Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools, Third Edition

Chapter 5

PERMAH: A Useful Model for Focusing on Wellbeing in Schools

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Abstract

The application of Positive Psychology within schools contends that education should prioritize both academic development and well-being. Nevertheless, high levels of mental distress and disengagement experienced by students, burnout and exhaustion of teachers and school leaders, and disconnections between the skills learned in school and the needs of the 21st- century workplace point to myopic education systems grounded in ineffective paradigms. An alternative paradigm is needed in which well-being is a central priority within schools. Such a paradigm requires that the abstract well-being construct is relatable, tangible, and measurable. Over the past decade, the PERMAH model has emerged as one useful framework for bringing well-being to life. Seligman proposed that flourishing arises from five pillars: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, a sense of Meaning, and Accomplishment. A sixth pillar, physical Health, often complements these five pillars. The model has raised interest in and understanding around well-being. Still, the model has received multiple criticisms. This chapter unpacks the PERMAH pillars, describes profilers that measure PERMAH, explores strategies for putting PERMAH into practice, and provides perspective on understanding and using PERMAH. As a whole, PERMAH can provide a useful model for prioritizing well-being in schools.

Keywords: PERMAH, well-being, flourishing, measurement, practical application

The application of Positive Psychology within schools contends that the purpose of education should be about academic development and performance *and* well-being (Seligman et al., 2009). Most parents want their children to be happy. However, the understanding of happiness is embedded within a paradigm that often equates happiness with high academic marks, high scores on standardized exams, entry into elite universities, and the pursuit of profitable, socially valued careers. A multibillion-dollar industry centered around academic testing has emerged. The impact on educational systems has been to ensure that (a) students receive a "standard" education, (b) their abilities can be directly compared, (c) high performance is rewarded, and (d) students who fail to conform to expectations are corrected or excluded. However, this has also brought a number of unintended consequences, including student disengagement with learning, high rates of depression, anxiety, attention deficiencies, school violence, self-harm, and suicide, and many teachers leaving the profession within their first few years of practice (e.g., Jones et al., 2003; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009; Wyn et al., 2014). Humanity is sacrificed for performance, and it is the children who suffer.

Well-being needs to become a priority within our schools, embedded in the schools' values, policies, procedures, and behaviors, to change the dominant paradigms that drive education today. Before this can occur, there is an immediate barrier: what is well-being? Well-being is abstract—people have a general sense of what it is and that it matters, and yet lack consensus on what it explicitly is. Most simply, well-being refers to feeling and functioning well (Huppert & So, 2013; McQuaid & Kern, 2017), but bringing well-being into school requires concrete, practical ways to understand it, measure it, and improve it. After all, measurement matters (Stiglitz et al., 2009) because it prioritizes accountability efforts. Academic performance expectations promise that standardized tests can theoretically remove bias and subjectivity and place students on an even playing field. An unfortunate shortcoming of academic performance expectations, however, is that they primarily evaluate how well

students regurgitate the information that teachers have emphasized, while disconnecting from the rationale and relevance of that information.

Positive Psychology has developed several frameworks and models that attempt to turn the ephemeral well-being construct into something relatable, tangible, accessible, and measurable. Numerous proposed definitions have corresponding measures and implications for practice. For instance, the World Health Organization includes physical, mental, and social dimensions. Theories within Positive Psychology tend to focus on the mental and social aspects, with a primary focus on subjective perceptions rather than objective conditions (Chia et al., 2000), incorporating a mixture of hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Well-being models offer a form of simplexity, simplifying the real world's complexity in simpler, meaningful ways (Kern et al., 2019). There is no one right model, but some can be useful at different times (Box, 1976). Seligman's (2011) PERMA model is one such model. Seligman suggests that flourishing arises from five pillars: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, a sense of Meaning, and Accomplishment, summarized by the acronym PERMA. Goodman and colleagues (2018) found a latent correlation of $r =$ .98 with Diener's (1984) subjective well-being, suggesting that the PERMA factors together contribute to one's overall sense of well-being.

Returning to the World Health Organization's inclusion of physical, mental, and social domains, a sixth dimension—physical Health—is often added. Although the model has received some criticism, some schools have found it to be a useful model for integrating Positive Psychology principles within their schools (e.g., Kern et al., 2015; Norrish et al., 2013). This chapter unpacks the PERMAH model, by focusing on four P's: pillars, profilers, practices, and perspectives.

PERMAH Pillars

The following section describes the six domains. Throughout this chapter, I use PERMA when referring to Seligman's original model, and PERMAH when referring to applications of the model by myself and others.

The Roots of the PERMA Model

The PERMA model is a theoretical model of well-being, based upon Seligman's extensive understanding and thinking around various areas of scholarship, combined with his own perceptions about and interpretations of people's experiences. Models are based on knowledge and scholarship at a specific time, which can evolve over time as empirical knowledge develops (Box, 1976). This evolution is evident in Seligman's thinking. His original model included positive emotion, engagement, and meaning and primarily emphasized hedonic well-being (Seligman, 2002). Aligned with the field's increased focus on eudaimonic well-being, eudaimonic components take precedence in the revised PERMA model.

Positive Emotion

How often do you feel positive, experiencing pleasure, joy, calmness, peace, excitement, gratitude, or hope, versus feeling sad, anxious, angry, or bored? Positive emotion refers to "the pleasant life" (Seligman, 2011, p. 11). Positive emotions capture hedonic aspects of well-being, reflecting the felt benefit of pursuing pleasure and escaping pain. The emphasis on positive emotions does not negate negative emotion and what is painful. Indeed, some of the most exceptional pleasurable experiences occur by persevering through pain and suffering (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014). Negative emotions signal that something is wrong, either within or without, which requires attention and care. However, numerous studies, meta-analyses, and reviews find that experiencing more frequent positive emotions than negative emotions relates to many good outcomes, including good social relationships, success at work, good physical health, faster recovery from illness, and even longer life (e.g.,

Howell et al., 2007; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005).

Importantly, this does not mean that positive emotions *cause* good outcomes. There are many things that people could do to feel happy, but they would be detrimental to longer-term outcomes. The positive emotionality that correlates with good life outcomes arises from thinking and behaving in health-promoting ways, living aligned to our values, and meeting our basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Friedman & Kern, 2014). Emotions provide feedback as to what is working and what is not working; by tuning into our emotions, we can better navigate the opportunities and challenges that life brings.

Engagement

Engagement has long been a paramount concern for schools. The Gallup 2019 student poll estimates that only 49% of students in Australia and New Zealand are actively engaged with their learning, with 19% reporting active disengagement. Considering the high rates of burnout and attrition for the teaching profession, teachers, school leaders, and other school staff are also at high risk for disengagement.

Engagement is a multidimensional construct defined and conceptualized in several ways (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredrickson et al., 2011). For students, major dimensions include:

1. *behavioral engagement* (e.g., attendance, participation in activities, persisting with tasks, being prepared for class, listening, following classroom rules);

2. *emotional or psychological engagement* (e.g., interest and enjoyment of learning, feeling safe, sense of belonging to and valuing school); and

3. *cognitive engagement* (e.g., concentration, paying full attention, focused, self-regulation, use of different learning strategies, willing to exert effort).

Meaningful engagement in learning is more likely to occur when the teacher knows their content well and is passionate about what they do, the student and teacher have a good

relationship, and students can see the relevance of the content.

For adults, workplace engagement involves being dedicated and committed to the organization (emotional engagement), vigor and energy for the work one does (physical or behavioral engagement), and absorption and focus on one's work (cognitive engagement) (Schaufeli, 2013). For older adults, engagement involves ongoing activity (behavioral engagement) and interactions with other people (social engagement) (Rowe & Kahn, 1987).

Seligman's conception of engagement is more limited than these multidimensional conceptions of engagement, focusing specifically on very high levels of psychological engagement, represented by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow. Flow is a state of deep focus, where cognition and emotion merge, time seems to stop, the individual becomes lost within an absorbing activity, and action and awareness come together. Flow is more likely to occur for intrinsically motivating activities, when the challenge of situation meets the individual's skill and ability to meet the challenge, and attention is completely focused (Bakker, 2005; Beard & Hoy, 2010).

I suggest that broader definitions of engagement, including student and workplace engagement, are most useful within a school context. Numerous studies point to the benefits of engagement (e.g., Appleton et al., 2008; Fredericks et al., 2004; Newmann et al., 1992), with the focus on the broader dimensions rather than the flow experience. Realistically, students will find some subjects more interesting and motivating than others. There are many distractions in the classroom, disrupting the intense concentration that makes flow possible. Further, the intensity of a flow experience can deplete cognitive energy—it is time-limited while engaged in a specific challenge. Students need to be present consistently, pay attention, and feel connected to their learning.

Relationships

Human beings need to connect with, relate to, and be accepted by others (Allen et al.,

2018; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). With the fulfillment of this need, people experience positive relationships with others. Conversely, loneliness can increase the risk of both mental and physical illness, including the risk of premature mortality (Cacioppo et al., 2003). However, relationships are not inherently positive—conflict, hostility, and incivility can be one of the biggest threats to well-being.

In defining relationships, Seligman (2011) points to the words of Chris Peterson, who contended that Positive Psychology is about recognizing that other people matter. Objectively, relationships include the number of social ties and the frequency of social interactions, such as number of friends on social media and frequency of spending time with others. Notably, studies find that the quality and perception of one's relationships matter more than quantity (Taylor, 2011). Indeed, some of the loneliest people have many social interactions but feel disconnected. Quality speaks more to satisfaction with one's relationships with other people—feeling heard, cared for, and accepted. Relationships also reflect the nature of connections—the balance between giving and receiving, including feeling supported by others, receiving help when needed, and providing support for others. Relational satisfaction tends to occur when there is a balance between giving and receiving from others. People need to know that others are there for them, but well-being becomes increasingly challenged when they must be dependent completely upon others, or others are dependent completely on them.

Meaning

Meaning has been defined in several ways. Isaksen (2000) suggested that meaning can be understood across four levels:

1. *cosmic level* (the existential question of what the meaning of life truly is);

2. *subjective level* (the meaning of my life, within that broader cosmic perspective);

3. *local level* (the meaning of the things we do); and

4. *situational level* (the meaning of the situations that we encounter).

Across these levels, meaning involves making sense of our experiences, cognitions, behaviors, thoughts, and seeking purpose and coherence within a broader life story.

Steger (2012) points to two primary dimensions of meaning: *comprehension* (being able to make sense of one's life) and *purpose* (having one or more personally relevant goals that motivate one's behavior). King and colleagues (2016) add *significance* as a third dimension, such that one perceives that their life is valuable and important. Seligman (2011) focuses on a subjective sense of purpose, combined with self-transcendence or spirituality— serving something or other people beyond ourselves. He suggests that while there is a subjective aspect to meaning, it is not solely subjective, such that others can define a person's life as full of meaning (based on their contributions to others and the world around them), regardless of whether the person sees their contributions as meaningful.

Accomplishment

Accomplishment similarly can be defined objectively or subjectively. Objectively, this includes winning competitions or awards, acts of greatness, and other socially created recognitions of success. Within schools, objective accomplishment includes high performance and achievement across various areas (e.g., academics, sports, music, arts). Subjectively, accomplishment reflects a personal sense of achievement, perceived competence, mastery and setting, pursuing, and achieving goals. From a well-being perspective, I prefer to focus on subjective aspects; however, this focus does not diminish the value of pursuing high-performance levels. Winning and succeeding require passion, perseverance, and hard work to achieve. However, accomplishment defined narrowly as high achievement can privilege those with unique talents, resources, and time for those pursuits. It also places the focus on specific outcomes, rather than the process of accomplishment that occurs as one develops a sense of mastery and competence within everyday tasks and

experiences.

Health

Seligman (2011) did not include physical health in the PERMA model, yet it arguably meets his criteria of contributing to well-being—people pursue it for its own sake—and it can be defined and measured separately from the other dimensions. Objectively, health includes one's ability to complete a range of daily activities; diagnosis of organic conditions such as heart disease, cancer, or influenza; disabilities that physically limit one or more aspects of functioning; and measured physical fitness and strength (Friedman & Kern, 2014). Subjectively, health refers to a person's perception of their health, feeling physically healthy, having a subjective sense of physical vitality, and having sufficient strength and energy for their daily activities.

While some children's conceptions of health focus on biomedical aspects such as not having illness or infections, others are holistic in nature, including feeling happy, strong, and connected with others (e.g., Piko & Bak, 2006; Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). Past experiences with illness and infection appear to play a role in how children conceptualize and think about health (Piko & Bak, 2006). Some children focus on environmental aspects that contribute to feeling healthy, such as spending time outside and the lack of smoke and other contaminants, and healthy lifestyles are perceived to be a main pathway towards staying healthy and preventing diseases.

<center>**PERMAH Profilers**</center>

Seligman (2011) contends that these pillars are distinctive and can be measured, which I have found to be accurate, with some caveats, as discussed in the PERMAH in perspective section. My colleague, Julie Butler, and I developed the PERMA-Profiler, a 23-item self-report measure. The measure includes three items capturing each of the six PERMAH components, and five additional items assessing negative emotions, loneliness,

and overall well-being. Through a series of 11 studies with nearly 39,000 participants, we developed and tested the psychometric properties of the measure, finding adequate model fit, internal and cross-time reliability, and evidence supporting the convergent and divergent validity of the factors (Butler & Kern, 2016).

Extending the original measure, I developed a workplace version that adjusted the context of the questions to the work context. To make the measure practically useful, Michelle McQuaid created an online version (see www.permahsurvey.com). Over time we have tested and refined the questions to reflect the workplace context better. Although a peer-reviewed paper testing the workplace version's psychometrics is lacking, we have found the measure to be practically useful.

A third measure focuses on late childhood and adolescence. In developing the measure, we were concerned about directly translating the PERMA model to younger ages. PERMA, as conceptualized by Seligman, is an outcome or state that we try to achieve. Further, some of the PERMA dimensions manifest differently in childhood. For instance, the ability to comprehend and find one's place in the world is still developing, such that older teenagers have a very different understanding of meaning than preadolescents. As such, we chose to focus on the process of living life well, choosing five positive psychological characteristics, which numerous longitudinal studies suggest make PERMAH more likely in adulthood: Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, and Happiness (EPOCH). We developed a 20-item measure that captures these five domains. Across the United States, Australian, and Chinese samples, the measure has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Kern et al., 2016, 2019; Zeng & Kern, 2019).

These measures each produce a score profile, with the PERMAH measures on a 0 to 10 scale and the EPOCH measure on a 1 to 5 scale. The advantage of the profile is that it allows people to see how they are functioning across multiple areas. Seligman (2018)

describes PERMA as a dashboard on a vehicle. How does one know whether their vehicle is functioning well or not? They might have a sense that something is wrong, but it is more helpful to have separate gauges that can quickly identify that the oil needs a top-up or the battery is dead. The profilers similarly provide a sense of how a person is functioning across a range of dimensions.

The measures are freely available for research and noncommercial purposes (www.peggykern.org/questionnaires.html). In practice, I find it useful to combine these measures with other questions to capture other domains of interest. For instance, I commonly combine the EPOCH measure with subscales from the Healthy Pathways Scales (Bevans et al., 2010) or the Kessler-6 measure of psychological distress (Kessler et al., 2003) to provide a broader understanding of how a young person is functioning, along with measures of socioeconomic status, demographics, and personality (although see Kern et al., 2020 for consideration of ethical concerns and challenges that can arise with assessing sensitive information).

These measures provide brief snapshots of well-being, but the dimensions may not all be relevant to the intended purpose. In such cases, I recommend using all of the questions within a dimension (e.g., the three meaning items in the PERMA-Profiler or the four connectedness questions in the EPOCH measure), removing unneeded dimensions. Further, the measures focus on general functioning, rather than functioning over a specific period. When studying change over time, it is necessary to adjust the questions to reflect the relevant time period of interest (e.g., changing "in general" to "in the past week").

The measures are descriptive, not prescriptive. There are no precise cutoffs as to what is low, average, or high functioning. Thresholds can lead to labels (e.g., a person is flourishing or not), suggesting a fixed state, when well-being is fluid, shifting based on our experiences, perceptions, and situations. Thresholds perpetuate a push toward constant

improvement, which should not necessarily be the goal. While it is generally preferable to score above the midpoint, it may be maladaptive to be a 10 out 10 on all dimensions all of the time. Instead, an individual might consider what is optimal for them, and aim to stay within their optimal zone. Different profiles will be best for different people, based on their values, interests, and experiences. For a highly social person, relationships may be particularly important. Another person might particularly value good physical health or high accomplishment. Others prefer a balance across the dimensions.

PERMAH in Practice

How can PERMAH practically be applied within schools? There is no one right approach or formula, as what is right depends upon the context and intentions of the school. PERMAH can be a useful way to help teachers and students develop well-being skills. Each pillar aligns with specific activities that support the pillar. Begin by choosing and focusing on one pillar. Get to know what the pillar means, consider some of the research and strategies that support that pillar. Table 1 provides some ideas to get started (see McQuaid and Kern [2017] for additional details and examples). Different activities will fit different people, so it is useful to experiment with different activities, seeing which activities work best for different students and staff.

Table 1

Example Activities for the Classroom that Support the PERMAH Pillars

Pillar	Strategy	Example Activities
Positive emotion	Promote positivity	Write down a list of small actions that bring a smile to your face and help you feel good. When you start to feel down, select something from the list that you can do to give yourself a pick-me-up.
	Decrease negativity	We are often our own worst critics. For a week, write down your thoughts, without editing. At the end of the week, read through your statements. How much was negative versus positive? Would you say those negative things to a friend? Are the negative beliefs really true? Challenge your thinking.

Pillar	Strategy	Example Activities
	Grow gratitude	Take a bowl and create scraps of paper. During the week, look for things that you can be grateful for, write it on the scrap and add the scrap to the bowl. At the end of the week, read through and appreciate the positive things that you experienced during the week.
Engagement	Discover and use your strengths	What are your talents and strengths? What energizes you and gives you a sense of life? What are your flaws and weaknesses? Complete a survey, such as the Values in Action (www.viacharacter.org) to help get to know your strengths. Then consider how you can use your strengths in everyday life, drawing on your strengths to bring out the best in yourself and others.
	Reduce distractions	How often do you and your students give full attention to things? Create a classroom environment that reduces distraction, creates a sense of calmness, and allows focus.
	Engage in mindful actions	Mindfulness involves being present in the moment, not dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Engaging in simple, mindful activities can help focus attention, helping students be grounded and centered. Explore a variety of ways to cultivate mindfulness in the classroom, such as taking a few minutes to breathe deeply, doing a rhythmic activity, or listening to a recorded meditation.
Relationships	Approach interactions with a strength lens	In your interactions with others, put on "strength goggles"—intentionally look for the strengths of others. Observe how the strength manifests. If you have the opportunity, share with the person the strength they demonstrated and why you valued it.
	Cultivate deep friendships	We need at least one good friend—someone who we can be real with, supports us, and cares about us. But good friends take time and commitment. Identify one or two people with whom you will commit to cultivating a deep friendship. Schedule regular times to connect. Listen deeply to them, be willing to be open and vulnerable with them, and readily forgive wrongs.
	Be available	Make yourself available to others. This may mean leaving your classroom/ office door open, showing up early or staying late from meetings, spending time in the lunchroom, or walking around the school and observing how people are going. Ask others how they are *really* going and be willing to listen if they are not ok.
Meaning	Find your story	Investigate your life like a journalist. What are the defining events in your life? What are your strengths and weaknesses? How did you get to where you are at today? Take time to write your story, celebrating the successes, mourning the failures, and considering what lessons you might have learned along the way.
	Make the mundane meaningful	Everyday tasks can seem meaningless—we do them because we should, but they deplete us. Create a meaning map. Take a piece of paper. On the left side, write down tasks that seem meaningless—you feel you have to do them, but they drain your energy. Draw an arrow to the right and write the purpose of the task or the outcome it helps achieve. Reflect on that purpose. If that feels unimportant, draw another arrow to the right, and ask again the purpose or potential outcomes of the task. Can you find a clear purpose for the task? Moving forward, spend more time on the things that have purpose, and limit the meaningless tasks.

Pillar	Strategy	Example Activities
	Gain perspective	We can get lost within the worries and activities of everyday life. Step away and spend time in nature. Sit on a beach and watch the waves, walk among forests, spend time in a garden, go to a dark place and see the stars. Be present in the moment, using your senses to notice all around you. Breathe deeply and acknowledge the much bigger world around you.
Accomplishment	Create a hope map	Take a sheet of paper horizontally and fold it into thirds. In the right column, write "Goals" and write down a goal you want to achieve over a specific time period. In the left column, write "Pathways" and list at least three actions that could help you to reach your goal. In the middle, write "Obstacles." For each pathway you listed, note obstacles or challenges you might encounter. At the bottom of the page, add the things you can do to maintain motivation, people who can support you, and ways you can celebrate your efforts.
	Take one small step	When things seem impossible, it is helpful to take one small step, and then another. Consider something you are trying to accomplish that seems overwhelming. What is a small step that you are willing to take? Write the step down, give it a go. Record how it went. Then take another step, step again. Every so often, look back at where you were—you might be surprised at how far you have come.
	Learn from failures	Think about a situation that went really wrong. What happened? Think through the details of the situation. What did you do? What were your actions? Do not judge what you did, simply write about your actions. What were the outcomes or costs of your actions? What did you learn from the situation, and what would you do differently in the future? By processing our failures, we can learn and improve.
Health	Sleep well	Good sleep is more likely to occur if we create the right conditions. Set clear bed and wake times. Try to maintain a consistent schedule, even on weekends. Begin winding down 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime, with cues that help the body relax, avoiding vigorous exercise, caffeine, and alcohol. Dim the lights, lower the temperature. If possible, turn off electronics. Keep a notepad by your bed. If your mind is spinning, write down what is on your mind, clearing your thoughts.
	Eat wisely	There is conflicting dietary advice about specific foods to eat or not eat. In general, some foods are healthier than others. When we feel stressed, high fat, sugary foods can be calming in the short-term, but not so good for how we feel and function. Proactively plan out your meals, making decisions before you are hungry and stressed. Identify healthy snacks that will fuel your mind during the day, avoiding the tendency to binge eat all of your calories in the evening.
	Move regularly	Humans are made to move. If you enjoy sport, working out at the gym, running, walking, yoga, etc., plan this into your diary, scheduling the time as if it was a class or meeting. Short bits of movement add up to have a big impact on how we feel and function.

Beyond drawing on the pillars to shape activities and interventions, some schools use

PERMAH as a guiding framework for embedding well-being within the school's culture.

This choice begins with determining whether the PERMAH model is appropriate to the

context of the school. To what extent does PERMAH align with these values and interests? Are all of the dimensions relevant? Are other dimensions missing? For example, schools might incorporate spirituality, strengths, and coping dimensions (see for instance Waters, 2019).

Second, consider how each dimension is specifically defined and what concepts are included within each dimension. Above, I defined how the dimension. Practically, schools have taken considerable liberty in identifying what concepts are relevant to the different dimensions.

Third, establish a well-being baseline. Use the freely available measures described above, along with other scales capturing important areas of functioning, considering patterns and trends across different year levels and classes. Measurement sends a message that well-being matters, and it helps identify where people are doing well, and areas that could benefit from additional focus. It also allows change, growth, and development to be tracked over time, pointing to what is helpful and what is a waste of time and resources.

Fourth, align activities with the pillars, identifying and communicating a clear purpose and intention for those activities. Carefully planned activities identify which skills are being developed, their underlying intentions, and communicate the purpose, rationale, and process to students. Activities should focus on quality rather than quantity, emphasizing pedagogical aspects (White & Kern, 2018).

Fifth, provide professional development, resources, and support for teachers. It is helpful for teachers to get to know the ideas underlying PERMAH, try activities in their own life, and consider what resonates with them (Norrish et al., 2013). Various resources and curricula supporting the PERMAH elements are readily available, through organizations such as the Positive Education Schools Association (http://www.pesa.edu.au/) and the education division of the International Positive Psychology Association (www.ippanetwork.org).

Sixth, encourage teachers to incorporate PERMAH into the taught and caught curriculum (White & Kern, 2018). The taught curriculum reflects explicit lessons, activities, and teachings on the PERMAH pillars. The caught curriculum reflects how PERMAH appears through the norms, practices, and culture of the classroom and school, including the language that teachers use, the school's appearance, and behaviors that are modeled by adults.

Finally, embed PERMAH within the strategies, policies, and structures of the school. These broader elements impact the extent to which PERMAH is simply a fad versus a more permanent part of the school's culture. Educators can commit to activities for a while, but only by embedding well-being within a school's culture will they be sustained beyond the tenure of a single person or across multiple years.

PERMAH in Perspective

Seligman's claims are straightforward. The model makes it possible to turn the abstract notion of well-being into a simple five or six dimensional framework, identifying specific focal areas. Still, the model has received some criticisms. Still, all models are imperfect (Box, 1976), and it is helpful to consider some strengths and weaknesses so that the model can be thoughtfully and purposefully informed.

A Compelling Acronym

From my observations, the PERMAH model appears to resonate well with people. The acronym is easy to remember. The dimensions resonate with many people's everyday experiences. Having positive emotions, interest in life, a sense of purpose, good relationships with others, achieving things—most people can connect with at least one of these domains. Indeed, self-determination theory suggests that we have a basic need for relatedness (experienced through positive relationships) and competence (leading to a sense of accomplishment), and autonomy underlies meaningful and engagement pursuits (Deci &

Ryan, 2000).

The included dimensions arise from the theorists' working model of the world, which is influenced by their own experiences, perspectives, and values in life. Seligman was trained in clinical psychology; thus, his model primarily focuses on psychological dimensions. He was close friends with Chris Peterson, who consistently emphasized the importance of social Relationships, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who illustrated the value of flow (Engagement), and Seligman greatly values objective Accomplishment. My background is in health psychology, and too often, there is an unhelpful split between psychological and physical dimensions of functioning, and so I include the Health in the model. People also identify the importance of a spiritual dimension. Seligman includes spirituality within Meaning, but arguably it could be a missing dimension.

Flourishing and Permaculture

Seligman suggests that the five PERMA elements represent the flourishing life, which is a useful choice of words, providing a compelling visual representation of the good life. The word flourish arises from the Latin word flor, or "flower." One can look at a garden and identify flourishing plants and flowers versus those that are struggling to survive. It is a general universal hope that children and families are vibrant and alive, not dying and decrepit.

There is also a fascinating parallel with the acronym itself. Permaculture refers to sustainable ecological approaches toward agriculture (and culture more generally), which aim to work with the land rather than against it, creating a sustainable ecosystem that is respectful of both the natural and social influences upon the land (Mollison, 1991). Seligman primarily applies PERMA at the individual level. Permaculture suggests that achieving well-being for an individual at the expense of other people or the environment is not flourishing, as it is not sustainable. Especially within schools, a system informed perspective is necessary, striving

for optimal functioning not only at the individual level but also at the human social system level (Kern et al., 2019). We need to consider the system as a whole—people, environment, and other aspects—that make our classrooms and schools more or less physically, mentally, socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable.

Statistically Problematic but Practically Useful

One of the main critiques of the PERMA model is that Seligman claims that its five elements are distinctive, and that people choose to pursue each dimension as a valuable outcome in and of itself, not as a means for achieving another dimension. For instance, flow (which represents high levels of psychological engagement) is often reported as devoid of emotion or even negative during the experience, even as it is retrospectively perceived as positive (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The pursuit of accomplishment can be a stressful, intense, and lonely journey. A meaningful life is not necessarily a happy life (Baumeister et al., 2013).

However, evidence of the distinctiveness of the five dimensions is mixed at best. While confirmatory analyses across multiple populations and languages repeatedly support the five- factors, exploratory analyses do not. Analyses typically result in one or two factors (e.g., Goodman et al., 2018), with an additional factor appearing if health is included. This is perhaps not surprising. The elements are mutually supportive and interconnected. Activities are often pursued because they are meaningful. Positive interactions with others evoke positive emotions. Many people find a sense of meaning in their relationships with other people. When one feels and function well in one area, they often feel and function well in other areas (Kern et al., 2019). As such, the factors tend to be strongly correlated with one another. Indeed, Seligman (2011) notes that when one feels joy, they have a sense of purpose, and feel proud about accomplishments with other people, suggesting that these dimensions are interconnected even at the definitional level. Based on many studies across multiple ways

of collecting data, I sense that from a statistical lens, any argument of the distinctiveness of the factors is tenable at best.

Still, the PERMAH model is practically useful, offering concrete strategies for building well-being, which are more useful than focusing on the more global, abstract well-being construct (Kern et al., 2014; McQuaid & Kern, 2017; Seligman, 2018). This perspective should make sense to an educator. An average grade point average hides the specific profile of the student. One student might excel in math and struggle in literacy, while another earns top marks in art and music but achieves poorly in science and math. A parallel appears with the VIA character strengths inventory (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The VIA proposes six different "virtues," which translate into 24 strengths, measured by a range of items. Factor analytic models find that items cluster into three to five factors, which differ from the proposed six virtues (McGrath, 2015). However, the VIA was never intended to be a statistical model (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It was assumed that the strengths and virtues were correlated and complementary. While statistically the model is questionable, practically VIA is useful. Similarly, PERMAH may not be a definitive well-being model, but it can still be a useful model.

Conclusion

There is growing recognition that there is a need to focus on well-being in schools. Nevertheless, well-being is abstract, value-laden, and less tangible than academic outcomes. Well-being frameworks can be useful for cutting through complexity. To that end, PERMAH has emerged over the past decade as a useful model. The pillars are accessible to people, reflecting many lay notions of well-being. The pillars can be measured, and various practices can help build and support each pillar. As a whole, PERMAH contributes to educators' ability to incorporate Positive Psychology within schools, supporting the well-being of students, staff, leaders, and others within the educational community.

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