



LITERATURE REVIEWS

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POSITIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT

“THERE MUST BE A BEGINNING OF ANY GREAT MATTER, BUT THE CONTINUING UNTO THE END UNTIL IT BE THOROUGHLY FINISHED YIELDS TRUE GLORY.” FRANCIS DRAKE.

Positive accomplishment is defined as the development of individual potential through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes. Positive accomplishment involves the capacity to work towards meaningful goals, the motivation to persist despite challenges and setbacks, and the achievement of competence and success in important life domains. Seligman (2011) defines positive education as traditional education plus approaches that nurture wellbeing and promote mental health (Seligman, 2011). Therefore, a focus on wellbeing within schools does not equate with neglecting more traditional goals of helping students acquire knowledge and achieve academically (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Links, 2009). In contrast, positive education entails a holistic approach whereby student accomplishment and wellbeing are both valued objectives that contribute to flourishing.

The purpose of this summary is to review literature on positive accomplishment and to outline four approaches

integral to student success: (a) goal theory (including coaching, self-concordant goals, and mastery and performance goals); (b) the implicit theory of intelligence; (c) hope theory; and (d) grit, tolerance, and mutual respect (Osterman, 2000). Moreover, skills that foster emotional and social competencies can be taught explicitly. For example, the Collaborative on Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2003) recommends teaching social and emotional skills in five areas: (1) self-awareness and understanding one's emotions, values, and strengths; (2) self-management, or the ability to control strong emotions and impulses and express emotions appropriately; (3) social awareness, empathy, and the ability to see things from others' points of view; (4) effective communication, listening, and conflict resolution skills; and (5) responsible decision making and considering the consequences of one's actions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT

Research suggests a bi-directional relationship between flourishing and positive accomplishment. On one hand, mental health is a requisite of effective learning (World Health Organization, 1994) and positive emotions contribute to creative and flexible thinking (Fredrickson, 2001). In turn, accomplishing worthwhile goals leads to positive emotions and wellbeing (Sheldon et al. 2010). For example, students may feel satisfied at the end of the day knowing that they have committed effort to achieving important objectives such as completing their homework or studying for a test. Helping students to strive for meaningful outcomes and persist despite obstacles is especially important as young people today face many challenges. As young people undergo the transition into adulthood, they will experience an increasingly global and competitive workforce (Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007). Indeed, there is significant pressure for students to perform well at school and set up pathways for their futures (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007). Some students may face set-backs in terms of not obtaining their university preferences whereas others may struggle to transition effectively to employment after school. Therefore, from a young age, it is essential to start equipping students with skills and resources that help them to devote effort to important goals, capitalise on opportunities, and cope adaptively with disappointments and challenges.

WORKING TOWARDS MEANINGFUL GOALS

An imperative element of positive accomplishment is the ability to work towards meaningful goals. According to Lopez et al. (2004), a goal is “anything that an individual desires to experience, create, get, do, or become” (p. 38). Goals can be short term such as achieving a daily task or long term such as achieving success in a chosen career. Goals can be academic (e.g., acquiring new knowledge); athletic (e.g., devoting an amount of time to practicing a skill); extra-curricular (e.g., taking up a new hobby); or social (e.g., meeting new people or joining a group). Goals are believed to be powerful motivators because they encourage self-regulation, effective planning, and the mobilisation of resources (Covington, 2000). Locke (1996) reviewed features of highly motivating goals and proposed that commitment is highest when goals are specific, highly valued, and challenging but attainable. Features of highly motivating goals are often represented by the SMART mnemonic: specific, measurable, attractive, realistic, and timely (Hassed, 2008). Lock and Latham (2002) propose that goals influence achievement through four mechanisms: (1) attention is directed towards goal activities and away from non-goal related activities; (2) goals are energising and promote effort; (3) goals promote persistence and

determination; and (4) goals lead to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. There is substantial evidence that setting and working towards goals is important for wellbeing and success (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Furthermore, goal-setting has been found to be an effective strategy for use with students of all ages, from young children (Szente, 2007) to adolescents (Scarborough, Lewis, & Kulkarni, 2011).

GOALS AND COACHING

Support for the utility of goal-setting in education settings comes from research on evidence-based coaching. A cornerstone of the coaching approach is helping individuals to develop and work towards structured goals (Grant, 2003). It is believed that assisting students to develop goals related to their personal and academic development leads to enhanced wellbeing, resilience, and performance (Green et al., 2007). In support of this notion, Green et al. (2007) conducted a coaching intervention study with a sample of 56 Australian, female high school students. Students were randomly allocated to a ten-week individual coaching intervention or a wait-list control group. In the coaching intervention, teacher-coaches helped students set meaningful goals and identify resources that could be used to work towards their goals. After completion of the program, students allocated to the coaching condition reported increased cognitive hardiness and hope and decreased depression relative to students allocated to the control condition (however, no significant differences were found between groups on measures of anxiety or stress). In addition to support for the benefits of goals, this research supports the imperative role that teachers play in supporting student wellbeing and accomplishment.

SELF-CONCORDANT GOALS

Goals are believed to facilitate motivation when they are self-concordant or intrinsically motivated and aligned with individuals' core interests and values (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) (see the positive engagement domain for a related discussion on intrinsic motivation). Goals that are not self-concordant are extrinsically motivated and influenced by external pressures or the desire to please others. According to Sheldon and Elliot (1999), self-concordant goals have two core benefits: (1) individuals devote more time and effort increasing the likelihood of goal-achievement; (2) the achievement of self-concordant goals fulfils psychological needs and therefore has a beneficial impact on wellbeing. Overall, there is strong empirical evidence that self-concordant goals are related to accomplishment and wellbeing. In a longitudinal study of high school students (N = 614), self-concordant goals were positively related to goal progress, school engagement, and academic aspirations and inversely related to burnout

(Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro, & Nurmi, 2009). Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001) conducted research into the self-concordant goals of students entering tertiary studies. In a first study (N = 189) students with self-concordant goals demonstrated superior goal attainment and wellbeing than students with non self-concordant goals. Furthermore, students with self-concordant goals commenced the subsequent semester with higher motivation and determination which in turn predicted increased goal achievement. This finding led the authors to suggest that self-concordant goals lead to upward spirals of goal attainment, motivation, and wellbeing overtime. In sum, research suggests that helping students to set goals that are consistent with their values, passions, and interests is beneficial for wellbeing and accomplishment.

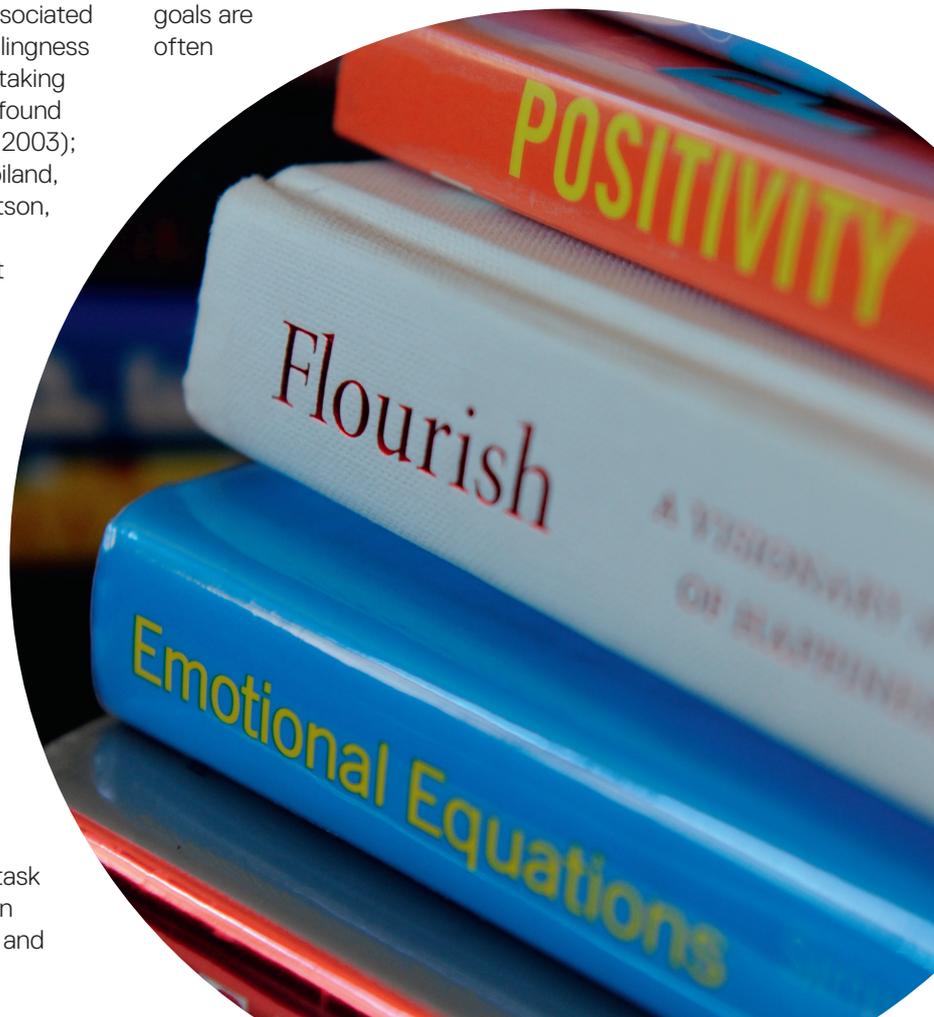
MASTERY AND PERFORMANCE GOALS

Important research concerns the difference between performance and mastery goals. Mastery goals (also referred to as learning goals) are oriented towards developing new skills, acquiring information, and building competence (Covington, 2000). Individuals who set mastery goals place high value on the information or skills that are being learned. There is substantial evidence that mastery goals are highly motivating. Payne et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analytic review and found that a mastery/learning goal orientation was associated with the use of effective learning strategies, willingness to seek feedback, and low anxiety (e.g., in test taking conditions). Similarly, mastery goals have been found to predict intrinsic motivation (Grant & Dweck, 2003); more favourable perceptions of homework (Froiland, 2011); decreased procrastination (Howell & Watson, 2007); and willingness to seek help (Roussel, Elliot, & Feltman, 2011). Research suggests that mastery goals predict academic performance beyond the variance explained by intelligence and personality (Steinmayr, Bipp, & Spinath, 2011). Mastery goals are believed to be especially powerful when disappointing results are obtained, as students view the disappointment as a learning experience and seek feedback that may help them in the future (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Performance goals are aimed at demonstrating skills and talent (Grant & Dweck, 2003). While not believed to be as powerful as mastery goals, research suggests performance goals are helpful in some contexts and can improve motivation (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Performance goals are especially useful during inevitable situations when tasks are not aligned with students' true interests and passions. In situations where the task or objective is important, but intrinsic motivation is low, performance goals can encourage effort and

persistence. However, certain types of performance goals, such as goals aimed at avoiding failure or looking incompetent, have been demonstrated to have a detrimental impact as students bypass challenges, procrastinate, and experience anxiety in assessment situations (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien 2007). Similarly, performance goals can stimulate comparisons with peers and may lead to unhelpful judgements of superiority or inferiority (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Overall, research suggests that mastery goals are especially valuable and performance goals have their place as long as they are used appropriately (Payne et al., 2007).

THE IMPLICIT THEORY OF INTELLIGENCE

Dweck's (2006) implicit theory of intelligence is closely related to positive accomplishment and to mastery and performance goals. According to Dweck (2006), an individual's core beliefs about the stability of their intelligence and abilities greatly influences their effort, motivation, and performance. More specifically, people are generally found to embody one of two mindsets. From a fixed mindset perspective, intelligence and talents are naturally determined and unchangeable. In contrast, from a growth mindset perspective, talent and intelligence are malleable and effort and determination are essential components of success and competence. Mastery or learning goals are often







associated with a growth mindset, whereas performance goals are associated with a fixed mindset (Payne et al., 2007).

Fixed and growth mindsets manifest in several important ways. Individuals with a fixed mindset select goals within their abilities in order to prove their worth and competence (Dweck, 2007). In order to protect their self-esteem they give up easily and avoid negative feedback (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). In contrast, individuals with a growth mindset select goals at the edge of their abilities, even if they are not completely sure of their capacity to achieve them (Dweck, 2006). They are willing to try new things and step outside their comfort zones (Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008). Similarly, individuals with a growth mindset persevere, see failures as opportunities to learn and grow, and actively seek out feedback that may improve their performance (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006).

Blackwell et al. (2007) conducted two studies that support the utility of the implicit theory of intelligence in educational settings. In the first, longitudinal study, (N = 373) adolescents' beliefs about intelligence were measured as they commenced secondary school. Young people who had ideas consistent with a growth mindset were found to develop mastery/learning goals, put more effort into their studies, deal more positively with setbacks, and display superior academic performance in maths over a two year period than individuals who believed their ability to be relatively fixed. In the second, experimental study (N = 99) students were randomly assigned to an 8-week program designed to cultivate a growth mindset or a comparison control group. Post-intervention, individuals in the growth mindset program demonstrated superior performance in maths, and enhanced teacher reports of motivation relative to students in the control condition. In addition to supporting the value of a growth mindset, this finding supports the potential of schools in helping students develop a growth mindset. Dweck (2006) recommends four steps for developing a growth mindset: (1) learn to identify the fixed mindset voice; (2) recognise the choice between interpreting challenges with a fixed or growth mindset; (3) cultivate a growth mindset voice; and (4) take action and embrace new challenges.

It is believed that key adults in young people's lives such as parents, teachers, and coaches play essential roles in mindset development. More specifically, Dweck (2007) suggests that feedback or praise focused on effort and persistence, as opposed to praise focused on abilities or outcomes, is imperative for helping students to develop a growth mindset. In six separate studies, Mueller and Dweck (1998) found that praise for intelligence or ability led to decreased motivation and effort, whereas praise for hard work and effort led to increased motivation and persistence. The implications for this are that: (a) if a child performs well on an assessment it is important to praise his or her efforts (e.g., you worked so hard) rather than his or her abilities (e.g., you are so clever);

(b) a student who works hard should be commended, regardless of the outcome. Overall, there is substantial evidence that helping students embrace a growth mindset is an effective strategy for nurturing their potential.

HOPE THEORY

Snyder's (2002) hope theory is a cognitive-motivational theory based on three inter-related elements: (a) goals; (b) pathways or strategies to achieve the goals; and (c) agency and motivation to achieve the pathways. This approach has also been referred to as having the will (i.e., the motivation, persistence, and agency) and the way (i.e., pathways or strategies) to work towards goals (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Riberio, 2009). Hope is closely linked with optimism which is discussed in detail in the health domain and plays a powerful protective role against depression, anxiety, and physical health conditions (Seligman, 2006). Hope is believed to be associated with accomplishment and performance as individuals experience increased motivation and have the ability to develop alternative pathways when obstacles are encountered (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003).

There is considerable evidence that hope is associated with important outcomes. More specifically, hope has been correlated with academic achievement (Snyder et al., 1997); athletic performance (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997); good physical health (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor et al. 2000); wellbeing (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006); and decreased mental pathology (Snyder, 2002). Hope has also been associated with effective coping with stressful and negative life events (Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006; Valle et al., 2006) and with successful school completion (Worrell & Hale, 2001). Marques, Lopez, and Pais-Ribeiro (2011) conducted a study where 31 adolescents took part in a 5-week program aimed at cultivating hope and were compared with a matched-sample of 31 adolescents who did not take part in the program. Students who took part in the hope program demonstrated increased self-worth, life satisfaction, and hope relative to controls post-intervention and at an 18-month follow up time point. This finding reiterates that helping young people to cultivate hope has worthwhile consequences.

According to Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand and Feldman (2003) school settings provide an invaluable opportunity for cultivating hope. The authors recommend helping students to develop pathways and agency thinking. Pathways can be developed by helping students develop skills in planning, time allocation, breaking down big goals into little steps, and brainstorming numerous paths towards their goals. Strategies for developing agency include working in teams, using goals that are progressively more challenging, and paying attention to negative self-talk that may undermine motivation. Hope and motivation can also be cultivated by visualising future

possibilities and the successful achievement of goals (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). In sum, goals, pathways, and agency are effective mechanisms for increasing accomplishment and have worthwhile implications for educational settings.

GRIT

Grit is defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Components of grit include self-regulation, discipline, and sacrificing short-term results for long-term gain (Duckworth et al., 2007). Seligman (2011) proposes the formula of: $\text{grit} = \text{skill} \times \text{effort}$ where effort is the amount of time devoted to practice, increasing skills, and obtaining experience. From this perspective, natural talent and intelligence are important components of success; however, commitment, perseverance, and regulated effort also play crucial roles. Seligman provides an example of a piano player who practices for thousands of hours prior to becoming world class – he or she may be born with musical talent, but without frequent practice and effort natural potential would not result in world class ability.

The association between grit and achievement has been empirically supported. In six diverse samples from the US (e.g., ivy league undergraduates and members of the army), grit was found to predict success beyond the variance explained by intelligence and personality (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit was associated with educational attainment and grade point average. In a sample of 274 competitors in the US National Spelling Bee, grit was significantly related to time dedicated to deliberate practice and to performance (Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, & Ericsson, 2011). In order to encourage grit, Duckworth et al. (2007) recommend that students who demonstrate high levels of commitment to a goal should be supported in the same way that students with natural talent are encouraged through gifted and talented and extension programs. Similarly, reflecting Dweck’s (2003) recommendations, key adults in students’ lives should praise stamina, effort, and persistence more strongly than natural ability or talent.

CONCLUSION

An essential aim of positive education is to help students develop their potential through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes. Within the model of positive education, a focus on wellbeing and flourishing is interconnected with efforts to help students learn, achieve academically, and develop skills and competencies. Positive accomplishment involves helping students embrace opportunities, learn from disappointments, and maintain effort in the face of adversity. In the increasingly challenging, global, and competitive environment schools provide invaluable opportunities for helping students to deal proactively with both opportunities and setbacks. In addition to benefits for themselves, it is hoped that students will pursue goals and objectives that have beneficial consequences for the greater community.

Integral to positive accomplishment is the pursuit of goals. Goals are believed to provide mental sign posts that direct and sustain cognitive and behavioural efforts (Covington, 2000). Helping student to develop self concordant goals is believed to be especially powerfully in increasing motivation and perseverance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Similarly, helping students to cultivate mastery goals and growth mindsets ensure they will seek out feedback and view setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow (Grant & Dweck, 2003). By nurturing hope, it is believed that students will become increasingly excited about future possibilities, understand that challenges and set backs are an inevitable part of life, and develop the grit and resilience to persist when times are tough (Snyder et al., 1997). Similarly, Duckworth et al.’s (2007) work on grit emphasises that no great accomplishment is achieved without persistence and effort. Overall, it is proposed that helping students strive towards meaningful outcomes and embrace new opportunities with grit, hope, and a growth mindset equips them for success in the present and the future.

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