Education in A Positive Way

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Abstract: The present schooling system had failed to address various individual, societal and national level problems which we are facing currently. The alarming rate of increase in the number of dropouts, delinquents, drug addicts and teen suicide is a major concern which needs to have special attention from the educators. In search for a panacea for all these concerns the paper suggests positive education as an effective strategy which not only engages the learner in established curricula but also helps to develop the learner's personal as well as interpersonal skills. The article focuses on various models of positive education and some most effective techniques to integrate positive approaches to the existing system.
Keywords: Positive education, emotional management, interpersonal skills, positive emotions, positive schooling.

INTRODUCTION

Plato had once said that "the purpose of education is to give to the body and to the soul all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable". While this has been the objective since the time of ancient Greeks and perhaps even earlier, the current education system has deviated much from this which results in certain negative outcomes such as: alarming drop outs, delinquencies, teen suicides etc…

The present schooling system is failing to curb the increasing dropout rates of students. According to the 2016 report by the Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring, UNESCO, 47 million youths of India had dropped out of school by their 10th standard.

Another report by the Institute for Policy Research Studies came out in 2016 states that, while enrolment in class 10 is 77%, it drops to just 52% in class 11.This may have high psychosocial impacts possibly leading to delinquesce and antisocial behaviors. Hence, such a drastic dropout rate is detrimental to the holistic development of the individual, to the society and to the progress of the nation.

Another major concern highlighted by the National Crime Records Bureau is the alarming rate of increase in suicide among adolescents. NCRB report (2015) states that: "Every hour, one student commits suicide in India". In the year 2015 alone, 8,934 students had committed suicide in India [1]. These alarming statistics highlights the crucial need for us to transform the education system in India to a field that would not only provide high quality academic education but also prioritize the teaching of social skills, vocational skills, emotional management, nourishing relationships and leadership skills among the youths. Most importantly, such an education system should ignite the flames in children`s curiosity such that they should truly enjoy their learning experience. To facilitate this, it is essential to integrate a positive approach with in the present education system. An education system which caters to all these spheres could be identified as positive education system or positive schooling.

Positive Education has been defined as "the development of educational environments that enables the learner to engage in established curricula in addition to knowledge and skills to develop their own and others' wellbeing" [2]. Thus the fundamental goal of any positive education is to promote positive mental health within the school community [3]. By incorporating wellbeing into the curriculum we could prevent depression, increase life satisfaction, encourage social responsibility, promote creativity, foster learning and even enhance academic achievements [2]. Research says positive education can promote human development, positive strengths, resilience and optimism in the learning environment [4].

Positive schooling has also shown to teach children about how to be happy, how to increase happiness and reduce depression symptoms significantly [5]. A study by Green in 2015, at Wellington College among girls and boys in years 10 and 11 (aged 14+ and 15+), shows that positive education practices enabled students to understand and

grasp the concepts that allowed living a flourishing life as well as practical skills for daily life. Certain positive education interventions as listed by Mariana in her studies (2016), to attain these skills includes: identifying and developing strengths, cultivating gratitude, and visualizing best possible selves" [2].

The National School Climate Centre, an organization under teacher's college, Columbia University, formed with the mission to support the development of leaders in the field of social and emotional education had defined school climate as "norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe". The National School Climate Center has identified five elements of school climate to incorporate this. These include "safety; teaching and learning; interpersonal relationships; institutional environment; and staff relationships" as the basic parameters for inculcating a positive environment or a positive climate.

The Department of Training and Education - Queensland, recommends that, it is very essential to promote a positive school culture. They emphasize on promoting good relationships between different individuals within the school setting as well as parents. Among many recommendations for improved school culture, the report suggests establishing policies, supporting learning and wellbeing strategies, anti-bullying, and behavior management programs to facilitate a safe and caring environment.

In a report published by John Hopkins Urban Health institute, talks about Effective Schooling or how to make the schooling more effective. They recognize that education should not only provide academies but also facilitate an environment where the students "feel excited to be a part of the educated community". This sense of excitement they feel, is possible only if there is an "environment of strong school connectedness" (Wingspread Declaration, 2003), this is defined as the belief among students that they are cared for by the adults in the school community, both in terms of learning as well as them as individuals [6].

This article highlights recommendations made by various governmental bodies across the world for a model positive education within the school system. It also explores certain specific recommendations for interventions given by psychologists based on scientific research.

Models for positive education
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) were introduced along with the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the USA. When PBIS is implemented in the schools, it is referred to as School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [7]. The PBIS model is a three tier student support system. This model identified – i) "Primary supports for the entire school, ii) Secondary supports which are targeted interventions for groups of students who show a greater need for support, and iii) Tertiary supports, which is an intensive support for individual student". Collaboration with staff was considered extremely important for success. Multiple studies indicate positive behaviour outcomes post PBIS model. These include "32% decrease in frequent bullying, a 67% decrease in widespread classroom disorder, and a 21% decrease in staff-perceived defiance" [8]. This highlights the significance of positive education beyond the academics, as an effective personal management tool.

Backward Design is another model that "works backwards" such that it identifies the desired results and outcomes first, and then develops instruction. Through this system the teachers are able to predict possible pitfalls and plan all the activities in advanced. This framework has three stages – first stage requires identifying desired outcomes, the second stage requires determining competency, and the third stage involves planning instructional strategies and learning techniques which develops these competencies [2].

Martin Seligman used the PERMA model (five elements of well-being) to promote positive schooling practices and to help the students flourish. The five elements are: "Positive emotions: feeling positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, interest, hope; engagement which includes, being fully absorbed in activities that use your skills yet challenge you; relationships, having positive relationships; meaning, belonging to and serving something you believe is bigger than yourself and accomplishment which means pursuing success, winning achievement and mastery". To achieve each of these, a range of interventions could be effectively applied [4].

While the above models could be generalized and applied to a few countries, there is still a need to develop specialized education models to cater to individual and community requirements. One such specific example is the study conducted by Down, with the objective of addressing the problem of violence among Caribbean youths through infusing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the curriculum. The study had introduced the students in the Caribbean population to Caribbean literature and were encouraged to trace the socio cultural and historical, economic and environmental aspects of violence, at the same time they were also exposed to alternatives to violence in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence the model provides an integrated learning experience where participants study ecology, economics, social and political issues pertinent to their respective countries and the world by assigning various relevant roles in the society to facilitate community engagement. This

attempt was found to be relevant, meaningful and valuable among students as well as the teachers [9].

Apart from these models for implementing an individualized education practice, there are also a few specific positive schooling practices that can be integrated in the existing system. These are:

Interpersonal connectedness

An important component to facilitate a positive school environment is to facilitate students build a sense of belongingness, include providing opportunities wherein they can feel connected and contribute to the school. Certain suggestions given by Manitoba Education and Training, Canada, to facilitate belongingness include 'Circle of friends', mentoring programs, teacher advisory programs, extra-curricular programs, newcomer programs and creating positive experiences (school helpers). 'Circle of friends' is a support system comprising of peers and friends. There are four circles of friends including circle of exchange, participation, friendship and intimacy. Students need to be encouraged to become actively involved in their school and classroom through these circle.

Interpersonal Connectedness has been shown to have positive effects on students in multiple studies [10]. It has been shown that when "students feel connected to at least one significant adult in their education they experience greater engagement and satisfaction with school." The John Hopkins Institute report on Effective education, had given recommendations to promote interpersonal interconnectedness in the school settings. These include reducing teacher talk time and increasing student talk time during discussions, student to teacher mailbox for private communication, allowing students to correct their mistakes to show that teachers have faith in their capabilities, highlight positive student contributions, treat students with respect, and provide public praise and private criticisms [10].

Triad of engagement

As suggested by John Hopkins Urban Health Institute, Triad of engagement is another positive schooling approach which allows students to feel a sense of connection and engagement with their school. This allows the students to experience interconnectedness with their school staff and peers, emotionally and physically safe engaging environments, and a sense of academic engagement, through support to achieve their personal best. This "triad of engagement" is self-building such that it helps the students become more resilient. They also feel safe, supported and capable of overcoming academic and personal life challenges.

The jigsaw classroom technique

The jigsaw classroom is a positive psychology technique proposed by [11]. In this method, the "students are divided into groups on the basis of their shared competencies and skills. Then, each student is assigned different topics, who will have to find students from other groups with the same topic. This would result in students with different strengths working on the same topic".

Positive discipline

Positive discipline requires finding long term solutions which will allow students to develop their own self-discipline. It also requires providing clear and consistent communication of information, rules, limits and expectations and reinforcing for the same. It involves building respectful mutual relationships between teachers and students and being fair in this relationship. Students will be taught values like "courtesy, non-violence, empathy, self-respect and respect for others and their rights" [12]. Life skills such as competence, confidence to handle stressful situations and developing a love for learning are some of the objectives of such a model.

Academic socialization

Studies by Houtenville and Conway have shown that parental efforts can have a large impact on a student's academic performance. Academic socialization is a "set of parental behaviours which have a demonstrably positive impact on learning and academic outcomes". These behaviours include clear communication with the child about parental expectations, value of love for learning, suggesting learning strategies, discussing school work in connection to current events, making plans and preparations for the future, facilitating a "stimulating and enjoyable learning environment", facilitating activities to build decision making skills, problem solving, and encouraging autonomy, and academic performance [13].

CONCLUSION

Positive Schooling is an important component of a successful academic life. It not only involves gaining academic knowledge, it facilitates the students to gain important life skills for emotional management and to build healthy relationships. It requires a joint collaboration on part of the students, school staff, parents and the society. If implemented properly, it can even foster the love of learning in students in order to ignite their inherent curiosity. Nelson Mandela identified education as the biggest weapon that could change world. If we take appropriate measures through implementing positive educational practices, we can soon make this a real.

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