

Purposeful Education at the Heart of Student Well-Being

How finding meaning and purpose in school and life support students' well-being



Research Insights

- Beyond performance outcomes, schools should seek to ask more fundamental questions about what students make of school and guide students in **finding and creating purpose** in school and life.
- A **purpose-focused education** with a **connected and future-oriented curriculum** would need to **raise different questions** students should think about to foreground both the **academic and human purposes** of education.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND



Singapore's achievements in international education benchmarking indicators are well-recognised. However, in light of the means-ends model of education that may lead to the narrowing of the curriculum, as well as the witnessing of higher levels of anxiety among youths, scholars argue for a critical re-examination of the purpose of education (Deng & Gopinathan, 2016).

In the Programme for International Student Assessment Students' Well-Being 2015 study, compared to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development average, Singapore students reported **higher on test anxiety** and had a **low score** for **sense of belonging at school** (Davies, 2017).

The concern for students' well-being, as well as how meaning and purpose in life can serve as a **moral beacon** for students, is aligned with MOE's efforts to develop and implement a national curriculum enabling students to lead purposeful lives (MOE, 2018).

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This research project (Heng, Blau, Fulmer, Bi, & Pereira, 2017) focuses on the following inquiries:

1. What is the nature of youth's purpose and search for meaning among adolescents in Singapore schools and how have adolescents been introduced to these purposes? What is the relationship between youth purpose and life satisfaction among adolescents in Singapore?
2. What is the nature of social support systems for adolescents in Singapore schools that help them maintain well-being in the face of stress?
3. What can schools do to support adolescents in their search for meaning and purpose?



Figure 1: Variables in the study

RESEARCH DESIGN

Using a quantitative and qualitative research design, students completed 4 questionnaires and 28 students were interviewed individually. 10 students were interviewed individually a second time 1 year later to examine stability of responses and to obtain further elaboration.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Youth's purpose, life meaning and social support systems** significantly influence school and life satisfaction.
2. Purposeful adolescents not only have self-goals, but often have a **beyond-the-self orientation**. If unsupported, the discovery and development of youth purpose is **tenuous** and **left to chance**.
3. **Support from parents** was the **strongest predictor** of life satisfaction.
 - **Self- and other-focused students** as compared to those with no-orientation **perceived significantly higher support** from parents, teachers and people in school.
 - Adolescents typically turned to close friends for school issues and to parents and teachers for bigger life issues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Policymakers should be aware that:

- The means-ends model of education may lead to students facing a mismatch between education reality and rhetoric. Students' **school and learning experiences** may not be consistent with **education policy aims** about developing passion, curiosity and creativity in learning (Ng, 2004).

In supporting students in their search for meaning and purpose, schools could re-examine:

- **what students make of school** so that education can be about **school experiences** that **speak to students as human beings**. Such a curriculum seeks to understand **young peoples' hopes and challenges for the future** and to give greater focus to the **educational substance, meaning, significance and value of learning**.
- how **performance measures** like **compulsory service points** could detract from the learning of values in community involvement projects.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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To visit the project page

Scan code or visit <https://www.nie.edu.sg/project/oer-10-13-mah>.

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