

# **A Meaning-Centered Approach to Positive Education**

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# Youth Suicide Rate

- In the US, it is the third leading cause of death among youth 15-25.
- In Taiwan, according to the Ministry of Education, suicide is the second leading cause of death in teenagers.
- Taipei has the highest suicide rate.

# Main Causes of Teen Suicide

- Academic pressure – Too much emphasis on cramming
- Lack of family affection & single parent families
- No one to talk to about emotional & relational problems
- Economic crisis and a bleak future for employment
- Mental health problems such as depression & anxiety

# Suggested Preventions

- Teachers actively caring about each student
- Less time studying, more time for sports & recreation
- Encouragement & reinforcement to build self-esteem & confidence
- Improving relationship between parents & children
- Having someone to share feelings & thoughts with
- Staying away from negative influences
- Building a positive life attitude

# The Need for a More Positive Philosophy of Education

- More child-centered than test-centered
- More emphasis on strengths & less emphasis on deficiencies
- Developing the whole person rather than just academic skills
- Preparing them for life rather than just for a job
- Teaching them how to live as a responsible & decent human being

# Life Education in Schools

- Life education was initiated in response to the high suicide rate after the big earthquake in 1999.
- There were as many as 7 or 8 suicides per day in Taiwan, among students.
- 'Life Education' consists of promoting students' personal, social, & spiritual development from a multi-faith perspective.

# Seligman's Positive Education



“Positive education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The high prevalence worldwide of depression among young people, the small rise in life satisfaction, and the synergy between learning and positive emotion all argue that the skills for happiness should be taught in school.”  
(Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins)

# The Downside of Happiness

- For many students, their main concern is survival, not happiness
- Too much emphasis on personal happiness encourages more self-centered students
- Setting up high expectations for happiness & success only produces more frustration & depression
- Focusing on positive emotion does not mean depression and anxiety will automatically go away



# A Meaning-Centered Positive Education

- This approach provides a more balanced positive education, placing more emphasis on personal, social, & spiritual development
- This is more consistent with the spirit of life education
- Happiness is considered a by-product of pursuing a meaningful life rather than the ultimate goal of life

# An Alternative Vision of Positive Education



# Caring and Competent Teachers

*Parker J Palmer (1998): The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*

- Good teaching comes from the personal identity and the integrity of the teacher
- Teachers need to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to fulfill the spiritual calling of teaching
- The inner life of the dedicated teachers shapes their teaching and learning
- Good teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students and students learn from this web

# Caring and Competent Teachers (cont'd)

Four important questions for good teaching:

- **What** – What is the content of the subject matter?
- **How** – What methods are required to best teach the content?
- **Why** – What is the justification for the content and methods used?
- **Who** – Who is the teacher as an individual?

# ***A Sense of Calling: Who Teaches and Why: A Report from Public Agenda (2000)***

- Beginning teachers were motivated, committed, and doing what they wanted to do.
- Incentives other than salaries actually attracted people to the teaching profession.
- Main worry was that they could not make a difference.
- Teachers believed that good teaching comes from what happens daily in the classroom.

## **Some of the findings:**

- Teaching is the work I love to do – 96%
- I would choose teaching again – 80%
- Teaching is a life-long choice – 75%
- I get a lot of satisfaction out of teaching – 68%
- Getting into teaching by chance – 12%

# The Need for Personal Growth in Teachers

## Setting an example

*“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”*

- John Quincy Adams

## Constructive personality change (Rogers)

- Promoting self-discipline
- Encouraging self-motivation
- Facilitating academic engagement
- Genuineness
- Understanding (empathy)
- Positive regards and warm acceptance

# What the Administrators Can Do to Build Positive Schools

- Engaging the students & teachers
- Spreading the love of learning
- Building relationships
- Clearly communicating what is expected
- Welcoming everyone's input
- Deciding on what matters most
- Creating a positive climate
- Meeting the basic needs for meaning and spirituality
- Building a caring, cooperative community
- Valuing each one's talent and uniqueness
- Building on each one's strengths and interests
- Validating and empowering each others
- Creating an engaged learning environment

# Adler's 3 R's of Good Citizenship

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- Responsibility
- Respect
- Resourcefulness



Please visit:

<http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=n76lN9ho8Ks%3D&tabid=93&mid=1130>



# Adler on Responsibility

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- Provide an encouraging and democratic environment
- Encourage social interests & cooperation.
- Discipline thru natural & logical consequences.
- Avoid putting children in a position of inferiority.
- Don't do for children what they can do themselves.
- Both pampering and neglect can undermine the development of responsibility.

# Enhancing Academic Motivation

## What is success?

*“Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be.”*

- George Sheehan

## The importance of values

- Values are important in deciding on the choice of goals and influencing our motivation in different domains of life.
- Values are based on our needs, wants, desires, our past experiences and our beliefs regarding what really matters in life. Values are clearly related to cultural and social norms.

# Different Conceptions of Values

## **Rokeach (1973)**

- Terminal values
- Instrumental values

## **Academic values (Ames, 1987)**

- Intrinsic mastery or learning values
- Extrinsic social approval values

## **Task values (Eccles et al., 1983)**

- Attainment value – Doing a good job
- Intrinsic values – Enjoying an activity
- Utility values – Serving a future goal
- Costs – The negative aspects of engaging in an activity

# Weiner's Attribution Theory of Achievement

(Weiner, 1979, 1985)

		Stability	
		Low	High
Locus of Causality	Internal	<i>Effort</i>	<i>Ability</i>
	External	<i>Luck</i>	<i>Task Difficulty</i>

- The more attribution to stable factors, the greater the expectation that the same outcome will occur.
- The more attribution to internal factors following success, the greater the pride and self-esteem.
- Values are defined in terms of affective response to attribution.

# Feather's Interactionist Approach to Values

- Feather (1975) found that academic persistence and satisfaction with school are related to congruence between student's personal values and perceived institutional values.
- Feather (1995):
  - *“Values have their source in basic human needs and in societal demands .”* (p. 1135)
  - *“Values are tied to a normative base involving a dimension of goodness and badness.”* (p. 1136)

# Dweck on Mastery Values

- Dweck (1986): Mastery values are associated with attribution of success to effort more than ability.
- Dweck & Elliott (1983): In test situations, children will value performance goals, whereas, in mastery-oriented learning situations, children will value learning goals.
- Goals need to be challenging in order to stretch students' ability and engender productive learning.

# Wong's (1998) Academic Attitude Scale

## Positive factors

- Intrinsic Value
- Instrumental Value
- Personal Development

**The positive factors are positively correlated with academic achievement & persistence.**

## Negative Factors

- External Pressure
- No Better Option
- Social Interest

**The negative factors are negatively correlated with academic achievement & persistence.**

# Focusing on Student Strengths rather than Weaknesses

## Three steps of The StrengthsQuest Program:

1. Complete the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment
2. Complete the workbook: *StrengthsQuest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, careers, and beyond.*
3. Take more in-depth training in their areas of signature strengths



# **Focusing on Student Strengths rather than Weaknesses (cont'd)**

**The very best students have these characteristics:**

- They clearly recognize and develop their talents and strengths
- They apply their signature strengths to areas that match their natural talents
- Apply their strengths to pursue desired goals

# **PURE as a Definition of Meaning in Life**

Meaning in life can be operationally defined in terms of PURE, which stands for:

**Purpose**

**Understanding**

**Responsibility**

**Enjoyment**

# Purpose

## Involves:

- Clarifying our life direction and core values.
- Organizing our activities.
- Deliberating your daily plans.
- Pursuing one's calling and mission in life with passion and commitment.



# Understanding



## Involves:

- Full awareness of the situation and the consequences of one's actions
- Knowing right from wrong
- Understanding the legal/ethical principles in decision making
- Self-knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses
- Understanding/knowing the world we live in
- Achieving a sense of coherence

# Responsibility

## Involves:

- Taking full responsibility of our own life
- Assuming responsibility for our decisions and actions
- Holding ourselves accountable
- Being a moral agent



# Enjoyment/Evaluation

- The natural outcome of leading a purposeful and responsible life.
- But a positive outcome is not inevitable.
- Sometimes, the personal costs of being responsible can be too high.
- This stage involves reflection and sometimes re-evaluation of PURE.

# The PURE Test

- The PURE test provides an operational definition of meaning in life
- P, U, R, E are interdependent components but their interdependence is only partial
- Interestingly, it is possible to score high on PERMA but low on PURE
- The happy rioter vs. the sad hero

# The PURE Test

1. Is your decision or commitment consistent with your overall life goal?
2. Is it consistent with your core values?
3. Is it something you feel passionately about?
4. Are you primarily motivated by something greater than self-interest?
5. Do you fully understand the consequences and implications of your decision or commitment?
6. Is your decision or commitment consistent with your sense of self identity?
7. Do you understand your own motives behind it?



# The PURE Test (cont'd)

8. Do you know how you really feel about it?
9. Are you sure you are doing the right thing?
10. Are you willing to be held accountable for your decision?
11. Can others depend on you to carry out your commitment?
12. Are you responding to what life demands of you?
13. Do you feel good about your decision or commitment?
14. Are you fully satisfied with the situation?
15. Do you think you will be happy with the consequences?
16. Given the opportunity, would you enjoy doing this again?

# Advantages of PURE

- Not achieving happiness at the expense of others
- Developing your full potential without harming others
- Leading a life that is good emotionally, intellectually, relationally, morally, & spiritually

# ABCDE Model of Resilience & Resourcefulness

- **Acceptance:** Accept what cannot be changed
- **Belief:** Affirm one's ideal, calling, competency, potential to grow, faith in others and in God
- **Commitment:** Determined to move forward, explore possible solutions, dig deeper, and carry out one's responsibility in spite of obstacles, setbacks and a bleak future

# ABCDE Model of Resilience & Resourcefulness (cont'd)

- **Discovery:** Discover greater inner strength, a broader horizon, the power of belief & faith, and learn something new about self, others, life, and the human condition.
- **Enjoyment/Evaluation:** Enjoy the struggle and progress, and constantly evaluate the process to improve the likelihood of success

# Conclusion

- The PURE model offers principles of personal growth and meaningful living.
- The ABCDE model offers principles of resilience and resourcefulness.
- The Deep and Wide hypothesis of the positive potentials of adversities is based on the ABCDE model.
- Students trained in PURE and ABCDE will be well equipped to live a fulfilling, responsible and productive life in the midst of uncertainties and challenges.