# POSITIVE EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AS A REQUIREMENT OF FORMATIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract: The main goal of this theoretical study is the analysis and interpretation of innovative processes of formative education. Education, towards the "dialogue of education" in the context of the modernized concept of positive psychology. The goal of every modern pedagogical concept is to improve education and make it more effective. The significant impact of innovations within the educational process have been created by the elements of modern and alternative concepts. Pedagogical practice is currently largely focused on the application of elements of positive psychology to the educational process and on a positive approach to education, supporting and developing positive aspects and traits of students' personalities, and supporting formative education. Positive psychology and pedagogy are based on the requirement that schools must prepare students for life, making them a key starting point for current education. Their application to a school initiates the creation of a positive model of such school, promoting the strengths and potentials of individuals. Attention is focused on solving and correcting negative phenomena in schools, and towards supporting and developing the best qualities in teachers, students, all actors in school life, but also schools as institutions.

Keywords: formative education, formative assessment, positive education and psychology, motivation

## 1 Introduction

The goal of every modern pedagogical concept is to improve education and make it more effective. The significant impact of innovations within the educational process have been created by the elements of modern and alternative concepts. Pedagogical practice is currently largely focused on the application of elements of positive psychology to the educational process and on a positive approach to education, supporting and developing positive aspects and traits of students' personalities, and supporting formative education. Positive psychology and pedagogy are based on the requirement that schools must prepare students for life, making them a key starting point for current education. Their application to a school initiates the creation of a positive model of such school, promoting the strengths and potentials of individuals. Attention is focused on solving and correcting negative phenomena in schools, and towards supporting and developing the best qualities in teachers, students, all actors in school life, but also schools as institutions.

## 2  Source of positive education – positive psychology

Positive psychology is a science dealing with the study of positive emotions such as joy, happiness, love, hope, positive life events and experiences (it concerns optimal experience – flow). In terms of research, it focuses on the study of positive individual qualities and personality traits (optimism, curiosity, sense of humour). Although its beginnings date back to the second half of the 20th century, the rise of scientific research and interest in the positive aspects of a human and society come at the beginning of the 21st century, when the Positive Psychology Center was established. The International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) was established abroad. Its main mission is to support determinants and factors that enable individuals, communities, societies to flourish (Seligman, 2002, Peterson, 2006, Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Research into positive psychology, human happiness, preparation of a person for experiencing a better life in future was the topic of studies by Seligman 2002, Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, Slezáčková, 2014, Trčková, 2016, Gajdošová, & Bisaki, 2015, and others.

Positive emotions play an important role, serving as indicators of flourishing or optimal well-being, a happy life and objective human happiness. Since 1991, the trio of scientists, Diener, Sandvik and Pavot, has been carrying out scientific work concerning the balancing of positive and negative emotions (Diener, 2000).

Positive emotions over the long run need to be cultivated not only as the ultimate state of a human, but also as a means to achieving growth and improving the quality of a person's life during their life. Positive psychology and positive education put preferential emphasis on the positive aspects of the personality, its possibilities, potentialities, and focus on the study of positive areas of human life. In the school environment, this concerns the positive aspects of a student's personality, cultivating the positive possibilities of a student, improving his/her motivational potential. Research into positive individual characteristics and personality traits, such as optimism, curiosity, resilience, coping, sense of humour, came to the fore (Hanuliaková, & Porubčanová, 2019).

Seligman et al. (2005) emphasise that positive psychology uses the same set of tools as traditional psychology, so positive psychology did not require the creation and building of a new construct. All that was necessary was to change the object of interest - i.e to move away from "repairing" the bad, negative in life, and turn to creating, developing the best in life. It is about promoting the optimal functioning of the human being, as well as the belief and hope that they will succeed. According to Trčková (2016, p. 2 - 3), "positive psychology's endeavour is to move towards positive values (sense of positive experience, life satisfaction) .... through what is healthy and functional in a person's life, and perhaps to strengthen the ability to cope with difficult and conflict situations." Positive psychology looks in its research, as well as its practice, into the quality of life, personal well-being and issues of positive emotions, emotional intelligence, mental health under the influence of school and family education (Tamášová-Kušnieriková, 2018, Szobiová, 2018, Furlong, 2018, Petrulyté, 2018, Sanchez - Núñez, García - Rubio, et al. 2020) and optimal experience - flourishing (Huppert, & So, 2011).

Why is it necessary to apply the elements of positive psychology to educational practice? The authors, Smitha Ruckmani & Balachandra, (2015), Zelina (2016), Vendel (2018), Gajdošová (2018), Roľková (2018), Furlong (2018), draw particular attention to building resistance to crises, burdens, conflicts, manipulations, to the importance of providing advice and procedures on how to overcome negative news and stimuli from the world, but also personal crises and stress. Positive psychology directs its focus on salutogenesis, the psychic forces in a person helping them to reach happiness and self-realisation. A school should be a place that promotes a healthy lifestyle and the development of physical as well as the mental health of students.

Ďuriš (2014) writes, e.g, that the current state of evaluation of learning results is linked to several problems that can cause stress in students:

- the assessment focuses on the shortcomings and ignorance of the student, much less on his/her strengths,
- the assessment frequently disregards the differences in students' personalities,
- the assessment often times compares students' performance, thus demotivating weaker but still able students,
- requirements for students are often shaped by the content and not the activity to be demonstrated by students at the end of learning.

If the assessment is to be improved, students should know in advance what is expected of them and what will be the subject of assessment, otherwise the student is not sufficiently motivated for the lack of idea about the requirements. The level of logical

thinking, creative and evaluative thinking, and not only memory knowledge, should also be evaluated in students. Assessment should be rich in information so that the student clearly understands in which area he/she needs to improve. An important part that can subsequently strongly motivate the student is when the teacher praises him/her in the assessment, encourages, expresses confidence and suggests that it is possible to work on the student's weaknesses and make progress in them.

A school that uses the model of positive education and formative education works from the PERMA model of a happy life by Seligman (2002, 2005, 2011), determined by the following determinants:

*P – positive emotions:* the school develops, cultivates and focuses on experiencing as many positive emotions as possible like joy, pride, gratitude, astonishment, interest, curiosity, love, hope, serenity – inner peace. Especially in the current covid-19 pandemic, when stress has become an everyday part of family and school life, the inner peace students experience is very important.

*E – engagement*: the school supports and seeks the interests of children, supports their deep and sincere interest in activities that can grow into a professional focus, a profession. The school works with children's strengths, encourages their curiosity, interest in the curriculum, and school life. There must be a transformation from students' lack of interest in the curriculum towards their engagement in school activities and school life.

*R – positive relationships:* school is an institution where interactions happen on many levels every day. Their quality is a necessary condition for a safe emotional and social climate and atmosphere, which is intensely perceived and evaluated by students, teachers and other school staff. The school supports and emphasises good and valuable relationships at school. It leans on values that are defined and observed by the school. These values are based on mutual relations at all levels of communication (teachers, students, leadership, parents) and also serve as a moral compass of coexistence. The school focuses on a formative and supportive approach in the education and training of students.

*M – meaning:* school, environment, relationships, life, the future must make sense to all concerned, it must show meaning, and it teaches students that what they do should make sense. Students must perceive and understand the validity and meaningfulness of the activities performed.

*A – accomplishment:* students, teachers, parents must experience greater or lesser accomplishment, which promotes their further growth and development. Every student in the class wants and must experience success in the framework of educational activities. Satisfying the needs of students at school is focused primarily on achieving positive results in testing the acquired knowledge. In the context of a happy life of a student, the school must appeal to meet the needs such as security, belonging somewhere, self-realisation, self-confidence, self-esteem, which are important not only for the school-attendance period, but also for their following life.

Seligman's theorems of positive psychology are the basis of the Social Emotional Health model by Furlong et al. (2014), as well as Furlong (2016), stating that it is necessary to look at the strengths of personality and at that what truly makes the meaning of human life. It is on these postulates that the Furlong's concept of covitality is based, and it is the result of systematic work in this area with the intention of finding a link between the personality's strengths and human well-being (Boman et al, 2017). Furlong et al. (2014), in creating the concept, deliberately focused on the school population in order to diagnose the level of social emotional health in childhood and adolescence. The results of their work create opportunities for effective intervention in the field of social and psychological prevention as well as personal development.

## 3 Positive education supporting students' potentiality *vs* formative education

The subject of positive psychology encompasses the following issues: happiness, well-being, love, friendship, joy, positive thinking, cooperation, trust, optimism, humility, enthusiasm, interest, creativity, resilience, altruism, empathy, forgiveness, spirituality, meaning of life, etc. These concepts though are rarely included in the daily educational activities of a teacher and learning activities of a student. Within the teaching activities, teachers are often oriented primarily to mediating the largest possible content of the curriculum, its revision and evaluation of students' mastery of it. They create less room for supporting and developing emotions that will accompanying the students throughout their lives and which they must learn to work with. One of the reasons why teachers pay minimal or no attention to emotions in teaching is probably their unpreparedness, or possibly their inability to design a teaching unit so that the teacher can work with a student's emotions, the emotions of the classroom as a team and also with the social dimension of the classroom environment, as report Hanuliaková and Porubčanová (2019).

Positive education within formative education has its potentialities, the main idea of which is the well-being of students, which supports their education and develops them as good people and citizens. A good school is not purely oriented on achieving academic potential for students (Krásna, 2019, p. 81 - 88), but also aims to develop students' personalities as caring, responsible, and ultimately as productive and valid members of society and in life. According to Vendel (2018), the way of treating the student as an individual at school is also important. It is correct if students have ample opportunities to take over responsibility and take part in school activities. Students also gain a lot from the opportunities in which teachers and students participate in joint activities so that they can get to know each other better and learn to appreciate each other's positive qualities.

In the context of positive psychology, it is possible to define positive and formative education as education for traditional life skills and education towards a happy person. Positive education is based on the best teaching strategies in order to facilitate the achievement of the best educational outcomes that support the security and well-being of students. Teachers' teams often discuss whether schools should strive for a high level of student performance or to be a pleasant place for students. This can be viewed as an unnecessary contradiction. Students tend to work better and learn more when they enjoy and have fun during school events. The same is true the other way around, if they are "doing well" at school, it is likely that they will feel satisfied in it. Nonetheless, one important aspect must be respected, and that is that students differ in their school potential and performance.

Especially students with good skills, who are socially mature, conscientious and attractive, do well at school. Those students who lack these qualities experience fewer successes at school. Therefore, it is important that students be evaluated and rewarded for what they know and not be punished for other students achieving a higher level of knowledge than them. It is also important to ask the question of how good education affects a child individually? How can it perform a protective function? Research of children with certain psychological risks emphasises that two types of experience are important in eliminating the effects of stress and unhappiness, according to Vendel (2018). On the one hand, these are harmonious, warm personal relationships, and on the other hand, an experience of success leading to a feeling of self-confidence and personal performance of the student. The school provides opportunities to establish friendships between students, but it also facilitates quite different relationships, particularly those that students form with adults (other than parents) whom they love and respect. The child needs to be respected and to experience success, which is a strong motive for him/her. The child can cope better with stress, gain self-confidence, but to do so he/she also needs social support, where the school is an important helper. Positive psychological

interventions include decision-making, problem-solving skills, relaxation, and creative brainstorming. The use of this knowledge in positive and formative education and assessment improves mental health and well-being, reduces depression and anxiety, and improves academic success and creative thinking, eliminating student's stress. Positive psychology is beneficial for teaching activities mainly in approaches and strategies that give credit to humanistic teaching, which will be the content of further subchapters below.

**3. 1 Approaches and strategies**

Zelina (2016) divided the ideas and starting points of a positive approach to school, upbringing and education into the following areas:

▪ *Student's cognitive development* – the student should enjoy thinking, discovering new knowledge from learning and problem solving. Based on the principles of positive psychology, the student should appreciate the importance of knowledge, appreciate education and the learning process. Leading students to a love of knowledge and leadership is possible through problem tasks, heuristic methods, project teaching, the application of metacognition strategies and self-regulated learning. The school focuses on the student's wisdom, desire for knowledge, self-efficacy, goal setting, hope, optimistic way of understanding life, optimism and well-being.

▪ *Potentialities for life* – a positive attitude towards education is a necessary condition for lifelong learning, attitude towards retraining within job *opportunities* – EU Council Conclusions of 8 June 2020 **–** Reskilling and Upskilling, raising one's qualifications through self-study, supplementary study, but also in the context of informal and non-formal education.

▪ *Positive emotions* – the student likes school, learning, likes going to school and has good feelings about what he/she learns, feels good among *classmates*, must feel that the teacher cares about him/her, comprehensively perceives the climate at school and in classroom as positive, even despite the occurrence of a failure, disappointment, fear and tension. The student can apply positive self-esteem and at school can experience the ultimate emotional and life experiences, emotional creativity, subjective emotional well-being. Emotional education is carried out by strategies of staging, situational methods, creative drama, art and therapeutic procedures. Positive emotions in the classroom are not associated with fun; a pleasant school experience should be associated with learning demands.

▪ *Potentialities for life* – be able to verbalise one's own feelings and emotions in family ties, in relationships with partners, in various roles, eg., parent, partner, colleague. Honest and open verbalisation of emotions can represent a prevention against the occurrence of socio-pathological phenomena, but also against aggressive behaviour.

▪ *Positive motivation* – the student is guided towards the meaning of life, universal human values, positive goals, the acquisition of the values of the *relationship*, school values. The opposite is burnout, reluctance to learn, resignation, indifference, disinterest, aggression, lack of faith and belief in values.

▪ *Potentialities for life* – the creation of attitudes and the internalisation of values in relation to one's own person, values in relation to moral aspects, to the rules of life, to society.

▪ *Positive socialisation* – in students, the aspects of the personality are strengthened that create productive interpersonal relationships, solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, help, charity, so that there is a positive atmosphere and climate in the classroom and at school, which is achieved by promoting empathy, quality relationships. A positive school and classroom climate leads to crime prevention, reduces reluctance to cooperate, reduces bullying, discrimination, hatred, selfishness, promotes the ability to tolerate and leads to humility.

▪ *Potentialities for life* – ability to work within the framework of social skills in coping with and solving challenging situations and tasks, *developing* one's own knowledge and skills within mental hygiene. Ability to reflect on job opportunities, adaptation to the work market, active citizenship, active participation in voluntary activities, participation in charity and developing one's own prosocial behaviour and solving challenging situations and tasks, developing one's own knowledge and skills within mental hygiene.

▪ *Autoregulation* – students learn independence, self-management, discipline, responsibility to have a desire to learn, to lead *students* to be independent in what they can do on their own, they learn to control their thinking (concentration, attention, perseverance, control over their emotions, fear, anger, bad mood), control their behaviour (psychomotor control).

▪ *Potentialities for life* – students are able to determine the order of life and work goals, daily routine, distribution of activities over time, to lead a person towards life self-discipline.

**4 Application of positive psychology in educational practice**

In order to apply positive psychology in pedagogical practice, it is necessary to look at the matter through the satisfaction of students' needs. According to Zelina (2018), the application of the elements and effects of positive psychology in pedagogical practice shows that:

*i)* - self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, which is particularly emphasized by positive psychology, is twice as good a predictor of performance, application and success in life as IQ and EQ;
*ii)* - happy young people in adolescence, as shown by longitudinal research, have higher incomes in adulthood;
*iii)* - engagement and meaningfulness of activities, accepted by positive psychology, are the best prevention of depression;
*iv)* - positive experience and meaningfulness of being supports life satisfaction and has a positive effect on the learning process, especially on creative learning.

Based on positive psychology, it is necessary in the educational process to respect the principles that have a positive effect on the educational reality and transform them into everyday life. The basic didactic principle is the combination of theory and practice, and therefore it is necessary to emphasise the principles of positive education, along with formative education and assessment, which can be transformed into the daily life of students and teachers (Huppert, F., & So, T., 2011, Geršicová & Barnová, 2018).

**4.1 Principles of positive education**

The principles of positive education are mainly:

▪ provision of a positive school climate and school culture, where these include also a positive family climate, living climate (Greškovičová & Maršicová, 2018, Tamášová & Kušnieriková, 2018; Ikhart & Szobiová, 2018);
▪ respect for positive values;
▪ positive application of knowledge in life with an emphasis on quality education;
▪ application of strategies to support critical, evaluative thinking and self-assessment;
▪ creation of productive interactions, teacher-student relationships based on empathy, acceptance of each individual;
▪ motivation to learn, in addition to classical methods, also through interesting tasks, using the method of relational frameworks and causal attributions;
▪ emphasis on self-reflection, self-evaluation, self-control, self-management of the student with the use of self-regulation learning programmes, self-knowledge programmes, programmes in social psychology, character cultivation programmes;

- emotional experience of the climate in the classroom, at school, its detection and change positively, evaluation of students' experience of learning and educational activities, teaching students to express emotions, feelings and control them, especially in stressful situations, communicate openly, creatively, and focus on rational communication as well as communication of feelings, emotions and experience (Zelina, 2016).
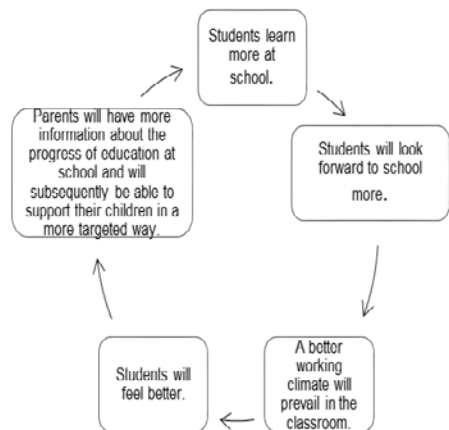


*Figure 1. Why use formative assessment in teaching?* (Starý & Laufková et al, 2016, p. 24).

In the family, it is also necessary to create a positive attitude of parents towards children, because they shape their social-emotional health. The family influences the child with its cohesion, cultivates their self-confidence, self-efficiency, optimism, life engagement (optimism, enthusiasm and gratitude). According to the researchers, Smitha Ruckmani & Balachander (2015), family harmony and satisfaction are key factors that positively condition the mental health of adolescents. Emotional well-being is a significant protective factor against the development of mental problems, or mental health problems. Science and research in positive psychology, which lay the grounds for positive education, clearly show that identifying one's strengths and focusing on developing the ability to cultivate and exploit these strengths (rather than "correcting" mistakes) leads to greater well-being and better academic and social results. A positive approach in education helps students to build confidence in education, in developing students' intellectual abilities and character, in developing the affective side of personality. Investing in positive education and formative education at the level of the whole school community results in helping students to become a better version of themselves as individuals and as part of the community.

**5 Conclusions**

The results of research and scientific literature suggest that the positive psychological interventions support students' intensive relationship with the school or school facility. In order for the application of elements of positive psychology in educational practice to be accessible and practically feasible, the school management must at a broader level, or in a broader school context, adopt and develop the theory of positive education. When applying the given elements to the educational process, the school principal can first start doing so in cooperation with pedagogical and professional staff, especially school psychologists, as suggested by Gajdošová (2018).

According to Gajdošová & Bisaki (2015), the introduction of positive psychology into school and the building of the "positive school model" supporting the strengths, virtues, potentialities of individuals also initiates a significant change in school psychology and the work of the school psychologist, especially the reorientation from addressing negative phenomena in the school towards developing the best qualities of the school as an institution and the people in it. The application of positive

psychology at school means a new way of viewing upbringing, education, oneself, the world and oneself in it.

In line with the goals of education for the future, it is necessary for the person of the future to be not only efficient but also happy. The goals of education must be focused on training a person who will be flexible, able to reflect on new stimuli and challenges, ready to resolve conflicts, speak foreign languages and ready to live outside his/her close community. One of the predictions that can be achieved is the fact that positive and at the same time formative education increases the school success of students and increases the quality of life of students in school and out-of-school environment. Human health, including that of children and youth, have been incorporated in the state school policy and health policy of the Slovak Republic through the document: Strategic Framework for Health to 2030. It is based on the fact that health is a basic human right, it is the key to social development and the full development of health is possible only in a health-promoting environment, family, work or school.

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**Primary Paper Section:** A

**Secondary Paper Section:** AM