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Happiness in ESL/EFL:
Bringing positive psychology to the classroom.

Marc Helgesen

Just over a decade after the positive psychology movement was launched, Seligman (2011), released *Flourish*, a book that presented a new model for positive psychology, PERMA. The acronym stands for the elements of positive psychology: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. One can think of PERMA as 'Happiness 2.0' or, more accurately, 'Well-being 2.0' since it looks at happiness as one part of a larger, more complete picture.

This chapter looks at ways to incorporate PERMA into ESL/EFL classes in ways that incorporate positive psychology strategies and clear language teaching/learning goals. In short, it looks at combining happiness and the language classroom. Many positive psychologists/researchers avoid the word 'happiness', preferring terms like 'positive emotion', 'subjective well-being' and the like. The word 'happiness' does trigger unscientific images like yellow smiley faces. In can be, as Fredrickson (2009: 37) said, 'murky and overused.' Kahneman (2010) said, 'the word 'happiness' is just not a useful word anymore because we apply it to too many things.' Why, then, does this writer not only use the term but include it in this chapter's title? Simply because the word is comprehensible. Learners understand it. Everyone wants it. As with all tasks in the language learning classroom, the promise of positive results make most learners willing to try the activities, even if they are different from some they usually associate with studying English.

Why should ESL/EFL teachers add positive psychology tasks to our classes? Teachers are, after all, busy. We're already responsible for listening, speaking, reading and writing. We worry about vocabulary, grammar and functions. We think about assessment, record keeping and a host of other things. Do we really need more responsibility? Perhaps we should think of positive psychology tasks as more of an 'opportunity' than a responsibility. Of course, all teachers deal with educational psychology, whether with awareness or by default. Awareness would seem to be a preferred strategy. There are other reasons as well. Happy students learn more. Oishi, *et al.* (2007) reported that happy students have higher grade point averages, miss fewer classes and report higher levels of conscientiousness. The same paper reported on an international survey of over 118,000 people that found that higher levels of life satisfaction correlated positively with the desire to continue one's education. Seligman, *et al.* (2009) connected positive mood to broader attention as well as enhanced creative, analytical and critical thinking. Achor suggested that positive emotion 'primes' people, making them better learners. He explained the neuroscience behind this, saying,

> 'positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that not only make us feel good, but dial up the learning centers of our brains to higher levels. They help us organize new information, keep that information in the brain longer, and retrieve it faster later on'. (Achor, 2010: 44)

Those neurotransmitters increase focus, memory and motivation (Willis, 2010), elements that every teacher wants to see in students.

Positive emotion

Although the five aspects of PERMA are all important, positive emotion is probably the one that most teachers will find useful in the classroom most frequently. It contains concrete elements that are easily connected to specific functions, grammar points, topics and lexical sets.

Lubomirsky (2005: 32-33) identified eight types of cognitive and personal behaviour that lead to a more satisfying life. Those items, which I have paraphrased to make them more accessible to the learners, are as follows.

1. Remember good things in your life. (Count your blessings.)
2. Do kind things.
3. Say 'thank you' to people who help you.
4. Take time for friends and family.
5. Forgive people who hurt you.
6. Take care of your health and body.
7. Notice good things when they happen.
8. Learn to work with your problems and stress.

Language teachers will notice that many of these are things that we already work with in our classes. 'Remembering' requires grammar, the past tense. 'Noticing good things as they happen' requires the present. 'Thanking' and 'forgiving' are functions and imply the use of related language routines. 'Friends', 'family' and 'health' are typical topics in many beginning-level English classes. If we are already broaching these topics anyway, framing them as 'working with happiness' can be a useful way of introducing positive psychology into the ESL/EFL class. One simple way is via a 'sentence strip dictation' (Davis & Rinvolucri, 1988). Simply copy the sentences. Make one copy for every seven students, cut the strips into sentences and distribute the sentence strips. Keep the first one for yourself to use as the example. Dictate the first sentence, 'Remember good things in your life.' Students write it. They also copy the sentence strip you have given them. Then learners stand, circulate and collect and write the remaining sentences while dictating their own to their classmates.

Once everyone has written all eight, have learners work in small groups, discussing the ideas and thinking of ways they do – or could do – them. The dictation activity gets the information to the students but, of course, it is at the level of individual sentences. It takes the discussion or expansion to get them thinking about the real meaning and how to apply the ideas to their lives.

One way to do meaning-based review of the ideas is to have learners write ‘happiness haiku.’ In pairs or small groups they write a haiku poem about one of the ideas. In haiku poems, the first line has five syllables, the second has seven syllables and the final line has five. Writing such structured poems can be challenging but, as Maley (2014) pointed out, constraints such as syllable-counts are actually a form of scaffolding that make success possible. Noticing English syllable counts can also be a useful exercise for learners whose native language is syllable-timed which makes the prosody of stress-timed English difficult. Here are examples of ‘happiness haiku’ written by first-year Japanese university students.

Whatever happens,
don't be afraid. Keep going.
We are living now.

The day won't come back.
Think about today's good things.
Open a new door.

We have many friends.
If you feel sad, they will help.
We must savor friends.

Just breathe air slowly.
It will calm your angry mind,
and you can forgive.

The class that wrote these haiku poems made illustrated posters and took turns sharing their poems with their classmates. See figure 1.

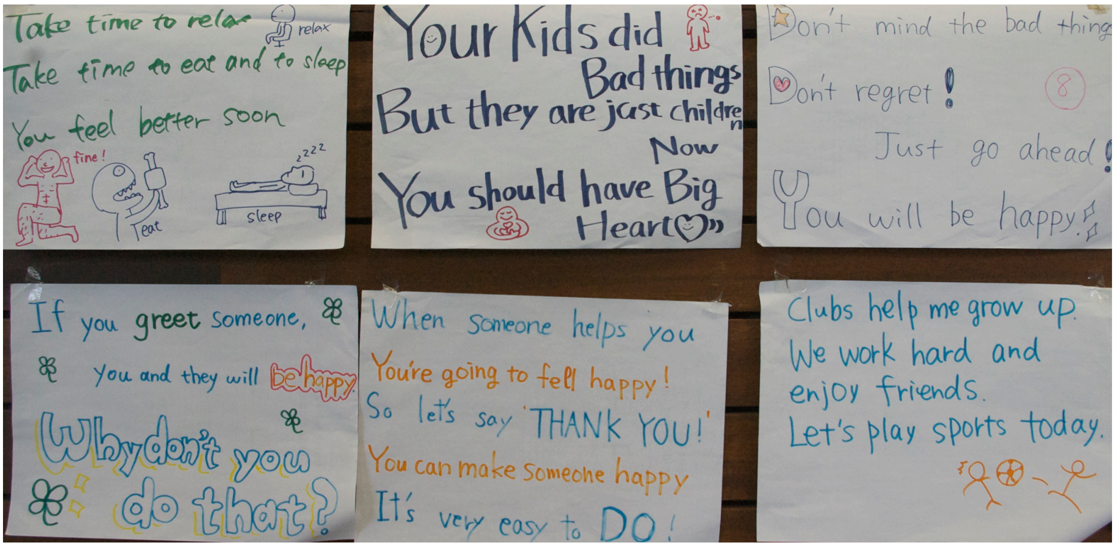

Take time to relax
relax
Take time to eat and to sleep
You feel better soon
fine!
zzz
eat
sleep
Your Kids did Bad things
But they are just children
Now
You should have Big Heart
Don't mind the bad things
Don't regret!
8
Just go ahead!
You will be happy
If you greet someone,
you and they will be happy
Why don't you do that?
When someone helps you
You're going to fell happy!
So let's say 'THANK YOU!'
You can make someone happy
It's very easy to DO!
Clubs help me grow up.
We work hard and enjoy friends.
Let's play sports today.

Figure 1: Student haiku posters decorating classroom wall

As teachers, we know the importance of spaced repetition (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2014: 132) for reviewing new language and concepts over time. For learners to gain the benefits of the ideas above, teachers may want to regularly include activities that combine language goals with the contents of the ideas.

The following are examples of ways to bring each of the eight ideas into the language classroom. Since it is generally easier to raise the level of activities than to lower it, elementary level tasks are used. Grammar targets, functions or topic areas are identified in parentheses.

• Remember good things in your life: *Gratitude list* (past and present tenses, fluency practice). Students make one oval on a piece of paper for each year of their age. In each, they write one thing they are thankful for. In groups, they explain the most interesting items. Note that this activity usually includes thanking, friends and family as well. This is based on Pink (2006: 236).

• Do kind things: *Compliments.* (Complimenting, reported speech). Write eight or so compliment phrases such as 'That's a great jacket' or 'You've got a beautiful smile' on the board. In groups of four or five, each learner gives one true compliment to each person. At the end, they try to remember all the complements, using indirect speech ('She told me…', 'He said I…').

• Say 'thank you' to people who help you: *Thank you to the world.* (Giving reasons with *because*.) On the board, write: 'I want to say (thank you) to (country) because…'. In pairs, students see how many different languages they can say 'thank you' in and why they want to thank that country or culture. ('I want to say *kop kun kha* to Thailand because of wonderful green curry.' 'I want to say *shukran* to Arab countries because they gave us math. I don't like math but it is important.')

• Take time for friends and family: *Toothpick family.* (Family vocabulary, positive adjectives). Write model sentences on the board: 'This is my (mum, dad, etc.). Her/His name is ____. She/He is a (job). She/He is very (adjective).'

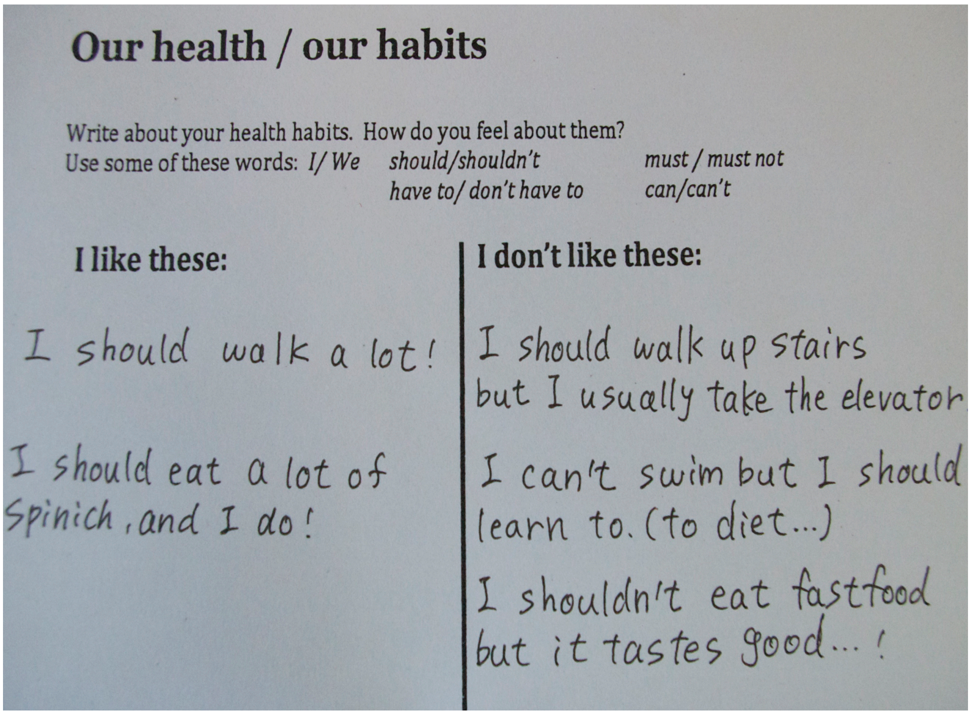
Brainstorm positive adjectives and write them on the board. (Examples: happy, energetic, smart, hard-working, creative, etc.). Students work in groups of four or five. Give each group some toothpicks. Students use the toothpick to introduce their family, laying the toothpicks on the desk while using the target and other sentences. They can break the toothpicks to represent different heights. After everyone has had a turn, partners see how much they can remember. If toothpicks aren't available, they can draw simple pictures.

• Forgive people who hurt you: *Forgiveness metapho*r (listening, following instructions, imperatives). Tell the students to think of someone who did something bad whom they have not forgiven. Tell them that this is a listening activity. They will not be asked to talk about it. The information is private. Everyone needs a small object like a water bottle, cell phone or pencil case.

Read this script to them: *Pick up the small object. Hold it in front of you.* (Pause) *Someone did something bad to you. Forgiveness does NOT mean the bad thing was OK.* (Pause) *Forgiveness does NOT mean that person can do the bad thing again. Forgiveness is important for things that must NOT be done again.* (Pause) *When you do not forgive, who is hurt? The person who did the bad thing usually doesn't know. Or doesn't remember. Or doesn't care.* (Pause) *The anger is in your heart. You carry the weight.* (Pause) *It does not help to know why the person did* *the bad thing. Usually that person doesn't know.* (Pause) *It is heavy, isn't it?* (Long pause) *You carry the weight. You have the power to – let – it – go.*

Afterwards, you might want to discuss how metaphors are useful to talk about things that are hard to discuss directly. Proverbs from the learners' countries/languages are one way into the topic.

• Take care of your health and body. *Our health/our habits* (Modal auxiliary verbs for obligation/permission, likes/dislikes). Each student divides a piece of paper in half and writes 'I like these' on one side and 'I don't like these' on the other. In groups of four or five, they think of health-related rules and customs using words like 'should/shouldn't', 'must/must not', 'have to/don't have to', 'can/can't', etc. They write the sentences on the side of the paper that reflects what they think. Then they compare where they wrote the ideas. Variation: They divide them according to how well they follow the rules (always, usually, never). (See figure 2).



Our health / our habits

Write about your health habits. How do you feel about them?
Use some of these words: *I/ We* *should/shouldn't* *must / must not*
have to/ don't have to *can/can't*

I like these:

I should walk a lot!

I should eat a lot of Spinich, and I do!

I don't like these:

I should walk up stairs but I usually take the elevator

I can't swim but I should learn to. (to diet…)

I shouldn't eat fastfood but it tastes good…!

Figure 2: Student example of *Our health/ our habits.*

• Notice good things when they happen: *Happiness chains.* (Present simple, present progressive). Give each student three strips of paper about 3 cm. x 15 cm. (1 x 6 inches) long. Each group of four or five students will need a stapler, glue stick or paper clips. They each write sentences about good things in their lives right now on the strips. In their groups, they take turns reading their sentences and adding it to a group 'paper chain', pasting or stapling the strip together. Each strip makes a link. Encourage partners to ask questions and make comments about other people's ideas.

• Learn to work with your problems and stress. *Working with stress.* (Habitual present, past tenses). In small groups, students brainstorm ways they deal with problems and stress. They suggest ideas. Partners ask WH-questions. Ideas often include exercise, prayer, meditation, eating chocolate, going for a walk, etc.

As mentioned above, the term 'happiness' is avoided by some positive psychologists as too simplistic. Fredrickson (2009: 39-48) identified ten distinct forms of positive emotion, listed below, along with 'sentence starter cues' that can help learners understand and get started talking or writing about each.

- Joy. *I was really happy when…*
- Gratitude. *I was thankful for…*
- Serenity. *I felt peaceful when…*
- Interest. *Sometimes I'm so interested in something, I don't even notice the time. I was very interested, alert and focused when…*
- Hope. *Even when things are difficult, I felt they would get better. For example…*
- Pride. *I felt good about something I did when…*
- Amusement. *It was fun and funny when…*
- Inspiration. *Sometimes I see people doing wonderful things for other people. For example…*
- Awe. *Some things are so wonderful, I almost can not believe them. For example, when…*
- Love. *This can include all of these feelings. It can be romantic love, family love or caring about friends. I really knew I was loved when…*

The sentence starter cues above are written to elicit past tense examples and stories from the students. They can easily be modified to encourage present or present habitual tenses, by changing the verbs to the present simple.

There are many ways to use these ideas in the classroom. Some teachers copy them, ask students to write answers to at least seven of the sentence starter cues, and then talk or write about one or more that interests them. It can be useful, before they write or talk about the topics, to spend s few minutes of 'thinking time' to clarify both what they want to communicate and how they will do so in English (Helgesen, 2003b). Other teachers lead a 'Guided Journey' (Berman & Brown, 2000). A 'guided journey' is sometimes called a 'guided visualization' but the term 'journey' is used here because it often involves more senses than 'vision' alone. After introducing the types of positive emotion and sentence starter cues, the students choose one they want to talk or write about. They close their eyes. The teacher, speaking in a calm voice, mentally leads them through the situation in a way that helps them re-experience the positive time. The teacher pauses frequently to give the learners time to imagine and to re-experience the event.

Think about the time you felt very happy. In your mind, visit that time and place again. Where are you? When did this happen? Who are you with? Look around. Notice the place. Notice the colors. Notice what things are made of. Notice the people. What do they look like? Who are they? What are they saying? What are you saying? What else do you hear? Notice what you are feeling. Is it warm? Cool? Is there a breeze? Notice the feeling in your heart – your emotion. What happens next? Notice everything that happens.

The teacher allows about 30 seconds of quiet time for students to imagine the story. Then they write or tell in pairs or small groups. If they are telling the stories aloud, it is useful to encourage partners to ask WH-questions or other kinds of questions. This is, of course, a useful discourse strategy to help the learners practice keeping a conversation going. It also leads to what Seligman (2011: 48) called 'active, constructive responding'. This type of response not only shows one is paying attention and leads to better communication, it also helps the main speaker mentally recreate the positive event, taking their own re-experience of the event deeper.

Some teachers have learners change partners, retelling their stories one or more times. This not only provides fluency practice (Mazgutova, 2013), it also gives the speaker an additional experience of the positive emotion since by re-experiencing the event mentally the student is reflectively savoring (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Fredrickson (2009) suggested that it is the experiences of positive emotion, including those that happen through remembering and savoring, rather than just the actual occurrence of positive events that contributes to a person's feeling of positivity.

Most of the classroom activities mentioned in this chapter are ways of modifying positive psychology ideas and interventions to make them useful for language learning. Interestingly, the final classroom task in the section, *Three good things*, required no modification. It is used directly as reported in Seligman, *et al.* (2005). For one week, the participants keep a daily log. They write down three good things that happen each day and why. For example, a student might write, 'Dinner was great tonight.' The 'why' can be 'why it happened' or 'why it was good.' Here are some possible reasons dinner was great:

> My mum/dad is a good cook.
> I was really hungry.
> Pizza is my favorite.
> I helped make dinner.

Note that while the good things will usually be remembering something good that happened, the reasons can touch on some of the other positive emotion items identified at the beginning of this section. Identifying someone as a good cook is similar to thanking, in this case a family member. Recalling the experience of being hungry and then eating is like recalling something good as it happened. Helping make dinner is doing an act of kindness.

The activity goes on for one week. It doesn't take long, perhaps five minutes a day. The significant thing is the results. Seligman, *et al.* (2005) found that this one-week task connected to six months of positive emotion. The activity correlated with a raise in positive emotion scores and a decline in depressive symptoms. Although the participants were explicitly told to do the activity for only one week, follow-up interviews found that they continued to notice good things in their lives. It is as if the one-week training had gotten them into a mentally healthy habit of noticing and remembering good things in their lives.

Engagement

In experimental studies, increased learner engagement has been shown to be connected with 'improved…curiosity, love of learning, and creativity' (Seligman, 2011: 85). That engagement requires a challenge. If activities are too easy, learners get bored. If they are too difficult, learners give up. According to Sousa & Tomlinson, (2011: 114) 'Work that interests students will necessarily be at an appropriate challenge level.' To encourage engagement, Seligman encouraged creating *flow*, the 'experience of complete absorption in the present moment.' (Nakamura &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2009: 195). Tardy & Snyder (2004: 118) stated that 'flow tends to occur when the level of challenge in a task is high, but manageable given the person's skills in completing the task.' In flow experiences attention becomes ordered and fully invested, leading to a loss of self-consciousness, and a distorted sense of time. In the classroom, cooperative learning and scaffolded autonomy tasks can lead to flow (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi: 2009)

Flow requires a balance between challenge and skill. The goal must be challenging, but achievable. Mazgutova (2013) suggested that fluency tasks that include task repetition and time limits can be useful in building fluency. One such task that works well for this is 4/3/2 (Nation, 1989), also known as 'Fluency Workshop' (Maurice, 1983). In the task, students are assigned or choose a topic. Any topic can be used but to make use of positive psychology in ESL/EFL classes, personalized items related to the positive behaviors identified at the beginning of this chapter work well. Normally learners have a minute or two 'thinking time' to consider what they want to say. Then they work with a partner. The first partner has four minutes to talk about the topic. At the discretion of the teacher, this can either be a dialog with the other partner asking questions for clarification or more information, or it can be a monolog with questions coming after the four minutes. Then the other partner has a four-minute turn. Next the learners change partners and repeat the task, this time with a three-minute time limit. Finally, they change partners again and do the task in two minutes. The first time, the task is fairly challenging. They are thinking about what to say and how they will say it. The challenge is high and, since they have not said this content before, their skill level is low. The second time, they have said it before. They are clearer about what they want to say. The first round provided a rehearsal for the second. They are becoming more fluent. By the third round, many learners experience flow. They are focused on their meaning and are often not thinking much about language itself.

Other fluency-frames which feature this 'task recycling' include 'Poster Carousel' (Lynch & Maclean, 2001) where students work in pairs to make a poster, then take turns presenting it while the partner goes off to see and hear other students' poster presentations, 'Line up' (Helgesen, 2003a) which is similar to 4-3-2 but the times are shorter and don't change and 'Mouth marathon' where students speak as long as they can each round. The round is over when they pause for five seconds or say a word not in the target language. All of these classroom activities provide for task repetition, which can lead to challenge, flow and engagement.

Relationships

Positive psychology pioneer Christopher Peterson was asked, in one or two words, to explain the essence of positive psychology. He responded, 'Other people.' (Seligman, 2011: 20). Haidt (2006: 223) shared a similar sentiment when he rewrote the adage 'Happiness comes from within' to 'Happiness comes from *between*.' Layard (05: 63) identified human relationships (family and friends) as two of the five most important factors affecting happiness. All of these ideas point to the importance of relationships. In the classroom, of course, we are concerned primarily with student-student and student-teacher relations. As Hamre & Pianta (2006: 71) pointed out, good student-teacher relationships 'are fundamental to (students') success in school, and as such, these relationships should be explicitly targeted.'

For teachers, this often starts with learning the students' names. This sounds obvious but in many parts of the world, classes have large numbers of students – 40 or 50 or more is not unusual and each teacher may have many classes meeting only once a week. As Viney (2009) pointed out, 'learning names takes work.' One way to facilitate learning names in large classes is to have students make name cards with index cards (See figure 3).

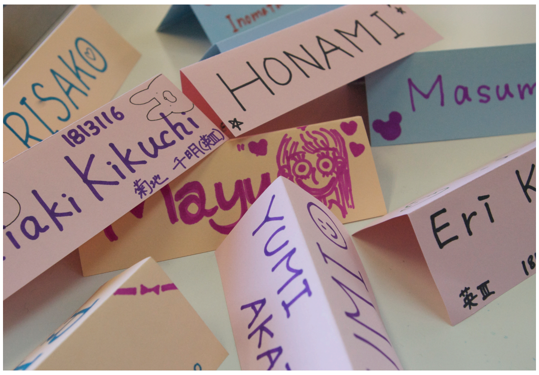
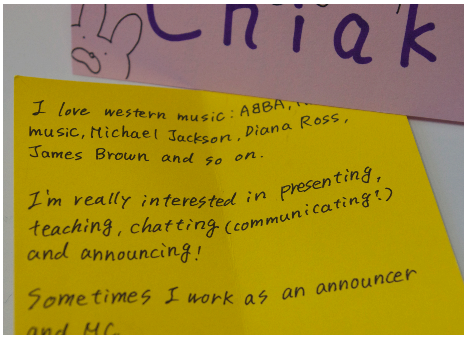


Figure 3: Student name cards.



I love western music: ABBA,
music, Michael Jackson, Diana Ross,
James Brown and so on.

I'm really interested in presenting,
teaching, chatting (communicating?)
and announcing!

Sometimes I work as an announcer
and MC

Figure 4: Student self introduction on the inside of the card.

Students fold the cards in half so they stand up in an inverted 'V'. They write their names with a magic marker on both the front and back of the card. During class, students place it on their desks. The name is written on both sides so the teacher can see it from any place he or she is standing. Some teachers invite the students to 'decorate and personalize' the cards which makes it easier to associate the card with its owner. In the sample in figure 3, they wrote give and family name on one side of the card and whatever they wanted to be called by the teacher on the inside. On the inside of the card, the student writes a short self-introduction. It is helpful if the students write something unique about themselves – something that is not true about most of the other students. See figure 4. Although it is easier to have each learner keep their own card, it is better for learning names for the teacher to collect them at the end of each class. In the subsequent class, the teacher spends a few minutes reading the student biographies, trying to associate the information with the names. The teacher arrives a few minutes early for each class and passes the cards to their owners. Just as challenge is useful for learner engagement, the positive pressure of remembering which card goes with which person is useful in helping the teacher learn the students' names.

In trying to establish rapport between learners as well as with themselves, many teachers begin courses with name related activities to help learners get to know each other. Wiltshier (2014) suggested four 'mini-tasks' that encourage learners to talk about and learn partner's names. Students write their name in the middle of a piece of paper. In the four corners of the paper, they write or make notes about the following:

- What their name means.
- Why they were given that name.
- What they like or dislike about their name.
- If they had a different name or a nickname, what they would want it to be.

The teacher designates one corner of the room for each of the items, student choose the one they want to talk about, go to that corner, find a partner and talk about the topic. They change partners several times, trying to remember each partner's name.

A final name-learning activity is 'name poem.' Students write their name vertically on a large (A3 or B4) sheet of paper with a marker. With a different coloured marker, they write one phrase including a word that starts with that letter. Then they circulate, reading other learners' poems and asking about interesting items. An example by the present author appears in Figure 5.

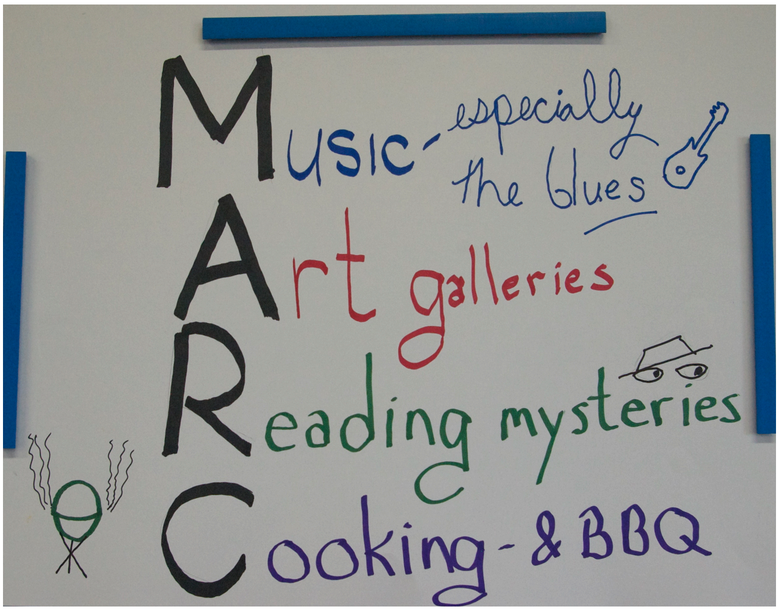


Figure 5. Name poem.

Modern language teaching methodology emphasizes student-to-student communication. This, of course, builds social relationships which Hefferon and Boniwell (2011: 56) called, 'one of the greatest predictors and facilitators of SWB (subjective well-being).' Most of the classroom activities suggested in the 'positive emotion' section of this chapter include learner interaction. Hadfield (1997: 10, 40) suggested an activity called 'Medals' at the mid-point or end of a course. Learners receive copies of a paper with an award-type medal printed on them. They cut them out, and decide on qualities of classmates that deserve recognition – good listener, interesting partner, helpful friend, cool fashion award, etc. They give the awards to each other, building their relationships as they practice English.

Meaning

It may surprise language teachers that 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness' need to be listed. Language teaching saw a shift away from mechanical, strictly form-focused pedagogy in the 70's toward more meaning-based communicative and task-based methodologies. In positive psychology, however, 'meaning' takes on a special nuance. Seligman (2011: 17) defined it as 'belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self.' Incorporating this idea, Lyubomirsky expanded her suggestions to 'learn to deal with problems and stress' and 'take care of your health and body' to 'Take care of your body and soul' (2007). In the category she includes religion and spirituality, meditation and physical activity. Like many positive psychologists, Lyubomirsky (2013) and Fredrickson (2013), suggest practicing meditation, with Fredrickson focusing on *metta* meditation. *Metta* is a Pali word usually translated as 'loving – kindness.' Pali is the language of the Buddha but, although derived from Buddhist tradition, 'loving kindness meditation' is not particularly connected to religion. To do it, one sits quietly, initially focusing on one's breathing. Then the person mentally repeats a series of items, while imagining his or her own compassion flowing to the person who is the object of their thought. There are many variations on the sentences but they are usually similar to the following, which has been simplified to make it comprehensible to language learners.

May I be healthy.
May I be happy.
May I be peaceful.
May I be loved.

Initially, one focuses on the self, wishing these gifts of compassion for him or herself. Then the cycle is repeated, with the focus on someone the person loves, often a family member or close friend, changing 'I' to 'you.' Mentally repeating the phrases, he or she visualizes their own loving kindness compassion flowing from their heart to the other person. Next the person thinks about someone he or she feels neutral about. Often students choose someone like a school bus driver or the office staff. These are people who are part of their lives but they don't have a strong emotional attachment to, positive or negative. Finally, they think about someone they don't really like. Even though they do not like the person, they can still wish them compassion. Many people end their loving kindness meditation with general, inclusive thoughts of compassion for their whole community, area, country and even people all over the world. To use this in the classroom, either the teacher can use the meditation as a listening task, leading the learners through the ideas, or make use of one of the many versions available on youtube.com or the free audio on Fredrickson's website, http://positivityresonance.com.

Another standard positive psychology intervention with direct ELT application is the 'gratitude letter'. The teacher teaches students the conventions of English letterwritting, then asks the students to think of someone who really helped them. It is often a parent, a special teacher, a coach or someone who has given them useful advice. They write a letter to the person, explaining specifically what that person did that helped them and how it made a difference in the student's life. In many or most cases with language learners, they need to write the letter twice, one in English for the class assignment and once in the language the person who helped them uses. Once they have written the letter, the teacher gives each student an envelope and, if it is not practical for the student to give the letter directly to the person, stamps so the student can mail the letter. The ideal way to deliver the letter is for the student to read it to the recipient.

In one study of the gratitude letter being used in a compulsory second year university writing class in Japan, 95% of the students writing and reading the letters reported experiencing positive emotions. They reported that 85% of the recipients reacted in positive ways ranging from 'fairly surprised' to 'astonished.' (Harada, 2014).

The gratitude letter was developed by Seligman and Peterson (Peterson, 2006). Peterson reported never having an experience of one parent being jealous when the letter is given to the other parent. There may be, however, cultural considerations. The present author teaches in Japan where such direct statements of emotion are unusual. To make it easier, the students use a form that explains, in Japanese, 'in my English class, we have been talking about important people and events in our lives. My teacher asked me to write a 'gratitude letter' to someone who had helped me. I decided to write to you.' People in other cultures may have different reactions. When Peterson was explaining the activity to now-prominent positive psychologist Nansook Park, she responded, 'Do you mean that your students have never done this before?' In Korea, where Park grew up, every child writes an appreciation letter to their teacher every year.' (Peterson, 2006:17).

Accomplishment

Accomplishment or achievements can play an important role in positive emotion. The pursuit of winning – playing the game well – can be as important as the actual rewards of winning. Seligman (2011) used examples as varied as athletes, bridge players and tycoons like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie and their current counterparts Bill Gates and Warren Buffett who made huge fortunes which they later gave away. Synder, *et al.* (2011) describes the idea as 'agency' when describing the pursuit of goals. It involves 'pathway thinking' – deciding on goals and finding alternative routes to those goals when initial paths are blocked and 'agency thinking' – taking action to move along those alternative routes. Lybomirsky (2007) identified six psychological benefits of pursuing goals. They include giving the person a sense of purpose, bolstering self-esteem in the case of meaningful goals, adding structure and meaning to one's life, helping people prioritize in order to achieve higher-order goals, learning to cope with roadblocks and replace unfeasible goals and, when the goals involving engaging with other people, the pursuit of those goals become its own reward.

Wingate (2000: 52-53) brings goal setting to the classroom with an activity called, 'Future Dreams.' Students are invited to think about their dreams, then identify the problems or challenges to achieving each goal, find ways to overcome those problems and, most importantly, break those ways down to small steps that they can actually accomplish. For example, many EFL students have a vague dream of studying in an English-speaking country. Of course, that is very expensive and out of reach to most. Lack of money is the first problem to be overcome. Studying abroad can cost thousands. It is difficult to save that much money. However, it is relatively easy to save a small amount. The learner can identify how much he or she can save in a month and then, commit to actually saving that much, perhaps putting it in a 'tin can' bank – the kind that can only be opened once with a can opener, to make it harder to break one's goals.

Another example of breaking goals into small, achievable steps for learners who want to improve their scores on tests like the IELTS, TOEIC, TOEFL or Cambridge English Exams. 'I want to improve' is vague. A goal such as 'I will spend 15 minutes every day practicing for the test' is much more concrete and achievable.

Two caveats about 'goal-setting: Snyder, *et al.* (2011: 397) urged teachers to make class goals relevant to learners' lives, ideas that fit in to the 'engagement' and 'meaning' aspects of the PERMA model. When good grades are emphasized as goals, it can 'turn students into grade predators who are more fascinated with their performances and with doing better than their peers than they are with learning.' Also, Sivers (2010) cautioned against telling goals to others lest it create a 'social reality' in which we feel we are closer to the goal than we really are and thus less motivated to do the necessary work to achieve it.

Snyder, *et al.* (2011) endorsed positive self-talk statements like 'I will keep going' to encourage people to keep working on their goals. Lybomirsky (2007: 220) contended that such statements can help create 'self-fulfilling prophecies.' However, Wood, *et al.* (2009) stated repeating positive affirmations such as 'I am a lovable person' may actually lower self-esteem in people with a weak sense of self-worth to begin with. It is as if they start feeling, 'I am not really a lovable person and now I'm a liar, too.' Kross, *et al.* (2014) offered a more complex view of self-talk, suggesting that the grammar of it makes a difference. When, instead of talking to oneself in the first person ('I need to relax.') before a stressful situation like a big test or giving a speech, subjects change it to the second person ('You need to relax.') or the third person including their name, ('[name] needs to relax.'), they experience 'linguistic self-distancing' which makes the advice to themselves stronger. The point of bringing up these issues is to note the complexity. A search for affirmations for students on google brings up over a half million hits. The research, however, clearly demonstrates that it is not as simple as telling students to say positive things to themselves. Teachers should be aware of the complexity and, perhaps, share some of those issues with students, encouraging them to say positive things they actually believe.

Conclusion

Positive psychology has matured. We have moved beyond 'happiness' to looking at the bigger area of well-being. It is also impacting a broader range of fields, including language teaching. We know that happy, engaged students learn more. As ESL/EFL teachers, we all deal with educational psychology and related issues like motivation and learner interest. Attention to developments in positive psychology such as PERMA – Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment/Agency, provides tools to let us teach more than grammar, functions and the like. They allow us to truly engage in humanistic language teaching. They let us teach people.

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