

Preface

Positive psychology, a fairly new branch of general psychology, is just over 20 years old. However, not much has been done in terms of its application in teaching and learning second/foreign languages. Positive psychology, first the movement and now a legitimate branch of psychology (to be distinguished from self-help and pop psychology), derives from the humanistic approaches of, among others, Abraham Maslow and Jeremy Bruner, and Gertrude Moskowitz in second/foreign language learning and teaching. Its main aim is to “to understand, test, discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive” (Sheldon, Frederikson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, & Haidt, 2000). In brief, positive psychology is interested in three main areas of study: the positive characteristics and traits of people (here: teachers and learners), positive emotions and feelings, and the role of contextual factors such as environment, and in particular, institutions (e.g., school) and their functions. Thus, positive psychology topics embrace the following areas of study and their applications: “flourishing, happiness & eudemonia, hope, gratitude, interest, joy, wellbeing, resiliency, hardiness, and the signature strengths of learners” (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2015, in press). So, in the case of positive psychology in SLA research, topics of research focus on positivity as expressed by affectivity in the processes involved, motivational and attitudinal factors, the strengths of teachers and learners as facilitative aspects of teaching/learning processes, as well as educational institutions and their functions enabling success, well-being, and development of both teachers and learners.

This collection of papers elaborates more thoroughly on the nature of positive psychology in various educational contexts. More precisely, it presents a multidimensional treatment of the issues concerned with foreign language learning and teaching, regarded from the perspective of positive psychology. The volume consists not only of chapters which are theoretical and others which present empirical studies but also ones which offer practical advice in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages, which draw upon what positive psychology has on offer to both teachers and learners. Each of the chapters demonstrates that positive psychology can bring not only success in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of the well-being of teachers and learners as professionals and human beings.

The collection is structured around four main themes. The first part of the volume offers the readers an introduction to positive psychology principles in the context of second language acquisition by pioneers of research and its application in second/foreign language instruction contexts, Rebecca Oxford and Peter MacIntyre. It also presents a historical overview and a critical assessment of understanding of positive psychology concepts and possible misinterpretations of its principles in educational settings, which are discussed by Hanna Komorowska. In the second and the most extensive part of the book, the focus of the presented chapters is on the foreign language learner and the ways in which positive interventions based on positive psychology strategies can facilitate both language success and well-being (among others, Tammy Gregersen's and Liliana Piasecka's texts). This part of the book also elaborates on how positive emotions can foster achievements in a learner (among others, Ewa Guz and Małgorzata Tetiurka, Katarzyna Ożańska-Ponikwia's texts). Emphasis is also placed here on enabling institutions, and their role in developing a learning environment that promotes success and well-being (Danuta Gabryś-Barker's chapter). In the third part of the book, the studies presented look at FL teachers as professionals and human beings, trying to demonstrate how positive psychology and positive affectivity can contribute not only to the development of their instructional competence but also to their happiness and satisfaction as teachers hoping to thrive as individuals (for example Sarah Mercer et al.'s study). In the final part of this volume the readers' attention is turned to one of the most significant and difficult-to-manage areas of the FL teaching process, that is, assessment of learner achievement. It is interesting to see how strategies of positive psychology can make this process less painful and perhaps even to some extent, enjoyable. Among others, Monika Kusiak-Pisowacka, Jan Zalewski, and Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel focus on these issues.

As editors of this collection, we hope on the one hand that it will provide readers with indispensable knowledge about positive psychology which will make them able to distinguish it from what is generally called self-help literature and, what is more, to see it as a discipline in its own right, with its own distinctive methodology and pedagogical applications. On the other hand, we believe that it will open new doors to innovative and creative methods and strategies in teaching foreign languages (and not only foreign languages), as has been demonstrated in the presented studies.

We also hope that this collection of papers by distinguished and perhaps less well-known scholars, all of whom believe in the impact of positive psychology on language success and in other educational contexts, will make us all more aware of the importance of paying attention to both the professional and the personal well-being of teachers and learners, the well-being of all of us involved in the process of educating others and therefore also educating ourselves.

It has been a real journey of discovery and thus an extremely enjoyable task to read and collate all the texts that make up this book.

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