

White paper Positive Education

CHANGE THE WAY OF THINKING BY CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

Petra van Haren and Koos Stienstra



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Positive Education: the core philosophy

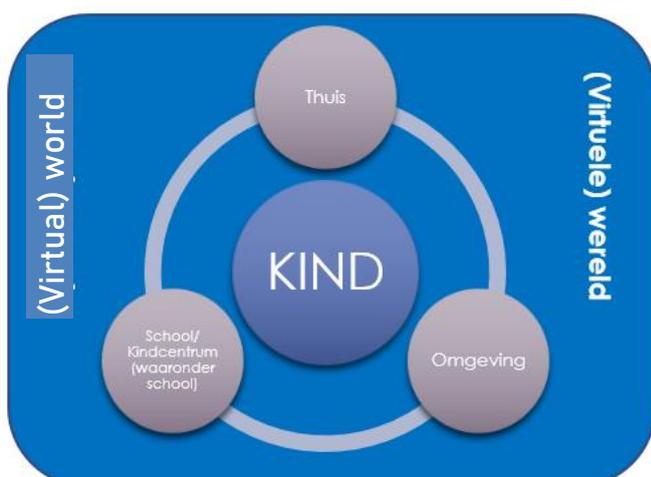
Children are the future. That is why it is paramount that we offer the education and care they need and which corresponds with the future they are facing. In education, the core question should always be about how we can help and facilitate children with their growth and development in the best possible manner.

Within the educational system, we are becoming more and more aware of the fact that the Suitable Education system in its current form is lacking. Moreover, a society that changes and develops continuously and rapidly requires children that are prepared for what they will be confronted with. This means that children have to be resilient and flexible.

The term Positive Education is a free interpretation of the term Positive Health, which was first used in the healthcare sector. Machteld Huber¹ introduced this term to describe the ability of the individual to adjust to, for example, physical, social, and emotional problems and challenges. This concept considers the overall development of the individual, which is also used in Positive Education.

Positive Education offers every pupil a pathway to becoming a resilient and flexible person. The main principle for this is that every child is given the same opportunities to develop optimally and feel good about themselves. The trajectory primarily focuses on the individual needs and the pupil retains control as much as possible throughout the entire process.

This can be achieved by developing an educational system based on the so-called 'matrix of well-being'. This matrix was developed according to the analogy of Machteld Huber's philosophy. The key element of this matrix is the well-being of the pupil: in order to develop, learn, and function properly in general, pupils have to feel good about themselves and their environment. Within the triangle parents – school – environment, this is called the pedagogical safety at school, which includes all the available and created environmental factors that affect the well-being of pupils. This safety can be created by a sound coordination and making contact with other parties involved within the child's triangle.



(Translation:home-Environment -School/Child Centre)

There is no such thing as 'a problem', there is, however, the question of what a child needs to develop and learn.

Machteld Huber emphasises the importance of an individual and needs-driven approach instead of one general approach that focuses on achieving the benchmark set by external parties. According to Huber, a transition has to take place from a so-called control model – with a problem-oriented approach that constantly requires alertness and intervention – to an adaptation model that focuses on a system and needs, and which is based on opportunities and self-regulating abilities and, hence, steers indirectly. This vision is also implemented in Positive Education.

‘Positive Education’ means: ‘Change the way of thinking by changing the perspective’²

The implementation of Positive Education means that schools and teachers need to structure the (Adequate) educational system differently. This also means that parents have to be closely involved. The development of the child is at the core and has to be based on their well-being and self-control. The specially developed matrix makes this process insightful and flexible (see pages 3 and 4 for more information). By choosing an individual approach for every pupil, one can actually create equal opportunities from an unequal approach. The structure of the tailored system is based on pedagogical basic principles because they are a precondition for competency development.

Education, therefore, whether or not combined with (adequate) care, is not primarily aimed at the maximum development of competencies and a measurable, performance-oriented result.

Schools, in turn, have to focus on the pupils’ abilities to cope with physical, emotional, and social challenges in their lives and, whenever possible, ensure that the pupils obtain self-control.

Within this vision, education is not strictly the domain of educational and care professionals but of all of those involved in a child's life as the focus shifts to developing the ability to handle changing circumstances.

Consequently, Positive Education also leads to something more: the development of everyone involved so they can meet the needs that have to lead to a sense of well-being.

The matrix of the Child Observation Web: seven dimensions

Positive Education has a broad perspective when it comes to the development of a child, and well-being is a basic condition. Do children connect sufficiently with their environment? Can they handle the study material they are offered? Is the study material meaningful? Do the children feel happy, or lonely? Do they feel self-confident and trust their own abilities³? Do the children feel heard and accepted? Do they feel good about themselves?

Children may also need (additional) support from their environment. In the end, children have to feel that they feel comfortable where they are, that they are seen, valued, energetic, and feel good about themselves in the way that suits them best.

To apply this principle in practice, we distinguish seven areas in a child's development needs: motor, sensory, language, cognitive, social, emotional, and

'schooling'. These aspects are all included as dimensions in the matrix: the Child Observation Web, or COBWeb in short.

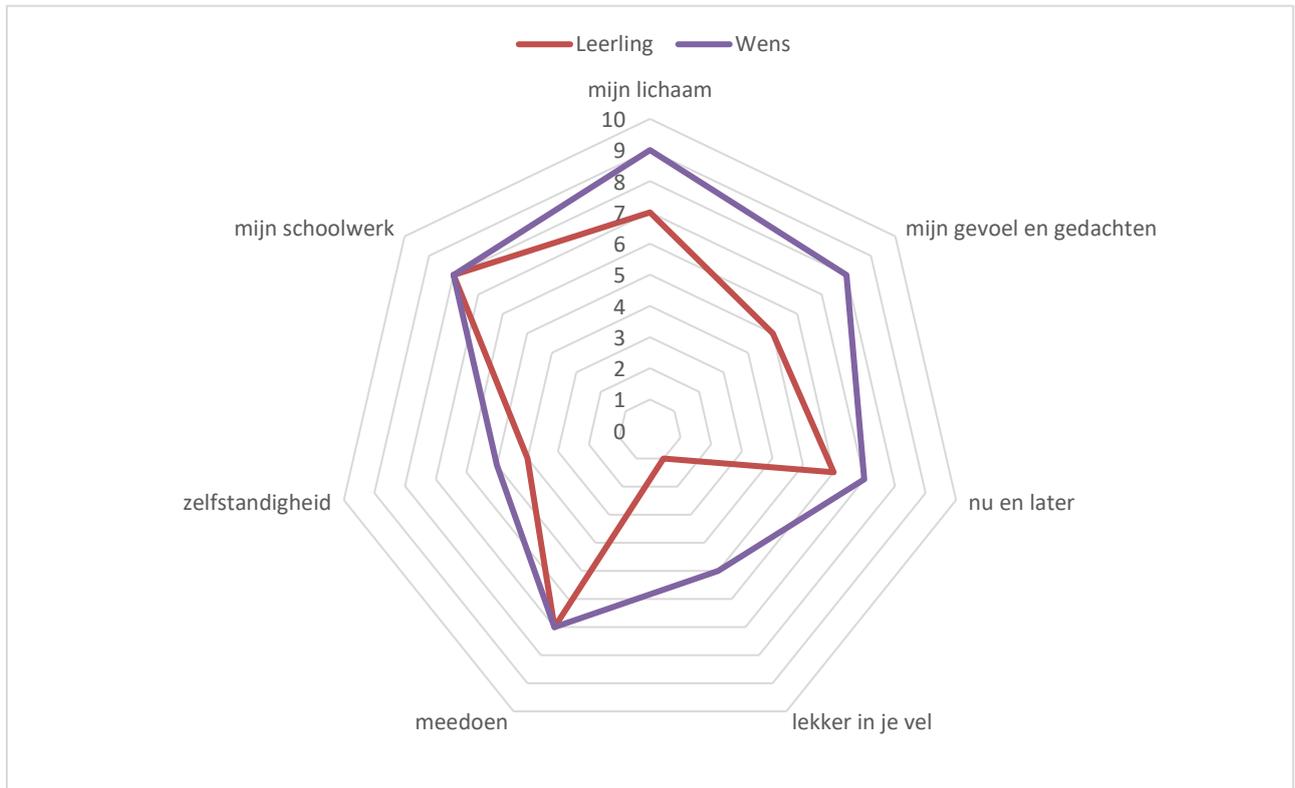
COBWeb: seven dimensions

- My body: physical. The functioning is in line with the development curve, physical hygiene, medical facts or observations, physical complaints (with a physical cause or otherwise)
- My feelings and thoughts: psychological. Mental state and resilience, emotional state, adaptability, self-confidence, mental functioning in line with developmental psychology, medical facts or observations.
- Now and later: metacognition⁴. Doing things that are meaningful. Zest for life, internal motivation, perspective for the future, (personal) goals, the pursuit of ideas or ideals, having a grip on the personal situation.
- Feeling good about oneself: quality of life. Self-esteem, self-confidence, self-image, self-acceptance, well-being and happiness.
- Interaction: socioemotional and interpersonal. Interaction with others, meaningful relationships, social skills, involvement with the environment, communication skills, feeling valued, asking for help and helping others, regulation of emotions, taking initiative and the ability to follow others.
- Autonomy: self-reliance. Self-control, working independently, self-management, energy, self-acceptance. Intrapersonal.
- My schoolwork: cognition. Is the study material sufficiently stimulating, the need for more or less time, conditions for the required performance based on age, cognition, and metacognition.

To obtain insight into the development needs of pupils, they are encouraged to reflect on themselves by asking a series of questions⁵. The score on the series of questions is indicated by a score ranging from 1 to 10, which is then entered into the COBWeb.

This results in a score figure that is used as a starting point for a conversation between the child and the teacher (or care professional) about the focal points in the personal development and approach. The dimensions directly support the pupil-oriented approach of Positive Education. The great thing about this is that the child is in control when it comes to formulating development and learning goals based on the COBWeb matrix.

COBWeb



In English: ----- Pupil ----- Wish

Area's:

- my body
- my schoolwork
- my feelings and thoughts
- independency
- now and later
- interaction
- feeling good about oneself

During this process, the educational professional (and perhaps the parent as well) observes the pupil. They look at the pupil from different angles by using a questionnaire⁶ that is based on the seven dimensions. These dimensions are also scored from 0 to 10. Additionally, these observations can also be done by using other, simple instruments.

Observations may also be substantiated by the measurable (test) results.

This offers a second score figure in the COBWeb that can be used as a second precept for the conversation with the pupil and/or the educational or care professional about the focal points in the learning development and approach.

Theoretical framework

The Self-determination theory

The underlying theory of Positive Education is the Self-determination theory (SDT)⁷. The base principle of the SDT is to create a learning environment and culture that contributes to the intrinsic motivation of children.

In this, well-being is defined as self-confidence, personal development, and vitality. It is important to realise that intrinsic motivation contributes to a person's well-being and that Dutch pupils tend to get low scores on the factor of self-confidence⁸.

The starting point of the Self-determination theory is that a (learning) environment has to include certain qualities to ensure that intrinsically motivated behaviour is not disturbed. Essentially, this is a theory about demotivation. Intrinsic motivation means that people do a certain activity because they experience a certain pleasure or satisfaction from the activity itself – and not because they are either rewarded or coerced.

Children who are intrinsically motivated to learn, want to learn. They feel the internal need or urge to learn or do something. SDT views human motivation fundamentally differently than how it is commonly regarded.

Pupils are not seen as 'barrels' in which to pour knowledge but like a sponge. According to the SDT vision, the pupil has a natural urge to acquire knowledge. One only has to ensure that this natural urge is not disturbed and that the learning environment is rich enough with knowledge for the sponge to absorb it.

It should be noted that this opinion is not new; it is also an aspect applied in the work of Montessori and nearly all classical educational pioneers. The Self-determination theory is based on three psychological basic needs: the need for competency, autonomy, and social connection. The motivation to perform a task or activity arises when the learning situation supports these three needs.

Emeritus professor Luc Stevens⁹, widely known in the world of education and who based his theory on the Self-determination theory, mentions the basic needs relationship, competency, and autonomy. He further developed concepts such as 'Pedagogical Tact' and 'Pedagogical Leadership' for practical use.

Pedagogical Tact?

Pedagogical Tact is about the interaction between teacher and pupil, and the ability of the first to constantly and adequately implement this tact into a series of 'pedagogical moments', meaning the ability of the professional to instantly know what to do and what not to do at certain moments. According to professor Stevens, this is based on a deep-rooted basic perception; a reaction that is in line with how the pupil experiences the situation and which, at the same time, allows them to continue the activities.

This creates a (pedagogical) sense of security and tranquillity within the classroom. It is visible and palpable that the teacher says and does the right things at the right moment, which is also picked up by the pupils. Consequently, this is not about the competencies of the teacher, but most of all about who they are.

Pedagogical Tact is ultimately based on a pedagogical basic principle that has been further described by Luc Stevens in 2004, in the book '*Zin in School*'. He also states that the quality of the interaction determines the quality of the pedagogical climate and, hence, the quality of the school. The idea that teachers coordinate their actions to the needs of the pupils at particular moments is paramount.

Concisely, a model of Stevens' theory looks as follows:

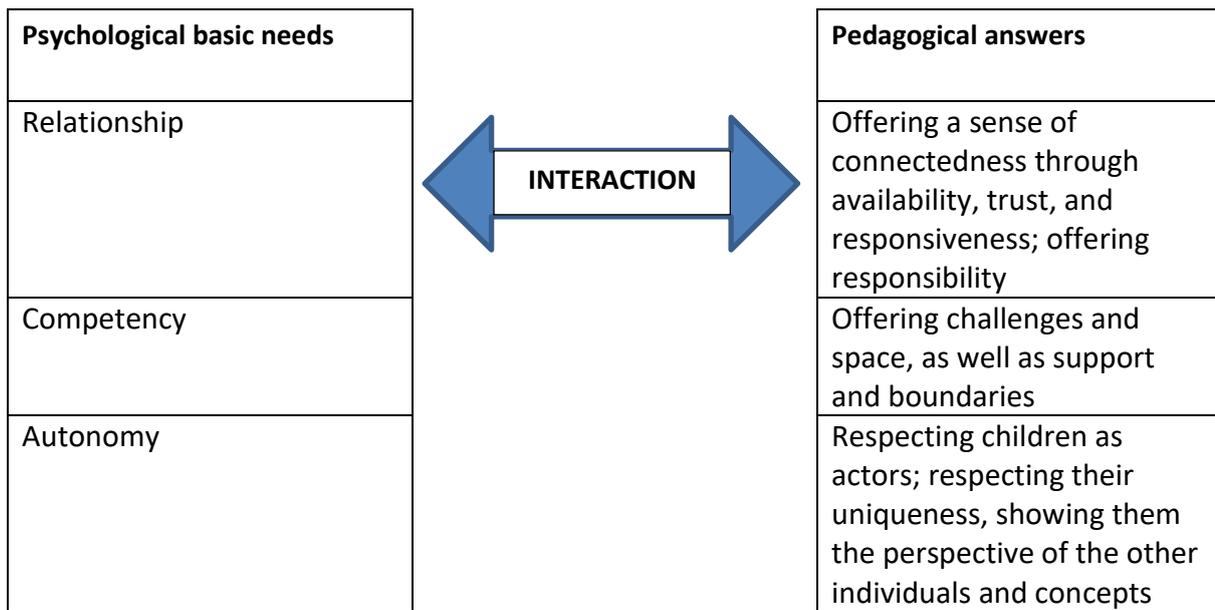


Figure 1: pedagogical basic principle

It is crucial that teachers are aware of the values of their school (and, therefore, of their personal values): the pedagogical principles. There must be a consensus about this within the school and amongst the staff, and not only has it to be described in a vision and concept of the school, but it must also be recognisable through the actions and practices undertaken by the school.

From the perspective of Positive Education, this results in a different work method and requires a different role and equipping of teachers and management. Earlier studies show how the school management is a deciding factor for the collaborative culture within a school. Adopting the Positive Education concept requires that the principles are anchored in the school vision and a manager who gives this positive work method room to exist.

This can be shown as follows:

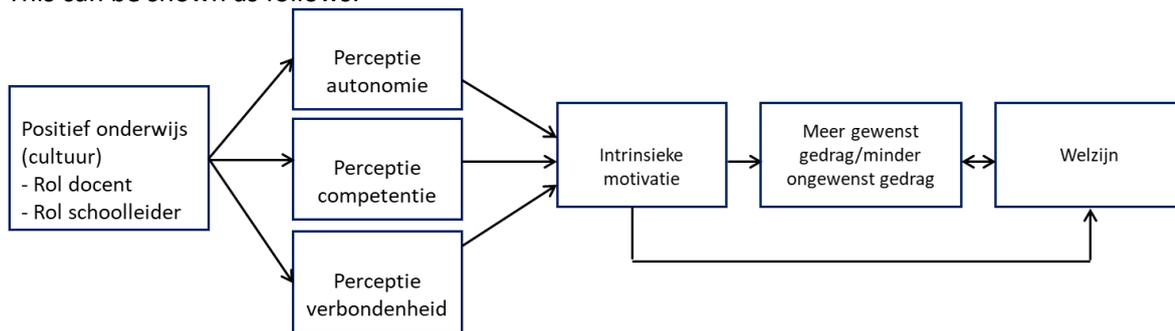


Figure 2: conceptual model

Translation in English:

Positive education (culture) : Role teacher-Role school manager –

Perception autonomy - Perception competency- Perception connectedness

Intrinsic motivation - More desired behaviour/less unwanted behaviour - Well-being

When the culture is part of the transition at school, the latter becomes all-encompassing and it offers teachers tools that they can use to deal with the pupils' special educational behavioural and social development needs. This way, the system gives pupils the space to be themselves and tools to maintain a suitable place within regular education.

Positive Education in practice

How can school benefit from Positive Education?

In the current system, Education and Healthcare are connected in various ways, as part of Suitable Education, Youth Care, Social and Societal Work, and society in general.

Those who are involved, such as the school, parents, pupils, (care) professionals, and other partners within the immediate environment of the pupil are often shareholders as well as stakeholders. They form a complex network with different perspectives and starting points. As such, it is not easy to develop an unambiguous approach.

Positive Education offers a way to make it easier to handle this complex situation, amongst other things, by providing tools and an unambiguous concept framework. For that matter, schools can also continue to use previously implemented educational work methods and tools and complement them, when necessary, with input from care professionals and other educational partners.

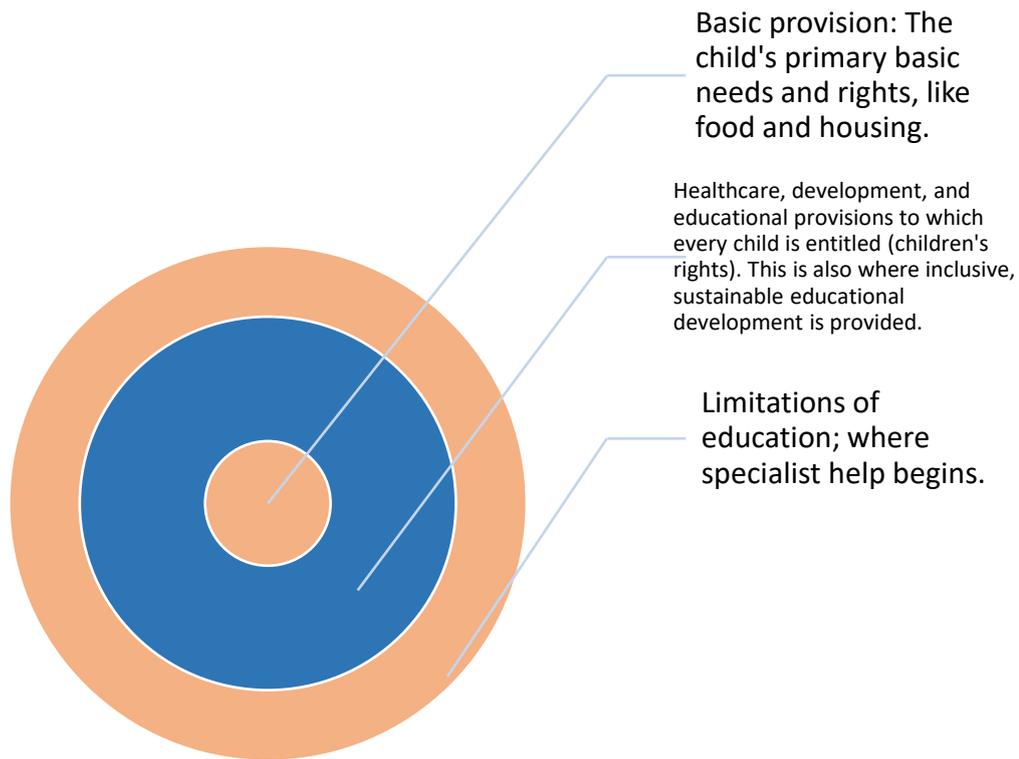
Positive Education is an important pillar when it comes to creating fair, adequate opportunities. This can be achieved by any school team. The role of the school management, however, is crucial: it must be inspiring and facilitate the required cultural change. This management has to safeguard the following principles and starting points:

- Putting the pupil at the core of everything.
- Rationalised provisions for the well-being of the pupil (and all stakeholders) are a precondition to achieve maximum (cognitive) development.
- 'Change the way of thinking by changing perspective' based on the talents and abilities of pupils. What goes well and what can this child do better?
- Concrete, workable tools for professionals by 'Change the way of thinking by changing perspective'.
- Focusing on other competencies and skills with all the professionals who are involved.
- Putting the emphasis on development and learning, based on a tailored and personalised approach instead of working to achieve external standards with a uniform and a performance-driven approach.
- Collaborating strongly with the parents and others from the pupil's environment.

Why Positive Education?

The goals of Positive Education, the why and what for?

The objective of education in the 21st century, in its broadest sense, is giving every child access to facilities and resources in education and healthcare that allow them to develop. This requires a different, more development-oriented, way of thinking. To visualise this, a basic model shows a free interpretation of the Doughnut model created by K. Raworth. The 'just and safe' part of the doughnut – which is the blue part of the circle below – is the field that has to be available to every child.



At the centre of the doughnut (central circle): the primary basic needs of every child, like food, access to education and healthcare, and a safe place to live and play. These needs also include the right to be loved, valued, and respected. Another primary need is that parents or carers look ahead and prepare the child for a promising and responsible future. Parents and carers are the primary responsible party for their child; society is responsible for the provision of healthcare, education, and broad, safe frameworks and provisions that offer a safe and liveable society.

In the inner ring (blue circle): provisions for healthcare, development and education to which every child is entitled and which are stipulated in the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This is where regular education is offered, which include Suitable Education and Youth Care. First and foremost, this falls under the remit of educational institutions, integral child centres, collaborative partnerships, and youth care institutions, as well as of national programmes and initiatives, such as the recent support programmes like *Geweld hoort nergens thuis* (initiated by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport) to reduce and sustainably deal with the problems of domestic violence and child abuse.

Policymakers and executives at all levels and collaborative partnerships within the educational system are responsible for establishing, implementing and promoting strategic frameworks for this broad base.

From the educational system, the *Algemene Vereniging Schoolleiders* (AVS, Dutch Association for School Managers) is involved in Positive Education to represent school managers. One of

the key themes for school managers to achieve this different way of thinking and change of perspective is the structuring of the culture within the school. Intraverte is a national care practice that supports children with support needs in the area of behaviour and motor skills. Its role within Positive Education is to provide the educational system with knowledge about what the 'total development of the child' actually includes, which is done to improve the detection and preventive actions by teachers and internal support staff by equipping and coaching them.

Regular youth care is offered by the youth and family support centres and social work institutions, when necessary in collaboration with youth, security, and care advisory teams. For the inner ring, the principle of one plan for every child and family within primary care (light care) applies.

Outer ring: the outer ring shows the boundary between regular education and regular care (like maternity and child health clinics and GPs). We will have to acknowledge that, concerning the areas identified for the inner ring, more is required than what can be offered by the regular approach as described in the centre circle. This is where a specialist approach and specialist help will be required and which includes special needs education, from the collaborative partnerships and targeted care by youth care institutions, safety networks, and social work. Structuring Suitable Education for 'every' child with a special, comprehensive approach and clear trajectory. In the outer ring, a specific case can be a motive to apply the deliberation framework and the Reporting code¹⁰.

For this type of care, organisations such as '*Veilig Thuis*' or the child protection services need to act. In this phase, the principle of 'one child - one family - one plan' is aimed at specialist, intensive care. Intraverte represents the element of 'a safe house' (preventive care, traumas, psychological problems, coaching and treatment by following a positive approach). As said, the AVS represents school managers. School managers are ultimately responsible for (Suitable) education at school and for educational care trajectories. School managers also have a pivotal role with regard to education within the *Lokaal Educatieve Agenda* (LEA, Local Educational Agenda) and they need to set the agenda of the special consultative meetings between municipalities and educational and healthcare institutions (*Op Overeenstemming Gericht Overleg - OOGO*). The exchange of information and compliance with privacy regulations as established in the GDPR are always two of the focal points.

Last but not least: Positive Education is a tool, not an objective as such. It helps educational professionals and children with their development and to increase their opportunities. Well-being leads to self-confidence. Self-confidence is crucial for self-control. Self-control, in turn, offers a sense of well-being. In short, well-being is a firm condition for the development of every child. This makes Positive Education a preventive, accessible, and effective approach to better equip pupils and professionals for a pupil-oriented approach within the existing primary education work method.

Why this white paper?

Petra van Haren and Koos Stienstra notice that the role and responsibility felt by educational and care professionals ensure that they are highly motivated to provide children with what they need. Everyone wants to give children the best opportunities to develop and ensure that they have a sound perspective for a good future.

At the same time, Petra observes how schools struggle to fit in the concept of Suitable Education. Furthermore, the number of referrals to special needs education increases again as well, which is partly caused by the static image that politics and the field itself have of Suitable Education.

Koos notices an exponential growth in the number of children that request (and receive) support at Intraverte. This is partly due to the fact that they are struggling with the standards that apply to 'the average child' and which are dictated by external parties. They don't take individual differences in development and growth sufficiently into account.

Prevention is better than the cure. In other words: a good (preventive) tailored approach stimulates children to develop optimally and prevents unnecessary care needs. Apart from this, they see that the strain on educational professionals is high.

What was lacking, was an effective, simple approach they could use to look at the pupil from a slightly different perspective that makes it easier to apply a pupil-oriented approach. In practice, either such a tool is missing or educational professionals succumb under the enormous administrative burden that results from the current culture of measurements and 'averages'.

This is why they looked at the healthcare sector, where the concept of Positive Health' developed by Machteld Huber appears to be promising. The concept is based on simple principles such as well-being, self-control, and unequal treatment and it shows good results. Within healthcare, and to the satisfaction of clients and professionals, strictly standardised work methods are replaced based on this concept.

As they are passionate about creating maximum development opportunities for children, and to equip educational professionals with better 'tools', Petra and Koos created a new interpretation of this healthcare concept to make it applicable for the educational system.

The way of thinking behind Positive Education is not entirely new. However, the concept has now been properly structured and concretised. It can be used to increase the well-being of children and professionals and prevent unnecessary work pressure. They chose to draw up this white paper to explain this concept so that it is now made available to and can be used by all educational and healthcare professionals. Moreover, they hope that the concept of Positive Education can be further developed based on the help, efforts, and practical experiences of colleagues.

For more information, please visit www.positiefonderwijsnederland.nl

About the authors

Drs. J.G. (Koos) Stienstra (1961)

Co-founder & Managing Director of Intraverte



Intraverte is a nationally operating care practice where children and parents can turn to for sensomotor and socioemotional support needs. Intraverte offers easily accessible support and closely collaborates with teachers at different levels at over 100 primary schools. Sharing knowledge is one of our main goals. It is Koos' mission to do what really must be done; work that matters: meaningful for organisations as well as individuals. From his educational background – economics, languages and religion – he set up development programmes for various organisations. He is repeatedly consulted by banks, railway companies, the tax authorities, agricultural organisations, and educational institutions to make the connection between economic necessity and individual meaning. As Managing Director of Intraverte, Koos is

hugely committed to providing meaningful support to children. Intraverte experiences daily that children often have to practise skills based on protocols but for which they are not yet ready. The Intraverte approach proves that by using a slightly different perspective, a coach can mean so much more for the child's future. This also applies to teachers who can make an even bigger difference to that specific, unique child with just a bit more knowledge and practise.

G.P.M. (Petra) van Haren, MBA-ME (1965)

Chairperson Algemene Vereniging Schoolleiders (AVS, Dutch Association for School Managers)



The AVS is a branch and professional association of and for school managers in primary and secondary education. Petra has a broad experience in the educational sector as a teacher, school manager, and executive. She also worked in the private sector. Her passion is leadership in the public domain as the development of children and schools, the quality of education and care, and the embedding of societal developments all depend on the quality of leadership. She is strongly convinced that investing in children and in their development, and by putting this at the heart of the matter in all kinds of ways, is the foundation on which our society builds its future. School managers have a pivotal role in realising the educational care quality within the school and manage innovation; they inspire

staff members and other educational partners to collaborate. School managers also create room for research, experimenting, and entrepreneurship. These developments are necessary to equip the school and its pupils for a promising future. From this perspective, Petra is the co-creator and promotor of Positive Education and she hopes to inspire school managers and others in the public domain.

Final notes

1. Huber, M., Knottnerus, J. Green, L. et al. 26 July 2011. How should we define health? BMJ 2011. Machteld Huber is the initiator of “Mijn positieve gezondheid” [My Positive Health] and originally worked as a GP. She developed a new, dynamic health concept based on resilience, functioning, and self-control.
2. Van Haren, G.P.M. and Stienstra. K. November 2018. Paraphrasing Koos Stienstra: ‘When we do tomorrow what we did yesterday... we will get completely stuck the day after tomorrow.’
3. See ‘Staat van het Onderwijs’, April 2019’, paragraph 1.1.3: “Additionally, the trust in one's skills to actively participate in society is a modest one.”
4. Metacognition is an important skill and part of an efficient ability to learn. When a person knows how to acquire knowledge, they can adjust their learning strategy accordingly. Generally, metacognition distinguishes between the two following partial aspects: pure knowledge and insight into one's (personal) learning process.
5. COBWeb questionnaire child, Intraverte 2018
6. COBWeb questionnaire care professional - parent/carer, Intraverte 2018
7. See Martens, 2010; Rigby & Ryan, 2018. Ryan & Deci (2000) are the founding fathers of this theory.
8. See ‘Staat van het Onderwijs’, April 2019, paragraph 1.1.3: “Additionally, the trust in one's skills to actively participate in society is a modest one.”
9. Prof. Dr. Luc Stevens is the founder of the *Nederlands Instituut voor Onderwijs en Opvoedingszaken* (NIVOZ - Dutch Institute for Education and Educational Affairs), an independent institute that, amongst other things, legitimises new educational practices. The NIVOZ initiated the development of concepts such as ‘Pedagogical Tact’ and ‘Pedagogical Leadership’.
10. The reporting code changed as of 1 January. As of this date, the norm is to report suspected acute or structural unsafe situations with Veilig Thuis. www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/huiselijk-geweld/meldcode