

# **POSITIVE EDUCATION. A LESSON FROM FINLAND**

**SURVEY ON THE WELL-BEING AND STRENGTHS OF STUDENTS**



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# FINLAND: THE HAPPIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

- In Finland, the happiest country in the world twice in a row according to the latest World Happiness Report (March 20, 2019)<sup>1</sup>, educational programs are built on each student's strengths, ensuring that people are always confident in their own values and can actively undertake self-study and self-discovery in a happy teaching-learning environment.



<sup>1</sup> <https://worldhappiness.report/>

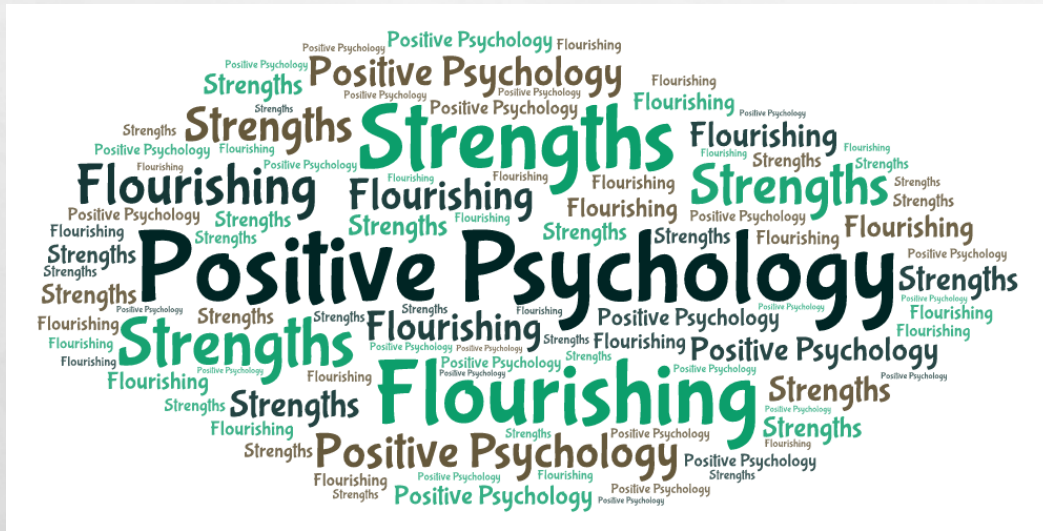


# POSITIVE EDUCATION



- This approach, which can be called Positive Education, challenges the traditional educational paradigm worldwide: it aims to promote well-being and happiness in a holistic perspective in the classroom and beyond, providing young people with knowledge and life skills to flourish in their present and future life.

# AN APPROACH BASED ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



- This contemporary educational approach is based on Positive Psychology, which is the scientific study of human flourishing and optimal functioning, and focuses on strengths and virtues that enable individuals, communities and organizations to succeed.

# THE BASES OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES

- The bases of Positive Psychology theories in Finnish Education system are, among others, the P.E.R.M.A. Model developed by Dr. Martin Seligman<sup>2</sup> (which focuses on the 5 components that create well-being for humans) and the VIA Classification of Character Strengths (studying about 6 classes of virtues and 24 character strengths of each person).

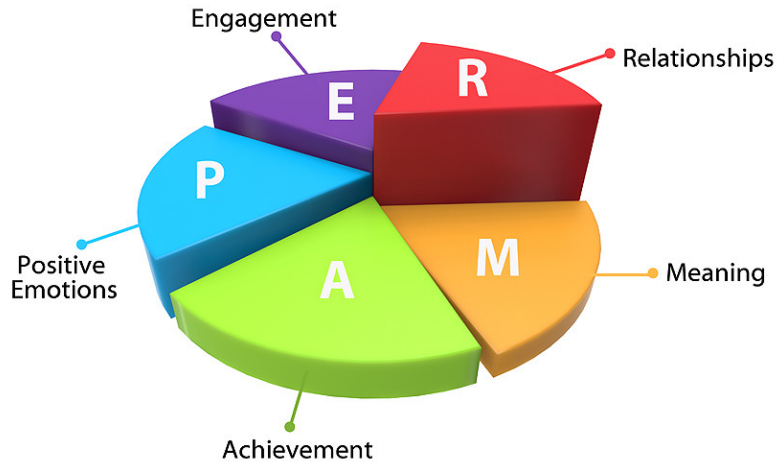


<sup>2</sup> American psychologist and educator, founder of the Positive Psychology



# THE P.E.R.M.A. MODEL

- According to the P.E.R.M.A. Model, to promote well-being in schools there are several strategies such as developing positive emotions (Positive Emotions), actively participating in activities (Engagement), building positive relationships (Relationships), looking for positive meaning in each activity (Meaning), and striving to get positive achievements (Achievement).



# THE VIA CLASSIFICATION OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- On the other hand, Dr. Seligman quickly recognised the need to identify the “positive individual traits” to be studied by Positive Psychology and that are involved in the multiple dimensions of well-being. The VIA Classification of Character Strengths developed by the VIA Institute on Character<sup>3</sup> identifies 6 basic virtues and 24 strengths that are considered good in most cultures and will increase overall happiness.



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.viacharacter.org/>

# THE 6 BASIC VIRTUES AND THE 24 STRENGTHS



**wisdom**

//creativity  
//curiosity  
//judgement  
//love of learning  
//perspective



**courage**

//bravery  
//honesty  
//perseverance  
//zest



**humanity**

//kindness  
//love  
//social intelligence



**transcendence**

//appreciation  
of beauty  
//gratitude  
//hope  
//humour  
//spirituality



**justice**

//fairness  
//leadership  
//teamwork



**temperance**

//forgiveness  
//humility  
//prudence  
//self-regulation



# THE SURVEY



- According to this theoretical approach applied in Finnish Education system, in November 2019 I decided to perform a survey on a class of the Institute where I teach<sup>4</sup>, to monitor the **well-being** of students and to evaluate their **strengths** in order to pursue the goal of bringing true happiness in teaching and learning activities. This research may also provide a direction for school leaders to promote students' well-being by infusing essence from Positive Psychology to the school curriculum.

<sup>4</sup> 3CR, Istituto Tecnico Economico e Tecnologico "Andrea Mantegna", Mantova (Italy)

# THE WELL-BEING QUESTIONNAIRES

- In order to monitor the **well-being** of students, they have been given three questionnaires, which adopted three measures, namely:
  - ☐ Flourishing Scale (F-S)
  - ☐ Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)
  - ☐ The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE)
- These three scales, developed by Dr. Edward Diener<sup>5</sup>, are commonly used to assess the overall well-being of students in many Positive Education studies.



<sup>5</sup> American psychologist, noted for his research over the past thirty years on happiness

# THE FLOURISHING SCALE (F-S)

- The Flourishing Scale is a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score.

Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree.

Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

- 7 – Strongly agree
- 6 – Agree
- 5 – Slightly agree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 – Slightly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 1 – Strongly disagree



A graphic of a 7-point Likert scale. The scale is tilted diagonally. The labels from top to bottom are: 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree', and 'Strongly disagree'. Each label is followed by a square checkbox. A green checkmark is placed in the 'Strongly agree' checkbox.



# THE FLOURISHING SCALE (F-S)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I lead a purposeful and meaningful life
- \_\_\_\_\_ My social relationships are supportive and rewarding
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am engaged and interested in my daily activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am a good person and live a good life
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am optimistic about my future
- \_\_\_\_\_ People respect me



**Scoring:** Add the responses, varying from 1 to 7, for all eight items. The possible range of scores is from 8 (*lowest possible*) to 56 (*highest possible*). A high score represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths.

# THE SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)

- *The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life.*

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 -7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your response.

- 7 – Strongly agree
- 6 – Agree
- 5 – Slightly agree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 – Slightly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 1 – Strongly disagree



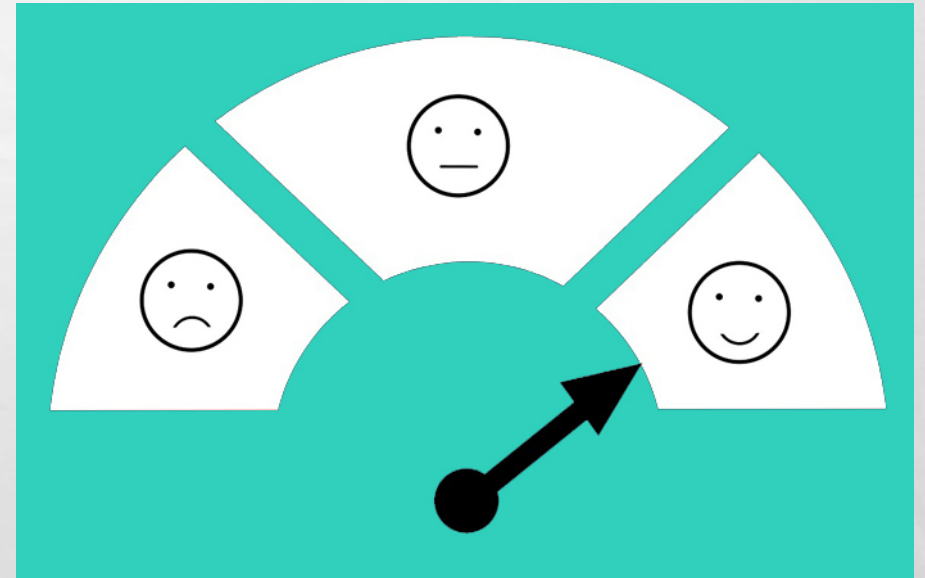
A graphic showing a portion of a survey form with a 5-point Likert scale. The options are: 'Strongly agree' (checked with a green checkmark), 'Agree', 'Disagree', and 'Strongly disagree'. Each option has a corresponding empty checkbox to its right.

# THE SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)

- \_\_\_\_\_ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The conditions of my life are excellent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

## Scoring:

- 31 – 35: Extremely satisfied
- 26 – 30: Satisfied
- 21 – 25: Slightly satisfied
- 20: Neutral
- 15 – 19: Slightly dissatisfied
- 10 – 14: Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9: Extremely dissatisfied





# THE SCALE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE (SPANES)

- The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANES) is a 12-item questionnaire which includes six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings. It is designed to assess an individual's positive and negative feelings.

Please think about what you have been doing and experiencing during the past four weeks. Then report how much you experienced each of the following feelings, using the scale below. For each item, select a number from 1 to 5, and indicate that number on your response sheet.

- 1 – Very Rarely or Never
- 2 – Rarely
- 3 – Sometimes
- 4 – Often
- 5 – Very Often or Always



Strongly agree ☒

Agree ☐

Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐

# THE SCALE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE (SPANEX)



\_\_\_\_ Positive  
\_\_\_\_ Negative  
\_\_\_\_ Good  
\_\_\_\_ Bad  
\_\_\_\_ Pleasant  
\_\_\_\_ Unpleasant  
\_\_\_\_ Happy  
\_\_\_\_ Sad  
\_\_\_\_ Afraid  
\_\_\_\_ Joyful  
\_\_\_\_ Angry  
\_\_\_\_ Contented

## Scoring:

The measure can be used to derive an overall affect balance score, but can also be divided into positive and negative feelings scales.

- **Positive Feelings (SPANEX-P):** Add the scores, varying from 1 to 5, for the six items: positive, good, pleasant, happy, joyful, and contented. The score can vary from 6 (*lowest possible*) to 30 (*highest positive feelings score*).
- **Negative Feelings (SPANEX-N):** Add the scores, varying from 1 to 5, for the six items: negative, bad, unpleasant, sad, afraid, and angry. The score can vary from 6 (*lowest possible*) to 30 (*highest negative feelings score*).
- **Affect Balance (SPANEX-B):** The negative feelings score is subtracted from the positive feelings score, and the resultant difference score can vary from -24 (*unhappiest possible*) to 24 (*highest affect balance possible*). A respondent with a very high score of 24 reports that she or he rarely or never experiences any of the negative feelings, and very often or always has all of the positive feelings.

# THE F-S SURVEY RESULTS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	variances			
Item 1	6	7	5	6	7	5	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	1	5	1,7578			
Item 2	6	5	4	3	6	4	7	7	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	1	6	2,1799			
Item 3	7	5	6	4	6	4	7	6	5	7	5	6	5	5	7	3	6	1,3080			
Item 4	6	6	7	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	7	6	5	0,4152		Number of items	8
Item 5	6	7	6	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	7	6	7	6	6	7	6	0,3391		Sum of the item variances	9,83
Item 6	6	5	4	6	7	5	7	6	5	7	7	6	5	6	6	7	5	0,8097		Variance of Total Scores	30,34
Item 7	7	6	3	5	6	4	7	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	1	4	2,1799		Cronbach's $\alpha$	0,77
Item 8	6	4	6	4	6	4	6	6	4	7	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	0,8374		Average	44,88
F-S score	50	45	41	39	49	36	53	47	42	51	48	48	43	47	50	32	42			Standard deviation	5,68

- **Flourishing Scale:** scores of 33 or above indicate that the students have chosen satisfied responses. The average score for this survey is therefore higher (44,88) with a standard deviation of 5,68. The Cronbach's  $\alpha^6$  for this survey is 0,77 (acceptable).

<sup>6</sup> An internal consistency coefficient which estimates the reliability of a psychometric test



# THE SWLS SURVEY RESULTS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	variances			
Item 1	6	7	4	4	6	4	7	3	3	6	6	6	5	6	6	3	3	2,0000		Number of items	5
Item 2	6	5	5	3	6	4	6	3	4	6	6	6	5	7	7	6	2	1,9862		Sum of the item variances	13,25
Item 3	6	6	4	6	6	4	7	4	5	7	7	7	5	6	6	1	3	2,5606		Variance of Total Scores	37,24
Item 4	6	2	6	4	6	4	5	6	4	7	7	7	5	6	5	1	4	2,7059		Cronbach's $\alpha$	0,81
Item 5	7	1	3	2	6	3	6	4	5	6	7	7	4	3	3	6	1	3,9931		Average	24,76
SWLS score	31	21	22	19	30	19	31	20	21	32	33	33	24	28	27	17	13			Standard deviation	6,29

- **Satisfaction With Life Scale:** according to Dr. Diener<sup>7</sup>, the normative average score on the SWLS is 23,5 with a standard deviation of 6,43. The average score for this survey is therefore higher than the normative average (24,76) with a slightly lower standard deviation (6,29). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this survey is 0,81 (good).

<sup>7</sup> Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75

# THE SPANE SURVEY RESULTS - 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	variances
Positive	3	4	5	3	4	3	5	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	0,5606
Negative	3	3	3	4	2	4	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	4	4	0,5260
Good	4	4	1	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	4	2	4	5	4	4	0,9481
Bad	2	2	2	2	1	4	1	1	4	2	1	3	3	2	2	3	3	0,8858
Pleasant	4	4	3	3	4	4	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	0,4429
Unpleasant	2	2	4	2	2	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	4	4	1,1626
Happy	5	4	4	2	4	2	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	2	4	0,8512
Sad	4	3	3	3	2	5	2	3	4	2	2	2	3	2	3	4	4	0,8235
Afraid	1	2	1	1	2	5	2	2	4	1	3	3	1	3	1	1	2	1,3495
Joyful	4	4	1	3	4	2	5	4	3	5	4	4	2	4	4	2	4	1,1903
Angry	2	4	3	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	2	1	4	0,6436
Contented	4	4	4	2	4	2	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	0,4844
SPANE-P score	24	24	18	16	23	16	27	22	21	25	25	23	20	23	26	15	22	
SPANE-N score	14	16	16	15	12	23	10	14	22	12	12	14	17	14	11	17	21	
SPANE-B score	10	8	2	1	11	-7	17	8	-1	13	13	9	3	9	15	-2	1	

# THE SPANE SURVEY RESULTS - 2

	SPANE-P	SPANE-N	
# items	6	6	
Sum of the item var.	4,48	5,39	
Var. of Total Scores	12,42	13,50	
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0,77	0,72	SPANE-B
Average	21,76	15,29	6,47
Standard deviation	3,63	3,79	6,71

- The SPANE-P average is 21,76 with a standard deviation of 3,63.
  - The SPANE-N average is 15,29 with a standard deviation of 3,79.
  - The SPANE-B average is 6,47 with a standard deviation of 6,71.
- 
- These scores indicate the prevalence of positive experiences, above the normative average.
  - The internal consistency coefficients found for the SPANE subscales for this survey are  $\alpha=0,77$  and  $\alpha=0,72$  for positive and negative scores, respectively (both acceptable).



# THE STRENGTHS SURVEY

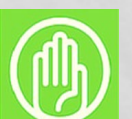


- In order to evaluate the **strengths** of students, they took the VIA Character Strengths Survey<sup>8</sup>, a free scientific online survey of character strengths, developed by the VIA Institute on Character, which takes only 15 minutes or less. In Finnish schools students usually take this survey to discover their greatest strengths, in order to allow teachers to ensure that their pupils are always confident in their own values and can actively do self-study and self-discovery in a happy teaching-learning environment.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>

# THE STRENGTHS SURVEY RESULTS - 1

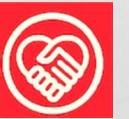
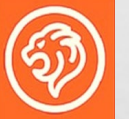
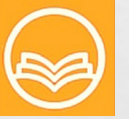
- According to numerous studies<sup>9</sup>, five character strengths show a consistent, robust relationship to life satisfaction: **hope**, **zest**, **gratitude**, **curiosity**, and **love**.
- On the other hand, the character strengths least related to life satisfaction (weak association) are **humility**, **creativity**, **appreciation of beauty and excellence**, **judgement** and **love of learning**.
- Viewed from another angle, it has been found that the strengths of the “heart” (e.g., **love**, **gratitude**) are more strongly associated with well-being than are strengths of the “head” (e.g., **creativity**, **judgment**, **appreciation of beauty and excellence**).



<sup>9</sup> Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 23, 603–619.

# THE STRENGTHS SURVEY RESULTS - 2

- Other character strengths, such as **perseverance**, **hope** and **perspective**, are related to academic achievements.
- In our survey, the strengths the students possess the most are **kindness**, **teamwork** and **humour**. This suggests the possibility to intervene positively by enhancing cooperation between students (promoting strengths such as teamwork and kindness), without forgetting that humour is an important lubricant to social interactions, for it can contribute to team building or moving toward group goals and is also a valuable method of coping with distressing situations.

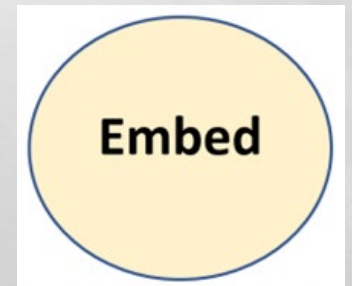
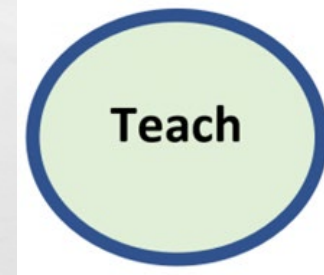
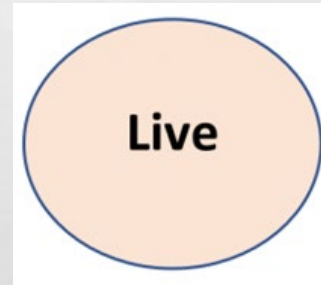




# HOW TO IMPLEMENT A POSITIVE EDUCATION MODEL?

- To promote students' well-being, a Positive Education model should focus on six areas, namely positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships and positive health. This model can be implemented in four levels:

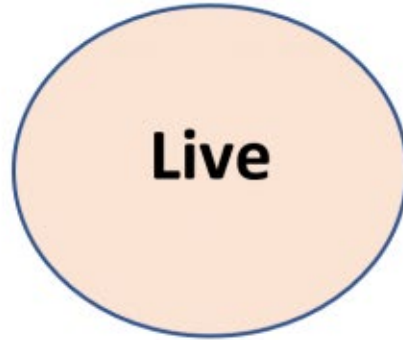
- ✓ Learn it
- ✓ Live it
- ✓ Teach it
- ✓ Embed it



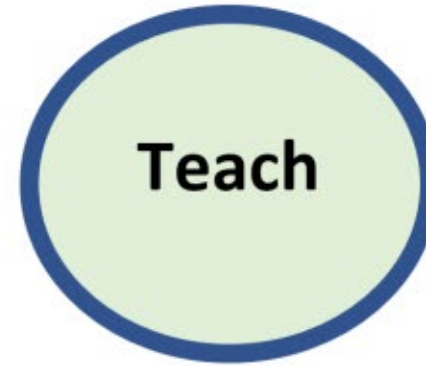
# THE FOUR LEVELS



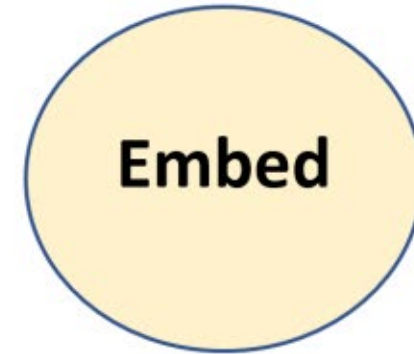
The staff and parents learn about the principles of well-being education through regular training opportunities.



The staff and parents are encouraged to be role models and live out the principles of well-being education.



The school explicitly and implicitly teach topics of well-being to our students.



The school endeavors to embed these well-being education principles within our school's practices and policies.

# LEARN IT AND TEACH IT



- Positive Education can be divided into explicit and implicit learning through formal and informal curricula. Explicit learning requires students to attend regular lessons on Positive Education held by experts, whereas implicit learning refers to the P.E.R.M.A. elements and character strengths infused into the existing formal curriculum in a wide range of subjects, such as, for example, Languages, Legal studies and History. Aside from the formal teaching curriculum in class, the informal curriculum (behaviors, rules and values) also allows infusing implicit social norms or expectations into students as a component of school life.

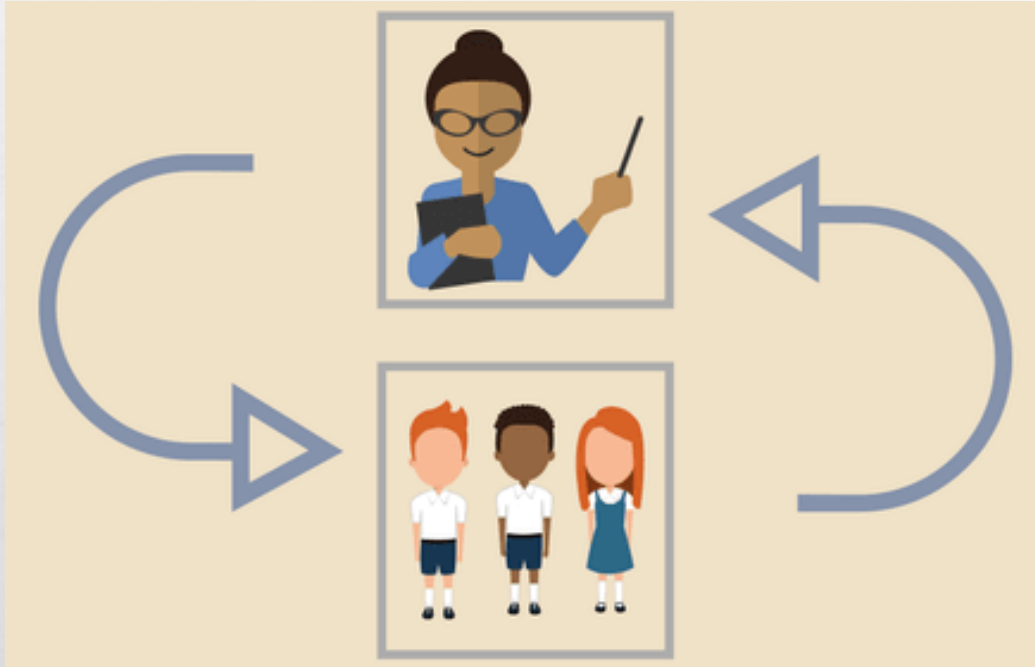


# LIVE IT

- An effective program supports students and teachers' well-being. School personnel should be trained with skills to teach Positive Education in class and act as genuine role models for students. Thus, training programs and workshops should be implemented for all teaching and non-teaching staffs; if possible, Positive Education workshops and talks should be offered also to parents.



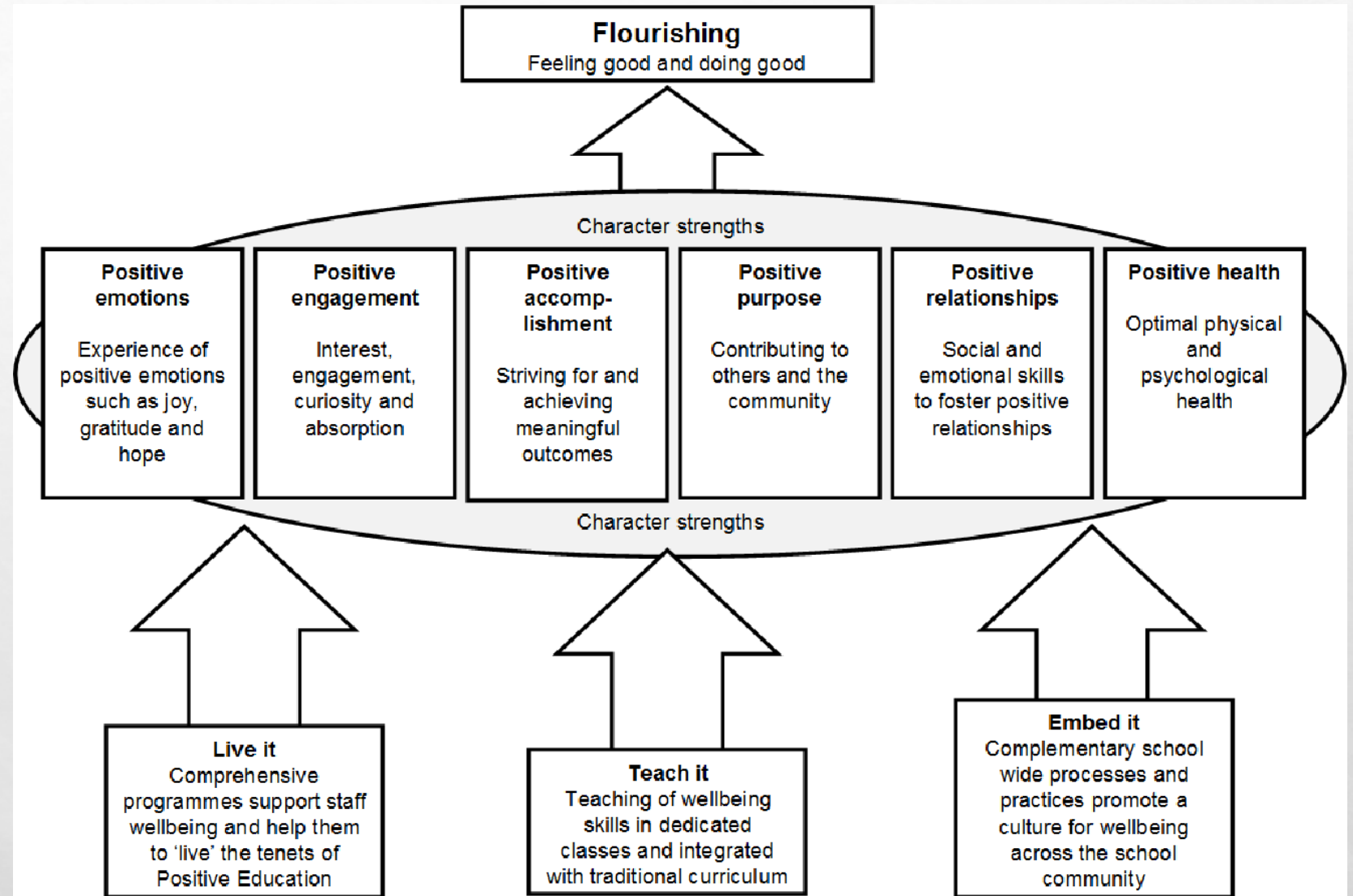
# EMBED IT



- A culture of well-being should be cultivated in the whole-school community through multifarious school-wide processes via school assemblies, projects, workshops and propaganda activities, to build up a flourishing culture.

# THE MODEL

- The model can be schematized as follows:





# CONCLUSIONS

- A school is an effective learning community because students spend the majority of their time in it. The aims of a Positive Education program are to equip students with positive mind-sets, coping skills and character strengths, thereby enabling them to have a flourishing life.

