

**New Special Interest Group**

**Positive School Psychology: Past, Present, and Future**

By Terry Molony, NCSP & Jeffrey J. Froh

Positive Psychology is devoted to the scientific study of strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. It is the study of the good life and what is right with people (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Martin Seligman is often credited with its origin; however, psychologists like William James, Abraham Maslow, Albert Bandura, and Carl Rogers are also recognized for their early contributions. Specific to school psychology, Bandura's concept of self-efficacy blazed the trail for Positive Psychology, which is associated with resiliency, aspirations, strengths of commitments, motivation, adaptive psychosocial development, and academic achievement. We, as school psychologists working to foster positive youth development, can borrow from the vast research base that is developing in the Positive Psychology community.

Positive Psychology's influence is apparent within contemporary school psychology. The first attempt at "gratitude induction" with early adolescents was conducted last spring (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2006). "Counting blessings" was associated with enhanced optimism, gratitude, life satisfaction, and decreased negative affect. Susanne Denham (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatzis, 2005) argues that forgiveness in children is a pathway to successful social and emotional development, such as greater peer acceptance and friendship quality. Jane Gillham's recent work with the Penn Resiliency Program indicates that promoting optimistic thinking in early adolescents leads to improved explanatory style for positive events and prevention of depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders in high-symptom students (Gillham, Hamilton, Freres, Patton, & Gallop, 2006). The relationship among the 24 signature strengths and positive youth development is being extensively investigated (Park & Peterson, 2005).

Acknowledging the demands placed on school psychologists, we wish *flourishing* would be given the explicit attention that symptom reduction receives. Doing so may provide positive school psychology a permanent place in our service toolkit. We urge training programs to consider educating future practitioners in the principles of positive psychology, positive youth development, assessment, consultation, and counseling.

Our Positive Psychology Interest Group (IG) formed spontaneously as we met each other at NASP workshops on topics related to Positive Psychology and realized our common interest. We have read research papers and books on the topic, and have communicated across the country via e-mail about our observations, questions, and appreciation of Positive Psychology. We hope that there are many other school psychologists who would like to be part of our internet dialogue. Therefore, we invite you to log on to our IG listserv and join us in our goal to deepen school psychologists' understanding of Positive Psychology for its use in schools and also in enhancing personal satisfaction with

life, work, and relationships. If you have already signed up for the listserv but have not received a message about how to register, we apologize because we have been experiencing some technical difficulties and request that you try to register again. Flourishing is much greater than simply being devoid of distress. We look forward to collaborating with you in the scientific pursuit of positive psychological functioning. ♦

**References**

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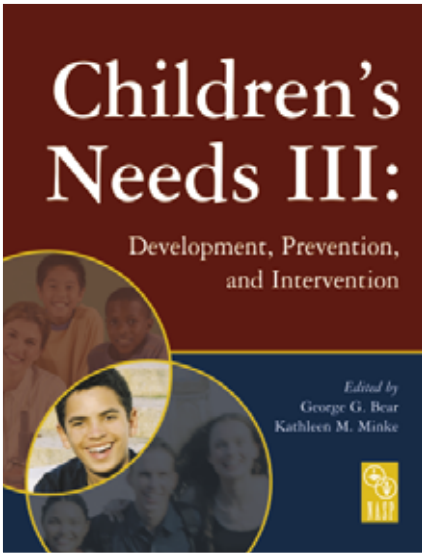
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