

STRETCHING BOUNDARIES

Papers from the Third
International Psychology
of Language Learning
Conference, Tokyo, Japan.
7-10 June, 2018

Stretching Boundaries. Papers from
the Third International Psychology of
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CHAPTER 5

Practical Positive Psychology Activities for the Language Classroom

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Positive psychology has become more widely researched within ESL and there is now considerable literature outlining its benefits. However, there is still a shortage of tested pedagogical activities. This paper outlines six practical activities for the language classroom. For readers not familiar with positive psychology, the influential PERMA model developed by Seligman (2012) encapsulates core aspects of the field, with each letter representing one key construct of well-being:

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Achievement

Below, the seven activities are introduced and can be adapted, scaffolded, and expanded for different teaching contexts.

3 Good Things

Gratitude is an important positive emotion which contributes to well-being, a sense of meaning, improves relationships, and engagement. One way to develop an attitude of gratitude is to keep a diary of good things that happen. They can be big things or small things.

Each day, list three good things that happen and the reason why each was good.

Example

Good Thing 1. Dinner was delicious tonight. My mother made grilled chicken.

Why? This was good because... grilled chicken is one of my favourite foods.

Day 1: _____ day

Good Thing 1.....

Why?

Magic Moments

Magic moments are moments in people's lives with special resonance and can be used to connect to the positive emotions and meaning constructs of the PERMA model. They also give students the opportunity to improve relationships with other students, to experience more of life vicariously, and to bring more magic into their own lives.

List examples for...

- ... a moment when you felt really alive
- ... a moment when something really changed in your life
- ... a 'light-bulb' moment when you had a new understanding

Use the questions below to interview your classmates.

What was one of your magic moments?

Try to experience it again.

What do you see?

What do you hear?
How do you feel?

Which of your classmates' magic moments would you like to experience?

.....

How can you have more magic in your life?

.....

Goal-Stepping

Goal-Stepping focuses on the *achievement* construct of the PERMA model and helps in setting achievable goals.

Ask your partner these questions.

What is one of your goals?
When do you want to achieve it?

Help your partner to imagine their goal.

Now imagine you have achieved your goal...
What do you see?
What do you hear?
What do you feel?
What do you say to yourself?

Lead your partner.

1. Imagine your goal is located somewhere in the room. Throw an eraser to mark your goal.
2. Walk to and step into your goal. Visualize achieving your goal.
3. Take a step back. What is the action that needs to happen at this step?

Write down the action. Repeat step 3 at least three times.

Help your partner to identify any missing steps. Be sure there is a step that can be taken very soon.

I-Messages

Positive psychology suggests that relationships are the top predictor of happiness. I-messages help to mend and improve relationships. In a "You-message", a person blames the situation on the other person. An I-message attempts to explain your perspective, thus protecting the relationship and helping the other person understand. An I-message has three parts:

DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOUR you would like to change in factual terms.

When you leave the dishes beside the sink after a meal for a long time...

DESCRIBE THE CONCRETE EFFECTS this behavior has on you

...it makes the kitchen dirty and then I wash them...

DESCRIBE HOW YOU FEEL about the behavior.

...and I feel angry at you.

➔ When you leave the dishes beside the sink after a meal for a long time, it makes the kitchen dirty and then I wash them, and I feel angry at you.

Think of a situation where someone's behavior annoys you.

Write an I-message.

Role-play the situation with a partner.

Reframing

A *context reframe* suggests another context where the behavior or event might be useful.

Example: *I always feel sleepy.*

➔ That could be useful when you are on a long boring journey.

A *content reframe* suggests another meaning for an event or statement.

Example: *I get shy when I have to talk in English. I'll never be able to do it.*

➔ Getting shy just means that you care about communicating properly.

Write context reframes of these statements.

Sometimes, I just don't want to talk to people.

etc.

Write your own "problems" and appropriate context reframes.

Write content reframes of these statements.

My teacher is too strict. He doesn't like us.

etc.

Write your own examples and appropriate content reframes.

Learning from Yourself

When students are facing the challenge of learning a foreign language, this activity supports them by remembering something they have learned successfully.

Ask your partner:

What is something you learned successfully?

When did you learn it?

1. What information or knowledge did you need to learn?
2. What skills did you need to learn?
3. What personal characteristics did you need to learn it?
4. What other resources did you have to learn it?
5. What was your motivation?
6. How did you know that you had learned it successfully?
7. How much time did it take to learn?
8. How did you feel while you were learning?

What is something you want to learn successfully?

When will you learn it by?

Ask questions similar to 1-8 to help your partner to think about the new skill.

e.g. What information or knowledge do you need to learn?

Fuller versions of these activities are available from the author (cullen.brian@gmail.com).

References

Seligman, M. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.