Review article

Introducing 'holistic psychology' for life qualities: A theoretical model for consideration

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A B S T R A C T

Positive psychology has attracted extensive interests from educators, researchers, and organizations. Many would recognize the work of Martin Seligman (e.g., Seligman, 2010) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (e.g.,Csíkszentmihályi, 2014b). In its summarized form, positive psychology is concerned with a person's state of flourishing, his/her perceived sense of resilience and inner virtues, and a desire to have positive outlooks in life. Positive psychology is significant, forming the basis for other research inquiries – for example, the advancement of the *theory of optimization* (Fraillon, 2004; Phan, Ngu and Yeung, 2019b). Considering this evidence, we develop and offer an alternative theoretical model for discussion, which we termed as 'holistic psychology'.

Holistic psychology, the main focus of this theoretical-conceptual article, is significant for its emphasis on the existence of life experiences, which may exist on a continuous spectrum without distinction between negativity and positivity. This testament, we contend, reflects the importance of inclusiveness and that one could consider maladaptive and negative life experiences (e.g., school disengagement) as sources of vitality, motivating and governing a person to seek for improvement, resulting in a state of flourishing. Our conceptualization in this sense is philosophical, grounded in the main premise of optimization (Fraillon, 2004; Phan et al., 2019b) in which we propose a key tenet for consideration – namely, the 'transformation' of negative life experiences into a source of 'energy' (i.e., denoted as E) for subsequent enactment. In detail for discussion, our proposed model of holistic psychology consists of four major stages: (i) personal reflection, (ii) the sub-process of transformation, (iii) enactment of energy, and (iv) arousal and sustaining an improved state of functioning.

1. Introduction

Positive psychology, an important paradigm in the field of psychology, focuses on the proactivity of human behavior, motivation, and personal outlook in life. The operational nature of positive psychology, situated within the context of schooling has been extensively studied (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014a; 2014b; Gable and Haidt, 2005; Kern et al., 2019; Phan and Ngu, 2017a). One notable inquiry, for example, has involved the use of positive psychology tenets to promote students' academic and non-academic well-being (ACU and Erebus International, 2008). Indeed, the perception of and the applicability of positive psychology is similar to that of *motivational beliefs*, which place strong emphasis on students' proactive engagement, enriched learning experiences, and improved performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

One major consideration of positive psychology is that its focus has been on the 'positivities' of life – for example, how can I improve and flourish in mathematics? In relation to academic learning, the paradigm of positive psychology considers the promotion and enhancement of different types of adaptive states of functioning (e.g., task engagement). Complexity of school, in this case, contends different academic, school-based, and life experiences for students – in this analysis, daily life experiences may be both positive and negative: some students with unfavorable personal circumstances may have low motivational beliefs, whereas other students may exceed their teachers' academic expectations. In a similar vein, of course, there is evidence that bullying (Kraft and Wang, 2009; Lazuras et al., 2017), as a defensive measure for some students, would give rise to school withdrawal, anti-social engagement, etc.

A duty of care would indicate that we need to foster positive schooling experiences and, in contrast, address maladaptive experiences. The use of positive psychology, for example, is advantageous and may instill motivational beliefs and/or facilitate and strengthen students' subjective well-being (e.g., academic) experiences at school (ACU and Erebus International, 2008; Fraillon, 2004). Similarly, of course, educators may

capitalize on positive psychology tenets to help develop different types of school-based and in-class preventive measures that could deter students' inclination towards negativities (e.g., school disengagement and/or low academic performance experiences). Drawing from this premise, we consider the expansion of positive psychology (Kern et al., 2019; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) with our own proposition of an advanced model, which we termed as 'holistic psychology'. In the subsequent sections of this article, we review the paradigm of positive psychology and from this examination, detail the proposed tenets of holistic psychology for consideration.

2. Positive psychology: an introduction

Positive psychology is related to the study of internal and external life conditions and personal experiences, which may reflect a state of optimal functioning (Gable and Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology (Gable and Haidt, 2005), arising from Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi and Peterson's work, focuses on the theoretical understanding of psychological well-being and optimal functioning of people's thoughts and behaviors (Quick, 2008). So, in this analysis, what is optimal functioning? Keyes (2005) postulates a *continuum of psychological well-being*: on one end of the continuum is the experience of languishing, or negativity, and on the other end of the continuum is the experience of flourishing, or optimal functioning, reflecting a perceived sense of positivity. Phan, Ngu, and Yeung (2017), in contrast, conceptualize optimal functioning as being the maximization of a person's competence – that is, for example, what is the best that a person can actually do, at present, in say mathematics?

Overview of extensive research developments acknowledges Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) with coining of the term 'positive psychology'. According to Sheldon et al. (2000), positive psychology is defined as being:

> ".... the scientific study of optimal human functioning. It aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive. The positive psychology movement represents a new commitment on the part of research psychologists to focus attention upon the resources of psychological health, thereby going beyond prior emphases upon disease and disorder" (Section 2).

Pawalkski's (2016) recent comprehensive review of positive psychology is interesting for its detailed analysis and examination of the complex nature of positive psychology. According to the author, the positive characteristics or qualities of this paradigm include, in particular, the importance of personal growth, mastery, drive, character building, human strength, and family and civic virtue (Phan, Ngu, Chen, Wu, Shi, Shih, Wang and Lin, 2020b). By the same token, there are a number of attributes that are negative or maladaptive – pessimism, helplessness, underperformance, and procrastination. This testament contends then, that there are two contrasting positions, or ends, within the paradigm of positive psychology: the encouragement, promotion, and enhancement of positive life experiences (e.g., a student who is doing well, academically, at school in different subject areas) *versus* the prevention and remedy of negative experiences and life conditions (e.g., personal experience of depression). From this analysis, we can surmise and highlight that there is a dichotomy between enhancement and prevention of life conditions and experiences, which may in turn govern a person's action and behavior differently.

In essence, we contend that positive psychology (Seligman, 1999; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) capitalizes on positive attributes (e.g., altruism, love, forgiveness, compassion) for personal development and, by contrast, considers the prevention and resolution of negative life conditions (e.g., a temporary state of pessimism, which arises from recent academic failures). Over the years, educators, researchers, stakeholders, and organizations have made concerted attempts to design and develop different educational and social programs that may reflect the theories of positive psychology. Interestingly, in the area of human motivation (Franken, 2007), for example, Maslow's (1954, 1962) *humanistic theory* considers the importance of accomplishment of different types of psychological needs (e.g., personal satisfaction). In a similar vein, in our recent conceptual analysis article, we proposed a potential association between the concept of mindfulness and the paradigm of positive psychology (Phan et al., 2020b). In this analysis, we argued that our proposed *multifaceted model of mindfulness*, taking into consideration both Eastern and Western epistemologies, philosophical beliefs, and rationales (e.g., the concept of *enlightenment*) (Phan et al., 2020b) would serve to stimulate, promote, and cultivate different types of life qualities (e.g., the cultivation of a perceived sense of spirituality).

Indeed, existing literatures indicate that it is somewhat difficult for researchers to provide a coherent or conclusive definition of positive psychology, given that this paradigm is complex and quite diverse in scope and coverage (Donaldson et al., 2015). On this basis, a number of researchers have proposed distinctive but yet comparable theoretical models to explain and/or to reflect the tenets of positive psychology – for example: Seligman's (2010) *PERMA* model (i.e., Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment), Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) *flow theory*, Keyes' (2002) *continuum of psychological wellbeing*, Peterson and Seligman's (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues Framework*, and Phan et al.'s (2017) *Framework of Achievement Bests*. In brief, as a point of consolidation, we could define and say that positive psychology is related to contentment and inner satisfaction of a person's past (e.g., achievement), optimism and hope for future experiences (e.g., positive emotions), and flow and happiness in the present moment (e.g., engagement and meaning).

Positive psychology, as conceptualized by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), is the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, a Greek term that connotes the meaning of welfare or a good life. The etymology of the term has its foundation in the Aristotelian philosophy of the relationship between human virtue and excellence. Modern reference to this term is a "state of well-being". This reference, indeed, intricately links the study of positive psychology to the concept of well-being. Similar to positive psychology, well-being is complex in definition and scope. From their comprehensive review of this topical theme, the Australian Catholic University defines well-being as "… a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and relationships and experiences" (ACU and Erebus International, 2008, p. 5). In school contexts, for example, subjective well-being may entail a student's emotional well-being (e.g., personal contentment) and his/her social relatedness with others.

Existing literatures indicate well-being is a multi-dimensional construct that may include the subjective element of happiness, physical health, inner satisfaction, purpose, and positive social relationships (ACU and Erebus International, 2008; Fraillon, 2004; Sanghani et al., 2013; Van Damme, De Fraine, Van Landeghem, Opdenakker and Onghena, 2002). In his book, titled *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman (2010) presented three fields of investigation that may explain and account for the enrichment of excellent mental health and well-being. He outlined these as:

1. *Pleasant life* – the pursuit of happiness and a focus on positive emotions (e.g., happiness).
2. *Meaningful life* – concerns the engagement and immersion of an individual within a meaningful activity. It also is applicable to the psychological benefits of engagement and connection to group and organizations.
3. *Good life* – how individuals derive pleasure through engagement in pursuits that are external to themselves or serves a greater good – for example, family, religion, community, country.

With reference to the use of positive psychology, Keyes (2002) describes a state of "complete well-being and mental health" as *flourishing*. Keyes (2002) highlighted that no existing measures are evident that could satisfactorily diagnose or study the presence of complete mental

health. Simply, according to Keyes (2007), "the absence of mental illness is the presence of mental health" (p. 5). Keyes and Lopez (2002) proposed a model for a state of complete mental health, whereby mental illness and well-being are two separate entities on a transecting spectrum. Individuals with high subjective well-being and low mental illness symptoms are considered to flourish and/or to possess a complete state of mental health. Recently, aligning to the tenets of positive psychology, Huppert and So (2013) suggest that the notion of 'flourishing' may, in fact, reflect 10 comparable features, namely: "vitality, self-esteem, resilience, positive relationships, positive emotions, optimism, meaning, engagement, emotional stability, and competence" (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor and Robinson, 2013). Interestingly, Phan and his colleagues defined flourishing somewhat differently, suggesting that it is the quantitative (and qualitative) difference, denoted as Δ, between two *levels of best practice*: *realistic achievement best* (L_1) (i.e., defined as what a person is capable of at the present time, for example: I am capable of solving equations with one unknown) and *optimal achievement best* (L_2) (i.e., defined as a person's testament and indication of his/her maximum capability) (Phan, Ngu and McQueen, 2020c; Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b)).

The proliferation of research, articles, and books on positive psychology has meant that the field has expanded to cover a broad range of definitions. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) conceptualized positive psychology as made up of three fields of study:

1. The importance of the valuing of subjective experience (e.g., subjective well-being, happiness).
2. Positive individual traits that a person may possess (e.g., character virtues).
3. The importance of civic values, which different types of institutions may support (e.g., positive organizations).

The study of positive psychology has often been misconstrued and criticized for its strong emphasis on positive life conditions and experiences, and the masking of negativities (Held, 2004; Lazarus, 2003). Linley, Joseph, Harrington, and Wood (2006) contend that this claim and misinterpretation is made on the unfounded belief that positive psychologies, which are antithesis to traditional pathological approaches are more effective. A deep understanding of positive psychology reveals an acknowledgement of the entirety of human experience in the hope of extrapolating the optimal conditions for self-fulfillment and flourishing. Having said this, we also need to put into perspective that life is often consumed by negative experiences, pessimistic outlooks, and maladaptive functioning. Hence, drawing from this understanding, later in the article, we present our own conceptualization of theoretical model that embraces and amalgamates both positivities and negativities.

2.1. The importance of positive education

Positive Education, coined by Seligman (2010), emerged as the 'practical application' of positive psychology in educational contexts. In other words, from a school-based perspective, how can educators capitalize on positive psychology to inform their teaching practices, professional growth, and students' learning experiences? The practical application of positive psychology theories (Gable and Haidt, 2005; Seligman, 1999; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000), or any theory for that matter, requires some form of conceptualization and design of a program or an in-class intervention for implementation, which then could improve and enhance students' learning and well-being experiences. For example, in our recent publication (Phan et al., 2020b), we recommended the use of mindfulness (e.g., Buddhist mindfulness), reflecting the paradigm of positive psychology qualities to facilitate students' academic learning and well-being experiences. Buddhist meditation, in this analysis, may give rise to a feeling of serenity and perceived sense of peace, resulting in .a student being able to think more clearly and to have positive life outlooks.

With reference to the study of subjective well-being, Waters et al. (2017) contend that this development in personal experience, emotion, and feeling would make a profound impact on different types of adaptive outcomes (e.g., proactive social relationship at school: Phan, Ngu, Wang, Shih, Shi and Lin, 2019a; Raufelder et al., 2013; Umberson and Montez, 2010). For example, according to the authors, a low level of well-being would closely associate with a perceived sense of pessimism, a weakening in academic performance, a high level of anxiety, etc. A recent correlational research by Phan, Ngu, and Alrashidi (2016a) substantiated Waters et al.'s (2017) claim, showing evidence of the direct effect of well-being on student engagement (β = .53, p < .001) and academic achievement (β = .22, p < .05).

Positive education, indeed, highlights a close association between student well-being and academic accomplishment in achievement contexts. The term positive education, as we discussed, is related to the transformation of theoretical understanding and empirical research findings into applied practice. This consideration (e.g., the application of positive psychology theories to assist a student's academic growth in mathematics) is similar to motivational research, which explores the practicality of motivational beliefs on different types of adaptive outcomes (e.g., academic buoyancy: Collie et al., 2015). Recently, reflecting positive psychology tenets, Phan et al. (2017) advanced the study of optimal functioning by proposing the *theory of optimization*. Phan et al.'s (2017) theorization, in this case, focuses on the potential for a person to reach his/her optimal achievement, via means of different types of educational (e.g., an effective instructional design: Ngu et al., 2014), psychological (e.g., the operational nature of personal belief of efficacy: Bandura, 1997), and psychosocial (e.g., the impact of the home environment: Daulta, 2008) agencies. Importantly, one hallmark of Phan et al.'s (2017) theory of optimization is that successful optimal functioning (e.g., optimal cognitive functioning) reflects a state of flourishing (Phan et al., 2019b).

Aside from education institutions' use of Seligman's (2010) PERMA model of positive psychology, other researchers and educators have focused on design and development of practical frameworks for in-class implementation. *Visible Well-Being*, developed by Lea Waters, is an appropriation of Hattie's *Visible Learning* approach. Hattie's (2009) seminal work proposed that to affect change, teachers need to be aware of the impact that they are making. Waters et al. (2017) argue that the missing element from Visible Learning is, indeed, the domain of subjective well-being. Waters et al. (2017) present the *Positive Functioning Framework* as the element to fill this gap. The Positive Functioning Framework is the result of a meta-synthesis of 18,400 studies, spanning the fields of psychology, education, health, neuroscience, and sociology (Rusk and Waters, 2015). The meta-synthesis, in this case, identified six comparable domains that may account for the psychological well-being of students (Rusk and Waters, 2015):

1. Attention and Awareness
2. Emotional Management
3. Comprehension and Coping
4. Goals and Habits
5. Virtues
6. Relationships

A core tenet of positive education is the prevention of anxiety and depression through the focus on resilience and optimism. Kern, Waters, Adler, and White (2015) empirically assessed Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework and the well-being of 516 Australian male students (age 13–18) in a secondary school. They found significant correlations between the multidimensionality of well-being and the PERMA framework, which overall provided guidance for positive education. Other research studies, likewise, have focused on and attested to the positive effects of hope (e.g., Adelabu, 2008; Bernardo, 2015; Phan, 2013; Rand et al., 2011) and academic optimism (e.g., Bressler et al., 2010; Phan, 2016; Wu, 2013) on academic performance.

Positive psychology is advocated not only as a preventative measure of negative life conditions and experiences (e.g., weakening in academic performance) but also as a potential strategy, which in this case could facilitate students' psychological well-being and academic engagement experiences (Alford and White, 2015). Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) and other researchers (e.g., Cohen, 2006; Gillham et al., 2011) contend that schools and formal institutions play a pivotal role in the support and shaping of children's and adolescents' psychological well-being. Aside from this recognition, Norrish et al. (2013) also believe that schools have the capacity to assist in the support of key developmental skills, such as resilience and environmental adaptation. Moreover, Seligman et al. (2009) emphasize the significant power of positive education to improve and foster academic learning and performance outcomes, via means of using different pathways, opportunities, and/or skills that could stimulate positive emotions (e.g., personal contention, satisfaction) and psychological well-being experiences. Bernard and Walton (2011) concur with this position by highlighting the positive correlation between positive education's promotion of life qualities (e.g., proactive social relationship at school: Phan et al., 2019a; Raufelder et al., 2013; Umberson and Montez, 2010) and school-related outcomes (e.g., academic performance).

Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, and Chin's (2014) seminal review regarding the use of positive education in an Australian school, Geelong Grammar, noted its potential effectiveness for wider usage. Having said this, however, Vella-Brodrick et al.'s (August, 2014) evaluation does recognize a need for further research development as empirical evidence, at this stage, is still in its infancy. In a similar vein, for potential advancement in future research, we contend that many research studies focusing on the effectiveness of positive education have used self-reported scales. This methodological approach is limited, to a certain degree, as it does not yield comprehensive information into the underlying processes of the delivery of positive education (e.g., the causal effect of positive education).

Waters (2011), in a recent publication, reviewed the effectiveness of 12 world-wide positive education programs (Note: $N = 3,400$ students). The author found benefits for such programs, which included the improvement of different types of well-being, self-esteem, self-acceptance, relationship satisfaction, and optimism. This line of evidence, from our point of view, affirms the significance of positive education and, more importantly, provides empirical support for the practical relevance of this theoretical orientation. One possibility, in this analysis, is to consider pathways and means that place emphasis on individual and shared happiness. For example, a school-based meditation program that seeks to instill appreciation of mindfulness (Hanh, 1976; Nyanaponika Thera, 1972; Phan, Wang, Shih, Shi, Lin and Ngu, 2019d; Tang et al., 2007; Viarengo, 1998) may, in a similar vein, encourage a state of calm, peace, and happiness.

3. The complexity of schooling experiences

Life, in general, is in a constant flux of continuous changes, both positive and negative. In school contexts, we do not expect students to perform at their optimal best all the time. In this analysis, the complexity of school settings gives rise to different contextual influences, which would affect students' daily functioning, both positive and negative. For example, the provision of a caring social environment conveys messages of care, emotional support, and social security, resulting in quality learning experiences and improved academic performances (Roorda et al., 2011). In a similar vein, appropriate pedagogical approaches that teachers use also help to improve students' academic learning of different subject matters (Ngu and Yeung, 2013; Ngu et al., 2014). Having said this, however, we acknowledge that some students, or many students, do not always have the flexibility, leeway, opportunity, etc., to flourish and experience enriched academic learning experiences.

It is evident that school also espouses non-favorable social and learning experiences. Some minority students, for example, may find adjustment to a new school environment difficult, consequently because of differing cultural values, customary practices, and/or social norms (Brown and Jones, 2004; Collins, 2005; Sabri, 2012; St. Louis and Liem, 2005). It is more than a possibility, in this case, for minority students to experience and/or to perceive racism, bullying, and social isolation (Lazuras et al., 2017; Lee and Shin, 2017; Wadian et al., 2016). With reference to the general student population at large, some students may experience difficulties with academic learning of some disciplinary areas (e.g., mathematics), consequently because of limited prior knowledge, lack of interest, and/or little perceived task value (Eccles, 2005; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). These examples, academic and non-academic, in general, underline the complexity of students' daily experiences in school and classroom settings.

In terms of society at large, there are also disadvantages such as limited funding, poor physical infrastructures, staff recruitment, neighborhood location and reputation, etc., which may serve to impede the enrichment of students' schooling experiences (Becker and Luthar, 2002; Heckman, 2006; Odgers et al., 2009). As such, some students may not have the advantage and favorable position to flourish in their academic studies. In this analysis, it would be unrealistic to expect comparable standards in terms of learning experiences, motivational beliefs, and/or subjective well-being for students who attend these schools. Academically and socially, some students may exhibit detrimental effects, consequently as a result of negative schooling experiences, such as pessimism (El-Anzi, 2005; Harpaz-Itay and Kaniel, 2012; Peterson et al., 1988) and helplessness (Gazelle and Druhen, 2009; Phan, 2010; Stipek and Kowalski, 1989).

In general, school settings impart and espouse different academic and sociocultural influences, which may yield both positive and negative personal experiences. It is a central feat of the schooling process for educators to consider the following: (i) make a concerted effort to prevent the continuation of maladaptive experiences (e.g., a student's sense of helplessness because of social isolation), and (ii) to encourage, promote, and facilitate positive experiences (e.g., a student's engagement of mastery and enjoyment of Chemistry). This consideration may involve, from our discussion so far, the use of positive psychology theories (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) to address the dichotomy between positivities and negativities. For example, in the context of schooling, we could focus on developing pathways, opportunities, school-based programs (e.g., a mentoring program), in-class strategies (e.g., an effective instructional design), etc. to deter the continuation of maladaptive experiences, or to foster positive experiences.

Aside from positive psychology, it is also possible for us to consider the use of *behaviorism* (Watson, 1924; Wiest, 1967) to negate maladaptive experiences and, likewise, to foster positive behaviors. In school settings, punishments (e.g., taking something that is pleasant away from a learner) are quite effective in helping to suppress certain negative and undesirable behaviors. Taking something that is pleasant away from a student (e.g., preventing the student from soccer training), for example, may discourage and prevent him/her from misbehaving. By all account, regardless of their effectiveness, punishments are unpleasant and may yield further detrimental consequences – for example, the use of in-class punishment could result in student withdraw, perceived feeling of stigmatization, and a sense of demotivation.

In contrast, of course, positive reinforcements such as in-class social recognition and prizes may serve to facilitate and motivate a student to strive for continuing success in mathematics. Positive reinforcements (e.g., providing effort feedback: Schunk, 1982, 1983) also serve to strengthen preferred desirable behaviors, such as strengthening students' personal belief of efficacy for academic learning. As part of the assessment process (Howell, 2014; Readman and Allen, 2013), prizes and other types of rewards (e.g., social recognition in class) could indeed encourage students to strive for educational successes. Indeed, from this analysis, it would appear that reinforcements are more potent in their explanatory power to foster desirable outcomes (e.g., improve academic

performance) than teachers' use of punishments, which instead would focus on the weakening of certain negative behaviors (e.g., misbehavior).

In sum, the aforementioned discussion underlines the complexity of school and the schooling process. On a daily basis and at any moment in time, a student may be subject to different sociocultural influences, which would guide and govern his/her motivation, behavior, and learning pattern. Personal experience, cognitive maturity, and self-autonomy, in this sense, may help students to focus on positive schooling experiences, and to purposively choose to avoid negative experiences. It is also advantageous, of course, for teachers to assist by capitalizing on the effective nature of positive psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014a; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2009). Our premise for development, as detailed next, relates to an alternative theoretical model that we term as 'holistic psychology'.

4. Conceptualization of the paradigm of 'holistic psychology'

In the preceding section, we made a concerted effort to highlight the complexity of students' schooling experiences, which closely align with general life experiences, encompassing both positives and negatives. This testament, interestingly, coincides with Pawelski's (2016) theoretical review and places emphasis on the complex nature of positive psychology, especially in terms of its scope and coverage. For example, relatively complex in scope, the work of Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi (2000) details the emphasis of positive psychology: "to prevent [normal people] from developing pathologies" and, likewise, in the "promotion of human flourishing" (Pawelski, 2016, p. 341). As a point of summary, Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi (2000) surmise the following: "The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (p. 5). In this sense, according to the authors, "[the field of positive psychology] is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best" (p. 7).

Pawelski's (2016) theoretical review, from our point of view, is significant for its critique and examination of one interesting question: *how do we reconcile the dichotomy between negativities and positivities?* Are they bipolar and, more importantly, is there a neutral point, denoted as say '0', which would separate the two valences? In a similar vein, there are some other imperative related questions that Pawelski (2016) raises – namely: "is the positive just the absence of the negative?, is the negative just the absence of the positive?, and are the two independently definable dimensions?" (p. 433). We commend Pawelski (2016) for his insightful and critical examination of this important tenet[1], which we advance further in this article. One line of inquiry that is of distinction is whether positive psychology, as a theoretical orientation, is indicative of its total focus and/or, alternatively, whether there is some form of deficiency that would require clarification and further modification. Our critique of this matter, resulting from Pawelski's (2016) writing is that the term 'positive' in itself contentious at best. Why is this the case?.

Our reservation with the coining of 'positive psychology', despite Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi's (2000) detailed rationale and Pawelski's (2016) critique, is that this term is somewhat 'non-inclusive' and may geared solely towards the fulfilment of positive human functioning (Phan et al., 2020b). In this analysis, our aim is to conceptualize an alternative nomenclature that could be perceived as being more inclusive. In addition to a change in nomenclature, we want to consider a conceptualization that would address the 'demarcation' between positive valence and

negative valence (Pawelski, 2016). In other words, is it plausible for us to argue that life experiences simply exist on a seamless spectrum by which there is no demarcation between positive and negative? The main aim then, from our consideration, is that we use an alternative form of positive psychology to promote and encourage optimal best experiences in life.

We propose an alternative nomenclature, which we term as *holistic psychology*. The term holistic psychology, for us, is more encompassing, emphasizing the importance of totality of personal experiences in life. Reference to the term holistic psychology, from our rationalization, is poignant as it acknowledges the complexity of different life experiences that exist on a continuous spectrum. Importantly, however, we contend that our proposition of holistic psychology does not place emphasis on a neutral point of reference, differentiating between positive life experiences and negative life experiences. Figure 1 shows visually our conceptualization of holistic psychology, which we examine in detail in the subsequent sections of this article.

4.1. Introducing holistic psychology

Before we commence with our examination of the four major steps involved in the proposed model of holistic psychology, it is sufficed to briefly describe its visual depiction. Pawelski's (2016) critique of the nature of both positive (e.g., optimism) and negative (e.g., pessimism) life experiences and the potential point of neutrality, which would act as a dividing line has assisted us in our conceptualization. Our interest in the development of the *theory of optimization* (Fraillon, 2004; Phan et al., 2017, 2019a; Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b)), likewise, has assisted us in this conceptualization of holistic psychology. Foremost in this analysis of our proposition, with reference to Phan et al.'s (2019b) theory of optimization, is that there is a seamless spectrum of personal life experiences and that, in particular:

- There is no specific reference *point of neutrality* (e.g., '0') (Pawelski, 2016) and that, specifically, life experiences, regardless of perceived negative or positive, exist on a continuous spectrum with two key points:
  - i. L_1 at T_1.
  - ii. L_2 at T_2.
- This stipulation considers 'negative' life experiences (e.g., pessimism) as a point of origin (i.e., T_1), denoted as L_1, by which a person would seek to move on and improve over time (i.e., L_2). Why is this the case? We argue that ultimately, the main emphasis of positive psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014a; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) and our replacement, holistic psychology, is to encourage and foster positive qualities in life. By placing a reference point of neutrality, we are connoting there are two main possibilities when, in fact, this is not or should not be the case: $N > P$ *versus* $P > N$ (N = negativity and P = positivity). Indeed, it is more poignant for us to consider that life is in a constant flux of change and is always evolving, morphing in with the complexity of life trajectories.
- *Energy* is the core engine, or driving force, of the underlying mechanism of holistic psychology. This postulation largely incorporates the recent revision of the optimization theory (Phan et al., 2019b, 2020c), which incorporates the concept of 'energy' where an adequate level would act to optimize a person's state of functioning.
- From our postulation, a level of energy is needed to motivate and optimize a person's internal state of functioning to progress from L_1 at T_1 to L_2 at T_2. In this analysis, the proposed model of holistic psychology acknowledges the significance and relatedness of negative life experiences (e.g., school disengagement: Henry et al., 2012; Liem et al., 2008) and their 'transformation', which would then govern, direct, and motivate a person to seek positive qualities in life.
- There are four sequential steps that underline the underlying mechanism of holistic psychology, namely: (i) *Identification,* (ii) *Contemplation,* (ii) *Inner strength,* and (iv) *Onset and continuation of improved*
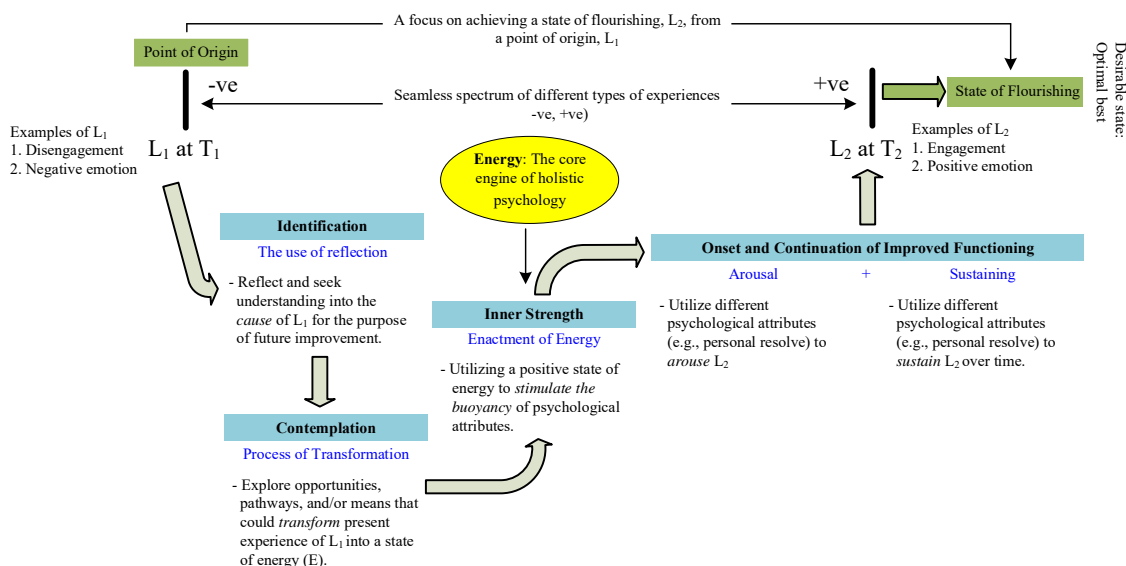
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[1] We advise and recommend readers to consult Pawelski (2016) article for in-depth analysis of the tenets of positive psychology. The article, titled "Defining the 'positive' in positive psychology: Part I. A descriptive analysis", provides a thorough examination of the nature of positive psychology – for example, the meaning of positives and negatives.

Figure 1. Conceptualization of the operational nature of holistic psychology.

functioning. From its visual depiction, the operational nature of holistic psychology, reflecting the potent effect of energy would result in and perpetuate a person's state of flourishing

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Step 1: The Importance of Identification

Step 1, termed as 'Reflection', is concerned with a person's individual reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987), seeking understanding into the *cause* of L_1 for the purpose of improvement. Referring to our previous example, a student may take some time to reflect and consider what are some of the causes that could have accounted for his/her experience of L_1 (e.g., school disengagement) – for example, one cause of school disengagement could be a student's subject to bullying and, likewise, another cause could be the student's continuing academic failures at school. Emphasis from this personal reflection is for a student to understand and appreciate his/her experience of L_1 with the main premise to improve further. It is pertinent to indicate then, that Step 1 is not related to retribution but rather on personal development and future improvement.

Personal reflection is complex and, in this case, may involve us using different strategies (Schön, 1983, 1987). In the context of the present proposition, a reflective strategy may consist of the posing of a number of notable questions by which a student contemplates for reflection – namely: "Where did I go wrong?", "Why am I feeling like this?", "What do I want to do next?", "Who can I confide in?", "Where do I go to seek assistance for improvement?", and "Am I prepared to learn and improve?" We contend that these reflective questions establish grounding for the student to proactively seek answers and understanding towards his/her present state of functioning (e.g., a state of disengagement). In this case, for example, the student may reflect and query as to why he/she is feeling disengaged – this, indeed, may clarify the cause of his/her state of school disengagement. Further to this is the issue of whether the student is prepared to change and improve for the better – am I prepared to learn and improve?

Seeking to understand the cause of experience of L_1 is not an easy feat. To achieve this accomplishment, it is important for a person to take the initiative to reflect and to be proactive in his/her quest to seek reasons for the experience of L_1. In a similar vein, there is impetus for individuals to show willingness to rectify and improve on from L_1. This mentioning is poignant, as it reflects realistic judgment, personal resolve, and self-efficacy to seek assistance from others to delve into the nature of experience of L_1. Importantly, of course, this initial step is integral towards the transformation of experience of L_1 into something that is more positive in nature. One possible mistake that students often make is their choosing to

disregard L_1 for various reasons – for example, embarrassment, a perceived sense of helplessness, complacency, and demotivational beliefs. From our proposition then, this step towards confronting the experience of L_1 is testament towards a person's inner desire to seek resolution and improvement.

Within the context of schooling, how would a student achieve Step 1 – that is, to be able to reflect on past and existing learning and non-learning experiences for the purpose of improvement? A perceived sense of autonomy is paramount as it relates to the student's willingness to seek answers that could account for his/her experience of L_1. Guidance via means of appropriate instructions (Ngu et al., 2018; Ngu et al., 2014) and/or encouraging feedback, in this instance, would be sufficed to initiate the student's intention to seek understanding to the cause of his/her negativity. Aside from personal guidance, it is also a plausibility to consider the use of direct explanation to help elucidate the nature of L_1. For example, with regard to the example of school disengagement (i.e., L_1), a teacher could explain to the student why attending school is important (e.g., school is important for later life purposes). From this description, we contend that direct input from a teacher, a principal, and/or relevant others is a source of inspiration and motivation, which indeed would facilitate the success of Step 1.

Step 2: Contemplation

Step 2, termed as 'Contemplation', is concerned with the provision of opportunities, pathways, and/or means, which could *transform* L_1 into a state of energy, denoted as 'E'. This theoretical concept of energy, introduced by Phan et al. (2019b) in their recent article, is central to the process of optimization. Energy, in this sense, is defined as personal experience of 'vitality', 'liveliness', and 'inner strength'. According to the authors, a heightened level of energy is needed to ensure that a person's state of functioning (e.g., cognitive functioning) would be optimized. The question then, from Phan et al.'s (2019b) theorization, is how would we transform experience of L_1 into a source of energy?

Having reflected on his/her experience of L_1, a student has to now look for different opportunities, pathways, and/or means, which could then help him/her accomplish his/her improvement. The quest to self-improve, in this case, is reflected in Step 1 where posed questions emphasize the student's need to seek external assistance – for example, who can the student see or where does he/she go to seek academic and social assistance for improvement? This willingness, we contend, would coincide with an institution's own directives to assist the student. Some examples, in this analysis, may consist of teachers' constructive feedbacks

and philosophical reasoning, abundant physical infrastructures (e.g., technologies), and motivational programs that could, individually or in combination, guide and instill positive feelings and strong self-beliefs for improvement. In a similar vein, constructive opportunities and different pathways (e.g., personal scaffolding via means of an individualized educational program) provided may also enlighten and motivate the student to move pass his/her failure, and to consider new courses of action.

From this understanding, the provision of opportunities, pathways, and/or means is perceived as being the instigator of the transformation process. In this analysis, an internal state of 'feel-good' experiences, which may indicate positive emotions (e.g., happiness), motivation, and heightened self-beliefs (e.g., self-confidence) would create a perceived sense of energy. In other words, our conceptualization considers the following:

Provision of assistance, via means of opportunities, pathways, and/or means

↓

'Feel-good' experiences → An internal state of energy
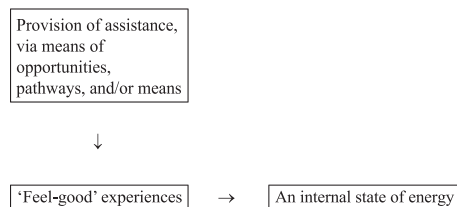
Inaction of assistance (e.g., lack of opportunities), in this case, is more than likely to limit a person from moving forth from L_1. Importantly, however, limited provision of assistance, as indicated, would negate the feel-good experiences that could operate as a source of energy. A low level of energy, as Phan et al. (2019b) described, is testament to a state of sub-optimization. Unhappiness and feeling of pessimism arising from L_1, for example, would not energize a student to strive further for improvement.

Step 3: Inner Strength

Step 3, termed as 'Inner Strength', is concerned with the utilization of experience of energy to advance in the *improvement* of L_1 (e.g., task disengagement). This step, for us, is in accordance with Phan et al.'s (2019b) theorization of optimization. As we previously described, according to Phan et al. (2019b), a high level of energy would help to optimize a person's state of functioning from L_1 (e.g., task disengagement) to L_2 (e.g., proactive engagement). Moreover, of course, energy is postulated to initiate and stimulate the buoyancy of different types of psychological attributes (e.g., effort expenditure), which then would arouse and sustain a person's transformed experience of L_1 to L_2 over a period of time (Phan et al., 2019b, 2020c).

Step 3 largely reflects the underlying process of optimization and, more importantly, emphasizes the central role of energy. Experience of vitality, liveliness, and inner strength, in this analysis, is central to our conceptualization of holistic psychology. Without a heightened state of energy, we contend, a person would not be able to advance his/her quest to improve L_1. Energy, according to the revised theory of optimization (Phan et al., 2019b, 2020c), is not a final standalone outcome, but rather acts as a driving force towards the achievement of L_2. This compelling force, reflecting a high level of energy, entails the stimulation and buoyant experiences of personal resolve, mental strength, effort expenditure, intrinsic motivation, and effective functioning (Phan et al., 2019b), all of which may act individually or in tandem with each other.

What would happen if, in contrast, a low level of energy was experienced? This question is perhaps self-explanatory but for the purpose of clarity, let us consider the previous example. A student's keen reflective practice to understand his experience of school disengagement (i.e., L_1) would propel him to seek support and assistance for the purpose of improvement. Additional support via means of an opportunity to work with a likeable mentor, in this instance, would help transform his experience of L_1 into some form of feel-good experience (e.g., a state of

enjoyment for schooling and, in particular, learning). This feel-good experience corresponds to an appropriate level of energy, guiding the student towards the achievement of a new state of functioning, L_2 – that is, an appropriate level of task engagement (Fredricks et al., 2005; Liem and Martin, 2011; Phan et al., 2016a). From our previous description then, a point of summary of the student's progress so far from L_1 to L_2 is as follows:

Reflection of L_1 (e.g., disengagement) → Seeking opportunities, etc. → 'Feel-good' experiences → Energy →…… Towards L_2 (e.g., engagement).

Step 4: Onset and Continuation of Improved Functioning

Step 4, termed as 'Onset and Continuation of Improved Functioning', is concerned with the *arousal* of a new state of functioning, L_2 (e.g., engagement), and its *sustained* state over time. This step, in particular, involves the utilization of buoyant experiences of personal resolve, intrinsic motivation, effort expenditure, mental strength, effective functioning, etc. Buoyancy of psychological attributes, as described in Step 3, arises from a person's heightened level of energy. Indeed, from this analysis, we postulate that evidence pertaining to the effectiveness of buoyant experiences of psychological attributes (e.g., personal resolve) is related to the initiation and arousal of L_2. In other words, from this account, we consider the following summation:

Buoyancy of psychological attributes (e.g., intrinsic motivation) → Initiation and arousal of L_2 (e.g., engagement) → Sustaining L_2

We contend that buoyancy of different types of psychological attributes, forming part of the process of optimization (Phan et al., 2019b, 2020c), is positive and coincides with the paradigm of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). Consider again the example that we described in the preceding sections regarding a student's school disengagement. A heightened level of energy is poignant as it acts to stimulate the buoyancy of different types of psychological attributes. The main premise in this step entails the student's focus and utilization of buoyancy of different psychological attributes in order to initiate and arouse the onset of accomplishment of L_2 (i.e., engagement). For example, the student may capitalize on his personal resolve and mental strength to strive for the accomplishment of L_2, which would then result in a high level of expenditure of time and effort. Indeed, from this analysis, we posit that the psychological attribute of personal resolve and mental strength serve as 'antecedents' of the initiation and arousal of L_2. An absence of buoyant experiences of psychological attributes, in contrast, would limit the potentiality for the student to accomplish a state of L_2.

The final aspect involved in our conceptualization of holistic psychology, situated within Step 4, is the sustaining of a person's state of L_2. What is L_2, in this case? From existing literature, a few researchers have stated that L_2 is concerned with a person's optimal best (e.g., Fraillon, 2004; Phan et al., 2019a; Phan, Ngu and Williams, 2016b). Optimal best, as we briefly explained, reflects a person's maximized state of functioning. In the context of schooling, for example, as we detailed in Figure 1, L_2 could represent a state of positive emotion (e.g., happiness), proactive engagement in learning (e.g., a focus on mastery), and exceptional academic performance in a subject. With this in mind, ideally, we would like to encourage and sustain the state of L_2. Phan et al.'s (2019b) recent theorization, interestingly, proposes that buoyancy of psychological attributes (e.g., personal resolve) could assist in the sustaining of a person's L_2 over time. We want to consider this tenet in detail in terms of our reference to the conceptualization of holistic psychology.

From a practical perspective, and in line with positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000), it is poignant that we encourage students to achieve a state of L_2. Moreover, in terms of individual growth and for the purpose of optimal efficiency, it is noteworthy that we make concerted attempts to sustain a

state of L_2. In this analysis, it would be meaningless and non-sensical to have a temporary state of L_2, which would contradict with our conceptualization of a state of flourishing. For us, based on our conceptualization, the tenet and interpretation of flourishing is slightly different from existing research development (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert and So, 2013; Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b)). Flourishing, as we detail in Figure 1, is related to a person's sustained experience of L_2 (e.g., continuing state of proactive engagement), which is enriching and positive. For this to occur, it is imperative that a student is able to capitalize on his/her buoyant psychological experiences (e.g., his/her level of mental strength), and utilizing these prolonged effects to sustain commitment towards L_2.

4.2. In totality: the importance of the four stages of holistic psychology

In summary, our conceptualization of holistic psychology is advantageous for its expansion into the study of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). We contend that our proposition of holistic psychology is more than just a change of nomenclature. It is termed 'holistic' in order to emphasize on and reflect a seamless spectrum of life experiences without any deliberate demarcation between negative and positive qualities. Our aim in this analysis is to consider an alternative theoretical model that is more coherent, capitalizing on maladaptive conditions and pathologies in order to develop positive qualities for meaningful living. Moreover, as shown in the preceding sections, our proposition of holistic psychology introduces the concept of energy: the absence of this experience would instead result in a state of stagnation, limiting a person's progress towards the achievement of flourishing, L_2.

Holistic psychology, in its entirety, places emphasis on four major steps that would account for the transformation of negative experiences and maladaptive conditions into positive qualities for daily living. Importantly, however, taking into consideration previous research development (e.g., Pawelski, 2016; Seligman, 1999; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000), our proposed model of holistic psychology expands beyond the realm of remedy and prevention of negative life experiences. Rather, from our rationalization, the *self-awareness* and *acceptance* of negative life experience (e.g., continuous failures for a student to master mathematics) is realistic and welcoming. The main premise, in this case, is not so much concerned with the development of preventive measures for implementation; rather, for us, the willingness to embrace negative life experiences is poignant as a person's repertoire of life itself is made up of different situations, events, circumstances, etc. Moreover, we emphasize a need for individuals to not 'differentiate' their life experiences into positive and negative qualities, but to simply internalize these as part of a learning curve. This rationalization for us, in part, closely aligns with Gruber and Moskowitz's (2014) recent writing, titled "*Positive emotion: Integrating the light sides and dark sides*", wherein the authors considered the plausibility that positive emotions could result in negative consequences. In a similar vein, Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2014) argue that negative emotions do not necessarily have to be 'detrimental'; in fact, negative emotions may lead to positive

emotions. From this brief account, we acknowledge that there are two possibilities:

i. Negative life experiences acting as incentives and facilitators of proactive and positive qualities.
ii. Positive qualities may serve to produce detrimental consequences.

Combining the mentioned possibilities, we consider negative and positive life experiences as not being dichotomous but rather operate in a cyclic pattern that constantly fluctuates. Figure 2 shows a visual depiction of a person's life, depicted as a 3-D ball that moves across space. The 3-D ball, in this case, has both negative and positive life experiences, which oscillate as the ball progresses through a tunnel – the tunnel in this case represents the progress of time. As shown, positive life experiences at T_1 (denoted as A) oscillate to become negative at T_2 (denoted as B); likewise, negative life experiences at T_1 (denoted as B) oscillate to become positive at T_2 (denoted as A). Thus, over the course of time, a person's life experiences would fluctuate and thus, from this description, it is more suffed to consider a 'repertoire' of life experiences rather than a dichotomy of positive and negative qualities.

5. The importance of holistic education

In tandem with our proposed theoretical model of holistic psychology is a topic known as 'holistic education' (Forbes, 2003), which is defined as "a group of beliefs, feelings, principles, and general ideas that share a collective family resemblance" (Phan and Ngu, 2019, p. 346). According to Miller (1992), holistic education is not a pedagogical approach but rather depicts a paradigm that may consist of assumptions and principles for consideration. In this analysis, holistic education differs from formal education for its strong emphasis on the fullest possible development of a person (Hare, 2010) – for example, spiritually, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. Within the context of schooling then, holistic education emphasizes the saliency of a student becoming the very best or finest that he/she can be, espousing and reflecting personal experience of all aspects of life (Forbes, 2003).

Holistic education in school contexts, according to Phan and Ngu (2019), is significant for its idealistic viewpoint and positioning – that is, to develop a student into a 'holistic person', which in this case may espouse the *enrichment of physical, moral, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development*. This philosophical position, indeed, is encouraging and focuses on preparation for lifelong learning and appreciation. Importantly, holistic education encourages students to adopt attitudes and personal awareness, as well as to acquire lifelong skills to adapt to the increasingly complex world. At the same time, holistic education recognizes the 'wholeness' of a student and that this wholeness is connected to his/her sociocultural surroundings (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Moreover, coinciding with our proposition of holistic psychology, holistic education emphasizes a need for the embracement of life experiences, which may consist of both positives and negatives. This recognition and acceptance of life experiences, in general, may reflect and involve a student's active engagement in reflective thinking discourse to improve and flourish.
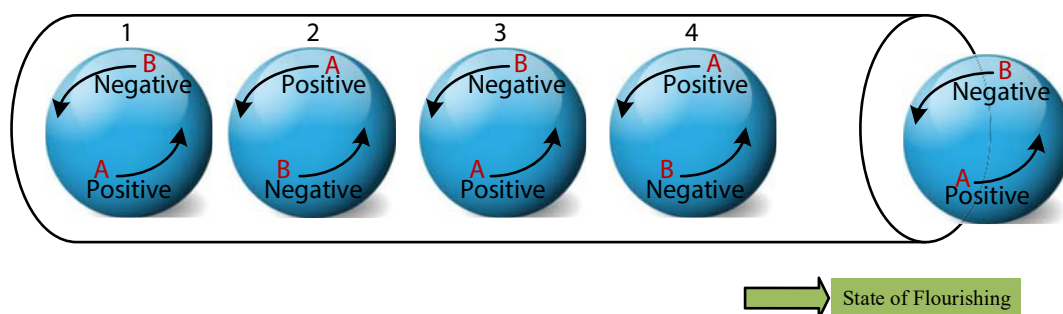

Figure 2. Conceptualization of life experiences.

We speculate that holistic psychology could coincide with the concept of holistic education and provides support for some of its proposed tenets. One distinctive aspect, in this analysis of our proposition, is the awareness and noting that we all have diverse learning and non-learning experiences. A 'holistic' student, in this case, would acknowledge the highs and lows of his/her life and, importantly, recognize that effective lifelong learning requires timely and considerate reflection of oneself – for example, what is my strength, and/or what is my weakness? At the same time, holistic development in school settings espouses the important viewpoint that regardless of a student's highs and lows, the emphasis in this case is to flourish and achieve optimal best in spirituality, morality, cognition, etc. Holistic psychology, as a framework for guidance, would facilitate the endeavor for a student to develop a holistic self.

As a framework for guidance, holistic psychology is effective for providing four important steps by which a student could adopt in his/her quest to achieve a holistic self. A holistic self, from our recent work (Phan, Ngu, Chen, Wu, Kuo, & Lin, 2021), is related to the *totality* of a person's development – for example, his/her perceived sense of spirituality. In the context of schooling, likewise, a student's holistic self may consist of his/her flourished state of academic competence in a subject matter, and/or his/her level of self-confidence to interact socially with others. The question then from this is how does the student utilize the model of holistic psychology to assist him/her with the development of totality? This reference and application of holistic psychology, we contend, could potentially form part of the repertoire of holistic education. In other words, from our rationalization, the success of holistic education may depend on a person's utilization of the holistic psychology model. This consideration of utilization of holistic psychology may entail the following:

- Self-awareness that schooling and learning have multiple life-relevant purposes, which may then motivate and energize a student to capitalize on different personal facets for usage. For example, one's own ability to socially interact (i.e., one's own interpersonal skills) with others in school settings may assist in the seeking of opportunities, etc. for the purpose of transforming negative learning and/or non-learning experiences into positivities. Proactive social interactions and, hence, interpersonal relationships are integral towards assisting students to adjust to school, providing emotional support, perceived security, friendship, etc.
- To consider passion (Fredricks et al., 2010), self-regulation (Pintrich and Zusho, 2002; Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2014), and self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 1991) as positive psychological constructs that could help arouse and sustain learning experiences of different subject matters. Passion, for example, may motivate a student and, in turn, mobilize his/her effort to persist in order to strive for educational success.

In summary, as we explained, holistic psychology encompasses the complete spectrum of a person's diverse experiences without any demarcation. By the same token, coinciding with holistic psychology, holistic education is related to the positivity and totality of a student's learning and non-learning experiences in school contexts. Holistic education, in this analysis, may incorporate the development of educational and/or social programs that emphasize the salient use of holistic psychology. This emphasis connotes the viewpoint that holistic education, in general, is more than just a person's development of his/her whole self and enriched experiences. It is also related to the complexity in design and implementation of pedagogical practices, programs, etc. that would facilitate the experience of wholeness.

6. Consideration for future research development

Any theoretical model or conceptualization, for that matter, requires ongoing discussions and empirical development for validation. Our concerted effort, in this case, entailed the inclusion of existing writings in the area of positive psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014a; Kern et al., 2019; Pawelski, 2016; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) to assist us in our construction of an alternative model, namely, holistic psychology. Holistic psychology, we prefer, is significant for its consideration of life experiences as being continuous without any demarcation between positive and negative qualities. Our focus of inquiry, in this analysis, posits the viewpoint that there is a seamless spectrum of life conditions and experiences, which would oscillate and fluctuate with time.

We invite researchers and educators to advance our proposed conceptualization of holistic psychology, theoretically, methodologically, and empirically. Of major interest, for consideration in future research development is a focus on the specific measurement, assessment, and validation of our proposed holistic psychology tenet. Theoretical understanding derived from philosophical and psychological reasoning may be limited in terms of established empirical grounding. In this analysis, we contend that there are a few notable inquiries of value for examination, which we explore in this section of the article.

6.1. Effectiveness of educational and social programs

It is noteworthy to consider an educational or social program that could: (i) reflect the tenets of holistic psychology, and (ii) support the proposition of holistic psychology. With reference to schooling, for example, students' personal situations of negative and maladaptive experiences may be considered – say, a student's experience of bullying, or a student's continuing failures in mathematics. The pervasive issue then, from this, is how does one embark on the use of holistic psychology? One possibility, in this case, is to first of all consider the development and implementation of an individual educational program (IEP) that could accommodate a student's needs – in this analysis, a particular IEP may address and accommodate a student who may experience continuing failures in mathematics. There are a number of questions to consider – namely, how would the individualized program developed help to transform a student's negative experience of mathematics into something that is more positive? and what would this transformed experience of L_1 be?

Individual educational programs may differ, depending on students' individual needs. For our example, consider an IEP that is developed to accommodate a student's negative experience of mathematics. For this IEP, we could consider the following, namely: (i) partnering the student with a more capable student in mathematics for the purpose of mentoring and scaffolding, (ii) stipulating learning outcomes (LOs) that emphasize the importance of authenticity and real-life application of mathematics, and (iii) considering the use of timely encouraging and positive feedback to help improve the student's self-beliefs for academic learning (e.g., self-efficacy: Bandura, 1997). The question then from this is how effective would this IEP be in terms of informing the student, and transforming his/her experience of L_1 in mathematics into that is more positive? This focus for research development, as shown in Figure 3, considers examination of the *effectiveness* of an educational program for a student who exhibits negative learning experiences. Effectiveness in this case, from our rationalization, is determined by the successful transformation of L_1.

In a similar vein, the effectiveness of the IEP, from our point of view, may be determined by the sustained effect of L_2. Our discussion in the preceding sections contends the importance of the sustained effect L_2 (e.g., engagement). It is meaningless, in this analysis, for the accomplishment of L_2 to not have any lasting influence on other related outcomes. From this acknowledgment, there is credence then to consider assessment of the sustained effect of L_2 – in this case, for example, a teacher could gauge into the student's contemplative response to questions such as "How will I learn and perform in future?" and "Will I approach my learning of mathematics in future with enjoyment?"

6.2. The importance of methodological appropriateness

In their recent research development, Phan and colleagues proposed a theoretical tenet, which the authors termed as 'methodological
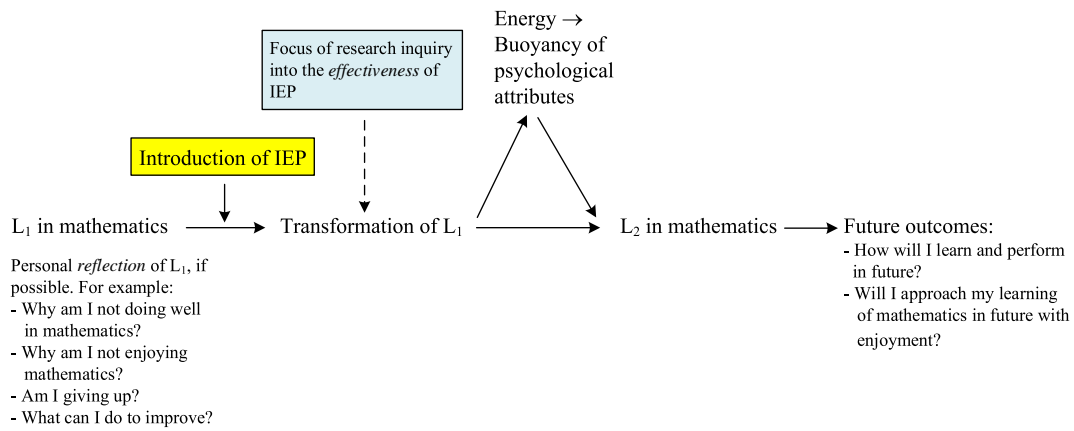
Figure 3. Consideration of Research Development of Implementation of an IEP. Note: As a conceptualization of holistic psychology in practice, an individual educational program (IEP) is introduced to help remedy experience of L_1. The effectiveness of implementation of this IEP is determined by the successful transformation of L_1, which would then result in a state of L_2. Part of this model of holistic psychology consists, initially, of a student seeking to understand about his/her state of L_1 – this consideration of reflection may entail some reflective questions – for example, "Why am I not doing well in mathematics?".

appropriateness' (Phan et al., 2019a, Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b)). This key terminology emphasizes the importance of *appropriateness* of a methodological approach that could, in turn, measure, assess, and validate a theoretical concept or process – in this case, the process of optimization. Phan et al.'s (2019b) article indeed detailed an in-depth analysis of a potential quantitative methodological approach that could be considered for usage. In a similar vein, with reference to the current context, we recommend a focus on the conceptualization and development of an appropriate methodological approach for usage. Referring to Figure 3, in particular, it is contentious from our point as to how one would study the following:

6.2.1. Transformation of L_1

The transformation of L_1 (from the introduction of an IEP), as we previously described, may serve to facilitate and motivate a student to achieve L_2. This noting recognizes the complex nature of 'transformation' and how this underlying process may yield a level of energy. How would we measure and assess this underlying process of transformation? By all account, consider the following depiction:

$$T_1 \qquad T_2 \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad T_3$$
$$L_1 \rightarrow \text{Transformation process} \rightarrow O \text{ Where } O = \text{perceived}$$

sense of vitality.

From this description, the process of transformation is proposed to result in qualitative changes – for example, as shown, an initial state of L_1 is transformed into a different state altogether, denoted in this case as 'O'. The context of our proposition makes it somewhat difficult for us to ascertain evidence of a state of change. This qualitative change, indicating two or more different states would, in this case, act as a proxy index of transformation. Hence, from this testament, perhaps one methodological approach that we could entail is *in situ* observation of behavioral changes (Lofland et al., 2006; Maxwell, 2005). *In situ* observations, in this analysis, may enable us to clarify the contextual meaning of the word and/or experience of 'transformation' – for example, what happens when we transform L_1, consequently as a result of a designated IEP? As a basic example, in this case, L_1 may indicate a student's state of school disengagement for various reasons, whereas O is concerned with his/her subsequent perceived sense of vitality and liveliness. The enactment of transformation at T_2 (e.g., the introduction of an IEP) could result in the student becoming more 'vibrant', exhibiting intellectual curiosity, excitement, and/or motivation in his/her schoolwork. Thus, from our rationalization, this positive behavioral change could serve as an index of transformation.

It is plausible from the above example that a student's self-report of his/her level of vitality, liveness, and inner strength could also provide evidence, affirming the enactment of transformation. The use of self-report measures (e.g., asking a student to indicate his/her level of vitality, liveliness, and inner strength), encompassing a non-experimental approach (Phan and Ngu, 2017b) may provide fruitful and relevant information pertaining to the personal experience of vitality, liveness, and inner strength. A student's high score, in this case, would indicate a high corresponding level of energy. Interestingly, in recent development of optimization, Phan et al. (2021) propose a multifaceted structure of energy, as shown in Figure 4. According to the authors, the notion of a multifaceted structure of energy connotes that there are, perhaps, differential effects of energy. In this analysis, as shown in Figure 4, the effect of energy on intrinsic motivation (i.e., denoted as Path A), stimulated by an instructional design, may differ from the effect of energy on effective functioning (i.e., denoted as Path B), stimulated by self-efficacy beliefs for academic learning. From this rationalization, it would be interesting for researchers to consider appropriate methodological designs that could measure and assess the differential effects of energy on different types of psychological attributes.

6.2.2. The nature of energy and buoyant psychological experiences

The nature of the concept of energy remains an inconclusive matter for development. What is energy and how does this proposed concept (Phan et al., 2019a, Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b), 2021) feature in the theoretical model of holistic psychology? Referring to both Figure 1 and Figure 3, we are interested to ascertain and determine the positive impact of energy – that is, how does energy initiate and activate the buoyancy of psychological attributes such as personal resolve, effective functioning, etc.? This issue of the positive nature of energy, as Phan et al. (2019b) attest, is not easily achieved. At best, from the perspective of social sciences (Phan and Ngu, 2017b), we could use experimental designs (e.g., a two-group design) to explore the causal effects of energy on different psychological attributes – for example, the causal effect of energy on effort expenditure.

Likert-scale measures (Cohen et al., 2003; Gravetter and Forzano, 2009; Shay, 2008) likewise may permit us to gauge into a person's level of energy. Self-report questionnaires (e.g., "I feel very much 'alive' at the moment"), in this analysis, may provide clarity into the nature of energy – for example, the proposition of the multifaceted nature of energy (Phan et al., 2021). Likewise, from this data source, researchers could explore associations between energy and other cognitive-motivational variables, achievement-related outcomes (e.g., academic performance), and/or
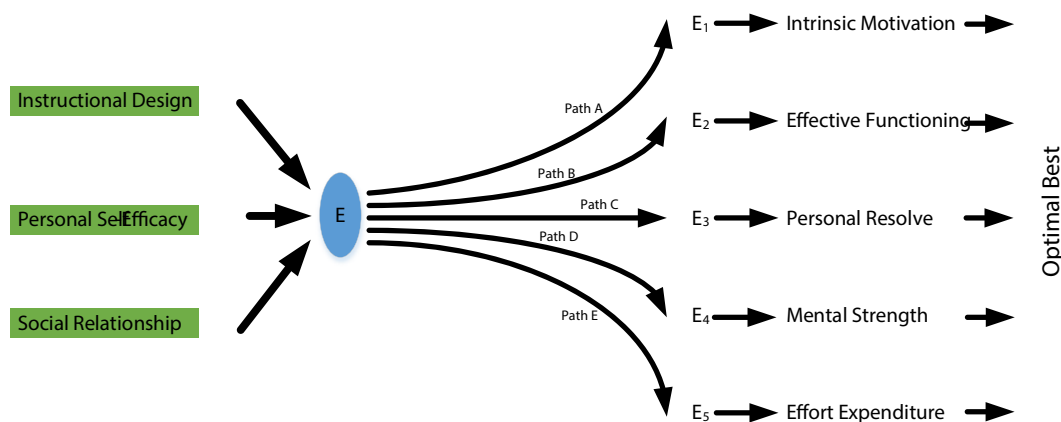
Figure 4. The multifaceted structure of energy.

non-educational outcomes (e.g., subjective well-being), via correlational analyses.

Despite the potentiality for researchers to use experimental and/or non-experimental data, we still remain doubtful as to how one would be able to measure and assess the nature and key characteristic of energy, as stipulated in Figure 1 and Figure 3 – for example, the onset of energy, which would 'initiate' and 'activate' of the buoyancy of different psychological attributes. How would we be able to measure, assess, and determine the initiation and activation of buoyant psychological experiences? Indeed, even from our own positioning, the issue of initiation and activation of buoyant psychological experiences from the positive impact of energy is contentious in terms of empirical validation. By the same token, an inquiry pertaining into the sustainability of a state of flourishing requires further methodological and research development. A sustained state of L_2 from L_1 (i.e., a state of flourishing) is not instantaneous and, in this case, calls for the use of longitudinal data, experimental or non-experimental.

Longitudinal data situated within a combination of both experimental and non-experimental designs are advantageous and may provide a logical approach towards the study of a sustained state of flourishing. Referring to our previous discussion and, in particular, Figure 1, a sustained L_2 in a subject matter in itself would indicate a person's experience of flourishing. Flourishing, we contend, is not instantaneous but an ongoing experience, which is positive and may produce other yields (e.g., an improvement in self-confidence). With this testament in mind, we rationalize that causal flows and latent growth modeling techniques (Duncan et al., 2006; Hancock and Lawrence, 2006; Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968), in particular, may provide stronger grounding for the capturing the intricate nature of a sustained state of L_2.

6.3. Holistic psychology and life education

We have recently engaged in a cross-institutional, cross-cultural research collaboration with scholars from Taiwan, focusing on an interesting subject – namely, the importance of *life and death education.* Life and death education, also known as *life education,* or *death education* (Chen, 2012, 2013; Huang, 2014), is a subject that is formally recognized in Taiwan for its pivotal role in helping to promote civics, respect, social well-being, and personal health. For example, it is believed that formal learning about the nature of life and death could impart life wisdom, assisting a person to view life in a positive manner, regardless of obstacles, difficulties, etc. In 2020, we published an article in *Frontiers in Psychology* (Phan, Ngu, Chen, Wu, Lin and Hsu, 2020a), which explored the nature of life education and how this subject could help promote the cherishing and fulfilment of different types of life qualities (e.g., personal contentment, happiness, aspiration).

The significance of the study of life education in Taiwan is reflected by its incorporation of Eastern-derived epistemologies, philosophical beliefs, cultural beliefs, and customary practices (Phan et al., 2020a). One

notable aspect that is resonated throughout the teaching of life education is related to Buddhism (Master Sheng Yen, 2010; Yeshe and Rinpoche, 1976) or Buddhist teaching, which in particular emphasizes on the notion of *spirituality,* or *spiritual cultivation.* Personal understanding of spirituality may encourage a senior citizen to consider the possibility that some 'form' of life, or 'esoteric' experience and/or divine being, could exist beyond the realm of death. In other words, from the perspective of Buddhism (e.g., the notion of *samsāra*) and spirituality, it is plausible for us to consider and/or to accept that, perhaps, there is another unknown dimension beyond life itself.

Advancing the study of life education, our conceptual analysis led to the development of a proposition, which we termed as a person's 'spiritual and enlightened self' (Phan et al., 2020a). What is the spiritual and enlightened self? As summarized in our published work (see Phan et al., 2020a for a detailed analysis), the study of life education may educate and inform a student of three major components: (i) personal reflection about the meaning of life and death (e.g., one purpose is to live a meaningful life and to assist others), (ii) the acquiring and cultivation of spirituality (e.g., appreciating the notion of *transcendence,* which could assist with the coping of death), and (iii) the development and enrichment of personal well-being (e.g., the enrichment of emotional well-being, via different means). The promotion, fostering, and interaction of the three components (denoted as 'X', which we term as '*Spiritual and Enlightened Self*') form a spiritual and enlightened self, resulting in evidence of a person's experience of different life qualities or characteristics – for example: having a positive outlook about life, having a perceived sense of spirituality, having compassion, showing more willingness to forgive others, etc.

In essence, from our point of view and rationalization, a person's spiritual and enlightened self is 'positive', yielding a number of life qualities or characteristics (e.g., being able to forgive others) (Phan et al., 2020a) that may, in this analysis, coincide with the proposition of holistic development or holistic psychology. Moreover, aside from our conceptualization of the spiritual and enlightened self (Phan et al., 2020a), there are certain elements within the subject of life education (e.g., the importance of acquiring life wisdom) (Chen, 2012, 2013; Huang, 2014) that may advance understanding into: (i) the underlying mechanism of holistic psychology (i.e., the four proposed steps that are involved, which we previously explored), (ii) the experience and manifestation of positive life qualities, or characteristics, of holistic psychology (e.g., the experience and testament of positive emotions), and (iii) the extent to which Eastern-derived epistemologies, philosophical beliefs, and customary practices (e.g., a belief in spirituality: the concept of samsāra) could 'widen' the coverage of life qualities of holistic psychology.

From this introduction, we posit the plausibility for life education and our proposed model of holistic psychology to interrelate with each other, potentially providing fruitful information into the totality of a person's development – spiritual, moral, emotional, social, etc. For example, as a

focus of inquiry for future research investigations, researchers and educators may wish to explore the extent to which the 'psychology of spirituality' (e.g., subsequent daily thoughts and emotions, which arise from 'spiritual awakening') could explain a person's holistic development. How does spirituality assist a student to academically adjust and/or to perform well in a subject matter? How does proactive peer social relationship (Furrer et al., 2014; Li et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2005) at school assist in the promotion and cultivation of spiritual beliefs? How does spirituality assist in ethics understanding and moral development? By the same token, a related inquiry that is worthy for development is validating the extent to which 'spiritual engagement', 'spiritual affiliation', and/or 'spiritual orientation' could instill and facilitate positive psychological beliefs (e.g., intrinsic motive to embrace and/or to cultivate spirituality). These questions, in general, place emphasis on the potentiality for us to affirm and unify the two theoretical concepts (i.e., holistic psychology and life education) within one conceptual framework.

7. Conclusion

The study of positive psychology (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014a; Kern et al., 2019; Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000) has provided grounding for researchers and educators to incorporate this paradigm as a reference point for implementation and/or usage. Positive psychology, theoretically, emphasizes the importance of resilience, inner virtues, mental fortitude, etc. Moreover, a state of flourishing (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert and So, 2013; Phan et al., 2019b) is a central premise of positive psychology, which may reflect and/or play an important role in accounting for a person's or an organization's growth. Recent research development, likewise, has made significant progress, detailing a state of flourishing as a quantitative and/or qualitative difference between two levels of functioning (Phan et al., 2019b, 2020c). In sum, positive psychology is concerned with optimal experiences that a person may acquire and develop over the course of time.

We do not discount the significance of positive psychology. For example, derived in part from this paradigm, researchers have recently focused on a related inquiry – namely, the elucidation into the complex nature of optimal best, which led to the development of the theory of (Fraillon, 2004; Phan et al., 2017, Phan, Ngu and Yeung (2019b)). With reference to the current focus, we chose to capitalize on the theory of positive psychology and introduce an alternative model, termed as 'holistic psychology'. Holistic psychology differs from positive psychology, utilizing the theory of optimization as an explanatory account, and reflecting its inclusive nature by taking considering life experiences on a continuous spectrum. Holistic psychology places emphasis on self-awareness and recognition that negative life experiences could have a profound positive impact, serving a source of energy and motivation for a person to capitalize on. Indeed, from this analysis, postulation of holistic psychology offers an alternative approach in the seeking of understanding and contentment of different perplexities of life.

We contend that holistic psychology is more encompassing in its operational nature. Confronting negative life experiences is something that is undesirable and if we could, we would mask and ignore negative life experiences altogether. Our consideration of holistic psychology, in this analysis, encourages the willingness and the embrace of maladaptive and negative life experiences for the main purpose of personal improvement. In other words, we capitalize on maladaptive and negative life experiences and make concerted attempts to transform these into positive outcomes for usage. In this analysis, our proposition contends a holistic approach in which different types of life experiences (e.g., negative *versus* positive) are considered as being continuous and intimately relate to each other. Having said this, though, we acknowledge that our proposed model of holistic psychology is theoretical, relying on philosophical psychology, intuition, and personal experiences. As such, we advise educators and researchers to continue with development of different types of conceptual, methodological, and empirical inquiries into the validation of holistic psychology.

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