

Nurturing Positivity and Resilience in Singapore Schools

Development and Evaluation of an Arts-Based Positive Psychology Intervention Toolkit

Imelda S. Caleon, Pamela Costes-Onishi and Nur Qamarina Binte Ilham

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Three positive psychology interventions (PPIs) developed for classroom implementation of teachers can be used as an additional resource in fostering adolescents' well-being and resilience.

The results of the study can guide educators in selecting PPIs that suit the needs and profiles of their students. The Gratitude PPI, which focuses on gratitude expression and reflection, and the Music-making PPI, which is about music-making using Arabic percussion instruments, were found to be potentially effective for reducing perceived stress. The Self-discovery PPI, which focuses on enhancing self-awareness and making sense of personal experiences, was found to be potentially efficacious for building students' resilience.

BACKGROUND

This study was conceived given the importance of well-being and resilience, which are key correlates and determinants of school functioning and future life outcomes, among adolescents. We utilized insights from positive psychology, which is a movement that focuses on promoting the positive aspects of human functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005), to develop an intervention toolkit designed to help students boost their well-being and nurture their resilience.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This research aimed to (1) develop a PPI toolkit; and (2) evaluate the effects of each component of the toolkit on the resilience and well-being of secondary students. The toolkit comprised the Gratitude, Self-discovery and Music-making PPIs that can be implemented in 6 to 8 sessions of about one hour each.

KEY FINDINGS

The three PPIs were found to have beneficial effects in some aspects of the target outcomes. The Gratitude and Music PPI were found to be effective in reducing students' perceived stress while the Self-discovery PPI was found to be useful in developing resilience. The gratitude PPI was found effective in enhancing gratitude, but only for students with low baseline gratitude or those who were attending the Normal Academic course.

Students facing moderate to high socio-emotional risk may benefit from the Gratitude and Self-discovery PPIs in terms of building resilience, but these benefits may be accompanied by a negative change in students' well-being.

Students who have high interest in the arts may benefit from Self-discovery activities by reducing perceived stress, but this may be accompanied

by a drop in positive affect; however, students with low interest in the arts may be negatively affected by arts-based Gratitude activities. Nevertheless, students with low interest in the arts may benefit from the Gratitude PPI in terms of increasing resilience.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for policy and practice

The present study provided some evidence supporting the effectiveness of PPIs among local students. The study focused on the development of three PPIs: two were found effective in reducing perceived stress and one was found to have strong and sustained effects in developing resilience. Teachers may adopt the PPIs as stand-alone activities or embed the PPIs into their classroom lessons. Policymakers may also utilize the results of the study to identify and introduce positive psychology approaches, principles, and resources into the school curriculum.

Proposed follow-up activities

The long-term effectiveness of the PPIs and the mechanisms by which they operate need to be examined further. The research team may also collaborate with practitioners and other researchers to further improve the PPIs and enhance their

effectiveness, especially for Self-discovery and Music-making PPIs that are both novel in the research about PPIs.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

The study involved 536 students as the main analytic sample (along with 302 students as pilot sample) and 34 teachers from three secondary schools in Singapore. For Study 1 and 2, selected participants were randomly split into two groups: one group attended the gratitude PPI and the other attended either Self-discovery PPI or usual lessons in Character and Citizenship Education. For Study 3, participants from one school were randomly assigned into three groups: one is a Music-making group only, the other is a Music-making group with positive psychology elements, and the last being the control group. All groups answered the same survey questions a week before and immediately/a few days after the completion of their assigned activities. Participants in Study 2 took another survey in about 4 to 6 weeks after the assigned activities.

REFERENCES

Gable, S.L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 103–110.

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