MATT SMITH describes the development of a whole-school Positive Education program at Brisbane Grammar School.

In Aristotle's view, 'educating the mind, without educating the heart, is no education at all'. Emotional Intelligence expert, Daniel Goleman states that 'happy, calm children learn best'.

The common thread is that happiness and wellbeing should be taught in 21st century schools. Educational institutions have a responsibility to ensure students are performing well emotionally and socially, as well as academically. Concurrent to the traditional, academic curriculum, a wellbeing program is essential if our students are to truly flourish in their adolescent and adult lives. Now for a short quiz:

In one or two words, what do you want most for your children?

In one or words, what do schools teach?

Typically, answers to the first question tend to be 'happiness', 'contentment' and 'fulfilment', while common responses for the second question are 'literacy', 'numeracy' and 'thinking skills'.

There appears to be a discord between what parents want for their children and what schools actually teach. Necessarily, schools must teach both the skills of wellbeing, in addition to delivering an academic curriculum. Students need to acquire fundamental and traditional skills of learning but also be happy, confident and resilient lifelong learners who look to the future with hope and optimism.

Positive Psychology and Positive Education

The field of Positive Psychology can significantly contribute to this dual approach in education. Positive Psychology emerged in 1998 when Dr Martin Seligman became President of the American Psychological Association. It is defined as 'the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions' (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Psychology in the 20th tended to focus on removing negative states, such as depression and anxiety (what is wrong?), whereas a Positive Psychology approach also considers positive states such as hope, optimism and resilience (what is right?). In terms of the application of Positive Psychology, 'Positive Education is education for both traditional skills and happiness' (Seligman et al., 2009).

Signature programs

While our Positive Education journey commenced at the start of 2013, pastoral care is nothing new at Brisbane Grammar School. Fortunately, our school began that journey long ago. In 1991, the first systematic model of pastoral care was introduced, allowing for a Head of Year structure and a formal lesson (Personal Development) set aside each week for pastoral instruction (today these lessons occur every Monday morning during period one).

As the fields of Positive Psychology and Positive Education are vast, and 2013 was our pioneering year, we realised the importance of a targeted approach in terms of subject matter and year level intervention. Our 2013 Positive Education course contained three interconnecting sub-strands:
• **Character strengths** (implemented in the Boarding House, the year 9 Personal Development Program and year 10 Outdoor Education)

• **Growth mindset/neuroscience** (implemented in the Boarding House and the year 9 Personal Development Program)

• **Emotional intelligence** (implemented in the year 7 Personal Development Program).

**Character Strengths**

Character Strengths are trait-like qualities that are ubiquitous, and morally valued across all cultures. They are ‘aspects of our personality that are defined as pre-existing qualities that are arise naturally, feel authentic, and intrinsically motivating to use and energising’ (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010).

It is worth considering that the great Civil Rights activist, Martin Luther King reminded us that: ‘We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education.’

As a starting point, a pilot program was implemented in the Boarding House (Harlin House) on Character Strengths. This afforded an opportunity for the boarders to be Positive Education pioneers, while also offering a chance to ‘test’ the topic of Character Strengths. Reflections on what worked well and what could be improved, enabled these lessons to be embedded formally into the year 9 Personal Development Program at a later date.

Prior to the introduction of this first unit on Character Strengths, a Positive Education training day was held, training all year 9 form tutors, which covered the areas of Positive Psychology, Positive Education and Character Strengths. It is critical that teachers themselves not only perceive value and worth in these interventions, but connect on a personal level to the material. To ensure a more authentic, meaningful and unique training experience, staff completed the same lessons that they would later deliver to their own classes (teacher as student).

The year 9 unit included the identification of the 24 strengths, strengths-spotting, completion of the VIA Pro survey to reveal signature strengths and follow-up activities about how to play to these strengths. Following this intervention, qualitative and quantitative survey data was collected to enable a reflection of the success of the program. Generally, students found their signature strengths affirming and empowering. This is a reminder that a Character Strengths approach emphasises the uniqueness of each child. Sir Ken Robinson laments the failure of schools to recognise individual differences in a ‘one size fits all’ brand of education. This strengths-based approach helps students (and teachers) to recognise strengths in themselves and others. Character Strengths education helps to celebrate individual difference and ultimately create a shared language (the 24 strengths) which offers a lens through which to see students positively (what is right?). For example, rather than immediately admonishing a student for being loud and disruptive, an approach could be ‘I admire you for your zest but challenge you to work on your self-regulation’.

**Growth Mindset**

Growth Mindset is based on work by Carol Dweck in her acclaimed book, *Mindset* (2006), in which she distinguishes two fundamentally different mindsets: a Fixed and a Growth Mindset. Those who possess a Fixed Mindset believe that ‘Intelligence is a static trait: some students are smart and some are not, and that’s that. Or they may have a growth mindset, in which they believe that intelligence can be developed by various means – for example, through effort and instruction’ (Dweck, 2010).

Students (and teachers) who possess a Growth Mindset are happier, more successful and more effective lifelong learners. Understanding that ability is not fixed, and can be developed through learning, is a powerful lesson for students: ‘Children are not always stuck with the mental abilities they were born with’ (Dolge, 2007). Students who are able to gain a better understanding of how their brains work, and how they learn, will be empowered with more hope and optimism. This is most evident with the concept of neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to change structurally and functionally, as the result of experience. Through this neurological understanding, students will appreciate that challenges, set-backs and failure provide opportunities for their brains to learn. Helping students to cultivate a Growth Mindset (as opposed to a Fixed Mindset) will enable students to develop healthier attitudes and perceptions towards their learning, thus develop thriving and not just surviving brains.

A second pilot program on Growth Mindset was implemented in Harlin House. This afforded another opportunity for boarders to be leaders in Positive Education and provided more scope for reflection and refinement prior to implementation of the program to the year 9 cohort. A second Staff Training session was held that enabled all year 9 form tutors to understand the Mindset theory. We decided to implement this unit differently to the Character Strengths unit by introducing a group-based task that required students to select a
famous example of a Growth Mindset person. Students conducted a biographical research about how that person encountered adversity and failure and ultimately reached success through a Growth Mindset.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI) was popularised by Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, and has gained a much greater profile as part of the Positive Psychology movement. Put simply, EI is the intelligent use of emotions (positive and negative).

A strong body of research suggests that emotional intelligence (measured as an emotional quotient, EQ) is a better predictor of enduring happiness and success compared with IQ (cognitive intelligence). If students are more emotionally intelligent (higher EQ), their learning will naturally be enhanced with an increase to their overall sense of wellbeing. Experiencing positive emotions broadens the mindset enabling the building of personal resources (physical, social, intellectual, psychological), which, in turn, improves thinking skills. Equally important is the ability to recognize and legitimize negative (difficult) emotions to gain important life skills such as self-control and personal discipline.

Through consultation with the year 7 form tutors, a series of lessons were devised titled *Emotional Intelligence*. Students learned about feelings and emotions and importantly the differentiation between positive and negative (difficult) emotions.

**Branding Positive Education**

All schools are unique and a proud product of their past, shaped by traditions, frameworks and strategic directions. Thus, Positive Education will (and should) look different at every institution. It is important to acknowledge and respect existing structures and introduce Positive Education as a complementary, synergistic layer.

While we greatly admire and remain in awe of pioneering institutions such as Geelong Grammar School and St Peters College in Adelaide, it has become apparent that, rather than directly emulate their achievements, it is important that we infuse the principles of Positive Education in accordance with our own school ethos. In 2013, we commenced mapping and aligning our signature programs (outlined above) with our own school traditions, frameworks and strategic directions. We have identified strong, meaningful links with our school motto, school song, the Dimensions of Learning Framework and Habits of Mind. Ultimately, our quest is to develop Brisbane Grammar School’s own brand of Positive Education.

**School motto**

Founded in 1868, Brisbane Grammar School’s motto is *nulla sine labore* (nothing without work). Learning about, and developing, a growth mindset places value on process-based learning, which is embodied in our school motto.

We hope a Growth Mindset intervention not only cultivates this type of mindset, but enable students to truly connect to the ethos of our school through the motto. Another connection the school motto has to our Positive Education program is through Character Strengths. There are a number of strengths that relate to notion of nothing without work; ‘perseverance’, ‘love of learning’ and ‘ zest’ (strengths of the mind).

**'School Song’**

The *School Song* (written in 1907) is another important part of our history and heritage. It is interesting to note that more than 90 years before the onset of Positive Psychology, the line ‘yes, life is worth living’ resonates strongly with the mantra of this new movement. Certain Character Strengths are implied in various lines of our school song:

‘It's lessons of truth’ (honesty)

‘The world full of beauty’ (appreciation of beauty and excellence)

‘Not swayed by wild hopes’ (hope)

Similarly, a Growth Mindset is represented in the lines: ‘Its lessons of labour’, and ‘The tasks overcome and the failure and fret’.

**School values**

Our five school values are: learning, endeavour, community, leadership and respect. These values are reflected in a number of the 24 Character Strengths. Examples include:

- **Learning:** ‘Curiosity’, ‘Creativity’, ‘Open-mindedness’
- **Endeavour:** ‘Love of learning’, ‘Perseverance’, ‘Zest’
- **Community:** ‘Teamwork’, ‘Social Intelligence’, ‘Citizenship’

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Dimensions of Learning

Since 1997, Dimensions of Learning (DOL) has served as the academic framework. It is based on comprehensive research about the learning process, the premise being that five types of thinking (the five dimensions) are essential to successful learning. This framework helps students to maintain a focus on learning, and understand and value the learning process. It is a model that offers a powerful metaphor for learning. Students are able to develop important life skills through the acquisition of complex reasoning processes. The five dimensions are:

Dimension 1: Attitudes and perceptions
Dimension 2: Acquire and integrate knowledge
Dimension 3: Extend and refine knowledge
Dimension 4: Use knowledge meaningfully
Dimension 5: Habits of Mind

A document titled Dimensions of Learning & Positive Psychology; the connections between DOL & Student Wellbeing has been created in an attempt to highlight important links between the school's academic framework (DOL) and personal development programs (guided by the principles of Positive Psychology). It is hoped that these Positive Education initiatives strengthen the DOL agenda, offer an explicit model for the teaching of DOL and, ultimately, improve wellbeing and academic learning.

Institutional change

In an effort to raise the profile of Positive Psychology generally, and Positive Education interventions specifically, a Positive Psychology/Positive Education launch occurred on our July Staff Day. This included a presentation by Dr Suzi Green (Founder of the Positivity Institute) and subsequent workshops with the Student Wellbeing Team. Also on this day, the Positive Psychology Reading Group was formed. This now comprises an eclectic mix of teachers across a broad range of academic and pastoral areas. The aim of the Reading Group is for members to discuss the theories and psychology underpinning our Positive Education signature programs (and to explore potentially new signature programs such as 'gratitude', an area we intend to introduce in 2014).

Since the launch, a series of presentations on Positive Education were given at Middle School staff meetings to continue to raise awareness and momentum. To further advocate change and create 'champions' of Positive Education, staff attended Professional Development conferences in a range of areas. In 2014, the Student Wellbeing Team received training so they can become Positive Education trainers. It is envisaged that whole-school staff training will occur over the next two years.

Evaluation of all Positive Education interventions is critical in order to ascertain the efficacy of these programs. This year a careful and systematic attempt to measure data will take place enabling a formal review of Positive Education.

To raise awareness in the wider school community, various forums will continue to be used: liaison with the Parents and Friends Committee, regular publications in weekly newsletters and the quarterly, Grammar News. The School Open Day presented another opportunity to showcase Positive Education and share our progress and vision. In a holistic sense, we want every student to flourish academically, socially, ethically, physically, intellectually and emotionally at Brisbane Grammar School. We believe that our Positive Education interventions can educate the heart (non-cognitive) and the mind (cognitive).

Einstein once said 'Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned at school'. What is more likely to 'remain' may well be those emotional experiences, products of 'educating the heart'. As Maya Angelou says, 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, and people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'

It is possible that Aristotle would agree with Maya Angelou's sentiment. We hope he may also approve of a Positive Education approach in schools today that will help to educate the heart and the mind.

*The comprehensive set of references that accompanied this article is available from the author.

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