

## Use of Positive Psychotherapy in Group Work with School Students: School Club "Communication Laboratory"



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### Abstract

The article discusses the practical application of Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) in a school environment, illustrated by the work of the school club "Communication Laboratory." The group aimed to improve social skills and self-awareness in adolescents, support their development, help them overcome obstacles more easily, and expand their networks. The approach shifts from a traditional model of "giving ready-made advice and recipes" to one that fosters self-awareness, develops communication skills, and supports personal development. The article details the exercises, tasks, stories, and parables used in each stage of the PPT process. Through interactive exercises, students were guided to recognize their own qualities and emotions, practice empathy, and strengthen their resilience. The club fostered a sincere and supportive environment where participants assumed responsibility for themselves and their relationships. The most significant outcome was that, despite individual differences, students improved their peer interactions, began resolving conflicts through dialogue rather than confrontation, and gained confidence in their social relationships. Thus, the group became a supportive refuge contributing to their daily mental well-being.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychotherapy, school, school club, group work, adolescents, self-awareness, communication, self-help

### Introduction

Even though suicide is a frightening, pro"if you give someone a fish, you will feed them for a day. If you teach them how to fish, you feed them for a lifetime," - Oriental wisdom. (N. Peseschkian, 2008)

In educational support, two primary models exist. The first involves providing ready-made solutions and services, where help is defined as giving the recipient what they need at that moment. The second involves partnering with and empowering the person so that they can address the problem themselves. Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) aligns with the latter, embodying the metaphor of the "fisherman" who teaches fishing rather than merely providing fish (N. Peseschkian, 2008).

Group work is a suitable form of training for young people. Social-psychological training is an active method for enhancing interpersonal communication and self-realization. It provides

opportunities for sharing, discussion, and reflection on young people's interactions within the school context. The goals include modifying personal attitudes, developing communication skills, shaping self-image, and influencing behaviour and knowledge. The specifics of development at this age need to be taken into account. Young people become particularly sensitive to their "internal" psychological problems. Limited life experience, on the one hand, and high personal activity, on the other, give rise to instability and intense internal tension. Adolescent instability is inherent to this developmental stage and reflects the need to explore new areas of activity. Self-discovery, social self-determination, and self-assertion, irrespective of individual characteristics, are common characteristics of teenagers.

In his book "Der nackte Kaiser" (N. Peseschkian, p. 168, 2011), Nosrat Peseschkian argues that the upbringing of children is not only the role of parents, but of all the people they

somehow interact with and who therefore exert a lasting influence on them, consciously or unconsciously. In social environments, children learn to manage their responsibilities, their performance, and their interactions with others. Teaching children to know themselves is a crucial component of child-rearing. By knowing themselves better, they can develop different strategies to cope with the problems and surprises in their lives.

**Methodology**

Positive Psychotherapy can be applied in various educational settings and can help both students and teachers better cope with the challenges of the educational process and its associated interactions. Groups can be organized around the four dimensions of PPT (N. Peseschkian, 2000):

**Body:** Groups focusing on health, self-esteem, and sensitivity.

**Activity:** Groups addressing behaviour, planning, and information processing.

**Contact:** Groups aimed at expanding communication skills.

**Future:** Groups exploring purpose, creativity, and imagination.

Effective group work requires clear motivation and organization, with goals encompassing meaning, future orientation, time

management, contact building, trust, faith, hope, and cultural awareness.

Guiding principles include: (1) Structure and Order (clear rules and setting); (2) Focus on opportunities (reliability, resourcefulness); and (3) Leadership/Group Management (courtesy, openness, fairness, agree upon norms, group size – open or closed).

Each group addresses emotional-social aspects and tasks, utilizing opportunities to build connection (ability to love) and foster knowledge in four areas: (1) one's own behaviour (self-knowledge); (2) the behaviour of one's partner, the couple formed; (3) social behaviour (of the group society); (4) spiritual/ worldview behaviour.

Correspondingly, groups have content aspects and utilize opportunities to acquire knowledge related to the body, partner behaviour, social behaviour, and worldview behaviour (Boncheva et al., 2021).

My role as a high school psychologist allows me to use PPT methods and tools with diverse students in themed focus groups.

One such group, named the "Communication Laboratory" (Area-Contact), consisted of 10 students (five girls, five boys) aged 14-15 from different classes. The intervention employed age-appropriate game models, parables, fairy tales, and exercises. The program structure is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Structure of the "Communication Laboratory" Program Based on PPT Stages**

<b>PPT Stage</b>	<b>Session Focus &amp; Key Activities</b>	<b>Examples of Exercises &amp; Tools</b>
<i>1. Observation – Distancing</i>	Building group cohesion, establishing rules, and initial self-reflection.	Icebreakers ("Who likes pizza?"), Group rule creation, Exercise "Who am I?" (name + positive quality), Parable: "The Crow and the Peacock" (N. Peseschkian, 2008).
<i>2. Inventory Taking</i>	Self-assessment, identifying personal resources and abilities.	Homework: "20 Positive Qualities" ("20 Point Feathers"), Completion of the Differentiation-Analytical Inventory (DAI/DAI 2) (I. Boncheva et al., 2021), Exercise: "The Magic Shop" (G. Gercheva-Nesterova et al., 2017).
<i>3. Situational Encouragement</i>	Experimenting with and reinforcing identified abilities in a safe setting.	Small group work discussing chosen abilities from "The Magic Shop", using stories (e.g., "Little Red Riding Hood" for Trust).
<i>4. Verbalization</i>	Articulating personal challenges and exploring alternative behaviours.	Pair/Trio discussion of situations from the DAI 2, Analysis of developed/underdeveloped abilities.
<i>5. Expanding the goals</i>	Translating insights into actionable plans and broader life application.	Exercise: "Advertising Yourself" (G. Gercheva-Nesterova et al., 2017), which discusses self-help strategies and planning for integration into other school clubs.

### 2.1. Program Description and Key Techniques

#### 1. Observation-Distancing

The first stage focuses on creating a safe and structured environment. Sessions began with warm-up exercises (e.g., greeting everyone with a handshake) and icebreaker questions to foster connection. The group collaboratively established rules (e.g., active listening, no interrupting, and a nonjudgmental attitude). The core tasks of self-awareness and contact expansion were introduced, with visual support provided by an explanation of the PPT model (the "balance model"). A central activity was the "Who am I?" exercise, in which participants introduced themselves by stating their name and a positive quality. The session included reading and discussing the parable "The Crow and the Peacock" (N. Peseschkian, 2008, p. 143), which illustrates how envy and focusing on others' perceived advantages can obscure one's own unique qualities. The "20 Positive Qualities" (or "20 Point Feathers") exercise, assigned as homework, required students to list 20 positive traits about themselves, challenging self-critical tendencies and fostering a focus on personal resources.

#### 2. Taking Inventory

This stage facilitated deeper self-assessment. The homework was reviewed, with discussion of difficulties and feelings associated with identifying positive traits. Participants then completed the Differentiation-Analytical Inventory (DAI/DAI 2) (Boncheva et al., 2021), a PPT-based tool for assessing capacities in areas such as contact, patience, trust, and order. The results were presented as reflective insights rather than absolute measures. Subsequently, the "Magic Shop" exercise (Gercheva-Nesterova et al., 2017, p. 83) was conducted. In this imaginative game, participants could "trade" less developed abilities for more desired ones (e.g., trading "punctuality" for "more spontaneity"), symbolically exploring personal change and responsibility.

3. Situational Encouragement Participants worked in small groups or pairs to elaborate on the abilities they "acquired" in the "Magic Shop." They read and discussed short therapeutic stories linked to specific abilities (e.g., a story about "politeness"), supporting the understanding of abstract qualities into relatable narratives and reinforcing their development in

a supportive peer setting. Feedback in the large group at the end of the session.

#### 4. Verbalization

Students returned to their DAI 2 forms in pairs or trios. They chose one challenging situation they had noted and analyzed it together: What did it mean to them? Which abilities were involved? How could they respond more effectively? This promoted articulation of difficulties and collaborative problem-solving.

#### 5. Expanding the goals

The final stage focused on integrating the learning. The exercise "Advertising Yourself" (Gercheva-Nesterova et al., 2017) required each participant to create a creative "advertisement" highlighting their capabilities and knowledge about themselves. The group discussed concrete self-help strategies derived from their experiences and explored opportunities to expand social contacts by joining other school clubs.

## Discussion

Every psychotherapist knows that at the beginning of the meetings, participants are timid in their interactions with peers. They expressed a desire for better self-understanding and improved communication, but lacked the tools. The structured progression through the five stages of PPT provided a safe environment for exploration. The results, based on participant feedback and observation, showed several positive outcomes:

- Enhanced Self-Awareness: Students reported a clearer recognition of their strengths and areas for growth through exercises like the "20 Positive Qualities" and DAI.
- Improved Communication Skills: The group environment and specific exercises (e.g., verbalization in pairs) practiced empathy and active listening.
- Increased Social Confidence: By the program's end, all participants had joined other school clubs, reporting feeling more confident in social settings.
- Desire for continued self-knowledge: Three students sought further individual sessions for self-discovery.

Group work confirmed that the five steps of Positive Psychotherapy are appropriate for teenagers. The use of parables and various exercises successfully reduced students'

defensive reactions. However, several challenges were noted. The small group size, although ideal for interaction, limits the generalizability of the results. Assessment was largely subjective, relying on the facilitator's judgment and observation. There were no standardized pre- and post-test measures, nor was there a control group. Some students initially struggled with self-disclosure, and the success of the exercises depended largely on individual commitment and imagination.

Future implementations would benefit from a mixed-methods approach that includes validated psychological scales (e.g., self-esteem, communication competence) to objectively measure change. Research could compare PPT-

based groups with other intervention models or examine their long-term effects.

### Conclusion

Positive Psychotherapy provides practical tools to help students discover their "peacock feathers" – their unique strengths – and learn to "fish" – develop self-help competencies. The "Communication Laboratory" demonstrated that PPT can be effectively integrated into school settings, offering a structured framework for preventive work that enhances adolescents' self-knowledge, resilience, and social-emotional skills. By moving beyond merely providing solutions to foster empowerment, this approach contributes meaningfully to a school's supportive system.

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