

# Positive Education and Work



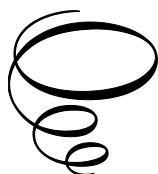
# Positive Education and Work:

*Less Struggling,  
More Flourishing*

Edited by

Sanna Hyvärinen, Tanja Äärelä  
and Satu Uusiautti

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Positive Education and Work: Less Struggling, More Flourishing

Edited by Sanna Hyvärinen, Tanja Äärelä and Satu Uusiautti

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## FOREWORD

*Less Struggling, More Flourishing: An Introduction to Multidisciplinary Research on Positive Education and Work* has been an inspiring book project for us. Our initial purpose was to provide a research-based description and analysis of the meaning and uses of positive psychological understanding in education, work, and life in general. During the process, we realized that we also wanted to tackle special issues that could be viewed from the perspectives of well-being and flourishing. As a whole, the book is based on positive psychological research approaches implemented in various research settings that cover the whole lifespan. The idea of positive education and work and their connection to life-long positive development and flourishing is discussed critically from multiple perspectives.

The book includes quantitative and qualitative research findings from the field and contributes to the scientific discussion about the meaning of positive education and work. The chapters in this book also provide practical insights. Our aim is to introduce this book for broad use as a textbook or course literature for education and work-related research studies. We hope that it will provide inspiration to researchers through its various methodological examples. The book is an interesting, research-based read intended for educators and researchers in many disciplines, such as the social sciences, social work, educational administration, and leadership. It is suitable for everyone with an interest in positive education and psychology.

The authors of the book are researchers who present their key findings about positive psychological approaches in education and work. The book starts with the editors' general analysis of the foundations of happiness in the lives of human beings. What are happiness and well-being in a person's positive development? How does flourishing manifest in life's different phases? There are important questions to be asked about whether everyone can flourish and achieve happiness and the role played by the people who surround us. The first part of the book lays the foundation for the chapters that follow, each of which focus on carefully selected themes covering the various phases, contexts, and phenomena of life.

In the second part of the book, pedagogical perspectives are discussed from various levels of education ranging from early childhood education and care to basic and higher education. The chapters in this part take a look

at the school institution as a place that can support the positive development and well-being of students. Students experience school in different ways, and what might appear safe and encouraging to some students might appear menacing to others. Samuli Ranta and Sanna Hyvärinen outline the premises of positive pedagogy in early childhood education and care. Their chapter is based on extensive research among Finnish early-childhood education teachers and their perceptions about the use of positive pedagogy in childcare centers. Eliisa Leskisenoja et al. analyze the foundations of functional home–school collaboration as the foundation of joy at school. They illustrate the levels of collaboration from teacher-led activities to active parental participation, leaning on parents’ experiences. Jyrki Huusko et al. present a model of a self-reinforcing cycle to promote a positive school culture based on positive school values and attitudes, positive teacher–student encounters, and positive daily solutions and activities. The last chapter in Part II focuses on higher education. Sanna Hyvärinen et al. report on findings from a survey among graduates of higher education institutions. The authors illustrate how to foster a successful life through a strength-based and future-oriented approach to student guidance.

Part III discusses the foundations of flourishing at work. Tiina Yrjänheikki et al. describe findings from lesson-based research among pre-service teachers. The study illustrates how self-efficacy in teachers’ work is constructed as early as the teacher-training period and provides the premises of flourishing for teachers. Krista Rautio’s research analyzes the preconditions of success in the work of construction site managers. Jorma Liikamaa and Ville Pietiläinen tackle the less studied phenomenon of airline pilots’ mental health. They review their findings in connection with flight safety and perceived organizational support. Salla Karima et al. focus on millennial leaders in Great Places to Work companies in Finland. Their analysis concludes that the value of positive interaction, education, and encouragement received at a young age is essential to fostering leadership among millennial leaders. Flourishing at work is not just about one’s personal experiences; in today’s workplaces, collaboration has become increasingly appreciated. Samuli Ranta and Satu Uusiautti turn their attention to teamwork. They present a three-level analysis of functional teamwork as the foundation of positive outcomes and flourishing in early childhood education and care settings.

Part IV tackles some special perspectives of well-being. The foundation for positive development is built at home and the role and responsibility of parents are at its core. This viewpoint is discussed by Kaarina Määttä and Satu Uusiautti in their chapter about good parental relationships as the basis of positive parenting. Another viewpoint to parenting is provided by Linda

Dianoff and Satu Uusiautti as they present their findings from interviews with LGBT parents as well as a model of LGBT parenting where the challenges and supportive elements of parenting are viewed in the context of external and parent-related factors. A special perspective on well-being is also offered by Hanna Nurkkala et al. in their analysis on the significance of well-being at school, which is based on the narratives of children in out-of-home care. Their chapter showcases a group of children whose voices are rarely heard but whose experiences shed new light on the role of school. Likewise, the chapter by Elisa Luukinen et al. introduces experiences from higher education that are often silenced. Their findings provide possible solutions for both raising awareness of bullying in universities and learning how to reduce and prevent it. The last chapter in Part IV looks at the workplace. Sanna Wenström and Kimmo Kuortti focus on a special element of well-being, namely enthusiasm. They provide an analysis of the phenomenon of enthusiasm and its importance at work by using vocational teachers as their example.

We wish all our readers a happy exploration of these wonderful research findings and all the best for your own research endeavors.

In Rovaniemi, at the University of Lapland, on Mother's Day,  
May 9, 2021.

*Sanna Hyvärinen, Tanja Äärelä and Satu Uusiautti.*

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We would like express our sincere thanks to all our expert reviewers who were willing to spare their valuable time and effort to make this compilation of excellent quality. Below are listed those reviewers who gave permission to publish their names:

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**PART I:**  
**INTRODUCTION**

# CHAPTER 1

## LOOKING BACK AT A RICH LIFE WITH UPS AND DOWNS: THE FOUNDATIONS OF HAPPINESS IN THE LIVES OF HUMAN BEINGS

SATU UUSIAUTTI, TANJA ÄÄRELÄ  
AND SANNA HYVÄRINEN

A resident in a nursing home sits and thinks about life. Have dreams come true and have the things that mattered been achieved? Has life been rich and unique with ups and downs? What can descendants be told? What advice can be given? This elderly person at the dusk of life realizes they have been part of a continuum of generations—no more, no less—and starts writing a diary...

### **Bright Future Right Ahead**

One day, I was born into a family as the first child. I was a highly desired new family member. My parents did their best to raise me, fulfill my basic needs, and support my development (Aassve, Goisis and Sironi, 2012; Sinkkonen, 2018; 2020). Indeed, my parents supported me to create a basic level of trust in others and have a sense of security (Erikson, 1998). Becoming accepted as I was, without any obligation to earn my parents' love, was the guiding baseline of my childhood (Durand et al., 2009). During this phase, I was planted with the seed of optimism, which provided me with the best ingredients for positive development in life (Carver and Scheier, 2005; Erikson, 1998). I developed and obtained a clear self-awareness and sense of control. I learned to act, use my initiative, and tolerate the fact that everything did not always go as planned (Salovey, Caruso and Mayer, 2004). This ability has been crucial because self-control



is a better predictor of academic success than IQ (Duckworth and Seligman, 2005).

In both early childhood education and school, my very successful path continued unabated. I had a tactful teacher who believed in strength-based teaching and found ways to support our strengths and skills relating to teamwork (Leskisenoja, 2016; Cousins, 2017; Duckworth, Quinn and Seligman, 2009; Ranta, 2020). The teacher was able to establish a reciprocal relationship with my parents, which laid the foundation for functional home-school collaboration (Goodall, 2013; Francis et al., 2016; Epstein, 2018; Moreira and Lee, 2020). At school, I was provided with optimal learning experiences (Coleman, 2009) through efficient feedback and rewards and interaction that supported my positive self-image as a learner (Mabbe et al., 2018; Schweder and Raufelder, 2019; Äärelä, Määttä and Uusiautti, 2016). I learned to recognize and use these signature strengths and came to understand the meaning of strengths for future choices in life, from choosing my places of study to finding employment (Hyvärinen, Uusiautti and Määttä, 2018; Uusiautti 2019). Realistic optimism (Seligman, 2002, 2008, 2011; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) promoted my hope-centered attitude towards the future: I believed that it was possible to make choices, learn and develop, and cope with challenges (Bandura, 2011; Cregan, Rowe and Wall, 2019). I had a happy, carefree childhood. Even as a child, I could understand that some of my classmates were not so lucky with their families. My home was warm and safe and I never needed to fear anything at home. My parents were hard-working and laughed a great deal. They loved music and often sang whilst completing housework; sometimes, I even saw them dancing happily together (see, e.g., Brassell et al., 2020).

I became an adolescent and faced the typical phases of finding my identity but I was equipped with the support of good friendships, critical media literacy skills, and secure relationships with adults (Šupšáková, 2016; Uusitalo-Malmivaara and Lehto, 2013). I felt connected in many ways, even to our dog, to whom I told some of my worries and many secrets (Hawkins and Williams, 2017). At school, I was told that I was exceptionally good at sports; my PE teacher told me so and made me try even harder (Erturan-Ilker, 2014). I developed competences that illustrated positive youth development (Lerner, 2009; Leskisenoja and Sandberg, 2019; Yeager and Dweck, 2012). In both high school and university, I actively participated in student activism, mostly due to social motives and the urge to participate and influence, but partly because of happenstance (Ansala, 2017). After graduation, I successfully entered the world of work. By following my signature strengths, I found an occupation and a job that allowed me to genuinely develop and succeed (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003;

Uusiautti, 2019; Uusiautti and Määttä, 2015). I worked in a medium-sized organization where I had a warm, equity-focused manager and congenial colleagues. My tasks were mainly interesting and challenging in a motivating way. We shared responsibility collegially and mostly enjoyed our work. We were like friends and sometimes even got together during holidays, especially if some of us were experiencing difficult times (e.g., Avey et al., 2010; Li et al., 2014).

As an adult, I have led a balanced life, had a happy family with offspring (Blieszner and Ogletree, 2018), and enjoyed active, meaningful, and healthy hobbies (Uusiautti, Leskisenoja and Hyvärinen, 2017; Wu, 2015). Nowadays, in the evening of life, retired and with children living their own lives, I am happy to be a grandparent (Maijala, Määttä and Uusiautti, 2018) and happy about the past and the life I have lived (e.g., Erikson, 1998; Mahlo and Windsor, 2020). I have now been a widow for a few years after being a caregiver for my loved one. My life is now about acceptance and active enjoyment (del Barrio et al., 2018); I have also promised to try and enjoy my family. Every day I go for a walk at a nearby lake; I just sit there on the bench at the waterfront and listen to the sounds of nature. Sometimes, I read to stimulate my mind and get some fresh ideas (Wang et al., 2020). Other times, I call my children or some friends to let them know that I am fine and to find out whether they, too, are fine (Liu et al., 2019).

## What if?

Happy life, happy people (Helliwell et al., 2020). The imaginary diary presented at the beginning of this chapter shows an ideal path of happiness. Why is it that everyone does not walk a similar path? If everyone knows what is needed for positive development, why is it that we do not act as needed? In reality, we also know that no two paths are similar and that children from identical conditions do not have identical development and life courses.

What if parents cannot support their child's development as expected (e.g., Locke and Newcomb, 2004; McKeown et al., 1997)? What if the child starts to show serious behavioral difficulties (Ilomäki, 2012)? What if the child needs special educational support or the adolescent engages in criminal activity (Gretton, Hare and Catchpole, 2004)? What if the adult ends up in a never-ending circle of unemployment, depression, and divorce? What if the last phase of life is filled with bitterness and regret?

Unfortunately, even with the best knowledge and intentions, we will never be free from difficulties, challenges, and obstacles. For example, in 2019, a total of 85,746 reports were made to the children's protection

service in Finland, and there has never been as much hurried decision-making to place children in out-of-home care (Forsell, Kuoppala and Säkkinen, 2020). At the same time, stress and mental health problems in adolescents have increased at an alarming rate (Blair, Leibenluft and Pine, 2014; Kuntu, Pesonen and Saari, 2016; Meszaros, Horvath and Balazs, 2017; Virtanen et al., 2018). It is also well known that difficulties seem to be inherited both socially and generationally (e.g., Saari et al., 2020). Differences between families in high and low educational backgrounds are obvious among adolescents and apparent in various areas of their well-being (Kestilä et al., 2019). In particular, low maternal education is associated with children's well-being problems and difficulties in school achievement (Jalovaara and Andersson, 2018).

## **Learning about Happiness**

Achor (2018) employed the concept of positive exceptions in reference to the possibility that we might learn about how to share good things more broadly. In a changing world, we are in constant need of new information about the individual and communal factors that support positive development and agency in human beings. One of the recent lessons learned is that, by focusing on characteristic strengths, human flourishing can be supported (Seligman, 2011).

Flourishing is not the exclusive domain of the best students, top workers, or active, altruistic community workers; it is for everyone, regardless of personal characteristics, support needs, difficulties, problems, and adversities. Good paths can be found in surprising places and we therefore need a level of open-mindedness to discover positive developments and useful practices in the various contexts in which we live and act.

For this reason, it would be interesting to know why, for example, a severely handicapped person recovers well and sometimes achieves a better level of functionality than before a major accident (Dunn, Uswatte and Elliott, 2008). Similarly, how does someone who was a criminal when they were younger, become a caring and responsible parent (e.g., Terävä and Eerola, 2020; Buston et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2012)? Why does an immigrant from difficult circumstances and a totally different culture adjust and integrate admirably in the new host country (e.g., Uusiautti and Yeasmin, 2019)? These are examples of questions that help us seek positive answers that can be shared and used for the common good. At the same time, we see that research on the positive does not ignore the negative sides of the nature and choices of human beings (Ojanen, 2014; see also Lazarus, 2003; Miller, 2008). No one survives without struggles or feelings of

loneliness at some points in life. These struggles can actually be seen as ways to develop the coping skills and resilience we need to bounce back from life's inevitable setbacks. The way in which we explain setbacks to ourselves is crucially meaningful, even boosting our immune system.

## **The Positive Toolbox for Life**

From an individual perspective, the elements of positive agency are resources that help us make choices that show appreciation for ourselves and others. In addition, these resources help us face crises, survive, and even show resilience and success. For educators, this kind of understanding and awareness is crucial. For instance, by identifying and bolstering children's strengths, we can provide them with ways of experiencing joy, finding satisfaction and self-fulfillment, and perceiving themselves positively. This impact radiates to their immediate environment: happy people are popular targets of friendship, which is a good thing, as reciprocal human relationships are one of the most important elements of well-being (Seligman, 2011; Taniguchi and Tanaka, 2019). Those who are skeptical about the importance of the aforementioned also say that we cannot find happiness before we have experienced the opposite. Naturally, we all experience disappointments and adversities; no one can avoid them entirely. The key is how we, as educators, can also provide support for positive development in these situations.

In the spring of 2021, Finland was chosen as the happiest country in the world for the fourth time (see The World Happiness Report, <https://worldhappiness.report/>). In this well-known survey, people are asked to evaluate their satisfaction with life and rate how often they have experienced positive and negative feelings lately. In addition to people's evaluations, the survey acknowledges, for example, life expectancies and income (by using the Well-Being-Adjusted Life-Years, WELLBY measurement). One explanation could be that slow positive development in Finland has been on course for a while in Finns' quality of life in a variety of measurements. For example, Sakari Karvonen's (2019) analysis of well-being indicators in Finland revealed that the biggest positive changes nationally have been a decrease in bullying at school, levels of loneliness among elderly women, and an increase in the quality of life among everyone except for working-age men. In addition, the general health level of Finns has been improving (Karvonen et al., 2019).

## Towards Sustainable Success

How do we guarantee happiness in the future? How do we share the lessons of happiness more broadly? If we want to encourage and support caring and active citizenship in people of all ages, we have to understand and teach the essential well-being skills of today and tomorrow (Seligman, 2011) and foster realistic optimism (Ho, Cheng and Cheung, 2010) in ways that enable us to avoid the pitfalls of pessimism and negative development cycles; indeed, optimism is related to self-esteem, low depression, low negative emotions, and life satisfaction (Wrosch and Scheier, 2003; see also Jiang et al., 2014). At the beginning of this introduction, we presented two extremes: the ideal path and the path of misery. Regardless of which one we encounter, we need the skills of well-being and positive development. It is also worth remembering that most of us travel a path that has its ups and downs, sideways and crossings, but it is still possible to find the right track.

According to Uusiautti and Hyvärinen (2020), “[s]ustainable success consists of positive development, flourishing, and well-being, and also top performances. It is based on positive educational psychological knowledge, wants to meet the needs of the current era, and provides hope toward the future.” Hope is crucial as we have to tackle unforeseen issues and problems (e.g., Ratinen and Uusiautti, 2020). Positive education and work provide us with lessons that open our eyes to see opportunities to develop and the multiformity of contexts in which positive psychological viewpoints can be applied, investigated, and shared.

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## **PART II:**

# **PEDAGOGICAL PREMISES OF WELL-BEING**

## CHAPTER 2

# OUTLINING POSITIVE PEDAGOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

SAMULI RANTA AND SANNA HYVÄRINEN

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this chapter is to create a comprehensive picture of how positive pedagogy can be utilized in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) centers. The following questions were set for this research: 1) How are the significant themes of positive pedagogy in ECEC implemented according to early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Finland? and 2) How can the Continuous Improvement Wheel of ECEC positive pedagogy (EPP) be utilized in practice? This chapter outlines positive pedagogy in Finnish ECEC and its development, using the results of Ranta's (2020) dissertation research, which was conducted using mixed methods. Twenty-one ECE teachers participated in interviews and 625 ECE teachers took part in a survey that enquired about specific positive pedagogical practices in Finnish ECEC. Positive pedagogy in ECEC was outlined through five main themes: teacher-child relationship; positive learning experiences; support for children's autonomy; children's relationships; and adults' relationships. Each theme was explored in more detail in the study so that the tool could be implemented. As a result, we also introduce the Continuous Improvement Wheel of EPP. As a pioneering study about the implementation of positive pedagogy in ECEC, the research has significance for ECE teacher training, not only in Finland but also internationally.

**Keywords:** early childhood education and care; Finland; positive pedagogy; survey.