

Positive Psychology is the study of Human Flourishing. It was founded as an official discipline in 1998 by Martin Seligman, a traditional psychologist, who is now known as the Father of Positive Psychology. He saw that the absence of trauma and grief, which are often the plights addressed by traditional psychologists, don't equal or guarantee a flourishing life. A flourishing person is vigorous, enjoys healthy growth, and is active and successful.

According to research done by Corey Keyes, 17% of the world's population is flourishing. Of those who are not flourishing, 57% are moderately mentally healthy, 12% are languishing, and 14% are mentally ill. The moderately healthy are the people who can easily and greatly benefit from Positive Psychology.

The audacious goal Martin Seligman set is for 51% of the world's population to be flourishing by 2051. The goal is called [Flourish 51](#). I'd like to be part of that goal, and I believe reaching youth is an effective way to make a big impact. In this paper, I will define Positivity Psychology and share examples of applications to give you an idea of what it is. I'll show you research findings where Positive Psychology is impacting the lives of young people in the world. Finally, I'll share an idea on how to make this application broader. My goal is to gain your support and get your input so we can spread the word and contribute to Flourish 51.

The basis for Positive Psychology is a model called the PERMA model (Positivity, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement), which defines what makes life good. These areas are the pillars for well-being, and Positive Psychology research has been done on hundreds of practices that can increase your well-being in these areas of your life. The difference between Positive Psychology and Self-Help is the research behind it. The good news for all of us is that we have control over our well-being. There are things we can do to make it better, and there's a ripple effect on the people around us so it's not selfish to focus on it.

If you think of psychology on a spectrum from -10 to +10, traditional psychology is a discipline to help people get out of the negative range and positive psychology is a discipline to move one's life from a 3 to an 8, 9, or 10. There are hundreds of positive psychology practices backed by research and data. Generally the positive psychology research is done in two masters programs at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of East London. The research supporting these practices sets it apart from Self-Help and people who simply give advice from their own experience. Plus, the research includes large numbers of people and it's often measured over time.

In a short paper, it's not possible to share all of the positive psychology practices, so I've chosen a few that are illustrative and can be practiced right away. The goal is to give you a taste and a desire for more.

The first practice is related to gratitude. Gratitude is magical. You can thank the world, yourself, or others for the good things in your life, and as a result you will likely end up focusing on the positive side of things. This Positive Psychology Practice is one of the easiest and most well-known practices. The official name is "[3 good Things](#)". It's recommended that you write down three things and what caused them to reflect more deeply. I also like the practice of writing down the part you personally played in each good thing.

Carol Dweck's work on the Growth/Fixed mindset is well-known and practiced in some schools, universities, and companies. There are generally two different mindsets, and we can have them throughout various areas of our life. A growth mindset, which is the desired state, is one where you feel empowered, open to feedback, willing, ready to learn, and try new things. The fixed mind set is one where you think you may have been gifted in an area with certain talents, but change is not possible and things are as they are. In this state, you're not open to feedback and you get hurt by it because it feels like an attack on your individual gifts. If you don't think you can change it, how valuable is the feedback? We all have areas where we are fixed, and finding them and changing our mindset is valuable. Carol Dweck wrote a [book on the subject](#), and she's known for this research-based work. This is a [nice summary](#) you can read on how to develop a growth mindset.

Another cool application that can make a huge difference in education is flow. We've likely all had a flow experience. Time stops. You are into something and suddenly hours have gone by. I'm not talking about binge-watching Netflix, but rather something productive where you are creating or learning. The key to flow is to find a balance of skills and challenge so you are interested and engaged but not overwhelmed or frustrated. Mike Csikszentmihalyi wrote a [book](#)

[on Flow](#) if you want to read about it in detail. This [article](#) from Edutopia has helpful summary on how to create more flow in your life and educational experiences.

My vision is to bring the practices of Positive Psychology into the mainstream because they can make such a big difference. Proactively working with young people is a great way avoid to problems before they happen. The research I've done reveals there are applications out there, but they are generally grassroots or they are offered at the college and adult level. Many teachers and professors bring practices like growth mindset into their classrooms because they've learned about them. However, the current level is not broad enough to truly impact our world and the general population. We see Positive Education in private schools, Ivy League colleges, and implemented by a few non-profits at charter public schools.

There is a school in Australia called [Geelong Grammar School](#), which is completely based on Positive Education. At this school, they had grassroots efforts in these areas in the past, where they focused on developing students' character, but they wanted to go all in. They found the team at The University of Pennsylvania, where positive psychology started, and hired them to immerse the students and teachers into the practices. The team spent six months in Australia training the teachers, administrators, and current students on Positive Psychology practices. As a result, the school encircled these practices around their academic curriculum.

At the college level, there are happiness classes at [Yale](#) and [Harvard](#). These classes are among the most popular and they always fill up. There's a ['Life Design Class'](#) at Stanford and [a book based on it](#). I checked the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and the University of Washington, but I didn't find classes like these in their curriculums.

In my research, I found a few nonprofits who are bringing Positive Psychology practices to under-privileged kids and many training programs for teachers. In addition there's one non-profit called [KIPP](#) which is supporting 183 charter public schools in the Positive Education endeavor.

The knowledge and application of Positive Psychology in the educational world is still grassroots and is in play sporadically. Public school would be a very good way to bring these practices into the mainstream and to make a broad impact. There are not any wide sweeping efforts to bring Positive Psychology into the Public School System yet. But I do recommend looking at this option because the public schools are the arena were we consistently offer subjects to all students. It's the panacea for change. However, changing public education and/or adding to it presents multiple challenges, not the least of which is convincing those in power that it matters. Our society would need to reach a tipping point before it would be possible. It could be that the violence in our schools and the desire to address that situation at the mental health level, may be a tipping point to leverage.

The other challenge to consider is one of implementation. Positive Psychology can be infused in the curriculum the way it is at Geelong or a class can be offered the way it is at Harvard, Stanford, and Yale. The infusion method is desired because it's all encompassing, it doesn't require an additional subject or class to be added, and it becomes part of the culture. However, the challenge of infusion is that it steps us down a level into how teachers teach. Teachers generally own that level of execution and that freedom is likely important to them. There's a potential risk of taking the teachers freedom and creativity away. This begs for a solution of influencing and training them to create advocates who are on-board with positive education but who can then creatively decide how to apply it in their classrooms. This does mean that some teachers may not do it and that the impact will potentially be less broad and consistent.

Problems abound in our world, and it starts when people are young. Imagine a beautiful little baby being handed to his or her mother and father. The innocence and the blank slate represent huge potential. But life can be difficult and as time marches on that baby may at worst, become a victim or a perpetrator. They may not reach their full potential or might become one of the 80% of people who is not flourishing and living the best life they can. If we provide proven Positive Psychology Practices to young people to help them navigate life and create the most socially conscious, morally astute, happy and responsible lives possible we can change the world in a big way. Engaging these practices early in life is proactive rather than reactive and could prove to avoid many problems all together.

There is hope, for our students and our world. There is a way we can make a difference, and create good for all of us. I hope you'll consider being part of Flourish 51!

Contact me (Kami Huck) kamip@comcast.net if you would like to learn more or be a part of this movement.