Schooling and children’s subjective well-being

Case Western Reserve
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Does Children’s SWB Matter?

• 1987 – Many school professionals said, “No”!
• Many psychologist said, “No”!
• Psychology focused on psychological problems
• Mental health: the absence of symptoms
Traditional Medical Model Measure

Reflected in measures of well-being focusing on symptoms

- Half-Asked Assessments (Kovacs Depression Scale)
  - I do not think of killing myself.
  - I think about killing myself but I would not do it.
  - I want to kill myself.
  - I look ok.
  - There are some bad things about my looks.
  - I look ugly.
Subjective Well-Being (Diener, 1984)

- SWB = absence of negatives and presence of positives
- Positive affect (PA) (joy, interest)
- Negative affect (NA) (anxiety, anger)
- Life satisfaction (life as a whole)
Example of Positive Psychology
Construct: Life Satisfaction
Andrews & Withey, 1976

- Terrible
- Unhappy
- Mostly dissatisfied
- Mixed (about equally satisfied & dissatisfied)
- Mostly satisfied
- Pleased
- Delighted
Dual Factor Model (DFM)
(Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2000)

Mental Health =

Psychopathology (PTH) +
Subjective Well-Being (SWB)
## DFM and School Outcomes

Antaramian et al. 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PTH</th>
<th>SWB</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Average to High</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td><strong>Flourishing</strong></td>
<td>511</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vulnerable</strong></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td><strong>Symptomatic but Content</strong></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Troubled</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health Group Classification

- SWB calculated by adding standardized LS and PA scores and subtracting standardized NA scores
- PTH classified as high or low using clinical decision point of $T \geq 60$
- SWB classified as high or low using corresponding decision point of $T \leq 40$
Mean Differences in Student Engagement

- **Behavioral Engagement**
  - Flourishing: 4.2
  - Vulnerable: 3.7
  - Symptomatic/Content: 3.9
  - Troubled: 3.5

- **Emotional Engagement**
  - Flourishing: 4.5
  - Vulnerable: 3.1
  - Symptomatic/Content: 4.2
  - Troubled: 3.6

- **Cognitive Engagement**
  - Flourishing: 3.8
  - Vulnerable: 3.4
  - Symptomatic/Content: 3.7
  - Troubled: 3.4
Mean Differences in Academic Achievement

GPA

MAP Language

MAP Math

MAP Science

Flourishing

Vulnerable

Symptomatic/Content

Troubled
Cross-Sectional Results

- Compared to Flourishing students, Vulnerable students showed lower
  - beh’ l, cognitive, emot’ l engagement (Cohen’ s $d = .86, 1.0, 1.2$)
  - GPA (Cohen’ s $d = .55$)
  - vulnerables differed little from troubled on GPA and engagement
  - Suldo et al. studies
  - reading scores
  - academic-related goals
  - physical health
## Longitudinal Results

Kelly et al. 2012

### Table 4: Stability and Dynamics of DFM Group Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychopathology</th>
<th>Subjective well-being</th>
<th>Average to high</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 1 (64%, $N=466$)</td>
<td>Group 2 (8%, $N=59$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 1 – 85%, $n=394$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 1 – 46%, $n=27$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 2 – 6%, $n=26$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 2 – 29%, $n=17$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 3 – 9%, $n=39$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 3 – 14%, $n=8$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 4 – 1%, $n=7$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 4 – 12%, $n=7$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 3 (20%, $N=148$)</td>
<td>Group 4 (8%, $N=57$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 1 – 43%, $n=64$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 1 – 18%, $n=10$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 2 – 7%, $n=11$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 2 – 23%, $n=13$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 3 – 42%, $n=62$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 3 – 12%, $n=7$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 4 – 7%, $n=11$</td>
<td>$\rightarrow$ Group 4 – 47%, $n=27$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* **bold** = group stability across Time 1 and Time 2
Vulnerable Students

- Lowest stability of groups
- 29% remain vulnerable
- 12% move to troubled grp in 5 months
- 14% move to symptomatic but content grp
- 55% stay same or get worse
Origins of Group Differences

- Vulnerables differed from Flourishing
- Personality (neuroticism)
- Environmental (family, peer, teacher support)
- Cognitive (self-worth, locus of control, self-perceived scholastic competence and physical attractiveness)
- Major stressors differentiated Troubled from Flourishing
“Happy children are rarely mean, violent, or cruel.”

“Happy children learn best.”

Noddings, 2003
Summary of DFM Research

• Noddings provided little empirical support

• More research needed, but preliminary (8) studies suggest SWB **is** important in school (and at home & in community)

• Happiness matters!
Summary Continued

- Measuring negative AND positive indicators of SWB is more nuanced & comprehensive
Implications

- Research suggests a relation between SWB & behavioral and academic outcomes: mentally healthy, but unhappy children appear at risk.

- Schools should monitor students’ SWB – several brief measures available for free.

- Schools should aim to systematically maintain positive student SWB (as well as academic learning).
Multidimensional SWB

According to Huebner and colleagues (1994), in addition to global LS, there are five distinct domains that can be differentiated among students as early as 3rd grade:

- Family
- Friends
- Neighborhood
- School
- Self
Model of Life Satisfaction

- General
  - Family
  - Peers
  - School
  - Self
  - Living Envt.
Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale
(Huebner, 1991)

**Global**
- I have a good life.
- I would like to change things in my life.
Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1994)

**Family**
I enjoy being at home with my family.
My parents and I do fun things together.
My parents treat me fairly.

**School**
I look forward to going to school.
School is interesting.
I feel bad at school.

**Self**
I like myself.
There are lots of things I can do well.
I am good looking.

**Living Environment**
I like where I live.
I wish there were different people in my neighborhood.

**Friends**
My friends are nice to me.
I have a lot of fun with my friends.


Questions & comments?

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