Positive Psychology
in the Geography Classroom

by
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Overview of Positive Psychology

- What are the key understandings from Positive Psychology theories and concepts that might be useful for me as a teacher?
- Who are the key academic researchers in this field that I could delve deeper into?

Implications for my classroom

- What learnings can I immediately apply in my classroom to produce happier, more engaged and more successful students?
THE SOUTHPORT SCHOOL
**TSS Parent:** “I want my son to be healthy, well-rounded and self-confident; to have good friends, a strong sense of worth and skills to maintain wellbeing; to be honest and caring of others; to know his strengths and to look forward to his future with purpose, hope and optimism.”

**TSS Teacher:** I am a Geography teacher but above all, I think of myself as a grower of young men. My classroom is the vehicle by which I do my real work to help my students discover their strengths, develop in character, form positive relationships, and find their individual ways of contributing to making this a better world.”
education is important, but big biceps are importanter
WHAT IS POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

Promoted especially by Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, Positive Psychology is an umbrella term for applied research that shifts the focus from mental illness to the discovery and promotion of the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive or flourish.

Concerned not with transforming -8 to -2, but how to bring +2 to +8

(Boniwell, 2012)
OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

THREE KEY THEORIES:

- Well-Being Theory - Martin Seligman
- Broaden-and-Build Theory – Barbara Fredrickson
- Self-Determination Theory – Edward Deci & Richard Ryan
1. WELL-BEING THEORY

Expressed in two recent books by Martin Seligman
Key understanding: Well-being is a function of five Elements of Well-Being, represented by the acronym, **PERMA**.
Positive Emotions

Subjective feelings of Joy, Excitement, Happiness, Gratitude, Hope, Love, Awe, Pride, Serenity, Inspiration, Pleasure
Help your students experience more positive emotions:

- Build optimism through inspiring TEDTalks
- Experience awe & wonder with the help of David Attenborough
- Experience the joy of time in the great outdoors on Geography field trips
- Build hope through a focus on progress on global issues such as disease eradication (eg Dr Brilliant).
Engagement

Doing something that is you think is enjoyably challenging and fun raises well-being, and may result in a state of ‘flow’.
Provide more experiences which are both challenging and achievable, so that students might experience a state of ‘flow’.

Eg: Role plays of disaster management teams for hazards such as bushfire.
**Relationships** – feeling connected to others in mutually caring relationships raises our well-being.
From their 2008-2009 study across schools in six countries, commissioned by the International Boys’ Schools’ Coalition, Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley reported five strategies teachers used to build relationships with boys:

- Being alert to and reaching out to meet individual students’ needs
- Acknowledging and expressing interest in boys’ special interests and talents
- Disclosing, where appropriate, teachers’ own interests and experiences
- Accommodating, within practical limits, a measure of opposition
- Admitting fault when appropriate, revealing vulnerability.

(Source: Reichert & Hawley, 2014, p. 171).
RELATIONAL LEARNING means...

“I don’t care what you know until I know that you care.”
Classroom Management

Successful discipline strategies:

- Act as if you expect students to behave
- Know your students’ names
- Get involved in co-curricular activities
- Find a reason to have ‘volunteers’ to clean and tidy at the end of the lesson
- Separate zones in the classroom
- Avoid personal attack – criticize the behaviour; never the person
Meaning

We enjoy doing things when we can assign meaning to our efforts.

For many, this occurs especially when being of service to others.
Move students from compliance to conscious choice by helping them with the **WHY** question.

- Identify your strengths
- Build good work habits for future success

Make progress on the path of answering the three big questions:
- Who are you?
- Where are you going?
- Who are you taking with you?
Accomplishment - When we achieve, we feel good.
TEACHING TIP

- Build successes into every lesson
- Cater to different strengths
- Praise effort

Most importantly, remember that....

*Student misbehaviour is always an attempt by them to have their greatest unmet need met*
2. BROADEN-AND-BUILD THEORY

Key understandings:

- Long-term well-being is built on feel-good moments which broaden our awareness and open us to try new things, meet new people, or hear new ideas.

- Well-being is enhanced when one experiences a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative feelings.
Try to give three positives to every negative piece of feedback.

But realise that constructive negative feedback still has an important role in learning.
Key understanding: There are three psychological needs underlying intrinsic motivation. Individuals and teams work best when they feel they have:

- **Competence** (control over the outcome; mastery)
- **Relatedness** (connection; belonging; caring)
- **Autonomy** (power over events in one’s own life and freedom to act in harmony with integrated self)
Encourage students to become competent learners through applying effort and good work habits.

Build relationships in the classroom by fostering sense of belonging and mutual respect – always ‘we’ not ‘I’.

Build choice into lessons, homework and assignments – eg. 15 minutes homework on one aspect of day’s lesson that interested you; choice of genre for report (written, oral, PPT, video).

Provide autonomy - always ‘could’ not ‘should’.
In addition to the three key theories, there are several related concepts now enriching the field of Positive Psychology. With relevance to schools, these include:

- **Signature Strengths** - by Peterson & Seligman
- **Multiple Intelligences** – by Howard Gardner
- **Grit** – by Angela Duckworth
- **Learned Optimism** - by Martin Seligman
- **Growth Mindset** – by Carol Dweck
1. SIGNATURE STRENGTHS

Key understanding: People work best and experience greatest well-being when they use their strengths.

2004 ‘Values in Action’ Project led to the VIA Survey of 24 character strengths.

Free online test at www.viacharacter.org

Top five are your ‘signature strengths’.
24 Character Strengths

Wisdom and Knowledge:
- Curiosity
- Love of Learning
- Judgement and Critical Thinking
- Ingenuity, Originality and Creativity
- Perspective

Courage:
- Valour and Bravery
- Perseverance, Industry, Diligence
- Integrity and Honesty
- Zest and Enthusiasm

Humanity and Love:
- Kindness and Generosity
- Loving and being Loved
- Social Intelligence

Justice:
- Citizenship and Duty
- Fairness and Equity
- Leadership

Temperance:
- Self-Control
- Prudence and Caution
- Humility and Modesty
- Mercy and Forgiveness

Transcendence:
- Appreciation of Beauty
- Gratitude
- Spirituality and Sense of Purpose
- Hope and Optimism
- Humour and Playfulness
Help your students discover their strengths and value themselves.

‘Educe’ means ‘to draw forth’.
From the research of Howard Gardner, the key understanding is that intelligence is not fixed.

In the past, we asked: “How intelligent are you?”

Now, we ask: “How are you intelligent?”
MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

- Linguistic
- Spatial
- Logical-Mathematical
- Bodily-Kinesthetic
- Musical
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
INVolvement reveals strengths

Unfortunately, as schools place emphasis only on some intelligences, some students may conclude they are useless. Hence the importance of encouraging students to get involved in as many things as possible while at school.

Angela Duckworth’s research has revealed two key understandings:

- **Achievement = Skill X Effort**

- Best predictor of academic performance is **grit** (a function of persistence and passion)
All students can leverage effort to improve performance.

Try:

- Concentrating for longer in class
- Writing more notes in class
- Answering more questions
- Seeking teacher feedback after class
- Doing one hour of homework per night
- Resisting playing computer games in class
4. LEARNED OPTIMISM
According to Seligman, people with an **optimistic explanatory style** are likely to experience greater well-being.

We interpret what happens to us in our lives on three dimensions:

- **Permanence** – is a situation permanent or temporary?
- **Pervasiveness** – is a situation specific to one event or all-encompassing of one’s life?
- **Personalisation** – is a situation internal (own fault) or external (due to bad luck or other events)?
## The Three P’s

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<tr>
<th>Three Ps</th>
<th>Optimist</th>
<th>Pessimist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permanence</strong></td>
<td>See incidents as temporary setbacks – and that things will be better next time</td>
<td>Believe that if something goes wrong once, that it will always go wrong</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pervasiveness</strong></td>
<td>When things go wrong, can see these as specific events rather than affecting all situations</td>
<td>When things go wrong, they catastrophise – see failures as failure across all situations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>Tend to look outside themselves for answers as to why thing went wrong</td>
<td>Tend to blame themselves when things go wrong</td>
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Seligman’s **ABCDE technique** suggests that we experience **ADVERSITY (A)** most days, ranging from daily hassles to life-changing events. In each situation, we develop **BELIEFS (B)** around why things happen. Leading on from this belief, there are emotional **CONSEQUENCES (C)**. To overcome these beliefs, we can **DISPUTE (D)** them which **ENERGISES (E)** us.

**Disputing** means asking yourself if the adversity is permanent, all-pervasive and wholly due to personal fault, and then deciding it is not.
Teach students the three P’s and the ABCDE Technique

Listen for statements of negative thinking and challenge them:

- I’m hopeless at doing maths
- I always do badly at oral presentations
- I’ll never be able to get a ‘B’
From research by Carol Dweck, the key understanding is that a growth mindset is better than a fixed mindset.
Growth Mindset

http://raisinghappykidsblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/tabletheoriesofintelligence.jpg
Beware telling bright kids they are smart; instead praise their effort.

Smart kids are at risk of believing that effort is only for those who are not smart.

Smart kids might also avoid challenges that threaten their reputation.

As a teacher, model being a learner, not a know-all.
Becoming is better than Being

Carol Dweck
Mindset

The Southport School is a community in which Wellbeing and Balance are promoted by staff as worthy of pursuit by our boys and young men.

The ideal is that all community members develop positive relationships, resilience and a positive disposition so that, through life’s challenges, they will have the emotional strength and strategies to flourish.
Innovations in Student Well-Being

- Habits of Well-Being – posters in every classroom

- Data Analytics – Signature strengths, Myers-Briggs test of preferred learning style, Multiple Intelligences test, goal-setting with Mentor teachers

- Year-level Assemblies – teaching well-being theories and concepts

- Embedded in Classroom – teachers encouraged to base their practice on positive psychology principles and conduct action research
HABITS OF WELLBEING

**Build Relationships**
*Engage in positive relationships as a universal requirement*
- Build and maintain positive and productive relationships
- Listen carefully and share your thoughts with others
- Respect other people and value their contributions
- Practice empathy and try to understand others

**Embrace Engagement**
*Experience flow in activities that use your skills and challenge you*
- Get involved in academics, sport and cultural activities
- Explore your interests to experience flow in work and activities

**Seek Meaning & Purpose**
*Belong to and serve something you believe is bigger than yourself*
- Dedicate your time to a team, a group or a cause
- Identify what you value and what is important to you
- Work with others on things you care about

**Pursue Accomplishment**
*Pursue success, achievement and mastery*
- Set tangible goals and set small steps to achieve your goals
- Aspire to your ambitions
- Discover and grow your strengths

**Cultivate Positivity**
*Feel and experience positive emotions*
- Spend time with others and be a good friend
- Show gratitude and express your gratitude to others
- Reflect upon your positive experiences
- Exercise and eat nutritionally
- Spend time outdoors enjoying nature
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The Southport School
Year Level Well-Being Assemblies

Prep School Curriculum

Introduction to the Habits for Wellbeing
- Character Strengths
- Resilience
- Health and Wellbeing
- Relationships and Optimism

Wellbeing Principles
- Elements of Wellbeing
- Positivity Ratio
- Managing Impulsivity

Living a Life of Wellbeing
- Stress Management
- Healthy Living
- Learned Optimism
- Wellbeing Retreat (Term 3)

Year 7
- Me At My Best
- Maintaining Motivation (SDT)
- Goal Monitoring
- Mental Toughness (4Cs)

Year 8
- Wellbeing and Me
- Sense of Belonging
- Getting Involved
- Gratitude

Year 9
- My Goals and Wellbeing
- Knowing my Strengths and Knowing Myself and Others (MBTI)
- Goal Setting (Personal and Academic)
- Goal Monitoring
- Signature Strengths

Year 10

Year 11

Year 12
Legendary UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, said of teachers’ character:

“No written word, nor spoken plea
Can teach our youth what they should be.
Nor all the books on all the shelves.
It’s what the teachers are themselves.”
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