

Using Positive Psychology (in the Classroom)

Finding and Using Human Strengths



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How can we understand the term
“positive” psychology?





Founders of Positive Psychology:

Time to move away from the medical approach?



Disease Model

- Focusing on weaknesses
- Overcoming deficiencies
- Avoiding pain
- Avoiding unhappiness

Health Model

- Focusing on strengths
- Building competencies
- Seeking pleasure
- Pursuing happiness



VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues

- **The DSM**
(1952: 106 disorders) (1987: 265 disorders) (now: 297 disorders)
- The “un-DSM”

Assumptions of VIA

- Human strengths are not secondary to weaknesses
- Human strengths can be studied scientifically
- Human strengths are individual differences

VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues

What are your top strengths?



How were these strengths selected?

- Must be manifest in a range of the individual's behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and actions, and is relatively consistent across situations and times.
- Contributes to fulfilment of a positive life for self and others
- Valued by society, not only because it can lead to beneficial outcomes
- One person demonstrating a strength should not diminish others
- If the opposite of a strength can be good, it is not classified as a strength

Let's explore this in our own experience...





Curiosity
(interest in the world)

Excitement

Control

Integrity

Spirituality (sense of purpose)

Benefits of strengths

- Exploring your strengths provides insights about your life
- Using strengths generates optimism
- Following strengths provides a sense of direction
- Knowing and using your strengths helps to build confidence

(Clifton & Anderson, 2001)

- Using strengths builds resilience
- Using strengths in work, family relationships, leisure and as parents generates positive emotions

(Peterson & Seligman, 2004)



Cross-cultural implications

Biswas-Diener (2006):

- 123 members of the Kenyan Maasai
- 71 seal hunters in Northern Greenland
- 519 University of Illinois students

There was a high rate of agreement about the existence, desirability, and development of virtues.

There were differences between culture and based on gender about the perceived importance of specific virtues (such as modesty).



A strengths-based approach to education

- Use strengths within recruitment and selection
- Use strengths for career and professional development
- Use strengths language across the institution
- Match people and projects based on their strengths
- Create teams based on complementary strengths
- Help students to identify and use their own strengths
- Educators act as “strengths-spotters”
- Preparing young people to thrive in the workplace by identifying, using and promoting their strengths



Following up

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