

**A MATERIAL PACKAGE FOR SUPPORTING PUPILS'  
WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE  
WITH POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

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July 2021

# UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
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Title A material package for supporting pupils' willingness to communicate with positive psychology	
Subject Englannin kieli	Level Sivuainetutkielma
Month and year Heinäkuu 2021	Number of pages 20 + liite 14 sivua
<p>Luokkahuoneet ovat täynnä erilaisia oppijoita. Toiset tarttuvat innolla keskusteluharjoituksiin, kun taas toiset välttelevät vieraalla kielellä puhumista viimeiseen asti. Opettajan tuleekin keksiä keinoja rohkaista kaikki oppilaat osallistumaan keskusteluharjoituksiin omien kykyjensä mukaan. Turvallinen ja kannustava luokkahuoneilmapiiri tukee halua kommunikoida kohdekielellä.</p> <p>Tunteilla voi olla suuri vaikutus kieltenoppimiseen. Esimerkiksi kieliahdistus voi olla syynä sille, miksi motivoituneet oppilaat saattavat vältellä tietynlaisia harjoitteita, kuten keskustelutehtäviä. Esimerkiksi pelko ääntämisvirheistä ja opettajan antama korjaava palaute luokan edessä voi johtaa siihen, että oppilas ei mielellään osallistu kohdekielellä tapahtuviin keskustelutehtäviin.</p> <p>Positiivinen psykologia keskittyy heikkouksien sijaan vahvuuksiin ja siihen, mikä menee hyvin. Virheiden korjaamisen sijaan keskitytään rakentamaan oppilaiden positiivisia ominaisuuksia. Luonteenvahvuuksien tietoinen harjoittelu ja hyödyntäminen kieltenopiskelussa voi auttaa oppilaita esimerkiksi kieliahdistuksen käsittelyssä ja tukea oppimista.</p> <p>Materiaalipaketin tarkoituksena on antaa esimerkkejä tehtävistä, joiden avulla voi tukea oppilaiden halua kommunikoida kohdekielellä. Tehtävien lähtökohtana on positiivinen psykologia ja luonteenvahvuudet. Tehtävien laatimisessa on huomioitu erityisesti oppilaat, joita vieraalla kielellä kommunikointi voi syystä tai toisesta ahdistaa. Tehtäviin kuuluu olennaisena osana myös vertais- ja itsearviointi.</p>	
Keywords positive psychology, language anxiety, willingness to communicate, material package	
Depository University of Jyväskylä	
Additional information	

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

During my seven years as a language teacher, I have met many kinds of language learners. Pupils have different personality traits, skills and strengths. There are always pupils who are willing to communicate in a foreign language when they have the opportunity. On the other hand, there are always pupils who avoid these situations the best they can. Some pupils may even have language anxiety and for this reason avoid these situations. I have noticed that anxiety to use English in a classroom increases when pupils get older. This is something that happened to me as well as a language learner. When we had to talk in the classroom in a foreign language, I felt that everyone else could speak better. I began to overthink because I did not want to make any mistakes in grammar or in pronunciation. As a result, creating perfect sentences in my mind took so long that I did not have time to say anything. Now as a teacher, I notice the same phenomenon even though I do not require perfect sentences or pronunciation from my pupils. I try my best to encourage them to speak without thinking any mistakes they may make. The most important is to communicate in a way that one gets understood. Despite my efforts to find a solution, this has been a challenge that occurs constantly.

I teach pupils from 3rd to 9th grade, and I find the difference remarkable. From my point of view as a teacher, this anxiety or sudden shyness often occurs when pupils start the 7th grade. This is also the time of change since pupils usually get new teachers and classmates. Furthermore, this is also the time of puberty. Many pupils become more anxious to use the target language and argue that they cannot speak or write any English. This is a somewhat confusing phenomenon since the same pupils usually have used English quite successfully only a few months earlier. Moreover, this phenomenon usually tends to spread in the classroom. From teacher's point of view, they seem to have lost their courage to use English and have a lack of self-confidence. At this point, it is crucial that the teacher creates a supportive learning environment where everyone is allowed to try and make mistakes. Pupils need a lot of encouragement and activities that support their willingness to communicate in the target language without feeling anxious. For instance, Reardon, Leen-Feldner and Hayward

(2009) have reviewed the empirical literature on the relation between puberty and anxiety.

I got interested in positive psychology and pedagogy during my special education teacher studies and decided to learn more about the topic. I familiarised myself with the literature and it became clear to me that this is something I need in my work as a teacher. I also participated in a “Rakennetaan nuori vahvaksi” study unit organised by Finnish National Board of Education. This study unit focused on how to support and develop pupils’ strengths in learning instead of focusing on difficulties or challenges they might have. Positive pedagogy was something that I had already, unbeknownst to me, used as a part of my lessons. Moreover, I felt that this is something that I need to use more consciously and systematically.

The aim of positive psychology is to research what works well rather than focusing on weaknesses. Positive pedagogy, on the other hand, focuses on bringing out the best in every pupil. It includes encouraging, positive feedback and focusing on strengths. Positive pedagogy is also something that can easily be adapted in every school subject. Shortly, positive psychology is focused on positive emotions, positive character traits and institutions that enable individual to flourish (MacIntyre 2016: 3). The field of positive psychology investigates topics such as positive emotions, flow, the PERMA model and character strengths. These four contributions have also been applied to second language acquisition (SLA) research. Pioneer of the field of positive psychology is American psychologist Martin Seligman. Researchers in the field of positive psychology in SLA are e.g., Peter D. MacIntyre, Tammy Gregersen and Sarah Mercer. Topics of positive psychology has also been studied in Finland by e.g., Erja Sandberg, Eliisa Leskisenoja and Kaisa Vuorinen.

As I already work as a language teacher, I find it essential that my thesis would somehow support my work. The aim of this thesis is therefore to find tools for encouraging pupils to communicate in the target language by means of positive psychology. The idea of the material package is to have communicative activities that supports pupils’ willingness to communicate in the target language. The material package is designed to give teachers inspiration how to use positive psychology in language classrooms and how to modify activities to meet the needs of pupils who have language anxiety.

In chapter 2, I will concentrate on the field of positive psychology and its contributions in second language acquisition. I will then look more carefully at one of the contributions, which is character strengths. Moreover, I will discuss how character strengths can be adapted to language learning. In chapter 3, I examine how emotions can affect language learning. I also define two essential terms which are strongly associated with communication in a foreign language: willingness to communicate and language

anxiety. In chapter 4, I introduce the framework of the material package. Lastly, in chapter 5, I discuss the possibilities of the material package but also possible challenges it can cause. Moreover, I give ideas how language teachers can support willingness to communicate in a classroom and consider especially pupils with language anxiety. The material package can be found in the appendix.

## 2 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

### 2.1 Positive psychology in SLA

According to MacIntyre (2016: 4), the term positive psychology was first used by Abraham Maslow (1954), who considered the positive qualities that make humans successful, fulfilled, and self-actualised. Peterson (2006: 4) has defined positive psychology as “The scientific study of what goes right in life”, which, according to MacIntyre (2016: 4-5), seizes the two main elements of positive psychology. First, it is a study of what goes right or what is good in life. Second, it relies on a scientific perspective. Moreover, positive psychology does not rely on e.g., wishful thinking or self-deception but rather tries to “adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behaviour presents to those who wish to understand it in all its complexity” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: 7).

According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5), the aim of positive psychology is to change the focus of psychology from repairing the damages in life to building positive qualities. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5) explain that positive psychology therefore concentrates on valued subjective experiences, such as well-being, contentment in the past, optimism for the future and happiness in the present. Moreover, positive psychology focuses on positive individual traits, such as courage, interpersonal skill, perseverance, high talent and wisdom. In addition to the individual level, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5), positive psychology considers institutional level that focuses on moving individuals toward better citizenship and notices e.g., responsibility, tolerance and altruism.

As MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer (2019: 262) point out, languages are both taught and learned by people. People tend to have different kinds of hopes, fears, strengths

and limitations. Second language acquisition (SLA) is therefore strongly linked with psychology. However, psychology tends to highlight the problems the individual may have, such as depression, anxiety and personal disorders. Since 2000, according to MacIntyre et al. (2019: 262), research has found new topics such as happiness, well-being, empathy and resilience. Since language learning is, as MacIntyre et al. (2019: 262) point out, a long-term, gradual acquisition process that requires perseverance, optimism and resilience, these research topics are a welcome contribution to SLA studies and push the field forward.

The topics of positive psychology are not entirely new to SLA, but instead, there are “historical trends” in the SLA literature that build foundation to future studies (MacIntyre et al. 2019). Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 153) introduce potential contributions of positive psychology to second language acquisition, such as the role of attitudes in language learning (e.g. Gardner 1985), the role of emotions in language learning and the concept of an affective filter (Krashen 1985) and, moreover, studies of the good language learner (e.g. Naiman 1978). Since positive classroom dynamics among pupils and teacher can have a crucial influence on how pupils communicate in the classroom, Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 156) suggest that the role strengths could also be a valuable addition to current perspectives on language learning processes and contexts.

MacIntyre (2016: 5) points out that positive psychology serves an umbrella term for a wide variety of research topics and there have been several significant contributions made within positive psychology. MacIntyre (2016: 5) introduces four key contributions of positive psychology that demonstrate the development of knowledge of the key concepts of positive psychology. These four contributions have also been applied to SLA research. First, MacIntyre (2016: 6) refers to Fredrickson’s (2001, 2013) theory of differentiating positive and negative emotions and how they tend to affect behaviour. For instance, anxiety is a negative emotion that is associated with fear and can produce avoidance behaviour, such as avoiding using the target language in the classroom. The second contribution of positive psychology to SLA, according to MacIntyre (2016: 7), is the model of character strengths (Peterson & Seligman 2004). The VIA inventory (VIA Institute 2015) of character strengths categorises a set of 6 broad virtues and 24 underlying character strengths. The inventory captures what goes right in individual’s life instead of focusing on what goes wrong. For instance, MacIntyre, Gregersen and Able (2015) have studied a strength-based approach as an intervention for anxiety of language learning. The third contribution of positive psychology which MacIntyre (2016: 9) introduces, is the PERMA model (Seligman 2011), which stands for Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning in life and Accomplishment. MacIntyre (2016: 8) refers e.g., to Helgesen’s (2016), who used the PERMA model in developing a classroom intervention where pupils express gratitude, give compliments and savour the good things that happen. The fourth contribution,



according to MacIntyre (2016: 9-10), is the flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), which focuses on a state of positive well-being. MacIntyre (2016: 9-10) describes the state of flow as “a sweet spot where challenges and abilities come together harmoniously, creating a sense that one is fully enmeshed with the activity at hand”. Flow has not yet been studied widely in the field of SLA (MacIntyre 2016: 10).

The term positive education is used for illustrating the application of positive psychology in the school context (Leskisenoja and Sandberg 2019: 17). In Finland, term positive pedagogy is used as a synonym for positive education. Vuorinen, Erikivi and Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2018) explain that while positive psychology is aimed at researching what works well and is strong in every individual, positive education focuses on bringing out the best in every pupil. It is not only a question about improving weaknesses but rather paying attention to diverse skills that already work well. The aim of positive education is, according to Vuorinen et al. (2018), therefore to make strengths visible in every learner.

Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 156) point out that teachers usually are aware of how important it is to improve pupils' experiences of language learning. This can be done, according to Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 156), by developing and maintaining motivation, persistence, resilience and, moreover, positive emotions that support the long-term commitment of learning foreign languages. Furthermore, as Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 156) point out, teachers are aware of the importance of positive classroom dynamics, which includes the interaction between pupils and teachers. This is essential for creating a safe classroom environment, where pupils can communicate freely without pressure or anxiety. According to Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 156), it would be essential to study the role of strengths in school settings since classrooms provide a natural environment for expressing and developing strengths. However, as Vuorinen et al. (2018) point out, positive education interventions are not seen as "panacea for curing all that cannot be handled by the illness-focused 'traditional' approaches". It provides tools for recognising the whole potential in every pupil.

Positive psychology has also been criticised. Mercer and MacIntyre (2014: 160) refer to Lazarus (2003), who criticised e.g., tendency to treat emotion too simplistically as either positive or negative and inadequate measurement of emotions. According to Lazarus (2003, cited in MacIntyre 2014: 160), positive and negative emotions are inseparable and there is a positive side to negative emotions and vice versa (MacIntyre 2016: 12). In the case of SLA, language anxiety, such as anxiety to communicate in the target language, may be seen as a negative experience but can have a positive contribution to the present situation, such as asking for help. (MacIntyre 2016: 12.)

When it comes to language teaching, according to MacIntyre (2016: 17), implementing a research based positive psychology intervention as a part of in-classroom exercises might seem to be justified. However, as MacIntyre (2016: 17) points out, it would feel challenging to plan classroom activities that would support both individual learners and contexts. Because of the number of variables interacting among pupils and contexts, it would be impossible to predict the outcomes of activities. According to MacIntyre (2016: 17), there is a need for research data of classroom interventions that would employ the best available measures and, moreover, would be sensitive to both the contexts and individuals involved. Furthermore, as MacIntyre (2016: 17) suggests, there are cultural similarities and differences that should be considered in SLA interventions that are based on positive psychology, since culture and language are closely tied.

## 2.2 Character strengths

Need for understanding, treating and preventing psychological disorders has led to composing different kinds of classification manuals (Peterson & Seligman 2004: 3). Although these classifications have led to effective treatments, they also tend to focus on what is wrong in people. However, as Peterson and Seligman (2004: 4) point out, it is more essential to focus on the strengths of character rather than weaknesses. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe these character strengths by means of positive psychology. American psychologist Peterson and Seligman (2004) participated in Values In Action (VIA) project which aimed to find a way to help youth to realise their full potential. The meaning of the VIA project was to provide the conceptual and empirical means of describing positive youth development (Peterson 2006: 137-138). Peterson (2006: 138) argue that prior programs “lacked common ways of characterizing optimal development and agreed-upon strategies for assessing the effectiveness of their interventions”. Peterson and Seligman (2000: 5) aimed to describe what a good character means and how it can be measured. That is how VIA Classification of Character Strengths came into being.

The core of character strengths are virtues, which are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. Character strengths are, on the other hand, components of the six core virtues. (Peterson & Seligman 2004: 13). Peterson and Seligman (2004: 13) clarify that character strengths are “distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues”. Peterson and Seligman (2004) present a classification that includes 24 strengths or, in other words, positive traits. Peterson (2006: 142-145) summarises virtues in the following way. First, virtue of wisdom includes cognitive strengths that are related to the acquisition and use of information. *Creativity,*

*curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness and perspective* express this virtue. Second, virtue of courage contains strengths that help to accomplish goals even if there is external or internal opposition. *Authenticity, bravery, persistence and zest* belong to this virtue. Third, virtue of humanity entails strengths that are related to one-to-one relationships and exemplify positive interpersonal traits. *Kindness, love and social intelligence* are part of virtue of humanity. Fourth virtue is temperance, and it contains strengths that protect us from excess, such as hatred and arrogance. *Forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation* belong to virtue of temperance. Fifth, virtue of justice includes strengths that are broadly social and relevant to the optimal interaction between an individual and a group or a community. *Fairness, leadership and teamwork* belong to virtue of justice. Last, the sixth virtue is transcendence, which entails strengths that allow individuals to "forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning to their lives" (Peterson 2006: 145). *Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, humour and spirituality* are part of virtue of transcendence.

The core of VIA philosophy is to recognise character strengths of every individual, and this can be done by means of the VIA inventory (Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2014). Seligman and Peterson (2004: 627) developed self-report surveys which can be completed by respondents in a single session. Separate inventories have been composed for adults and for young people aged 10-17. The VIA survey of character strengths (viacharacter.org) provides analysis of respondent's best qualities, in other words, strengths. The survey gives information about respondent's five signature strengths of the 24 strengths. However, as Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2014) point out, the rest 19 strengths that are not identified as signature strengths, are not weaknesses either. Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2014) add that it is not possible to get a negative result from the survey. The survey does not provide analysis of weaknesses, it is only a question about strengths. Character strengths are not stable but instead, they can be developed and practised (Leskisenoja & Sandberg 2019: 26). However, it is also possible that character strengths weaken if they are not used and strengthened. Therefore, as Leskisenoja and Strandberg (2019: 26) argue, it is essential to treasure character strengths in childhood and youth in order to maintain them in the adulthood.

MacIntyre (2016: 10) points out that it is essential to understand how both positive and negative emotions affect language learning. Moreover, it is important to find out how to handle these emotions e.g., in the case of language anxiety. When it comes to character strengths in language learning, according to MacIntyre (2016: 11), it is important to understand the strengths and how individual learners can adapt their strengths to language learning. In order to raise awareness of personal strengths, the tools of positive psychology, such as the VIA (Values In Action) inventory, can be useful (Mercer & MacIntyre 2014: 161). Awareness of personal strengths helps to develop strategies for building on the strength in order to assist e.g., language learning. MacIntyre (2016:

11) argues that pupils would probably prefer using their signature strengths in new ways that facilitate learning rather than working primarily on remediating their weaknesses. Furthermore, as MacIntyre (2016:11) points out, in this way pupils are able to benefit from their individuality and, moreover, choose when to work on weaknesses.

Applications of positive psychology in SLA is nothing new anymore (e.g., MacIntyre et al. 2019). However, studies of utilising character strengths in language learning were surprisingly difficult to find. To name one, Piasecka (2016), has studied the use of character strengths in learning literary texts in foreign language. Her case study aimed to find pupils' opinions about the role of literary texts in foreign language learning and, moreover, to check whether working on poetry with a positive psychology activity reveals and supports participants character strengths. Piasecka (2016) also investigated, which character strengths pupils showed during the course. In this context, the shown strengths were strongly linked to self-efficacy and life satisfaction.

In Finland, Vuorinen et al. (2018) have studied the use of character strengths in classroom. The authors introduce a 16-week long positive education intervention which took place in 11 Finnish inclusive classrooms. Intervention focused on explicit teaching of strengths in character and their usage in order to promote social skills, well-being and learning skills. For instance, pupils were taught what character means and how one can improve upon it. The results of the study showed, for instance, that teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interaction was improved. Moreover, strength vocabulary and using positive, encouraging words became an important part of classroom communication. Results also showed that the intervention group of pupils with learning challenges seemed to benefit from the programme.

### 3 EMOTIONS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Emotions can have a significant role in language learning. Negative emotions, such as language anxiety, can affect willingness to communicate in the target language. Positive emotions, on the other hand, support language learning and using. In this chapter, I will define the terms *willingness to communicate* and *language anxiety*.

#### 3.1 Willingness to communicate

Willingness to communicate can be defined as “the probability of speaking when free to do so” (MacIntyre 2007: 564). When there is an opportunity to use the second language, some people choose to initiate communication at that particular moment whereas some people choose to remain silent. According to MacIntyre (2007: 564), this phenomenon can be conceptualised as a volitional process, when the speaker chooses freely whether to speak or not. There are various aspects that underlie communication at a particular moment, such as individual, social, linguistic and situational factors. (MacIntyre 2007: 564.)

According to MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément and Noels (1998: 546), willingness to communicate is basically seen as a personality trait. However, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 546) point out, in addition to trait-like variable there is also, for instance, a situational variable that has both transient and enduring influences. Willingness to communicate can change for example due to people in the situation, the formality of the situation or the topic of discussion. In some cases, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 546) point out, the even used language can change from mother tongue to foreign language. Regarding individual, social and situational factors, it could be argued that it is easier to communicate with people that one knows well, the situation is unformal and used language is one’s mother tongue.

As MacIntyre et al. (1998: 545) point out, willingness to communicate is not depended on the linguistic competence. There are pupils who are willing to communicate in a foreign language with only minimal linguistic knowledge when they have the opportunity, whereas some pupils with high linguistic competence avoid communicating in a foreign language in every situation. This is also a common phenomenon in language classes. Some pupils may avoid speaking aloud even though they have excellent language skills. Furthermore, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 545) point out, it is not only a question about younger language learners but also some adults with native-like language skills may avoid communication in foreign language in various situations.

In school settings, willingness to communicate is visible for example when teacher poses a question (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 549). MacIntyre et al. (1998: 549) explain that there are pupils who feel confident to answer and raise their hands to demonstrate that they are willing to speak. Although there is usually only one pupil who gets the opportunity to verbalise the answer, there are also other pupils who express willingness to communicate in a foreign language by raising their hands. In these cases, it is important to encourage pupils to raise their hands to answer or even allow other ways to show that they know the answer. It is essential that the situation will not increase pupils' state anxiety since, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 549) point out, it will also reduce one's self-confidence and therefore one's willingness to communicate. According to Baran-Łucarz (2014: 445), anxiety and foreign language self-confidence are strongly linked to willingness to communicate in a foreign language learning environment.

### **3.2 Language anxiety**

According to MacIntyre (2007: 565), language anxiety can cause a negative emotional reaction to foreign language use or learning. Language anxiety is therefore a significant concern for teachers, learners and educational leaders because it also influences the quality of teaching, learning and assessment (MacIntyre 2016: 8). Horwitz (2010: 154) points out that the concept of anxiety is multi-faced and it is possible to differentiate various types of anxiety, such as trait anxiety, state anxiety and achievement anxiety. Language anxiety is, according to Horwitz (2010: 154), categorised as a situation-specific anxiety. In other words, language anxiety is related to both individual's personality but also, for instance, to formality of the situation. Also MacIntyre (2007: 565) explains that language anxiety is linked to three conceptual levels: trait, situation-specific and state levels. In brief, typical patterns of behaviour occur in different times and situations. MacIntyre (2007: 565) also points out that language anxiety and its effect on language learning cannot be seen only at the level of a personality trait but

rather as “sensitive to fluctuation over short periods of time”. In other words, language anxiety can affect the willingness to communicate at various levels. Language anxiety can concern for instance listening, writing, reading, speaking and grammar (Baran-Łucarz 2014: 451).

Results of Dewaele’s (2007: 405-406) research suggest that language anxiety is “probably situated half-way between trait, situation-specific anxiety and state, more sensitive to environmental factors than personality traits and yet more stable than states since it remains relatively stable across languages”. Moreover, findings of the research show that language anxiety is somewhat lower in languages that are acquired earlier and the level of language anxiety is highest when talking in public, followed by talking to strangers. Language anxiety is lowest when a person is talking to friends in any known language. Baran-Łucarz (2014: 451) refers to studies (e.g. Horwitz et al 1986 and Phillips 1992) that have shown that the most anxiety-provoking skill is speaking, especially in front of the class.

MacIntyre, Gregersen and Abel (2015) suggest that language anxiety can be a reason why well motivated language learners may avoid participating in activities that might promote learning, such as interaction with native speakers. In other words, they are unwilling to communicate although they have the opportunity. MacIntyre et al. (2015) point out that the fear of negative evaluation is one of the reasons why anxiety is present in language classrooms. Negative evaluation can consider both other peoples’ opinions of the learner but also testing. MacIntyre et al. (2015) classify possible contributors to language classroom anxiety, such as fear of being laughed at, low self-esteem or personality traits such as shyness. Fear of errors in pronunciation or a poor-quality accent can also increase anxiety but also instructors who correct errors in an embarrassing way in front of other pupils. MacIntyre et al. (2015) suggest that positive psychology and developing character strengths, such as courage, could be an answer to language anxiety. MacIntyre et al. (2015) aim to explain in their article, how strength of courage can support willingness to communicate in the target language. Instead of focusing on anxious learner’s deficiencies positive psychology suggests concentrating on developing learner strengths. The authors introduce specific classroom activities that can be used as an intervention for developing language learner courage. These activities also raise awareness of character strengths of the virtue of courage.

Baran-Łucarz (2014: 445) points out that studies show that especially concern over pronunciation mistakes cause embarrassment and apprehension in foreign language pupils. This can be, according to Baran-Łucarz (2014: 445), a reason for why many post-puberty learners avoid participating in speaking tasks in the foreign language classroom. Baran-Łucarz (2014: 446) argues that most foreign language learners aim

to achieve a level in the target language that enables them to communicate freely with native and non-native speakers. This, on the other hand, requires systematic oral-communication practise. It is therefore essential that foreign language classes encourage pupils to participate in these activities. However, some pupils do not take the opportunity for oral exchange in the classroom. Baran-Łucarz (2014) reports the results of a study that showed that pronunciation anxiety is related to willingness to communicate. In the study, pronunciation anxiety is conceptualised as pronunciation self-perception, fear of negative evaluation, and beliefs concerning the pronunciation of the target language. The findings of Baran-Łucarz' (2014) study show that smaller groups are less anxiety generating and therefore would encourage pupils to initiate and participate in speaking tasks.



## 4 FRAMEWORK OF THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

### 4.1 Starting points

The national core curriculum for basic education (Finnish National Board of Education 2016) highlights that every pupil is unique. They are heard, valued and encouraged. Moreover, pupils feel that their learning and well-being matter. Teachers need to provide opportunities to develop their skills for both self-assessment and peer-assessment. In this way pupils learn how to give and receive constructive feedback. Furthermore, teachers guide pupils to recognise their own strengths and developmental needs. As Vuorinen et al. (2018) pointed out, the aim of positive education is to bring out the best in every pupil. Pupils have skills that work well and strengths that can be adapted in different contexts. Sometimes, pupils need support to make the strengths visible. From my point of view, positive education answers quite directly to the values of the curriculum.

The starting point of the material package is to focus on strengths, not weaknesses or mistakes. Developing individual's character strengths (Peterson & Seligman 2004) can be part of every school subject. Character strengths can be practised and developed and, as Leskisenoja and Sandberg (2019) pointed out, it is crucial to use and treasure character strengths already in childhood so that they do not weaken in youth or adulthood. According to MacIntyre (2016), awareness of personal strengths helps to understand how they can be adapted, for instance, to language learning. Both positive and negative emotions can affect language learning and awareness of strengths gives tools to handle these emotions, such as language anxiety.

This thesis with its material package gives tools for support pupils' willingness to communicate in classroom by means of positive psychology and character strengths. At the same time, the activities will raise pupils' awareness of their character strengths. When planning the activities, I have given a special attention for pupils who have language anxiety and may avoid speaking aloud in the classroom. The activities also consider the important role of positive classroom dynamics, such as giving positive feedback, which create a safe classroom environment where pupils have courage to communicate. Furthermore, the material package gives opportunities for pupils to develop their skills for both self-assessment and peer-assessment.

As said before, developing and practising character strengths can be part of every school subject. This material package, however, focuses on communication. I have therefore chosen to focus on eight character strengths which, in my opinion, are part of communication and support willingness to communicate. Moreover, developing these strengths hopefully reduce possible language anxiety concerning communication in a foreign language. The strengths I have chosen for the activities are *creativity, curiosity, love of learning, perspective, zest, persistence, social intelligence and teamwork*. Although these are the strengths the activities aim to develop, it is highly possible that pupils will develop other strengths during the activities as well.

## 4.2 Aims

I have noticed that pupils tend to get more sensitive in communicating in English when they get older. Many of them often say that they cannot communicate in English and do not trust their own language skills. This is the challenge that I aim to solve with my material. Aim is to encourage pupils to talk in the target language as much as possible. Practising communication in a safe classroom environment may even lead courage to communicate in a foreign language outside the classroom.

The main objective of my material package is to plan a set of activities that support pupils' willingness to communicate in foreign language, in this case, in English. The aim of the activities is to consider especially pupils with language anxiety. Furthermore, the aim is to raise every pupil's awareness of character strengths and how they can support language learning but also other school subjects. The activities also aim to develop the strengths that a pupil may have challenges with.

As MacIntyre (2016: 17) pointed out, it could be challenging to plan classroom activities that would support both individual learners and contexts because of the number of variables among them. Moreover, it would be, according to MacIntyre (2016: 17),

impossible to predict the outcomes of activities. This is a challenge that is important to recognise. Although the activities include particular strengths to practise, every pupil may also develop other strengths at the same time. These strengths do not have to be the same as the other classmates have either. The aim is that every individual can benefit from the activities even though they do not have language anxiety.

The challenge with planning the activities may also be that they can be easily used as a part of language lessons. The activities do not have to take the whole lesson but are rather smaller sets that can be done for instance at the beginning or the end of a lesson. These activities require that a teacher is somewhat aware of positive pedagogy and the aim of the activities. On the other hand, the activities are simple enough that every teacher could easily use them.

### **4.3 Target group**

The material package is aimed at teaching English for pupils from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades. However, the activities can easily be modified and utilised for language teaching at any level. I have chosen this particular target group since, as pointed out earlier, I have noticed as a teacher that some pupils start to be more anxious about pronunciation and communicative activities when they begin the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The reason may be new classmates, teachers, puberty or something else.

The role of the teacher in these activities is more as an advisor. Teacher's role is also to encourage pupils to communicate in English, develop the strengths and create a safe and encouraging learning situations where this is possible. The role of the learner is to be an active one, who aims to develop the needed language skills and strengths. The role of the material is a supportive one. The activities aim to help pupils to become more courageous to use the target language and support the strengths that they have or need to be developed.

### **4.4 Structure and content**

The content of the material package is a set of activities that support pupils' willingness to use the target language in the classroom by means of character strengths. However, the activities that support pupil's character strengths would be easily adapted to other school subjects as well. It is essential that the activities would be used by as many

teachers as possible. The aim of the material package is to give ideas how to practise and develop character strengths with different kinds of activities. The activities in the material package are quite common in language or other teaching materials but they are not directly from any English workbook. Different teaching materials have, however, worked as an inspiration for these activities. Moreover, the activities presented here are not complete but work rather as ideas that can be easily modified. I have used these communicative activities in my lessons but not as a part of developing character strengths this consciously. The activities give ideas how to modify similar classroom activities to answer to the needs of pupils who are unsecure with communicating in English and may have language anxiety.

The activities in the material package focus on small communicative activities where every pupil can participate the best they can. The aim is to get every pupil talk in the language classroom and hopefully outside the classroom as well. As the findings of Baran-Łucarz' (2014) study showed, smaller groups are less anxiety generating, and therefore I have decided to plan activities that can be done in pairs or in small groups. However, the activities can also be done in larger groups if the situation is suitable for it.

In the beginning, it is essential to raise pupils' awareness of their character strengths and therefore the first task could be the VIA inventory. In this way, pupils get information about their signature strengths and which strengths could be developed. Moreover, it is crucial that there is discussion about the meaning of different strengths and how the use of character strengths can support especially language learning and communicative situations in a foreign language. This also raises awareness of the character strengths. Each activity includes a suggestion of strength(s) that are practised by means of the activity. Some activities can be prepared as a homework but there are no completed discussion templates, such as A/B worksheets. The lengths of the activities vary and some of them may even take a 45 min lesson. My suggestion is that after every lesson pupil assess which strengths they have practised during the lesson. In addition to self-assessment, pupils give positive peer feedback at least to one classmate. The form of self-assessment can be written, e.g., own notebook or common whiteboard, where they can mark the strengths they have used. Peer feedback can also be either written or oral. It would be useful to have the strengths visible in the classroom. Pupils can, for instance, design a poster of the strengths on the wall.

Each activity includes an idea for a short warm-up question for discussion in pairs, instructions for the activity, suggested strengths to practise with the activity, possible requirements for the activity and a suggestion for the assessment. Furthermore, activities involve an extra tip for modifying the activity or suggestion if it is suitable as a homework. These activities can be done in any order. Aim of the activities is that it is

easy to choose any activity that fit best for the lesson. However, it is beneficial that these activities are done systematically. For instance, there could be at least a short communicative activity in every lesson. Moreover, character strengths and assessment could be part of every lesson. Although I have suggested strengths that are practised during the activities, pupils may probably practise other strengths as well. Reflecting the used strengths provide opportunities to practise assessment skills and learn how to give and receive constructive feedback. Positive feedback also creates an encouraging learning environment.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Inspiration for this thesis came from challenges that I continuously meet as language teacher and, moreover, as a language learner. The anxiety to use a foreign language in the classroom tend to increase when pupils get older. The fear of making mistakes in grammar or in pronunciation, or that teacher corrects errors in front of the other pupils, decreases willingness to communicate in the target language. The aim of this thesis was to find tools for supporting willingness to communicate in a language classroom and focus especially on pupils with language anxiety. People often tend to concentrate on mistakes. There is always something to improve. Positive psychology as a starting point brings therefore a welcome viewpoint to language learning. Positive psychology focuses on strengths and what goes well instead of weaknesses. This does not indicate, however, that learners could not develop and improve their strengths that are not that visible.

In this thesis I have examined how positive psychology and character strengths can support willingness to communicate in a foreign language. I have designed a material package with 10 communicative activities that aim to give ideas how to modify common activities to meet the needs of pupils with language anxiety. The main objective with the activities is to encourage every pupil to speak in the target language. Since the activities also raise the awareness of character strengths, it is also reasonable to use self- and peer-assessment for recognising one's strengths and developmental needs. This also gives pupils tools for practising both giving and receiving constructive feedback. Furthermore, the role of safe learning environment cannot be emphasised enough. Focusing on strengths has an essential role in creating positive and supportive classroom, where everyone has courage to speak.

Although I have used these activities in my lessons, raising pupils' awareness of character strengths has not been a conscious part of these lessons. For this reason, I look forward having the opportunity to try the activities from a fresh viewpoint and find

out if my pupils become even more inspired of them. Moreover, it is exciting to examine how long it takes from pupils to start utilising the strengths themselves as a part of their learning. Furthermore, giving and receiving feedback can be challenging at first but also I assume that this will also improve in time. In my opinion, conscious use of character strengths and assessment could be part of every language lesson and, moreover, part of every school subject. Although positive psychology is the starting point of the material package, it is also possible that not everyone gets excited of utilising character strengths. It is therefore crucial that teacher can explain the role of character strengths in learning. The teacher has also an important role in creating a positive learning environment where pupils encourage each other. Furthermore, it is essential to remember that teacher is a role model for the pupils.

As said before, this material package with its activities has only partly been tested. Moreover, the activities are only examples and gives ideas how to modify similar activities in order to increase pupils' willingness to communicate and, moreover, support pupils with language anxiety. For these reasons, the material package provides interesting possibilities for further development. To conclude, I have written a list of suggestions how teacher can support willingness to communicate in a classroom considering especially pupils with language anxiety.

- ◆ Create a safe and encouraging learning environment.
- ◆ Prefer discussion in pairs or in small groups
- ◆ Practise oral communication often. Activities do not have to take a lot of time
- ◆ Use various activities for oral communication
- ◆ Remind that it is OK to make mistakes, language does not have to be native-like
- ◆ Do not correct pupil's pronunciation in front of the whole class
- ◆ Practise different character strengths
- ◆ Use self- and peer assessment
- ◆ Concentrate on pupils' strengths, not weaknesses
- ◆ Give positive and constructive feedback as often as possible
- ◆ Treat pupils as individuals
- ◆ Be a good example for your pupils! Allow yourself to make mistakes!

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1**

*YES, YOU CAN!*  
**A MATERIAL PACKAGE FOR SUPPORTING PUPILS'  
WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE WITH  
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

## FOREWORD

Welcome to use a material package that utilises positive psychology and character strengths in language learning. The aim of positive psychology is to research what works well rather than focusing on weaknesses. Positive education, on the other hand, focuses on bringing out the best in every pupil. Language teacher meets pupils who have different personality traits, skills and strengths. There are always pupils who are willing to communicate in a foreign language, when they have the opportunity. However, there are also pupils, who avoid these situations the best they can. Some pupils may even have language anxiety and, for this reason, avoids these situations. The aim of this material package is to give ideas for supporting pupils' willingness to communicate in classroom by means of positive psychology and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman 2004).

The material package is aimed at teaching English for pupils from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades. However, the activities can easily be modified and utilised for language teaching at any level. When planning the activities, I have given a special attention for pupils who have language anxiety and may avoid speaking aloud in the classroom. The activities also consider the important role of positive classroom dynamics which creates a safe classroom environment where pupils have courage to communicate. Furthermore, the material package gives opportunities for pupils to develop their skills for both self-assessment and peer-assessment.






The starting point of the material package is positive psychology and characters strengths. I have chosen eight character strengths as the basis of the activities. These strengths, in my opinion, are part of communication and support willingness to communicate. The character strengths are *creativity, curiosity, love of learning, perspective, zest, persistence, social intelligence and teamwork*. For getting familiar with character strengths, I suggest completing the VIA inventory ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)) to find information about own strengths. In addition to communicative skills, the activities in the material package raise pupils' awareness of their character strengths and how to utilise them in learning.

The material package includes 10 communicative activities. Each activity includes an idea for a short warm-up question for discussion in pairs, instructions for the activity, suggested strengths to practise with the activity, possible requirements for the activity and a suggestion for the assessment. Furthermore, activities involve an extra tip for modifying the activity or suggestion if it is suitable as a homework. I have given a suggestion for the duration of the activities. However, the duration depends on the group size, possible time limits or if pupils have prepared for the activity at home. One activity can therefore take even the whole 45 min lesson. These activities can be done in any order and the idea is that it is easy to look for a suitable activity for the class. Aim of these activities is simple: to use English as much as possible.

Thank you and enjoy!

*Anna*







Each activity is constructed as follows and described in symbols:

	Strengths to practise
	Instructions for the activity
	Possible requirements for the activity
	Assessment
	An extra tip for modification







## CONTENTS

<b>Activity 1: An Interview</b>	Curiosity, social intelligence, zest
<b>Activity 2: Draw and tell</b>	Creativity, persistence, zest
<b>Activity 3: What has happened?</b>	Creativity, perspective
<b>Activity 4: Packing for a trip</b>	Social intelligence, teamwork, perspective
<b>Activity 5: True or not?</b>	Curiosity, creativity, zest
<b>Activity 6: Story telling</b>	Creativity, teamwork
<b>Activity 7: Problem solving</b>	Perspective, creativity, persistence
<b>Activity 8: Whose holiday?</b>	Curiosity, creativity, teamwork
<b>Activity 9: New use for an object</b>	Creativity, love of learning
<b>Activity 10: Teaching others</b>	Creativity, zest, love of learning

## Activity 1: An Interview







	Curiosity, social intelligence, zest
	Warm-up question: How do you feel today?
	<p>-Pairs or small groups prepare questions for an interview. These questions can be simple, such as name, age, hobbies, interests etc. When the questions are ready, pupils go to interview at least two classmates. After listening to answers, the pupil who asks the questions uses positive reactions, such as “that is interesting, tell me more!”</p> <p>-Duration: c. 20 min</p>
	<p>-Examples of possible questions</p> <p>-The whole class can think how to react to answers in a positive way.</p>
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to ones you interviewed. What strengths did they use?</p>
	-Teacher / pupils can create different profiles and pupils can perform as someone else.

## Activity 2: Draw and tell







	Creativity, persistence, zest
	Warm-up question: When do you feel creative?
	-Pupils draw a picture about the given topic (room, nature etc.). After drawing, a pupil describes the drawing to a pair and the other one tries to draw a picture that is as similar as possible. It is possible to ask the pair to repeat. -Duration: c. 20 min
	-Pen and paper -Possible repetition of prepositions
	-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more? -Give peer feedback to classmate(s) you worked with. What strengths did they use? Say something positive about the given instructions for drawing.
	-Drawing a picture can be given as a homework for saving time in the classroom.









### Activity 3: What has happened?

	Creativity, perspective
	Warm-up question: What have you done today? What did you do at the weekend / yesterday?
	-Teacher shows a picture of an event. Pairs or small groups discuss what has happened just before the picture has been taken. What do (possible) people think or say? -Duration: c. 5-10 min
	-Picture about some kind of an event that can be described -Possible repetition of past tense / present perfect
	-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more? -Give peer feedback to pupil(s) you worked with. What strengths did they use?
	-Choose a picture of the topic you have been studying so that you can use the studied vocabulary.







#### Activity 4: Packing for a trip

	Social intelligence, teamwork, perspective
	Warm-up question: Where did you travel at the last time?
	<p>-You are travelling somewhere. Write down individually 10 items that you will need to pack with you. After that, make groups of four pupils. Tell your lists to the others. As a group, decide 10 items to pack together. After this, teacher tells that pupils have to reduce the items to five. When you have done it, groups will tell and reason why these items are the most important ones.</p> <p>-Duration: c. 20 min</p>
	-Think of possible place where you are going to travel. Is it a camp or desert island?
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to your group members. What strengths did they use?</p>
	-Groups can decide a leader, secretary and the one who tells the list to other







## Activity 5: True or not?

	Curiosity, creativity, zest
	Warm-up question: What are you good at? What makes you laugh?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Make up three claims or stories that has happened to you. Use stories that the rest of the class do not already know about you. Two stories are true and one is false. After this work in small groups. Others can ask such questions which can be answered yes/no to find out which story is false. You can decide the number of questions that are allowed.</li><li>-Duration: c. 20-30 min</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Teacher can give an own example before pupils start to write their stories / claims</li><li>-Possible repetition of making questions</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</li><li>-Give peer feedback to your group members. What strengths did they use?</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Stories / claims can be written as a homework</li></ul>







## Activity 6: Story telling

	Creativity, teamwork
	Warm-up question: What kinds of stories / movies do you like?
	<p>-Work in small groups. One pupil starts a story “Once upon a time there was...” and the next one continues at least with one sentence. This continues until time is up. The story can be funny and there can be surprising twists.</p> <p>-Duration: c. 15 min</p>
	-Decide the time limit that can be used for a story
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to your group members. What strengths did they use?</p>
	-Pupils can make a summary of their story and tell it to others.







## Activity 7: Problem solving

	Perspective, creativity, persistence
	Warm-up question: Have you had a situation when you did not know what to do?
	-You have ended up in a difficult situation. Ask advice from your classmates. What should you do and how? Work in pairs or small groups. -Duration: c. 10 min
	-Teacher or pupils makes up possible problems / difficult situations to solve.
	-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more? -Give peer feedback to your pair or group members. What strengths did they use?
	-Pupils can think possible problems to solve -Teacher can make up different kinds of roles for pupils to use in discussion, such as bossy, enthusiastic, shy... this can give an extra twist for problem solving!







## Activity 8: Whose holiday?

	Curiosity, perspective, teamwork
	Warm-up question: How does it feel to be back to school?
	<p>-Divide class in two groups. Every pupil writes down one thing they did during a holiday / weekend on a piece of paper. One group member collects the papers. One group at a time reads one paper aloud. The other group negotiates and tries to guess whose paper it is. If they guess correctly, they get a point. Teacher can count the points.</p> <p>-Duration: 30 min</p>
	-Pens and pieces of paper
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to one of your group members. What strengths did (s)he use?</p>
	-The topic can also be e.g. "whose thought?" or "Whose 'never have I ever'?"

## Activity 9: New use for an object

	Creativity, love of learning
	Warm-up question: What is this and what is it used for? (picture of a tool etc.)
	<p>-Pupils choose an object, such as pen, phone, key etc. and makes up a new use for it. Pupils tell about their objects and its use for at least one classmate. Classmate should make at least two questions about the object.</p> <p>-Duration: c. 10 min</p>
	-Teacher can give an example. For instance, "this may look like a key but it is not one. It is called _____ and it is used for _____."
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to classmate you worked with. What strengths did s(he) use?</p>
	-This is good to prepare as a homework

## Activity 10: Teaching others

	Creativity, zest, love of learning
	Warm-up question: When do you feel happy?
	<p>-Think about something that you can do well. It can be knitting a beanie, baking a cake, cycling etc. Think about instructions how you can advise others to do it. You can also write the instructions down but practise to tell the advice aloud. Work in pairs or in small groups.</p> <p>-Duration: c. 15 min</p>
	<p>-Teacher can give an example of something s(he) can do well. It is funnier if the teacher chooses something exceptional, such as making a sandwich etc.</p>
	<p>-What strengths did you use today? Think or write them down. Which strength would you like practise more?</p> <p>-Give peer feedback to classmate you worked with. What strengths did s(he) use?</p>
	<p>-This is good to prepare as a homework</p>