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Abstract

The feeling of anxiety, boredom, and apathy is more prevalent in school than in the family or in the company of good friends (Olah, 1999). Positive psychology says that learning could be joyful and stress-free in schools. Seligman (2009) pointed out, that “*well-being should be taught in school, even in three areas: to counterpoint depression, to gain life satisfaction as a means of self-development and to facilitate effective learning and creative thinking.*” How these apply to the world of school? According to Olah (2004), the message of positive psychology to pedagogy is that by applying the principle of “burdening until it can be kept in flow,” education can become such a positive experience creating action, which could help to realize the process of knowledge assimilation and personal development. In this sense, education is the process of transmission of knowledge via love. This paper aims to provide a brief review research on black pedagogy (Hunyadyne et al., 2006), and point out those practices against it which proves that positive pedagogical practice could only mean positive alternative. The positive/white education is not just a dream. There are already existing good teaching practices, positive attitudes, and methods of teaching the joy of learning. The task is to find a further example and study these practices. The positive/white pedagogy as a new discipline relies on these achievements.

Keywords: positive/white pedagogy, positive psychology, black pedagogy, learning, flow

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Introduction

Positive psychology as an antecedent

According to Keyes, the most important objective of social science is to call attention to the specialities of well-working communities, and for this to explore social protective factors, and the strengths of personality that establishes social well-being. From the side of psychology, positive psychology was the one to undertake this program. Sociology, pedagogy, communication, economy, and many other areas are still waiting for a literally “positive” turn. This positive turn does not mean the end of critical aspect, only the initiation of a balanced status. It is true that we must reveal dangers, problems, dysfunctions, but we must also admit that elimination of these factors does not mean automatically the foundation of well-being, neither on the individual’s, nor on the community’s level ([Hamvai & Piko, 2008](#)).

Education sociology carries out the decision-making process for pedagogy, through revealing general regularities, presenting facts, making decisions using results of researches to classes, education, school, and even to the whole educational system ([Kozma, 1984](#)).

Maslow was the first to refer to the need of founding positive psychology since, according to him, studying “cripples” results in “cripple psychology” ([Maslow, 1954](#), p. 354). The so-called humanistic aspect of psychology is attributable to him.

Positive psychology represents a bit wider approach than humanistic psychology does, in the sense that it puts the importance not only on the individual but also on the social well-being first. It also aims to study, identify, and certify the factors ensuring proper human functioning by severe empirical researches ([Csikszentmihalyi, 2012](#); [Olah, 2004](#); [Seligman, 2011](#)).

The outstanding representatives of positive psychology underline in their works that in their opinion the important thing is the self-fulfilling joy that knowledge and development can give, as well as their effect resulting in rewarding oneself. Moreover, in achieving self-realization and well-being, curiosity and initiation on one’s own can be decisive.

An important mission of positive psychology is to shift the focus of psychology from observing dysfunctions and pathological symptoms to exploring and exploiting human strength and virtue. The emblematic questions are ([Olah, 2004](#)):

- how could psychology assist people becoming happier?
- how could the members of our society become healthier and more balanced, both physically and mentally?

Olah (2004) dwells on the message of all that to education and upbringing; meanwhile, he reviews the American history of new psychological paradigm. He points out that Allport (who studied the marks of mature personality), Rogers (who tried to understand the well-functioning man), White (who studied the evolution of patterns of competence, personal effectiveness and ability of self-control), and Rotter (who studied the effect of success-orientation on performance), as well as Atkinson, Terman, and Lazarus can be considered as founders of today's positive psychology. The works of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi can provide the most comprehensive picture to those who are interested in the subject. According to Olah (2004), the message of positive psychology to pedagogy is that by applying the principle of "burdening until it can be kept in flow," education can become such a positive experience creating action, which could help to realize the process of knowledge assimilation and personal development. In this sense, education is the process of transmission of knowledge via love.

Martin Seligman's merits are indisputable in "bringing" the founding theses of positive psychology "to a common platform" (Olah, 2012). In his work that was published in 2011 with the title *"Flourish – a Visionary New Understanding Happiness and Well-Being,"* Seligman appoints flourish as the subject of, and the progress of the flourishing process, as the aim of positive psychology. He handles well-being as a construction, which has five elements (he supposes people choose them for their own sake, and they can be measured independently of the other elements): positive emotion, engagement, meaning, achievement, and positive relationships. The empirical validation of these theories is ahead.

According to Csikszentmihalyi, the reason why we need new psychology – which uses scientific ways but is a bit different from the methods of science – is to draw people's attention to the three following thematic questions:

- what does it mean to be human (learning and experiencing our own nature),
- working out the principles of a "new social contract" (with business – ethic – loyalty in the center),
- he considers the power of happiness and experiencing that consciously in every moment also to be important. He mentions Plato's Republic, in which the writer states that the most important task of a pedagogue is to teach young people to find beauty in worthy things.

Csikszentmihalyi's opinion (2012) is that flow is the prime motivation and that can affect performance in school positively. The cybernetic model of Hejj (2013) suggests something similar. His model states that during the educational process, the students' sense of security increases due to the growth of emotional support, thus increases motivation

toward new lectures and thus correlates positively with experimental mood and attention. All these affect success in a positive way, which feels like the achievement of his or her own action to the student, so his or her competence intensifies together with the knowledge that a new challenge is less threatening for him or her. This way such positive feedback takes place, which intensifies itself and this feedback generates self-assertion, foreseeing the reoccurrence of the possibility of exploratory approach (Figure 1; see Hejj, 2013).

The outlines of positive pedagogy

The researchers of positive psychology (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998; Rowe et al., 2007 cited in Seligman, 2009, pp. 294–295) also confirmed that there is an obvious relation between well-being and learning. Seligman and his colleagues state that “greater level of well-being goes together with more effective and efficient learning. There is a supposed growth in learning due to the increase of well-being, which is the original purpose of education.” (p. 294).

They also point out that “well-being should be taught in school, especially regarding three areas: to counterpoint depression, to gain life satisfaction as a means of self-development and to facilitate effective learning and creative thinking” (p. 295; see Balint, 2014).

Figure 1. When does a learner pay attention? Cybernetic model made by Andreas Hejj (http://www.hejj.de/H/Mikor_figyel_Hejj.pdf) – original version made by Hungarian. This version was translated by Ladnai

According to Balint (2014), positive pedagogy should focus on the exploitation of students' creativity in the first place, since creativity increases both subjective well-being and efficient learning.

According to Olah (2004), that teacher fulfills his or her function at the optimal/most effectively, who is able to bring lecture requirements and his or her expectations to the burden level of students. Meanwhile, he or she is able to keep students in the flow. This way the triumvirate of knowledge – learning – personal development may realize together under “the loving aegis” of positive psychology. Olah (2004, p. 46) summarizes the out-turn of applying positive psychology in pedagogy with the following words: “*the roots of knowledge are not bitter, only sweet, especially when school is able to give flow experience to students.*”

The terminus technicus *positive pedagogy* does not exist yet, but more and more people, researchers think that there is a need for it. By thinking of the factors that brought the positive turn as a new direction into psychology, it could be easy to find comparison concerning pedagogy that there is a need to change in the point of view also in education. It is well known that there are written works about black pedagogy for a while (see Hunyady, Nadasi, & Serfozo, 2006), but remarks to the initiations of “white” or positive pedagogy are rare (Hamvai & Piko, 2008). Sandor Klein (2012) as the Hungarian follower of the psychology of Rogers successfully identified dozens of best practices based on the practices of teachers in Hungarian alternative schools. On the other hand, he did not study the educational methodology of traditional educational institutions (see Klein, 2007; Klein & Soponyai, 2011).

Black pedagogy as a counterpoint

The term black pedagogy was first used by Rutschky (1977), in a sense that adults as teachers and also in the family, as well as in institutional education misuse children's dependent position. Vincze (1991) presents the history of abuse against children, since ancient times in the context of the history of education. Although the term itself is new, the problem is quite old. The following explanations came up to the definition (see Hunyady et al., 2006):

- Béla (2001) – It is the whole of efforts that take advantage of the child's exposed situation, and want to rationalize education to the damage of the child.
- Miller (2002) – On one hand, it is an upbringing method, on the other hand, a complex composition (passing the family's upbringing methods to the further generations – intimidation, isolation, and love deprivation).

- Krumm (2003) – It is that negative communication activity, which occurs at least once a week through 6 months at least.
- Hunyady et al. (2006) – It is a system of impressions, the forms of pedagogical hazards occurring in institutional education. It is the subset of conscious and unconscious pedagogical dysfunction that has its negative impact on the student, even in the future.

It risks his or her physical, emotional, and mental health or does some damages to him or her, and it can be recallable under spontaneous or supportive circumstances.

Hunyady et al. (2006) arranged the effects of black pedagogy in two groups: the ones we live and the ones we experience. Even though the first one is harming, the one who is affected does not know that things could be different (e.g., compulsion to conform to parents and unfavorable medical circumstances in school). The latter one (experienced) is harming, the student has an immediate reaction to it, and the detriment embeds in the intensive negative surroundings, making life bitter for the time being. It may be buried, but after a while, the detriment emerges, and the strongest ones can be recalled even in adulthood. However, living life that black way is a question of personal life and personality. The demonstrated effects of black pedagogy relate to the following subjects (Hunyady et al., 2006):

- process of education and learning,
- formal and informal performance evaluation,
- violation of regulations of social arrangements,
- rivalry between contemporaries,
- conflicts due to the demonstration of the position of power, and
- differences related to the teacher's educational style.

Above all these, the author mentions damages in the personality and the physical-emotional health of harmed people as the most serious effect.

Positive pedagogy as an area of research

It is obvious from the previously described that there is a need to researches that reveal the opposite of black pedagogy. That is, how one can handle the educational process, the evaluation of students, the everyday problems of social relations (inequalities of student-student, teacher-student) more efficiently by applying a positive approach.

One should also pay attention to the negative emotional effects of performance in school, even among teachers in training (see Hejj, 2013, pp. 12–14): *“When thinking about the performance in school, such tension arouses in the teachers in training that can result in pathological symptoms.”* Does anyone wonder that students feel the same way? According to Hejj (2013), if school is the experience of frustrating failure between boredom and stressed fear, then educational psychology must do its best to solve the problem. Hejj believes that instead of half-hearted performance, students should be inspired to find pleasure in dealing with the lecture. In his opinion, living the experience of success and the accompanying positive feelings can be vital in respect of students’ results.

According to Sandor Klein (2012), *“school years are not only for preparing for our life, but also for enjoying this current stage of our life”* and he urges the changes that await the teachers of the 21st century.

As previously described, there is an instant need to create the terminus technicus positive pedagogy in the area of educational sciences and to fulfill it with content. The following concepts can help us with this.

Let us say that positive pedagogy is a system of effects, which is formed and used deliberately by teachers, and it forms a complete system of communication, attitude, and behavior. By measuring the effects of the pedagogical educational process, this system summarizes all the positive things that occur in institutional education. Meanwhile, positive pedagogy is a set of conscious and unconscious pedagogical practices, which can have its positive effects on the student in the future, helping his or her physical, emotional, and mental health. Regarding operationalization, it is also important that the phenomenon must be recallable under spontaneous or supportive circumstances, depending on its feature.

On the analogy of questions of positive psychology, the following can be the most important questions of positive pedagogy:

How could pedagogy contribute to:

- making learning happier,
- maintaining and improving the emotional health of students and teachers,
- realizing more effective cooperation in education,
- the flow experiences of students and teachers becoming more frequent,
- improving and increasing the experience of flourish,

- experiencing happiness in knowledge, developing a liking for studying, to the necessity of interpretation studying as a lifelong experience, and to the understanding of this by all?

Feedbacks received from others form our self-image. In the communication between teachers and students, the quality of questions (by teachers) and that of given answers (by students) is a defining element that defines the relationship of the parties largely. The quality of answers given by teachers can be two kinds (positive or negative), but their effects can be various regarding the consequences (Gordon, 1998). If the feedback is positive, it can aim at the personality as well as at the performance (“You are doing great!” and “Excellent job!”).

On the other hand, negative feedback should only aim at the performance (“This essay is rubbish!”); otherwise, it can have a destructive effect on the self-evaluation of personality and thereby on the optimal development of personality (such a feedback like “Oh, you are so stupid!”). A properly given (subject – time – location – way) or simply positive feedback to a student can deeply influence the efficiency of pedagogical practice.

In 2008 in Geelong Grammar School, Australia, Seligman (2009) drew up the criteria of applicability of positive psychology’s aspect in education. At first, teachers were trained to put literature with a positive psychological background into practice in education; then, teachers and psychologists together began to draw up a new curriculum that can help to apply the aspect of positive psychology in school in the future (see the website of Geelong Grammar School: <https://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/What-is-Positive-Education>)

Encouraged by the success, Seligman (2012) brings the following into question in the epilogue of his book:

- is it possible to teach history in a way, so it can stress that human development is an incredibly good, fine, moreover excellent thing?
- is it possible to teach mathematics in a way, so it can emphasize to students that this subject is the appearance of the perfect form of truth?
- moreover, is it possible to teach biology through a system of ideas, according to which human evolution resulted not only in bad things (wars, armament, and famine) but also in good things (cooperation, self-sacrifice, and love)?

Seligman (2012) expresses his hope that his work may contribute to “*the start of ending the global depression.*”

Researchers' questions and suggestions

The researchers at the University of West Hungary ([Holecz & Molnar, 2014](#)) pointed out the importance of positive psychology's approach, as well as the significance of roles of well-being-boosting factors – revealed by the movement – in the self-improvement of teachers in their study.

They also emphasized that teachers' happiness and an increase of their satisfaction may have a positive effect on the following generations.

After giving deeper thought to the previously mentioned, I list some, in my opinion, relevant questions, which relate to the initial steps of research and founding positive pedagogy as a field of research.

- (a) Which already existing concepts can be transferred from positive psychology to the new concept of positive pedagogy? Is it necessary to create new concepts beyond the already existing ones?
- (b) Is positive pedagogy presented in teachers' practice nowadays? If it is presented, then in what proportion and how consciously?
- (c) Does it depend on the type of school, the age of teacher, the subject, and other (will be identified later) variables?
- (d) Is it possible to make a change in the usually unconscious practice of black pedagogy by having a change in the teachers' attitude?
- (e) Would students receive it positively? (Is it sure that change in the approach and positive attitude would work with every student? If yes, why so, if not, what could be the reason?)
- (f) Is it possible that both students and teachers should be taught this attitude? (see [Seligman, 2011](#) – Geelong experiences, [Hejj, 2013](#))

Epilogue

Seligman ([2011](#)) cites Nietzsche, who divided history into three stages. He called the first stage the "camel's" period: the one who just sits, whimpers, and broods. The second stage was named the "lion's" period, who can say no (to tyranny and ignorance). In his opinion, the third will be the period of the "reborn child," who will ask the question: "What shall we say 'yes' to?"

According to Seligman, we all can say “yes” to the followings:

- more positive emotions,
- deeper engagement,
- better relationships,
- more meaning in our life, and
- more positive achievements, greater well-being ([Seligman, 2011](#), p. 250).

We all can say “yes” to a wider extension of the positive educational-upbringing processes.

Converting the aspect and the researches’ results of positive psychology to the world of pedagogy is necessary, and it becomes inevitable soon due to the necessity of effective processing of knowledge, which doubles in every 5 years (see [Hejj, 2013](#)). Why not explore already existing good practices and build them in an everyday educational-upbringing process widely, to serve the satisfaction of next generations? It may happen that not every scientist of education will receive my subject with enthusiasm, but I have the opinion that education science has to give adequate answers to the urgent challenges of our time.

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About the Author

The author is primarily a mother and wife, moreover, a teacher, an assistant lecturer, and PhD candidate at the Institute of Educational Sciences at the University of Pecs. She lives with her family in Pecs and finds herself lucky because she can put her theoretical knowledge into everyday practice, both in public education and in higher education. As an economist, Hungarian literature teacher, drama teacher, and curriculum developer, she believes her achievements in research can bring real benefits to students’ lives and to the widest possible enjoyment of a state of public education, based on knowledge. This mutually reinforcing model of positive psychology and its model of pedagogy (which relies heavily on past achievements) is to declare this. The author had full access to all data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

Ethics

The study procedures were carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Educational and Cultural Sciences (University of Debrecen) approved the study.

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