

# The Application of Positive Psychology in Primary and Secondary Classroom Teaching

Meie Zhu \*

Department of English, Jishou University, Hunan, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: 41997310@qq.com

**Abstract.** Positive psychology is the applied science that reveals human strengths and promotes their skills. Its main function is to use scientific methods to discover the power of positive mental strengths, and use these mental strengths to help ordinary people maximize their own potential to achieve happiness. Applying the positive psychology to education, positive education came into being. The fundamental goal of positive education is to promote flourishing or positive mental health within the school community. By advocating the positive education method adopted by teacher Marva Collins, this paper tries to find the potential positive strength of students in daily work, enhance their positive experience, and finally cultivate their positive personality.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychology, Positive Education, mental strength, positive personality.

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese society in transition is in urge need of positive psychology, which adopts scientific principles and methods to help people understand the meaning and value of life. It takes positive quality as the core of research and development, takes the inherent, actual and potential power of people as the starting point, advocates a positive attitude, and makes new interpretations of many psychological phenomena of people, being aimed to inspire inner positive strength [1]. Positive education is developed under the guidance of the concept and method of positive psychology, with curriculum intervention and daily behavior management as the main way to cultivate students' positive mental strengths, in order to shape children's active learning and continuing learning spirit [2]. positive education described by Green, Odes and Robinson (2011, p. 16) [3] as 'applied positive psychology in education', and Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) [4] further define positive education as an educational approach that fosters traditional academic skills and skills for happiness and wellbeing.

From the current research, positive psychology is a complete psychological research system involving people's personality, emotion and behavior. It has academic rigor and precision, but it involves less practical operation and application. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the positive education method adopted by teacher Marva Collins, trying to provide practical and operable teaching methods for primary and secondary education, and cultivate children who are energetic, optimistic and confident, to persist in reading and learning. [5]

## 2. The Connotation and Principle of Positive Education

Positive psychology is a new milestone in the development history of human society. Different from the traditional pathological model of psychology, it no longer focuses on the problems existing in people, but starts with the research of people's positive qualities and positive strengths [1]. It uses mature and effective measurement means and experimental methods to study the positive aspects of human advantages and virtues. Positive psychology emphasizes the development of positive personality traits. Positive human characteristics have two independent dimensions [6]: (1) PI (PI: positive individualism) refers to accepting oneself, having personal life goals, being able to face challenges, feeling the meaning of life, feeling independence, feeling success, and being able to grasp the environment. (2) PR (PR: positive relations with others) refers to be able to get support from

others when you need it, and being willing and able to help others when they need it. Positive personality traits can help people be more successful in all aspects of life[7].

## **2.1. The Connotation of Positive Education**

The study of positive psychology starts from happiness and takes "lifelong happiness" as the ultimate goal, which coincides with the ultimate goal of positive education[8]. True education should be selfless, should be based on the child, and should be for the well-being of the child as the ultimate goal. Marva Collins, a famous American educator, invented a set of positive and constructive teaching and learning methods based on this idea. She believes that the most important criterion for a teacher is to love children, to care for children's self-confidence and self-esteem with gentleness and patience, to explore children's strengths and fortes through careful observation day after day, and to encourage and praise to stimulate children's potential. Secondly, by leading children to read classic works such as Shakespeare's plays day after day, and discussing with them the values, morals and characters conveyed in the book in the form of questions and answers, children's life values can be imperceptibly shaped. Third, Give a realistic explanation of common sense, let the children face reality, take an example from the book: "children, you are foolish to spend school time clowning and grinning. teachers come in here wearing nice clothes, and they drive away from here in nice cars. They get all that from you, from the public paying their salaries. You pay them to teach. If you just sit there grinning and not learning, you are paying them for nothing." The reality of the explanation, often hit the heart, but she is full of love for all children, can teach them reality, but also believe that they will achieve.

With the teaching method she created, Marva Collins cultivated a large number of troubled students who were on the verge of dropping out of school into children who were confident, optimistic and curious about learning.

## **2.2. The Principle of Positive Education**

Encouraging children to be aware of their strengths helps them to develop more self-confidence and self-awareness. [9]. The goal of positive education is to reveal a combination of children's character strengths and develop their ability to effectively use those strengths[10]. Each child is smart and unique, and although their abilities are different, they can reach their full potential and become the best they can be with the right guidance. Teachers, as active educational practitioners, play an important role in guiding them to form a confident and optimistic character, and explaining to them how learning is closely related to life so that they can tap their maximum potential.

### **2.2.1. Building self-respect in students**

Education should build children's self-respect. Helping the students establish good self-respect is duty-bound for each educator. The cultivation of self-respect should give due emphasis in school, which will promote the cultivation of student's sense of innovation and their all round development. Marva concerns everything about the child: grooming, attitudes, manners. She believes that "teachers should promote children's character development and help them build a positive self-image." She always made sure the students' faces were clean, their hair combed, clothes clean and decent. She tells them to walk with their heads and their shoulders back up to have dignity and confidence. She also cautions them that a person's view of themselves can determine their destiny. She asks all students to set themselves a high standard regardless of their ability level. While being strict with them, she does not hesitate to express her love for them and strives to create an atmosphere of love and inclusion.

Teachers always guide students to maintain a dignified and confident personal image, which is very helpful for the shaping of students' character, but the interpretation of this guidance is also very important, if only emphasize discipline and unity, this is the suppression of children's personality. Teachers should take the children as the center of everything, and emphasis that guidance is only to

help them build self-respect, continuously reminding students that they are special, intelligent, worthwhile individuals is a affective way to build self-respect in students.

### **2.2.2. Motivating self-confidence in students**

Positive psychology advocates to make a positive interpretation of the problems that individuals have, and enable individuals to gain positive meaning from it. Educating children is not to scold and correct children's misbehavior, but to guide children to find their own positive power, and consciously encourage and cultivate it, children can really overcome their shortcomings, and make progress. Marva believes that the most important thing is for children to learn to believe in themselves, believe that they are unique in this world, and believe in their own abilities. So she encourages students to always believe in themselves in the classroom.

When they misbehaved, their punishment was that they had to write down 100 reasons why they were so good that they didn't perform well, or how they were so great that they couldn't do what they were doing. Like I'm cute, I'm pretty, I'm brave, I'm a kind person, I'm important..... If they misbehave again, they have to use another synonym and cannot use a word that has already been used before. The older children would tell the new error-maker, "I don't know why you're naughty. I'm tired of telling Miss Collins how great I am."

There are always times when children behave badly, classmates argue and even fight, homework is not finished on time, and they are late for school..... These can become an opportunity for children to learn to affirm themselves, if children write reviews, punishment stations, and even corporal punishment, accompanied by a sense of shame, children will not like this feeling, but sometimes mistakes just mean that they need to grow up, which is the inevitable process of growth, if children understand that mistakes are just the beginning of learning, calm face, And the courage to affirm their own advantages, every child can grow through mistakes, and can grow up believing in themselves.

### **2.2.3. Developing character strengths in student**

There are many things in life that we can't control. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose where we are born or our family background. We do not choose our talents and intelligence. But we can choose our character and who we are. For example, in the face of difficulties, whether to face up or be timid, whether to take responsibility or shirk, whether to adhere to fairness and justice or to calm down..... In the age of information explosion, children are constantly exposed to a variety of information, and if we want to ensure that they can make ethical choices at all times, we must make good use of their time in school.

At present, schools emphasize reading classics, because they know that the highlights of classics can shape children's character, but most children have not understood the beauty of classics, if they only emphasize to read, many children will feel boring and can not read. The curriculum set by the school is mainly to cope with the exam, even the classics in the textbook, but also more emphasis on memorization, utilitarian is too strong, will weaken the enthusiasm of children to read the classics. Therefore, the school needs to set up a special classic reading course, the passionate and emotional teachers lead the children to read the classics, appreciate the classics, analyze the classics, and experience the perseverance of the characters, the brilliance of human nature, and the great love of mankind in the classics. Day in and day out, even though these tasks may seem useless now, they can shape the next generation with good behavior, passion and love.

## **2.3. Current Situation of Primary and Secondary Education and Demand Analysis of Positive Psychology**

In recent years, the government and the education department have carried out continuous reform and exploration on educational policy and educational screening, although some achievements have been made. But from the current point of view, there are still many problems in primary and secondary education.

### **2.3.1. Rigid Education**

Education is more than the accumulation of knowledge, just as history is more than the descriptions of times, people, and events in history books. The essence of education should not be rote learning. In so many years of education, what we remember is the idea, the event, the formula, the sermon, the norm, the model, such education is rigid education, is dogmatic education. True education requires psychological engagement, putting its own stamp on knowledge, thinking, imagining, describing, communicating, communicating, and experiencing. The knowledge learned in this way is their own, and such knowledge is vivid, human, and memorable. However, the child's idea is not valued in the cramming education, in the classroom more requirements are quiet listening, concentrate on taking notes, even if there is a chance to answer, it is also the standard answer.

After class, the children have been asked to stay in the classroom quietly, do not run and jump, in case of accidents. Even back home, the idea now is to prepare a quiet environment for the children to study. Over time, those children who used to ask countless why in kindergarten, as they grow older, become more and more quiet, less and less of their own ideas, and lose their curiosity about the things around them.

To change education, teachers need to adapt teaching methods so that all children can express their opinions, communicate their ideas, show their imagination, and experience the infinite possibilities of difference.

### **2.3.2. Narrow education**

Traditional Chinese education holds that a person only needs to be capable and diligent, but ignores normal emotional needs. In order to motivate children to study hard, teachers sometimes unconsciously use some evaluation and encouragement methods that will hurt children's self-esteem. When a child fails a test, some teachers or parents will turn their anxiety, worry, anger into unhealthy subjective assumptions about the child's character state, while some children's academic level is not ideal, they need more suitable help, but sometimes simply defined as low intelligence.

Now our students come out of school capable, but not necessarily likeable. But in the 21st century era of teamwork, it is absolutely essential to have emotional resonance, empathy, to appreciate others, to be good at infecting and inspiring others, to be positive and optimistic, to find a sense of meaning and happiness in your own life.

### **2.3.3. One-sided education**

Education should also show children the whole world. Nowadays textbooks mainly preach virtue and dedication to children, which is too one-sided. Life is not perfect. We all have to deal with life and death, injustice and deception. Don't be afraid to show your children the dark side of life, but guide them to find resilience and perseverance in the dark.

### **2.3.4. Lacking creativity in Education**

The advantage of Chinese education is that the overall level of students is relatively high, but the weakness of Chinese education is that there are too few creative talents.

Creative thinking first comes from knowledge, which is not the key concept and formula in exam-oriented education, but interdisciplinary knowledge, cross-domain knowledge and cross-boundary knowledge. The second source of creative thinking is curiosity and imagination. It is undeniable that children's curiosity and imagination are particularly strong, but the longer the years of education, although the knowledge increases, the more conceptual formulas to master, but the children's curiosity and imagination are retained less and less. The fundamental reason is the knowledge structure of our education system.

The purpose of education should not be just high scores. Now many main subjects often occupy the hours of auxiliary subjects, this situation is more serious after the exam. Some auxiliary subjects such as psychology, physiology, science, etc. are in a state of dispensation.

Our students are too limited to professional knowledge, lack of interdisciplinary, cross-field, cross-boundary knowledge, when the only purpose of students learning is to achieve good grades, when the

only goal of teachers teaching is to teach standard answers, and eager for quick success and short-term results, then it is likely to lead to children's curiosity and imagination are more systematic and more completely stifled.

### **2.3.5. Cell Phones Hazard**

In addition, this is the era of big data, the era of mobile phones. Many kids check their phones when they go to bed, when they get up, or even when they play. One study found that more than 60% of people spend more time on their phones each day than they study, more time than they play, and more time than they interact with people. This not only leads to a lack of communication between people, but also diminishes the sense of accomplishment and meaning they can experience in learning. The emotional resonance, mutual appreciation and vivid expression that people need to communicate with each other will also be lost in the virtual space of mobile phones.

## **3. How to apply positive psychology in primary and secondary education**

Positive psychology focuses on human positive characteristics and helps people develop their potential, bring out their strengths, and improve their happiness. The goal of positive psychology is to help individuals and societies thrive by studying and implementing hope, optimism, and resilience, engagement, achievement [11, 12].

Positive psychology has carried out a large number of empirical studies in the field of education and has achieved certain research results [13, 14, 15]. I believe these studies can prompt educators to re-examine and reflect on education. The concept of positive education, based on positive psychology, focuses not only on traditional academic achievement, but also on the ability to make children happy and flourish [2]. This paper carries out the theory of positive psychology and positive education from these two aspects of teachers' attitude, teaching strategy, aiming at promoting the improvement of classroom teaching effect in primary and secondary education.

### **3.1. Teachers' emotional attitude**

#### **3.1.1. Loving, passionate.**

In the past, when you failed college entrance exams, you could choose to enroll in a normal college with a low score and become a teacher after graduation. Or if you are not a graduate of a normal college and have encountered obstacles in employment, you can become a teacher with academic certificate.

The situation has improved, but not enough. Because what children really need is one who is full of love for children, is willing to devote time to children, and has the passion to learn how to be a teacher that truly benefits children. According to Marva Collins, love for children is the most important criterion to become a teacher, compared with professional knowledge and teaching experience. Children need teachers who understand them, who are sensitive to their needs and interests. Every child is unique, their interests are different, and they need different guidance in school and life. They crave gentle, patient guidance and proper guidance from their teachers.

Especially for young children, the accumulation of basic knowledge day after day, such as phonetic symbols, words and so on itself is quite boring, need teachers have passion to teach, in order to lead children to have passion to learn. A teacher can't do this without love for children.

#### **3.1.2. Positive attitude**

For a long time, because of the utilitarian and social needs, education has given scores too much value and significance. We are obsessed with rankings, with percentages, which makes teachers and parents vulnerable to children's mistakes. When the teacher corrects homework or papers, the bright and striking fork can not actually spur the child, on the contrary, it is harmful to the child's self-esteem. The analysis and comparison of parents in the face of their children's missing grades does not motivate children, but rather damages children's curiosity for learning.

Marva Collins believes that every child has the potential to learn. Adults should have a positive attitude towards the child, create a positive atmosphere, when the child does something wrong, do not simply draw a cross or write negative comments on the paper, and do not correct him in front of other children, which will hurt his self-esteem, but should take the child aside and help him do it right. We should all remember that if the child knows how to do it properly, he will do it in the first place. So that treating mistakes, don't ridicule, don't criticize, just like two sides of the coin, the other side of the mistake is success, tell children, "Don't ever be afraid of making a mistake, if you can't make a mistake, you can't make anything." These methods of protecting children's self-esteem teaches them that mistakes are the beginning of learning.

Furthermore, it is very important to understand the child, accept the child, and guide the child to understand and accept their own emotions, and strive to face their situation with positive emotions. Positive emotions play an important role in the learning process. When people have negative emotions, they will be unhappy and weak, heavy walking, but when they have positive emotions, they will feel full of vitality, and be willing to explore. Guide children to study with positive emotions, weaken children's shortcomings, and emphasize each child's strengths. As Marva Collins says: "school can teach you how to lead a good life, we all come here to make life better. and the knowledge you put in your heads is going to save you."

### **3.2. Teachers' teaching strategies**

#### **3.2.1. The Pygmalion effect**

The importance of teacher attitudes and expectations to student learning has been demonstrated in many studies [16,17,18,19,20]. A majority of the research comes from the United States [21,22,23,24,25,26], some studies have also been conducted in Europe [27,28,29,30,31,32]. One of the most influential experiments was the experiment "Pygmalion in the Classroom" by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968)[33]. Despite significant methodological differences, most studies have found support for the impact of teachers who have high expectations for all students are more effective in teaching [34].

In fact, every child wants to be recognized and to succeed. Education should teach children to believe in themselves, to believe that they are unique in this world, and to believe in their own abilities. Everyone's ability is different, as long as the right guide everyone can explore their own maximum potential, find their own position. Teachers play an important role as active educational practitioners, if the teacher can believe them from the heart, and combine their own characteristics with different ways to give expectations and encouragement, and constantly affirm their advantages, the children can also strongly feel the love and expectation from the teacher, become more confident, and thus have made extraordinary progress in all aspects. Thus, never be hesitate to Convince children "you can do it", there wasn't anything they could not do. At the same time, teachers' positive and sincere attitude towards children will also be learned by children and returned to classmates and society around them.

#### **3.2.2. Focusing on teaching according to student's ability**

Positive psychology assists us to recognize that we may be stronger in some areas and weaker in others, and Positive psychology does not view weaknesses as 'unfixable' areas, and we can work to improve it, meanwhile understanding our strengths allows us to further navigate our understanding of ourselves and achieve goals[35,36]. Applied to education, teachers guide children to explore and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, and when they talk about themselves in a positive way, acknowledging their strengths and not avoiding their weaknesses, this will create a mutually supportive classroom atmosphere.

Whether it is homework or a size test, if the child is capable enough, he will do the best he can do; if he can not do it, it must be that he lacks ability and needs help. Each child's weakness is different, this needs the teacher to find carefully, simply standing in front of the podium to lecture can't find, the teacher needs to approach each child, find their mistakes in time, and timely correction. Because

if the mistakes are not corrected in time, they will continue to add up, causing the child's academic level to be pulled down. Approaching each child, we will find that their weaknesses are different, so we need to give them more targeted homework and find more suitable learning methods to guide them. Of course, at the same time, we can also find each child's expertise, good guidance, can give play to children's greater potential. Set different goals for each child that match their ability and help them achieve their goals. When the goals are achieved, invite all children to share the joy together, thus promoting mutual appreciation and encouragement among classmates. All these jobs require teachers to pay a lot of time and energy. Therefore, teachers are a difficult profession. Only with enthusiasm for teaching can they become outstanding teachers.

### **3.2.3. Cultivating Critical and creative thinking in students**

In recent years, a large number of questionnaires or group tests conducted according to "the Chinese Primary and Secondary School Students' Positive Psychology Scale" show that primary and secondary school students generally lack creativity and leadership [37,38,39]. Children do not lack basic knowledge, but lack the ability to ask questions, and lack curiosity and imagination.

#### **3.2.3.1. Cultivating Critical thinking in students**

Chinese education is too simple to equate education with knowledge, the main duty of students is to learn knowledge, and the duty of teachers is to teach standard answers.

Marva Collins advocated the dialectical method of Socrates in reading fairy tales and classic literary books, and conducted in-depth research and questioning of the ideas in the books through gradual questioning and answering, thus stimulating critical thinking. In the process of reading, Marva will ask students to read aloud first, so as to inspire them to dare to question, and then ask them what the book is about. From the story plot to the characters, Marva will guide the children to think about a series of questions and answer them. There is no standard answer to any question. Practice to stimulate thought and imagination. Finally, students are required to write daily comments about the author or the characters in the book, which aims to train students to ask questions correctly on a topic, find strong arguments, express their opinions clearly and effectively, and be able to objectively evaluate the opinions of others, and ultimately develop students' critical thinking.

Furthermore, encouraging children to question, and to develop leadership in children, don't be afraid to tell them, "you must never be afraid to tell a teacher if she is wrong."

#### **3.2.3.2. Cultivating Creative thinking in students**

To consciously protect the curiosity of students, stimulate the imagination of students. Curiosity is a stronger driver of innovation than material and spiritual motivation. To give students sufficient imagination space, do not easily crack down on the current norms do not meet the "wild imagination". At the same time, it is necessary to change the knowledge structure of students, increase students' interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, and enable students to integrate the knowledge of different disciplines and fields.

In addition, the whole society should overcome the short-term utilitarianism of quick success, the mentality of eager success, and the values of success and failure, which lead to plagiarism and copying, and it is unlikely that there will be real innovation, let alone disruptive innovation and revolutionary innovation. Focus on children's future, encourage children to pursue the truth, to change the world. Now is the era of artificial intelligence, but human creative work is artificial intelligence can not replace. Therefore, in the face of the rapid development of artificial intelligence, our education must be adjusted, and the direction of efforts is clear, that is, the people we educate must do what the machine cannot do, that is creative things.

### **3.2.4. Advancing with The Times and Remaining true to the original aspiration**

In order to enable students to adapt to the changing needs of the future society, teachers should take the initiative to adapt to the new technological changes such as information technology, digital technology and artificial intelligence, integrate innovative ways into daily teaching, display teaching content vividly with the help of diversified and novel technical equipment, integrate updated and

richer online teaching resources for students, and focus on increasing the richness of curriculum structure design. Let the curriculum iteration keep pace with The Times. Now, we see that more and more artificial intelligence education is appearing in primary and secondary school classrooms; Set up special courses to encourage children to explore; Linkage with science and technology museum, vivid science and technology of cutting-edge.... The "open way" of basic education curriculum is increasingly rich, which can not only light up children's curiosity, but also stimulate imagination.

However, the rapid development of science and technology brings opportunities as well as challenges to children, but positive education always focuses on children's mental health. Teachers should pay attention to the communication with students, adopt more heuristic, interactive and inquiry teaching methods, Effective teachers form authentic, caring relationships with their students through instructional communication. Teaching and learning cannot occur without communication. Technology definitely supports better learning opportunities such as internet resources and availability of mobile computers; however, excessive or problematic technology use can have negative impacts on study-related activities. While teachers refer to smart phones, computers and other electronic products to assist teaching, they should also strengthen the publicity and education of children's scientific use of electronic products to help children develop good habits.

#### 4. Summary

The profession of teacher is sacred, and teacher is the profession that creates all professions. Without good teachers, there would be no scientists, politicians, engineers, doctors, writers and artists. Teachers are the foundation of a good education system, especially for primary and secondary education. There is no point in trying to reduce the difficulty of teaching and underestimating the ability of children, which will only lag behind their academic achievement. According to the positive education practiced by teacher Marva Collins, teachers should be strict with children and believe in each child at the same time, always express their love for children, and find ways to assign difficult challenges to children, and also help them overcome difficulties and find ways to cope with the challenges, and keep the passion and patience for teaching at all times. With passion to awaken passion, motivate children, encourage them to follow their dreams, teachers should also continue to learn, adapt to the changes of The Times, find a more suitable teaching method for today's children. The future of a country is in the hands of the children, the teachers lay the foundation for the children's future life, and the children's future lays the foundation for the society and the country.

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