

Promoting student mental health through meaning-centered positive education



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Why we need positive education



- The prevalence of mental health problems among young people is shockingly high worldwide.
- For example, nearly 20% of youth experience an episode of clinical depression by the end of high school (Lewinsohn et al., 1993).
- The high prevalence worldwide of distress 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.
- Offers a variety of teaching strategies with an aim to enhance whole-person happiness/ wellbeing
- Opportunity to track the well-being of students, staff, and parents through scientifically validated measures
- Equip students with life coping skills

Why we need positive education

- Positive education focuses on skill development for well-being and achievement in education (Seligman et al., 2009).
- Promotes one's character strengths and helps to utilize them in order to build confidence and competence in individuals
- Increases positive emotions within our students and encourage them to engage their unique strengths and abilities for both personal and community gains

Policy in education is increasingly prioritizing students' well-being in schools in addition to the overarching educational goals of promoting students' cognitive abilities.





What is Positive Education?

- A relatively new branch of psychology that conducts scientific inquiry into the factors that help individuals, communities and organisations ‘thrive’ or ‘flourish’ by building on their strengths and virtues (Peterson, 2008).
- Positive education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness (Seligman et al., 2009)
- Seligman has incorporated positive psychology into education models as a way to decrease depression in younger people and enhance their wellbeing and happiness

What is Positive Education?

- Positive Education can play a key role in helping young people flourish and thrive even in the face of life stressors. Positive Education takes the science of well-being and integrates it into schools so that it is as important as academic achievement.
- Positive Education assists all aspects of our life; creativity, academic, socially and emotionally. Studies suggest that explicit positive psychology programs can have the following impacts;
 - Academic performance (critical thinking)
 - Better physical health (sleep patterns)
 - Enhances positive emotions and navigates painful ones (anxiety, depression)
 - Cultivates healthy personal and professional relationships
 - Discover a higher purpose



What is the meaning-centered positive education?

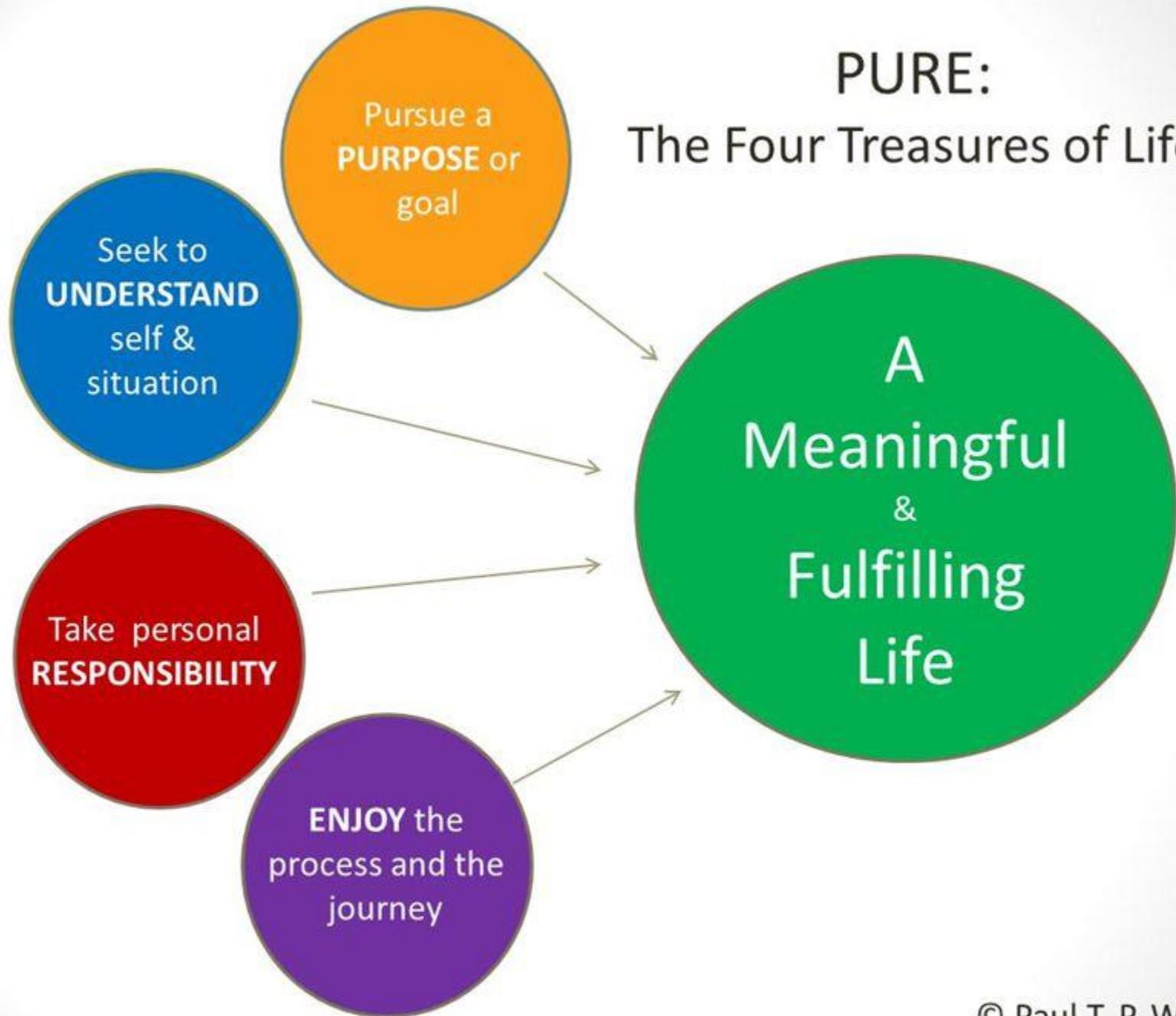
- **The meaning-centered positive education (MCPE)** proposed by Wong et al. (2016) was informed by the second wave positive psychology (PP2.0) (Wong, 2011).
- The MCPE is originated from the application of Frankl's (2000) logotherapy and provides a flexible framework of positive psychology-based interventions to cultivate students' mental health and well-being.
- The MCPE, which places more emphasis on personal, social, and spiritual development, is an approach that provides a more balanced positive education and is more consistent with the spirit of life education (Wong, 2017).
- The approach also teaches students that a good life consists of meaning, virtue, and mature happiness, which come from the deep satisfaction of making a unique contribution to humanity and learning how to become a fully functioning person (Wong, 2007).



What is the meaning-centered positive education?

- Positive psychology-based interventions are generally recommended to improve flourishing and character strength.
- Meaning-Centered Approach (MCA) is an integrative and holistic framework developed to build resilience and improve flourishing and mental health.
- The MCA is mainly based on the PURE (i.e., purpose, understanding, responsibility, and enjoyment) and the ABCDE (i.e., acceptance, belief, commitment, discovery, and evaluation) approaches (Wong & Wong, 2012), which provide strategies and practices for building a healthier and happier life.

PURE: The Four Treasures of Life





The PURE Strategies

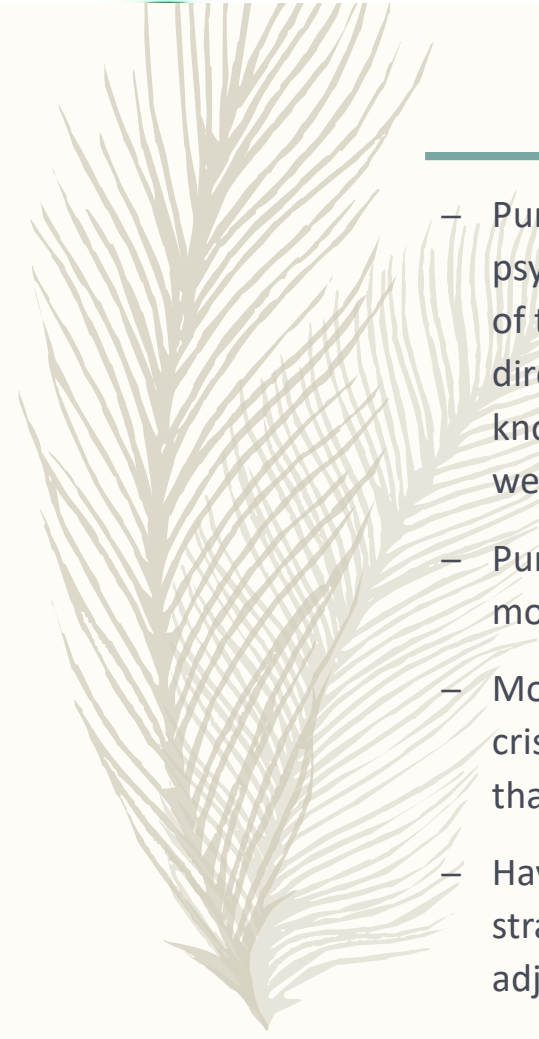
- The PURE approach is a comprehensive definition of meaning in life and a model of existential positive psychology-based interventions for implementing the MCPE in the context of student mental health.
- According to the meaning-centered formwork, these components of the PURE strategy work together and create an upward spiral feedback loop (Wong, 2012).
- This PURE thus provides the strategies of meaningful and purposeful living and comprises the following principles:



P

You need to choose a worthy **purpose** or a significant life goal.

The PURE Strategies

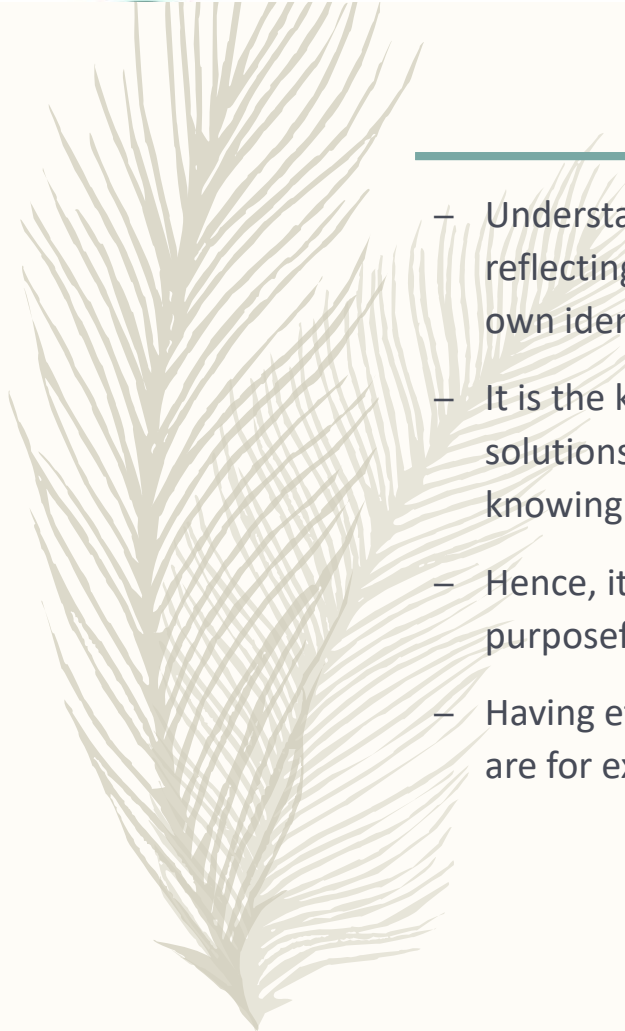
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- Purpose– Experiencing a strong purpose is an essential key to students' psychosocial functioning and flourishing. Purpose is the motivational component of the PURE approach, which comprises aspirations, goals, incentive objects, directions, values, and objectives (Wong, 2010) and helps students to search and know what matters in their lives and important sources to their mental health and wellbeing.
 - Purpose is identified as a natural partner of student achievement and striving and motivates students to take action to move toward their goals (Steger et al., 2021).
 - Moreover, purpose is an effective means of helping to overcome one's identity crisis (Erikson, 1968) and depends importantly on people's overall life orientation that helps them to make the right choices (Wong & Wong, 2012).
 - Having a strong sense of purpose, thus, encourages young people to develop strategies and introduce activities that cultivate flourishing and psychosocial adjustment.



U

You need to have sufficient **understanding** of who you are, what life demands of you, and how you can play a significant role in life.

The PURE Strategies


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- Understanding– Understanding is the cognitive component of the PURE model, reflecting a sense of coherence, effective communication, understanding one's own identity and other people, and making sense of situations (Wong, 2012).
 - It is the key to assessing and accepting the existing situation to discover solutions to a problem and comprises making sense of what happens and knowing oneself (Wong et al., 2016).
 - Hence, it plays an essential role in searching for meaning and building a purposeful and meaningful life.
 - Having effective communication, a sense of coherence, or a clear self-concept are for example important for positive functioning and meaningful school.



R

You and you alone are **responsible** for deciding what kind of life you want to live, and what constitutes a significant and worthwhile life goal.

The PURE Strategies

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- Responsible action– Responsible action, the behavioral component of the model, refers to doing what is morally right, finding the right solutions, and appropriate actions (Wong, 2012).
 - Responsibility is also an essential resource to the thriving and surviving of not only individuals but also society in significant challenging times (Arslan & Wong, 2022).
 - Young people with high levels of sense of responsibility take an active role in tasks and works and make the choices and decisions that positively influence their academic goals and wellbeing.



E

You will **enjoy** a deep sense of significance and satisfaction only when you have exercised your responsibility for self-determination and actively pursue a worthy life-goal.



The PURE Strategies

- Enjoyment– Enjoyment, a key element in self-regulation, is the affective face of the PURE model, which refers to one's assessment of satisfaction with the situation and life as a whole (Wong & Wong, 2012).
- Feeling good is the natural result from doing well. When students experience satisfaction with their choices and actions, there are more likely to have better psychosocial and academic functioning. Hence, enjoyment is a motivational resource promoting students' productivity and positive development.
- For example, students with low levels of enjoyment can re-evaluate the previous steps of the PURE (i.e., purpose, understanding, and responsible action) and focus on areas that need improvement.



The ABCDE Strategies

- The ABCDE model is primarily a meaning-centered intervention strategy dealing with adverse life events (Wong, 2012).
- The ABCDE strategy is different from the ABCDE strategy of rational-emotive therapy (Ellis 1962, 1987); however, it is similar to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes 2005) that focuses on actions and values rather than thinking.
- The ABCDE model includes the skills and strategies for people to overcome challenges, whereas the PURE approach emphasizes the principles of meaningful living.
- The ABCDE model entails the following psychological strategies:



The ABCDE Strategies

- *Acceptance*– Acceptance is a vital element of meaning-centered interventions which does not only contributes to the source of meaning but also is a key component of the tragic optimism and ABCDE model.
- It is the first step of recovery, and people need to change when they accept something is wrong. However, this does not mean passively accepting the situation as fate (Wong, 2012).
- Acceptance means recognizing one's limitations, accepting the dark side of the human being, and learning how to transform and transcend what cannot be changed (Wong, 2010).
- This first step enables people to face the new situation to which they must adapt and helps them to develop a more positive attitude toward life being.



The ABCDE Strategies

- *Belief*– Belief is another component of the ABCDE strategy, which is linked with faith and positive expectations (Wong, 2012).
- Belief motivates one to maintain hope and confidence in the face of adversity and is an important motivational resource for change. The MCA highlights the importance of positive thoughts and beliefs that gives individuals hope and pursue goal striving (Wong & Wong, 2012).
- During childhood to adulthood, believing that the future could be better and life is worth living despite challenging experiences is particularly important to cultivate young people's mental health and wellbeing. If they do not believe that life can be better, they are less likely to be committed to taking the steps to change.



The ABCDE Strategies

- *Commitment*– Commitment is the action principle of the model, reflecting the potency of action.
- Change and recovery are possible when people take concrete steps in a new direction, which means to move forward and carry out their responsibility with resolve, regardless of threatening circumstances (Wong, 2016).
- Therapeutically, this strategy helps young people to specify and commit to the pursuit of valued directions, which promote daily functioning and psychological health (Biglan et al., 2008).
- Hence, it is important to help youths for identifying their values and commit to actions consistent with these values.



The ABCDE Strategies

- *Discovery*– Discovery strategy helps young people to learn new things about the self and life and discover hidden resources and strengths (Wong, 2016).
- People discover meaning more than creating it (Frankl, 2000), which helps them to explore positive aspects of life and understand what matters in life. Many strategies and skills can be utilized to help young people discover life in a new way. For example, mindfulness-based activities may be useful in discovering the richness of existing moments.
- *Evaluating or Enjoying*– Evaluation is the affective element of self-regulation and is related to the previous strategies of the ABCDE model. If previous strategic steps work well and are successful, positive feelings (e.g., joy, gratitude) are inevitable, which promotes positive changes (Wong, 2010). Thus, this ABCDE strategy helps youths to assess risks and opportunities and enjoy all outcomes of the progress.



Conclusion

- The MCPE emphasizes principles and strategies that target to improve psychosocial and emotional well-being, positive relationships, resilience, and character strengths and focuses on teaching students how to apply these principles in their lives.
- The PURE-based strategies provide the main sources of mental health and wellbeing, whereas the ABCDE principles focus on the essential strategies of MCA in dealing with adverse life events.
- Students trained in the PURE and the ABCDE will be well equipped to live a fulfilling, responsible and productive life in the midst of uncertainties and challenges



Thank you!

– Please contact me for further;

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