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Library SCEB Model: Advocating Positive Psychology Interventions in Library Settings (Full paper)

Abstract

Library SCEB is a model that reframes library practices by building on elements from prominent theories in the positive psychology movement. We assert that certain types of space redesign (*S*), collection building (*C*), innovative events and programming (*E*), and bibliotherapy (*B*) are closely aligned with Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs), which have been found experimentally to successfully improve subjective wellbeing (positive emotions, engagement, character strengths) in several disciplines, including education, health care, and organizational studies. We identify challenges with the *Library SCEB* efforts and recommend strategies for further integration of PPIs in the context of academic, public, and school librarianship.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs), Subjective Well-Being, Libraries

Introduction

Positive psychology can be defined as the study of conditions and processes that contribute to optimal flourishing of human beings (Noble & McGrath, 2015). Positive psychology emphasizes the cultivation of positive emotions, strengths, and conditions that make life most worth living and these can be powerful at times of change (Rimmer, 2024). This branch of psychology, founded by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, has influenced disciplines such as education, health care, neuroscience, and economics, inspiring professionals to apply its principles in their work (Donaldson & Ko, 2010; Meyers et al., 2013; Rusk & Waters, 2015). Positive education represents a movement that prioritizes the inclusion of positive psychology principles in educational settings with the aim of providing students and staff with relevant school and life skills for optimal flourishing. Positive education movement has two major overlapping areas of focus: preventing downward spirals by promoting resilience and the capacity to adapt to stressors and challenges; and promoting upward spirals by cultivating character strengths and capacities for creating and experiencing positive emotions, positive relationships, and meaning (Gomez-Baya & Gillham, 2019).

Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) are programs, practices, treatment methods, or intentional activities to cultivate positive feelings, behaviors, or cognition (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Growing evidence shows that PPIs can enhance positive emotions (Kraiss et al., 2023) and have been applied to educational settings with noticeable results on students and staff (Durlak et

al., 2011; Elfrink et al., 2017; Waters, 2011), as evidenced in positive education literature. The need for PPIs such as gratitude journaling (Kaczmarek et al., 2015), use of character strengths (Lai et al., 2018), and the Three Good Things interventions (Rippstein-Leuenberger et al., 2017) in libraries becomes evident as libraries' role has changed from a passive institution to an active one leading to the creation of new interactive services and activities (Bouaamri & Barátné Hajdu, 2024). Another role of libraries, especially in the post pandemic recovery, is serving as platforms for community engagement, fostering resilience, and mental health support, and for reducing social isolation (Karki et al., 2024). PPIs for improved well-being in academic, school, and public libraries can support responses to COVID-19 pandemic effects such as psychological distress and suboptimal subjective well-being of students and adults (Bjursell, 2020; Burns et al., 2020; Lopes & McKay, 2021; Patrick et al., 2020; Villani et al., 2021). Additionally, the rising demand for scholarly support and community wellbeing services from library staff could predispose them to burnout. Implementing these support services with the traditional library services underscores the need for PPIs which involves library staff, students and lifelong learners. Drawing on the values of PPIs as established in the extant literature, we proposed the SCEB Model as an innovative means by which libraries can improve the subjective well-being of students, lifelong learners and library staff using their existing services which are closely related to these psychological interventions.

Overview of Relevant Positive Psychology Theories and Frameworks

Using advanced search of academic literature in peer-reviewed journals, academic databases, and scholarly textbooks globally, we selected seven prominent theoretical frameworks from the seminal positive psychology literature based on the consequent reports of the empirical validation of the PPIs. We provide a brief account of their origins and evolution, observing key ideas and commonalities in their constituent elements (see Table 1 for a visual summary.)

Table 1: Positive Psychology Theories, Models, and Frameworks.

THEORIES & FRAMEWORKS	FLOW THEORY	VALUES IN ACTION (VIA) FRAMEWORK	BROADEN-AND-BUILD THEORY OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS	PERMA MODEL	PERMA-H MODEL	PROSPER FRAMEWORK	PERMA+4 FRAMEWORK
AUTHORS	Csikszentmihalyi (1990)	Peterson & Seligman (2004)	Fredrickson (2001; 2004)	(Seligman, 2011)	(Kern, 2022)	Noble & McGrath (2015)	Donaldson, Van Zyl & Donaldson, (2022)
ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration • Enjoyment • Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanity • Wisdom and Knowledge • Temperance • Transcendence • Justice • Courage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Emotions (joy, interest, contentment and love) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Emotions • Engagement • Relationships • Meanings • Accomplishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Emotions • Engagement • Relationships • Meanings • Accomplishment • Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positivity • Relationships • Outcomes • Strengths • Purpose • Engagement • Resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Emotions • Engagement • Relationships • Meanings • Accomplishment • Physical Health • Mindset • Environment • Economic security

Flow Theory: Developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1990, this theory states that when a person becomes engaged in an activity, harmful thoughts and other negative feelings are often ignored, leading them to be in a state of “flow”. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow

experiences involve being attentively absorbed and skillfully engaged in an activity that one finds valuable. Flow is a state of consciousness in which people are completely focused on an enjoyable activity (Bisutti, 2011).

Values in Action (VIA) Framework: These are groups of positive psychology character strengths developed by Peterson and Seligman in 2004. Character strengths are theorized to create the pathway through which core values become mundane behaviors, leading to positive social outcomes (Lavy & Benish-Weisman, 2021).

Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions: This theory describes the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment, and love. Developed by Fredrickson (2004), the basis of broaden-and-build theory is that individuals who engage in more positive thinking and behaviors are better able to adapt to their environments, elicit more fulfilling lives, engage in greater personal resource development, and that this engagement can enhance factors that would promote health longevity (Danilowski, 2015).

PERMA Model: Introduced by Seligman in 2011, the framework includes five core elements of psychological subjective well-being: *Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment*. A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that the PERMA model may be a robust framework for the measurement, management, and development of well-being (Donaldson et al., 2022).

PERMA-H Model: Advanced as an extension of Seligman's *PERMA*, the *PERMA-H* model adds the sixth explicit dimension of physical *Health* alongside affective, social, and psychological aspects of well-being (Morgan & Simmons, 2021). *PERMA-H* serves as a useful model for prioritizing well-being in schools (Kern, 2022). Like the *PERMA* model, *PERMA-H* has also been applied in positive education to test satisfaction of school life and character strengths among school students in Hong Kong (Lai et al., 2018) and to enhance well-being in physical education classes (Campoamor-Olegario et al., 2025).

PROSPER Framework: Noble and McGrath (2015) proposed the *PROSPER* (*Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement, and Resilience*) framework for positive education. With several similarities to Seligman's (2011) earlier *PERMA* model, the *PROSPER* framework of well-being includes two additional significant components: *Strengths* and *Resilience*.

PERMA+4 Framework: Donaldson, van Zyl, and Donaldson's (2022) *PERMA+4* framework extends *PERMA* to the organizational context. Using meta-analyses and systematic literature reviews, they proposed that *physical health, mindset, physical work environments, and economic security* can be seen as contextually relevant building blocks for work-related well-being within organizations.

Conceptual Framework

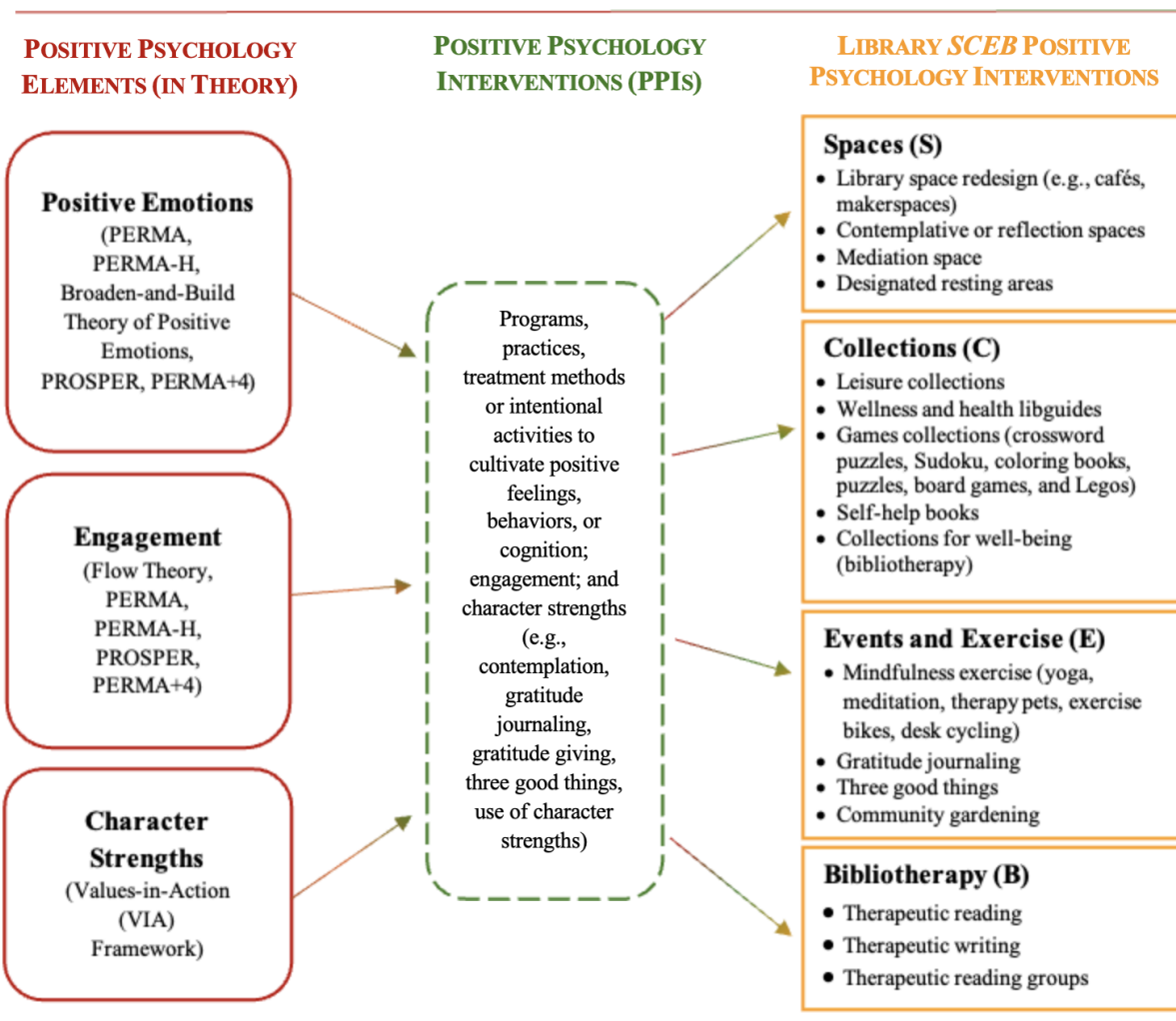


Figure 1. Library *SCEB* Model.

The conceptual model for positive psychology interventions (PPIs) in Library *SCEB* (*Spaces, Collections, Events & Exercise, and Bibliotherapy*) demonstrates the origins of the overlapping elements in positive psychology theory, leading to application of concrete PPIs that have either been implemented under different names and/or have the potential to increase subjective well-being (SWB) of patrons and staff in the library setting.

Based on the analysis of the above positive psychology theories, models, frameworks and their incrementally built-up components, we propose a conceptual framework highlighting the interrelationships that exist among them. Based on one of the seminal works in the field of positive psychology – Flow Theory, we draw a parallel between three characteristics of flow established by Csikszentmihalyi and engagement in the *PERMA* model and its extensions. Our insight in connecting these elements of flow to engagement is based on Seligman’s (2011) view that engagement is precisely about flow: being one with an activity, experiencing a sense of time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an activity. Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defined flow as a state in which people are so intensely involved in an activity, they find immensely enjoyable that they are not aware of anything else happening around them.

The intersection between the positive emotions of the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004) and the positive emotions elements of the *PERMA* model was also noted in our conceptual framework due to the importance of positive emotions in most well-being theories and studies (Kern et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2018; Leontopoulou, 2020). The character strengths of the *VIA* framework also serve as building blocks for *PROSPER* (Noble & McGrath, 2015) due to the presence of the *Strengths* and *Resilience*. The influence of the *PERMA* model on new models and frameworks such as the *PERMA-H* model, *PERMA+4* framework and the *PROSPER* framework is traced in our *Library SCEB* model (see Figure 1.) Drawing on our analysis of the interrelationships among the theories, models and frameworks above, we adopt positive emotions, engagement and character strengths, and examine how these elements are being used in PPIs for libraries.

Positive Psychology Interventions in Libraries

Our review of the extant Library and Information Science (LIS) literature reveals library initiatives, programming, and services that are similar to PPIs. In reframing these library practices in the SCEB Model, we aim to unify such efforts under the umbrella of psychological measures that have been extensively studied and purposefully tested in the field of positivity psychology as interventions (PPIs), though mostly outside of the LIS context.

Library Space (S) Redesign for Well-being

The library remains central to the university campus as a place to study and socialize, and as such students spend time in the library, especially at critical and stressful times such as exam periods (Brewster & Cox, 2022). Though libraries are established to provide information relevant to users’ needs, a constant bombardment of information could have detrimental effects on physical and mental health, especially on concentration, and ultimately on happiness (Powers, 2011). As they consider their role in fostering students’ well-being, libraries have been rethinking how their spaces are designed and used (Bladek, 2021). Phul et al. (2024) also highlight the importance of public library spaces in supporting community well-being by accommodating a wide range of reading resources and community events for social engagement. Due to the significance of space in enhancing students’ well-being, more academic libraries are making strategic upgrades inside

their physical space to accommodate the “whole” student (Ramsey & Aagard, 2018). Drawing from the Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), we explore studies on how libraries can increase engagement and reduce distraction of users through the design and redesign of their spaces.

Using insights from studies on the roles of space on moods and behaviours, Mathews and Soistmann (2016) noted that library buildings are entirely composed of programmable space that can be optimized for better experiences and behaviors. The authors further encourage librarians to function as choice architects in addition to being learning space managers, as the principles of interior design can improve mood. In a comprehensive review of well-being interventions in academic libraries, Bladdek (2021) noted that the growing interest in mindfulness practices, including meditation, and their proven contribution to overall well-being has led many libraries to designate spaces where users can pursue a wide range of contemplative activities. Wachter (2018) also reported the adoption of “reflection spaces,” which are newly allocated areas that include meditation, contemplation, non-denominational prayer, wellness rooms, and stress-free or relaxation zones in academic libraries. Pyati (2019) noted the important role that public libraries play in providing more affordable, equitable, and inclusive access to contemplative practices such as mediation and yoga classes through programming and provision of space. Merga (2021) explored the use of school libraries in three Western Australian schools and reported that school libraries are valued for their capacity to foster belonging and sanctuary, allow exposure to books and opportunities for reading, and provide a space for relaxing and recharging. The above findings have implications for the promotion of upward spirals among students and lifelong learners who interact with libraries.

Library Collections (C) for Well-being

Libraries also traditionally maintain collections of information resources on well-being topics and other leisure activities. Brewster and Cox (2022) identified the traditional roles of libraries in developing special library services to improve student well-being, such as special collections of leisure materials/self-help books, specially designed relaxing spaces or the provision of mental health information, such as a LibGuide to information about wellness. While their wellness and health collections provide access to information on health matters specifically, libraries have also sought to promote their leisure collections – and reading in general – as a relaxing and communal activity that fosters student well-being (Bladdek, 2021). Libraries also provide book suggestions for leisure and pleasure reading that can offer students relief from everyday stress and anxiety (Brookbank, 2023). Additionally, academic libraries have improved their physical collections by adding new items such as crossword puzzles, Sudoku, coloring books, puzzles, board games, and Legos to offer access to de-stressing activities to the communities they serve (Brewerton & Woolley, 2016; Nance, 2022).

Brookbank (2023) sampled 98 students from 10 U.S. and U.K. universities to collect qualitative interview data about students’ leisure reading habits and observe the patters of their use of the library leisure collections. The study found that undergraduates do read for leisure and want leisure

collections in their university libraries, even though they do not fully utilize such collections. The author therefore recommends promotion of leisure collections in academic libraries, and inclusion of services that are designed to tend to students' non-academic needs such as cafés, makerspaces, study breaks during finals, and therapy dogs, as this could encourage the use of leisure collections.

Events and Exercise (E) for Well-being

Finch, Iannetta, and Rutter (2022) explained the roles of events on physical and emotional well-being of people to include creating happiness and joy for those taking part in them as well as the short-term boosts to mood that one can get from attending. Grimes (2024) noted an increase in innovative programs and community partnership by libraries to encourage healthy living and to support the wellness needs of the community they serve. Lately, libraries have been organizing events and activities aimed at promoting users' well-being in collaboration with relevant professionals. These library events and programming has ranged from community gardening to cooking classes to StoryWalks to free yoga and others (Grimes, 2024). Partnering with other organizations and units, academic libraries provide stress-relieving activities that include free coffee and snacks, yoga breaks, kittens and therapy animal visits, designated resting areas, and arts and crafts (Ramsey & Aagard, 2018).

Campbell and Gray (2018) reported the Library Health and Wellness program in an about 3,600 students at a public high school in Colorado, U.S. The program focused on four areas of teen health and wellness: exercise, nutrition, relationships, and mental health, and was tailored to specific classes, mapped out to include a few events each week for a month. With wellness programming such as mindfulness exercises, gratitude journaling, yoga, and desk cycling while reading in the library, students reported positive feedback like de-stressing after practicing mindfulness and end to the habit of negative self-talk. Charney et al. (2019) explored mindfulness programming in a medical school, public library, academic library, and kindergarten–twelfth grade (K–12) public school system in the U.S., by focusing on mindfulness programs techniques that have been used, for example, restorative yoga and weekly meditation. Participants reported increased gratitude, and relief from stress and tension.

Bibliotherapy (B)

The practice of bibliotherapy in libraries is involves using books to prevent downward spirals in people. Tukhareli (2011) defines bibliotherapy as the practice of using books to help people cope with their mental, physical, developmental or social concerns. Bibliotherapy integrates the process of reading and writing into the psychotherapeutic discourse, making use of varied and diverse types of texts such as poems, prose, biblical quotes, movies, dreams, diaries, blogs, and childhood lullabies (Rottenberg, 2021). To Lucas and Soares (2013), bibliotherapy is not simply a reading activity, but the combination of reading with a method of reflecting on the reading. Bibliotherapy also harnesses writing and reading to the therapeutic process, placing the creative aspects of the therapeutic relation at the center of the focus (Zoran, 2008). The strength of bibliotherapy lies in

the creative and expressive channel offered while integrating it into the therapeutic relationship (Rottenberg, 2021). Bibliotherapy has been widely perceived as a methodology that holds incredible promise in helping librarians address the behavioral, emotional, and social worries of different individuals (Zanal Abidin et al., 2021).

Consequently, public libraries as community centers play a great role in taking actions toward mental health and well-being through bibliotherapy services (Zanal Abidin et al., 2021). Walwyn and Rowley (2011) examined the value of therapeutic reading groups that are run by U.K. public libraries. Using results from narrative interviews conducted with 14 members of three therapeutic reading groups, the participants reported benefits such as improved self-esteem, confidence, assurance, social inclusion, catharsis, empathy, enjoyment and relaxation. In a recent study, Phul, Gorrington and Stokes (2024) used the “well-being through reading” program to determine whether reading group participants from a U.K. public library can experience key facets of well-being as defined by the Five Ways to Well-being. Using a sample of 131 participants who attended 15 well-being themed stories and poems sessions, the authors reported that participants were able to connect more with one another, expressed gratitude, and experienced other forms of well-being.

Conclusion

This work reframes valuable library practices and services as Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs), unifying them as the *Library SCEB model (Spaces, Collections, Events & Exercise, and Bibliotherapy)* which, in turn, positions libraries as key partners in community well-being initiatives. Our review examines PPIs and their effectiveness in academic, school, and public libraries using evidence from the LIS and positive psychology literature. Our review shows that PPIs can improve well-being among students and lifelong learners by increasing positive emotions through the promotion of upward spirals (increased happiness and life satisfaction, improved resilience and grit to face adversity, as well as increased social interaction and engagement). Additionally, PPIs reduce downward spirals caused by negative emotions such as those associated with stress, anger, anxiety, and anti-social behaviours among these groups. Despite the enormous promise of PPIs, van Zyl and colleagues (2024) criticized positive psychology and PPIs as having an individualistic approach that neglects the role of the context and environment in understanding positive characteristics and institutions. Diener (2012) also faulted positive psychology for focusing too exclusively on the individual person, rather than considering the impact of neighborhoods, social groups, organizations, and governments in shaping positive behaviour. While we acknowledge these shortfalls of positive psychology, our SCEB model recognizes the significance of environment and context (Spaces) in applying PPIs and the need for constant engagement among library staff, users (students and lifelong learners) and/or other collaborating practitioners in implementing PPIs in libraries. Also, implementing PPIs through book clubs, wellness groups, study groups, storytelling and adult literacy programs in libraries could address the criticism of PPIs using individualistic approach. While the relevance of PPIs in improving well-being is well-established in the literature, its uptake in libraries is slow compared to what is

obtainable in the school settings and could be attributed to the shortage of competence required to run PPIs in most libraries. Rimmer (2024) advocated for appropriate training and provision of relevant support and resources to enable library staff offer these well-being services successfully. Charney et al. (2018) also advised libraries to collaborate with local subject matter experts and to be connected with their community to successfully drive their wellness initiatives.

Lately, academic librarians have been inundated with research, teaching, leadership, and outreach services in addition to the traditional library services for their teeming users. The scope of public libraries services has been extended to include support for individuals with homelessness, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence. Library staff routinely engage with individuals who are contending with higher levels of social isolation and loneliness, increased rates of mental illnesses, and antisocial behaviours (Dalmer et al., 2022). Consequently, these roles and extended library services could predispose librarians to burnout as reported in the LIS literature (Holm et al., 2023; Lindén et al., 2018; Siamian et al., 2006), thus making them to benefit from PPIs. In view of this, we encourage librarians to advocate various Library *SCEB* PPIs for well-being and provide the required support for their implementation in libraries since library staff could equally benefit from these initiatives.

Acknowledgements

This research has been funded by the Government of Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant awarded to Dr. Victoria L. Rubin’s Language and Information Technology Research Lab (LiT.RL) for the 2024 – 2028 project entitled “*Well-being in Social Media: Applying Natural Language Processing Analyses to Discover Thriving Online Communities, Promote Healthier Social Media Design and Authentic Happiness.*” We extend our special thanks to our Lab members – Sarah E. Cornwell, Dominique Kelly, Alex Mayhew, Nicole Delellis, and Kristen Franseen – for their contributions during numerous discussions of the *SCEB model*, and to the two anonymous CAIS/ACSI reviewers – for their suggestions on paper revisions.

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