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# The gift of positive psychology: Wellbeing and high performance at school



SZILVIA FODOR, PHD

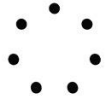
EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

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NATIONAL METHODOLOGICAL CENTER OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

4TH FEBRUARY, 2025

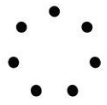


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# Agenda

- Positive psychology – in school
- Wellbeing and high performance
- Practices to enhance wellbeing:
  - personal
  - and whole-school level



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# Positive psychology

SELIGMAN, M. E. P., & CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.

## Positive Psychology

### *An Introduction*

Martin E. P. Seligman  
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

University of Pennsylvania  
Claremont Graduate University

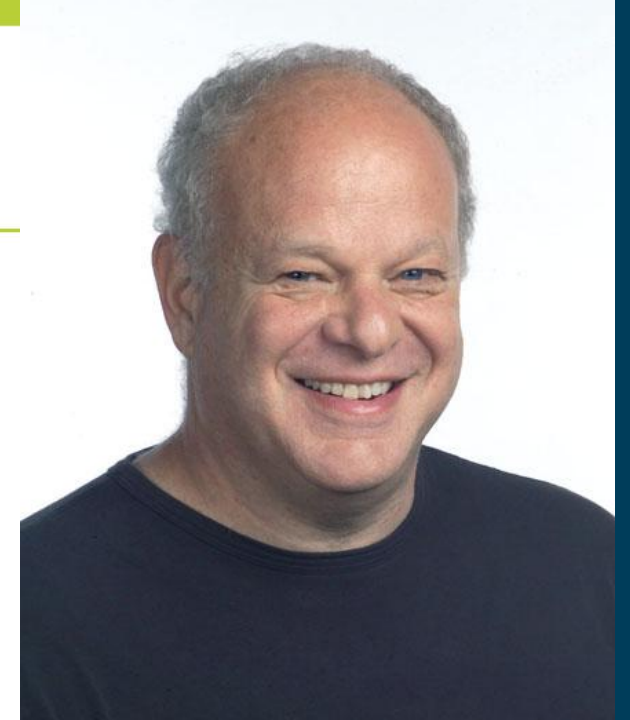
*A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promises to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless. The exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living. Hope, wisdom, creativity, future mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and perseverance are ignored or explained as transformations of more authentic negative impulses. The 15 articles in this millennial issue of the American Psychologist discuss such issues as what enables happiness, the effects of autonomy and self-regulation, how optimism and hope affect health, what constitutes wisdom, and how talent and creativity come to fruition. The authors outline a framework for a science of positive psychology, point to gaps in our knowledge, and predict that the next century will see a science and profession that will come to understand and build the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish.*

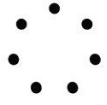
**E**ntering a new millennium, Americans face a historical choice. Left alone on the pinnacle of economic and political leadership, the United States can continue to increase its material wealth while ignoring the human needs of its people and those of the rest of the planet. Such a course is likely to lead to increasing self-

become a science largely about healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the fulfilled individual and the thriving community. The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.

Two personal stories, one told by each author, explain how we arrived at the conviction that a movement toward positive psychology was needed and how this special issue of the *American Psychologist* came about. For Martin E. P. Seligman, it began at a moment a few months after being elected president of the American Psychological



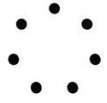


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Positive psychology is the scientific study of **optimal human functioning** that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive. (Positive Psychology Manifesto, 2000)



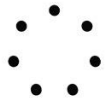


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- Positive psychology is a **scientific approach** to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behavior with a **focus on strengths** instead of weakness, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and **taking the lives of people up to “great”** instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to “normal”  
(C. Peterson, 2008)

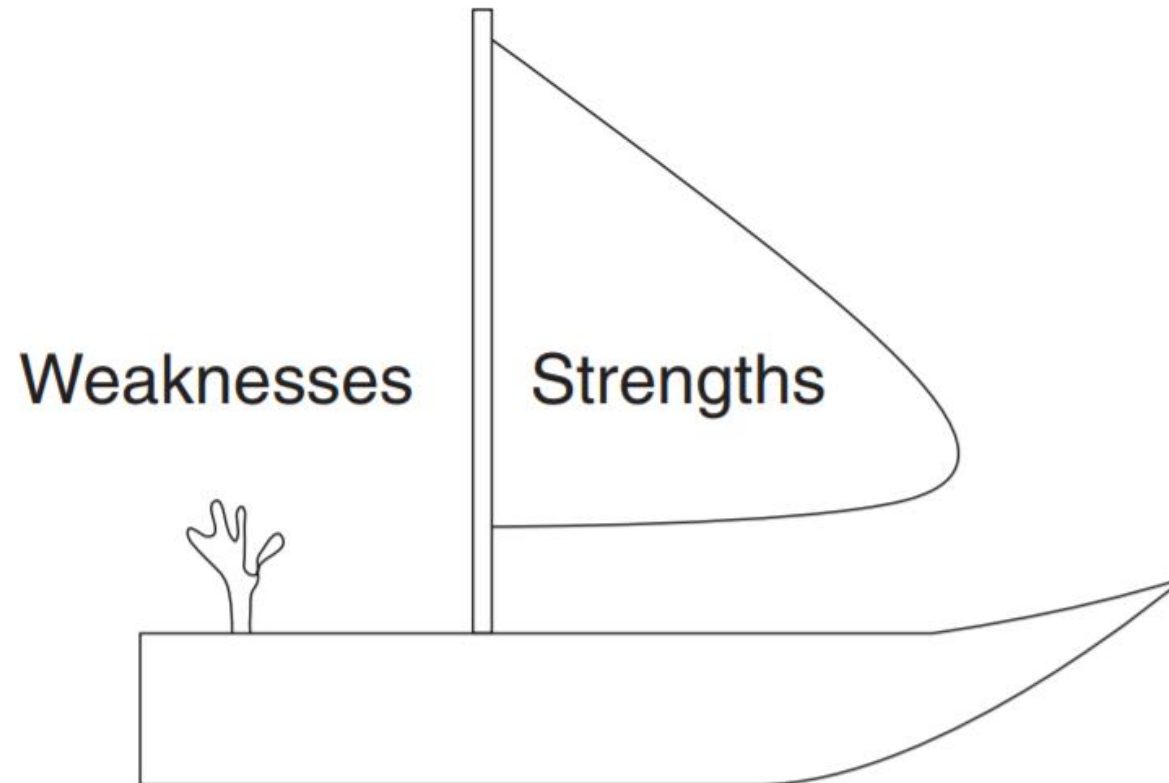


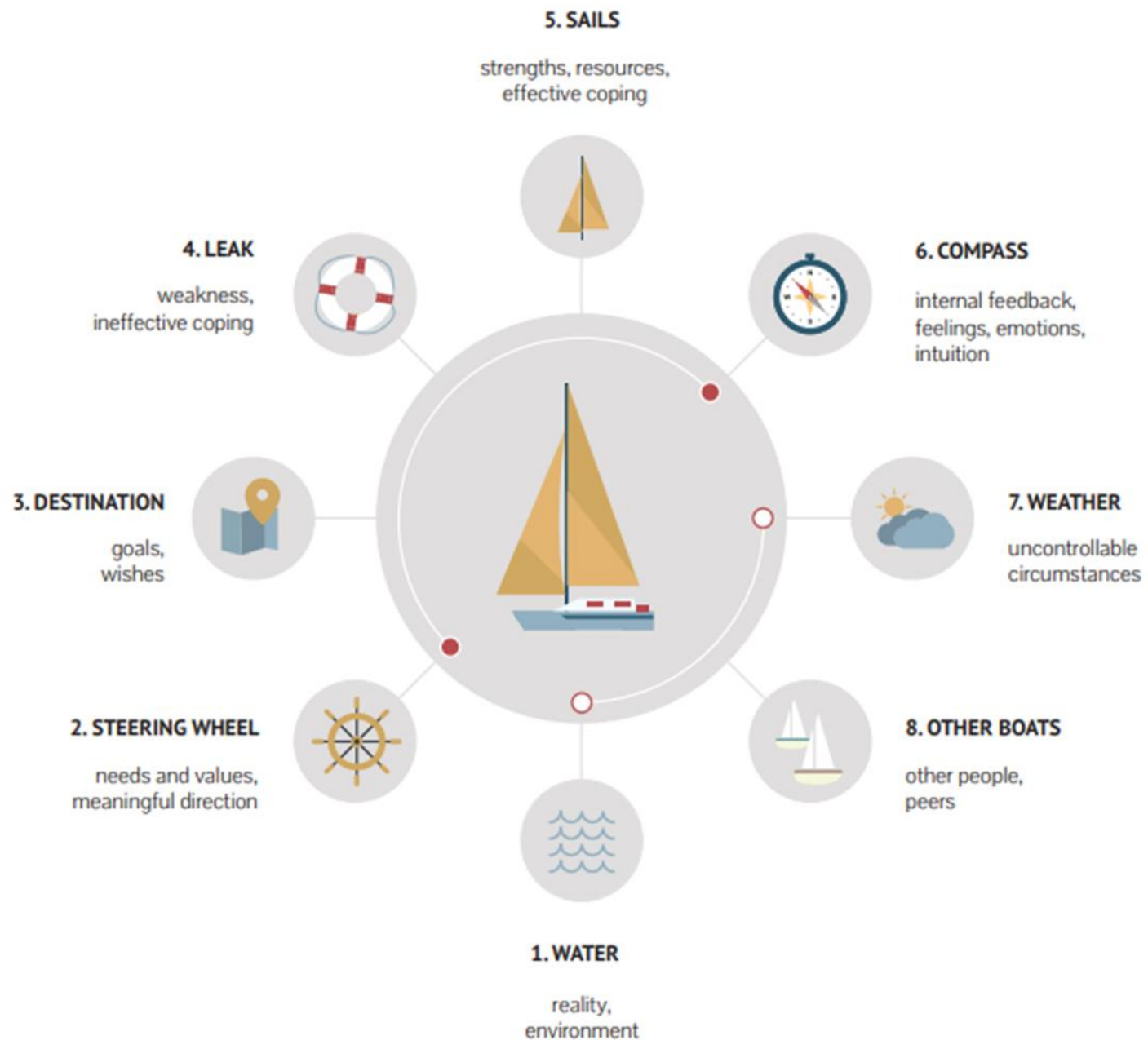
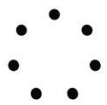


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# The sailboat metaphor





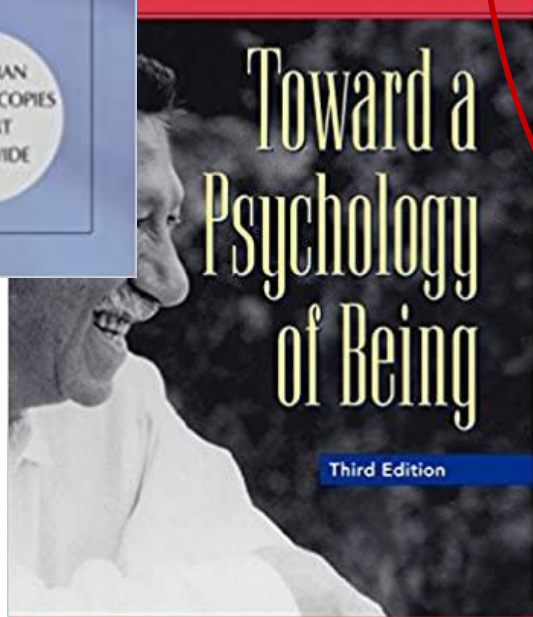
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# MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

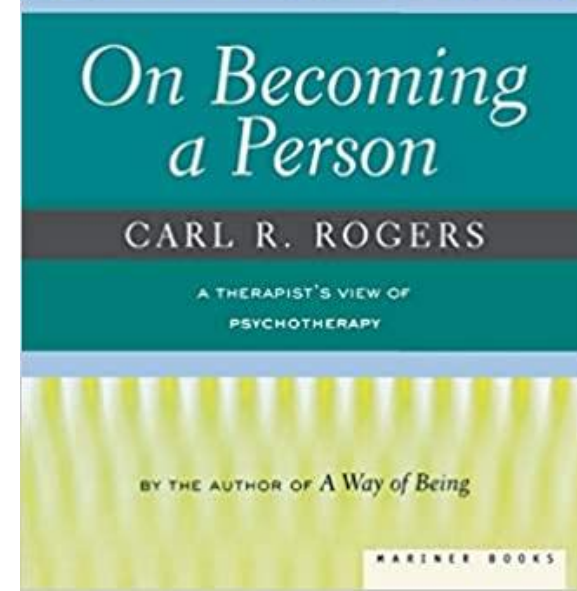
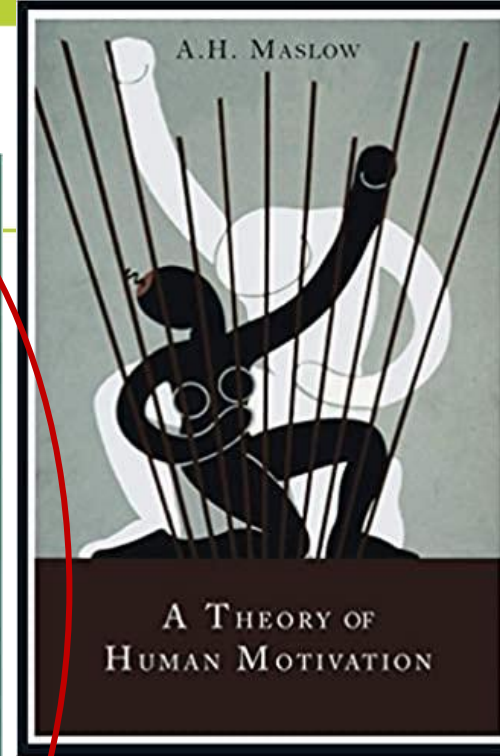
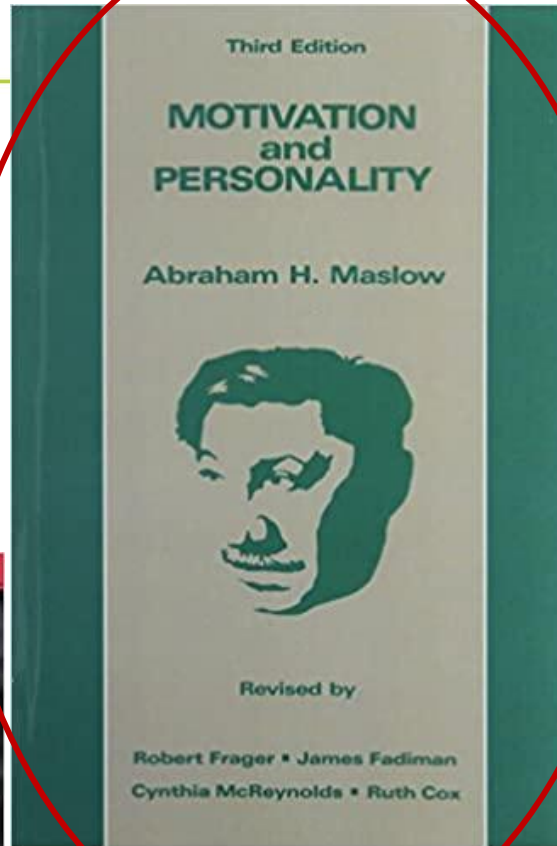
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Ilona Boniwell

Third edition

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Christopher Peterson  
Martin E. P. Seligman

# SECOND WAVE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

EMBRACING THE DARK SIDE OF LIFE



Itai Ivtzan  
Tim Lomas  
Heather Hefferon  
Helen Worth

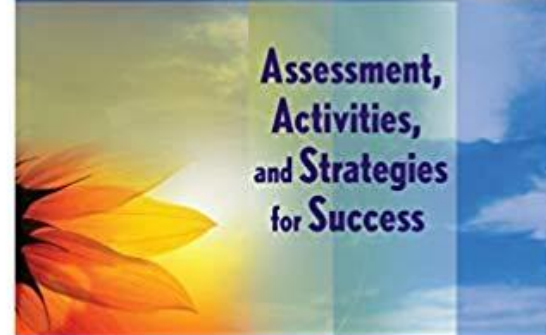


# A PRIMER IN Positive Psychology



CHRISTOPHER PETERSON

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING

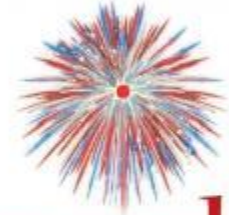


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# Flourish

MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN

BESTSELLING / AUTHENTIC

national bestseller

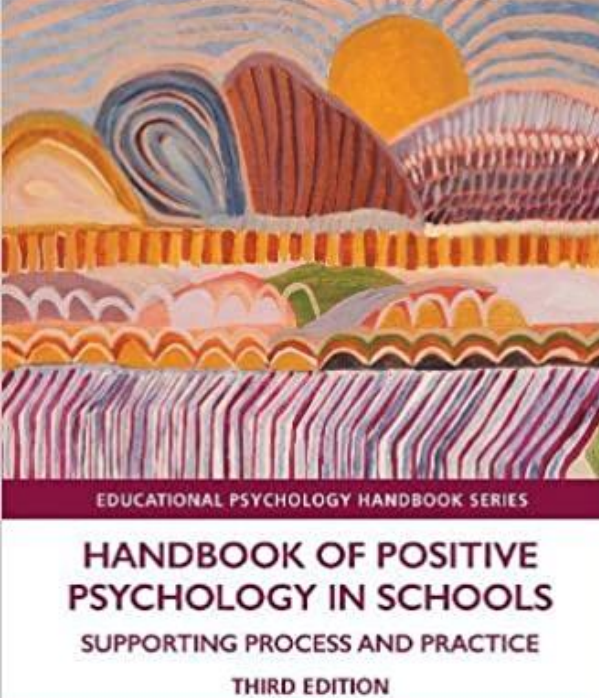
# flow

mihaly  
csikszentmihalyi

the psychology of optimal experience  
"Important...  
Illuminates the way to happiness."  
—New York Times  
Book Review

HARPERPERENNIAL MODERNCCLASSICS



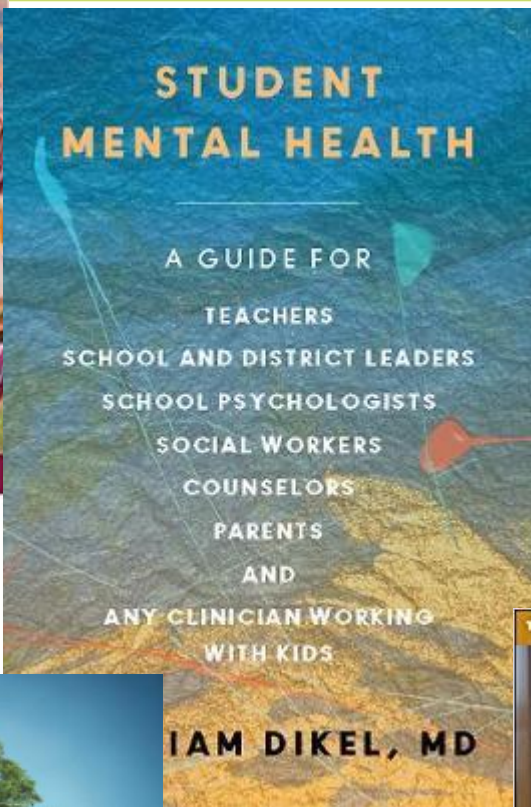


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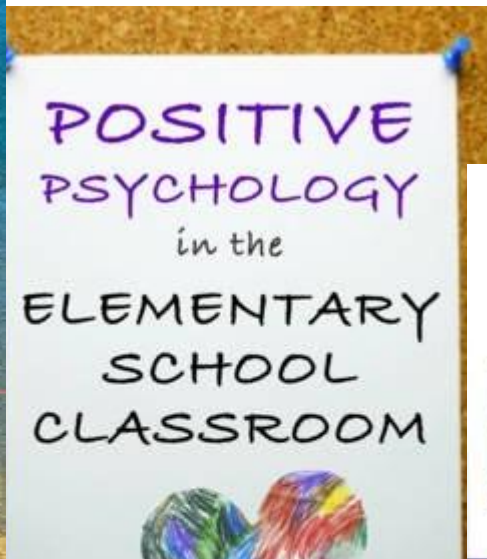


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PARENTS  
AND  
ANY CLINICIAN WORKING WITH KIDS

**IAM DIKEL, MD**



**POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**  
in the  
**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM**

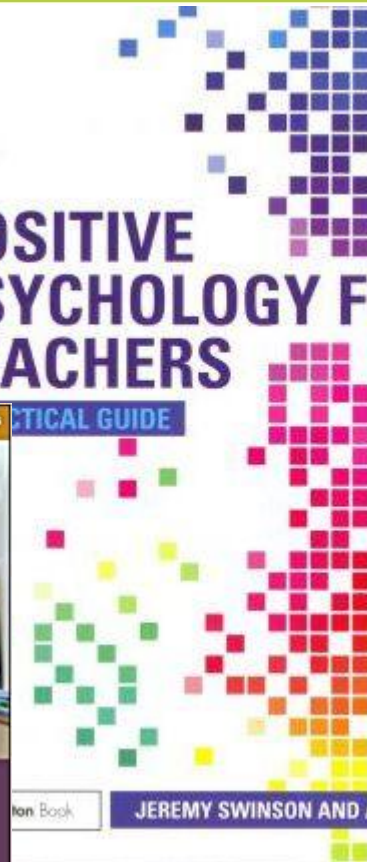
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Positive Psychology Interventions in Schools

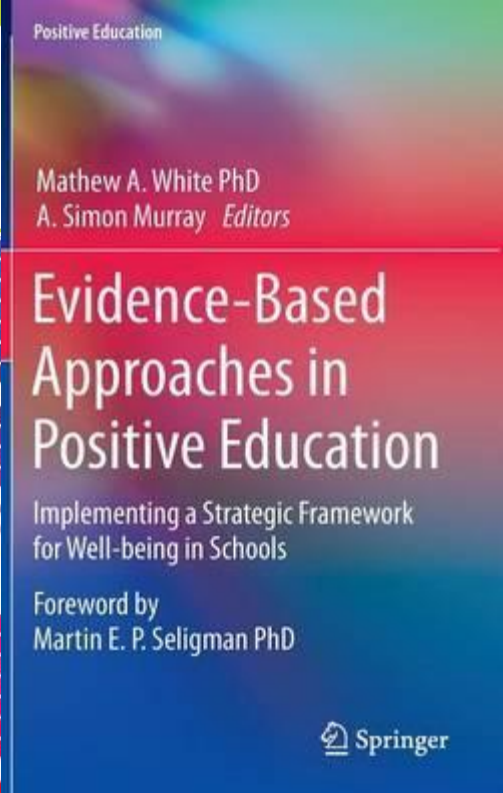
**Shannon M. Suldo**



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Practical Guide

JEREMY SWINSON AND ALEX HARROP



Positive Education

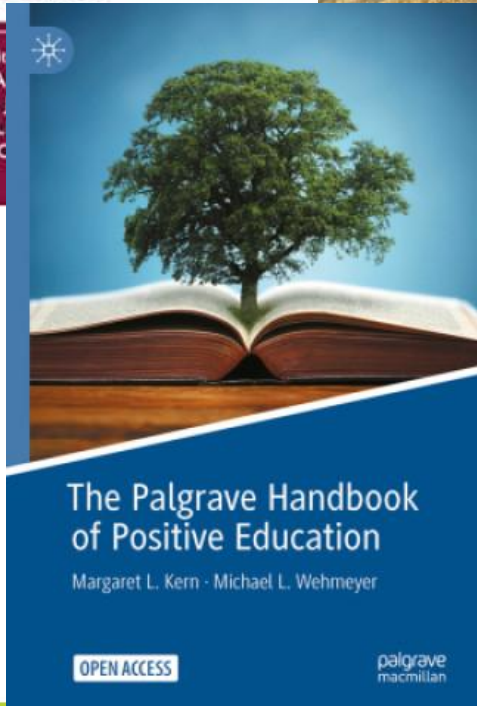
Mathew A. White PhD  
A. Simon Murray Editors

**Evidence-Based Approaches in Positive Education**

Implementing a Strategic Framework for Well-being in Schools

Foreword by  
Martin E. P. Seligman PhD

Springer

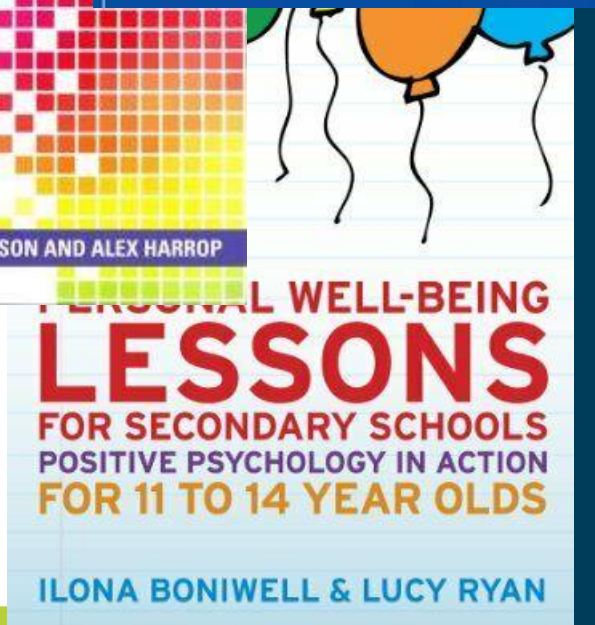


**The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education**

Margaret L. Kern · Michael L. Wehmeyer

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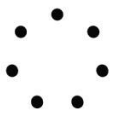


**PERSONAL WELL-BEING LESSONS**

FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN ACTION  
FOR 11 TO 14 YEAR OLDS

ILONA BONIWELL & LUCY RYAN

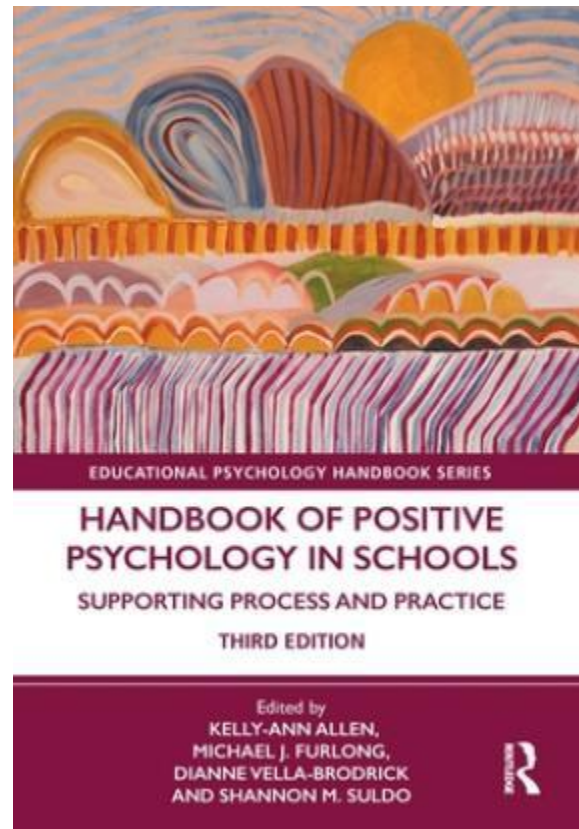
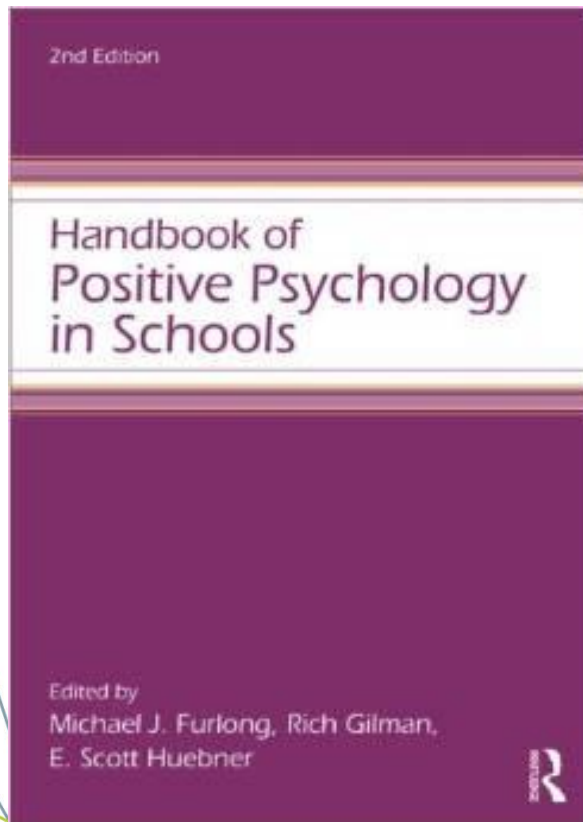




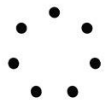
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Gilman, E. S. Huebner, & M. J. Furlong (Eds 2009.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (433-445). New York, NY: Routledge



hope, optimism, empathy, prosocial behaviour, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance, goals, creativity, curiosity, engagement, flow, meaningful activities, feedback, mindset, effect of praise, mindfulness, peer relations, coping, satisfaction, school climate



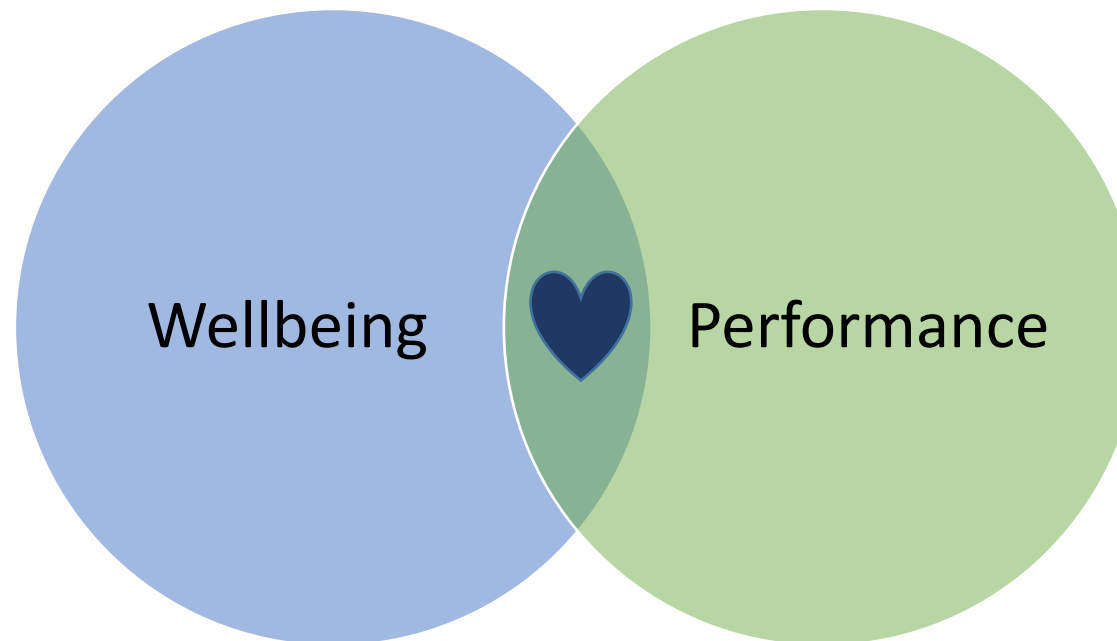
# PP & gifted education

What do you most want for your children?

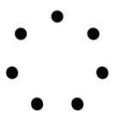
'Happiness', 'Confidence', 'Contentment', 'Balance',  
'Good Stuff', 'Kindness', 'Health', 'Satisfaction'

What do schools teach?

'Achievement', 'Thinking Skills', 'Success',  
'Conformity', 'Literacy', 'Mathematics',  
'Discipline'







# Rationale: KEY DATA ON WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS

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Across Europe 25% of pupils report having been bullied in the past month, 50% report having experienced cyberbullying in the past (Lobe et al., 2021)



Key sources of teachers' stress: admin work, excessive marking, classroom management, heavy teaching load, and addressing parental concerns (Eurydice, 2021)



In Europe, almost 50 % of lower secondary school teachers experience stress at work, with variations ranging from 20% to 90% (Eurydice, 2021)

9 million adolescents (10-19) in Europe are dealing with mental health challenges (OECD, 2022)



Life satisfaction and self-rated health among adolescents, particularly girls, has been in decline, while there has been a rise in multiple health complaints – such as difficulty sleeping, backaches or headaches, or feeling low (WHO, 2023)



In Western Europe, the estimated annual cost of mental health disorders in youth (0-19) amounted to 57.6 billion US dollars (UNICEF, 2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already existing mental health challenges in teachers with high levels of anxiety, depression and stress (Silva et al., 2021)



13% of adolescents in 23 EU countries feel lonely while at school (Baarck et al., 2022)

In Europe, suicide is the second most common cause of death among adolescents aged 15-19. (UNICEF, 2021)

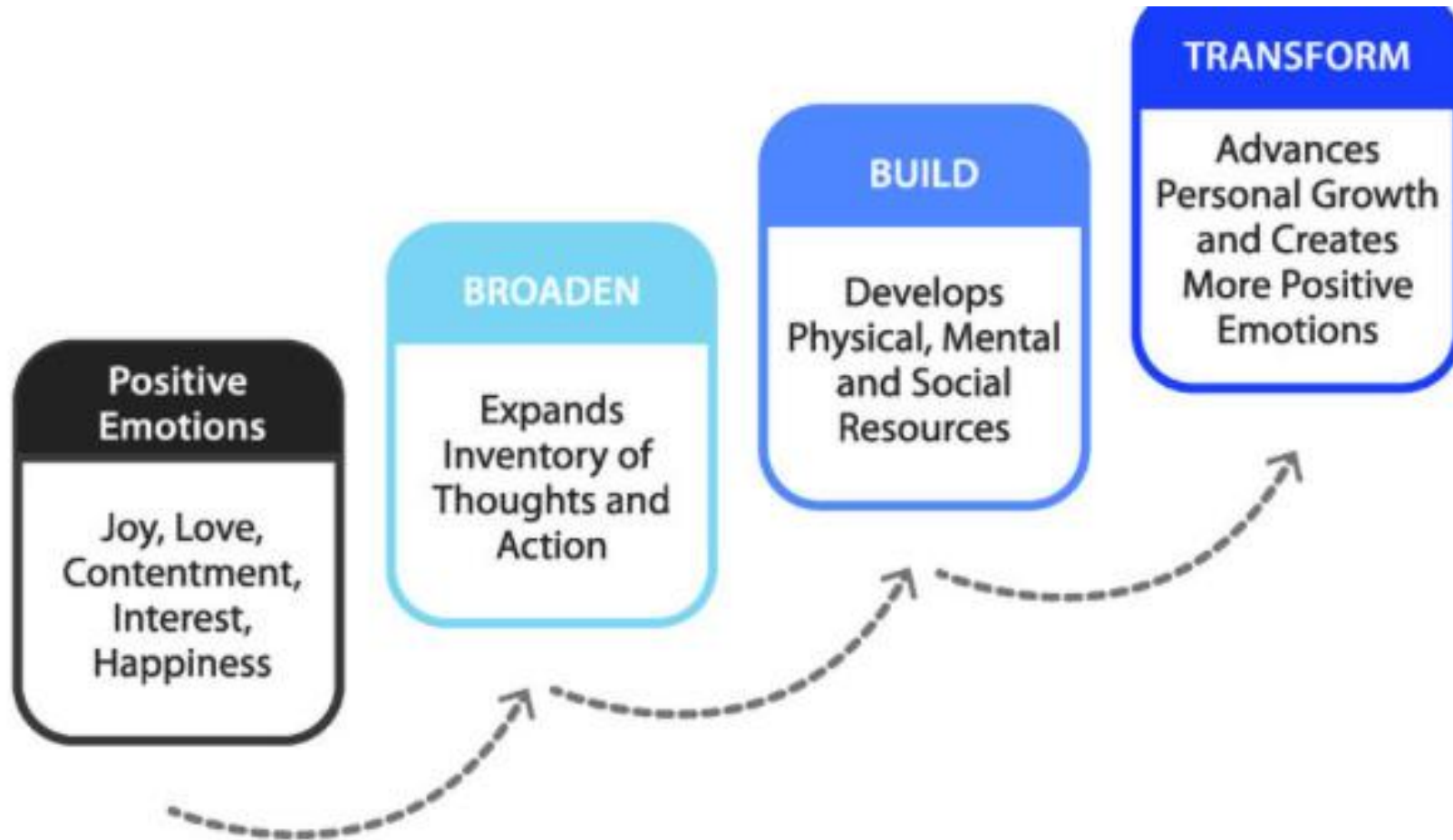


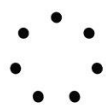
## More well-being is related to better learning.

- Increases in wellbeing are likely to produce increases in learning.
- Positive mood produces **broader attention** (Fredrickson, 1998; Bolte et al., 2003; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Rowe et al., 2007), **more creative thinking** (Isen et al., 1987; Estrada et al., 1994), **more holistic thinking** (Isen et al., 1991; Kuhl, 1983, 2000), negative mood produces narrower attention (Bolte et al., 2003)



## B. Fredrickson: Broaden-and-Build theory



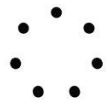


# Benefits of happiness/positivity

(Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005)

Lower turnover at work	Higher longevity
Better reports of customer service	Fewer fatal auto accidents
Better supervisor evaluations	Lower incidence of alcohol or other drug abuse
Lower emotional exhaustion	Faster recovery from illness or injury
Higher job satisfaction	More likely to be judged worthy of receiving a pay raise
Better organizational citizenship behavior	More likely to be judged as creative
Fewer work absences	More likely to resolve conflict through collaboration
Fewer emergency room and hospital visits	Increased motivation
More volunteerism	Better decision-making efficiency
Others perceive as friendlier, more assertive, and more confident	Increased creative thinking
Higher annual salaries	More inclusive thinking toward others



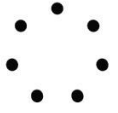


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# Recent research at ELTE:

- Character strengths & wellbeing in adolescence (resilience, self-efficacy, anxiety)
- Future-orientedness, goal-setting and motivation
- Translation and adaptation of VIA-Youth questionnaire
- Character strength intervention for students
- Character strength intervention for teachers (online)
- Effectiveness of e-learning materials in positive psychology
- Teacher wellbeing, character strengths - burnout
- Mapping the wellbeing of students: reflexive photography



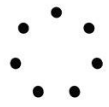
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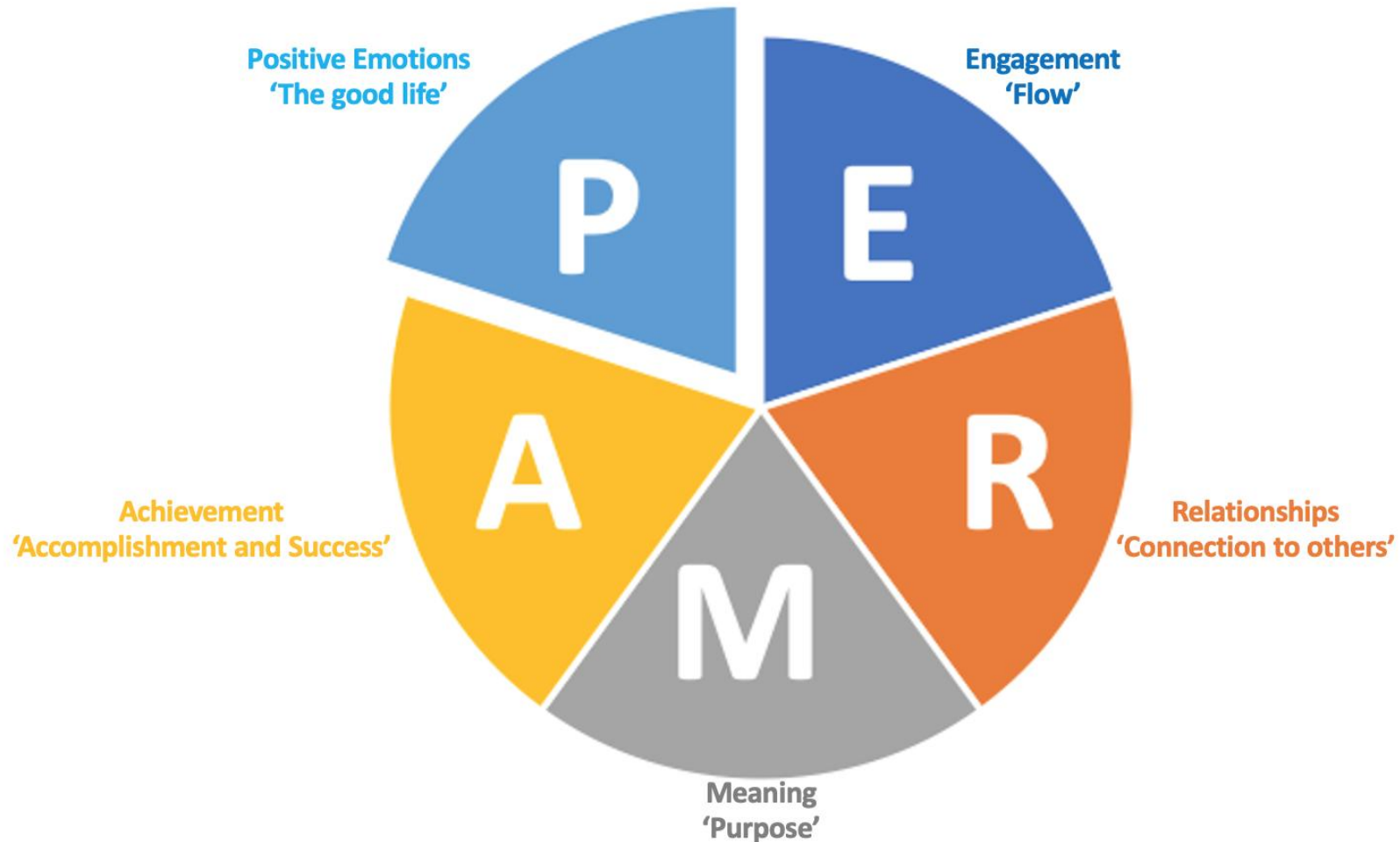
# APA dictionary

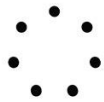
## *well-being*

- n. a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health, or good quality of life.



# Seligman (2011): PERMA model





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Evolutionary Neuroscience  
Optimistic Thinking Skills  
Mindset & Resilience  
Emotional Regulation  
Brain Biases

Psychosomatic / Somatopsychic Principles  
Body Balance & Alignment  
Energy Management  
Sleep & Nutrition  
Physical Activity  
Stress vs. Calm

Willpower & Self Regulation  
Choice & Decision Making  
Mindfulness Training  
Leveraging Strengths  
Peak Performance  
Savoring & Flow



Visualization, Goal Setting & Meeting  
Hope & Change Theory  
Grit & Perseverance  
Intrinsic Motivation  
Self-Determination  
Habit & Ritual

Transforming Challenging Dynamics  
Flourishing Relationship Skills  
High Quality Connections  
Positivity Resonance  
Kindness & Altruism  
Forgiveness

Spirituality  
Making Meaning  
Purpose & Passion  
Transcendence & Awe  
Neurobiology of Belief  
Post-Traumatic Growth



## Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions

Martin E. P. Seligman<sup>a\*</sup>, Randal M. Ernst<sup>b</sup>, Jane Gillham<sup>c</sup>, Karen Reivich<sup>a</sup> and Mark Linkins<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Pennsylvania; <sup>b</sup>Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools; <sup>c</sup>Swarthmore College and University of Pennsylvania; <sup>d</sup>Wallingford-Swarthmore (Pennsylvania) Public Schools, USA

Positive education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The high prevalence worldwide of depression among young people, the small rise in life satisfaction, and the synergy between learning and positive emotion all argue that the skills for happiness should be taught in school. There is substantial evidence from well controlled studies that skills that increase resilience, positive emotion, engagement and meaning can be taught to schoolchildren. We present the story of teaching these skills to an entire school—Geelong Grammar School—in Australia, and we speculate that positive education will form the basis of a ‘new prosperity’, a politics that values both wealth and well-being.

### Introduction

First, a quiz: In two words or less, what do you most want for your children? If you are like the hundreds of parents I’ve asked, you responded, ‘Happiness’, ‘Confidence’, ‘Contentment’, ‘Balance’, ‘Good Stuff’, ‘Kindness’, ‘Health’, ‘Satisfaction’, and the like. In short, you most want well-being for your children.

In two words or less, what do schools teach? If you are like other parents, you responded, ‘Achievement’, ‘Thinking Skills’, ‘Success’, ‘Conformity’, ‘Literacy’, ‘Mathematics’, ‘Discipline’ and the like. In short schools teach the tools of

### REVIEW ARTICLE

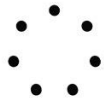
## Review of Brief School-Based Positive Psychological Interventions: a Taster for Teachers and Educators

Rébecca Shankland<sup>1</sup> • Evelyn Rosset<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 29 January 2016

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2016

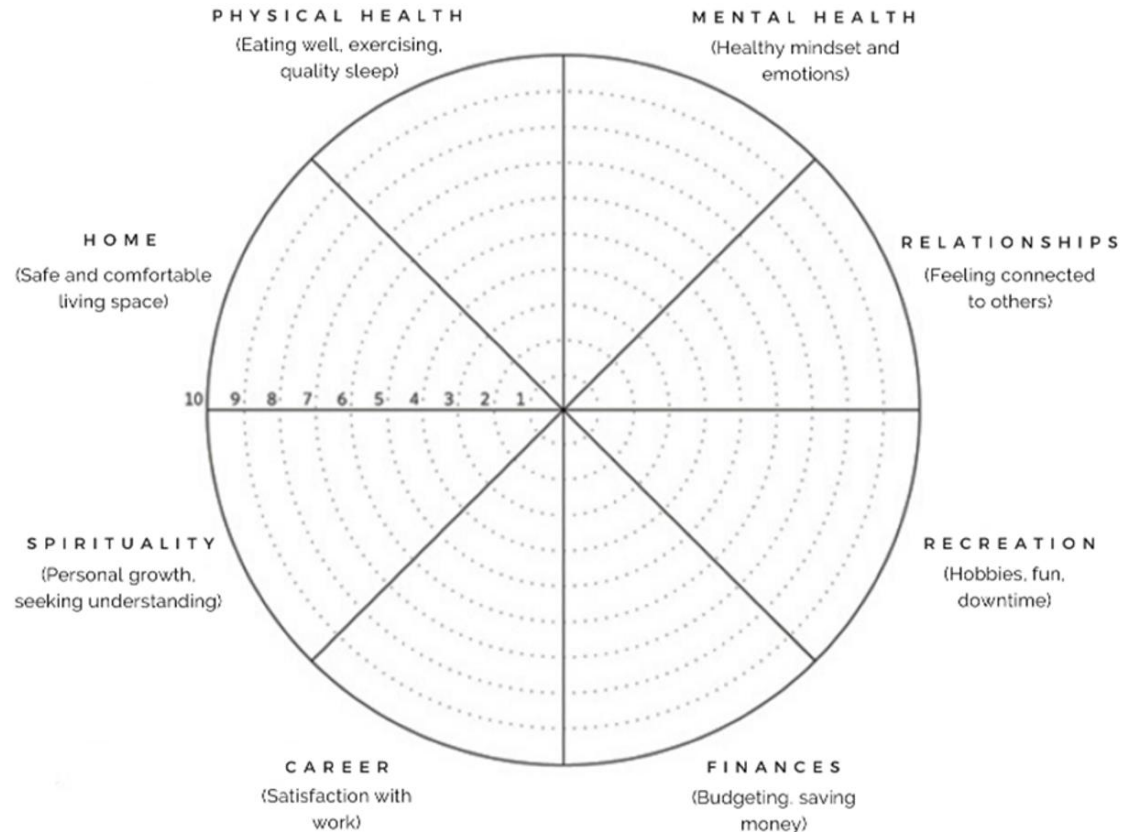
**Abstract** Research studies looking into the effects of positive psychology interventions (PPIs) implemented in classrooms have yielded promising results, not only in terms of student well-being but also in terms of academic outcomes, school climate, and teacher well-being. However, a number of PPIs require relatively high levels of commitment from school administrators and teachers to put into place. This may result in many teachers dismissing PPIs across the board as too complicated to implement. The goal of the present article is thus to present a review of brief PPIs (BPPIs) based on positive psychology research in order to encourage involvement in such interventions at school. The BPPIs presented here have been categorized into four sections according to established areas of research in positive psychology, mindfulness, gratitude, strengths, and positive relationships, with precise examples of practices which have been successfully implemented and have demonstrated diverse benefits



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## WELLNESS WHEEL



What is your level of satisfaction in each of these domains? Use the wheel. A score of 1 indicates that you are not satisfied at all and a score of 10 means you are highly satisfied. Connect the lines to form an inner wheel. This gives you an overview of the level of satisfaction in life.

Discussion:

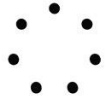
In what ways you would want to change the shape of the inner wheel?

Which domains draw your attention?

Why does this domain need attention?

What would it take to raise your satisfaction by one score in this domain?

What can you do to raise your satisfaction in this domain?



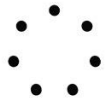
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# Activities:

- Shankland, R., Rosset, E. (2017) **Review of Brief School-Based Positive Psychological Interventions: a Taster for Teachers and Educators.** *Educational Psychology Review* 29, 363–392.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9357-3>
- Mindfulness
- Character strengths
- Gratitude
- Positive relations





# Mindfulness

- The awareness that arises from paying attention to the present moment, deliberately and without judgment (Kabat-Zinn 1996). This allows seeing thoughts and emotions as mental events instead of facts.
- We frequently ask children to pay attention but give them no instruction as to how to do so. Mindfulness programs work by directing attention to the present moment and focused attention.
- *Mindful bell, Brief Body Scan*





# *Bells of Presence: A brief Intervention inviting Mindfulness into our Daily Life*

*Kira Schlegel<sup>1</sup>, Dr Itai Ivtzan<sup>2</sup>, and Dr Marina Dorian<sup>2</sup>*

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## Affiliations

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<sup>2</sup> Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado, USA

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## New paper statement

We confirm that the paper has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration in any

## Abstract

**Objectives:** Mindfulness has become a main topic in Positive Psychology, as well as other disciplines, due to its effect on numerous positive outcomes, such as wellbeing and stress reduction. Many different mindfulness-based interventions have emerged in the last decades, however, to this point there is limited literature available for brief mindfulness-based practices that can be easily integrated into people's daily life. To address this gap in research, this study is going to examine the Mindfulness Bell, which offers individuals an opportunity to focus on the present through an audible notification at random moments during the day.

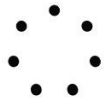
**Methodology:** The study made use of an existing smartphone application, instructing participants to bring their attention to the sound of the bell, their breath, and their current activity at six random times each day. A two-week repeated-measures design was applied to measure effects of the Mindfulness Bell on participants' ( $N = 21$ ) levels of mindfulness, both subjective and psychological wellbeing, and stress.

**Results:** A statistically significant correlation was found between the Mindfulness Bell intervention and levels of mindfulness, subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. No significant correlation was found for stress.

**Discussion:** As a mediator of positive wellbeing outcomes, mindfulness is related to environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Research shows that the length of the study and the level of mindfulness experience affected the success of the intervention.

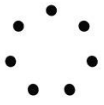
**Conclusion:** This paper reveals insight on the importance of engaging with the mindfulness concept and outlines what scholars need to consider when creating mindfulness-based interventions.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Mindfulness-Based Intervention, Mindfulness Bell, Subjective Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing, Stress*



# Character strengths

- Intrinsically valued ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling which promote well-being, positive relationships, and successful goal achievement (Peterson and Seligman 2004)
- When people work from their strengths—as opposed to their weaknesses—both their learning curve and their performance are improved at work (Clifton and Harter 2003) - they learn faster and perform better; they are also more motivated and have a higher level of satisfaction, feelings of mastery, and competence, which then can impact self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1997).
- *Identifying strengths, Strength 360<sup>o</sup>, Secret Strengths Spotting*



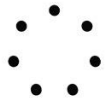
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## A strength-story (storytelling)

- Tell a story about an event in your life that showed yourself at your very best! (A strength story) „That was me at my best, and I am proud when I am able to act this way.”



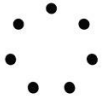


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# Gratitude

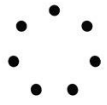
- A sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty (Emmons 2004, p. 554)
- Grateful individuals report experiencing higher levels of life satisfaction, optimism, and vitality, while also reporting less depression and envy (McCullough et al. 2002) higher well-being and benefits on specific academic variables such as school satisfaction and academic achievement (Froh et al. 2011).
- Gratitude plays a unique role in social bonding and relationship maintenance.
- *Gratitude Journal, Gratitude letter, Gratitude box*



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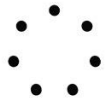
- Gratitude letter/visit
  - Call up the face of someone still alive who years ago did something or said something that changed your life for the better. Someone who you never properly thanked. Your task is to write a letter of gratitude to this individual and deliver it in person. The letter should be concrete and about three hundred words: be specific about what s/he did for you and how it affected your life.



# Positive relationships

- Supportive interactions and cooperation with both teachers and students. They appear to be essential to well-being in general (Baumeister and Leary 1995) and in schools (e.g., Segrin and Taylor 2007). The only factor that consistently predicted happiness across widely differing cultures was the quality of social relationships.
- Diener and Seligman (2002): ways of coping with stressful situations was increased through social support.
- Connectedness
- *Supportive sticky notes, Secret acts of kindness*





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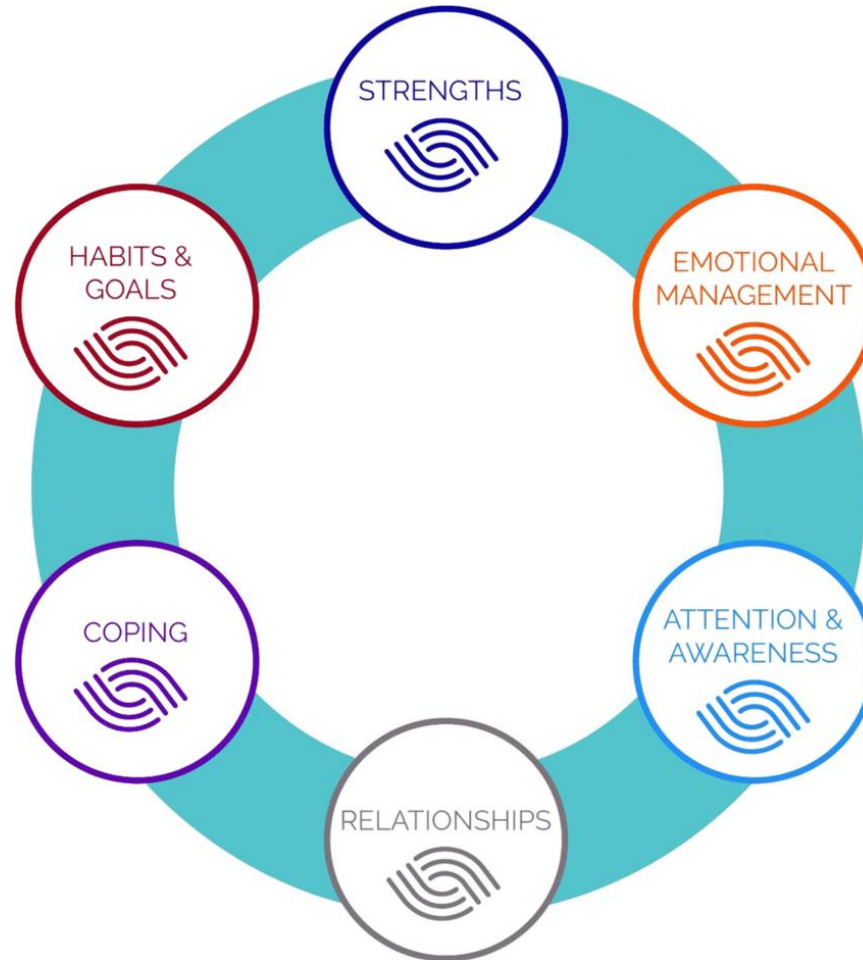
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## The gift of time

- Think of a person about whom you care. Plan a gift of time for this person and give it, whether it means doing something with them or something for them on your own. Spend as much time as needed to do the favor well and do not take any shortcuts. You might even consider taking off your wristwatch or switching off your phone 😊 Regardless, do not tell the recipient of your gift how much time you spent. Let the gift speak for itself!

# SEARCH: A Meta-Framework and Review of the Field of Positive Education. (2019) L. Waters & D. Loton

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s41042-019-00017-4.pdf>



# Wellbeing and mental health at school

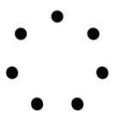
*Guidelines for school leaders, teachers and educators*



## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The “**Guidelines for school leaders, teachers and educators to address wellbeing and mental health at school**” were developed by the Commission Expert Group on supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting wellbeing at school. They are based on the evidence-informed framework “A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing in schools”<sup>2</sup> and align with the logic and approach of the Council Recommendation on **Pathways to School Success**<sup>3</sup>, the **EU Strategy on the rights of the child**<sup>4</sup> and other frameworks proposed by international organisations, such as the **World Health Organization (WHO) “Health-promoting schools and systems”**<sup>5</sup> implemented in association with United Nations Children’s Fund, and UNESCO, the **OECD’s “Education for inclusive societies”** project<sup>6</sup> and **UNESCO’s “Happy Schools Framework”**<sup>7</sup>. The guidelines are also aligned with the principles within **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>8</sup>, the **Council of Europe’s approach to well-being**<sup>9</sup> and the **UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**<sup>10</sup>.





# A whole-system, whole school approach to wellbeing and mental health



The approach, as illustrated above, is built upon:

- a **universal approach** where **all pupils** are supported to develop and maintain their wellbeing, both in terms of mental and physical health. It aims to reduce risks, build social and emotional competence, resilience, increase the sense of self-worth, and establish supportive environments for wellbeing.
- The identification of the individual, social and structural risk factors, so that **students at risk** of experiencing mental health conditions can be provided with **additional targeted support**, in small groups or at individual level, and in collaboration with health professionals and agencies.



The wheel complements the pyramid by illustrating the **main pillars**. Its different parts are highly interconnected and overlapping.

The **guidelines on school wellbeing and mental health** offer eleven recommendations and inspiring practices to assist policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and educators in implementing this comprehensive approach. A key and transversal element is the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It is essential to set up structures to gather data on policy implementation and its impact, along with regular evaluations to assess effectiveness across target groups and meet objectives.

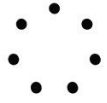




## Recommendations:

1. Establish a **positive school climate rooted in the active participation and empowerment of learners.**
2. Integrate **social and emotional education into the curriculum**, starting from early childhood education and care to upper secondary education.
3. Foster **collaborative partnerships among schools, communities, and stakeholders to enhance wellbeing.**
4. Fully integrate **wellbeing principles into Initial Teacher Education** programs.
5. Strengthen the capacity of **school leaders to address wellbeing** at school to create inclusive and supportive environments.
6. Ensure the creation of **safe schools** to prevent and address various forms of violence, including gender-based violence, and (cyber-)bullying.
7. Promote **wellbeing in the digital age.**
8. Uphold fundamental rights by safeguarding **core enablers** of well-being: nutrition, play and rest, physical activity, and arts.
9. Provide **continuous professional development and support** to educators on well-being.
10. Prioritise **equity, inclusion and diversity** as essential conditions for well-being, ensuring that no one is marginalised or excluded.
11. Guarantee access to **support services** for learners with mental health needs.





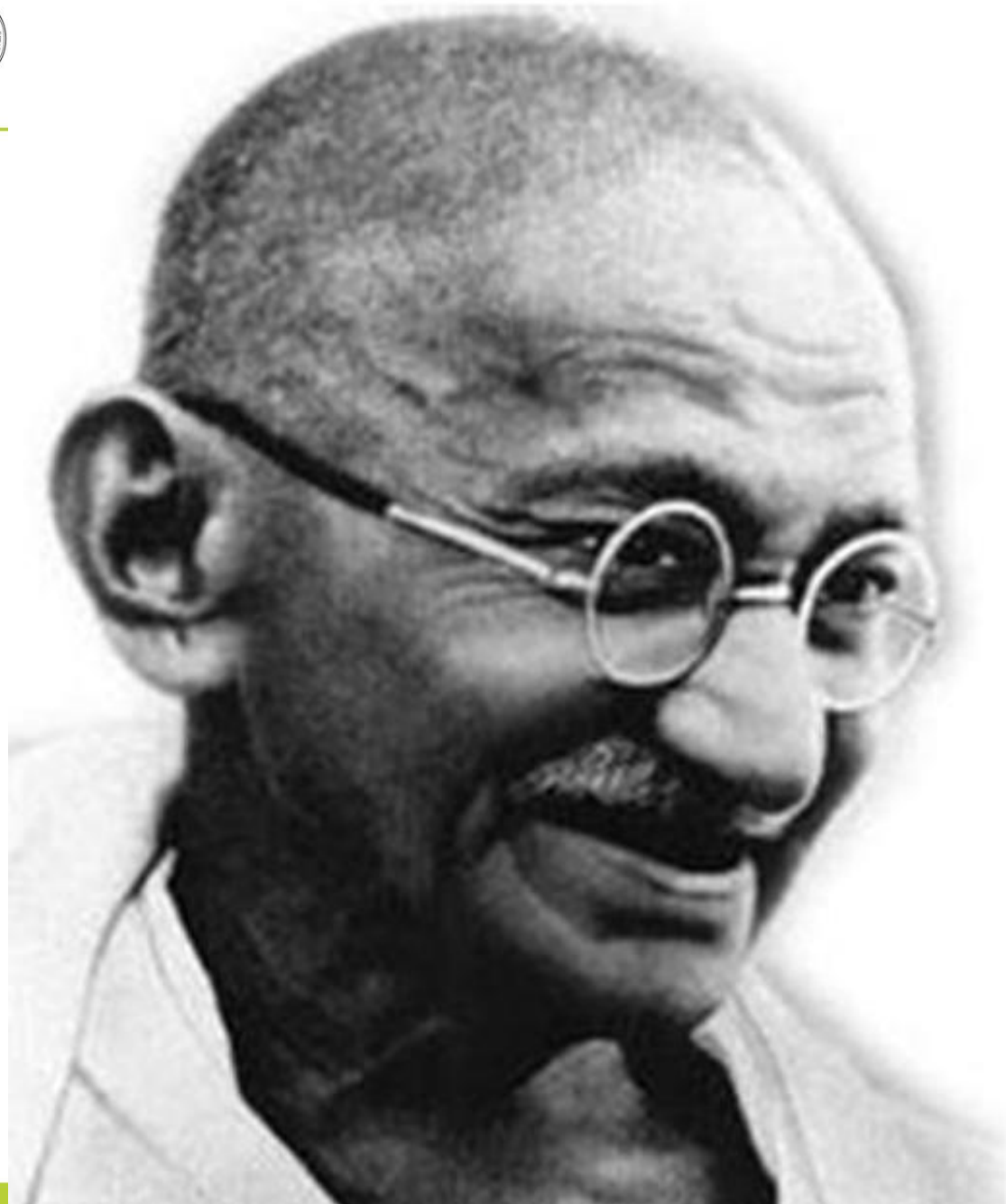
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# Main take-aways

- Positive psychological perspective is relevant and needed in schools
- Well-being and performance go hand in hand
- One swallow DOES make a summer
- More swallows make it faster





Be the change  
you want  
to see  
in the world

*Mahatma Gandhi*

