



TRANSPERSONAL EDUCATION & POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Resilience Building

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Growing2gether – Resilience Building Based on Positive Psychology

Resilience is seen to be an increasingly important factor for all young people, but especially those who are disengaged socially and educationally and come from disadvantaged areas. We offer and illustrate the Growing2gether programme as a resilience based programme, with a solid evidence base and a successful track record of delivering the Growing2gether programme to over 600 children and young people in the Scottish Highlands. Psychological resilience, in a broad sense, is defined as a process whereby people bounce back from adversity and go on with their lives.

Introduction

Growing2gether aims to inspire disengaged young people from disadvantaged areas to succeed at school, in work and in their community, by giving them the life skills and self-belief they need to understand who they are, who they can become and what they can achieve. The educational pedagogy of the Growing2gether programme is based on transpersonal education (Psychosynthesis) and on positive psychology, which



underpins its classroom curriculum, integrating the learnings with the immediate application of skills learned through young people mentoring a small child (three to five years old).

Growing2gether is unique, because it is an early intervention programme targeting two sets of vulnerable children simultaneously, raising the aspirations of young people (age 13-16) from disadvantaged areas by pairing them as a mentor and role model to a child in a nursery who is in need of extra support. This transformative work experience, combined with classroom training, teaches young people interpersonal skills and builds their sense of resilience and responsibility, so they make positive decisions about their education, their health and their future.

The programme objectives are to help young people to:

- enhance emotional wellbeing and mental health;
- stay in school and fulfil their educational, employment and personal potential;
- develop life skills, aspiration and new positive life goals;
- discover their inherent signature strengths and learn to apply these in their own lives;
- develop resilience and self-belief;
- learn emotional literacy (self-reflection, self-management, awareness of others and social skills);
- understand the impact of risky behaviour, including drugs and alcohol and develop the capacity to make positive choices.



Each 18-week Growing2gether programme is run in partnership with the local authority and/or with participating schools and nurseries, one afternoon a week, with up to eight young people and eight children. It combines:

- Accredited vocational SQV Units, Personal Development, Level 4 (Self in Community) and (Self Awareness), designed to encourage the experience of success and to subsequently re-engage with education.

- An innovative work experience scheme where, for two hours each afternoon, teens mentor a disadvantaged child in a nursery to build a sense of responsibility, work as a team and build community engagement.
- 1.5-hour classroom sessions affirming their character strengths and positive behaviour, and then applying their learning to their:
 - community and home life (peer relations, family relationships, community engagement and willingness to volunteer);
 - school (cognitive learning, engagement and enjoyment of learning, behaviour and attendance, the importance of delayed gratification, aspirations and plans for the future);
 - self-efficacy (sense of coherence, resilience, character strengths, communication and relational skills, positive communication and life goals; emphasizing the capacity to actualize those goals);
 - healthy behaviour (attitudes to risk taking, sexual health knowledge and capacity for advice-seeking).

Introduction Transpersonal Education & Positive Psychology

The earlier focus for most psychological research, and much practice, was about how we can understand people when things go wrong (for example, when a person experiences depression). The focus of positive psychology, by contrast, is on what conditions and experiences make for wellbeing, success and fulfilment. It is an approach to psychology, which aims to use psychological research to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Positive psychology is an umbrella term, describing the *scientific* study of what makes life most worth living. It is concerned with positive experiences, character strengths, positive relationships, schools and communities. Positive psychology does not replace 'business-as-usual' psychology, but rather intends to compliment and extend a problem-focused psychology.

Key themes of positive psychology for education (Seligman 1998)

Strengths focus: enabling young people to focus on what they are good at produces better results than constant attention to what they do not do well.

Positive emotions: helping young people shift to a more positive emotional state more frequently, thus opening up their resourcefulness and scope for action.

Finding a state of flow: supporting educational engagement through identifying the conditions required for them to access this high-performance state.

Resilience: enabling the student to develop the ability to cope with pressure and deal with adverse circumstances in a resourceful way.

Grit: the ability to see tasks through even when they become difficult – a key attribute for being successful in life.

Mindset: helping the young person to reframe their attributions and assumptions about what is happening to them or their context.

Positive psychology applied to education enables the student to search for solutions that already exist, to amplify what is working, to focus on and develop their inherent character strengths (potential) and to affirm what they are doing well. The evidence for focusing on character strengths shows that when we do so, we are happier and more confident, have higher levels of self-esteem, are more resilient, more likely to achieve our goals, engage better with education and to perform better at school (Seligman 1988).

The current fathers of positive psychology, Seligman (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) have argued long for wellbeing programmes to be taught in schools, and that they can promote strengths and skills that are valued by most of society, produce measurable improvements in students' wellbeing and behaviour, and facilitate students' engagement in learning and achievement. (Oxford Review of Education, 2009)

The skills of positive psychology have been taught (by the Positive Psychology Centre at the University of Pennsylvania) and evaluated with great success in a whole school approach in the Australian Geelong Grammar school. These skills are resilience, character strengths, gratitude, positive communication, meaning and optimism (Oxford Review of Education, 2009).



Transpersonal Education

Although positive psychology is the current, modern term for a holistic approach to education, it is not new. Positive psychology is providing the scientific rigour and psychological research that was lacking in earlier iterations- the most well-known being Transpersonal Psychology (Carl Jung and Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis). Psychosynthesis, a precursor to the current positive psychology, provides a holistic psychological approach focusing on enabling individuals to access more of their potential;

on developing self-awareness and personal responsibility and on recognizing the importance of meaning as requirements for wellbeing and positive engagement with education and with society (Assagioli, 2008). Growing2gether is underpinned by transpersonal psychology and focuses on bringing out the unique potential of young people, rather than seeing them as a 'problem', through empowering them with life skills, work experience and a deeper understanding of who they are, their character strengths, their potential and aspirations applied to their current lives.

How the Growing2gether programme addresses and builds resilience in 'at risk' young people

The clear and strong message of the all-party parliamentary group on 'Social Mobility, Character and Resilience Manifesto' is that social mobility can be strongly correlated to emotional, non-cognitive skills - empathy, the capacity for healthy relationships, delayed gratification, grit and self-control – and ascribed these attributes as 'Character and Resilience' (APPG 2014). It also provided the links of how character and resilience underpin (and can be taught for) academia, future workplace and relationship with family and community. The APPG also concluded that programmes seeking to improve educational performance and attainment should not be focused exclusively on cognitive abilities, but also work to enhance self-esteem, personal efficacy and perseverance.



Growing2gether

What follows is an explanation of how the Growing2gether programme builds character and resilience in disengaged young people, providing an *experience* of their potential – of who they can become - as well as teaching them the tools and capacities to actualise this.

We believe that it is our responsibility to show them how rich with potential they are and how much they have to contribute to the world. Growing2gether forms a partnership with the potential of each young person. We aim to become an ally for who they can become – perhaps who they really are from the start, until layers of difficult life experience hide their potential.

Adolescence is a time of discovery and change, challenge and possibilities; a time when brain development is particularly active; a time when young people are being 'called' to discover their gifts, character strengths and inherent talents. But it is not only about

uncovering potential. The true value of our approach lies in supporting young people to form the capacity to *actualise and express their potential*. We aim to build young people's awareness of their own uniqueness; encouraging new skills and capacities so that they can become resilient and have a sense of control over their lives and can positively contribute to their communities. Not only can character and resilience be taught and learned. Even more importantly, it is a *human longing* – if there is *meaning* in one's life, an individual's development is sped up considerably. All young people long to belong, to feel masterful, to make a difference in the world and to feel a part of something bigger.

Many social and educational experts have commented on the importance of mentoring schemes, which provide exposure to valuable adult role models and older, more experienced people. In our programme, this occurs through the young people's relationship with their two Growing2gether facilitators, who provide one-to-one mentoring, as well as the nursery and reception teachers. They are treated as a valuable part of the school team and trusted to perform well. The programme also focuses on future goals for careers, and emphasis is placed upon *what the young person would need to do/be in order to fulfil their career aspirations* – building their social capital. The relationship that develops between participants and their facilitators embodies a positive relationship, with significant adult role models.

Growing2gether – Character and Resilience Building

Drive, tenacity and perseverance (ability to stick with tasks and see things through)

On the Growing2gether programme, young people, through mentoring a small child, learn the importance of working through difficulties and staying with adversity. The young child they are assigned to mentor usually has significant challenges to overcome, which require the young person to be creative in finding ways to mentor them that address those challenges. For example, young people on the Growing2gether programme have mentored children with special educational needs, as well as language difficulties (with a large proportion having English as their second language). A control trial study of the impact of this bespoke mentoring has shown that teenagers mentoring and supporting small children significantly enhance the children's learning in four of the main seven areas of development, when compared to control groups. (Humphrey and Olivier, 2014).

Sense of coherence

Sense of Coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) is a concept closely linked to resilience. SOC is a global orientation to view the world and the individual environment as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful, claiming that the way people view their life has a positive influence on their lives (Antonovsky, 1987). SOC is a resource that enables people to manage tension, to identify and mobilize the general resilience to promote effective coping, by finding specific solutions to specific problems. For adolescents, an important element of SOC is in

the arena of risk-taking and risky behaviour (Buckner 2003). An individual with a strong sense of coherence is more likely to feel less stress and tension and to believe that they can meet life's demands, leading to a healthier lifestyle. Resilient teenagers have better mental health status and are less likely to get involved in high-risk behaviours, such as alcohol and drugs. (Fardardi et al, 2010).



Supporting evidence can be found in a paper published for the Journal of Adolescent Mental Health, which found that SOC contributes to the relationship between attitudes and perception of risk and risky health behaviour, whereby individuals with stronger SOC were less likely to partake in risky health behaviour. Results indicate that SOC may be used to help predict risky health behaviours. The findings from this study help develop a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms contributing to the efficacy of a programme that enhances wellbeing and discusses their potential impact in reducing risky health behaviours (Humphrey. and McDowell, 2013).

SOC is comprised of three components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). *Comprehensibility*, refers to our ability to judge reality, *Manageability* refers to the extent to which an individual perceives that resources are adequate to meet the demands created by certain stimuli, and *Meaningfulness* refers to the extent to which one feels that life makes sense emotionally.

The Growing2gether curriculum includes the young people exploring the risks that the small children in the nursery are taking, and on the value of risk as an element of striving to go beyond their current edges of learning and development. They are then coached to explore their own potential for risky behaviour and the potential outcomes and consequences. They investigate issues in sexual relationships, by exploring self-respect and understanding peer pressure. They learn the importance of boundary-setting with their small child, which is then extrapolated to their own setting of boundaries, in terms of risk.

Mental toughness or grit

Duckworth and Peterson (2007) define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, and that it predicted validity of success measures over and beyond IQ. Achievement of long-term goals requires sustained and focused attention that perseveres and tenaciously addresses obstacles along the way. Educational attainment also requires this quality. Young people, selected on the programme on the basis of risk of disengagement with education, have often endured chaotic lives and family discord, and live in poverty. Consequently, they have developed a type of grit that has enabled them to survive in a chaotic world. This capacity can be reframed, transformed and channelled into more constructive and positive work on re-engaging with education in order to get what they aspire to from their lives in the long-term.

The Growing2gether curriculum session on 'potential' aims to support the development of grit and perseverance. Young people explore human potential and are coached to recognise realistic aspirations. This is learned through exploring what they believe the potential to be of the small child that they are mentoring, followed by a lengthy inquiry into what conditions and support would be required for that small child to actualise their potential, as well as what qualities and talents would need to be developed. The focus is then shifted towards the young people themselves – their aspirations for the future and their sense of their own potential (character strengths, unique qualities and passions). They look at the short, medium- and long-term conditions and support they will need to reach their aspired goals. Using their relationship with the small child they are mentoring as a precursor to looking at their own development provides a safe and congruent way of understanding, before the application of the learning to self.

In the Growing2gether session on 'Dreaming into Your Future,' young people learn to build on existing strengths using self-management, and to develop an action plan to reach their goals. Important in this process is recognizing how current life choices impact the future. The curriculum also aims to enable young people to identify techniques and skills to self-motivate, as well as new behaviours and ways to reach their goals. One session, entitled 'Does The Way We Think Matter? Mindsets,' specifically focuses on applying the learning so far to school behaviour, engagement and attainment; identifying what has worked well and recognizing how behaviour and attitude can support learning at school.

Better equipped to face life and its challenges

A key factor in developing grit is for young people, especially the more at risk, is to facilitate them recognising that life is challenging and that they can be empowered by learning to both accept challenge and to work with it in creative ways. Most likely, they have not had

positive roles models for this in their lives, and need the mentoring of their facilitators to coach them towards alternative ways of coping with challenge that give the young person what they truly want.

The Growing2gether curriculum includes a session where young people identify their strengths, what has worked well by gathering feedback, and an understanding of different stakeholders in their learning environment. Roleplays on challenging behaviour are included in the classroom time: how to deal with a difficult relationship, conflict resolution, coaching exercises on identifying next steps to succeed at reaching their goals.

Ability to recognize one's responsibilities towards others and empathy

On the Growing2gether programme, mentoring a vulnerable small child is not always an easy process – there can be challenges to overcome in forming a nurturing relationship. Sometimes the young person feels that ‘they can’t be bothered’ that day, or that they are not bonding well and want to switch to a new mentee. The programme encourages the young person to stay with it, persevere and to work through the challenge. This strategy pays off with an eventual break through into right relationship with their assigned small child. Young people are reminded what happens if they don’t show up for one session, how their small person will feel let down and abandoned (much like they themselves have been in their lives), and the fact that their small child looks up to them and values the relationship is stressed. They are offered the opportunity to recognise their responsibility to the small child they are mentoring, and this recognition builds empathy – the ability to put oneself in other people’s shoes and be sensitive to their needs and views.

The Growing2gether curriculum works on exploring how to support the small child’s personal, individual learning challenges. The young people design unique games to enhance the small child’s learning and to overcome their obstacles. In doing this, the teens are then able to internalise for themselves the ability to reframe their own challenges and seek new ways to address positive solutions. The interpersonal curriculum focuses on right relationship, respecting and valuing self and others, and the appreciation of difference – again building the capacity for empathy. Social issues such as racism and gender confusion are confronted if they arise, with emphasis on how to help and support each other. If one group member shares a problem they are having, the group together explores how they can engage with that person, supporting them in a responsible way.

Ability to understand one's strengths and weaknesses – relating to potential, not to behaviour

Growing2gether facilitators are trained to have *bifocal vision* – that is, to hold a perception of the young person which includes *what is*, as well as *what could be* (their potential). The facilitator's attitude here is, 'I know that who you really are is so much more than the behaviour that you are demonstrating'. 'I see more of you than your behaviour'. 'I see who you really are'. From this perspective, a young person can receive challenge and hard love in a way which engages rather than alienates them.



If we only relate to a young person's behaviour, we will try to control that behaviour. The situation becomes a battle of wills - someone has to win and someone has to lose. However, if we come from a larger perspective of the whole young person, if we see their potential character strengths as well as their behaviour, we create a wider field for them to grow and develop within and to know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses. To be truly seen in our potential has a dramatic impact on us, which we don't forget and, most likely, which we carry inside ourselves for many years. For a significant other to see our potential and believe in us enables us to find self-belief and an empathic inner awareness that does the same.

Growing2gether creates a safe and loving environment, building trust in order that the facilitator can provide feedback and coaching on the young person's strengths and weaknesses. For example, Facilitators carefully observe the young people whilst they are mentoring, looking for even the smallest positive behaviour demonstrated by the teen, which is reported back to the teen after nursery time each week. This provides real and authentic positive feedback, which allow the young person to start building their own understanding of what they, indeed, have to contribute.

In each Growing2gether, the young people write journals where they identify what they have done well, using examples to concretise these developing strengths and provide a behavioural way to narrow the gap between knowing and doing. The curriculum includes an affirmation celebration, where young people give feedback to each other on what they have observed as a strength. This is particularly challenging, as young people are more accustomed to criticising and laughing off other's, and their own, achievements.

Social intelligence/competencies – identity and personal freedom

In the classroom segment of Growing2gether, young people learn to reason through and to dialogue about social issues (-why do young people have sex, what is risky behaviour, what are the consequences). They also learn that to take risks is important, because it is enlivening to touch our growing edge, but also to identify when these risks could be potentially damaging. Through dialogue, they learn to be aware of themselves within a social environment, about other's opinions, which can enhance their understanding of social issues and develop their capacity for empathic response. They study the impact that they have on others, and learn that they are responsible for their own behaviour (rather than blaming). The aim here is to foster an expanded sense of options and available responses, which supports greater internal freedom. For example, when cross-talking inevitably occurs, they are encouraged to reflect on the impact this has on their colleagues when they are sharing and communicating. The inevitable positive experience and success at mentoring a small child changes a young person's perception of themselves (-I can make a difference, have something to contribute and positively engage in my community), of what they can achieve and their relationship to society at large.

During adolescence, the teenage brain is still developing in the prefrontal cortex. This area is critical for reasoning, risk evaluation and inhibitory control, hence providing the context in which teenagers make decisions to engage in risky behaviours. Therefore, interventions like Growing2gether are really important at this time.

The Growing2gether curriculum addresses this point through the 'Empowerment session,' and through a dialogic process of the young people ascertaining how their mentee has developed – attributing and defining all the elements to the child's support network, including parents, nursery staff, and the young person themselves. In this way, they learn that each individual has an important part to play in the community. This learning is then translated into the young person's life and how they can constructively access support structures for themselves.

Self-control and emotional intelligence (the ability to monitor and regulate one's emotions properly)

We can trust young people to make their own decisions *if* they first: learn the skill of self-reflection, reflect on the choices that they are making, reflect on the consequences and outcomes of those choices, and, perhaps most importantly, from those choices, they ask if they are getting the outcomes they want. (Usually not).

Young people can be coached to gain an increased awareness and understanding of the choices they are making in their lives and the consequences of those choices. Having a

greater awareness leads to a greater capacity to self-manage and to be empowered to take responsibility. For adolescents this is a great developmental task, which, once learned, can be applied to many areas of their lives. It is more effective at promoting change to trust that each young person is capable of finding their own answers, if we provide them with self-awareness and self-belief.

The value this attitude contains is one of inner freedom. Rather than having a normative chart on the wall that tells us what a healthy, fully-functioning adolescent *should* be like, we can value each teenager finding the *inner freedom* to do and be what they choose as valuable and worthwhile.



If young people are less dictated to, and more encouraged to develop the capacity to think through their goals and the best ways to create outcomes that work for them, the results can be astounding. Growing2gether aims to give an adolescent an experience of the '*here and now choices and the power they have to create different outcomes for themselves*'. This dramatically increases their motivation to continue to choose differently in other areas of their lives. For example, changing the negative outcomes of angry reactions into positive outcomes from assertive communication is a major re-framing in a culture that usually promotes the necessity of 'keeping face' at all costs.

Enabling young people to develop reflective muscles will provide a more robust capacity to 'think through' challenges and choices in the future. Teaching them to use their minds in this capacity is something that the current education system fails to address, and is one of the most important strengths to acquire. Through sharing at both peer group level and one-to-one time with adult role models, young people create new bonds beyond their immediate social life, and develop a more clearly individuated sense of themselves.

This process establishes personal responsibility as a keynote in their lives and attitudes, crucial to the creation of a life on large and small scales that they are motivated to aspire towards. This leads to Grit (finishing what one starts; completing something despite obstacles; a combination of persistence and resilience (Seligman and Peterson)).

Transition to adulthood

At risk young people are often labelled as being a problem and are met with negative expectations. Growing2gether Facilitators are trained to meet the young people with fresh eyes and to expect the best. We have found that this translates into the young people becoming exceptional role models for the young children and successfully gaining the SQV qualification. With the aim of supporting a positive destination for participating young people, the programme provides:

- work experience;
- a responsible role, assisting the nursery/reception staff;
- the opportunity to work as part of a team and to learn the value of teamwork;
- a focus on building aspiration and future goals.

Volunteering

APPG agreed that ‘community volunteer work helps build the skills and habits that all young people need for success in work and life – like teamwork, enthusiasm, resilience’ (BBC News, 2013).

Through the mentoring and work in the nursery environment, young people on the programme learn to understand the value of community and engagement through the experience they have of their positive impact on the small child they are mentoring. They are led to identify further opportunities for community engagement.

The young participants of Growing2gether volunteer their services in nursery/reception classes, where an *extra pair of hands* is both needed and valued. This enhances the young person’s experience of making a difference.

Understanding that young people are values driven

Young people are values driven – even when behaving negatively. Beneath or behind the behaviour is a value that is driving that young person. For example, ask a young gang member what he gained from being part of a gang. Inevitably, the response will be, ‘because it makes me feel like I belong’. Take the example of a disadvantaged young person stealing expensive trainers. What value does that fulfil for them? It provides them with a sense of importance and recognition. It is our experience that teenagers are longing to express their values and opinions, to test them out in the world and see what the consequences are.

Young people are at a stage in their lives when they are forming their identities, developing their capacity to think, searching for core values around which to orientate their behaviour and seeking future goals towards which they can aspire. Many of our most vulnerable young people are at risk of failing to meet these developmental needs in a positive way, instead forming identities around a negative sense of themselves, borne from a sense of hopelessness in the world around them. As a result, the sum total of their aspirations in life is often to make as much money with as little effort as possible, and therefore to fall prey to criminal activities or to make money in ways that exploit them and compound a sense of failure. At best, they will tend towards a rather depressed and passive attitude to life, in which they expect to be looked after by a parental state. From this attitude, it is 'no big deal' for a young woman to become pregnant, as they are often hoping a boyfriend or the benefit system will subsequently look after them.

For the small children who are mentored

In Scotland, although the quality of early year's provision is generally excellent, they are short-handed. Growing2gether provides one-to-one adult support and mentoring to small children for early intervention. The young people provide consistency and warmth, which is associated with the strongest social and emotional development in children by age 5 (Lexmond and Reeves 2009, 'Building Character', Demos).

Furthermore, a control trial study showed that teenagers mentoring small children significantly enhanced children's learning in four of the seven main areas of development, when compared with controlled groups. (Humphrey and Olivier, 2013). The young people support reception class children to make the transition from nursery to primary school, in terms of social adjustment and communication. The most significant improvement was found in communication and language scores, which is extremely important for *school readiness*, and predicts subsequent development of mathematics and literacy skills (Purpura et al, 2011).

Growing2gether provides a live, hands on, experiential way of developing character and resilience skills, which are all inter-related and developmentally congruent.



APPENDIX 1

As recommended by the Resilience Forum, additionally, Growing2gether meets nine of the ten elements that resilience programmes should have in place. (boingboing.org.uk)

Ten things resilience approaches should try to put in place:

- 1 At least one trusted adult, with regular access over time, who lets the pupils they 'hold in mind' know that they care;
- 2 Making sure vulnerable pupils actually access activities, hobbies and sports;
- 3 Helping pupils to be better at problem-solving at every opportunity;
- 4 Creating safe spaces;
- 5 Helping to map out a sense of future (hope and aspirations) and developing life skills;
- 6 Helping pupils to cope – teaching self-soothing or management of feelings;
- 7 Support to help others e.g. volunteering, peer mentoring;
- 8 High intensity interventions, based on individuals' needs, and with a joined up approach between home, school and other organisations for those that need it;
- 9 Supporting children, young people, staff and parents to understand what resilience is and how they might achieve it for individual students and the whole school community (Preparedness and a capacity to help with basics, i.e. food, clothing, transport, and even housing).

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