

# The Positive EFL Classroom: A conceptual analysis of Positive Education (PE) and its compatibility with Austrian EFL education.

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This paper

- provides a conceptual examination of Positive Education (PE).
- reviews previous studies looking into the effects of Positive Education interventions (PEIs) on both students' wellbeing and their academic performance.
- demonstrates that the concept of PE is compatible with the Austrian school context and provides concrete and practical suggestions on how the principles of PE can be realized in Austrian EFL classrooms.

## 1. Rationale

The increasing numbers of mental health problems and alarmingly low levels of wellbeing among children and young adults (Twenge, et al., 2019) have led to an urgent call for more positive and holistic approaches in educational contexts. One such approach is the concept of Positive Education (PE), which can be described as a pedagogic practice that applies the findings of Positive Psychology (PP) to educational settings, with the aim to promote students' wellbeing, character development, and academic flourishing (White & Waters, 2014). While positive educational approaches have been around for centuries, the modern PP-based concept of PE was brought to life in 2008 by Martin Seligman, who is also widely considered the father of general PP. Since then, PE has increasingly gained momentum, particularly in Anglophone countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States. In Austria, and the German-speaking world in general, PE still seems to be in its infancy, and little is known about its potentials, principles, and practices. Therefore, the present study applies the concept of PE to the Austrian school context with the aim to investigate their compatibility and suggest ways to implement PE practices into Austrian EFL classrooms.

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## 2. Definition of key terms and concepts

Before outlining the aims, research design, and results of the present study, three key concepts will be defined briefly, namely Positive Psychology (PP), wellbeing, and Positive Education (PE). The connection between these concepts can be understood as following: PE draws on the science of PP, which in turn studies the factors that lead to wellbeing and flourishing in all areas of life. In other words, by applying the findings of PP to educational settings, PE aims to foster and promote students' wellbeing (and thereby also their academic success).

### 2.1 Positive Psychology (PP)

PP is a subdiscipline of psychology which studies “the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). PP has also been defined as “the scientific study of virtue, meaning, resilience, and wellbeing, as well as evidence-based applications to improve the life of individuals and society in the totality of life” (Wong, 2011, p. 72). Simply put, PP studies the factors that allow people and organizations to thrive.

What should be emphasized, however, is that PP does not neglect negative psychological phenomena, nor does it advocate a Pollyannaish (i.e. unrealistically optimistic) view of the world (Hart & Sasso, 2011). PP simply takes a look at the other side of the coin, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the human psyche “that recognizes human strengths as clearly as it does human frailties and that specifies how the two are linked” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 109).

### 2.2 Wellbeing

Wellbeing – which PP aims to study, grasp, and foster – is understood as a multifaceted concept that goes beyond a mere momentary sense of happiness. Following Seligman's PERMA model (2011), this study defines wellbeing as an abstract concept that is operationalized by five elements, namely positive emotions (P), engagement (E), positive relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A).

Firstly, positive emotions (P) refer to pleasant feelings like love, joy, or gratitude, the experience of which has both an inherent as well as an instrumental value. For instance, studies have shown that happy individuals experience more success at work, have longer lasting friendships, more satisfying marriages, higher incomes, more resilience, and a better health status than their less happy peers (Fredrickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Secondly, engagement (E), as Seligman (2011) understands it, is synonymous with ‘flow’, which was first described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). Flow has been defined as a subjective state characterized by intense concentration, temporal distortion, and a loss of reflective self-consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow states typically occur when one is completely absorbed in a challenging activity such as climbing, dancing, or crafting.

Thirdly, positive relationships (R), in contrast to toxic ones, are characterized by their enriching, energizing nature (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). While the presence of positive relationships is positively associated with happiness, life satisfaction, and physical health, their absence is connected to depression, anxiety, loneliness, and increased mortality (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Steptoe, et al., 2013).

Fourthly, meaning (M) has been defined as “knowing what your highest strengths are, and then using them to belong to and serve something you believe is larger than the self” (Seligman, et al., 2009, p. 296). In other words, a meaningful life has a purpose beyond that of the individual, be it in the form of abstract values, a religion, or one’s family (Seligman, 2011).

Finally, accomplishment (A) refers to setting and achieving one’s goals. Wellbeing seems to be most promoted by goals that have been set autonomously, that one feels competent to achieve, and that are related to other people (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, research has found that the pursuit of intrinsic aspirations (e.g. personal growth or affiliation) is much more predictive of wellbeing than that of extrinsic aspirations (e.g. material goods, wealth, or fame) (Ryan, et al., 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). Lastly and perhaps surprisingly, the link between achievement and wellbeing is not only one-directional. In other words, while it is obvious that success sparks momentary happiness, higher wellbeing also seems to lead to more success in areas such as school, work, and relationships (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

### 2.3 Positive Education (PE)

The concept of PE can be described as a pedagogic practice that applies the evidence-based research and scientific principles of PP to educational settings, with the aim to promote students’ wellbeing, character development, and academic flourishing (White & Waters, 2014). PE has also been defined as “an umbrella term used to describe empirically validated interventions and programs from positive psychology that have an impact on student wellbeing” (White & Murray, 2015, p. 65).

PE can be understood as a reaction to current approaches to education, which predominantly focus on students’ intellectual, academic, and cognitive qualities (Slemp, et al., 2017). PE is a more holistic approach, as it incorporates “education for both traditional skills and for happiness” (Seligman, et al., 2009, p. 293). PE is also characterized by its proactive orientation, which distinguishes it from traditional reactive wellbeing interventions (Slemp, 2017). While proactive approaches aim at preventing negative states or events before they occur (e.g. depression, addiction, or anti-social behavior), reactive approaches are elimination-focused and respond to negative states and events after they have happened. The underlying, research-backed idea is that teaching wellbeing in school will increase students’ resilience and thus prevent future psychological problems (Chaves & Tamés, 2017; Oades, et al., 2011).

PE can also be described as a resource-oriented approach (in contrast to a deficit-oriented one), since it focuses on fostering the existing strengths of students, rather than fixing their weaknesses (White & Murray, 2015). In this respect, a particular emphasis is placed on students’ character strengths, which have been defined as “personality traits that characterise the positive and socially valued functioning of the individual” (McGrath, 2017, p. 1). Although there are a couple of recognized strengths models, the one typically used in PE contexts is the Values-in-Action (VIA) Inventory, which classifies 24 universal character strengths, such as curiosity, kindness, bravery, fairness, or hope (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Since character strengths are conceptualized as malleable instead of fixed, PE aims to help students identify, utilize, and develop their strengths to increase their wellbeing, performance, and life satisfaction (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Lyubchik, 2016).

It is noteworthy that the resource-orientation of PE aligns well with the positive orientation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which forms the conceptual basis for any formal language education in Austria (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR defines six language proficiency levels (A1-C2) and formulates concrete, outcome-

oriented educational aims for each (e.g. “I can understand instructions when expressed in simple language”). The resource-oriented approach of the CEFR also becomes apparent in its positive perspective on the learners’ diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires. In short, the CEFR and the concept of PE share their focus on positive achievement and resources rather than negative deficiencies. Hence, even at low language levels, learners can proudly notice what they can already do and thus grow their language confidence.

In short, PE is a proactive, resource-oriented, and holistic approach to education that draws on evidence-based PP research to help all students develop their full potential and flourish both intellectually and psychologically (Oades, et al., 2011). Exactly this connection between psychological and intellectual flourishing will be the topic of the next section, which takes a closer look at the so-called “broaden-and-build” effects of positivity.

### 3. The link between wellbeing and academic achievement

As mentioned above, wellbeing does not only have inherent, but also instrumental value. For example, higher wellbeing has been shown to have favorable effects on students’ learning outcomes and academic achievement (Gräbel, 2017), educational performance and development (Waters, 2011), students’ grade point averages and absences (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007), and even later salary levels (Diener, et al., 2002). While it might be obvious that wellbeing is an end in itself (since it simply feels good), it is less obvious why more positivity should also lead to better learning outcomes. Some might even hold the belief that a genuine concern for students’ wellbeing is incompatible with the goal of their achieving academic excellence. According to this view, doing well and being well would mutually exclude each other, at least to some extent.

Practitioners of PE hold an entirely different view: they make wellbeing a central concern of their teaching, because the findings of PP tell them that academic success and wellbeing can (and should) go together (Waters, 2011). There are several explanations for this link, the most prominent one coming from Fredrickson (2001). Her empirically validated broaden-and-build theory proposes two crucial functions of positive emotions: firstly, they *broaden* peoples’ awareness and thus encourage creative and holistic thinking, novelty-seeking, and openness to experience; secondly, they *build* peoples’ social and psychological resources over time, making them more resilient in the process. Negative emotions, in contrast, narrow peoples’ attention and lead them to disengage from their environment (Fredrickson, 2001).

In an educational context, Fredrickson’s theory suggests that negative emotions like anxiety, shame, or frustration might lead students to behave in self-protective ways, such as avoiding participation in lessons. Positive emotions, on the other hand, might contribute to a relaxed learning atmosphere, where students are not afraid of making mistakes. Furthermore, the social and emotional resources built up through positivity might make students more resilient against inevitable setbacks and failures at school. Hence, they bounce back from adversities more quickly and stay confident in their ability to overcome obstacles.

In short, Fredrickson’s theory offers a possible explanation for why wellbeing and academic achievement tend to go together. This realization coupled with the fact that happiness is not entirely genetically determined but can be learned and taught (see chapter 6.1) offers a positive prospect for the potential impact of PE on students’ psychological and intellectual flourishing. To conclude, if teachers and educational policy makers want students to not only be well, but also to perform well, ‘happiness skills’ (as they are taught in PE) need to become an integral part of the curriculum.

## 4. Research questions

The diploma thesis on which the present article is based (Käferböck, 2018) sought to answer the following three interrelated research questions:

RQ1

Have previous school-based PP (Positive Psychology) interventions been successful at increasing students' wellbeing and academic performance?

RQ2

In how far is the concept of PE (Positive Education) compatible with the needs of Austrian students and the educational aims stated in the Austrian curriculum?

RQ3

How can EFL teachers in Austria incorporate the principles of PE (Positive Education) into their lessons to help their students flourish?

## 5. Methodology

This paper is based on secondary research, drawing on the findings of more than 250 scientific books and papers related to various aspects of PE. In the following, I will briefly outline the methodology used to address each of the three aforementioned research questions.

The first question (RQ1) was tackled by an integrative review of 30 independent empirical studies investigating the effects of different school-based PP interventions (see Whitemore & Knafl, 2005 for more information on integrative reviews). 19 of the 30 reviewed studies focused on the interventions' effects on several elements of student wellbeing (e.g. resilience, mental health, experience of positive emotions and flow, sense of belonging, development of character strengths), while the remaining 11 studies looked at the effects on various aspects of students' academic performance (e.g. grade average, performance on standardized tests, development of self-regulating skills, growth mindset, and perseverance). The studies were selected according to their robust and reliable design. More precisely, all 30 reviewed studies were controlled and peer-reviewed and additionally met some or all of the following criteria: random assignment, double-blind design, pre- and posttests, follow-up studies, and large sample sizes. A summary of the most salient findings can be found in chapter 6.1.

Secondly, to ascertain the need of Austrian students for more positive educational approaches (RQ2.1), I reviewed four large-scale national and international health reports according to data about the health status of Austrian children and adolescents. I paid particular attention to indicators for psychological health and illness, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety, students' sense of belonging or social isolation, and their subjective wellbeing. A summary of the main findings of this review will be presented in chapter 6.2.

Thirdly, to determine whether the concept of PE is compatible with the Austrian curriculum (RQ2.2), I performed a curriculum analysis aimed at identifying educational aims that justify and support the incorporation of PE into Austrian schools and classrooms (see Project 2061 for more information on this procedure). Specifically, the following three parts of the general curriculum for secondary education (BMBWF, 2017) were analyzed: general educational aim ("Allgemeines Bildungsziel"), general didactic principles ("Allgemeine didaktische

Grundsätze“), and foreign language (first, second) (“Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite)“). The six educational aims identified through this analysis will be outlined in chapter 6.3.

Finally, to give some concrete and practical suggestions on how the principles of PE can be realized in Austrian EFL classrooms (RQ3), I revisited the studies reviewed for RQ1 and selected what I found to be the most promising and easy-to-administer PP-induced exercises and practices. Chapter 7 offers a taste of the numerous explicit and implicit ways in which PE can be brought to life.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 The effects of PEIs on student flourishing and wellbeing

Advocates of PE have very high hopes for the potential of applied PP in educational contexts. Vella-Brodrick (2011), for instance, believes that PE approaches can “transform schools into places where assets such as empathy, optimism, creativity, self-efficacy and resilience are identified, appreciated and cultivated” (p. 12). With similarly high expectations, Cefai and Cavioni (2015) state that PE could potentially lead “to the formation of academically, socially and emotionally literate young people who have the skills, abilities and emotional resilience necessary to thrive in a challenging world” (p. 54).

To explore whether these great promises can be backed up by evidence-based research, I reviewed 30 studies investigating the effects of different PEIs on student flourishing, both in terms of student wellbeing and academic success. More precisely, 19 of these focused on the impact of PEIs on elements of wellbeing, while the remaining 11 monitored changes in various aspects of academic performance. The PEIs reviewed ranged from brief mindset interventions and character strengths building workshops, over curriculum-based meditation programs, to whole-school PE transformations. The reviewed PEIs have been implemented across many different school types and school systems, and with students of various age levels (primary to tertiary education), ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and nationalities. Despite those diversities, the one complex question pervading all reviewed studies is: Do PEIs have long-term effects on students’ wellbeing and performance, and if yes, why and how?

Tables 1 and 2 present what I consider the most salient findings of the undertaken review along with some basic information about the respective PEIs. As a whole, the studies have generated three promising insights: firstly, and most importantly, wellbeing can be learned and taught; secondly, PEIs can significantly improve all PERMA elements of wellbeing, as well as students’ academic performance; lastly, several studies have confirmed that wellbeing is positively correlated with academic performance, which supports the idea that wellbeing and academic success do not mutually exclude, but rather depend on each other.

Table 1: Effects of PEIs on elements of student wellbeing:

Type of PEI	Observed effects	Study
18-lesson Penn Resiliency Program: teaches cognitive reframing, relaxation strategies, optimism, coping etc.	Increased optimism and social and emotional resilience Decreased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness	(Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009)
12-week academic English conversation program incorporating 6 PP exercises that elicit different positive emotions	Increased positive emotions, hope, optimism, resilience, speaking confidence, stronger interpersonal connections Decreased negative affect	(Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Meza, 2016)
2-week gratitude intervention: keeping a daily gratitude journal (“note down 5 things you are grateful for”)	Higher levels of gratitude, optimism, life satisfaction, satisfaction with school Lower levels of negative emotions	(Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008)

Mindfulness curriculum “learning to BREATHE”: 6 mindfulness meditation lessons focused on self-regulation skills	Increased levels of self-acceptance, calmness, relaxation, emotion regulation; decreased levels of negativity, tiredness, physical complaints	(Broderick & Metz, 2009)
4 brief positive relationship PEIs focused on acts of kindness, active-constructive responding, and expressing appreciation	Increased psychological and emotional wellbeing, quality of peer relationships, self-esteem, prosocial behavior Decreased negative effects of bullying	(Shankland & Rosset, 2017)
20-lesson Strath Haven PP Curriculum focused on VIA strengths development	Increased social skills, engagement and enjoyment at school, levels of curiosity, love of learning, and creativity	(Seligman, et al., 2009)
1-year mental health intervention program (targeting PERMA elements)	Increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism Fewer symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress	(Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014)
Brief one-time mindset intervention about students’ sense of belonging	Increased sense of belonging over several years Higher levels of self-reported health and wellbeing	(Walton & Cohen, 2011)

Table 2: Effects of PEIs on aspects of students' academic performance

Type of PEI	Observed effects	Study
One-time growth mindset intervention teaching about brain plasticity and the potential for change	Increased academic achievement, more invested effort Improvements in classroom motivation	(Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007)
15-month curriculum-based PEI targeting 10 non-academic wellbeing skills (incl. mindfulness and empathy)	Higher scores on standardized tests (math, science, reading) Increased perseverance	(Adler, 2016)
Relevance PEI: writing a letter about the link between different science topics and students’ own lives	Improvements in scientific interest and course grades Increase in perceived relevance of learning content	(Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009)
Social and emotional learning program: teaches self-awareness, perspective taking, impulse control, empathy, etc.	Higher levels of cooperative behavior Improved performance on achievement tests	(Durlak, et al., 2011)
6-weeks strengths PEI: identifying top 5 strengths and keeping a strengths diary	Increased academic expectancy, self-empowerment, self-efficacy, motivation, and self-perceptions of ability	(Austin, 2006)
‘Student Success Skills’ PEI: teaches stress regulation, anger management, social skills, coping, goal setting, etc.	Improved math and reading performance Increased cognitive and meta-cognitive skills	(Brigman & Webb, 2007)
One-time belonging PEI for freshmen, telling them that worries about belonging are normal and will soon vanish	Higher grade point averages and self-reported health 52% reduction in the achievement gap between white and African-American students	(Walton & Cohen, 2011)
30-minute self-regulation intervention (goal setting skills, mental contrasting)	Increased self-discipline and self-regulatory abilities Increased goal setting and striving skills	(Duckworth, et al., 2011)

## 6.2 Mental health in schools: PE’s potential in the Austrian context

Several studies have reported concerning findings about alarmingly low levels of wellbeing, a rising prevalence of depression, and dangerous levels of psychological distress among children and young adults (e.g. Bitsko, et al., 2018; Casey & Liang, 2014; Kienbacher, 2017). To investigate whether secondary school students in Austria are also affected by low levels of mental health and wellbeing, the findings of four studies examining the health of school-aged children in Austria have been reviewed (BMGF, 2016; Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2006; OECD, 2017; WHO, 2016). What follows is a brief summary of their main findings:

- The number of diagnosed mental and behavioral disorders among 10- to 19-year-olds has slightly but steadily increased from 2000 onwards (BMGF, 2016).
- 5.4% of Austrian 7- to 17-year-olds show symptoms of depression, 10% report symptoms of pathological anxiety, and 7.6% report behavioral disorders (BMGF, 2016).
- Compared to other European and North American countries, Austrian 13- to 17-year-olds show relatively low levels of health competence (WHO, 2016).

- 24.5% of Austrian students report feeling unsatisfied or only moderately satisfied with their lives; especially older and female students are less satisfied with their lives in comparison to younger and male students (OECD, 2017; WHO, 2016).
- 15-year-old students' sense of belonging at school has continuously decreased from 2003 to 2015 (OECD, 2017).
- The two major threats to Austrian students' wellbeing are school-related anxiety and social isolation through bullying. 50.1% of Austrian 15-year-olds have been bullied at least once within the previous year (OECD, 2017).

To summarize, a review of four large-scale health-related studies has shown that young people in Austria, too, are affected by increasing levels of depression, anxiety, chronic stress, and social isolation, all of which are potentially detrimental to their wellbeing. Since PE can act as an antidote to depression and other mental health issues (White & Murray, 2015), Austrian students are highly likely to greatly benefit from it.

### 6.3 The compatibility of PE with the Austrian curriculum

To examine the ways in which the curriculum for general secondary education (BMBWF, 2017) justifies and supports the implementation of PE into Austrian schools and EFL classrooms, a curriculum analysis was undertaken. As a result, six educational aims ("Bildungsziele") were identified that align well with the principles and practices of PE: (1) providing health education, (2) identifying students' strengths and helping them develop their full potential, (3) teaching and cultivating values and virtues, (4) fostering students' self-competency (which includes the ability to perceive and critically reflect one's own behavior and thoughts), (5) fostering students' interpersonal and social competencies, and (6) helping students create a meaningful life.

Having studied the manifold positive effects of different PEIs (see 6.1), I am convinced that each of these six educational aims stated in the curriculum could potentially be realized by incorporating elements of PE into Austrian schools and classrooms. For example, PE can support the development of students' health competence (aim 1), since its primary goal is to increase students' mental, physical, and social wellbeing. By fostering students' self-efficacy and educating them about health and holistic happiness (e.g. the PERMA elements), PE has the potential to provide students with practical knowledge and wellbeing skills that will help them endorse a health-conscious lifestyle far beyond their graduation.

Furthermore, the VIA strengths model could play a major role for aims 2, 3, 5, and 6, since it classifies 24 universal character strengths that are hierarchically linked to one of six abstract core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). By taking the VIA online strengths survey (<https://www.viacharacter.org/>), students can identify their top 5 strengths and discover ways to use them more diversely and frequently. Furthermore, since the VIA virtues have been found to be valued and endorsed cross-culturally (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005), class discussions about their meaning and importance can be a powerful tool for fostering students' open-mindedness, cosmopolitanism, and respect for other cultures. This can create a deep sense of connection among students with diverse cultural backgrounds, increase their sense of a shared humanity, and create a climate of trust, dialog, and mutual respect.

Finally, PE can help students develop more self-competence, since it aims at fostering students' reflective and self-regulating skills, their sense of duty, self-efficacy, and responsibility, and their growth-mindset. For example, mindfulness-focused PEIs have successfully taught students to become more aware of their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Broderick & Metz, 2009), which is a first crucial step in learning to regulate oneself.

Interestingly, a better understanding of one's own mind can also lead to enhanced empathy and perspective-taking skills (Siegel, 2010), which connects self- with social-competence.

## 7. Application

Looking at the reviewed PEIs (see chapter 6.1), it seems that there are essentially two main ways in which PE can be brought to life in Austrian EFL classrooms: firstly, through the explicit teaching of PP topics (e.g. resilience, mindfulness, the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, the PERMA model of wellbeing, or types of positive communication); secondly, by implicitly embedding the principles and practices of PP into various aspects of the lesson (e.g. by incorporating mindfulness meditations, fostering students' growth mindsets, or designing tasks that evoke positive emotions or flow). Chapter 6 of Käferböck (2018) presents an extensive catalogue of concrete and practical suggestions on how the principles of PE can be realized in areas such as assessment, task design, or the classroom environment. A small selection of ideas is presented in the application box below.

However, it should be pointed out that the suggested implementations have some clear limitations, since they only address the bottom-up side of positive educational change (i.e. the ways in which individual teachers can embed PP into their classrooms). While small-scale PE projects at grassroot level are an indispensable part of sustainable change, so are large-scale top-down policy measures, such as the anchoring of PP in the curriculum or teacher training courses. Waters (2011), for instance, found that PEIs were most successful when they were implemented into existing subjects by practicing teachers (bottom-up) and at the same time supported by a larger educational system (top-down). She concluded that "positive psychology needs to be woven into the 'DNA' of the wider school culture" so that PE "becomes the general way of life at the school" (p. 85).

Ideally, then, an entire school would commit itself to transforming into a positive institution, with PE imbuing every aspect of teaching, connecting, and living. That this is indeed possible can be seen at Geelong Grammar School near Melbourne, which is an excellent example of a whole-school approach of that kind (Seligman, et al., 2009). However, since such profound and far-reaching changes require a lot of time, patience, energy, and money, this study focused on smaller-scale and easy-to-administer PEIs with low-resource requirements. Nonetheless, they can be expected to reap valuable benefits, since their effectiveness is backed up by evidence-based and scientifically robust studies, such as those reviewed in 6.1.

## Application Box

- Ask students to take the free VIA survey (<https://www.viacharacter.org/>) to discover their unique strengths profile. You can additionally use existing worksheets to work with the results (e.g. [http://www.youthstart.eu/en/challenges/my\\_character\\_strengths/](http://www.youthstart.eu/en/challenges/my_character_strengths/)).
- Adopt positive classroom rituals and routines such as mindfulness exercises or the WWW (what went well, e.g. yesterday or on the past weekend) starter activity.
- Consider the incorporation of brief meditations at the beginning of lessons (or before tests) to help students become more mindful and improve concentration.
- Foster students' growth mindsets by teaching them about brain plasticity, by praising effort instead of talent, and by criticizing behavior instead of character.
- Increase the amount of positive peer relationships and build strength-based teams for upper secondary classroom projects (consisting of so-called executors, influencers, relationship builders, and strategic thinkers; see Rath & Conchie, 2009).
- Practice active-constructive responding (ACR) and non-violent communication (NVC) in speaking-focused lessons.
- Change speaking prompts from "Give a speech on a time you were embarrassed" to "Give a speech of when you were of value to others".
- Practice letter writing by assigning a gratitude or self-compassion letter as homework and ask students to keep a personal journal for gratitude exercises (e.g. "write down 5 things you are grateful for every night before going to bed") or goal setting and monitoring tasks.
- Create PP-imbued grammar exercises, like those suggested by Helgesen (2016).
- When working with literature or movies, ask students to identify VIA strengths, positive transformations, and resilience in characters.
- Discuss stories of resilience, courage, persistence, and bravery with students to provide them with positive role models.
- Make use of the mood-boosting effects of music during group work activities, "brain breaks", or at the beginning of lessons.
- Make the positive visible and counteract the negativity bias through positive classroom posters, affirmative quotes, or positivity jars (i.e. empty glass jars that function as a container for folded paper strips containing some positive content, e.g. performed acts of kindness, WWW stories, or things they are grateful for).

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