

Keep up the good work: How language teachers foster positive affect in university students

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Abstract

Drawing on research in positive psychology and second language acquisition, this article presents essential teacher qualities and behaviors that contribute to positive affect in second/foreign language learners in higher education. I argue that language teachers' kindness, empathy, enthusiasm and professionalism (KEEP) build students' trust and respect, and create a positive learning environment where students cooperate with teachers willingly; that is, attend class gladly, participate in learning activities, do homework and strive to get good grades. Teachers foster this positive affect starting from the first lesson, by consistently behaving in ways that nurture positive affect in every lesson. Thanks to their empathy and enthusiasm, teachers become more creative and are able to prevent boredom in their classes, paving the way to more motivated, engaged and resilient students. The scientific and practical evidence presented in this article will inspire second and foreign language teachers to adopt KEEP for their students' and their own benefit. Researchers are invited to put to the test some of the claims I have made here as a practicing language teacher in higher education these past 36 years.

Keywords: language teacher qualities; positive affect; language learner resilience

1. Introduction

The possibilities offered by the Internet have transformed the way we learn languages. Second or foreign language (L2) teachers in higher education are often

overwhelmed by the abundance of professional literature on teaching trends in the 21st century and on how to incorporate technology into L2 classes. Trying to keep abreast of all the new developments, some teachers feel inadequate if they have not mastered the latest digital tools. In reality, the secret to successful L2 teaching lies not in teachers' technological virtuosity but in their pedagogical strengths. It is essential for language teachers, novices and veterans alike, to recognize the qualities that make up these strengths and to nurture them for their students' and their own benefit. The first step in this direction is to understand the significance of affect.

Affect is an emotional state that changes or influences what we think or do. Whether or not we experience positive affect while doing something, determines our willingness to engage in that behavior in the future. To put it simply, when we like an activity, we want to repeat it (Fredrickson, 2013a). According to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003), affect is a motivational construct that can increase or diminish student engagement in class. Research shows that one's affective state can positively or negatively influence the learning process (Craig et al., 2010). Over the years, I have observed time and again that students in parallel classes (i.e., different teachers) evaluate differently a course with the same requirements, the same website, and the same teaching materials. I have seen that students in one class love their teacher, while students in a parallel class are indifferent to or dislike their teacher. Why do students look forward to some classes and easily find excuses to miss others? What do our students need from us and how can we become better teachers? In view of the crucial role of affect in learning, this article aims to shed light on the qualities and practices of language teachers that contribute to positive affect in their students.

2. Positive psychology in foreign language teaching and learning

In the past decade, a growing body of research has emerged on the connection between affect and language learning. Arnold (2011) convincingly argues that establishing a positive affective atmosphere is essential for effective language teaching and learning. Likewise, Swain (2013) claims that cognition and emotion are inseparable in second language learning. According to MacIntyre and Mercer (2014), students' motivation, resilience and positive emotions are key factors in successful language learning. In a groundbreaking anthology titled *Positive Psychology in SLA*, MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer (2016) demonstrate the relevance of positive psychology (PP) for foreign and second language learning. Affective factors have rightfully earned their place at the forefront of research on language teaching and learning (see e.g., Dewaele, 2019; Gkonou et al., 2020). Positive psychology researchers in applied linguistics agree that language teaching and learning can benefit greatly from PP (Dewaele et al., 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019).

To be sure, PP can inform and improve language teaching and learning in many ways. According to MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), L2 teachers can harness the students' imagination to foster positive emotions that facilitate language learning. Learners with a positive L2 self have been observed to attain higher levels of L2 proficiency (Lake, 2016). Researchers have found that psychological well-being affects language learning. Successful learners have specific emotional and mental qualities that facilitate language learning (Oxford, 2016). Studies in PP have also examined *teachers'* emotional well-being. Hiver (2016) looked into positive emotional traits among language teachers, and determined that hope and hardiness can help novice L2 teachers remain in the profession. Likewise, MacIntyre et al. (2019) underscored the emotional aspect of language teaching and outlined a list of qualities required for the well-being of teachers and for effective language teaching. Dewaele et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between learners' foreign language enjoyment and the teacher. Along similar lines, learners reported higher levels of foreign language enjoyment when the teacher created a positive emotional atmosphere (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020).

Teachers are arguably the most important factor in any kind of learning. Jane Arnold, in her foreword to *The Emotional Rollercoaster of Language Teaching*, reiterates the teacher's role in creating a positive atmosphere that leads to student engagement and successful language learning (Arnold, 2020). While second language acquisition (SLA) researchers acknowledge the teacher's role in foreign language *enjoyment*, the effects of specific teacher characteristics on the learners' experience of *positive affect* have not been widely explored. The purpose of this article is to identify teacher qualities and behaviors that can induce the yearned-for positive emotions in language learners, and thus, further elucidate the role of the teacher in L2 learning. Certain fundamental human and professional characteristics are required for successful teaching in general, and L2 teaching in particular in order to foster positive affect in students and lead to effective learning. I put forward kindness, empathy, enthusiasm and professionalism (KEEP) as essential qualities for L2 teachers in higher education. The acronym is easy to *keep* in mind, and helps teachers stay focused on what can really create the positive affective conditions to enhance language learning.

3. The KEEP concept

Whether students take a language course because it is required for their degree or because they are interested, our role as professionals is not only to teach well but also to make language learning an enjoyable experience. At Tel Aviv University, English is compulsory, and students have to finish the B2 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001) by the

end of their first year. However, English is not included in their GPA. Consequently, many students consider English a burden and would rather not have to take it at all. Motivating and engaging such students is a challenge. Teachers can turn this required, but non-accredited language course into an enjoyable experience for their students by harnessing the magical power of positive affect. The purpose of this section is to present L2 teachers with an anchor to help them teach with confidence while nurturing positive affect in their students. I analyze the KEEP concept, discuss the characteristics of each notion and how they manifest in our teaching. This is not intended to be a comprehensive review of effective teacher qualities or L2 teaching practices, but a summary of qualities and practices that I have found effective in my three and a half decades of language teaching experience at Tel Aviv University.

3.1. Kindness

Being kind is generally associated with being friendly, considerate, helpful, caring, generous, and respectful. Novelist Henry James is quoted to have said: "Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind" (Griswold, 2019, para. 1). In recent years, kindness has become a highly fashionable subject of inspirational talks and scientific research. Studies exploring the beneficial physiological and psychological effects of kindness advocate its adoption for a healthier and happier life (Hamilton, 2010, 2017, 2019). For some people, it is an inborn quality, for others it may be a quality that they need to develop. Auschwitz survivor, author and renowned clinical psychologist Edith Eger (2017, 2020) suggests asking ourselves the following question before we say anything: "Is it kind?". Thus, kindness can become a way of being, a principle that guides us in our actions and relationships. It influences our personal relationships as well as our relationship with our students. The success of our teaching very much depends on the relationship we build with our students. Fostering positive affect begins with kindness, as it is beautifully expressed in the following quote:

By modeling in their own discourse and attitudes and in encouraging learners to use the same, teachers can create flourishing groups by using language that is overtly supportive, encouraging and appreciative, and avoids negativity, disapproval, sarcasm and cynicism. (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 210)

Students with a hostile attitude can intimidate teachers, especially at the beginning of their careers. When a student challenges the authority of a new teacher, it is not easy to respond kindly. Nevertheless, we can learn how to be assertive without being unkind. Bearing in mind that our students come from different

backgrounds, and have different learning styles and linguistic abilities, we can choose to respond wisely and kindly: "I will check this and will let you know," or "I will give you other examples next lesson to clarify this point." If a student is obnoxious, we should speak with the student in private after the lesson and if necessary, seek professional advice.

Kindness can also help us cope with students who disturb the flow of the lesson by constantly asking questions. We need to master the skill of kindly deferring questions to a later moment in the lesson, or if the questions are not relevant to the entire class, we can schedule a separate meeting with the student. Our ability to maintain a friendly, caring atmosphere in the classroom even when certain students create discord is quite reassuring for the other, more cooperative students. When we teach in a relaxed atmosphere, students look forward to our lessons as a time-out from their daily worries and responsibilities. A kind teacher sends a message of stability and confidence, which contributes greatly to the students' favorable perception of the teacher and the course. By being kind to our students, we are being kind to ourselves. Our time in class (or on Zoom) can be the best hours of the day, for us and for them. Inducing positive affect in our students starts with our kindness, which creates upward spirals nurturing more positive affect lesson after lesson.

An excellent illustration of the power of kindness is the parable of the wind and the sun. The wind and the sun hold a competition to take off a man's heavy coat while he was walking alone by the roadside. The wind challenges the sun saying "I will make this man take off his coat" and attacks the man with terrifying intensity. The howling wind almost blows the man off the road, but cannot make him take off his coat. The more intensely it blows, the tighter the man holds onto his coat with all his might. The wind finally gives up and lets the sun take its turn. As soon as the sun shines in the sky and spreads its clear light and its life-giving warmth, the man immediately and voluntarily takes off his heavy coat. He smiles at the sun with gratitude and continues walking with joy in his heart (Kalo, 1990).

3.2. Empathy

Empathy is our ability to respect and respond sensitively to what the other person is feeling. When we feel empathy, we try to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and show understanding. Empathy is similar to kindness, but it is a more profound expression of generosity, care, and love, succinctly conveyed in the commandment "Love thy neighbor as thyself." To check whether or not we are showing empathy in a given situation, we can ask ourselves: "Is this the way I would like to be treated? How would I treat my own children? How would I want teachers to treat my children?". Empathy is a quality that students appreciate

highly because they interpret it as caring and love. Like most human virtues, empathy can be developed by deliberate practice. We can also cultivate our empathy with the help of inspiring videos, TED talks, podcasts and books.

When we show empathy to a person, we touch that person's soul in ways we cannot even imagine. A particularly moving case is told by Dr. Edith Eger in her many interviews and her first book (Eger, 2017). After having to dance for the infamous Nazi doctor in the barracks of Birkenau, the 16-year-old Edith received a small loaf of bread. She climbed up to her bunk and shared the bread with her bunkmates, "the girls" as she called them – not an act to be taken for granted when one is very hungry. Several months later, during the death march from Auschwitz to another camp, Edith was so weak that she was no longer able to walk. Anyone who stopped was immediately shot and killed. The same girls with whom she had shared her bread noticed that she was about to stop; they formed a chair with their arms to carry her, thus saving her life. Young Edith had no idea what seeds of gratitude her unselfish act had planted in their hearts many months earlier.

When we feel empathy, we become more flexible and are capable of changing our plans to accommodate others. I have observed in my Advanced Turkish class, which is an elective course, that the inability to cope with grammar (often a pessimistic and exaggerated view held by the learner) could result in dropping the course. This observation is consistent with Dewaele and Thirtle (2009) who hold that foreign language anxiety can cause learners to drop the course. They argue that students need to see language learning as fun and achievable, and that the most important factor in the learner's success is the quality of teaching. My empathy for my students who did not like traditional grammar instruction and exercises, combined with my determination to prevent them from dropping the course, pushed me to find an engaging and effective way for teaching grammar that otherwise would not have occurred to me. This innovative method, a beautiful example of how empathy, and I dare say love, makes us creative, is described in Azaryad Shechter (2018). Learning grammar through dialogues in television series has become the highlight of second-year Turkish and a significant component of the positive affect that reigns in my Turkish classes.

In her insightful article dedicated to the central role of empathy in language teaching and learning, Mercer (2016) emphasizes the need to train language teachers to promote their empathic skills. When we develop new materials and share them with other teachers, this generosity is an expression of our empathy. When colleagues support each other, they nurture their empathy, which they can then direct to their students. By the same token, teachers who show empathy to their students are generous towards their colleagues as well. There is magnanimity in empathy; as such, it is the opposite of pettiness. I celebrate the following quote by Peter MacIntyre who encourages teachers to treat students with empathy:

. . . teachers can affect their students in positive ways through even the smallest gestures – a compliment on an otherwise dismal paper, a casual conversation about the student's hopes for the future, or a few days' extension on a project when the student would rather not say why it is needed. (MacIntyre et al., 2016, p. 3)

3.3. Enthusiasm

The ancient Greek word *enthousiasmos*, which means divine inspiration, has long been generalized to denote intense enjoyment and excitement. Previous studies emphasize the crucial role of teacher enthusiasm in student performance. For instance, Brewer and Burgess (2005) found that teacher qualities, such as enthusiasm, motivate college students to continue attending classes more than factors such as teaching methods. Similarly, according to Keller et al. (2013), teacher enthusiasm is a key factor in effective teaching. Keller et al. (2016) propose a holistic definition of enthusiasm which combines teachers' experience of enjoyment with their behavioral expression. As an enthusiastic teacher, I genuinely enjoy language teaching, feel excited about the experience that my students are going through, and rejoice in their small progresses and epiphanies. Enthusiasm attests to our love for our profession. Students liven up when they see our passion for what we are teaching. Nobody wants to learn anything from a teacher who looks lifeless, bored, impatient, or disinterested. Boredom correlates negatively with motivation and academic performance (Pekrun et al., 2010). Similarly, according to Dewaele (2015, p. 14), "routine is a killer in the classroom" and very little learning can take place when students are bored. This view is further supported by Kruk et al. (2021) who observed that boredom is mainly caused by repetitiveness, monotony and predictability. From my personal experience as a language *learner*, I am convinced that boredom is in fact the L2 learner's greatest enemy and that teacher enthusiasm is the best panacea for student boredom.

By developing enthusiasm, teachers can improve their pedagogical skills (Schoofs, 2019). The best way to boost our enthusiasm is to learn a new language. In my opinion, a teacher who is not fascinated with language *learning* cannot become a *great* language teacher. The excitement of being a learner brings more passion to our teaching. This passion is transmitted to our students and they, too, are magically affected by it. When we are learning a new language, we feel closer to our students and understand their needs better because we are going through similar challenges. We can share our own difficulties to reassure our students that grammar mistakes are a natural part of language learning. When students hear of our struggles with the grammar of a new language, they become more patient with their own difficulties and mistakes. I encourage teachers to boost their empathy and enthusiasm by learning a new language. My efforts to learn Russian these past five years enhanced my empathy and enthusiasm in class, consequently

making me a better teacher. I have become more creative, and my examples and explanations have gotten better and better. Learning a new language is a very inspiring process that L2 teachers should not fail to experience. Likewise, teachers can kindle their enthusiasm by developing a new course or by teaching an old course in a new way.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was also an advocate of enthusiasm, as the following quote from his book *Citadelle* shows: „If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast endless sea.” In other words, we should strive to awaken our students' intrinsic motivation. When teachers love what they do and work hard, they inspire their students to work hard. Leadership studies confirm this view. According to Willink and Babin (2015), when all other variables are controlled, the team leader is the sole factor that determines success or failure. Hence, when we, as 'leaders,' slacken, it affects our students negatively; when we love and believe in what we do, we inspire and motivate our students. Indeed, students have told me time and time again that they enjoyed my classes and persevered particularly because of my enthusiasm and my love of languages. This is consistent with previous research that shows that enthusiastic teachers motivate students (Patrick et al., 2000; Kim & Schallert, 2014) and encourage them to persist in their academic studies (Wheeless et al., 2011).

3.4. Professionalism

Professionalism is an awareness in a never-ending journey where the teacher constantly learns and improves both as a teacher and as a person. Among other things, our professionalism can be expressed in the following ways: through carefully prepared, well-delivered lessons, striking a balance between the time allotted to frontal teaching and student engagement, whether or not the type of tasks and skills covered in a lesson are proportionate, whether or not we are attuned to our students' states of mind and are flexible, how we behave in the classroom, and how we communicate with our students. A professional teacher is focused, does not jump from one thing to another, and does not cause students to lose track of what is being learned. A professional language teacher repeats, rephrases and sums up as often as needed to make sure the students are following what is being taught. Professional teachers are respected and admired for their knowledge, commitment and hard work. When students trust and respect their teachers, they do not want to disappoint them. They try to live up to their teachers' expectations, and as a result, they are more receptive and cooperative.

Professionalism does not mean the teacher has to be a virtuoso in handling language teaching technologies. If you are an expert user of digital tools

and feel completely at ease juggling a variety of tools, then by all means, use them as you see fit. If, on the other hand, you are more conservative in implementing new technology, this does not make you a worse professional. It is true that online teaching has made technology an indispensable part of our job. However, we do not need to master a great number of digital tools for successful teaching. Teachers can find two or three interactive applications that work best for them and mindfully incorporate them into their lessons. There is no point in overwhelming our students (and ourselves) with new tools. Our purpose is to help them learn a foreign language without creating additional challenges, and we should use technology selectively, as a catalyst for teaching.

A detailed discussion of professionalism is beyond the scope of this article. Besides the teacher's kindness, empathy and enthusiasm, certain tangible, down-to-earth professional practices contribute to a positive learning environment that mysteriously fosters positive affect in students and motivates them to persevere. A good L2 course has at its core a pedagogically sound syllabus with realistic goals, upon which the teacher designs a well-organized course site (Azaryad Shechter, 2016) and uploads excellent teaching materials. Each component displayed in the figure below can cultivate or hinder positive affect in the students. The teacher is what makes this whole system work (see Figure 1). In my opinion, even the best course site design and the most amazing course materials require a professional teacher with the right attitude and teaching practices to fulfill the *raison d'être* of all the components that make up the course. Please see the Appendix for practical tips to foster positive affect.

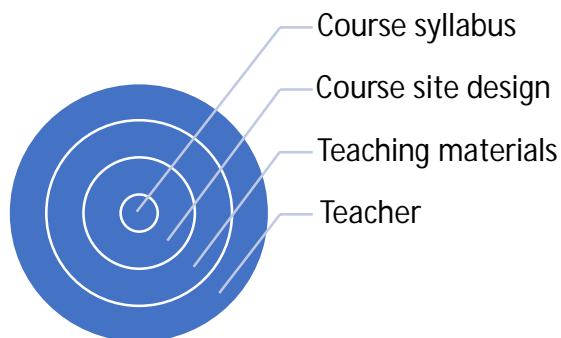


Figure 1 Elements of professionalism

4. Positive effects of positive affect

Scientific evidence supports that it is worthwhile for teachers to embrace qualities and behaviors that foster positive affect in students. According to Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory, positive emotions help us build resources

that accumulate and compound (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004; Fredrickson & Joiner 2002). Her studies in the past two decades have revealed again and again that when people experience even *mild* positive emotions, their peripheral vision expands and their outlook to their environment changes; they become more open, more aware, and see more possibilities. As positive emotions broaden the scopes of attention and cognition, they also help people build their psychological and intellectual resources (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004, 2013a; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). It therefore follows that positive emotions have the capacity to improve academic performance.

The most frequent positive emotions that people experience are joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride (attributed to achievement), sharing amusement/laughter, being inspired, feeling awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2013a). These emotions are vital in helping us cope with life's challenges and are also clearly beneficial in academic studies. For instance, according to Pekrun et al. (2004), joy, hope and pride positively correlate with students' beliefs in their own self-efficacy and academic achievement. Similarly, enjoyment and pride positively predict subsequent achievement, and achievement positively predicts these emotions (Pekrun et al., 2017). Discussing the effects of positive psychology in the ESL/EFL classroom, Helgesen (2016, p. 321) concludes that "happy, engaged students learn more."

Positive emotions contribute to flourishing mental health (Fredrickson, 2013b) thanks to their undo effect which enables people to regulate negative emotional experiences (Fredrickson 2013a). Accordingly, language teachers can help dissipate a student's feelings of anxiety by invoking positive emotions such as joy, amusement, interest, hope and pride in the lesson. One of the most transformative positive emotions in life and one that we can easily nurture in our students is gratitude. Allowing students to choose a test date, giving an extension on an assignment, switching to a fun activity when students are not in the mood for whatever we had planned for that lesson, or dedicating time to a student outside class are little acts of empathy that nurture their gratitude. According to Jin and Wang (2019), gratitude has a positive effect on adolescents' learning engagement; moreover, teachers' emotional support enhances this effect. Similarly, Clarkson (2020) found that gratitude leads to higher levels of optimism, hope, sustained interest, and perceived academic performance. These are especially desirable outcomes for students in L2 classes. L2 learners who are not actively engaged cannot improve their communicative skills and therefore will have low self-efficacy which can trigger further negative emotions. Thus, if L2 teachers harness the power of positive affect, they can help their students increase their levels of engagement and achieve persistence in language learning.

When people experience positive emotions, they become more creative, more resilient and more trusting, since shared positivity builds trust (Fredrickson,

2001, 2004, 2013a). When we nurture positive affect, students pay us back with trust and respect that are expressed, among other ways, in their resilience. This is in fact a ripple effect; it is our hard-earned reward for nurturing their trust and respect. One cannot overestimate the importance of trust and respect in any relationship: they are the *sine qua non* of true friendships, partnerships, teacher-student bonds, and boss-employee relations. When students trust and respect us, they become more open, they value our feedback and feel free to voice their views/criticism frankly. All of this leads to a positive learning environment which further enhances their positive affect and resilience. People who are resilient know how to tap into the broaden-and-build effects of positive emotions (Cohn et al., 2009; Fredrickson, 2001, 2004). I have observed in my classes that when students develop resilience, they are better able to cope with challenging tasks and are more likely to do their homework. Furthermore, they are more likely to work on difficult articles without complaining, and do the assignments more willingly and more creatively.

Since positive emotions are temporary (Fredrickson, 2003), we have to arouse them anew in every lesson. According to Fredrickson (2014), smiles draw attention more than any other facial expression. When we enjoy teaching and genuinely smile often during the lesson, we do not only express positive affect, but we also invoke it in our students. The teacher's sincere smile is a wonderful way to dissolve stress and anxiety. Feigned positive emotions are toxic, and therefore we have to be genuine in our words and our body language (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). To be sure, our enthusiasm, too, has to be sincere, as false behavior can undermine the trust and respect we have nurtured since the beginning of the course. If we have just landed after a long-distance flight and have slept little, or if we are upset about something, it is better to briefly share our state of mind with the students to explain why we are unfocused. It is alright to occasionally acknowledge our vulnerability if we have previously cultivated our students' trust and respect.

According to Duckworth (2016), the secret to achievement is not talent or IQ, but a combination of passion and perseverance that she calls 'grit'. In other words, loving what we do and working hard to achieve it account for our success more than our inborn talents or intelligence. Like any non-trivial achievement, language learning, too, requires grit. Keegan (2017) argues that if we understand the role of grit in L2 learning, we may be able to explain why some learners are more successful than others. She recommends that teachers try to foster grit in their students to help them become more successful language learners. The important role of grit is also emphasized in a recent book by two prolific and renowned scholars in L2 education research, Sarah Mercer and Zoltan Dörnyei. According to Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), in today's world, motivation is not

enough for language learning because students are surrounded by too many distractions. They argue that what learners need is *engagement*, which they define as motivation plus implementation. Addressing both theory and practice, they present insightful ideas to engage students with learning tasks and to sustain this engagement. I believe that *sustained* engagement is the most important ingredient of resilience in L2 learning. In line with the arguments I have made in the previous sections of this article, Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), too, stress the role of the teacher in facilitating psychological states conducive to learning (Aoyama & Ouchi, 2021) and single out certain positive emotions that promote student engagement (Liu, 2021).

According to Mercer and Dörnyei (2020), “Focusing on engagement thus underlines the fact that who teachers are and what they do matter” (p. 8). This is consistent with MacIntyre et al. (2019, p. 35), who stated that “the quality of learning depends to a large extent on teachers and their actions in their classes.” Assuming a language teacher treats students with kindness and empathy, and is professional in the ways described earlier, I argue that enthusiasm may be the most important teacher quality to nurture grit and resilience in L2 learners. Students develop passion and perseverance mainly thanks to the teacher. If a teacher lacks enthusiasm and cannot engage the students, most students will probably just hope for the course to end, doing the bare minimum necessary to pass. Without an enthusiastic teacher, only the exceptionally gritty students for whom the language is an absolute necessity or carries inherent and meaningful value will be resilient throughout the course; that is, show active involvement in the classroom, engage in the learning tasks, do homework, study the vocabulary, etc. While teacher enthusiasm is extremely important, we should also bear in mind that certain factors beyond our control, such as individual circumstances or dispositions, can undermine students’ engagement in language learning. Our task as teachers is to try our best in every situation. I truly believe that our sincere efforts to engage students will not go unrewarded.

5. Teaching with awareness

This section illustrates how teaching with awareness can be beneficial in many respects. Whether we are at the beginning of our career or have been teaching for decades, KEEP can serve as a torch that guides us every step of the way starting from the very first lesson. When we strive to embody KEEP for our students’ sake, we also grow kinder to ourselves and can make better decisions regarding our pedagogical practices. Last but not least, our success with KEEP motivates us to help our fellow language teachers to also reap its benefits.

5.1. The first lesson matters

The cliché “we cannot make a first impression twice” is useful for novice and veteran teachers alike. The first lesson is of utmost importance because this is when students form an opinion about the teacher and the course. Teachers can start cultivating positive affect already in the first lesson by making sure it is a positive learning experience. To start the semester on the right foot, prepare a first lesson that is reasonably challenging, interesting, and fun. Avoid monotony: cover different types of tasks in the lesson, engage the students, ask questions to introduce what you are teaching and elicit responses from the students. Part of the lesson can be dedicated to group work. Teach with enthusiasm, and let the students get to know you and begin to trust you. The students will come out of the first lesson with a sense of achievement, feeling they have learned something useful and that this is going to be a course worth attending. Most importantly, you will have earned their trust and respect that are the building blocks of their resilience.

5.2. The new teacher’s path to flourishing

New graduates and novice L2 teachers can benefit from the guidance of veteran teachers. While your mentor or teacher educator may give you very clear and detailed guidance trying to cover as many scenarios as possible, please remember to trust your own judgment. Sometimes the classroom situation warrants a different response than the ones your mentor recommended. Trust your intuition to deal with the specific case. Listen to your inner voice, especially when theory conflicts with reality. As far as teaching advice is concerned, never follow a practice that you have not internalized, do not feel comfortable with, or do not believe in. Make modifications to suit your personality and teaching style or put it aside for future consideration.

5.3. Promoting professional development

Language teaching is an exciting journey in which we learn continuously. Not only researchers but also veteran language teachers have a lot to contribute to the field of SLA. We are the ones who are in class, coping daily with real situations that arise, adapting our lessons according to students’ needs, requests, and attitudes, while we modify our teaching methods based on what worked and what did not, etc. As much as I enjoy teaching English and Turkish, I enjoy sharing my experience and best practices with fellow language teachers and student teachers. The years have made me more confident, more relaxed, and more enthusiastic. Teachers and students in my audiences have often told me that I practice what I preach; they see in

me the very qualities that I am trying to nurture in them. Teacher training is a truly rewarding experience, one that I thrive in and always look forward to.

I have talked about fostering positive affect at international conferences and professional development workshops at home and abroad since 2017. Invariably, the end of my positive affect talk sounded something like this:

- We can inspire positive affect first and foremost by putting our heart into our work. When we love what we do and care about our students, we can motivate them.
- Do not be disheartened by an unsuccessful lesson or an unhappy student. They are part of the ups and downs of life. Always come to class with renewed hope, believing that this will be an excellent lesson.
- A compassionate teacher, one who uses relevant and engaging materials that the students like, and who comes to class well-prepared, will earn the students' trust, and thus, teach in an atmosphere conducive to learning.

6. Conclusion

The topic of teacher qualities and practices that engender positive affect in language learners is a relatively untapped area in PP research that harbors great potential for SLA researchers. With regard to future research directions, I second Mercer's (2016, p. 106) call "to put empathy more solidly on the research agenda." Empirical studies are needed to help us clarify the role of teacher kindness, empathy, and enthusiasm in the learners' experience of positive affect in language classes. The findings of such studies will have powerful implications for all parties involved. I am hopeful that teacher education programs will finally acknowledge the urgency to empower future language teachers with kindness, empathy, and enthusiasm, while simultaneously developing their professional skills. I have no doubt that the findings of future research will also encourage language teachers to adjust their pedagogical practices in line with the principles of KEEP to their own as well as their students' delight.

In this article, I have tried to distill into four words the hard-earned wisdom of a practicing language teacher in higher education: kindness, empathy, enthusiasm, professionalism. The concept of "Wholehearted living" – living and loving with our whole heart (Brown, 2010), can be applied to the context of our language teaching as well. I would like to appeal for Wholehearted teaching – teaching and loving with our whole heart. When we teach Wholeheartedly, we treat our students with kindness and empathy, and enthusiasm comes naturally to us. When we teach Wholeheartedly, professional improvement is something we pursue with joy. Wholehearted teachers will foster positive affect in their students and inspire them to willingly engage in language learning and succeed:

I now see that cultivating a Wholehearted life is not like trying to reach a destination. It's like walking towards a star in the sky. We never really arrive, but we certainly know that we're heading in the right direction. (Brown, 2010, p. xiv)

In the fall of 2018, I taught a B1 level English course. At the end of the semester, in January 2019, my students gave me a little angel statuette along with a greeting card. The message in the card closed with the words "thank you for your kindness and professionalism." I was aware of my empathy and enthusiasm and had stressed the importance of these qualities in my conference talks since 2013. However, I had taken for granted my kindness and professionalism. The acronym *KEEP* was born thanks to the message from this class.

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APPENDIX

Practical tips to foster positive affect

The following is a brief list of practices I have found useful in my own teaching. I believe that it is to a great extent thanks to these practices that my students never complain about boredom or unfair demands. They see that I care, and that I want them to enjoy our lessons and succeed.

- Have a clear and pedagogically sound course syllabus.
- Invest in the design and organization of your course site.
- Develop and teach your own materials as much as you can.
- Create digital quizzes that can be automatically graded.
- Present assignments attractively and always show a sample.
- Give tasks that are relevant, engaging, and reasonably challenging.
- Give appropriate credit for significant and useful tasks.
- Reward students' efforts and not just their results.
- Teach grammar in fun and engaging contexts.
- Use mistakes effectively to enhance learning.
- Be flexible and sensitive to the class atmosphere.
- Sweeten your lessons with humor and brief diversions.
- Use culture and personal stories to arouse students' interest.
- Do not ignore outliers and try to respond to their needs.
- Share your own difficulties and joys in learning a new language.
- Cultivate the students' self-efficacy: praise their little progresses and give constructive feedback.
- Prepare your lessons well and teach with empathy and enthusiasm.