# 6

# Positive Education Pedagogy: Shifting Teacher Mindsets, Practice, and Language to Make Wellbeing Visible in Classrooms

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## Evolving the Field of Positive Education: Three Key Areas for Growth

Positive education, although only just over a decade old, has enjoyed rapid growth (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Shankland & Rosset, 2017) and can pride itself on being an innovative and expansive field (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Waters & Loton, 2019). With the spirit of growth and innovation in mind, this chapter puts forward three key ideas for expanding the field (see Fig. 6.1). Below, I suggest that we need to find ways to implicitly deliver well-being practices in addition to the current delivery mode of explicit programs. Second, I propose that, in addition to the current focus on teaching the content of wellbeing, the field would benefit from approaches that build the contexts for wellbeing. Third, I recommend that, in addition to the current focus on educating the students, the field must also empower the teachers to more actively utilize their own teaching expertise and relationship. My aim is to motivate researchers and practitioners to build upon the current trend of focusing on programs, content, and students to also include approaches that emphasize practices, context, and teachers.

When it comes to building student wellbeing, schools can adopt explicit and implicit approaches (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg,

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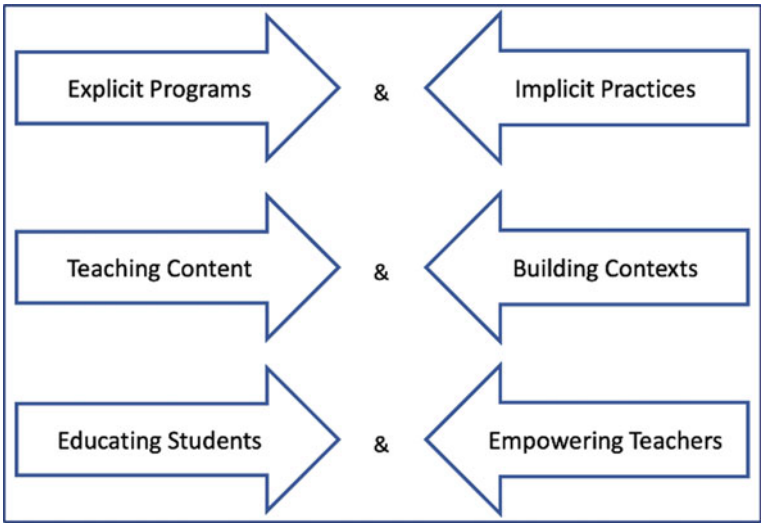


**Fig. 6.1** Three key ways to expand the field of positive education

2009; Waters & White, 2015). While explicit approaches (i.e., curriculums) build wellbeing through *what* we teach students, the implicit approach opens the door to enhancing wellbeing through *how* we teach (i.e., pedagogy).

An explicit approach follows the principle of direct instruction and overtly educates students about wellbeing through prescribed curriculums and programs (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2008). (For a review of programs see Slemp et al., 2017; see also www.casel.org). The international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) analysis revealed that schools typically rely on explicit curriculums and programs as the prevailing approach for promoting student wellbeing (OECD, 2016) and according to the analysis, most schools implement wellbeing programs through dedicated units within physical and health education, civic and citizenship education, moral education, and/or religious education. Other researchers have found the explicit approach is implemented via wellbeing programs being taught in after-school programs (e.g., Durlak Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010) as well as tutorial/house/pastoral groups (e.g., Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007; Proctor, Tsukayama, Wood, Maltby, Eades, & Linley, 2011).

There are several benefits to the explicit approach, namely that wellbeing curriculums are designed by experts, are developmentally appropriate, and provide teachers with high-quality resources including worksheets, scenarios, class discussion, and games (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Nelson, Westhues, &

MacLeod, 2003). Another strength of the explicit approach is that it provides a consistency of content, thus, allowing teachers to follow a uniform lesson sequence and ensuring all students are taught the same key lessons.

Despite the strengths of the explicit approach, it has been criticized for privileging content over context in ways that emphasize the teaching of content-based skills (e.g., mindfulness, cognitive re-framing) without considering how the environment impacts wellbeing. According to Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, and Parker (2016), most positive education programs fall short because they are designed to teach students how to change their inner state but fail to show students and teachers how to recognize, and thus change, the contexts that shape wellbeing (e.g., teacher–student relationships, classrooms, learning environments). Ciarrochi et al. (2016) go on to argue that teaching individual-level psychological skills to students, while well-intentioned, may place the onus of wellbeing too heavily on the shoulders of the student and, thus, make the student vulnerable to further distress if they are in a context where those skills are unable to be used (or, indeed, may even backfire).

In relation to teachers, the explicit approach may also have a downside by inadvertently disempowering them as active agents in building the wellbeing of their students. This can occur for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned above, wellbeing programs follow a set sequence and, thus, teachers may be unable to adjust the learning to suit the specific needs of their classroom and/or utilize it in their own pedagogy and unique teaching style. Second, not all teachers are given the opportunity to deliver wellbeing programs in a jam-packed timetable (White, 2016), meaning that many teachers are not trained and thus feel unequipped to know how to boost student wellbeing. Finally, by focusing on individual-level skills taught to students (i.e., content), explicit wellbeing curriculums do not provide professional development to teachers about the importance of context.

While acknowledging the downsides of the explicit approach, the evidence shows that wellbeing programs and curriculums do successfully build student wellbeing and, thus, are important for schools to have in place (Durlack Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Maynard, Solis, Miller, & Brendel 2017; Waters, 2011). Perhaps one way to get the best of the explicit approach while overcoming the shortcomings is to encourage schools to also adopt an implicit approach to building student wellbeing, thus extending beyond the formal teaching of wellbeing curriculums.

Unlike the explicit approach, the implicit approach does not aim to build wellbeing through formal instruction, but instead works on the principle of permeability to find flexible ways to infuse learning about wellbeing into the

student's daily life at school through academic subjects, co-curricular activities, the school yard, and so on (Balmer, Master, Richards, & Giardino, 2009). By weaving opportunities to learn about wellbeing into a wide range of experiences, the implicit approach allows for a focus both on content and on context (see White & Waters, 2014, for a case study of the way positive education can be implicitly woven into a school).

With respect to content, the implicit approach has already been shown to be successful through the integration of wellbeing topics into traditional academic subjects. Indeed, Norrish et al. (2013) demonstrate how positive education can be implicitly embedded into a broad range of academic curriculums, stating:

> in History, students explore the topic of genealogy through the lens of character strengths by interviewing family members about their own and relatives' strengths. In art, students are asked to explore the word 'flourishing' and to create a visual representation of their personal understanding; and in Geography, students examine how flourishing communities can be enabled through the physical environment of towns and cities. (p. 151)

In this way, the implicit approach provides the advantage of reaching many students across a range of discipline areas and not leaving the learning solely to the realm of a formal wellbeing curriculum that sits only in certain subjects (e.g., health studies, religious studies).

These examples demonstrate how wellbeing can be implicitly delivered through content linkages to various academic curriculums. A second pathway offered through the implicit approach is that of context. According to Ciarrochi et al. (2016), context is a key factor shaping wellbeing. Although students operate within multiple contexts at school, the classroom is arguably one of the most significant. As such, the way a teacher shapes the classroom environment is likely to have a strong influence on student wellbeing (Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel, & Creemers, 2007). Indeed, past research has found links between aspects of teacher pedagogy and student wellbeing including instructional practices (Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch, & Michalowski, 2009), the degree to which teachers give academic help (Carmen, Waycott, & Smith, 2011; Løhre, Lydersen, & Vatten, 2010), teacher responsiveness to student needs (Andersen, Evans, & Harvey, 2012), teacher–student relationships (Hattie, 2008), and the peer relationships enabled in class by teachers (Hamm, Farmer, Dadisman, Gravelle, & Murray, 2011). These findings suggest that teacher pedagogy is a contextual factor worth exploring in positive education.

## Towards a Positive Education Pedagogy

Enhancing student wellbeing implicitly through teacher pedagogy is not a new idea and its roots can be traced back to child-centred teaching movements existing for many decades, including Montessori (100+ years old, Lillard et al., 2017), Steiner (first developed in 1919), and Reggio Emilia (developed after WWII, Katz, 1993). In recent years, a number of wellbeing-specific pedagogies have been developed including "person-centred pedagogy" (Fielding, 2006; Gatangi, 2007), "pedagogic connectedness" (Beutel, 2009), "student-centred pedagogy" (Cornelius-White, 2016), and "pedagogical wellbeing" (Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2010; Soini, Pyhältö, & Pietarinen, 2010). These approaches contend that wellbeing is a dynamic state constructed *within* the teaching process itself. According to Pyhältö et al. (2010) "pedagogical wellbeing is constructed in the core processes of teachers' work" (p. 737). Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbell, and Donovan (2009) found that teachers are "key deliverers" of student wellbeing. Certainly, teachers interviewed in Kidger et al.'s (2009) study believed that taking care of a student's emotional and mental health was a core part of teaching that is "inseparable from learning" (p. 7). The idea that student wellbeing can be fostered implicitly through pedagogy, as separate from delivering explicit student wellbeing curriculums, generates a fruitful opportunity for schools who are aiming to build student wellbeing. By training teachers how to incorporate the science of positive psychology into their teaching practice the implicit approach adds a new "wellbeing lever."

In a recent example of using positive education pedagogy to design teacher interventions, Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2016) trained teachers how to incorporate trauma-informed principles into their daily teaching practice in order to boost the self-regulatory capacities of students affected by trauma.[1] In this study, nine teachers who worked in an alternative learning/trauma-affected setting were trained to more intentionally weave practices that fostered the students' use of self-regulation into their teaching (e.g., using circle time to show students how to wait their turn to speak, helping students persist with a difficult task, using rhythmic activities such as drumming to calm the nervous system, teaching mindfulness). Following the intervention, the teachers were interviewed three times over a 13-week time period (i.e., one school term). The results of this study found that teachers had confidence in their new teaching practices and that students showed greater self-management.

[1]Given the nature of how trauma affects a student's ability to learn, an explicit curriculum on self-regulation was unlikely to be successful, as such the implicit approach was adopted.

Building on this self-regulatory pedagogical intervention, and again working in a trauma-informed classroom context, Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2019) developed a year-long intervention called Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE). TIPE is a teacher training program that educates teachers on how to marry together positive education practices with trauma-informed principles in the classrooms. Eighteen teachers were trained over one year to adjust their teacher approaches in ways that were aimed to help their students to and overcome classroom-based adversity and grow their psychological resources. The teachers reported that TIPE enabled them to use a range of new wellbeing-oriented teaching strategies such as positive primers, play, mindfulness, and goal setting in class. According to the teachers, weaving these strategies into their teaching resulted in the students building stronger relationships skills, having higher trust in the teacher, and showing more frequent use of their character strengths. These research findings show the promise of using positive pedagogical interventions as a means for improving student wellbeing.

## Exploring the Role of Positive Education Pedagogy: A Case Study

In the last section I have argued that pedagogy is a core mechanism for schools to embed positive education into student life in ways that are implicit, context-based and teacher empowering. This section describes the design and findings of a qualitative study that explored the role of positive education pedagogy to examine my contentions.

### Sample and Procedure

Two Australian Government schools comprised the research sites for this study. Both schools educated mainstream students and had a socio-economic index equal to the Australian average (i.e., they were not disadvantaged or trauma-informed, alternate setting schools like those targeted for Brunzell et al., 2016, 2019). The first research site was a high school (grades 7–12) and the second research site was a K-12 school. In both schools, the Visible Wellbeing Intervention (explained below) was delivered to all staff. In addition to the all-staff professional development days, a small team of teachers were chosen to be the "Visible Wellbeing Implementation Team" and were given one additional day of training (in Term one) combined with a coaching

session run by the researcher in Terms 2 and 3. The teachers in this implementation team came from primary and secondary classes and ranged across all the major discipline areas of the school. It was this team that formed the study sample ($n = 30$). The data was collected in three forms: focus groups, teachers writing about their practice, and the researchers notes team coaching sessions. These three forms of data were collected at three time points over a full academic year.[2]

## Methodological Approach

An inductive qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable for this study. The inductive approach allows for findings to be built-up through the data, rather than imposing a pre-existing theory (Langdridge, 2004; Willig, 2008), and is considered the best approach for investigating new ideas where theory does not yet exist. An inductive qualitative approach was also deemed the most suitable for this study given that the implicit delivery of wellbeing via pedagogy will be expressed in many varied ways (as many different ways as there are teaching styles) and, as such a one-size fits all framework like PERMA would be too blunt. Finally, given that implicit teaching methods are often subtle (i.e., not mapped out in the content of a lesson plan), a fine-grained open-ended approach was required to capture the small and varied changes that teachers were potentially making to their practice following the intervention.

The inductive qualitative paradigm has a strong history of developing methods that are repeatable, dependable, and transferable across studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters, & Synard, 2017). Such processes include member checks (in this study, data themes were sent back to a smaller sample of the teachers from both schools to check that the themes identified by the researcher were accurate), data triangulating (in this study, data came from three sources: group coaching session, focus groups, and written transcripts), sample variation (in this study, the data was sourced from two schools across three campuses over two different states in Australia), prolonged and substantial engagement (in this study, participants were followed across a full academic school year with substantial connection between the researcher and study participants), a dedicated step-wise data

[2]The three time points were determined by the two schools who acted as research sites and were decided upon based on the researcher needs for the best timelines to collect data showing changes in teacher practice together with school calendar and other teacher commitments. The timelines were: 1) the end of Term 1 (the training was at the start of Term 1), the end of Term 2, and mid-way through Term 4.

analyses processes that allow for rigour in the data analysis (the current study used Mile and Huberman's [1994] data analysis process), and peer debriefing (i.e., the researcher had multiple-discussions with research colleagues through the analysis process to sense-check interpretations).

## Pedagogical Intervention: Visible Wellbeing

Research into classroom teaching has seen a big push for the "science-informed pedagogy of learning" (Fischer et al., 2007), with research devoted to using science to improve teacher practice in ways that allow for greater student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008; Hattie, 2008; Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). Along the same lines, Waters (2015, 2017, 2018) has argued for a "science-informed pedagogy for wellbeing." Teachers can integrate the science of wellbeing into their pedagogy in ways that allow for greater promotion of student wellbeing. Waters has devised a pedagogical intervention called *Visible Wellbeing* that trains teachers how to marry together the science of wellbeing with the science of learning and teaching (Waters, 2015, 2017, 2018; Waters, Sun, Rusk, Cotton, & Arch, 2017).

Visible Wellbeing (VWB) is not a program or a set curriculum about wellbeing. Rather, it is a pedagogical intervention delivered to teachers that trains them how to implicitly integrate the science of wellbeing into their teaching. VWB trains teachers in a language, a framework, and a process for seeing and building the wellbeing of their students.

The aim of the VWB intervention is to help teachers teach in a way that shifts wellbeing from a subjective, internal experience occurring within the student to a tangible, observable phenomenon that is visible in class for students and teachers to see. When wellbeing becomes visible in class, it becomes a resource for learning (Waters, 2018). By teaching in ways that make wellbeing visible, students learn how their emotions influence their learning, see patterns in their wellbeing, and become knowledgeable about how context shapes their emotions, thus responding to the call of Ciarrochi et al. (2016) to take a contextual approach to wellbeing.

## Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman's (1994) four-step qualitative framework was used to analyse the three forms of data: data reduction, data display, and verifying conclusions. Figure 6.2 outlines the iterative process used for data reduction in the current study. A loop-like pattern of multiple rounds was undertaken

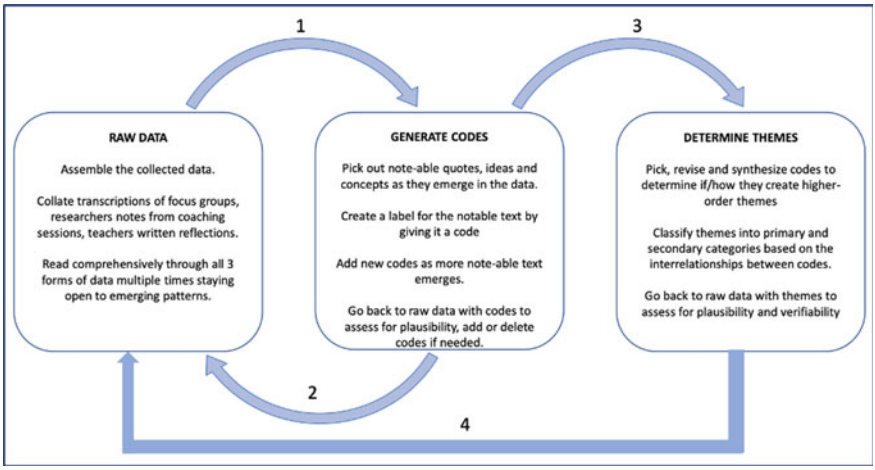


**Fig. 6.2** Qualitative data reduction coding process

starting with the raw data being examined to generate initial codes (step 1), revisiting the data as additional codes emerged (step 2), making connections between codes to create higher themes (step 3), and verifying the themes by going back to the original data (pathway 4).

## Results

Three primary themes were identified in this study that had the following temporal order: (1) legitimizing wellbeing in the teacher's minds, (2) actioning wellbeing in the classroom, and (3) building wellbeing through relationships across the school. Six secondary themes were identified. Two subthemes arose through legitimizing wellbeing: licence and language. For the "actioning wellbeing" theme, two secondary themes emerged: insight and impact. The third primary theme, building wellbeing through relationships, contained two secondary themes: care and collegiality. Richer data, in the form of teacher quotes, for each secondary theme will be provided below.

Figure 6.3 depicts the temporal order of the themes and shows that at the end of Term 1, following the VWB intervention, the theme of "legitimizing wellbeing" emerged. This was seen through a change in the mindset of the teachers who reported viewing wellbeing as a more worthwhile goal. Teachers conveyed that the VWB intervention had given them the licence to prioritize wellbeing and the language to discuss wellbeing with students. This change in teachers' mindset gave them the confidence to incorporate changes into their teacher practice so that wellbeing was more intentionally woven in.

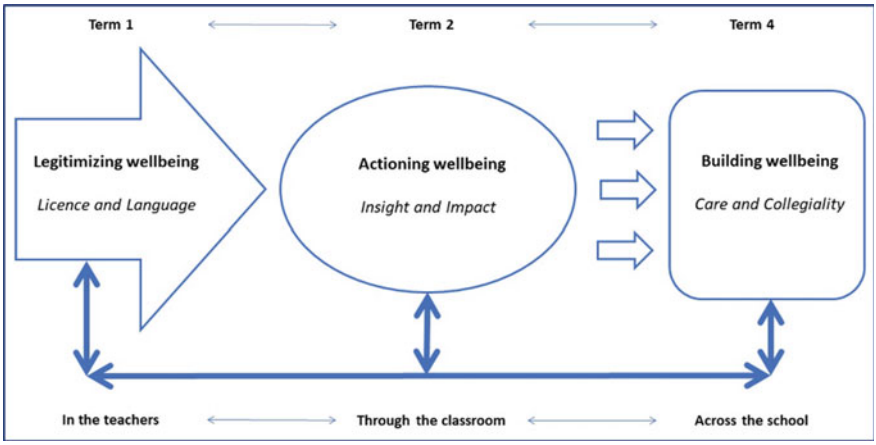


**Fig. 6.3** Key themes, timelines, and levels of outcomes following a positive education pedagogy

At the second round of data collection (end of Term 2), teachers described greater insight into the wellbeing of their students, and this allowed them to tweak and adjust their teaching practices in ways that better supported wellbeing and learning. Teachers were seeing the impact of their new teacher practices rippling across the classroom through better student learning, engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour.

Finally, analysis of the third round of data collection (mid-way through Term 4) found that, as teachers and students became more and more comfortable using VWB practices in class, they were taking the new wellbeing practices outside of the classroom and creating positive changes to their relationships across the school.

The temporal relationships of the three primary themes showed a pattern that sequenced from change at the individual-level (within the teacher), through to group-level impacts (across classrooms), and on to the school-level effects (through relationships outside of the classroom; student–student, teacher–student, and teacher–teacher). Although the three primary themes each emerged at consecutive time points across the year it was also evident that, as the visible wellbeing practice deepened, the earlier themes were still present and were forming feedback loops as indicated with the bi-directional arrows in Fig. 6.3.

**Term 1 data: Legitimizing wellbeing**.

***Secondary theme: Licence***. Following the visible wellbeing pedagogical intervention, teachers observed that wellbeing had been a given legitimate place in the classroom. For some, this increased the value they now placed on

student wellbeing, and for others it gave them licence to do what they were already doing. Representative comments included:

- "I've always known that student wellbeing is important but, to be honest, in the past I would think "Yeah, yeah, but I've got to get on with my curriculum" and I'd put the emotional needs of my students to the back of my mind. When you teach in Year 12 there's always so much curriculum to get through. I've been teaching English for 29 years, but it's only since the training that I really know that if the student is not feeling emotionally ready to learn then I am not doing my job as a teacher. It is *THE* most important thing as far as I'm concerned and I wish I'd realised this much earlier in my career" (ST, Year 12 English).
- "This is not meant to sound offensive, but when the school first announced we would be doing this training I thought it would be full of 'hocus-pocus'. I'm a chemistry teacher and I was thinking 'What will I do with this training?" I can see now I had a classic fixed mindset about wellbeing and about my ability to teach wellbeing. I feel embarrassed admitting that now because I had no idea about the science of the field. I've used the training to think about the elements of my teaching that create the optimal 'emotional chemistry' for learning. I introduced the idea of wellbeing to my students through the lens of chemistry and we've talked about the 'chemical reactions' that foster a productive learning environment" (ST, Year 11, Chemistry).
- "I've always wanted to connect more with my students from a personal perspective but I didn't think I could. I'd see other teachers doing it so naturally and I figured 'Well, this is just not my style'. I guess I gave up on myself. Since the training I have now learnt that I can do this and there are skills and techniques I can learn that have made me more personable with my students" (ST, Year 9, Mathematics).
- "If I'm honest with myself, I have had the same teaching style since I first graduated 22 years ago which is 'Mr Task Master' mode. What I found after the training is that I am capable of changing my approach and being a bit more relaxed and friendly in class. It proves you can teach an old dog new tricks and the kids are watching me change my old style in front of them which shows them they can change too" (Primary, Grade 5).
- "My mindset has radically changed. I've gone from thinking my job is to teach 'physics' to my job is to teach 'students about physics'. I've realised that the more I become a person, and not just a teacher, the better my students will learn" (ST, Year 10, Physics).

- "Well, yeah, I've always prioritised wellbeing. In the past I was known as the 'hippie' teacher but now it's like Visible Wellbeing has given me the licence to do what I have always done. Others see the legitimacy of what I do now" (ST, Year 11, Business Studies).

***Secondary theme: Language***. Another way in which teachers reported that wellbeing was legitimized as a result of the VWB intervention was through the greater use of shared vocabulary about wellbeing. Representative comments included:

- "The major difference is the language, I can now give students the words for them to better recognise their wellbeing and how it influences their behaviours and actions. We are still managing some of the relationship conflicts of the group, but through conferencing and discussions they are able to identify things. They are self-recognising when they have over stepped the mark or have hurt someone's feelings" (PT, Grade 5).
- "I have an ASD student, who used to get overwhelmed with his emotions and lash out. After the training I wrote up 5 words for negative emotions we're allowed to feel and talk about in class as well 5 words for positive emotions we want to feel more of in class. It was not part of a formal lesson, we just discuss those words as situations come up during the day, like if there has been a fight at lunchtime or when the kids are happy about a project they are working on. It's helped all the students but my ASD student has benefited the most. Now he is developing a language to express his state of wellbeing he is able to say "I don't want to hear your voice right now, it is making me tense" and I know to walk way. This is such a step forward from the way he would previously have handled his overwhelm which would have been to physically lash out at me" (PT, Grade 3).
- "Students have a broader vocabulary around emotions and it's allowing them to express themselves in a more open and honest way, they feel safer to express the negatives and I can see it is helping their stress levels to get their bad feelings out in the open and to know they are not the only ones who feel this way. They can see that life is 'sweet and sour' for everyone. It's very normalising and it means we don't get stuck on the negative because we can discuss it, release it, have a good vent and then move on" (ST, Year 10 Co-ordinator).
- "We have one boy who has oppositional defiance disorder, most of the students know this boy from last year and so they came into my class already having labelled him as naughty. I decided to use the wellbeing

language to help us all reframe his behaviour. The students understand that he just hasn't learnt how to handle his emotions as well as they have and that he is not been intentionally naughty. They don't call him naughty anymore, now they remind him 'take some deep breaths, keep your calm, use your strengths" (PT, Grade 2).

**Term 2 data: Actioning wellbeing**. At the end of term two teachers were still discussing licence and language but it was clear that they were now actioning more of VWB practices they had been trained in. Two new secondary themes: insights and impact.

***Secondary theme: Insight***. Teachers spoke about how the visible wellbeing training gave them insight into the wellbeing of their students and themselves. Representative comments included:

- "I am more conscious of the students' wellbeing now. I look at their body language, I listen to the tone of their voice, I read their facial expression. I'm way more observational and I'm using this to bring their wellbeing to my attention and also to their attention. We are learning Grammar rules at the moment and, you know, it's complex stuff because the English language doesn't make sense half the time. We're learning about conjugating verbs and I can see them shaking their head in derision or confusion, I can see them tuning out and looking at me blankly. Prior to the training I would have unconsciously picked up on this and I would have felt frustrated because I was losing them. But it would have been all under the surface, you know. I wouldn't have been aware of it consciously and I would have started raising my voice and becoming sarcastic to re-assert my authority. Now I can read these minor signs of wellbeing in real time. It has become second nature now to take this into account when I am running my classes and I use it as a teaching tool because I point it out. I say "What's with the faces guys?" and I ask them where they got lost rather than pressing ahead for the sake of finishing my lesson plan. I'll say "I notice your hunching over, let's take a deep breath and sit up." It is surprising how much difference this small teacher practice makes to the class. I'll say "I can see you're smiling, you're getting this, I can see your enjoying today" or with some of those hard to crack students I can joke "you're not crossing your arms as much as you used too" and then there's a little half smile and I feel like it's little sign of success and I'm making inroads towards getting them to love English" (ST, Year 8 English).
- "I've learnt to constantly check the wellbeing of the class, like a weather thermometer. I know what to look out for and I'm happy to stop the class

in the middle of the lesson and do a quick brain break to re-energise or refocus them" (PT, Grade 5).
- "I feel myself being more observant and tuning into the emotional climate. I look at my class before I act. I take into account facial expressions and body language. I listen to whether the noise is productive or not before I automatically tell them to be quiet" (PT, Grade 2).
- "I find it easier to see now when students are not themselves. I have much better insight into where they are at emotionally. I think it comes with knowing them better now because I use the visible wellbeing tools and I know my role is to help them 'feel before they think'" (ST, Year 9, Politics).

***Secondary Theme: Impact***. The greater insight teachers were gaining into the wellbeing of their students flowed into concrete changes in their teaching practices, which then flowed into tangible changes for the students. Teachers reported a fluid change in practice that allowed them to create learning environments that were adaptive and took into account the wellbeing of their class. Teachers also reported an observable impact on student outcomes such as engagement, behaviour, wellbeing, and learning. Representative comments included:

- "My grade 4 students have a tendency to give up when the learning gets tough. I talked to them about the importance of grit. We then followed it up with some activities that are hard to do like drawing a picture with your non-dominant hand, writing a sentence with a big word and then having an attempt at a Sudoku. During these activities I could hear kids saying: "this is too hard", "I can't do it", "I give up". After a little time I then heard other children say to them: "don't give up", "keep trying" "use your grit". I now continually hear children say "we need to persevere", "you will get it if you keep trying!" Using grit has become a teaching tool that I can see gives my students endurance to learn effectively" (PT, Grade 4).
- "As a German teacher, I used to be very military and regimented about the exams, whereas as I now create a calm and playful environment. Prior to the oral exams I now play music and I invite the students to intentionally clear their brains and let their bodies relax. You can physically see a shift in their mindset before they stand up and do the oral exams, they get less stressed about memorising the words and they go more to the meaning of the words, they get more playful and inventive. I use the science of 'Broaden and Build' to know if I boost their wellbeing in that moment it will help them perform better academically. I have also changed the way I assess the Year 11 and Year 12 oral work. I set up a production-line and I

get the more able German speakers to have conversations with those in the line just about general stuff. It's about loosening up their tongue and it's using relationships to put people at ease. I ask them to have a conversation in German about the things in their life that make them happy, I put the more nervous kids at the back of the line so they have longer to get over the nerves. If I hadn't been shown how to think about the wellbeing of the students I would never have done this. It used to be that students had to come up alphabetically now the order of testing is on their state of well-being because I know that the most effective way for me to truly test their skills is when their mind is positive and open. My students all do much better in their orals" (ST, Year 7, 11, and 12 German).

- "These past two terms since the training and our coaching sessions I get students to choose a 'leaving song' at the start of the class. They know I will play the song as they leave class if (and only if) they have completed all of their tasks. When the song is played it is a reward for doing their work. Students are leaving on a positive note and it's great to see them dancing their way out of the door – overhearing conversation about how much they love the subject as they leave" (ST, Year 8 Science).
- "What I've really been struck by is how the visible wellbeing approach has helped to give some of the more introverted students a bit more confidence to engage in class. We all did the strengths survey and then these kids understood that being shy doesn't mean you're not strong. It boosted their confidence so much to understand that thoughtfulness, prudence, humility and the ability to be quiet and listen to others are actually strengths. They can see how these strengths help them learn and one little boy volunteered for a leadership role which blew his mum and me away. Neither of us could believe it and couldn't wipe the smile of our faces. I think it's because when you help kids to focus on what's on the inside the outside difference seem less important" (PT, Grade 5).
- "My homegroup this year is a really difficult group and, yeah, there's lots of behaviour management issues, they're disengaged with school, no parental involvement and so on. I'm dealing with some fairly troubled kids and, yeah, the class dynamics can get volatile pretty quickly. I was chosen for this group because I'm a big guy and I guess the thinking was that I'd be able to control them. The funny thing is that because of the training my focus is now on understanding what going on for these kids inside and trying to make their wellbeing visible rather than control by power. I've adopted a 'Gentle Giant' approach. I sit with them on the floor and we talk about what we would do if we had a magic wand. I tell them about my weekend and help them see I'm on their team. I bring homecooked food

on Monday morning. We have created a music sound track that plays as they enter homegroup and it's a great way to start the day. They started out ribbing each other's music choices but we talked about tolerance and how to mindfully listen and now they support each other's choices and, yeah, they are quieter and more respectful. Now they turning up to homegroup and I've gone from about a 30% turn-up rate to 90% - I'm stoked!" (ST, Homegroup).

**Term 4 data: Building wellbeing through relationships**. By Term 4, the impact of the VWB pedagogical intervention had started to extend beyond the classroom and spill into the staff/faculty rooms and positively influence relationships across the school. Student–teacher and teacher–teacher relationships were characterized as being more caring and teachers also reported higher level of collegiality.

***Secondary theme: Care***. The data showed an emerging them of teachers and students taking greater care of each other by term four, following the pedagogical intervention. Representative comments included:

- "We have focused on kindness in class and I hear the kids use more words that express kindness to one another, they are more open to thanking one another and praising one another. When someone is being unkind, I don't have to correct this as much because the other students have the words to articulate what is going and they remind each other 'It's time to be kind." Because they have a vocabulary for kindness it means they are seeing it more in others and they report it back to me that 'such and such was kind because they helped me glue my worksheet in my book or they lent me their eraser when I made a mistake. I really see how bringing the wellbeing words into my class is changing what the kids see and what they value in each other" (PT, Grade 1).
- "The thing I see is that because I have set the emotional tone of the class the students are noticeably more caring for each other. This is a big win when you're teaching 15-year olds who can be fairly self-involved" (ST, History Year 9)
- "I had an exam in my class on Monday that had a few issues and made late for my next class. All term we have been working on the habit of being 'on time' and yet here I was arriving late. I was feeling frazzled and had not eaten since breakfast. The students could have been very hard on me, but they showed kindness and smiled. They held my coffee, offered to take my laptop, and they got my keys out. Straight away they got into their groups and started working on their art projects. They allowed me time to drink

and finalise an issue from the exam. They got on with the job. I talked to them about how stress effects us all and thanked them for allowing me to take a few moments to settle my mind. The visible wellbeing training has allowed to talk with the students about wellbeing in an open way and we realise we're all in this together and everyone has emotions" (ST, Year 10, Art).

- "I teach Learning Support and many of my students struggle with low self-esteem and mental health issues. One such student is John. John is from Japan and has learning difficulties that can't be diagnosed due to his language barrier. He suffers with mental health issues. In class he was brave enough to ask me what a mentor was. One of the boys sniggered at him, asking how he didn't know. John immediately went back into his shell and became withdrawn and self-conscious again. I took the moment to point out one of John's strengths. I asked the other students (there are only 9 of them) if they knew that John spoke fluent Japanese. They didn't realise, even though he is obviously Japanese and has an accent. I told them about how English was John's second language and sometimes he had to ask questions that seemed simple to us so he could understand. I asked them to imagine what it would be like to go into a classroom in Japan and have people start talking at them in Japanese. The other boys then became interested in John's story. They asked him questions about what it was like living in Japan, how to say certain words, what people did for fun. I watched as the boys stopped viewing John as someone who didn't know very much and began to see him as a wealth of knowledge in an unfamiliar culture. I felt the mood in the room shift from one of judgement and insecurity, to curiosity, humour and a little bit of awe. John is more confident in my class now to ask questions and take learning risks" (ST, Year 8).

***Secondary theme: Collegiality***. In addition to care becoming a more apparent feature of the relationship across the two schools, teachers also reported on a greater sense of collegiality coming forward. Representative comments included:

- "I set up a gratitude wall in the Year 8 common room and it was a big hit. I was honestly taken aback about the gratitude that poured out of these young teenagers and especially how many of them wrote gratitude notes about their teachers. I invited the teachers to come along in their lunch break one week and see what the students had written. You could see the wellbeing lifting in the teachers when they read the notes that students had written about them. That gave me the idea of doing the same thing in the

faculty room. I snuck in one weekend and set up a wall and then over the next few weeks watched as teachers started writing on the walls about the positives they saw in the students and the gratitude they had towards other teachers and support staff" (ST[3]).

- "It's a simple thing, but after the training, we decided to set up a birthday cake roster where people put their name down if they want to be involved, and then against someone else that they will bring a cake for on their birthday. It's a nice way to get the staff sitting around the table chatting and having a good time over lunch and cake. This I believe has encouraged more staff to make a regular event of sitting around the main table for lunch and has brought the staffroom closer together. It's made us more productive too as a lot of stuff that used to come to the formal meetings now gets sorted out more informally – all because we decided to care more for each other and deliberately work on building up a collegial culture. That's what struck me about the training is that wellbeing is just as important for us" (PT).
- "One of the teachers asked me the other day about the mindfulness sessions I run at the start of my classes. She said she noticed how much calmer the students are when they come to her following my class compared to other classes. I showed her the App I'm using and a few weeks ago she told me how she'd been using that App at home and what a difference it has made to her stress levels. It felt great to think that I am helping one of my colleagues in this way, not just my students" (ST).
- "This week, we're heading into exam period which is always a time of high stress for us. For the first time since I've been at this school there was talk about how we can support each other and we came up with a bunch of things to do. It's not like we haven't supported each other in the past but this time we are being more pro-active about it" (ST).

## Positive Education Pedagogy: Implicit Approaches, Content, and Teacher Empowerment

Within the spirit of growth and innovation, I have used this chapter to put forward three key ideas for expanding the field of positive education: (1) the use of implicit practices (in addition to explicit programs), (2) the

[3]Given that these quotes are about staff room collegiality, it is not necessary to put detail as to what class or year level the teacher was teaching.

consideration of context (in addition to the teaching of content), and (3) the empowerment of teachers (in addition to the education of students).

These three ideas have been explored through the design and findings of a qualitative study that investigated the impact of an evidence-based positive educational pedagogy intervention that was set up so teachers could develop a positive education pedagogy unique to their own teacher practice, suited to their own discipline area (e.g., science, art, geography, language studies), and applicable at all school levels (e.g., primary, secondary).

The idea that wellbeing can be delivered through pedagogy, in addition to programs, was eye opening for teachers in the current study and many reported a change in their mindset about their own role in building student wellbeing. By "legitimizing wellbeing" and providing teachers with the licence and language for wellbeing, the pedagogical intervention helped to shift those teachers who had a fixed idea about teaching (e.g., *I am here to deliver academic content*) to a more open viewpoint of teaching the whole student.

This shift in their idea about their role as a teacher triggered a shift in mindset for some teachers about their ability to modify their own pedagogy. Mindset refers to the underlying beliefs people hold about the world and about their capacity for change (Heyman & Dweck, 1998). Dweck (2008) identified two types of mindset: growth and fixed. A person with a growth mindset sees themselves as having qualities that can be changed through effort and practice, while someone with a fixed mindset sees personal qualities as being static and unchangeable. Although the notion of mindset was initially applied to one's understanding of the malleability of intelligence (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), it has since been expanded to include people's underlying beliefs about the degree to which they can change can occur across a range of aspects such as one's talents, character, relational abilities, and strengths (Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkel, 2013; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016; Heyman & Dweck, 1998; Jach, H., Sun, J., Loton, D., Chin, TC., & Waters, 2018).

Mindset is at play in teachers when it comes to their beliefs about their capacity to change their pedagogy, specifically as it relates to changing the way one teaches so as to build student wellbeing. Teachers in this study explained:

- "I can see now I had a classic fixed mindset about wellbeing and about my ability to teach wellbeing."
- "I've always wanted to connect more with my students from a personal, perspective but I didn't think I could… I have now learnt that I can do this and there are skills and techniques I can learn that have made me more personable with my students."

- "If I'm honest with myself, I've had the same teaching style since I first graduated fifteen years ago which is 'Mr. Task Master' mode."
- "I am capable of changing my approach and being a bit more relaxed and friendly in class."

Given that positive education and mindsets are both relatively new areas of research inquiry, the current study has made an important contribution by linking the two topics and exploring how teachers' mindsets about their ability to adopt a positive pedagogical approach are surfaced and changed through intervention. Evidence that the VWB intervention can trigger a growth mindset about teaching style supports past research that has found mindset about other aspects (i.e., intelligence) can be changed through intervention (Blackwell et al., 2007).

The importance of creating interventions to foster growth mindsets in teachers is powerful when considering the work of Meadows (2008) on systems, who suggests that mindset is a core "change lever" in creating system wide change. The change in a teachers' internal mindset about positive education pedagogy flowed through into changes in their practices that had visible impacts on classroom environments and the relational systems across the school. Starting first at the classroom level, with a new growth mindset about positive pedagogy, teachers set about "actioning wellbeing" in their classes. Teachers developed the confidence to try new classroom strategies based upon positive psychology such as kindness, gratitude, mindfulness, grit, goal setting, and strengths. Specific examples included: establishing the "emotional elements of learning" in chemistry, the use of positive words to redirect the behaviour of a student who has Oppositional Defiance Disorder, using a music playlist to motivate students to finish their tasks in science, and using gratitude boards in student common rooms.

Past researchers writing about wellbeing pedagogies contend that wellbeing is a dynamic state constructed *within* the teaching process itself (Kidger et al., 2009; Pyhältö et al., 2010). In the current study, it became apparent that wellbeing occurs, and is built up, in the multiple small moments of connection and positivity that occur between a teacher and his/her students. Importantly, teachers observed that when they fostered wellbeing, they also fostered better student learning, higher engagement, stronger confidence, and more co-operative behaviour. Teachers reported that their new teaching practices enabled more stamina in the learning process (e.g., the students who encouraged each other to keep trying), built resilience against adversity (e.g., doing better in time tables, taking an oral test in German), and fostered more

respectful and supportive student relationships (e.g., the high school boys who included the Japanese student).

The link that teachers observed between positive pedagogy with learning, wellbeing, and social class dynamics can be explained using Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden and Build theory, which asserts that positive emotions serve to broaden one's awareness (encourage novel, varied, and exploratory thinking) and one's social resources (encourage prosocial and empathetic actions towards others) in the moment that they occur *and* that positive emotions build these cognitive and social resources over time.

Further evidence of the broaden and build effect was the "Building wellbeing across relationships" theme that emerged in Term 4. Teachers across both schools reported that the VWB intervention created a deeper connection with their students and colleagues. Teachers found that they were connecting professionally around the VWB practices and were also using the practices to intentionally take care of each other's wellbeing, especially at peak times of stress during the academic year. Students were showing more care and compassion towards teachers (e.g., the students who allowed the teacher time to eat while they went about their own learning tasks) and each other (students supporting kids on the spectrum).

The change in relationships, together with the change in teachers' mindset and language, are each concrete examples of how pedagogical interventions, such as VWB, can trigger "systems change." According to Rosas (2017), schools are systems that are made up of interconnected elements that work together (or sometimes in opposition). A systems approach to the study of positive education is particularly important given the repeated criticism of the field as being overly focused on intrapersonal interventions and ignoring the role of contextual wellbeing (Ciarrochi et al., 2016). Kern et al. (2020) developed Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP), which applies principles from the systems sciences to positive psychology theory. SIPP can be used to explain the changes outlined by teachers in this study as the principles of SIPP tell us that people are interdependent with the systems they are a part of, and that wellbeing is thus influenced by changes to the system. SIPP also shows us that appropriateness of interventions is dependent on the context and people within the system. This principle was born out in the current study, where the chemistry teacher adopted different aspects of the VWB training in his class compared to the German Language teacher and the English teacher. This was also found with the evidence of teachers using different VWB practices in their non-classroom contexts (e.g., the Dean and Homegroup teacher). Teachers understood that the practices for one context may be different for

another and showed evidence of understanding the system effects for positive change.

Systems research shows that when one element of a system is targeted for change, an "action–reaction pattern" is triggered that in turn activates change in other elements, thus leading to new patterns of interaction across the system (von Bertalanffy, 1975). The VWB intervention helped teachers to change their pedagogy—a *core* element of the system—and when teachers were shown how to change this one element, an "action–reaction pattern" unfolded that created change in a range of other elements such as mindsets, language, and relationships. These changes then interacted in new ways to build wellbeing, learning, and more positive relationships in both students and teachers over time.

Each of the elements of the system that were changed, although small, was noticed by teachers to make a big difference. In fact, a core narrative through the qualitative data was the surprise that teachers expressed at the impact that small tweaks to their practice were having on key outcomes. Representative quotes include "It is surprising how much difference this small teacher practice makes to the class" and "It seems like a small thing but it has made a big difference to the way we use the learning plans." Teachers marvelled at how "simple things" and "little sign of success" added up to create tangible, positive changes to the learning climate, wellbeing outcomes, and relationships across the school.

## Conclusion

The World Economic Forum (2016) claims that "to thrive in the twenty-first century, students need more than traditional academic learning. They must be adept at … the skills developed through social and emotional learning" (p. 4). Positive education is clearly an important field to grow and evolve. The current chapter distinguishes itself by putting teacher pedagogy, as opposed to student curriculum, at the core of creating change through positive education. The finding that positive education pedagogy deepened and extended its impact on wellbeing, learning, and relationships inside and outside of the classroom over time is best understood by looking at the results through the lens of mindsets, the broaden and build theory, as well as SIPP. The power of using positive education pedagogy as a key lever for change in schools is the fact that it creates positive change through implicit, context-based, teacher-empowered ways, and thus, provides an important complement and evolution to the more typical program, content, student-focused approaches.

I hope that this chapter encourages future researchers and practitioners to consider the exciting and effective role that pedagogy and other potential implicit mechanisms can play in growing our field.

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