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Positive Education Program on the Psychological Well-being of Educational Actors

Programa de psicología positiva aplicada a la educación sobre el bienestar psicológico de actores educativos

Programa de psicologia positiva aplicada à educação sobre o bem estar psicológico de pessoas nela atuantes

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Abstract: In the framework of promoting psychological well-being in educational settings, the following study is intended a) to determine the impact of the Positive Education program based on character strengths on the psychological well-being of educational actors and their pre- and post-modifications; b) to analyze the relationship between psychological well-being and character strengths after the implementation of the program. The methodological approach used a pre- and post-exploratory model and a correlational analysis. Thus, the study was conducted in two different educational actor groups working at Uruguayan educative system levels with two sample groups: group A with 34 individuals and group B with 26 individuals. The data recollection instrument used was the Scale of Psychological Well-being for Adults [BIEPS -A] (Casullo, 2002), and the character strengths sub-scales adapted and validated by Rojas, & Feldman (2010), both with extensive evidence on validity and reliability; non-parametric hypothesis tests were administered for data

analysis as well. The findings showed that there were statistically significant changes in the well-being of educational actors, both in group A (Z = -4,31, p <0.05) and B (Z = -3,49, p <0.05). Likewise, significant positive correlations were observed between psychological well-being and character strengths after the application of the Positive Education Program. Consequently, it is recommended that further studies are conducted to examine the effect of Positive Psychology interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being in educational contexts.

Keywords: Psychological Well-Being; Character Strengths; Programs; Positive Education.

Resumen: En el marco de la promoción del bienestar psicológico en contextos educativos se presenta la siguiente experiencia de investigación con los objetivos de: a) determinar el efecto del programa basado en psicología positiva sobre el bienestar psicológico de personas actoras educativas antes de la intervención basada en fortalezas del carácter y después de esta, b) analizar las relaciones entre bienestar psicológico y las fortalezas del carácter luego de la aplicación del programa. A nivel metodológico corresponde a un diseño cuasi experimental pre y post, además de correlacional. De ahí que se llevó a cabo con dos grupos independientes de varios individuos actores educativos del sistema educativo uruguayo con una muestra en dos grupos: A de 34 sujetos y B de 26 sujetos, la técnica de recolección de datos fue a través de la escala de bienestar psicológico BIEPS-A de Casullo (2002) y sub escalas de fortalezas del carácter de la versión adaptada y validada por Rojas y Feldman (2010), ambas con adecuadas evidencias de confiabilidad y validez, se emplearon pruebas de contrastes de hipótesis no paramétricas para el análisis de datos. A modo de resultados, se obtuvo que hubo cambios estadísticamente significativos en bienestar psicológico antes y después de realizado el programa de psicología positiva, tanto en el grupo A (Z = -4,31, p <0.05) como en el grupo B (Z = -3,49, p <0.05). De igual manera, se encontraron correlaciones estadísticamente significativas entre el bienestar psicológico y las fortalezas del carácter luego de la aplicación del programa psicología positiva aplicada a la educación. De modo que se recomienda la profundización en estudios dedicados a examinar el efecto de intervenciones orientadas a la promoción del bienestar psicológico en contextos educativos.

Palabras clave: Bienestar psicológico; fortalezas del carácter; programas; psicología positiva; educación.

Resumo: Esta experiência de investigação é apresentada no marco da promoção do bem estar psicológico em contextos educacionais, com o objetivo de a) determinar o efeito do programa baseado na psicologia positiva sobre o bem estar psicológico de pessoas atuantes na educação antes e depois da intervenção orientada no fortalecimento do caráter, b) analisar as relações entre bem estar psicológico e as fortalezas do caráter, logo depois da aplicação do programa. A nível metodológico, corresponde a um projeto quase experimental antes e após, além de correlacional. Foi feito com grupos independentes de vários indivíduos-atores educativos do sistema educacional do Uruguai com uma amostra feita em dois grupos: um grupo A de 34 pessoas e outro B de 26, a técnica de coleta de dados foi feita através da escala de bem-estar psicológico BIEPS-A de Casullo (2002) e sub escalas de fortalecimento do caráter da versão adaptada e validada por Rojas e Feldman (2010), as duas com evidências de confiabilidade e validade; foram feitas provas de contrastes de hipóteses não paramétricas para análises dos dados. Como resultados, se constata que aconteceram mudanças estatisticamente significativas no bem-estar psicológico antes e depois de realizar o programa de psicologia positiva, tanto no grupo A (Z = -4,31, p <0,05) como no grupo B (Z = -3,49, p <0,05). De igual

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modo, foram encontradas correlações estatisticamente importantes entre o bem estar psicológico e as fortalezas de caráter, logo após a aplicação do programa psicologia positiva aplicada à educação. Desse modo, a recomendação feita sugere um aprofundamento nos estudos dedicados ao efeito das intervenções orientadas à promoção do bem-estar psicológico nos contextos educativos.

Palavras chave: Bem-estar psicológico; fortalezas do caráter; programas; psicologia positiva; educação.

Introduction

During its development, traditional psychology focused its research on identifying and reducing pathologies in people, which possibly caused psychology to abandon the study of things that could be functioning optimally or properly (Park et al., 2013). In this way, this narrow focus has somehow limited the progress of research on the healthy aspects of people. Consequently, positive psychology is presented as a psychological approach aimed at identifying and understanding human qualities and virtues, as well as promoting conditions that allow people to have a happy and productive life (Reppold et al., 2015). This is why the emergence of positive psychology in recent years has allowed the development of research on topics related to human empowerment and growth, seeking to broaden the vision of psychology as a science, which in turn includes the use of assessment and intervention techniques beyond the study of psychopathology (Reppold et al., 2015).

Among the most relevant scientific contributions of positive psychology are the study of well-being and human strengths (Seligman et al., 2005). In this context, psychological well-being is a concept considered as part of the cognitive representations that people have about their lives and their well-being formed from the eudaimonic tradition. Psychological well-being is conceptualized in terms of the cultivation of personal strengths and their contribution to a greater good, allowing the development of potential and experiences of meaning in life (McMahan, & Estes, 2011).

On his part, Ryff (1989), defines this construct as the subjective evaluation that people make in different areas of their lives. Thus, psychological well-being is considered as a multidimensional construct, and several of its aspects constitute well-being. This construct is represented by the dimensions of self-acceptance (the recognition and acceptance of the person's positive and negative qualities), positive relationships with others (ability to maintain satisfying, warm and honest intimate relationships), autonomy (the capacity for self-determination and independence); environmental mastery (referring to the skills for handling both internal and external situations); purpose in life (having goals and leading behavior to achieve them) and personal growth (feeling a need for continued personal improvement).

Positive psychology has revitalized the study of well-being, but also of character, understood as the set of stable traits that define a person. Nevertheless, this approach is focused on studying good character, that is, those traits with a moral and axiological value that are

found in the structure of personality but these alone do not define it, due to the complexity of the construct declared as a psychic system that makes individual differences possible (Gancedo, 2007). In this work, the position of Peterson, & Seligman (2004) in the definition of character as a set of human virtues operationalized specifically in the strengths is assumed, which according to them, are sensitive and malleable to context. In some way, the authors pose that character strengths are educable, and who knows if character education can resurge?

However, character strengths are defined as intrinsically valuable ways to behave, think, and feel, which promote well-being, positive relationships, and the achievement of goals (Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). They are considered as a multidimensional construct, constituted by a set of 24 highly valued character traits in multiple cultures, which are classified under 6 virtues (Park et al., 2013). This inventory of virtues and character strengths was the result of the analysis of classical texts on the nature of virtues from the Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, classical Greek, Judaeo-Christian, and Muslim traditions (McGrath, 2015).

Those traits related to the use of the mind and knowledge, that are expressed in curiosity, open-mindedness, creativity, love of learning, and perspective are considered strengths of the virtue of wisdom. Likewise, the virtue of courage is related to the proper handling of emotional traits to accomplish objectives, and it includes the strengths of authenticity, persistence, bravery, and zest. The virtue of humanity is composed of the strengths related to relational management as well as the ability to love, kindness, and social intelligence. The fourth virtue is justice shaped by the strengths of teamwork, fairness, and leadership.

The next virtue, temperance, includes the strengths of forgiveness, modesty, prudence, and self-regulation. Finally, the virtue of transcendence, shaped by the strengths of spirituality, appreciation of beauty, humor, gratitude, and hope (McGrath, 2015; Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Seligman et al., 2005). Studies in several countries have confirmed the relationship of strengths such as gratitude, hope, zest, curiosity, and love with well-being in youth and adults as well as their association with high mental health, life satisfaction, positive affect, mental health and others (McGrath, 2015; Ovejero et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013).

In the field of positive psychology, the area linked to the creation of interventions to promote well-being has shown an increasing development (Lomas et al., 2015). Positive interventions, as they are called within this discipline, are rather recent. These programs are designed to cultivate the presence of positive feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that promote human well-being (Sin, & Lyubomirsky, 2009). In the educational context, they aim to improve mental health and enhance well-being in the education of all members of the educational community (Shankland, & Rosset, 2017). It has also been called Positive Education, and with this, schools could teach both the skills of well-being and the skills of achievement (the boulevard into the world of adult work). Besides, more well-being is synergistic with better learning. Increases in well-being are likely to produce increases in learning, the traditional goal of education.

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Over the last few years, several studies that provide evidence of the effectiveness of these programs in reducing depressive symptoms have been published (Sin, & Lyubomirsky, 2009). As for Park et al. (2013), they explain that these studies have shown that the interventions designed in positive psychology have not only succeeded in decreasing discomfort in situations considered to be distressing but have also impact on the identification, recognition, and promotion of personal resources that can be employed in some other challenging situations in the future. These are ideas that match with the perspective of Sin, & Lyubomirsky (2009), because these authors argue that the effectiveness of these interventions is based on the fact that the participants learn coping strategies, problem-solving and, of course, to recognize their character strengths.

Additionally, research and review studies indicate that positive psychology interventions generally have small to moderate effects on psychological well-being in patients with anxiety problems and depression (Gorlin et al., 2018), they have also shown positive results in elderly people (Jiménez et al., 2016), in people with chronic physical illnesses (Ghosh, & Deb, 2017), and in clinical and non-clinical samples with different types of psychosocial risks such as depressive symptoms (Bolier, et al., 2013). In general, the current results in meta-analyses show that positive psychology interventions can be effective in improving well-being and reducing negative symptoms in people.

In educational settings, especially for teachers, the evidence refers that there are few published works. However, the evidence provided indicates that high levels of well-being are associated with greater physical health, satisfaction, and organizational commitment, which benefits not only the mental health of the staff but also in the training of students (Cobo-Rendón et al., 2017). This benefit is also viewed in educational terms, where teachers serve as guides for the modeling of new positive behaviors for their students because they usually influence in a direct way the student's mental schemes through modeling and the processes that arise during the teacher-student relationship. Thus, it may be suggested that educators receive training, in order to improve their psychological well-being as well as promote the development of their character strengths since it would be difficult to teach what has not been previously acquired (Palomera, 2017).

In light of the few positive psychology interventions oriented to the promotion of psychological well-being and character strengths in teachers and other educational actors, this study seeks to communicate the characteristics of a positive education program. Consequently, the research objectives are a) to determine the impact of the Positive Education program based on character strengths on the psychological well-being of educational actors and their pre- and post-modifications; b) to analyze the power, magnitude, and significance of the relationship between psychological well-being and character strengths considered in this research design: self-regulation, curiosity and love of learning, love and being loved, gratitude, and bravery, after the implementation of the program in educational actors. In this context, the hypothesis that

oriented this study was the following: the individuals participating in the positive education program will increase their levels of psychological well-being.

Conceptual framework: Some theoretical considerations

Positive psychology is an approach focused on the systematic and serious study of human qualities, the optimal subjective experience as well as the states, traits, and situations that relate to psychological well-being (Park et al., 2013). Accordingly, positive psychology can be considered as a scientific movement that focuses its research variable in describing what a good life consists of. The following are some of the elements that can be related to this variable: subjective experiences, positive traits, relationships, and positive institutions.

For these reasons, the goal of positive psychology is the study of the factors mentioned above, in order to ensure the conditions for human flourishing, that is, a life with well-being (Seligman, 2011). At this point, it is important to clarify that the well-being from positive psychology is a multidimensional construct that integrates the hedonistic and eudaimonic traditions, in their dimensions of subjective and psychological well-being, respectively (Vázquez et al., 2009).

In this regard, this research paper is centered on the integrative perspective of psychological well-being as a construct that includes the affective or hedonistic dimensions of life, in association with the dimensions of personal growth and fulfillment, specifically in the multidimensional models of psychological well-being that focus on indicators of positive functioning according to the context (Vielma, & Alonso, 2010). Within this theoretical perspective are the contributions of Ryff (1989, 2014) and Seligman (2011), who understand psychological well-being from a more eudaimonic perspective based on carrying out activities with intrinsic value and consistent with the values of the person through voluntary commitment and action.

In the model of positive psychology, positive emotions are considered as essential components related to satisfaction with life as a heritage of the hedonistic traditions (Seligman, 2011), meaning, it is recognized that positive emotions have an impact on well-being, due to their positive value in the subjective experience, for example, joy, gratitude, hope, and others. For Seligman (2011), from a multidimensional eudaimonic vision of well-being in his PERMA theory, positive emotions are one of the ways people seek to achieve their well-being along with the elements of commitment, social relationships, meaningful living, and achievement/goals as elements seen as traditionally more virtuous. Schueller, & Seligman (2010) note that activities with intrinsic value related to commitment have greater weight in well-being than merely pleasurable activities.

Continuing with the models of well-being from a multidimensional approach, Ryff (1989, 2014) based on Keyes' contributions (Vielma, & Alonso, 2010) proposes a conceptualization of

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psychological well-being based on the true development of the self-potential, expressed in proper psychic functioning with indicators framed in the life cycle. This theory is an effort to establish a difference from the concept of subjective well-being inherited from the hedonistic philosophy (Vázquez et al., 2009).

In this regard, García-Álvarez, & Soler (2016) explain that Ryff's (1989) multidimensional psychological well-being model was proposed more than 25 years ago with multiple applications, constant updates, and has generated more than 350 studies. Therefore, Ryff (2014) examines the construct of psychological well-being in a model based on psychosocial indicators, its development would be based on the efforts that people make to achieve their personal growth, that is, approaching that ideal version of themselves or in other words: self-realization.

Hence, the model of psychological well-being is based on indicators related to areas of optimal human functioning, emphasizing those virtuous behaviors that people perform for their personal growth, according to what the Aristotelian tradition explains: a virtuous life, on those aspects related to the ephemeral emotion or hedonistic elements of well-being. Moreover, Ryff (1989) states that psychological well-being is the subjective evaluation that a person makes when considering the areas of his or her life, that is, an evaluation of how the individual has lived and what he/she has achieved in this journey of existence. The dimensions of well-being are based on the recent revision of Ryff (2014):

a) Self-acceptance: an element that refers to the capacity for self-knowledge, looking to the past and present in order to be able to integrate lived experiences, on the basis of those considered subjectively negative or positive, which means that it implies evaluating the past towards the present. It could consist of an evaluation of the self in a retrospective dimension.

b) Autonomy: refers to the capacity to feel responsible for one's own life, which means the perception each person has of the effectiveness of their resources according to their own quality standards as well as feeling independent when making decisions and leading their lives.

c) Positive relationships: element that has to do with social relationships, that is to say, the interpersonal world in its different shades: peers, friends, partner, and family environment. Similarly, it is based on having healthy social relationships, understanding the world of attachments, social motives, and their influence on personal well-being.

d) Environmental mastery: this element includes the capacity for self-perception, in order to perform adaptive processes on the internal and external environment of the psyche. Thus, these adaptive behaviors would be related to the modification or adjustment of internal states according to external needs or vice versa, in order to obtain benefits and take advantage of opportunities.

e) Purpose in life: an element of well-being related to the future and the way people envision their lives, meaning that they set themselves tasks, objectives, and goals that can mark out ways of leading their lives. In other words, they draw up a path or life projects, and this element emerges from the present into the future.

f) Personal growth: a key element in the model of psychological well-being; people should have feelings of growth, self-realization, or self-actualization. People should perceive that they have grown personally over time, both in resources and in experiences, it means that they see themselves in constant transformation, and they are also open to experiences.

In other words, "this model proposes the development of the abilities, potential skills, and optimal human functioning in the interaction of these elements that can fluctuate while the person identifies, recognizes and stimulates his or her strengths for continuous improvement" (García-Álvarez, & Soler, 2016, p. 38). It should be noted that in the introduction character strengths were referred to as personality traits with moral value, which have implications on the way people behave, think, and feel. For Peterson, & Seligman (2004), these psychological traits are the way virtues are expressed, and a life led by the voluntary implementation of strengths should be the main path to well-being (Seligman, 2011).

Martínez-Martí, & Ruch (2014) point out that character strengths are central elements in eudaimonic models of well-being. It is worth mentioning that there is plenty of empirical evidence in the scientific literature that shows the relationship between character strengths and psychological well-being, namely: Buschor et al. (2013), Ovejero et al. (2016). As part of this, only the character strengths of the human virtues considered in the research design will be conceptualized, according to the approaches presented by Peterson, & Seligman (2004) and by García-Álvarez, & Soler (2016), specifically:

a) Self-regulation: strength that belongs to the virtue of temperance since it protects people against all disproportions including the emotional and behavioral aspects. This strength refers to the ability to regulate cognitive processes, emotions, and behaviors; highly related to discipline.

b) Curiosity and love of learning: part of the virtue of wisdom, which includes strengths focused on using the cognitive processes to learn and solve problems. This strength is expressed as a cognitive openness in different subjects of knowledge, interest in knowing the world, and the satisfaction of learning specific subjects according to one's personal interests.

c) Love: strength that belongs to the virtue of humanity, that is to say, it is a trait related to the mastery of the interpersonal world. It allows people to care for others, be sensitive to expressions of love, and affection with behavioral manifestations.

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d) Gratitude: strength that consists of being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen, all this from a cognitive point of view, and being touched by this acknowledgment. Hence, gratitude has two components: thought and emotion. It is located in the virtue of transcendence because the expression of gratitude connects people with other peers and even with things, beliefs, and institutions; it is conceived as transpersonal gratitude.

e) Bravery: it belongs to the virtue of courage because those are traits that allow people to show their will in specific matters. This strength consists in being brave when facing challenges or difficult situations. It would be not to become smaller when facing life's challenges.

Methodology

Design: This research experience is classified according to León, & Montero (2015), as a quasi-experimental pre/post-test design with only one group, since we sought to evaluate the effect of the positive education program on the psychological well-being of educational staff before (pre-test) and after (post-test) its implementation. As an alternative to replicate the study, simultaneously, with the same research design, this study was carried out in two separate and independent groups (i.e. A and B), but these groups had no interaction and no control group was intended to be part of the research, nor were the relevant implications for that such as contact precaution.

It is important to mention that this design is due to external reasons to the research team because the group A and B were already formed naturally, as will be described in the procedure section. As a consequence, the random selection of the participants in the study was not possible, and the limitations of this particular case did not allow us to consider any other research designs such as the experimental design with control groups.

Participants: The research was carried out with two independent groups (A and B) of educational staff working in the subsystems of early childhood, elementary, middle, or secondary education of Uruguay's educational system. In that sense, there are group A for the city of Paysandú and group B for the city of Fray Bentos, both capital cities of their departments in the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. As will be described in the procedure section, the groups were organized by the foundation that sponsored the program. These were specifically formed by education practitioners that responded to a press release with the purpose of gathering active members of the educational system interested in a positive psychology training applied in education, which somehow explains the inequality in sex percentages and heterogeneity of its participants.

In the same way, group A was composed of 34 people (33 women, 97.1% female and 1 man, 2.9% male) with an average age of 37.7 years and a standard deviation of 10.54, minimum 20 years and maximum 56 years. The group was comprised of teachers of early childhood,

elementary, middle, and high school education and specialized in the field of education, management, psychology, engineering, communication, and social work staff.

At the same time, group B consisted of 26 people (23 women, 88.5% female and 3 men, 11.5% male), mean age 38.65 years and standard deviation 8.66, minimum 26 years, and maximum 52 years. The group was comprised of: elementary and secondary school teachers, management staff, seconded teachers, recreational staff, a doctor and healthcare technician. It is important to note that the design of quasi-experimental pre and post-test research with a single group remains unchanged because groups A and B did not interact with each other.

Data collection instruments: A three-part questionnaire was developed:

a) Informed consent form and socio-demographic data section.

b) Psychological Well-Being Scale for Adults (BIEPS-A) by Casullo (2002, p. 18) to assess the multidimensional psychological well-being variable in its dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, purpose in life, and environmental mastery. It is an additive scale with directly written statements, consisting of 13 items with three answer options, which can be applied individually or collectively over a period of 5 to 10 minutes. Regarding its psychometric properties reported in the original study, it presents adequate evidence of reliability (0.74) and validity using factor analysis to confirm the factorial structure of the four components. In this way, the operationalization of the psychological well-being variable is based on the dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relationships, purpose in life, and environmental mastery, and its high scores indicate high levels of the variable.

c) Character Strengths Subscale to specifically measure the strengths of self-regulation, curiosity, gratitude, bravery, and humanity/love in the Character Strengths Inventory adapted and validated by Rojas, & Feldman (2010) from the Values in Action (VIA) by Peterson, & Seligman (2004). All subscales used present adequate evidence of reliability with internal consistency values in Cronbach's alpha above 0. 90 and validity using factor analysis reported in the previously mentioned validation. It is a Likert sub-scale that has five answer options, written in a direct and additive way, and high scores in each of the character strength sub-scales are interpreted as a high indicator of the presence of the respective strength.

Procedure: The investigation was carried out due to the opportunity generated by the foundation of an international company interested in promoting changes in educational contexts in Uruguay. This foundation made a call through newspapers and radio stations for education professionals eager to participate in a positive education course. For this reason, the foundation was solely responsible for the selection process using as main criteria for selecting participants people who would act as potential agents of change in their environment, educational communities or regional references.

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From there, the foundation formed two groups, namely those mentioned A and B, to be trained by another non-profit organization dedicated to positive psychology. Besides, only one of the members of the research team had access to the groups as a teacher of the program to achieve the research objectives, with prior authorization and informed consent of the participating subjects. Pre- and post-intervention measures were taken and only transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed after the end of the course.

Program: Positive Education Course

The Positive Education Course (CUPPAE, for Curso de Psicología Positiva Aplicada a la Educación in its Spanish-language version) was designed so that the participants could integrate the principles of positive psychology in their classrooms or in their educational settings. In this course, the emphasis is made on those aspects that allow human flourishing, with this approach it is intended that its participants are able to identify what makes life worth living by taking as a starting point the recognition of each person's own character strengths. Rather than focusing on their weaknesses, it would begin with what is right.

The Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) also took a constructivist approach by providing the participants with tools for them to build their own knowledge. In other words, based on the exchange of ideas and contributions generated by strategies and resources in each module, the participants built their own learning through examples, didactic situations, explanations, and other sources with intrinsic value. Moreover, this training process was dynamic, participatory, and interactive, besides each session of the course included theoretical-practical foundations to stimulate them into action.

In addition, among the purposes of the Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) was also to raise awareness among educational staff of the fact that they can become agents of change and promote psychological well-being by implementing the principles of positive psychology in the classroom and other educational contexts. For these reasons, the general purpose of the course was to develop skills for proper management of their personal resources such as the virtues and character strengths, which are ways of promoting psychological well-being in educational contexts. And perhaps, contributing to a possible improvement in teacher performance and school adjustment, as indirect benefits.

Consequently, the objectives set for the Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) were a) To understand the principles of positive psychology and incorporate them into personal and professional practice to increase psychological well-being and reduce psychosocial risks; b) To promote change agents' attitudes in educational actors so that they can act as mental health promoters in their educational communities; c) To develop theoretical - practical skills to be applied as actions that make the promotion of character strengths, mental health, and well-being possible in their communities. In summary, the training had as a general objective to develop the psychological well-being of educational personnel by identifying their virtues and character strengths.

In order to achieve the goals and objectives set regarding the increase of the staff's psychological well-being, the multidimensional theories of well-being were considered and the program was focused on the identification of their strengths using the "Character Strengths and Virtues Inventory" by Peterson, & Seligman (2004), so that each person could identify his/her strengths and voluntarily put them into practice. Therefore, special emphasis was placed on the idea of fixed versus growth mindset as a strategy to consider the difference between one strength and another, which is a condition sine qua non to promote positive psychology. In other words, it was considered important that the participants could understand that certain skills, strengths, attitudes, and thoughts can be developed through work and effort since these are not fixed. It is the idea of willpower that exposes, in some of its aspects, positive psychology in its vision of the active human being.

Moreover, the Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) was held in two groups: A and B, over the period April to November, resulting in eight workshop sessions throughout the year. The meetings were conducted on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. in two departmental capitals of Uruguay, which served as a center for the participants coming from multiple areas. Two university halls were used as premises as they both have suitable facilities for the meetings and also because of their resources: TV sets, audio equipment, internet connection, large and illuminated rooms, boards, and others.

Summarizing, the Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) was designed over the eight modules that were taught in the form of workshops. In these training spaces, the educational personnel was able to identify various psychoeducational interventions, which allowed them to know how to adapt them to their specific work styles and contexts. Similarly, they learned different tools of positive education, because all the subjects involved were able to integrate what they learned into their work plans through practical experiences. In order to describe at an operational, didactic, and functional level, the contents and their specific objectives of the program were:

- **Module I:** Introduction to Positive Psychology. The objectives of this first module were to introduce positive psychology, its history, and foundations; to know the scope and applications of positive psychology; to define key concepts such as character, virtues, and strengths; to describe the theories of multidimensional well-being and its elements.

- **Module II:** Routes to well-being. The objectives were to understand the concept of well-being; to analyze the myths of happiness; to analyze the theories of multidimensional well-being and its elements; to reflect on the thinking and behavioral styles of happy people; to apply the habits that build well-being.

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- **Module III:** Character Strength Development. The objectives were to define the concept of character and personality; to analyze differences between character, temperament, and personality; to discriminate character strengths; to know the classification of strengths into character virtues; to examine innovative interventions to develop character strengths; to reflect on some necessary conditions to promote the development of character strengths in the classroom.

- **Module IV:** Interventions in positive education. In this module the objectives were to introduce the concept of positive education; to compare the conceptions of happiness, satisfaction, and well-being; to define non-clinical positive interventions and ways to carry them out; to analyze habit changes oriented to well-being.

- **Module V:** Cognitive styles, resilience, and optimism. The objectives of this module were to explain mental styles as well as explanatory styles of reality, and to identify attitudes of growth and fixed mindset; to design an action plan to develop a growth mindset in the educational and personal contexts; to analyze the concept of resilience; to identify risk and protective factors in the resilience framework; to identify the types of optimism seeking to deepen the understanding of explanatory styles; to know the concept of self-efficacy.

- **Module VI:** Mindfulness, self-knowledge, and self-regulation. The objectives were to analyze concepts of self-regulation, self-control, and will; to know self-control strategies; to define mindfulness in order to know some practices; to associate mindfulness and positive psychology.

- **Module VII:** Emotional balance of the educational staff, empathy, and compassion. The objectives were: to analyze the concepts of compassion and empathy; to distinguish between empathy and compassion; to contrast self-pity and self-esteem; to explore self-pity techniques and their applicability.

- **Module VIII:** Educational and community-based positive psychology interventions. During the last meeting, all the interventions prepared by the participating subjects were presented, which were a fundamental requirement for approving the course. The interventions were prepared with a checklist that allowed all of them to meet with certain didactic and uniformity requirements and standards. More than 33 different interventions were presented at the last meeting, some already carried out and others to be implemented next year. Some were worked on in groups and others individually, meaning that some participants decided to join efforts as a team for geographical proximity or similarity in the topics. When presenting the intervention, the group or the participant had a few pre-established minutes to explain their idea and then a debate was organized with contributions from the rest of the participants.

After the completion of each module up to module seven, each participant, individually must have chosen, analyzed, and practiced some willful purpose to work on during the month, which must have been based on the contents of this module to support its implementation. The training team consisted of three teachers trained in positive psychology, who were rotated throughout the year. In that sense, each workshop was developed with a presentation, where several types of resources and didactic materials were included. Also, there were instances of reflection and sharing that were related to this constructivist approach. For greater organization, each participant was given a notebook where they could write down their tasks and practical activities workshop by workshop, for example, the willful activities, many of which came to light in the sharing, although others were personal pieces of work.

As a final work and requirement for the issuance of the diploma, the participants had to develop an intervention based on one of the topics discussed throughout the year, to be implemented in the educational institution where they work. The target population to carry out the Positive Education Course (CUPPAE) formed a heterogeneous group from various places and with different duties within the educational community, which enriched the program with the diverse contributions of each participant from their different experiences and contexts. This variety and heterogeneity also allowed the participating subjects to confirm that all the work done in the course is applicable to different contexts and realities. In summary, the educational staff was able to broaden its view and perspective on the many possibilities of positive psychology.

It is worth noting that the participants came from more than 22 different localities scattered in three departments of Uruguay. In most locations, there was more than one representative and in some cases several working in the same institution, which strengthened the work of the course. One party working in the same institution was able to work as a team and design interventions with the goal of presenting them as an education center project (or PEC for Proyecto Educativo de Centro in Spanish) for the following year. At the beginning of the course, a well-being questionnaire was implemented and at the end of the course, the same procedure was followed, in other words, the pre and post-tests to respond to the proposed research objectives.

Data analysis: The data collected through the instruments previously described was transcribed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 18 (PASW, formerly SPSS 18). Exploratory data analysis was carried out as well as the descriptive statistics of the study variables, then the Kolmogorov–Smirnov goodness of fit test was performed with significance correction of Lilliefors, due to the size of the samples in each of the variables to know their distribution. These results indicated non-normal distributions ($p <$ to 0.05); therefore, the use of non-parametric inferential statistics was suggested, namely: for correlations, the Spearman

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coefficient and for contrasting research hypotheses, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, as well as the calculation of the effect size of the latter.

Similarly, Berlanga-Silvente, & Rubio-Hurtado (2012) recommend the use of non-parametric tests to samples with characteristics similar to those of this study, namely: sample size, non-normal distribution and other parametricity conditions. For the calculation of the effect size, the program G - Power (version 3.1.9.2) was used. The estimation method used was the Asymptotic Relative Efficiency (ARE), according to guidance provided by Hettmansperger & McKean (2010) for relative efficiency applied to the Wilcoxon test.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1: Pre and post-program results

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD
Group A pre and post-results, n=34								
Psychological well-being	29,00	39,00	34,7059	2,61151	32,00	39,00	37,0294	1,93038
Dimension of control	9,00	12,00	11,0294	,96876	10,00	12,00	11,5588	,66017
Dimension of relationships	7,00	9,00	8,5588	,74635	7,00	9,00	8,8529	,50045
Dimension of achievements	6,00	9,00	7,8529	,85749	6,00	9,00	8,4412	,78591
Dimension of environment	5,00	9,00	7,2647	1,26272	7,00	9,00	8,1765	,86936
Group B pre and post-results, n=26								
Psychological well-being	31,00	39,00	35,8462	2,29246	34,00	39,00	37,4615	1,65483
Dimension of control	9,00	12,00	11,2308	,90808	10,00	12,00	11,6154	,63730
Dimension of relationships	7,00	9,00	8,6923	,61769	6,00	9,00	8,7692	,71036
Dimension of achievements	6,00	9,00	8,0769	,89098	7,00	9,00	8,6923	,54913
Dimension of environment	31,00	39,00	35,8462	2,29246	7,00	9,00	8,3846	,75243

Min: Minimum score; Max: Maximum score; M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation.
Note: Made by the own authors.

In Table 1, the results describing the psychological well-being variable are presented in the dimensions of Casullo's instrument (2002) based on the model proposed by Ryff (1989, 2014), namely: self-acceptance, positive relationships, purpose in life, and environmental mastery. These were measured in Groups A and B of educational personnel before and after the program intervention, Table 1 shows that the psychological well-being means had an increase after the application. In fact, groups A and B analyzed with Casullo's scale (2002), were below the 50th percentile before application, and after the application of the program, they are in the 75th percentile of psychological well-being.

Based on the above, and according to the research objective of evaluating the impact of the positive education program on the well-being of educational personnel, the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test with the measures of psychological well-being showed that there were statistically significant changes in psychological well-being before and after the implementation of the positive education program in both group A (Z = -4.31, p <0.05) and group B (Z = -3.49, p <0.05). Likewise, statistically significant changes in the dimensions of psychological well-being, in group A in its four dimensions: control (Z = -2,612, p <0.05), relationships (Z = -1,996, p <0.05), achievements (Z = -3,162, p <0.05), and environment (Z = -3,715, p <0. 05). Similarly, in group B in three of its dimensions: control (Z = -2,308, p <0.05), achievements (Z = -2,858, p <0.05), environment (Z =-2,977, p <0.05), but there were no statistically significant changes in the relationships dimension (Z = -1,000, p > 0.05).

In addition, the size of the effect of the positive education program on the psychological well-being of the participating educational personnel was calculated as follows: for group A based on a mean difference of 1.62 (absolute value) and a standard deviation of 1.63, a high effect was detected with high power (d=0.99, power = .994). On the other hand, group B, with a mean difference of 2.32 (absolute value) and a deviation of 2.27, a high effect with high power was detected (d=1.02, power = .994).

If the results found from Ryff's view (1989, 2014) are analyzed, it is interpreted that the educational staff of group A and B present increases in the environmental mastery dimension, that is to say, they improved their perception of the skills for environmental/context management and they are able to adapt or modify it. They also feel they can control external factors, identify growth opportunities, take advantage of the means and resources available in that context, and take actions consistent with their own values. Likewise, increases in the self-acceptance dimension can be interpreted as an improvement of their perception of freedom, independence, positive attitude towards the self as well as greater recognition of their traits, whether those are qualities or defects. Also, in resisting social pressures, if the person thinks his or her behavior is appropriate, that is, the perception of control and competence increased (Casullo, 2002).

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In addition, the educational staff in both groups reported increases in the purpose in life dimension, which is interpreted according to Casullo (2002) and the contributions of Ryff (1989, 2014) in formulating adequate life goals and objectives. In other words, they perceive that their life has a direction (a life with meaning), that they have goals in their lives that they must work to achieve, and of course, they have a value system that gives meaning to their lives and drive them to action. Nevertheless, only group A showed statistically significant increases in the relationships dimension of well-being. The authors Casullo (2002) and Ryff (1989, 2014) refer that the educational personnel are warmer, more trustworthy, and have a tendency to have healthier relationships, can be empathic and affective, concerned about their relations and the well-being of other people, and they understand human relations as reciprocal acts of kindness and empathy.

Summarizing, the increase in the psychological well-being of groups A and B is interpreted as an adequate evaluation of their optimal functioning throughout the life cycle, that is, they perceive that they are people who are in constant growth, development and updating in the construction of the best version of themselves. There was also an improvement in recognizing and being aware of their potential when they see an improvement over time and circumstances, possibly these educational actors will change in a way that expresses better self-knowledge and effectiveness (Casullo, 2002; Ryff, 1989, 2014).

The results of the increase in psychological well-being after the application of the positive education program can be explained by the fact that the sessions were designed to identify and put into practice in a voluntary, conscious, persistent and daily way their main character strengths. Some background information has shown the relationship between the implementation of character strengths and psychological well-being (McGrath, 2015; Ovejero et al., 2016; Park et al., 2013; Veloso-Besio et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the program also sought to cultivate the use of positive feelings, cognitions and behaviors that promote human well-being in the educational staff. As stated by Sin, & Lyubomirsky (2009), it is one of the elements that make positive interventions successful, and they also refer to the implementation of different character strengths. All this in addition to the program contents on gratitude, resilience, optimism, and explanatory styles, which have been successful in other wellbeing-oriented interventions (He, 2009; Seligman et al., 2009).

Moreover, the results of this study are congruent with those reported by Cuadra-Peralta et al. (2012) and Jiménez et al. (2016), in their pilot programs for the improvement of psychological well-being in older adults, based on the foundations of positive psychology and recognition of character strengths. These findings are also consistent with the study made by Veloso-Besio et al. (2015) about a program based on positive psychology for workers, and with the results

reported by Cuadra-Peralta et al. (2010) on a positive psychology program to promote well-being. It is important to clarify that there are few controlled studies in educational work contexts and especially in teacher population about the effectiveness of interventions based on positive psychology, for example, in the systematic review made by Bolier et al. (2013) the interventions in educational contexts were excluded from their analysis criteria.

Now, regarding the research objective of analyzing the power, magnitude, and significance of the relationship between psychological well-being and character strengths considered in this research design: self-regulation, curiosity and love of learning, love and being loved, gratitude, and bravery, after the implementation of the positive education program for educational staff. The results show positive coefficients of statistically significant correlations for each of the strengths in both groups, at the level of **= <0.001, *=<0.05, see Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations between post psychological well-being measures and the strengths

Psychological well-being	Group	Self-regulation	Love of learning	Love	Gratitude	Bravery
Spearman's Rho	A	,407*	,341*	,483**	,610**	,639**
	B	,632**	,431*	,600**	,540**	,437*

**= <0,001, *=<0,05.
Note: Made by the own authors.

These correlations are theoretically expected, García-Álvarez, & Soler (2016) explain that character strengths are traits that when put into practice every day will promote well-being in people, for example, the strength of capacity to love and be loved of the virtue of humanity would relate to well-being in its dimensions of healthy interpersonal relationships and self-acceptance, as well as the ability to control the environment in its social domains as it relates to the environmental mastery dimension of psychological well-being. At the same time, they explain that the strengths of self-regulation and bravery help people in situations that involve achieving goals, being organized, overcoming obstacles, and defending their positions if they think they are right. All this relates to the dimensions of environmental mastery, purpose in life, and of course, self-acceptance since courage is required for the latter. The strength of love of learning is also included for the achievement of these goals and is even related to the dimension of growth and professional updating.

Similarly, the strength of gratitude has been one of the most commonly associated with psychological well-being. Park et al. (2004) explain that gratitude is one of the strengths that mostly predict psychological well-being, in fact, gratitude would enable people to recognize

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those things they should be satisfied with, and it relates with the dimensions of self-acceptance and positive relationships in the framework of well-being. Definitely, the character strengths studied here can act as ways of cultivating well-being in educational personnel. Indeed, the specialized scientific literature indicates that the strengths of gratitude, love of learning, hope, and self-regulation are the most predictive of psychological well-being (Buschor et al., 2013; Castro, & Cosentino, 2016; Park et al., 2004; Sheldon et al., 2015; Proyer et al., 2011; Proyer et al., 2013).

To summarize, these results of positive and significant correlations between character strengths and well-being are consistent with what has been reported by other backgrounds in different samples, and also with the data described above, namely: García-Álvarez & Soler (2016), Park et al. (2004), Park et al. (2013), Ruch et al. (2014), Martinez-Martí & Ruch (2014). The findings are also consistent with the data reported by Ovejero et al. (2016) in their systematic review of the connections between character strengths and well-being, where the correlation coefficients of the strengths studied are greater than .40, and even states that three of the strengths presented in this study are the most predictive of well-being, specifically: curiosity and love of learning, gratitude, and love.

Conclusions

All things considered, the positive education program had a positive impact on the well-being of educational staff, in other words, there was a statistically significant increase in the psychological well-being of the participating subjects after the implementation of the program, with satisfactory evidence of the effect size of the intervention. Additionally, it is concluded that there are positive and statistically significant correlations between psychological well-being and the strengths of self-regulation, curiosity and love of learning, love and being loved, gratitude, and bravery, after the application of the positive education program in educational personnel.

The results presented here should be considered with caution, as they are based on research that used a quasi-experimental design for the pilot study with a small sample and no control groups. For these reasons, one of the main limitations of this study is its design itself, but these results are quite optimistic with implications on possible future lines of research. It is suggested that such lines of research carry out the described program in larger samples with some experimental design that includes control groups and random samples. Similarly, it would be useful to see the effect of this type of intervention on other variables in the educational work context, for example, job satisfaction, school climate, teaching efficiency, and others.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, after the intervention based on the positive education program, there were increases in psychological well-being in educational staff, as expressed in the post-test conducted at the end of the school year, where the job demands

on educational personnel are higher. This is a fact that may have very interesting practical implications if considered as an effort that can be carried out as a strategy to promote well-being in educational work contexts from the offices of educational administration. It is also oriented towards the mental health of teachers and educational personnel, in the pursuit of psychosocial risk reduction including the ones with implications in work and personal life, but especially in the positive impact on the student population.

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