

CASE STUDY A

How Positive Education helped this Primary School actively manage student stress and anxiety by creating a positive school culture

CONTEXT: PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE

This school is a choice school in the neighbourhood, with families willing to move house in order for their children to get into the school. Students generally came from middle to upper middle class homes, with both parents working full time. However, because of academic pressure, students experience stress and anxiety. In this case study, you will learn how the school was able to support and build student resilience, manage student anxiety and create a positive and uplifting school culture while balancing academic achievement.

BEFORE	AFTER
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students experience significant stress and anxiety especially prior to exams and after the release of exam results. When they compare themselves to their friends, they feel like they are not achieving enough, or not good enough. In order to cope, some of them resorted to self-harming. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students learnt various ways in which to manage their stress e.g. practicing mindful breathing, focus on their strengths. The school observed students actively practising the strategies before the exams began, resulting in less stress and anxiety. The cases of self-harming also reduced by 30 per cent.
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are competitive because they want to get top grades. They don't share the methods they use at tuition because they are afraid their classmates will outperform them. In class, they would compare grades and those who did well would even say unkind words to those who didn't do as well. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the promotion of a more collaborative environment, students were more willing to help and support other students during class time. In one particular class, high-performing students were seen asking their peers if they needed any tips and strategies. Parents also gave feedback that they were grateful that their son/daughter received help from their peers. As a result, they did better in their studies.

Before #3	After #3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers were worried about the overemphasis on academic results and the sheer amount of work students had to do beyond school homework. They shared that some students have endless tuition classes over the weekend, resulting in them being exhausted during lesson time. ● They noted that when students encountered small mistakes in their marks, they took it personally and felt like the whole world was over. Some would cry, experience panic attacks or have outbursts in class as they did not know how to tolerate failure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With the greater emphasis on positive classroom culture, by introducing positive emotions like gratitude & love languages, the teachers noted more energy and enthusiasm in the classroom. Students also started using phrases like “I’m grateful for..” when speaking to peers, teachers and even other school personnel. ● Introduction of the growth mindset during lessons and infused into curriculum time helped students understand how they could learn lessons from failure. Teachers noted fewer students feeling helpless or crying as a result of mistakes or bad grades.

FAQS

How did the school get to know me?

- The Head of Department had attended a Positive Education symposium held in another school and saw me speak about “Cultivating a happy and positive classroom”, so she invited me to her school.

What were the skepticisms the school had before proceeding?

- Unsure about how teachers might respond to “yet another framework” as they had been exposed to many other approaches before.
- Lack of clarity about how to make the psychological concepts tangible and practical. Also, they were unsure about how to implement the concepts across the levels and how to infuse it into the current platforms (e.g. curriculum, CCA etc) they had

What convinced the school to (a) work with me (b) adopt Positive Education?

- They had read research articles and felt that the evidence base behind Positive Education was robust.
- They had heard positive feedback about my training workshops and support given to other schools in their Positive Education journey, particularly how the strategies were practical and highly implementable in the classroom.
- As I had a very sound understanding of both the local school context and Positive Psychology, I was able to give specific examples about how to build upon the current practices they had, making the process feel seamless and doable.

CASE STUDY B

How Positive Education helped this Primary School go from constant firefighting to ZERO Discipline cases

CONTEXT: PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE

This school was situated in a rather challenging neighbourhood and had quite a number of students who came from low SES backgrounds. Such students did not have sufficient family support and this sometimes manifested in behavioural issues in school. In this case study, you will learn how the school was able to overcome long-term discipline cases which were tough to crack, how they managed to increase student satisfaction rates to over 95 percent, and ended up becoming a school that championed student well-being - a choice school in the neighbourhood.

BEFORE	AFTER
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High number of discipline cases (30 +) which sucked up a lot of energy and time. Discipline committee tried all ways and means (e.g. time-out programmes, talking to parents, giving students leadership positions) but could not find a sustainable solution. These cases thus tended to drag on over long periods of time. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Went from 30+ long-term discipline cases to 0 cases because of implementing a whole-school Positive Education approach which included strengthening Positive teacher-student relationships, cultivating a positive school culture and developing specific programs that focus on aspects of well-being & meeting students needs.
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School satisfaction rate was low and students were not motivated/engaged in the classroom. Some students only saw the school as a place to study, and did not have a strong sense of belonging to the school. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student satisfaction rate at all time high of 95%. Students enjoyed going to school because they felt supported and engaged during lessons. They saw the school as a place where they could learn and grow, make friends and call a second home.

Before #3	After #3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers were spending too much time trying to manage classroom behaviour by scolding and fire-fighting. They did not know how to address some of the challenging behaviours in the classroom. As a result they were often exhausted. ● While the teachers were passionate about teaching the students, only a few teachers were able to see the bigger picture of what they were doing for the students. As a result, there was inconsistency & lack of unity in the approach towards students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers won top accolades for teaching (i.e. President's Award for Teachers (PAT)). They believed strongly in Positive Education as they saw the impact on the students self-belief, attitude and behaviour ● Because of the positive school culture and a strong purposeful goal, it was not just the discipline committee's job to come up with solutions. Other teachers began taking initiative to suggest new ideas. ● Became the go-to school in the neighbourhood and a pioneer in Positive Education

FAQS

How did the school get to know me?

- Two other schools had mentioned the work I do in Positive Education, so the Head of Department reached out to me to find out more

What were the skepticisms the school had before proceeding?

- Unsure if this solution will work as they had tried many before (e.g. time out program, meeting with parents, offering students leadership positions etc), and none of them had worked sustainably or consistently.
- They were concerned that teachers might view Positive Education as a soft approach. Many of the teachers were used to taking a much firmer/stricter approach, and so they were worried that teachers would not buy into this idea.

What convinced the school to (a) work with me (b) adopt Positive Education?

- They had read research articles and found that Positive Education is evidence-based and thus effective in meeting their needs.
- They felt confident that I would understand and be able to connect with the teachers as I was a former teacher and MOE guidance officer, with an understanding of the local school context.
- I had also studied with Martin Seligman (founding father of Positive Psychology) at the University of Pennsylvania, and would thus be able to guide them in their conceptual understanding & implementation of the key topic areas.

CASE STUDY C

How this Secondary School used Positive Education to strengthen students' meaning, purpose and sense of belonging

CONTEXT: SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE

This school is a well-known school with many years of history, with many students making it their top choice after Primary School. However, there is still pressure coming from the need to perform in their academics and also stress from feeling the need to uphold parental expectations. In this case study, you will learn how the school was able to build student resilience, increase students' sense of belonging to the school and create a positive school culture.

BEFORE	AFTER
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students experience significant stress and anxiety especially prior to exams and after the release of exam results. When they compare themselves to their friends, they feel like they are not achieving enough, or not good enough. ● The school counsellors reported an increase in the number of students feeling stressed and anxious, and even resorting to self-harming behaviour in order to cope. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incorporating Positive Education school-wide meant increased touchpoints to equip students with the necessary skills to manage their anxiety. ● Celebrating strengths in different domains gave students opportunities to shine even outside of the academic context. ● School counsellors reported a reduction in self-harming behaviour with more students adopting positive coping mechanisms like exercising, or journaling.
<p style="text-align: center;">Before #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who do not do as well as other students feel disconnected from their peers. Some of them also feel jaded about the emphasis on grades, and feel that “going to school is meaningless.” ● As a result, Some of them drop out or behave poorly in class (e.g. distracted, failure to submit assignments etc). It was challenging for teachers to find ways to engage them meaningfully and they often felt frustrated & tired. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greater emphasis on values-based lessons and introduction of discussions on meaning & purpose. Involving these students in meaning-centred activities such as community giving projects helped them cultivate a deeper understanding of their life purpose. ● This resulted in much-improved classroom behaviour and some of them even stepped up to take on leadership positions in the school.

Before #3	After #3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some teachers viewed the teaching of character and values as the form teacher's scope. Thus, they only focused on helping students with their academic results. ● Because of this, there was an inconsistency in how they responded or related to students. When there was a behavioural issue, they would quickly refer them to the counsellors or discipline department, resulting in increased caseload for the counsellors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers went through full day Positive Education training sessions where they learnt specific strategies to manage student behaviour in a more positive way. They became better attuned to students' emotions and experiences in the classroom, and were able to manage the behaviour more effectively. ● Building of a positive school culture led to greater consistency, and teachers felt more empowered to impart values and character in the classroom. Staff, students and teachers were able to speak a common language.

FAQS

How did the school get to know me?

- The school counsellor had known me before (from the Ministry of Education), so she reached out to me when she learnt that I had completed my Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at the University of Pennsylvania.

What were the skepticisms the school had before proceeding?

- Unsure about how teachers might respond to Positive Psychology as it was still a fairly new discipline at the time.
- Lack of clarity about how to make the psychological concepts tangible and practical. Particularly, they were unsure about how to embed the concepts into the particular subject areas e.g. Chemistry, Physics.

What convinced the school to (a) work with me (b) adopt Positive Education?

- They spent time reading research articles in depth and felt that the evidence base behind Positive Education was robust.
- As a former teacher and guidance officer, they knew that I had a very sound understanding of the local school context. Furthermore, I was the first Singaporean to graduate from the MAPP course, and hence would be able to guide and support them as they began their journey.