Broaden-and-Build Theory

Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions is an important theory related to how social support causes positive student outcomes. Proposed by Fredrickson (2003), this theory describes emotions as a set of biological functions that humans have developed to adapt over the course of evolution.

Negative emotions serve protective functions. Emotions such as fear, anger and anxiety are known to arise in response to potential dangers, and narrow peoples' scope of attention (Schmitz et al., 2009). The narrowing of scope of attention refers to the fact that people with negative emotions are known to be more focused on narrow sets of stimuli and thoughts, while ignoring information that is deemed irrelevant. They also tend to become defensive – any information which threatens to challenge their beliefs and views quickly provokes anger. Based on these findings, Fredrickson (2004) and other scholars (e.g., Frijda, 1988) theorized that negative emotions are evolutionarily designed to serve protective functions, prompting the individuals to engage in narrow behaviors such as fight, flight and freeze under the presence of dangers.

In contrast, positive emotions tend to arise in the absence of danger (Cacioppo et al., 1999; Watson et al., 1999). They serve to facilitate 'approach behaviors', which function to prompt humans to grow to become more engaged with their surroundings and willing to participate in (intellectual or social) activities. Many of these activities are ultimately helpful for building the

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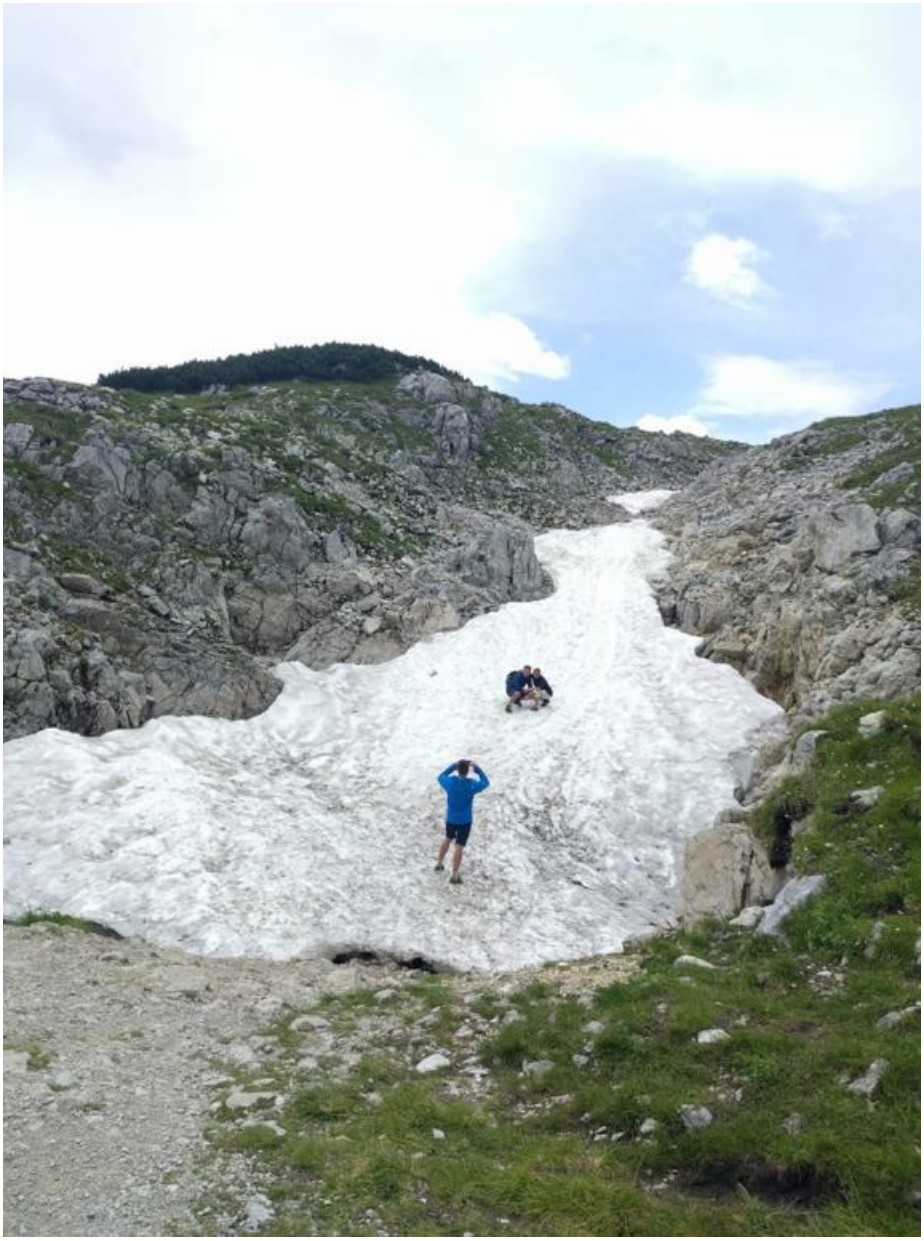
individual's resources and hence enhance future survival. For instance, engaging in social interactions fosters social bonds, which enables the individuals to seek help from their fellow humans in future situations; as a result, the ability to feel positive emotions is adaptive by evolution's standards. With the predisposition to experience positive emotions, people become more prone to exploring novel objects, people, or situations, exposing themselves to a variety of stimuli and information, which in turn enhances their learning.



There is ample evidence that positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and affection tend to broaden people's momentary thought repertoires – they tend to enable people to come up with new ideas and thoughts more readily (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). They also tend to prompt people to be more interested in playing and leisure activities (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988). They make people more motivated to explore new information and experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). They make people more driven to engage in positive social interactions with each other (Lewis, 1993). All these action tendencies proposed (Fredrickson, 2003, 2004), serve in the long term to promote exploratory behaviors, which help build cognitive resources and enduring personal bonds, thus enhancing survival. As a result, positive emotions serve a survival-enhancing function and are favored by natural selection.

Examples of positive emotions enhancing survival include: (1) contentment, a distinctive pleasant emotion, broadened by prompting the individual to savor and examine their current situations, prompting them to learn from the past (Izard, 1977); (2) pride, another pleasant emotion, arises from personal achievements and creates the urges to share the news about the said achievements with others, urging interpersonal interactions (Lewis, 1993); and (3) love, viewed as a distinct emotion, is experienced in the presence of a safe and close relationship and prompts the individual to cultivate relationships with the target loved ones (Fredrickson, 2000). These different types of positive emotions each prompt the individual to build personal resources, and this is the core idea of the Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions.

The broaden-and-built theory of positive emotion can spark innovative pedagogies, such as creating opportunities for students to explore, discover and create, through interaction, discussion and presentation. Learners' broaden-and-built behaviour can be developed through creative opportunities, hence it is crucial for teachers to change the text-book oriented approach and content-based approach to task-based, collaborative projects.

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