Positive Education in Australia: Practice, Measurement, and Future Directions

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Abstract Positive education (PosEd) combines the concepts and scholarship of positive psychology (PP) with best practice guidelines from education to promote student flourishing within educational settings. In this chapter, we first review the conceptual approaches to well-being upon which much of PosEd in Australia is based. Second, based on our experiences with research, teaching, and consulting, we identify issues that might impact the successful implementation of PosEd, including the frameworks used, the extent to which implicit or explicit strategies are employed, the importance of sustained and rigorous evaluation, and the impact of student, teacher, and other stakeholder buy-in. Third, we illustrate our own research that addresses some of these challenges, including the development of measurement tools to profile well-being and the undertaking of longitudinal studies evaluating PosEd programs. We then consider areas of future inquiry and practice that are particularly relevant to the Australian context, including (1) the need for research

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and applications to expand to diverse populations, such as Indigenous Australians, migrants, refugees, at-risk students, and disadvantaged groups, (2) systems approaches to implementation and research, and (3) strategies to produce and evaluate lasting change. We conclude that there is much potential for PosEd in Australia, but care needs to be taken so that it becomes a core part of education as a whole, and not simply a short-lived fad.

Keywords Positive education · Positive psychology · Well-being · Skills · Development · Young people · Intervention · Program

1 Introduction

Formal education prepares young people for life by building cognitive abilities and knowledge in the core academic disciplines. Over the past several decades, standardised testing and global ranking systems have narrowed Australian curricula to focus increasingly on Mathematics, Science, and English, at the expense of holistic learning. While striving for excellence in these disciplines is an important and worthwhile objective, there is a growing national and international impetus towards expanding what education means, and thus an increasing emphasis on building both academic excellence and well-being (Green et al. 2011; Huitt 2011).

The shift towards well-being in education is likely to gain further momentum in the coming years. At the 2015 UNESCO World Education Forum, world leaders articulated their 2030 vision for education, with health and fulfilment central to this vision (Incheon Declaration 2015). The Australian national curriculum now includes personal and social capability as one of its core competencies (ACARA 2013). Thus, personal capabilities, such as self-regulatory abilities, social and emotional intelligence, decision-making skills, and resilience, are becoming central to the academic agenda. The increasing emphasis and funding for co-curricular services (Faulkner 2007), such as school psychologists, counsellors, and well-being coordinators, is yet another indication of the growing centrality of health promotion in education.

The initiatives for holistic education are timely, with the well-being of young people a cause for growing concern in Australia and abroad. Recent trends suggest that mental health problems accounted for almost 50% of disease burden in Australian young people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011). About 1 in 7 Australian adolescents experienced a mental health disorder in the previous year (Lawrence et al. 2015), and suicide is the leading cause of death in Australian youth (aged 5–17) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). With studies indicating that the onset of 75% of psychological disorders occur before the age of 25 (Kessler et al. 2007), it is not surprising that the World Health Organisation (WHO) recently predicted that depression will be the leading cause of disease burden among wealthy nations by 2030 (WHO 2015). Inevitably, the national prevalence of disorder and distress in young people has led to many policy makers questioning what can be done to reverse such worrying trends.

Adolescence is a time of dynamic brain development, during which young people develop the mental and social capabilities required to advance through life (Patton et al. 2016; Steinberg and Morris 2001). This life stage is now recognised as an important window for prevention and early intervention to improve health outcomes. Instilling life skills and capabilities in young people during this critical phase of development might help them cope with challenges both in the present and as they progress through life. Positive Education (PosEd), defined as the application of the science of positive psychology (PP) to promote optimal functioning and well-being within educational settings (Norrish et al. 2013; Seligman et al. 2009), has this endeavour as its central aim.

In this chapter, we first review some of the conceptual frameworks that underpin PosEd approaches in Australia, including how it intersects with social and emotional learning (SEL). Second, we identify issues that may impact successful implementation of PosEd programs and initiatives. Third, we review and propose an evidence-based approach for measuring and evaluating well-being within schools. Finally, we address potential challenges and limitations in the field and suggest recommendations for future research and practice.

2 Positive Education and Social Emotional Learning

PosEd aims to build strengths, capabilities, well-being and resilience in educational communities. It arose in part from recognition of the growing mental health crisis in young people. At its core, PosEd suggests that the purpose of education is to develop both traditional academic skills as well as happiness (Seligman et al. 2009). It is not a single approach, but rather provides an umbrella under which multiple theories, programs, frameworks, and approaches reside. The vision, scope, and boundaries of PosEd are yet to be fully defined, but it both intersects with and complements social and emotional learning (SEL; see Durlak et al. 2015; Greenberg et al. 2003). SEL programs focus on developing various cognitive, emotional, and behavioural capabilities, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, positive social skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2005). SEL programs teach students psychosocial skills across an array of content areas, including understanding and managing emotions, goal-setting, building lasting and positive relationships, showing empathy for others, ethical behaviour, and problem-solving. SEL has been shown to produce positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes in students (Durlak et al. 2011; Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2014; Schonfeld et al. 2015).

Many of these SEL skills are incorporated into PosEd programs. However, PosEd is broader in nature. It includes additional frameworks and theories, which go beyond psychosocial skills to include aspects such as character, morality, meaning and purpose, and physical health. It also is more interdisciplinary in perspective, drawing on literature from organisational scholarship, neuroscience, economics, philosophy, and the humanities. Still, future theoretical and applied work will benefit from further delineating how the two areas fit together.

3 PosEd in Australia: A Taste of the Conceptual Underpinnings

PosEd is gaining momentum in Australia. Young people spend a lot of time at school, and many educators are committed to developing the character and well-being of their students. With psychosocial development becoming a core area for learning in the Australian curriculum, many schools are now building aspects of student well-being into their vision or mission statement (Allen et al. 2016).

Research and scholarship in PP has developed numerous interventions that can enhance individual well-being, buffer from stress, and develop one's character (see Parks and Schueller 2014 for a review). Some commonly used interventions include activities that help one reflect on good things in life, envisioning one's best self, showing gratitude towards others (e.g. writing a gratitude letter), and identifying and using one's strengths (e.g. Emmons and McCullough 2003; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005; Seligman et al. 2005). However, the question arises as to how the concepts of PP can best be implemented in education—a complex system with many resource demands, competing interests, and other real-world challenges.

Educators have a long history of developing and applying best learning practices to a range of topics to translate knowledge and skills to students. A growing range of programs is available. Most programs include at least some lessons or activities around character strengths, emotion regulation, mindfulness, gratitude, and positive social behaviours. However, the specific components and approaches vary by school and context. A full review is beyond the scope of this chapter, but in the following paragraphs we provide a taste of some of the common conceptual frameworks upon which many PosEd programs are based, starting with one of the most widely implemented and known programs available, the Geelong Grammar School (GGS) framework (see Chapter "The Geelong Grammar Positive Psychology Experience").

In 2008, during a 6-month visit by Professor Martin Seligman and his colleagues, GGS began introducing PosEd into its community. The school designed initiatives around Seligman's (2011) PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) model, adding a physical health component (Norrish 2015). Interventions, activities, training, and feedback at the school are oriented around this model. GGS implemented a whole-school approach to PosEd, in which both implicit and explicit learning is combined with school-wide practices across the school community to cultivate well-being and provide a nourishing environment (Norrish et al. 2013). PosEd is taught implicitly across subjects by finding opportunities to create links to relevant topics (e.g. strengths, gratitude), while staying true to core academic objectives. It is also taught explicitly in scheduled classes across most year levels. The whole-school approach aims to engage all stakeholders of the school community, including teachers, staff, leadership, and parents. In recent years, GGS has extended training to educators and schools around Australia.

Another approach is school-wide positive behavioural intervention and supports (Sugai et al. 2000; Sugai and Horner 2002). This approach uses principles from behaviourism to support positive behaviours and enhance student, school, and community capacities (www.pbis.org). The program aims to build positive lifestyle results for all young people across personal, health, social, family, work, and recreational domains by making maladaptive behaviours less relevant and desired behaviours more attractive. Positive behavioural intervention and supports is not a curriculum, but offers a framework and assessment system for adopting and implementing evidence-based behavioural interventions within the school environment.

Many students experience considerable hardship in their early years. To address this, more tailored programs have been developed to help meet the specialised needs of this group. Trauma-informed PosEd (Brunzell et al. 2015, 2016) draws from the available evidence in traumatology, PosEd, and PP, to offer a tailored PosEd framework specifically designed to meet the unique developmental and educational needs of trauma-affected students. Specific components of the program aim to improve students' abilities to regulate attention, psychophysiological and emotional responses, repair disrupted attachment styles, as well as to increase their psychological resources.

In addition to these conceptual frameworks commonly underpinning PosEd programs, a growing number of standalone curricula exist. Table 1 summarises some of these programs, providing links or references for more information.

Finally, as schools learn about PosEd, teachers are incorporating concepts into the classroom without an overarching framework or established curricula. As PosEd is a young field, this allows experimentation, with various schools testing what works and what does not. Some schools will pick and choose concepts that work for them, and omit others that are not relevant within their setting. Organisations such as the Positive Education Schools Association (PESA; www.pesa.edu.au) allow educators to share their experiences and learn from others who share an interest in implementing PosEd programs.

4 Factors that May Impact the Implementation of PosEd

Over the past decade, members of our team have been researching, teaching, and consulting with various schools and organisations in the area of PosEd. Our work in this area suggests that there are several factors that schools might want to consider if PosEd is to be successfully implemented. Based on our shared experiences, Table 2 identifies several areas that schools might want to consider when applying PosEd, with some relevant questions for the implementation phase. Some of these issues

Table 1 Stand-alone PosEd curricula

Program	About	Further information
Learning Curve	A program for primary, middle and senior year students, which covers an academic year's program in either online or hard-copy formats. The program incorporates growth-mindset, mindfulness, and character strengths, and is based around six pillars: positive engagement, skills and achievement, relationships and optimism, meaning and purpose, exercise and health, and strengths and emotions	www.learningcurve.com.au
KIDsmART	KIDsmART's focus is arts integration, an inquiry-based approach that uses the arts to create connections between content and different ways children learn. The program aims to increase student academic achievement, deepen learning, and to build problem-solving skills. The program is primarily US based	www.kidsmart.org
Smiling Mind	Smiling Mind is a free education program which provides mindfulness sessions and audios for individuals or groups of students. The programs can be facilitated by teachers or other wellbeing staff	www.smilingmind.com.au
Youth Connect	Youth Connect is a program that works with the community to provide all young people with the skills and knowledge to manage a successful pathway through secondary education. A core focus of the program is to cultivate further learning and employment opportunities	www.youthconnect.com.au
Bounceback!	Bounceback is a series of interactive books, supported by online materials and	www.bounceback.com.au

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Program	About	Further information
	games, which covers a range of curriculum units: Values, Resilience, Courage, Emotions, Relationships Bullying, and Humour	
Making Hope Happen (MHH)	Based on hope theory (Lopez 2013; Snyder 2002) the MHH program aims to foster the core components of hope in students: goals, pathways thinking, and agency	Lopez et al. (2009)
Penn Resiliency Program (PRP)	A US-based program, the goal of PRP is to aid students' ability to cope with daily problems common during adolescence. Core features are building optimism, assertiveness, relaxation strategies, coping skills, and decision-making skills	Seligman et al. (2009)
Strath Haven Positive Psychology curriculum (SHPPC)	First developed and piloted at the Strath Haven High School in the US, SHPPC aims to build character strengths, relationships, meaning, and positive emotional experience	Seligman et al. (2009)
Celebrating Strengths	Celebrating Strengths draws on the VIA character strengths tool to build a strengths focus in students and teachers	www.viacharacter.org/resources/celebrating-strengths/
Self Science	A social emotional learning program, first started in 1978, provides a methodology for teaching social emotional learning skills that can be integrated into classrooms	www.6seconds.org
The Positive Living Skills Social and Emotional Wellbeing Primary Program (PLSSEWP)	An early education program, the PLSSEWP is focused on developing a child's self-esteem, building awareness and skills to understand and regulate emotions and behaviours, and fostering children's ability to form healthy and secure relationships while interacting with others	www.kidsmatter.edu.au

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Program	About	Further information
MindUp Curriculum	Developed by the Hawn Foundation, MindUp offers a curriculum to develop social, emotional, and self-regulatory strategies for early to middle level students	www.mindup.org
YouCanDoIt!	YouCanDoIt! is a social emotional learning program designed to build five core capabilities: confidence, persistence, organisation, resilience, and interpersonal relations	http://www.asg.com.au/you-can-do-it-education

we address in greater detail below, but others are open questions that schools and the field as a whole will need to consider in the future.

An important factor to consider is what PosEd will look like in the school. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach, as different schools are finding success by following different approaches. Some of the schools that we have worked with have been strategic and structured in their approach, whereas others simply have some teachers or people in the school trialling different exercises in their classes. Some of the schools that are currently implementing PosEd include weekly explicit lessons devoted to PosEd content across one or more year levels, as well as implicitly embedding positive language and well-being concepts through all areas of the school. Other schools, especially those that are early in their PosEd journey, have included small programs and activities, mostly driven by a few interested staff members. Several schools are in the process of developing a strategic approach, up-skilling staff, with hopes of implementing formal and informal programs over the next few years.

Some schools are following a specific conceptual model, whereas others incorporate a range of activities or programs. For example, GGS follows a modified PERMA model, adding in a physical health component (Norrish 2015). St Peter's College in Adelaide has also followed the PERMA model (Kern et al. 2014, Kern et al. 2015a). After reviewing a range of models, one school developed their own model ("learn, grow, flourish!"), which was the best fit for the school.

Another issue to consider is who should be involved. Schools that have the most success are taking a whole-school approach, with teachers, staff, leadership, and other key stakeholders all involved (Waters and White 2015). However, what is meant by whole of school is not clear and might vary depending on the context of the school. Often, schools focus on the students, with the hope and aim of building student well-being. However, this can meet resistance in the school, especially as

Table 2 Some issues and questions to consider in the implementation of a PosEd program

Issue	Questions to ask
Boundaries of the program	Who should be targeted and included in a program? Should it focus on students or staff alone, or incorporate students, staff, leadership, parents, and the local community?
Explicit versus implicit strategies	To what extent should PosEd be explicitly taught in classes versus implicitly embedded into the climate and structure of the school?
Framework	Should there be a specific framework structuring PosEd efforts? If so, what framework is most appropriate for the values and context of the school? Should it be an existing framework or model, or should it be a hybrid of different models?
Language and culture	What language should be used? What is the meaning of different words, and do they resonate with the school, or should language be modified to fit the culture?
Intended outcomes	What outcomes are expected to come from the program? Who will benefit? Are expectations realistic? Will benefits of the program be visible immediately, or will it take several years or even decades to see the full impact of the program?
Evaluation	How will efforts be evaluated? What measures are collected? Should these be self-reported surveys or incorporate other strategies? What are the pressures to demonstrate immediate success?
Timeframe for implementation	What is the timeframe of change? What can be implemented immediately, and what will take a longer period of time? How should program efforts be structured?
Potential barriers	What barriers will be encountered? How can potential barriers be addressed?
Resources	What resources are available? How can resources be used most effectively? What sort of support and funding is available for short-term efforts and long-term strategies?
Training and consultation	How much training for staff members is needed? Are professional development days sufficient, or should some staff members receive formal training in PosEd? Should outside consultants be used?
Sustainability	How can PosEd be embedded in the school, so that it survives through shifts in leadership and staff turnover? Which strategies are more sustainable?

teachers feel overworked and disconnected from a new PosEd initiative. One approach might be to focus first on staff, work to build morale through teacher centred initiatives and training (e.g. Jennings et al. 2013; Roesner et al. 2013), identify and engage early adopters and champions, and gain commitment from leadership, and only then turn to the students themselves.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing interest in including measurement and evaluation as part of the implementation process. This is becoming increasingly important, both to help schools evaluate what is working or not working and to provide evidence that putting resources into PosEd will be useful. Schools that are more advanced in their PosEd journey tend to be using a range of methods to evaluate their efforts, including student attitude and well-being surveys, feedback sessions with staff, observation, and behavioural data (e.g. attendance, positive behaviours). Positive behavioural intervention and supports includes explicit methods of evaluation. However, for most teachers that we consult with, success is based on observations and anecdotal evidence. There does not seem to be a strong consensus around best approaches for evaluating PosEd efforts, married with a strong sense that resources for evaluating efforts are needed.

Educators are showing a growing interest in incorporating PosEd within their schools, as evidenced by the exponential growth in the number of people seeking and completing training in PosEd. However, our students, collaborators, and colleagues have encountered numerous challenges, which if poorly managed, can extinguish the growing interest in the field. While many staff are receptive to PosEd, others are unsupportive, cynical of "happiology", and even block efforts (see also White 2016). There is often a lack of support during the early stages of implementation. If leadership is unsupportive, then it is generally very difficult to get the programs underway. Some students are resistant to the activities conducted within PosEd programs, such as mindfulness and other exercises. Perhaps the biggest issues stem from conflicting priorities and time and resource issues. Teachers are time-poor, and if they feel like it is just another thing to do, then they are unlikely to engage. The growing number of resources available is generally helpful, but often teachers are unaware of what is available or programs are too costly. Motivated staff then find ways to implement PP concepts into classes, but this takes time, energy, and resources.

As a whole, implementing PosEd takes time. Early on, there is often resistance, and there can be numerous setbacks along the way. Change is challenging, and it is important to take small steps, take things slowly, and do small things well. We recommend taking time to remedy situations where people are unsupportive and when various initiatives are not working, but schools should not allow these negatives factors to become the full focus.

5 Measuring Well-Being in Schools: An Introduction to the Well-Being Profiler

One of the challenges of understanding the broader impact of PosEd on student engagement, achievement, well-being and successful transition into young adulthood is to accurately and efficiently measure adolescent well-being. Many approaches to measuring well-being exist, but there is little clarity for schools about the methods available to approach it. While schools that are more advanced in their PosEd journey generally have ways to measure well-being, little consensus exists about the best approaches.

Traditionally, there have been two philosophical approaches that underpin the measurement and study of well-being: eudaimonia and hedonia (Deci and Ryan 2008; Ryan and Deci 2001). Whereas eudaimonic approaches are more concerned with engaging with life's existential challenges and the optimisation of human potential (e.g. pursuing meaning, purpose, identity, growth), hedonic approaches are concerned with the subjective experience of happiness. Increasingly, researchers are in agreement that a broad, synergistic approach, incorporating both of these two philosophical traditions, provides a more comprehensive method for measuring and studying well-being than focusing on either domain alone (Delle Fave et al. 2011; Forgeard et al. 2011; Henderson and Knight 2012; Keyes 2007; Vella-Brodrick, in press).

There are several existing frameworks for studying and measuring well-being. A set of those that might be of particular of interest to schools and community youth groups are outlined in Table 3.

The list of frameworks contains common key variables and conceptual overlap. Many of the measured variables are embedded within broader life domains of young people, including strengths and emotional well-being; interpersonal relationships with family, friends, teachers and members of the wider community, as well as cognitive and psychological well-being. Just as these frameworks have overlapping concepts, there are also unique variables within each of the measurement approaches.

Table 3 Existing frameworks for measuring youth wellbeing

Measurement framework	About	Reference
Positive youth development	A strengths-based framework comprising of five core positive assets in young people: caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection	Lerner et al. (2009)
PERMA	The PERMA model of flourishing is defined by five pillars: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment	Seligman (2011)
Flourishing	Flourishing is measured by 10 aspects of feeling good (Hedonia) and functioning effectively (Eudaimonia): including competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality	Huppert and So (2013)
Psycho-social systems	A psycho-social system approach is captured by the five domains of positive functioning: attention and awareness, comprehension and coping, emotions, goals and habits, and virtues and relationships	Rusk and Waters (2015)
PROSPER	The PROSPER framework incorporates seven components: positivity, relationships, outcomes, strengths, purpose, engagement, and resilience	Noble and McGrath (2015)
EPOCH	The EPOCH model of adolescent well-being measures five positive psychological characteristics: engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness	Kern et al. (2016)

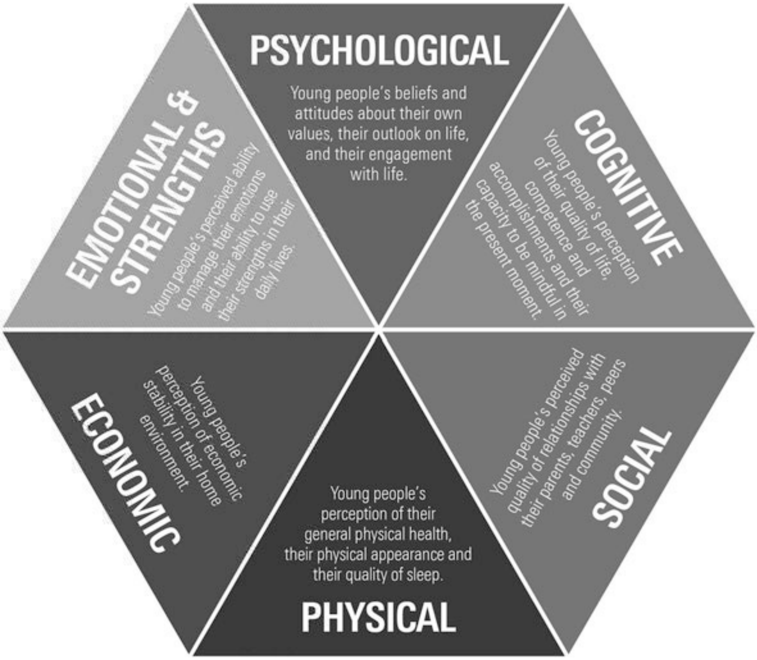
PSYCHOLOGICAL
Young people's beliefs and attitudes about their own values, their outlook on life, and their engagement with life.
COGNITIVE
Young people's perception of their quality of life, competence and accomplishments and their capacity to be mindful in the present moment.
SOCIAL
Young people's perceived quality of relationships with their parents, teachers, peers and community.
PHYSICAL
Young people's perception of their general physical health, their physical appearance and their quality of sleep.
ECONOMIC
Young people's perception of economic stability in their home environment.
EMOTIONAL & STRENGTHS
Young people's perceived ability to manage their emotions and their ability to use their strengths in their daily lives.

Fig. 1 An integrated model of measuring youth wellbeing (Chin et al., in prep)

To draw together these converging but independent approaches to measuring adolescent well-being, Chin et al. (2016a, c) conducted a systematic review of the relevant literature to identify core themes relating to adolescent well-being. The review incorporated relevant theoretical perspectives, meta-analyses, and a range of empirical studies. The core themes identified from the review process served as the underpinning for a comprehensive, online survey and reporting tool: The Well-being Profiler (Chin et al. 2015, 2016b). This multi-dimensional measurement tool captures six broad domains of well-being, which are depicted in Fig. 1.

The Well-being Profiler provides domain scores to distribute information on how young people are faring with respect to six categories of well-being. Apart from positive indicators of well-being, such as engagement, life satisfaction, happiness, connectedness, physical health and stability at home, risk factors are also included. For example, negative emotional states such as anger, anxiety, depression and stress provide information about subjective experiences that might oppose the domain of emotional well-being and strengths. Other risk factors include loneliness, bullying, and negative peer pressure, which yield information about negative forms of sociality that could obstruct the domain of social well-being. Levels of sedentary activity are relevant to physical well-being. The Well-being Profiler can help schools and community groups identify indicators and risk factors of well-being, which can enable more targeted and effective interventions (Chin, in press). This level of information can also be used as a needs analysis, prior to the implementation of new programs, as activities and discussions can be suitably tailored towards addressing the evident concerns and challenges found within a particular cohort of young people.

As an example of the Well-being Profiler in action, a recent needs analysis was conducted with a community of schools in the North-Eastern region of Victoria, as part of a Maroondah Youth Well-being and Consultation Project (Chin et al. 2016b). The aims of this project were threefold: (1) to collect data to provide each participating school with an overview of their students' well-being across the various year levels, (2) to equip individual schools with the capacity to design tailored well-being interventions that would meet the needs of their students; and (3) to combine data across all participating schools to be used collectively for community-wide planning and decision-making about improving well-being outcomes across the community. The Well-being Profiler also incorporated open-ended questions to seek ideas from young people about changes that could be made to further support them and improve well-being in the municipality. Identified themes and survey findings demonstrate that young people are insightful about their needs, struggles and aspirations, and that when provided with an opportunity to share their perspectives using an independent research tool, are candid and perceptive.

6 Future Directions for PosEd in Australia: Research and Practice

The enthusiasm surrounding PosEd in Australia has led to a rapidly increasing number of schools looking to embed it within their curriculum and pedagogy. This rapid uptake shows much potential for PosEd to mature and grow in the Australian context, yet it also raises areas for concern, with some practitioners experiencing difficulties making programs stick (White 2016), implemented programs being rushed and underdeveloped, and research not able to keep pace with the application. We explore some of these concerns and recommend directions for future research and practice in Australia.

Research with Diverse Populations. PosEd is quickly becoming an extensively utilised framework for schools looking to benefit student well-being and academic outcomes. It is being implemented to varying degrees across public and private, urban and rural, co-ed and unisex, religious and secular, as well as in primary and secondary schools in Australia. However, further efforts to study PosEd across these varied and diverse populations are still needed.

As we noted above, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive PosEd evaluation programs are primarily taking place in schools that have taken the lead in implementing the whole-school approach. Two independent schools—GGS (Victoria) and St Peter's College (SPC) (South Australia)—are good examples. While these evaluations have yielded valuable and promising results about the potential outcomes of PosEd in these schools (e.g. Kern et al. 2014, Kern et al. 2015a;

Vella-Brodrick et al. 2014, 2015; White and Waters 2015), generalising the findings remains a challenge due to the unrepresentative nature of these high socio-economic and well-resourced schools and students, as well as the difficulties in finding comparable control groups.

At present, little empirical evidence at the whole-school level exists about the efficacy of PosEd in schools that hold more diverse student profiles. This includes schools with lower socioeconomic students, as well as those from more diverse sociocultural backgrounds, such as refugees, migrants, and indigenous Australian students. Indeed, there is evidence that some of the activities typically employed in PosEd, such as conveying gratitude or expressing optimism, are more effective in participants of Anglo or Celtic heritage than those from other backgrounds (e.g. Boehm et al. 2011; Layous et al. 2013), suggesting that their benefits do not necessarily extend universally across cultures. Thus, caution needs to be exercised when generalising the results of these well-known and established PosEd programs to more diverse schooling demographics in Australia. To help address this, a currently funded project being conducted by the Centre for PP is evaluating PosEd in public schools with more diverse student populations and findings should be available in the coming months.

Notwithstanding this need for research across diverse student samples, some more tailored applied approaches are available and may be more relevant for students who possess specific needs and where standard forms of PosEd may not be applicable. One example of this is trauma-informed PosEd (see above), which was developed for vulnerable students who have experienced or have witnessed traumatic stressors. Other programs have also shown some success with disadvantaged communities, including positive behavioural intervention and supports (e.g. Carr et al. 2002), and SEL (e.g. Tolan et al. 2015; Wiley and Siperstein 2015). These tailored approaches are promising because they consider the unique circumstances and needs of the recipients, yet ongoing research is still needed to test the efficacy of such programs.

A Systems Approach. PosEd, with its roots in PP, is a field that is heavily embedded in models of individual behaviour change. Thus, PosEd research has typically focused on programs underpinned by specific interventions, generally implemented within a single school setting (Kristjánsson 2012; Waters and Stokes 2013). For example, studies conducted with students in Australia and internationally suggest that interventions focused on fostering gratitude, a sense of hope for the future, growth-mindsets, and mindfulness are associated with positive outcomes in students, such as enhanced well-being or academic performance (Waters 2011). But these programs do not take into account the interrelated social and contextual factors that have been shown to be important potential antecedents for the mental health and well-being of young people (Currie et al. 2012). Systems approaches offer an alternative to individual behaviour change interventions in schools and better consider complexity by developing interventions that focus on changing the structures of the system. A system is defined as “a set of things…interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behaviour over time” (Meadows and Wright 2008, p. 2).

Systems approaches generally consider three key aspects (Williams and van't Hof 2016). First, they seek to understand *interrelationships*, or how different elements within a system are connected to each other and the consequences that follow across related elements when one of them is impacted. The education system has many objects and processes that are connected in multiple ways and impacting one of them may have cascading consequences which need to be understood. Second, systems approaches consider multiple *perspectives* across a range of people involved in the system, including how different perspectives affect people's behaviour or affect the success judgments of any improvement initiative. Teachers, students and parents, for example, may possess unique thoughts and perspectives and it may benefit efforts to consider such differences. Third, there is an effort to understand the *boundaries* of the system, which involves considering what is included and excluded from it. A boundary determines what is considered relevant or irrelevant, worthwhile or not, who gets what kind of resources for what purpose, and whose interests are marginalised. For example, a school intervention might only include students and staff at a school, or it could extend to include siblings, parents or the local community.

Systems approaches help identify pathways and key factors that influence individual and collective well-being. Once identified, specific factors such as policies, resource allocations, relational structures, community norms and values, as well as skills and attitudes can be targeted, while keeping in mind the broader range of influences on any given action (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007). By first evaluating the system across a broad range of inter-relationships and perspectives, systems approaches are better situated to consider contextual factors as well as potential unintended consequences that programs might cause. Enablers within the system can be identified and activated, while barriers can be proactively addressed. Systems approaches are also more likely to be effective and sustainable because additional levers for change are targeted and triggered (Kern et al. 2015b).

An example of an education intervention that illustrates a systems approach is the Gatehouse Project, an initiative designed to promote the health and well-being of young people by increasing student connectedness. The project was conducted in Victorian secondary schools between 1996 and 2001, and adopted a flexible and iterative action research process for promoting sustainable whole-school change (Bond and Butler 2009). The intervention drew on the work of systems thinkers including Senge, Argrys, and Fullan and was considered as a 'process of change' rather than a product or program to implement.

The project considered existing inter-relationships and how things were already connected within the schools, rather than simply adding another single program to the curriculum. Moreover, one of the explicit goals of the project was to strengthen the relationships between students and teachers, as well as students and the school (Bond and Butler 2009). One of the ways this project considered the different perspectives of those involved was by providing facilitators/critical friends to schools. Their role was an important one and included building relationships with the teachers to gain an understanding of their perspectives, the school's culture, and its practices. They also provided this feedback to the research team which subsequently changed some processes during implementation (Butler et al. 2011).

Evidence across 25 secondary schools supported a sustained reduction in the health risk behaviours in the intervention schools at four-year follow-up (Patton et al. 2006). From a systems perspective, the approach employed in the Gatehouse Project suggests that having a broad focus on school climate and student connectedness may be more effective than specific, single issue focused programs addressing a specific behaviour (Bond et al. 2004). However, the complexity of implementing a multi-focused intervention requires long-term commitment by schools and the recognition that they are not merely ‘quick fixes’, but instead require on-going support, effort, and modification. Future PosEd programs should consider strategies for incorporating systems approaches into change process within an educational community.

Strategies for Lasting Change. While the prompt uptake of PosEd is promising for the field, the question arises as to how the programs can be sustainable (White 2016). Challenges include lack of endorsement of PosEd programs by staff or leadership, student disengagement with PosEd curricula, confusion over what PosEd is and what good implementation looks like, and the need to evaluate the longer-term course and impact of programs. We explore these challenges in the following paragraphs.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges involves staff and leadership support for incorporating PosEd into a school, with many being detached and disengaged with PosEd curricula. If time-poor teachers are asked to implement curricula, but do not understand what PosEd is or why it should be incorporated into an already packed schedule, programs can be thwarted and efforts halted. In serious cases, disengaged teachers may model behaviours that send a subversive message to the intentions of the implemented programs, potentially undermining the progress of receptive students. For programs to be sustainable, there is a need to help all staff and key stakeholders take ownership of the program. This does not mean silencing sceptical voices—some of the biggest critics become the greatest advocates once their perspective and needs are considered. As such, programs may benefit from beginning with staff, helping them to feel like an active part of the change process, and spending time and resources to provide proper training and support for teachers.

Second, student disengagement can be a problem, with some students stating that PosEd classes can be too broad and unrelated to young people’s everyday experiences (e.g. Vella-Brodrick et al. 2015). Effort should be given to refining programs to make it engaging and meaningful for students. Vella-Brodrick et al. (2014, 2015), for example, conducted focus groups with a range of students and revealed that students are more engaged with PosEd when it is taught experientially, and when the delivery is less ‘academic’ in nature. Students also wanted teachers to use real-world examples, applicable to their age group, and to demonstrate consistency in content delivery and in modelling the aspired behaviours. Such insights offer valuable lessons about delivery modes for PosEd curricula. At the same time, PosEd claims to draw on best learning practices from education, and hundreds of years of pedagogical development both in Australia and globally should not simply be discarded. What best practice approaches look like for PosEd is a challenge for the future.

Third, excitement by some over PosEd and PP concepts can lead to exaggerated claims over what PosEd can and will do—a dialogue often devoid of nuance and context (McNulty and Fincham 2012). While the interest in PosEd in Australia is positive, it can quickly become counterproductive if implementation is rushed, delivered as a once-only program and there are unrealistic expectations about the outcomes that are achievable. While PosEd may indeed have mental health benefits for some young people, evidence suggests that it is not a blanket panacea for psychological distress, with factors such as age and year-level potentially overriding lasting benefits (e.g. Vella-Brodrick et al. 2014). While we are hopeful that PosEd will help prevent the growing mental health crises of young people, the programs have not been around long enough for us to know the long-term benefits or consequences of different programs. Further, it is important to recognise that each school is unique and is contained within a 'noisy' context, which is likely to have implications for the efficacy of PosEd programs.

Crucially, rushed short-term programs and over-expectations may create false expectations for students—leaving some disheartened, anxious and perhaps worse-off when experiencing quite natural dips and declines in well-being (Diener et al. 2006). Care needs to be taken to ensure that students, staff, and other stakeholders have realistic expectations of what to expect from any given program or strategy. Schools need to understand that sustainable change occurs slowly, and often the positive effects are not immediately evident. By setting realistic expectations and adopting a long-term plan of embedding PosEd in the day-to-day operations of the school and providing booster sessions to supplement specific PosEd programs, this may help avoid rushed implementation efforts and discouragement when setbacks occur, while also aiding program sustainability.

Finally, only a handful of studies have investigated longer-term consequences of PosEd programs (e.g. Marques et al. 2011; Vella-Brodrick et al. 2015). Building character and capability is a long-term process, and the impact of intervention efforts may not be visible for years to come (Kumkale and Albarracín 2004). Further work is needed that tracks students across life's transitions into tertiary education, the workforce, relationships, and beyond. While a recent government funded project led by Vella-Brodrick along with a Victorian local government will examine the longer-term outcomes beyond the school context, there remains a need for further research assessing the lasting effects of whole-school programs. This includes programs that are rolled out over hundreds of students with mixed-methods approaches (e.g. self-reports, experience sampling, biological data, academic test scores, awards, medical records) that measure well-being as well as other socially-valued outcomes. The work by Vella-Brodrick and colleagues (Chin et al. 2015; Vella-Brodrick et al. 2014, 2015) adopts a comprehensive measurement approach including in the moment sampling using the *Wuzzup* app, biophysio data (salivary cortisol and heart rate reactivity), academic performance, student focus groups and on-line well-being surveys that assesses the full spectrum of mental health–from mentally ill-health to flourishing. While this is a start, more work of this nature is needed with a broader range of samples, which is likely to require substantial funding resources to achieve. Hence, a priority for the immediate future is to secure funding to enable this comprehensive research to be conducted.

7 Concluding Thoughts: Towards a Positive Future for PosEd in Australia

With the national prevalence of pathology in Australian youth today, policy makers and educators are eager to organise efforts to reverse these trends. Educational systems are uniquely placed to aid this objective, providing a window to instil important life skills during a critical phase of child development. While this opportunity offers much potential for preventative efforts to occur, care needs to be taken to ensure that PosEd programs are not a short-lived fad, but are instead sustainable, targeted, and sensitive to the context of each school and the specific needs of the students. Methodical evaluation, using evidence-based and comprehensive measurement tools, may help schools in this regard. Schools should also consider using systems approaches to progress implementation efforts, as well as take care to promote key stakeholder buy-in through all stages of the change process. Future research needs to continue to explore PosEd with more diverse population demographics, using long-term follow-up strategies.

PosEd is a young field, requiring ongoing research to identify the underlying processes that aid program success. Practitioners and educators are united in this front to improve the well-being of young people, but the enthusiasm needs to be balanced with careful consideration, thoughtful planning, funding, and open discourse about the limitations of programs and the field. With the ample concern, care, and compassion that educators have for the young people in their care, along with the latest research initiatives, we are optimistic that the field will journey along the right path.

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