

Building a positive learning environment through positive psychology

Teaching can be challenging. Staffroom pressures, difficult parents, and a heavy workload of marking can all feel overwhelming. Not to mention students, who might be disengaged or presenting challenging behaviours. As a teacher, it can be difficult to know where to begin if you want to build your class into a positive learning environment.

Research shows that one of the most powerful ways to build a positive learning environment is through positive psychology. The PERMA model, created by Martin Seligman, is one practical way to explore, explain and practise positive psychology. But what does 'positive psychology' mean, and how can you focus on it in the classroom?

This will help you to:

- understand the overall principles involved in positive psychology through Martin Seligman's 5 elements of PERMA.

What is positive psychology?

You've probably already heard of positive psychology. Traditional approaches to psychology focus on fixing life's problems. But instead of trying to fix specific problems, positive psychology aims to build strengths so that we can cope better with life's challenges. Some of the strengths that positive psychology focuses on include:

- Inspiration
- Resilience
- Gratitude

Positive psychology isn't about feeling happy all the time. It's about recognising that we all have strengths we can build on.

Is positive psychology important for students?

Students bring all of life's ups and downs with them into the classroom, and in some cases this can lead to poor focus and disengagement. A learning environment that uses positive psychology focuses on giving all students a chance to build their resilience and learn to cope with and manage challenging situations.

Positive psychology in the classroom can also have practical benefits. Students who feel supported and engaged will be more focused in class, will connect better with their teachers and classmates, and will achieve better academic outcomes.

What does positive psychology look like in the classroom?

This varies for each classroom environment, but a positive classroom environment will have the following characteristics:

a safe, welcoming atmosphere a sense of belonging among students trust between students and the teacher willingness in students to ask questions, participate and take risks clear expectations, and fair and honest feedback, from the teacher.

How do I bring this to life in my classroom?

There are lots of tools and activities you can use to bring positive psychology into the classroom. The PERMA framework is a great place to start, as it looks to the key elements of positive psychology as outlined below:

- **Positive emotions:** students can focus on things that make them feel good, like being recognised for quality work or having the chance to help a classmate.
- **Engagement:** students feel absorbed by their work because they find it challenging but achievable, and it explores new ideas in interesting ways.
- **Relationships:** students feel able to build strong connections with you, and with other students, through feedback and activities.
- **Meaning:** students understand the purpose of their work and why it's important for them to learn.
- **Achievement:** students receive encouraging and honest feedback on their work and feel a sense of accomplishment and success.

By focusing on each of these areas, you can build your classroom into a positive learning environment.

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