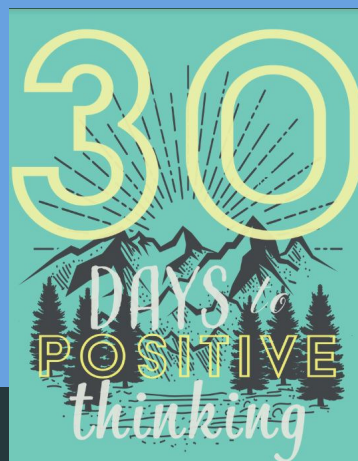


A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTION IN FE TO IMPROVE GROWTH MINDSET AND WELL-BEING

The main aim of this research was to evaluate how well FE students, aged between 16-19, responded to a Positive Psychology Intervention (PPI) aimed at improving mindset and well-being.

Joby Oram and Lee Bailey



INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence worldwide of depression among young people (Seligman et al, 2009) and the fact that a quarter of mental health conditions develop during the time when students are at college (Department for Education, 2017) highlights the difficult role front-line staff face when educating in the FE sector. As practitioners in an FE college that serves over 1500 learners, it was noted, albeit informally, how much our pastoral support system and the use of our college's Health and Well-being team had increased in use the past few years. Further research showed that this was a national problem, based upon a report by the Department of Health, Future in Mind (2015). We recognised that as practitioners we had a problem, but not yet a solution. This changed when we completed some college CPD on Growth Mindset and The Happiness Advantage. So now we had our tool, and this manifested itself into an idea that a Growth Mindset and well-being Journal that encouraged daily tasks could help to improve students' perceptions around mindset and well-being.



34%

CHILDLINE (2019) FOUND THAT OF THE MAIN REASONS FOR CHILDREN AGED 16 TO 18 YEARS TO CONTACT THEM, THE MOST COMMON CONCERN IDENTIFIED WAS MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL HEALTH (34%)



METHODOLOGY

30

 Students completed the Journal for 30 days

The study provided students with a Growth Mindset Journal that encouraged daily tasks to improve students' perceptions around mindset and well-being. Students were actively involved in the planning phase to increase ownership and retention during the study, a combination of focus groups and surveys obtained participants views.



KEY LITERATURE

Rimmer (2017) wrote a love letter to the education system and a relationship that has lost its way. Exploring the need to change and think what is best for our future. He suggests we have been disconnected from teaching the necessary skills that it takes to be happy human beings. He believes spending more time focusing on the broader aspects of an individual's education will lead not only to greater academic success and technical proficiency but a better and happier lifelong learner.

Over the past decade there has been prominent research in positive education, with the work of both Dweck (2006) and Seligman et al. (2009) featuring prominently in educational research. Dweck coined the terms fixed and growth mindset to describe the attitudes and beliefs that people had about learning and intelligence (Dweck, 2006).

In relation to well-being and attainment, Seligman asked parents in two words or fewer what parents want for their children:

“Happiness, Health, life satisfaction and meaning”. (2009, p93).

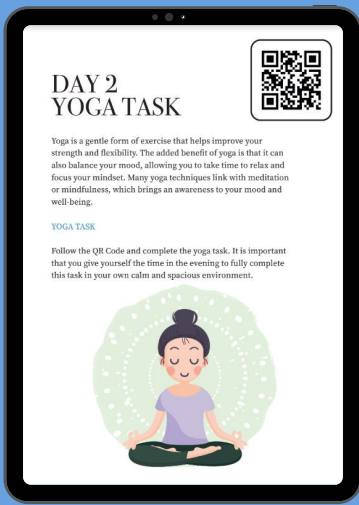
Positive psychology interventions, or PPIs, are a set of scientific tools and strategies that focus on increasing happiness, well-being, and positive cognitions and emotions (Parks and Schueller, 2014).

Kaplan, et al. (2014), Seear and Vella-Brodrick (2013), both conducted interventions to increase well-being with positive outcomes. A meta-analysis by Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) of 51 PPIs also highlights how a range of positive interventions significantly increased well-being. Indeed, many studies have supported a relationship between mindfulness and both increased well-being and decreased anxiety and stress (Bränström et al. 2011; Brown and Ryan, 2003).

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KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



Holistically the methodological design and outcome of the study was success. Reinforcing previous work by Seligman (2009) and Kidger et al. (2010) alike that a PPI has a positive refractive effect on well-being and subsequent outcomes. It was evident that students engaged more positively to more practical tasks such as yoga, but this may have been indicative to the study's specific demographic. Having said that, complex evaluation techniques such as reflectiveness and gratitude also demonstrated appeal to a high percentage of learners.

Lucy said "I thought it was really well put together and it looked really nice which made me want to complete it".

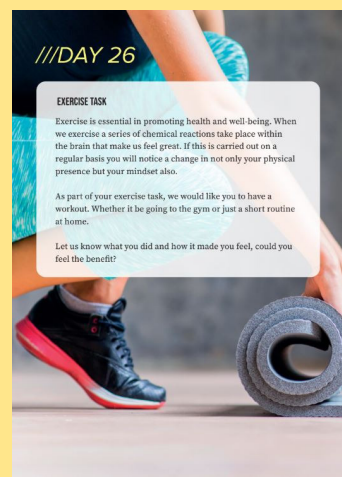
KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS CONTINUED

66.6% Unanimously agreed this Journal was helping them work towards their goals

66%

- Learners identified value in the completion of PPI tasks and began to witness what they considered to be "developments in their happiness and well-being." This may have been influenced by the fact students were exposed to these interventions for the first time, even learners with initial apprehension or response bias showed encouraging signs in completing the journal. Some eluded to continual practice post study.
- Nina said *"100% I am understanding my own feelings a lot more , day 7 made me realise I put myself down a lot more often than I thought and put other people before myself without thinking about how it might make me feel."*

- The journal had provided some comfort for students amidst and from the onset of a pandemic. Something of which could not have been predicted. Without question the extremely low completion rate could be justified by the lack of intended face to face interaction and the subsequent online remote substitute. It is suggested that disengagement throughout lock down resulted in learners not fully understanding the purpose of mindset and positive psychology. It was documented in the focus group that should the intervention have been supported by weekly face to face meetings, engagement was likely to have improved.



- It could also be suggested that the lockdown itself caused such disengagement with the journal. Our student comments reflect that of a survey carried out by YoungMinds (2020) during the initial stages of lockdown. The survey of 2,111 young people found that 51% of students agreed that their mental health had gotten a bit worse, with 32% saying that it had gotten much worse from the introduction of government enforced restrictions

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The fundamental limitation resides around the lack of tangible attainment to validate intervention success. Studies conducted by Adler et al. (2016) and Weare (2015) may be a preferable model and approach for any future research. It is recommended then that any future intervention may be more effective if conducted with learners from a wider spectrum demographic inclusive of academic abilities, age, and diagnosed psychological profile.
- A more thorough, robust and timely completion of the journal would be considered for future related studies. It had been identified strong peaks of mindful progression had been experienced when completing the intervention, as such it is suggested that 4 intervals of journal completion should be implemented.
- To reflect on what we ourselves as practitioners have learnt holistically during our study. Considering the issue of addressing problems, rather than puzzles (Revans (2011). Recognising that National Policy (Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care, 2018) and wider research into current interventions may yield improved results.



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