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# AI Practitioner

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## Accelerating Positive Education Around the World

Edited by

**David L. Cooperrider, Lindsey N. Godwin and Michelle McQuaid**

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# A Positive Revolution in Education

## Uniting Appreciative Inquiry with the Science of Human Flourishing to 'Power Up Positive Education'

**This issue of AI Practitioner emerges from the World Positive Education Accelerator (WPEA) AI summit held in June 2018. The contributors – thought leaders and practitioners of Positive Education – were participants in the largest AI summit ever organized to accelerate Positive Education.**

**T**his special issue emerges from the largest Appreciative Inquiry global summit ever convened to advance and accelerate Positive Education (PE). We are thrilled to welcome some of the top thought-leaders and practitioners of PE for this special issue, each of whom was a participant at the World Positive Education Accelerator (WPEA) AI Summit held in June 2018. But, before we highlight each of our contributors, we want to first provide historical context for the positive revolution in education we are seeing emerge around the globe, and how Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is becoming a transformative engine for this movement.

*PE reunites a focus on the whole human being.*

## What is Positive Education?

As defined in a recent global report<sup>1</sup>, the opportunity of PE is fundamentally to re-unite the great aims of education and produce both wellbeing as well as forwarding the traditional outcomes of schooling. Imagine PE as a powerful educational double helix, blending together great 21st century academics plus human flourishing. Drawing on breakthroughs in human sciences, PE reunites a focus on the whole human being, helping each child, each learner, not only excel in the traditional academic aims of education (literacy, numeracy, science, etc.) but also enables and equips each person to grow into their best potentials, propelled by teachable skills for advancing the wellbeing of self, others and our world.

Over the years, there have been many calls for this kind of reunion. Martin Luther King placed an emphasis on character strengths when he declared, “Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.” Looking across schools today, one can see the spread of socio-emotional learning and the building of leadership skills and collaborative capacities for working with, relating to and helping to build the best in others. In this world of complicated, complex and often fractured interdependencies, the Dalai Lama recently urged us to go beyond simply an *education of the mind* to also cultivate an *education of the heart*.

*‘Go beyond simply an education of the mind to also cultivate an education of the heart.’*

The Dalai Lama

Indeed, if you ask a parent or caregiver what they want most for their children, they consistently say they want their child to grow up to be happy, with good relationships and perhaps a family, a sense of purpose and respect, good health and a sense of wellbeing. Now, compare this with the subjects that are taught and assessed in schools. How often do we see content like “happiness”, “relational skills”, “compassion”, “life purpose and meaning”, “resilience”, and “character strengths” — the very things that every parent yearns for, for their children – taught in schools? The disunion is obvious. The vast share of schooling is on the traditional strands of math, reading, writing and job preparation. Indeed, very few educators specialize or even have training in human character development or the elements of the “good life”.

Today, PE is fueled not only by our elevated hopes for the next generation, but also by the science of positive psychology. Harvard’s Howard Gardner declared positive psychology’s ground-breaking research on human strengths to be “one of the most important initiatives in psychology of the past half century.”<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> *The Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*. See <http://www.happinesscouncil.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, C. and Seligman, M., (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*The study of optimal states actually heightens the love of learning, creates cognitive, physiological and relational resources, and heals past negative patterns in life.*

essence of this movement involves a courageous and comprehensive invitation to the field of psychology for a radical reversal: instead of a science preoccupied by what is wrong with the human being, there is currently emerging a vast reversal or rebalancing – searching for at least a 50/50 – inquiry into the good life, the meaningful life and the flourishing life; that is, the christening of the field of positive psychology.<sup>3</sup>

With its large tent, the domain of positive psychology calls for the serious study of the good life and more precisely human flourishing – what it looks like, what enables it and where is it happening. Its three main pillars include: the study of positive human experience; the study of strengths, especially human strengths, that advance the good life; and the discovery and design of positive institutions. In the past two decades, there has been a fertile flood and huge wave of fresh and powerful work unleashed. For example, Barbara Fredrickson, recipient of the 2017 Tang Prize for the greatest achievement in the human sciences,<sup>4</sup> showed the world how the study of optimal states – positive emotions such as hope, inspiration and joy – actually heighten the love of learning, create cognitive, physiological and relational resources, and heal past negative patterns in life while building capacities for resilience and bounce-back capacities. Her work epitomizes the interdisciplinary instincts of positive psychology to span fields, to think synthetically beyond competing voices and fragmented data-sets, and to build the kind of world-historical insights our complex times are calling out for.

For nearly three decades now, Appreciative Inquiry, likewise, has showed how powerful the act of inquiry itself is – that human systems grow in the direction of what we study most deeply, frequently, and rigorously – and declared that the answers themselves were not positive psychology's most important achievement, but its questions.<sup>5</sup> Take Fredrickson's work as an example for shifting the field's question. For decades the human sciences studied over and over again the negative emotions of anger, fear, depression, learned helplessness, anxiety, despair and stress but marginalized how positive emotions were not just signals of optimal functioning, but how powerful and effective they could be when harnessed to transform the emotions of affliction. When Fredrickson posed the new question: *What Good Are Positive Emotions?* she modeled the best in the domain's new possibilities.

The field of education has been taking notice of these shifts.

<sup>3</sup> Seligman, M. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive Psychology: An Introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.

<sup>4</sup> "Fredrickson receives the 2017 \$100,000 Tang Prize for Positivity Research." <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/publications/observer/obsonline/fredrickson-receives-tang-prize-for-positivity-research.html>

<sup>5</sup> Cooperrider, D. and Srivastva, S., 1987. Appreciative Inquiry Into Organizational Life. In R. Woodman and W. Pasmore (eds.), *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, vol 1., 9–67.

*Educators are increasingly using evidence-based pathways documented by positive psychologists to reunite academics with the science of human flourishing.*

Educators are increasingly using evidence-based pathways documented by positive psychologists to reunite academics with the science of human flourishing. From trailblazers in Australia, to Bhutan, China and India, to the UAE, Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and from Mexico, the USA and Peru to the UK and to Israel, educators are empirically demonstrating that there is a synergy between academic performance and wellbeing, with academic scores significantly increasing the more we incorporate wellbeing into the curriculum. Furthermore, we are also learning that the skills for wellbeing can be taught in a lasting way.<sup>6</sup>

PE is showing that, through evidence-based interventions, we can raise overall levels of curiosity; elevate love of learning; promote heightened engagement; create better learning outcomes; contribute to thriving learning communities; build more elevated emotions such as hope, inspiration and joy; generate increases in social intelligence and better relationships; lead to stronger career success; support better health and decrease risky behaviors; open minds toward acceptance and inclusion of others; build leadership capacities; and serve as both a preventative for, and provider of better routes to treatment of, depression, despair or thoughts of suicide than anything we know of pharmacologically.<sup>7</sup>

### The PE + AI back story: From conversations to collaborations

A few years ago, Michelle McQuaid (one of the co-editors of this special issue) invited Marty Seligman and David Cooperrider to do a series of lectures with PWC Australia, and then with various groups ranging from Australia's chief financial officers to health care leaders, IT groups and more.<sup>8</sup> In those talks with business leaders, educators and government officials, Marty summed up the individual flourishing side of the equation, including the public policy implications, while Cooperrider spoke about the discovery and design of positive institutions and the method of Appreciative Inquiry to enable positive organizational and large-systems change.<sup>9</sup> As it turned out, it became what Marty called "a great duet", because much of his work, as does most of psychology, focused heavily on the individual, while David's AI work based in the organizational sciences and social construction had him concentrating on institutions and large-system positive

<sup>6</sup> *The Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*. See <http://www.happinesscouncil.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> For a review of the academic literature around positive education, see: Adler, Alejandro (2016) *Teaching Well-Being increases Academic Performance: Evidence from Bhutan, Mexico, and Peru*. Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, 1572 (<http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1572>) and The World Government Summit, *The State of Positive Education* (2017) (<https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document/8f647dc4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6>).

<sup>8</sup> McQuaid, M. and Cooperrider, D. (2018) *Your Change Blueprint: How to Design and Deliver an AI Summit*. Melbourne Australia: McQuaid Pty Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Cooperrider, D. and Godwin, L. (2011) Positive Organization Development: Innovation Inspired Change in an Economy and Ecology of Strengths. In *Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*. Kim Cameron and Gretchen Spreitzer (eds.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 737–750.

change, including breakthrough cases with whole industries, economic regions, whole cities and UN World Summits.

Then, on the third day of their lecture series, Marty spoke about several pioneering schools in Australia and introduced David to Professor Mathew White, author of *Evidence-based Approaches to Positive Education: Implementing a Strategic Framework for Well-being in Schools*.<sup>10</sup> Australia, to be sure, is home to some of the world's most forward-looking innovations in education. And after looking at the positive education frameworks, the data and the interest emerging not only with individual schools but at the Ministry of Education levels, David sensed the vast potential. That was when Marty said there needed to be a unity, a powerful partnership between AI and the PE movement. Of course, we all know how difficult it is to enact widespread education reform requiring systemic-level changes. Marty articulated the need:

*To bring the rich findings of the science of positive psychology to society, we need ... the development of thriving at the individual level along with the discovery and design of positive institutions...do you think, David, we could use the large-group Appreciative Inquiry Summit methods with whole school systems, at local and national levels, just as you've have shown in the videos of your work where AI was used to help build the United Nations Global Compact, or move whole cities and enable such effective systems change at Apple, the Red Cross and the US Navy?*

Mathew White, for one, immediately saw the potential. Soon, for example, he selected the AI summit method as the way to introduce PE to schools at the mission level of an entire school system, not as a “bolt on” but an “embedded reality.” Saint Peter's College wanted to build an entire culture around PE and saw the need to address two strategically significant issues: (1) how can you have positive education in the classroom without the discovery and design of the school organization as a positive institution, that is, more fully human, strengths-based, and deeply developmental for staff, teachers, leaders, and the entire ecosystem of inclusive stakeholder relationships from families to communities? And (2) how can you succeed at seamless systems change unless the means and ends of change are congruent? Or put more affirmatively, aren't the positive Organization Development methods of AI tailor-made to model it and help everyone experience the promise of positive education via the strengths-based, design-inspired, and “whole system in the room” change process itself? So Marty said to David, “our duet was great, but now let's look for the opportunity to bring the acceleration of positive education together with the system-wide change capacities of Appreciative Inquiry”.

<sup>10</sup> M. White and S. Murray. (2015) *Evidence-Based Approaches in Positive Education: Implementing a Strategic Framework for Wellbeing in Schools*. Australia: Springer.

*Let's look for the opportunity to bring the acceleration of positive education together with the system-wide change capacities of Appreciative Inquiry.*

Marty Seligman

In his keynote at the 2015 World Congress on Positive Psychology, David recounted the trip to Australia and shared a dream, asking the audience: “What if we held a national summit for accelerating positive education in America?” The response at the World Congress was astonishing and there was a resounding stir.<sup>11</sup> Energy for the idea continued to build. Then, in 2017, a transformational \$1 million gift appeared. The Stiller Family Foundation, headed by Bob and Christine Stiller, donated an anchor gift to the Cooperrider Center at Champlain College to launch this work, announcing in a press release their vast commitment to helping every child grow into the best versions possible and to seeing each child surrounded by people who could see each human being’s signature strengths and create the enabling environments from early childhood on up, for good brain health, loving and trusting relationships, whole person development and *full-spectrum flourishing*.<sup>12</sup>

But this was just the beginning of something larger. After hearing all of the stories of AI and large-systems change, Marty Seligman suggested this effort be modeled other AI summit successes, such as the United Nations Global Compact and the United Religions Initiative, which launched with a global summit followed by local summits, followed by additional global summits.<sup>13</sup> Following this same pattern, Seligman proposed: “Why not start this with a world summit for positive education – not just a national one – and then let’s discover how a growing global community might unfold in ways that can help regions and empower countries to convene their own accelerator summits?” With this conversation, a generative partnership was forged. The new collaboration emerged between Champlain College’s Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry and the International Positive Education Network (IPEN), a global network begun by Sir Anthony Seldon, the leader of Buckingham University, the UK’s first publicly announced “positive university”.

## The World Positive Education Accelerator

On June 25th to 28th in the Fort Worth Texas Convention Center, over 800 people from over thirty countries came together to turn inspiration into action and accelerate positive education around the world! The summit brought together teachers and academics, presidents of universities and school system leaders, parents, powerful student voices, policy makers, business leaders, foundations, professional associations, positive psychology thought leaders, AI practitioners, media representatives, and schools from early education to higher education

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ippanetwork.org/tag/cooperrider/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.champlain.edu/about-champlain/news-and-events/positive-education>

<sup>13</sup> Cooperrider, David L. and McQuaid, M. (2013) The Positive Arc of Systemic Strengths. *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 46, pp. 71–102.

David Cooperrider and Lindsey Godwin (far left) facilitated the Appreciative Inquiry Summit to accelerate positive education, while Marty Seligman (center) helped kick it off by sharing the evidence base and the PERMA model. Nadya Zhexembayeva (next to her daughter Lila, far right) served as WPEA moderator.



and beyond. From the opening welcome by Don Laackman, the president of Champlain College who said “Let Us Dare”, to Deborah Heinz, the CEO of a media company and magazine called Live Happy; from Chris Stawski, the president of IPEN, to positive psychology thought-leader Marty Seligman – there was an energy that was palpable and infectious. There was the realization that we have an unprecedented opportunity in human history to create the best educational systems that the world has ever seen. And there were numerous moments that were spontaneous and electric – for example, when Sir Anthony Seldon, later after his talk on “The Fourth Education Revolution”, led the entire summit into a new version of Pharrell’s hit song Happy. But most of all, there was collective action. In fact, twenty-six working groups emerged:

Table 1: Working groups emerging from the WPEA

1. Creating new teacher education and enrichment programs	2. Envisioning a national Summit for accelerating Positive Education in the USA
3. Envisioning the learning environment of the future for early education	4. Envisioning a national Summit for accelerating Positive Education in Latin America
5. Envisioning the learning environment of the future for kindergarten to Grade 12/ primary and secondary education	6. Envisioning a national Summit for accelerating Positive Education in Singapore
7. Envisioning the learning environment of the future for higher education	8. Envisioning a national Summit for accelerating Positive Education in China
9. Cultivating learning partnerships across institutions	10. Creating a movement of Positive Education in Belgium/Netherlands



Report-out from Lila Jernovoi

11. Creating the new science of positive education, research and evaluation studies	12. Enabling more IPEN-like regional networks
13. Artificial Intelligence and digital technologies to accelerate positive education	14. Creating core values to unite a Positive Revolution in education
15. Positive Education for parents and families	16. Ensuring equitable access for all to Positive Education
17. National and international policy for Positive Education	18. Youth-led initiatives for Positive Education
19. A funding and resource campaign to support the creation of schools as positive institutions	20. Making Positive Education go viral
21. Cultivating links to strategic institutions and opinion leaders to accelerate Positive Education	22. Planning post-summit momentum and structure
23. Powering up Positive Education for school leaders, administrators, principals and executives	24. Business as a force for Positive Education
25. Creating standards and best practices for Positive Education	26. Creating a roadmap for a Positive Education journey at Champlain College

### The accelerating potential of AI

Those who have already participated in an AI summit know that the emergence of working groups that continue to transform inspiration into action long after a summit is over is one of the distinctive characteristics of this large-scale convening methodology. It is a refreshing replacement for the conference fatigue many experience, where they attend an event with inspiring speeches and dialogues, but then nothing happens.



Maria Sirosis moderating a panel on students' stories

An Appreciative Inquiry Summit is not a traditional conference; rather, it is a large-group strategic planning, designing or implementation meeting that brings a whole system of 300 to 1,000 or more internal and external stakeholders together in a concentrated way to work on a task of strategic, and especially high-purpose and transformative, value. Moreover, it is an exciting three- to four-day meeting where everyone is engaged as co-designers, across all relevant and resource-rich boundaries, to share leadership and take ownership for making the future of some high-purpose opportunity successful. The meeting appears bold at first, but is based on a simple notion: when it comes to system-wide innovation, integration and inspired action, there is nothing that brings out the best in human systems – faster, more consistently and more effectively

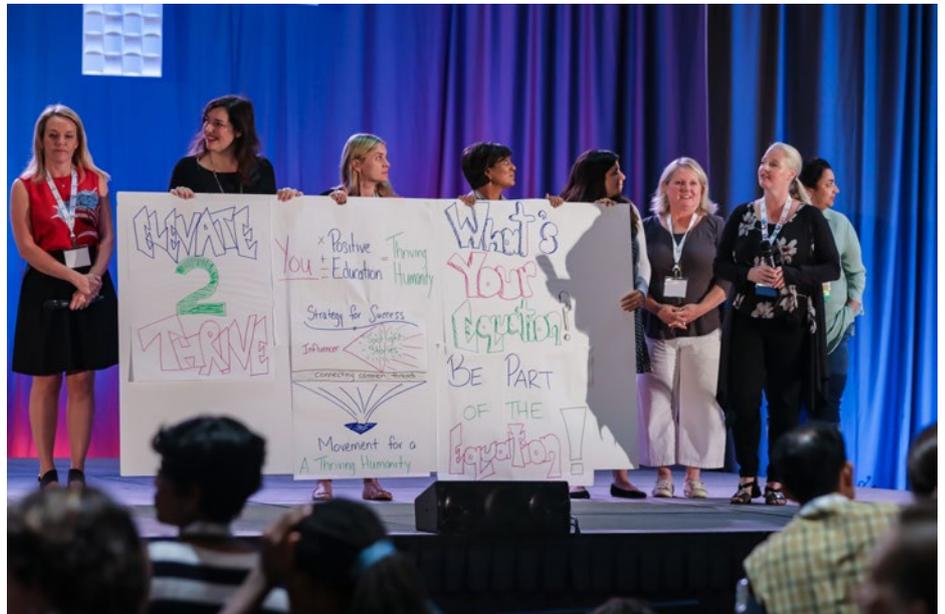


Marty Seligman and David Cooperrider

– than the power of “the whole”. Flowing from the tradition of strengths-based leadership (Cooperrider 2012), the “AI Summit” says that in a multi-stakeholder world it is not about (isolated) strengths per se, but about configurations, combinations and interfaces.<sup>14</sup> We live in a world where change is the new normal, but today the question is not just how do we change for the better. The real question has shifted: it is how do we change at the scale of the whole? How do we move together as a whole 67,000-person telecommunications company; or a whole 1.5 million-person city; or whole industry wishing to help lead in the sustainability revolution; or in this case, rise to the opportunity to unite the best in 21st century education with the best in the positive psychology of human flourishing?

For those who may not have experienced an AI summit we would like you to imagine that you were there with us at the WPEA. You enter the grand convention center in Fort Worth, Texas. Let’s say that you are the superintendent of some large urban school system – and you know the complexities of leading change in that kind of world, which has so many vocal stakeholders. You have heard stories of how universities such as Universidad Tecmilenio in Mexico – with some 60,000 students – uses Appreciative Inquiry in their strategic planning, where they bring together the whole system into the room: faculty and managers from finance to marketing; they include every level of staff from the cafeteria to facilities maintenance, as well as students as stakeholders and

Group report-out from WPEA



14 Cooperrider, D. L. (2012) The Concentration Effect of Strengths. *Organizational Dynamics*, 42(2), (April–May 2012), 21–32. See also Cooperrider, D. L. (2013) The Spark, the Flame, and the Torch: The Positive Arc of Systemic Strengths in the Appreciative Inquiry Design Summit. In Cooperrider, D.L. et. al (2013) *Organizational Generativity: The Appreciative Inquiry Summit and a Scholarship of Transformation*. vol. 4 in *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Also, McQuaid, M. and Cooperrider, D. L. (2018) *Your Change Blueprint: How to Design an AI Summit*. Melbourne, Australia: McQuaid Pty Ltd.



Using technology to document and communicate at WPEA

members of the board, to envision and unleash system-wide strategies, make organizational decisions and design rapid prototypes for new initiatives. You may have heard, as the superintendent of a large school, about examples such as this, but now you are here to see the AI summit up close and personal. You sense the anticipation. The ballroom is teeming with nearly 800 people from over thirty countries. There is no auditorium-type seating, only roundtables, 100 of them. You sit at your roundtable with seven others from around the world, and you are struck by the complex configuration of individuals: the CEO of an educational technology company; a couple of students, one from a leading positive education pioneering school in Australia, another from Brazil; then there is a thought-leader who is the president of the International Positive Psychology Association, and a renowned researcher who authored the 2017 report on Positive Education & Wellbeing for the World Government Conference in Dubai; and finally, there is one teacher from an early education school and another from a low-income city school. Soon this “whole system in the room summit” begins. Your biggest question emerges as a doubt: “how can this possibly be framed in a way that calls forth not only the best in this massively diverse setting, but actually sets the stage for collective action?”

So, in the spirit of getting the real sense of it, let’s look at it. There is no better way to describe the call of the summit than to share the actual words and concrete way the WPEA task – the big hope and compelling opportunity – was presented to the 800-person assembly. Over the next few pages, we present to you an excerpt from the call to action and initial discovery question that was posed to the WPEA participants. We invite you to read this as if you were there, getting ready to engage in the task of the summit:<sup>15</sup>

*How might we accelerate a union between the best in 21st century learning, with the best in the science of human flourishing, and the positive psychology of human strengths?*

*We wish to celebrate the hundreds of people participating in this large-group summit to accelerate Positive Education worldwide. The exciting opportunity before us is exploring this question: How might we accelerate a union between the best in 21st century learning, with the best in the science of human flourishing, and the positive psychology of human strengths? This collaborative accelerator is the largest of its kind ever held. The astonishing surge of interest reflects the fact that we all want the best for our children and every life-long learner, where every person in every walk of society is able to realize their inherent potential to achieve both educational success + human wellbeing.*

*As the International Positive Education Network states: “Every institution in society has a moral obligation to promote human flourishing and a better world, yet none more so than those responsible*

<sup>15</sup> You are welcome to download the entire summit workbook, report and video at [www.champlain.edu/ai-home/positive-education-summit-2018](http://www.champlain.edu/ai-home/positive-education-summit-2018)

*Every institution in society has a moral obligation to promote human flourishing and a better world.*

IPEN

*There has never been a more prolific time in the human sciences to be alive.*

for educating our young people” – families, schools, our entire communities and even our life-long learning workplaces.

### An unprecedented opportunity...

We have an opportunity unprecedented in human history to create the best educational systems that the world has ever seen. First of all, access to education has greatly expanded. A century ago, less than 40% of the world’s population achieved basic education. Today, that number has skyrocketed to over 85%. Across the world today, 91% of children are enrolled in primary school (up from 72% in 1970), which is over 600 million children!<sup>16</sup> What’s more, there have been great innovations in 21st century learning. We have, for example, better professional training capacity for educators and learning leaders at our fingertips than any previous era might have been able to provide or even imagine. And talk about dramatic change – think about all the internet-sized opportunities with global networks, billions of mobile connections, the instant movement of innovations across the planet, massive open online courses, video technologies capable of connecting classrooms across cultures – and this is an era where every year, we produce more computing power than the sum of all prior years.

Likewise, exciting breakthroughs in the brain sciences are showing us the realities of brain plasticity, while innovations in neuroscience and economics are showing how a simple dollar invested in the earliest years of brain formation can have downstream societal benefits that are eightfold, tenfold or more in payback.<sup>17</sup> But most important for our work here: there has never been a more prolific time in the human sciences to be alive. With positive psychology’s rapid rise – calling the whole of the human sciences to graduate to a new stage beyond the treatment of disease, depression and deficit to the serious and scientific study of optimal human states – something of a Cambrian explosion has occurred, including the prolific outpouring of groundbreaking research.

### What do we know about scaling up excellence...?

And while all of us here certainly know the remarkable story of the advances in positive psychology, we want to pause on it for a moment.

<sup>16</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/primary-and-secondary-education>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/our-analysis/opportunities-to-achieve-impact/early-childhood-toolkit/why-invest/what-is-the-return-on-investment/>

*Why? Because it may help us understand a bit more why we called this summit an accelerator – it’s a term taken from studies into the diffusion of innovation. And it asks us to think about positive psychology in a way that we don’t often speak of in the human sciences. It asks us to think about the whole of positive psychology the way we would speak about a groundbreaking innovation in technology or in medicine. We know that, given the superior power and scope of a new idea, we might expect it to prevail rather quickly, but that almost never happens.*

*In medicine, for example, the global eradication of smallpox was an unprecedented victory in human cooperation and global action. Its ravaging effects created blindness, deathly fevers, disfiguration and pain, and killed millions everywhere, across cultures. In the long run, of course, there was to be good news. On May 8, 1980, the 33rd World Health Assembly officially declared the world free of this disease – smallpox had been eradicated.<sup>18</sup> It was the first time in history we ever*



18 Cooperrider, D.L. and Dutton, J. (eds.) 1999 *The Organizational Dimensions of Global Change: No Limits to Cooperation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications; see also, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *History of Smallpox*. <https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/history/history.html>

*Some innovations spread fast. How do you speed up the ones that don't?*

solved a global problem through massive collective action as a whole human family. Among other things, the success was living proof that it was no longer utopian to envision organizing and aligning human strengths at a world level, with common cause.

Eradication of smallpox is considered the greatest achievement in the history of international public health. But guess when the innovation – the vaccine – was discovered and developed? The answer surprises. Alfred Jenner's innovation happened in 1796.<sup>19</sup> Sadly, because of the loss of lives, it took nearly 200 years to scale it, spread it, rejoice in its promise and advance it through scientific iteration and improvement. Many life-enhancing innovations take decades; in this case, centuries. So, the story raises a puzzle: Some innovations spread fast. How do you speed up the ones that don't?

That's a question the "diffusion of innovation research" has taken on. It led to its own vast literature in leadership with terms such as "scaling up excellence" and "innovation champions" and "institution-to-institution mentoring" and "tipping points" – points in time where little changes have big effects, reach a critical mass and create what Jonas Salk once called "positive epidemics".

### Might this kind of framing help us in this summit?

The worldwide emergence of the science of positive psychology might well be a pivotal event in history. In every field there are moments that we look back on as defining moments, in large part because of the remarkable impact of that moment on large numbers of people. Rarely in the human sciences has a new advance emerged that has, in such a short time, tapped into the genius of so many of the world's top scientists, practitioners and students. And as we've stated, rarely do we speak of innovations in the human sciences the way we speak about innovations in medicine, as in another example, the discovery of penicillin which helped double human lifespan in most every part of the world.<sup>20</sup>

*The worldwide emergence of the science of positive psychology might well be a pivotal event in history.*

Epic innovations of this kind, whether in engineering, medicine or today's digital technologies of connection, often inspire "moonshot" plans and possibilities. Bubbling up already, because of the revolutionary

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *History of Smallpox*. <https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/history/history.html>

<sup>20</sup> W. A. Adedeji, *The Treasure Called Antibiotics*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5354621/#R6>

*On almost every objective measure, we have an opportunity unprecedented in human history to create the best educational systems that the world has ever seen.*

advances in the positive psychology science of human flourishing, thought leaders are “daring greatly” and asking us to do the same. They are speaking in non-utopian ways, both with urgent optimism – and with an eye on our world situation – about a “moonshot goal” for the whole of the human sciences.

In his classic volume, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing*, Marty Seligman, the father of positive psychology, proposes such a moonshot goal for the field. He asks us to imagine a world where – by 2051 – we have not only, for the first time in human history, eradicated extreme poverty from the planet (UN Goal #1), but also have enabled and propelled a world where the majority of people everywhere are living lives characterized not by despair, depression, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, loneliness, fear of others, meaninglessness or other disabling conditions of life, but in high states of wellbeing, happiness, with lives of purpose, meaning, value and vital relationships.

We are thrilled that you are here. We believe that on almost every objective measure, we have an opportunity unprecedented in human history to create the best educational systems that the world has ever seen. Add to this the groundbreaking discoveries in the science of human flourishing, the billions of kids and learners that now have access to education, and our cooperative capacities to help accelerate positive change – especially if we listen to the future that’s wanting to happen – then we have reason for hope. The great anthropologist Margaret Mead reminds us that there may be no collective power greater than a community discovering what it cares about when she said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

With this powerful call to action and framing for the WPEA in mind, imagine now that you are asked to turn to a colleague at your table and engage in a paired conversation around the following questions:

*We all want the best for our children, and we all want to create a flourishing future where each child, young adult and lifelong learner is able to fulfill their potential and achieve both academic achievement and human flourishing. Positive education pioneers are emerging everywhere in the world. Somewhere in the world it is already tomorrow! Our Appreciative Inquiry summit approach uses design-thinking tools. One of the most creative firms in the world – the acclaimed design firm IDEO – teaches that the key to positive change*

*What are some of the most inspiring, living examples of positive education in schools, workplaces, communities and cultures around the world?*

is to surround your design opportunity with sources of inspiration and strength, examples of “living proof” from around the world and across analogous fields. Let’s take a moment to scan for these educational innovations, pioneers and learning leaders. What, for you, are some of the most inspiring, living examples of positive education in schools, workplaces, communities and cultures around the world – whether or not it’s formally called “positive education?”

- What two discrete innovations in education, or schools, institutes, or programs would you like to shine a spotlight on?
- Why do they inspire you?

**How would you respond?**

The morning yoga class at WPEA



### **A special issue for AI Practitioner: A new format and shining a spotlight on PE voices around the world**

This very special issue is in part an answer to that very question we posed at the WPEA.

We are so grateful, energized and privileged to bring to you a taste of the WPEA by highlighting here a mixture of voices and visionaries from the summit. Furthermore, to model true innovation, each article is brought to you in two ways: 1) presented here in written form, and 2) because each of these articles are actually a summary from a lengthier interview, you can access the full interviews

free online via a podcast. The full podcasts are available via Michelle McQuaid's podcast series:

[www.michellemcquaid.com/makingpositiveeducationwork](http://www.michellemcquaid.com/makingpositiveeducationwork)

If you like the interview and want to “pay it forward” to others interested in mobilizing positive education, you are invited to share the links to the podcasts with others! In this special issue you will:

- Learn about the powerful “living proof” stories from pioneering presidents and leaders of universities dedicated to positive education. For example, the interview with Héctor Escamilla and Rosalinda Ballesteros of Universidad Tecmilenio in Mexico highlights what it looks like when an entire university commits to this work. Likewise, Nance Lucas, Executive Director of George Mason University's Center for the Advancement of Well-Being in the USA, describes their efforts to transform the entire “ecosystem” of their university as they work to link wellbeing with issues of diversity and inclusion. Both these living case studies also highlight how they have used AI to help create positive change within their systems.
- You will be taken into the evidence-based work of several of the top researchers in the field, with our interviews with Alejandro Adler, the co-author of the World Government Summit report on Positive Education and Wellbeing, and Mathew White author of several major books on positive education and public policy, as well as D. Peggy Kern, a researcher at Melbourne University who is putting into operation a measure of human flourishing to track changes in the wellbeing of students. These colleagues each remind us of the importance of the evidence-based approaches to positive education and how we can use the science of wellbeing to help educate and inspire systematic change.
- You will hear too, the story of an overnight sensation at Yale University – it's a summary of our interview with Laurie Santos, the electrifying and gifted professor who created the course with the highest attendance in the history of Yale, on the topic of happiness.

- We will take you also into the remarkable work advancing positive education at a national level and with large, city, public school systems in our interview with Dr Abdulla of Dubai, who shares insights from a national positive education initiative being led by the Ministry of Education in the UAE. Likewise, our interview with Jillian Darwish, the head of the Mayerson Academy – where the original work on the “VIA Human Character Strengths” has blossomed to become a cornerstone for almost every school embracing positive education – illustrates what it looks like to bring this work to life in educational settings around the world.

### An invitation to create and share your own stories of positive education

Lastly, we want to invite you into this work.

We see the positive revolution in education unfolding over the next decade and more. There will be new national summits and regional networks unfolding. There will be more pioneering schools. There are post-summit working group sites where you might consider joining in or creating a new working group. There are curriculum, research and knowledge sharing sites, and there are sites with links to training.

For those wanting to learn more about the AI Summit method itself, we have made the remarkable WPEA summit workbook available, at no cost, as well as a video summary of the WPEA and a more comprehensive post-summit report on the Cooperrider Center website at [www.champlain.edu/ai-home/positive-education-summit-2018](http://www.champlain.edu/ai-home/positive-education-summit-2018). It's time for a positive revolution in education; we are capable of so much. And we don't want you to miss a bit of it!

**David L. Cooperrider, Lindsey N. Godwin and Michelle McQuaid**  
**November 2018**

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