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**Promoting children's social and emotional wellbeing:
Evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program
in a New South Wales regional school**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Child mental health problems are common and their prevalence is not declining despite an increase in the use of services. A recent Australian survey found almost 14% of 4- to 17-year-olds have a diagnosable mental health problem which equates to almost 600,000 Australian children and young people (Hafekost et al., 2016). Paediatricians see increasing numbers of children with mental health issues (Hiscock et al., 2016), and teachers report concerns about increased numbers of children with internalising disorders such as anxiety and depression. At school entry almost a quarter of Australian children are rated as being developmentally vulnerable, or at risk, in the domains of social competence and emotional maturity (AEDC, 2018). In both domains, rates are higher in males, Indigenous children, and children from families who are disadvantaged or come from a language background other than English. While many behavioural problems are transient and social-emotional issues resolve, often these problems continue beyond childhood. It is estimated that about half of adult mental problems begin before the age of 14 (Kessler et al., 2007).

The AEDC National Report for 2018 identifies that in regard to social competence, boys continue to be more than twice as likely as girls to be developmentally vulnerable on this domain, a gap that has continued to widen since 2012. Additionally, the gap continues to widen among children with a Language Background Other than English (LBOTE) who were not proficient in English and those who were proficient in English, with a 31% difference in vulnerability on this domain (AEDC, 2018, p, 23). Nationally the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain continues to increase over the three periods of data collection (2012, 2015 & 2018). And again, in 2018, LBOTE children who were not proficient in English were more than four times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable in terms of their emotional maturity (24.8%) compared to LBOTE children who were proficient in English (5.8%) (AEDC, 2018, p. 28). The increasing evidence that mental health is influenced by potentially modifiable early life experiences provides an opportunity for public health intervention. The social and environmental

conditions under which children are raised directly impacts their development (Moore, Arefadib, Deery, & West, 2017), and specific childhood exposures, such as harsh parenting, parental substance use, and poor housing, are predisposing factors for the development of mental health problems.

Fostering child and family resilience to these adverse events may mitigate their effects. A range of mental health promotion and prevention programs for parents and young children, (that focus on resilience, social connectedness and mental health and wellbeing), are available in school settings and online. These include frameworks such as Positive Behaviour for Learning (New South Wales Government Department of Education, 2019), Be You (Australian Government, 2019), and BounceBack! (Noble & McGrath, 2017). “However, there is limited information about the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of such programs, especially in an Australian context, making it difficult for health and education professionals to be confident in recommending programs appropriate for their settings” (Centre for Community Child Health, 2018, p. 2). One new Australian program that contains “preventative and practical mental wellbeing skills and strategies” for children in all stages of primary schools is called the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program (PLS, 2018).

1.2 Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program

The Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program (PLS) is an early childhood mental health resource for use by teachers in primary schools. The PLS philosophy is that “every child has the capacity to reach his or her unique potential and that every child in today’s world needs to learn proactive and practical ways to look after their own mental wellbeing, starting in Early Childhood” (PLS, 2018). Positive Living Skills [PLS], is a “social impact organisation that supports the mental wellbeing of individuals to live as participating and contributing members of thriving communities” (PLS, 2018). The programs developed by PLS aim to prevent mental health problems by empowering children and young people with strong social and emotional competence. The programs are based on the work of Dr Terry Orlick, an authority on the psychology of excellence and quality living (Cox & Orlick, 1996; Orlick, 1996; Orlick & Partington, 1988). The PLS mission is three-fold:

1. To assist educators to teach children habitual skills to build their social and emotional competence, starting in early childhood and continuing throughout primary school

2. To support and enhance educator wellbeing through the materials and resources in the programs, and with dedicated Professional Development experiences focused on developing educator emotional intelligence.
3. To support families to build mental wellbeing skills, through the resources that come home from children and educators, and through the 'Family link' online resource portal (PLS, 2018).

The Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program is a comprehensive, 'whole of school community', early prevention and intervention program. It supports teachers, students and families by embedding the Positive Living Skills concepts into their daily lives through a focus on awareness and understanding of emotions as the basis for self-management (PLS, 2018). In primary schools' Stage 2 (Years 3 & 4) and Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6), the program focuses on the development of skills to direct feelings, thoughts and actions. The six core units of the program focus on the development of skills to direct feelings, thoughts and actions. These six units provide activity-based learning experiences focusing on:

- noticing everyday positive experiences (called Highlights),
- understanding feelings,
- developing attention,
- learning about relaxation,
- fostering cooperation, and
- building self-esteem.

Activities within the six PLS units include listening to audio recordings and stories, drawing, reflection and discussions, worksheets, role plays and working in small and large groups. Teachers work through each unit flexibly, depending on the needs and interests of the children with whom they work. Typically, teachers begin by introducing the 'Highlights' unit and work through the program towards 'Self-esteem.' The overarching goal of the Positive Living Skills Wellbeing programs is "to teach children habitual skills to build their social and emotional competence, starting in early childhood and continuing through to the end of Primary School, so they can move into adolescence with a strong sense of self-worth and a range of practical mental wellbeing skills and strategies they can continue to build on" (PLS, 2018, p. 1). Additionally, the programs are designed to "meet significant elements of the Australian National Curriculum F-10 in both the Learning Areas and the General Capabilities." Three theoretical approaches guide the implementation of the PLS programs. These are:

- (1) *Priming*: An implicit memory effect where exposure to one stimulus influences a response to another stimulus;
- (2) *Distributed Practice*: A learning strategy where practice is broken up into a number of short sessions spread over a longer period of time; to build
- (3) *Long Term Habits*: Long term habits are created with repetition and practice, and the brain can change itself through neuroplasticity. Based on practice and repetition, by completing an activity repeatedly, eventually all the relevant neural systems work together to automatically produce the activity, and the activity becomes a 'habit' (PLS, 2020).

Participating schools receive a PLS starter kit that contains a Teachers' Manual, Resource Books (one for each level of learning: Foundation, Stages 1, 2, & 3), Posters, Happy Highlight clickers, and several USB drives prepared with the full PLS program, all contained within a PLS satchel.

Recently, Positive Living Skills Wellbeing Programs (Primary School & Early Childhood) have been garnering a great deal of interest, and have been introduced into a range of early childhood and school settings across New South Wales (NSW). Hence Positive Living Skills Directors Catherine Shaw and Jo Devin have commissioned researchers from Charles Sturt University to undertake a series of independent studies into the efficacy of their programs. In 2018 the first of these research studies was a pilot study that evaluated a group of Stage 2 teachers' and children's perceptions of the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program. The study was carried out at a NSW Government Primary School, located in a south western suburb of Sydney metropolitan area. Five teachers and 13 children participated in a focus group discussion and a classroom chat respectively. The PLS program had only been implemented in the school for two school terms (terms 3 and 4 in 2018), but already teachers were noticing changes in how children talked about their feelings. The children were not only comfortable at practising the strategies at school but were also incorporating certain aspects ('*highlights*' and '*relaxation*') into other areas of their lives (Fordham 2019a). Participating teachers reported that delivering PLS content was easy, straightforward and time-friendly, and that PLS lessons engaged the children at appropriate linguistic and cognitive levels (Fordham, 2019a). Two limitations of the study were identified: the short time frame that teachers had been implementing the program and that only Stage 2 teachers and children were involved in the study. Recommendations for further research included

evaluating the PLS program at a whole school level and incorporating a pre and post quantitative measure of children's wellbeing (Fordham, 2019a).

The second research study explored how one privately-owned Early Childhood Long Day Care Centre in a suburb in north west Sydney was introducing the PLS Early Childhood Wellbeing Program to 38 infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers. Five early childhood educators representing the three teaching rooms (Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers) participated in a focus group discussion. After only four months of implementing the PLS program, educators were already noticing positive changes in some children's behaviours and reported that other children were using PLS language (such as '*happy highlights*' and '*changing channels*') in their conversations (Fordham, 2019b). In both research studies primary teachers and early childhood educators shared examples of how learning about and teaching the PLS concepts was having a positive flow over effect into their own lives (Fordham, 2019a; 2019b). Limitations of this study were twofold, namely the sample size and the timeframe. Further research into the PLS Early Childhood Wellbeing Program across diverse early childhood settings that examines educators' views after implementing PLS for a longer time frame was recommended.

1.3 The Current Study

The current study is the third in the series and reports on the views of teachers and children of the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program, which was introduced into Wellington Public School, a large primary school in regional New South Wales, at the start of 2019. In order to understand how effective the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program might be in promoting children's social and emotional well-being, three research questions were developed:

- RQ1 What are teachers' experiences of implementing the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program?
- RQ2 What are children's experiences of participating in the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program?
- RQ3 How does PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program support children to look after their own wellbeing?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Approach

Research methodology. The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program in promoting children's social and emotional well-being from the perspectives of a sample of Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers and children at a regional primary school where the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program was being implemented. Accordingly, in order to obtain these participants' views the study utilised a qualitative research methodology, namely that of 'constructivism' (Mertens, 2005), whereby the understanding or meaning of the research phenomena under investigation is formed through the subjective views of a small group of participants.

Data collection methods. This study employed focus group qualitative methodology (Jenkinson et al., 2019), whereby focus groups were conducted with a group of participating teachers and also with small groups of participating children. This methodology was selected as the most appropriate type as it enables the researcher to ask both open and closed questions (the content of which focuses on issues that are central to the research questions) and also allows for flexible, conversational, two-way communication (Minichiello et al., 2004). This research method also impacts minimally on the busy daily lives of teachers and school children.

2.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval. An ethics application for this study was submitted to the Charles Sturt University (CSU) Humans Research Ethics Committee (HREC) using the National Ethics Application Form. The study met all the ethical requirements of the National Statement including informed consent, disclosure of the true purpose of the study, confidentiality, potential harm and management strategy and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice (see Appendix 1: Ethics approval). The protocol number issued to the project is H18181.

Communication of findings to PLS, participating primary school and families. An interim summary report was submitted to PLS in May 2020 and a final research report was submitted to PLS in May, 2020. The final research report will also be submitted to the Principal of Wellington Primary School and the participating teachers, with a summary report prepared for the school to

share with its children and families in the school newsletter and/or website. Wellington Public School has given permission for its name to be used in this report.

2.3 Research Participants

Wellington Public School. Wellington is a regional town located in the Central Western region of New South Wales, 360 kilometres west north west of Sydney. Wellington has a population of 4077, of whom 1133 (28%) identified as Indigenous in the most recent Census (ABS, 2016). Wellington Public School (PS) is a New South Wales Government Primary School catering for children from Kindergarten to Year 6, and was officially opened in 1955. Details obtained from the School's website (NSW Government Department of Education, 2020) and the My School website (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2020), showed that in 2019 (last reporting year) there were 35.6 full time equivalent teaching staff and 11 non-teaching staff. At the time of the study there were approximately 473 enrolments from Kindergarten to Year 6 (250 boys and 228 girls), with an attendance rate of 89.54%. In 2019, the school was running 27 classes inclusive of five Special Education classes and a preschool. Approximately 61% of the student population identify as being from an Indigenous Australian background, and 3% of students have a language background other than English (LOTE). In 2018, Wellington PS's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) had a value of 810, which was 190 points above the average value for the state. Data from the most recent Australian Early Development Census (AEDC, 2018), showed that 41.4% of students at Wellington PS were developmentally vulnerable on one domain (compared to the NSW average of 19.9%); and 21.2% of Wellington PS's students were developmentally vulnerable on two or more developmental domains (compared to the NSW average of 9.6%).

The School Vision Statement on the school's website states: "Wellington Public School is committed to providing an environment where quality teaching, learning and leadership ensures future success and wellbeing for all students within an ever-changing world." Wellington Public School's motto is 'Search, Discover, Grow' and the school's strategic directions from 2018-2020 are Engaged Learners, Quality Practice and Educational Leadership. Wellington Public School was chosen by the Positive Living Skills Directors as a potential site for a study, as the school services a large regional population and was participating in the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework and the Be You initiative. After implementing the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing

Program for a few months, Wellington Public School then purchased the Positive Living Skills Early Childhood Program to implement with their onsite preschool cohort, however that cohort is not included in this study or this report. The Principal at Wellington Public School approved all teachers of Stage 2 and Stage 3 classes to consider participating in this study of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program (see Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Stage 2 and Stage 3 Teachers & Appendix 3: Consent Form for Stage 2 and Stage 3 Teachers).

Participating children and teachers from Wellington Public School. Research participants were recruited from five Stage 2 (Year 3 and 4) and four Stage 3 (Year 5 and 6) classrooms. In total, parent consent was provided for 35 children in Stage 2 (15 boys and 20 girls) and 14 children in Stage 3 (10 boys and 4 girls). At the time of the study (end of 2019) Stage 2 comprised six female teachers, one male teacher, and 135 children (73 boys and 62 girls), and Stage 3 comprised two female teachers, two male teachers, and 102 children (49 boys and 53 girls). A teacher from a year 5/6 Inclusive Education class was also included in the research. In one of the Year 4 classes two teachers shared the teaching over the course of a school week, however only the teacher who was present on the day of the focus group took part in the research. Thus, five Stage 2 teachers and four Stage 3 teachers consented to participate in the focus group discussion facilitated by a CSU researcher to provide some of their views and experiences of implementing the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program.

Of the 237 children enrolled in Stage 2 and Stage 3 classes, a sample of 49 children (20.7%) took part in the study. The children's parents had given prior consent for the children (N=49) to consider participating in the study (see Appendix 4: Information Sheet for Parents & Appendix 5: Consent Form for Parents). After having their involvement in the study explained to them, all 49 children assented to participate in focus group discussions that were facilitated by the same CSU researcher. The children's right to withdraw participation at any time or not be included in voice recordings was also explained to them immediately prior to the focus group discussions, and all children were willing to participate and to have their voices recorded.

2.4 Research Procedures

Focus group discussion - Teachers. Four Stage 2 and four Stage 3 teachers (8 teachers in total) participated in one focus group discussion with the researcher in December 2019 (see

Appendix 6: Focus group questions). One teacher who consented to participating in the study was away on this day. This discussion took place in a familiar Stage 2 classroom one afternoon after school had finished and it lasted approximately 40 minutes. Focus group questions were created from a review of the PLS program and an understanding of how Wellington Public School intended to implement it, with some input from the PLS Directors. Questions encouraged teachers to reflect on how the children engaged with the learning activities; which activities children responded to best; the ease of program implementation; resource utility; perceived personal benefits; general feedback; and ideas for future implementation (Appendix 6).

Focus group discussion – Children. Forty-nine (49) children participated in small focus group discussions which lasted 15 to 28 minutes. Between three and six children were included in each group and groups were organised according to Stage, Year and Class level (e.g., Year 3 children from the same class were in a focus group together; Year 4 children from the same class were in a focus group together; and Year 5 and 6 children from the same class were in focus groups together). This helped ensure children felt comfortable and had known peers in their focus group with them. It also ensured that children’s cognitive and language abilities were more closely matched to other members of their group, rather than having cross-Stage groupings which might see 9 year-olds included with 12 year-olds (for example). Additionally, it ensured that children who were being taught the same PLS content (e.g., Stage 2 or Stage 3 content) were included in focus groups together, and so there were no conflicting ideas about PLS content in discussions.

The children’s focus group questions were drawn from an understanding of how Wellington Public School was implementing the PLS program (see Appendix 8: Scope and Sequence), and children were given an opportunity to explain what they had learned or remembered about the PLS activities, with encouragement to share some examples, as well as state what they had liked or disliked.

Data recording and transcription. The focus group discussions were digitally recorded using an iPad recording application called Voice Record Pro (Version 7). Digital recordings were then sent electronically to a transcribing service in another Australian State and when completed, the transcriptions were emailed back as word documents to the CSU researcher. No identifying names of children or teachers are used in this report or in transcriptions. Participants’ responses are identified only as being provided by a teacher or by a child.

2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was the approach used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis involves carefully searching across a data set “to find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 86) and it aims to minimally organise the data set whilst providing rich detailed descriptions of the phenomena being studied (Braun & Clark, 2006). Three stages of data analysis were employed for this study: i) Organisation of the data; ii) Familiarisation with the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003); and iii) Interpretation of the data. These stages are briefly explained:

Organisation of the data. An important first step in the analysis process is to organise data into a manageable configuration (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Accordingly, the transcriptions were organised into documents with wide margins to facilitate comments.

Familiarisation with the data. This stage is also known as immersion in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006) and it requires repeated reading of the texts to allow meanings and themes to emerge. Voice recordings were also listened to again at this stage to familiarise researchers with teachers’ and childrens’ views.

Interpretation of the data. Searching for themes and the interpretive framework. In this stage of analysis relationships between themes become clearer and links or connections emerge (Braun & Clark, 2006). As these relationships are revealed, the researcher can attach significance to them, offer explanations and draw conclusions (Patton, 2002).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Introducing the Positive Living Skills Lessons

Wellington Public School began introducing the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program in Week 1 of Term 1 in 2019 (January 29th). All teachers were following the same ‘Scope and Sequence’ (see Appendix 8 for details of this sequence) which was Wellington Public School’s agreed-upon approach to introducing the Positive Living Skills activities to their children. The order for the units was: Highlights, Feelings, Focus, Relaxation, Co-operation and Self-Esteem, and the school planned for each unit to be taught over a period of three weeks. Each unit comprises six lessons, which meant that Wellington Public intended to teach two lessons from a unit every week. The PLS program includes pre-prepared Parent / Carer Newsletters that explain each of the units in a jargon-free way for families. Wellington Public School modified some of these

newsletters and included information from these in their school newsletter or on separate flyers to families. Appendix 9 shows an edited version of the Positive Living Skills Parents and Carers Newsletter for Highlights.

According to their Scope and Sequence in Term 2 teachers would introduce and complete lessons around Highlights and Feelings; in Term 3 the teachers would introduce and complete lessons around Focus and Relaxation; and in Term 4, teachers would introduce and complete lessons around Co-operation and Self-esteem. Given that the focus group discussions took place in Weeks 8 and 9 of Term 4, according to their Scope and Sequence (Appendix 8) all Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers should have started the final unit, and be introducing activities around Self-Esteem. However due to the extra demands of the end of a school year, not all teachers were synchronised with the scope and sequence schedule, and while some Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers were introducing Self-Esteem concepts, some were still presenting activities around Co-operation. Hence, not all of the participating Stage 2 teachers had introduced the six PLS units into their classrooms at the time of the focus group discussion.

3.2 Teachers' Views

Teacher Reflections on the PLS.

In their focus group discussion, teachers were asked to reflect on a number of aspects of the PLS program. They were asked about how easy the PLS program was to access and deliver, how well the program could support student extension and inclusion, whether children struggled to understand any learning concepts, and which learning experiences were the most or least beneficial for children.

Initially, teachers identified the accessibility, flexibility and organisation of materials as instrumental in how easily they could use and deliver the program, for example one teacher explained:

From my perspective I think it's been very easy because all of the lessons are already typed up ready to go along with all the resources. They've just been put into our stage folders so it's just easy to access. The lessons are sort of timed from 15-20 minutes, but I like that you can explore some of the themes in it and you can take it as far as you like or you can just stick to that 15 minutes. I really like that it's flexible.

Another teacher added, in terms of organisation and consistency of delivery across the classes

I also like that each stage has the same title for that week. So, everyone is doing self-respect (for example). Even though the lessons are different everyone's got the same topic so that we know where they're up to as well as everyone's got that same language in the same week.

In regard to how the PLS program is organised, a third teacher explained that they:

...like how (the program is) broken into the folders as well. So, for cooperation all (of) the resources for that (are together) – it's not all just mixed in for the term. I like how it's actually sorted into the folders with the lesson and the resources.

Other teachers noted that the organisation of the program allowed them to “cater for two themes per term” which allowed them to spend time exploring one topic/theme for five weeks without “jumping from topic to topic”.

In terms of accessing the PLS program materials and sharing them with students, teachers described a number of positive experiences. They explained how “all of the lessons were put on (a) central server” in their school, which teachers could then either print off or access electronically on their class smartboard, for example:

If there was a work sheet or something that the children have to complete we would have it in our shared data and on the server and we'd just bring it up (on the smartboard), modelling what we want them to do, discuss it.

Teachers agreed that “everything was in the right spot”, they were able to modify the material slightly if the need arose, and there were a number of aspects of the actual program which were useful, such as “the fact that they've got the definitions down the left-hand side – that's good because I'll often get my kids to write that into their PDH book...”, and that it can easily be linked to the NSW Syllabus.

In terms of program content, teachers were asked to reflect on which of the six learning experiences had been most or least beneficial/helpful in the classroom, and if the students had struggled with any content. With regard to the latter, the teachers offered feedback about how adaptable the program was to support extension and inclusion in the school. The teachers

considered all aspects of the PLS program to be beneficial, but felt that having words such as “highlights” and “changing channels” not only helped the children to understand their own feelings but also helped them understand the feelings of others. Indeed, most teachers mentioned the positive benefits of exploring ‘highlights’, ‘focus’ and ‘awareness’, but all agreed that every program element had merit. One teacher stated:

I quite liked them all. I think every one – each topic has their own sort of ... benefit.

Another thought that “highlights” and “focus” were the most useful as they could be incorporated into many different learning experiences, for example:

I think highlights is easy to just have a quick – even as you’re walking up to computers or on lunch duty you could say, okay, so ‘what’s your highlight?’ sort of thing. That’s an easy one to have a conversation with and (students) get that. Focus is ... we tend to say that a lot.

And another teacher added:

I think the highlights... (children) realise that their highlight is just as important as someone else’s highlight even though they’re not the same. So, ... their highlight might be – I don’t know – dad came home from work early ... and someone else went to the movies and ten pin bowling or whatever, it doesn’t matter, it’s their highlight, which is a really important thing for them to realise.

Some specific lessons were noted by teachers as extremely powerful for students. One teacher explained:

I think one thing that really surprised me ... I kind of thought, oh yeah, this’ll take a couple of minutes and it’ll be done, and it was the (lesson) where you write your name on a piece of paper and put it in the middle (of the room) and you time how long it takes everybody to get their piece of paper back by looking at it and then you time (how long it takes) if we help each other find our piece of paper. And I think that’s made a big impact on my kids. I’ve only been in there one term ... but they talk about that - remember when it was quicker to help people? And I think for a lesson that I thought was going to be quick ... it has really impacted. I wish some of my other lessons would impact as much!

Another teacher shared:

I just think it gives them awareness too because some of them weren’t even aware of some of the words that we’re using in Positive Living Skills. So, we did a lesson yesterday, a self-

respect one, and just saying how you have to value yourself before you can display it or give it to someone else. I found that they actually took that in. Whether they do it or not is a different story but they actually sat there and they actually thought about the whole concept of self-respect and valuing yourself, then giving it to someone else.

Teachers were also asked to reflect on whether the children in their class had struggled with any of the PLS content. Discussion mainly focused around one teacher's experience with adapting the content for their Stage 3 inclusive education class, as well as the concentration levels of children in Stage 2 classes during relaxation/meditation lessons. The first teacher explained:

I probably found that – because I'm on a Special Ed (sic) class, so we did the Stage 2. We're Stage 3 but we did the Stage 2 program but I found the Stage 3 content was too much above their head but the Stage 2 was babyish at times for them so we kind of – like we adapted a lot of it (and) they still got a lot out of it. Still a great program but it was ... hard being in the middle of 2 (stages) I guess. It was fun. So I could have nearly done all three Stages in one classroom sometimes. We just picked pieces out that worked for us.

Other teachers spoke about the relaxation/meditation lessons and explored the possibility that Stage 2 children needed a little more practice and possibly a longer attention span for these, but Stage 3 students asked to extend the meditation time. For example, one Stage 2 teacher "found with the relaxation sometimes (the children would) just be silly, giggling and just that sort of thing. So, (the lessons) became a bit shorter and sharper." A Stage 3 teacher remembered that "(the students) wanted the time to go longer because they felt like as soon as they would get in and get relaxed I was bringing them out of that meditation". Teachers explored the idea that relaxation or meditation might be "so foreign to some of them" and "just a completely new idea". They suggested that children "get uncomfortable with quiet" and "feel like they have to fill that quiet", and felt as though children "never just switch off". One teacher hypothesised that maybe "that's why (children) enjoyed the meditation."

PLS' role in supporting teachers.

Teachers were asked about the role the PLS program played in supporting them personally and pedagogically or professionally. Flow on effects in teachers' personal lives were discussed, as were the close links the program has with the curriculum and other student wellbeing programs. The

way the PLS program supports the development of positive student-teacher relationships was also talked about in some depth.

All teachers agreed that there had been flow on effects in their personal lives and some identified which components of the program had helped them the most. Many teachers concurred with the following example given by one teacher:

I remember I was doing a lesson the other day on self-talk and I almost felt a bit hypocritical talking about how to positively talk to yourself ... So, I took a bit away from it myself, and the good echoes, repeating it back to yourself. That's something that I don't do and I should do more. And I'm upfront teaching the kids how to do it and I think, well I really should do this more myself!

Teachers discussed how closely the PLS program links with the NSW curriculum and existing student wellbeing programs such as Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) (used in over 60% of NSW public schools) and Filial Play Therapy. With regard to the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PD/H/PE) syllabus, the teachers explained how the PLS program has replaced what they used to do for PD/H and that it has not been additional to what they would normally do. Two teachers detailed how the PLS program has filled a gap in their current PD/H curriculum with the first noting that PLS "...sort of slotted into that social and emotional program part of Be You and Kids Matter". The second teacher elaborated on this by saying:

It filled a gap that has been – we've been doing our own lessons for the last (few years) – we bought the paths program, did that for a year, altered that the next year, added in some of our stuff. Then we got rid of it and we were doing all our own stuff for about 2 years, if not 3 maybe ... so, this definitely fits in.

A third teacher outlined:

I mean, as part of our PD/H syllabus we need to be teaching social relationships and things like that and I think that it's fitted in really well as providing those resources for those (PD/H) outcomes.

And another teacher added:

We've just made the decision as a school to – for the (PD/H) outcomes that (PLS) doesn't cover – more like water safety or fire safety – to try and have days where we have visitors

come in (to teach those concepts). We allocate the time as a school to teach those just to make sure that we're covering those other outcomes.

How well the PLS program relates to PBL was discussed in some depth, with teachers noting the way PLS models positive behaviour in the school. One teacher explained:

I think it's really good to have (PLS) because it models what positive behaviour is. Like some of the home lives of our kids wouldn't have a lot of positive behaviour at home so it's good that we don't have to sort of start from scratch – Oh, how do I teach that? Or how do I teach self-talk?

Teachers also explained the connection the PLS program has with a small yet important play therapy program used in the school:

One of the good things for a very small group of kids in our school too is that we do Filial Play Therapy and it reflects well with Positive Living Skills language as well. So, a very small group – maybe 10 kids a year – but they're probably the ones that need it to be in their whole world.

The way PLS promotes positive student-teacher relationships was explored by teachers who noted that the positive language of the program helped support positive relationships between themselves and their students. One teacher explained:

It's a good way to relate with them because I think they finally understand that you're a person as well and that it's not always happy, positive things all the time. And if you can share that with them ... I think that's something they really like ... because they like to know more about you.

A second teacher agreed and added:

It's nice for the students to hear our highlights as well as we mentioned before. I find it just opens up a lot of discussion and you can get a feel for how the kids are feeling and also if you need to touch base later with the students about anything. That's what I like.

A third teacher explored this further, noting:

You're either going through or been through 'have I got any friends' or something like that sort of thing. And I think (students) think, no, you wouldn't have had any of that. But I think

they like to hear that, okay, I'm having a tough day today. You need to take care of me or ... that sort of thing. It's nice.

PLS' role in supporting the development of children.

A number of questions asked teachers to think about how the PLS lessons might influence children's behavioural, social, emotional and language development. A significant number of positive impacts were discussed by teachers who noted positive differences in children over almost four terms of program delivery. Some of the positive behavioural differences have been examined earlier in this section of the report (with regard to which learning experiences were most beneficial) however a lot of discussion occurred around children's improved behavioural, social, emotional and communication skills. One teacher discussed how children in her class were thinking more positively and explained:

And I think it's also that you begin to realise that there are – there are good things in every day and that's the kind of discussion I've had with my kids. So, you may not be having a good day but let's try and pick one thing that was good about your day. So, it's really focusing on being positive as well.

Teachers also recounted the positive influence that children play in their peers' lives at school. For example, one teacher remembered "it's nice for them to hear that maybe they were a part of somebody else's highlight. I sometimes don't think that they realise that that's the case as well."

A second teacher added:

And also that something so little, just by helping someone, can be a huge highlight for another person. So, just little things can make a difference to someone else's day I think is what I've noticed is a lot of the kids didn't realise.

Teachers discussed how children were beginning to use the positive language of program concepts to recognise positive or negative behaviours in others and themselves. One teacher explained:

I think in terms of language it has (helped children), particularly changing channels. That was something that the – when we did that in class and then they could identify it in somebody else more so than in themselves. I think you need to change your channel. And they would say that and – but then not necessarily recognise it in themselves.

Supporting children’s social and emotional competence was noted as important by teachers and there was a lot of discussion about how the PLS program supported social and emotional understandings. One teacher described:

I try and have a social circle of an afternoon where we just go around and we say the highlight of the day. Sometimes, some students like to mention a lowlight that they might’ve had and ... they’re really excited to share the highlight or the lowlights. And we’ve also introduced that into our Monday morning assembly.

The social circle activity was mentioned by other teachers as well, who noted the impact it was having on children’s social and emotional competence, particularly their ability to sympathise and empathise with others’ feelings. For example, one teacher started the discussion by explaining how important it was that children were “feeling comfortable to talk about a feeling and what that may be like for them”. A second teacher followed on from this explaining:

Something that I’ve noticed – just with the social circle that I have and discussing their highlights and the lowlights and being really open and honest with each other about their feelings both positive and negative.

The first teacher agreed and added “you really don’t get that opportunity in any other subject - to sit around and talk about that sort of thing.” And the second teacher expanded on this and related the discussion to the development of empathy and sympathy:

And empathy and sympathy because we spend a lot of time discussing the difference between those and what they look like and how you react to different situations and whether it’s empathy ... or if it’s sympathy. Yeah, that often gets brought up. So, if there’s a student in my class, one in particular has a bit of a hard time in the playground, I find that ... my students are more understanding of the situation since we’ve had that big discussion about empathy and sympathy.

Further discussion about empathy included talk about cooperation and understanding the perspectives of others. One teacher explained how the PLS activities gave children opportunities to walk “in somebody else’s shoes”:

I think in here ... the cooperation and also just thinking from other people’s perspective. And I can’t even remember what lesson that came up in but it was just, okay, thinking of somebody else’s – like they’re walking in somebody else’s shoes type thing. So yeah,

empathy. I think that that – it just was a bit of a light bulb-y sort of moment where they hadn't really thought about how there could be a different perspective to what they thought.

How children communicated their feelings with their teacher and their peers has also been positively impacted by the PLS program. Teachers explained how children now had “a forum ... to discuss their feelings”, “a safe place” where their emotions could be supported and seen as important, and an opportunity to focus on positive feelings. Teachers noted how they were:

Setting aside that time each week or each afternoon, whenever it may be, for them to (discuss feelings). And it shows that it is important. We're not just talking on the way to playground duty or whatever, this time's set aside just for this. We're not doing it, you know, to squeeze it in somewhere. That makes it really important, I think.

PLS beyond the classroom.

Teachers spoke briefly about how the PLS materials were being accessed by or provided to families at their school. They explained that the PLS family link was sent home to be accessed by families, but they were unsure how many parents/families had accessed it. They were looking into whether or not they could ascertain these figures. Teachers also discussed that family factsheets for ‘highlights’ and ‘changing channels’ were shared with families, but modified in order to make them slightly less “wordy”, more “family friendly” and more accessible for the community.

For children starting school the following year, the PLS program was introduced to parents at Kindergarten transition in December, and while the facilitator of this said the presentation “was very well received”, the teachers in this focus group did not know if there was any feedback from parents. It is the intention of the school that from 2020, children from Preschool to Year 6 will all be involved in the PLS program.

Final teacher feedback.

When asked if there was any final feedback that they would like to provide in terms of either the learning experiences, the materials, or any information for the founders of the program or for other teaching colleagues, the focus group teachers had some great suggestions for additional program materials and learning activities. While teachers thought that the lessons were well structured and didn't need to be any longer “because (they) were short and sharp ... straight to the point ... (and) kind of got the message across”, most teachers thought the layout of the lesson plans could do with some modification to include a “section for registration and – just so that we

can keep track in our programs of where we're up to and what – thinking ahead of what resources we need to get organised." One teacher thought that assessing children's understanding of PLS concepts would be helpful in the future and outlined a suggestion for this:

Maybe you could do a pre and post assessment as well about what (children) think of themselves ... (for example) describe a highlight as before you do the lessons, like at the beginning then at the end of the year, now what do you think? Or what have you learnt that's new? To see the comparison maybe.

There was also discussion around making lesson adjustments, noting down extension opportunities and having somewhere on the lesson plans to record adjustments and evaluations. One teacher noted the need for this:

The only thing I would say is just a spot for evaluation on the lessons. So, it didn't actually have a spot whereas we just asked the staff just to sort of jot it down somewhere but a sort of designated spot for ... evaluation.

And another explained how this would be especially helpful in an inclusive education environment:

As a Special Ed (sic) (teacher) ... maybe some place where you could record adjustments that you made ... I know that sometimes I did the activity, sort of introduced part of it and then we'd leave it and then we'd come back and do that part and the next part. Just broke it up a little bit. I would probably do that again, I think, because that seemed to work well with (my students) ... If there was a space for evaluation then you could record it there.

All teachers talked a lot about the PLS posters and flyers, and suggested some changes for these. One teacher thought that having more posters "around the school would be good..." and another noted that these could include:

More realistic pictures because we're talking about real things and real emotions, maybe actual photographs.

A third teacher explained that more PLS posters would be a good accompaniment to the current PBL posters up around the school and explained their PBL meetings had floated this idea:

I think (more) posters will be good because we've got our PBL language up around the school on the signs so I think what we've been discussing in our PBL meetings is tying it all

together. So, we're looking at having T2 interventions with PBL next year where we have groups of students who maybe require adult attention or need a social skills program. So, we want to make sure that our PBL language fits in with our Positive Living Skills language so we're not introducing another thing.

3.3 Children's Views

As the intention of one of the study's research questions was to explore the children's experiences of the PLS program, children were asked what they remembered about some of the units that they had learnt about thus far (in this instance: Highlights, Focus, Feelings, Relaxation and Changing Channels). The 49 children taking part in the focus group discussions were all keen to answer questions about the PLS program and every child contributed several ideas. To help the children focus their responses they were asked questions in order of how the units had been introduced to them.

Highlights. The children could easily recall what Highlights were and their responses were related to at-home highlights and school highlights. Children's highlights included activities they like to be involved in, significant events, and more intrinsically motivated and personal experiences. Examples of out of school highlights included:

"A highlight is something that is good about your day"

"A highlight is something that brightens up your day"

"Something you enjoy doing in the day and you can remember it"

"Something that makes you feel happy"

"A happy moment"

"Something you really liked about your day"

"When it rained a lot"

"Doing something for other people"

"When your friends play with you"

"Something that has improved your day that you really like it"

"On the weekend at cricket I scored my first boundary"

"Playing with my dogs"

"Playing with my brothers"

"Like scoring a try in footy or something"

“Something you’ve done on holiday”

“You get something that you’ve always wanted and you get really happy and stuff”

Examples of school highlights included:

“Playing with my friends at school”

“Getting awards at assembly”

“Like if you, like in maths or something you go really well”

“Like you get a good report or something”

“Seeing your friends”

“A school excursion”

“Having fun in the day and trying not to be annoying”

“There’s a new person in my class”

“You made a new friend”

“You get free time in your class”

“In our assembly we have this Deputy Principal, and she just talks about what’s been our highlights and what’s coming up and everything. And so everyone’s just looking forward to it in school. So maybe they come to school more often to do that stuff.”

“Usually every Monday at assembly, Mrs E and Mr T tell us about a highlight they’ve had on the weekend”

“You had no-one to play with and someone came over and asked if [you] would like to play with them”

Focus. Children were asked what they remembered about Focus and what the term Focus meant to them. They had lots of say about this and as they shared their ideas they expanded on each other’s contributions. They said Focus meant:

“Focusing on one thing”

“Taking your mind off everything else and focusing on that thing”

“Focusing on someone’s voice”

“Concentration”

“...like catching the ball and passing it”

“Concentrating – listening to the teacher”

“Relax and focus on your work so it, so it doesn’t get rushed”

“Not getting distracted”

“Shutting off all noise around you”
“When you’re meditating”
“When someone’s talking and you listen”.

Some children elaborated on their ideas about focus and explained:

“It’s like when you’re concentrating very hard on an object, like a task”
“Like just listening to your mind and like listening to what your mind tells you”
“Like...you’ve got to think of things that are happening now, like you’ve got to be in the present”
“They don’t listen to other people, they just keep on working”
“When you focus, finishing something instead of getting distracted by other people”
“If there’s a game and or like a mystery treasure hunt or something and you’re focusing on the clues, trying to find out”
“Yesterday when we did art, the teacher only put the music down softly ‘cause we had to focus on our art”
“Say someone is having trouble with work and then you go up and then you help them and then someone else is also needing help. Like you could say, I am helping this person out this time and maybe you can focus on your work for now and then I can come and help you”
“Like concentrating on if the teacher’s telling you to do something that you need to do it”
“When you concentrate you learn more about it. If you’re just in some mood and you don’t concentrate, and you just rush it. You’re just not even trying”.

Feelings. The children were also asked what they have learned about Feelings. Their responses indicated a simple understanding of feelings being emotions and the different types of feelings people can experience, for example:

“There’s a lot of different types”
“You can feel anything at any time”
“You can feel multiple of them at once”
“Emotions”
“About really what you feel like emotionally”
“Your expression”
“And it comes from inside your body”
“If you’re feeling sad or happy, or angry or disappointed”

“Some feelings are happy and sad”

“Shy, scared, and mean”

“Depressed”

“Devastated”

“(When people) say something nice and you just fill up your bucket of joy and all that”

Responses also indicated an understanding of sympathy and empathy, and how children help others when they are not feeling well, for example:

“If you’re happy and someone else isn’t, go and help them”

“If you’re feeling happy and your mate’s not feeling happy or they got hurt, you can go help them up or tell the teacher or something like that”

“So, sympathy and empathy, like putting yourself in other people’s shoes and how they would feel...”

“Yeah, like if someone like fell over or something you can like sympathise how that felt for you...and like help them”

“Like when you’re watching a video and they’re like riding a bike or something and they fall over and yeah like, you can know how that feels”

“Treat others how you want to be treated – that’s our golden rule in the school”

Children’s responses also exemplified how they might cope with negative emotions:

“So, if you’re angry, just take three deep breaths”

“If someone’s being mean to you, don’t react. And you forgive them, and try to be nice to them so that they stop. And you control yourself”

“We take a photo and every time we feel sad or angry we put it on the spot (on our desk). (The teacher) might send you for a walk”

“If there’s been a bush fire or anything and your home gets destroyed you’ll have, you wouldn’t be able to, you wouldn’t know how to feel”

Relaxation. In Term 4, the children had been introduced to a PLS unit of work on Relaxation. All of the children remembered positive things about Relaxation. As part of the PLS activities the children had enjoyed listening to the PLS relaxation audio recordings and lying on the floor to practice relaxing. They mentioned relaxation as a way of calming down and coping with negative experiences. They also enjoyed meditating and recounted their favourite activities in the

focus group interviews. Children reported using relaxation at school and at home. Children explained what relaxation looked like at school and what it meant to them:

“Calm down and look at the world”

“Reading can help you relax”

“It can help you control your breathing”

“When you relax and then it gets your mind back together once you go back and do work”

“Helps you focus on the stuff you’re meant to do”

“Relaxing is where you just forget about everything and just focus on relaxing...”

“Help us calm our-self down and calm our emotions. You can go somewhere and just count – take deep breaths and just calm ... down. And then you just relax and you’re back kind and everything”

“It sometimes helps us think that if you’re bullying someone – stop”

“It can make you charge up and be ready to do more work or something”

“Relaxing can help you learn a bit more and work”

“Turns your brain more on”

“It clears your head too so you can focus better”

“If your mind wanders off you’ve got to think on your breathing, like in and out”

“It can help you like if you have a big like tests or a game of sport or something, like get rid of all your nerves”

“It can calm you down when someone irritates you or calls you names and that”

At home, children reported that relaxation included the following:

“Watch movies”

“Lie down”

“Just lie around and listen to music. And just not worry about anything”

“Sleep, read and paint, play PS4 with my friends”

“Meditate”

“Take deep breaths...”

“Sleeping. Get a cool drink. Watch some TV. Maybe just lay down...laying down in the air-con with a cold drink”

Changing Channels. Following on from talking about relaxation, children were asked if they have heard about Changing Channels and to explain what the term Changing Channels meant to

them. Initially children explained that Changing Channels was like “...when you’re watching TV ... you can change channels” and “...when you calm yourself down”. One child exclaimed, “I change my channel pretty much every day!” Children had interesting things to say about what Changing Channels meant to them:

“We can go do something that will take our mind off something we done (sic) that made us angry”

“Like, say, if you were sad but you can take a deep breath in and like breathe out, and then you feel happy again and that memory is in the past now”

“You can change being angry to being happy when someone does something kind and nice to you or for you”

“And when someone says something to me and I get upset, then I just ignore it and get on with my day”

“I don’t want to get out of bed, so I decide to change my channel and get up”

“Changing your emotions or something”

“Changing what you feel for someone or something like that”

“Being grateful. Say like you don’t get picked for something or something bad happens, well you can say, ‘well at least I got this far’, or something”

“Like if something negative happens you can think like how lucky you are and like other people...living in poverty and stuff...and how lucky we are to have food...and like a house”

“When you’re really mad, and...need to sit down and relax and yeah be a bit happier”

“When someone’s always mean, but you can change your feelings to be nice and calm”

“Sometimes when you’re say, playing football, and you’re out there. And you feel nervous. Your friends cheer you up. And then you change your channel”

“When I’m playing cricket, if I get out, but then once I go in, I’m angry. But once I go back out to the field I might bowl someone out...and I feel happy”.

PLS skills at home. Children were also asked if they had talked about or used any of the Positive Living Skills ideas at home. Most of the children were keen to share how they were using the skills at home, although some of them said they had not used them much. But for those children who said they had used Positive Living Skills at home, they said that when their parents asked them “*what happened at school today?*” they told them about “*our highlights*” and “*we say we’ve had a great day or we’ve done something*” and others reported telling their parents about “*heaps of highlights*” or “*relaxing.*”

Favourite parts of PLS. Before concluding the focus group chats, children were asked what they have liked to learn about most during the PLS lessons and whether or not they would have liked to learn about PLS earlier. To answer the first question, some children mentioned that they liked “relaxing” and “meditation”, and other children offered a range of different ideas which related to their improved social and emotional skills, as well as the development of their academic skills over time:

“That we get to sit around and see what other people’s emotions and things are”

“Miss asks us what we did on the weekend and things and people share what they did”

“Like you can let your words out but then you can also listen to other people as well”

“You can share with other people and everyone listens and you get to share your ideas”

“It helps you later on in life...that’s what school’s about – like the future and when you’re grown up and an adult”

“Practice self-control”

“I couldn’t focus that well at the beginning of the year and I can focus a lot better now”

“At the start of the year I was a pretty bad writer and now I’m pretty good”

“We had to lay down, concentrate. We had loud music in the background and there was, like, numbers and we had to count how much and see if we got the, the right number”

“We can share happy things, happy feelings with other people, other kids”

“We can learn to change channels and stay calm”

When children were asked if they would have liked to learn about PLS earlier in their schooling, all of the children said yes. Children explained that they would have liked to learn about PLS “like from kindergarten all the way” for a few different reasons. These related to learning about self-control, learning about being more positive, understanding their feelings better, understanding others’ feelings better, and being more relaxed and focused. Children’s responses included:

“Yeah, probably because we’d get to learn more about each other”

“Because it helps you to be open with your friends”

“Cause it could help you express yourself before now, talk about your feelings back then”

“We’d be a happier person”

“(We’d be) more relaxed”

“And you learn more about it from what you learned last year to this year”

“Yeah, because I knew, like, when I went to kindergarten you don’t know what you’re doing and you can get into lots of fights”

“Like when you come into kindergarten, like, you are not really sure what to do, but I think Year 1 and Year 2 should do this experience as well, because like Primary shouldn’t just do it because lots of Year 1 and Year 2 and infants have emotions as well. And sometimes they like to tell what their feelings are now”

“And sometimes...school and kindergarten people start bullying you when you first started and you get really angry and then normally people start punching you and that, because they don’t know how to control themselves”

“It makes you, like, more focused and relaxed and like you could be more positive when you get like older and stuff, you get like strive to get your work (done) and do good work and get to Uni and stuff. It would be like, it would be a better life”

Finally, one child summed up their learning in the PLS program as follows:

“And they’re positive living skills! So it’ll help you being positive when you’re a grown up!”

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to undertake an evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program at a large primary school in regional NSW. The study canvassed the views of eight (8) Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers and 49 children attending Wellington Public School, to understand the efficacy of the PLS program in promoting children’s social and emotional well-being. This discussion briefly addresses the three research questions 1) What are teachers’ experiences of implementing the PLS primary program? 2) What are children’s experiences of participating in the PLS primary program? 3) How does the PLS primary school wellbeing program support children to develop proactive and practical ways to look after their own mental wellbeing? Some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are subsequently addressed.

4.1 What were teachers’ experiences of implementing PLS?

Teachers in the current study agreed that implementing the PLS primary program was straightforward and time-friendly, which they saw as really important in the busy environment of a school. All PLS materials were supplied to the school on USBs that were then uploaded to the school server, from where they could be easily accessed by teachers in their classrooms. The various PLS resources (such as posters, audio recordings, stories, and worksheets) were provided in such a way that lesson preparation and facilitation was stress-free. Additionally, lessons were

scripted, yet flexible enough to enable teachers to adapt them to meet their classroom's interests (such as extending discussions or modifying activities) or children's specific wellbeing needs (such as focusing on 'Relaxation' with anxious children).

The teachers also reported that delivering the content was easy, that lessons were engaging and that on occasions they were surprised at how well the children responded to some of the learning activities. Teachers noted that the PLS activities were a good way to strengthen teacher-child relationships as children had opportunities to get to know their teachers better, and teachers had many more opportunities to get to know children, their likes and dislikes, their feelings, and their coping strategies. Additionally, most teachers identified one or two aspects of PLS that they had since incorporated into their own, or their families' personal lives, specifically 'Highlights', 'Focus' and 'Relaxation.'

Teachers explained how well the PLS program linked in with the current PBL initiative they were implementing in the school, particularly how easily the language of both programs tied together. While teachers used the Be You program for their own staff development, they noted how well PLS complemented or slotted into the concepts outlined by the Be You and Kids Matter initiatives, and how the PLS program was now used as the only Personal Development and Health (PD/H) program in the school. The PLS program has been embraced by the Principal as well as all teachers at the school, and is currently being taught to children from preschool to Year 6.

Teachers reported that collectively the children had taken to PLS very easily and that children had really enjoyed the program. 'Highlights' and 'Changing Channels' were noted by teachers as having a significant positive impact on changes in children's behaviour and in the language they use to talk about others and themselves. 'Highlights' were also something which brought teachers and children together, with everyone referring to highlights numerous times throughout each week and taking more notice of positive things which happened each day.

Children often asked to play mindfulness and relaxation games and "extend the meditation time" they were given in class, and teachers noted that it was "a really powerful thing" for children to develop skills in communicating their emotions with each other and with the teacher.

4.2 What were the children's experiences of participating in PLS?

The Stage 2 and Stage 3 children who took part in the focus group discussions were enthusiastic as they easily recalled definitions and examples of the PLS lessons that they had undertaken and the concepts they had learned about. For many children, relaxation, feelings, highlights and changing

channels had been the most popular topics to talk about, but children were also very eager to talk about empathy, focus, co-operation, respect and self-esteem. Each child communicated many examples of things they liked about the program and concepts they used at home, and although not asked explicitly about aspects they disliked, no children volunteered information about parts of the program they would change. Overall, children gave a clear indication that participating in the PLS program had been a thoroughly enjoyable, meaningful, and influential learning experience which they would have liked to start earlier in their schooling, and which they want to continue learning in the future.

4.3 How does PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program support children to look after their own wellbeing?

The PLS program engages with children at their linguistic and cognitive levels and teaches them about personal wellbeing strategies using learning experiences that the children enjoy, practice, repeat, and ultimately remember and incorporate into many areas of their lives. Teachers in the current study explained how using focus words/terms such as 'Highlights' and 'Changing Channels' allowed teachers themselves to model positive behaviour and a positive attitude towards life, and in turn enabled children to focus on the positive aspects of their and others' days. Teachers explained how they observed positive changes in children's social and emotional wellbeing, and that particular lessons had a significant impact on children's awareness of others as well as the development of their own self-respect. Children were able to give many relevant examples of how they were applying aspects of the PLS lessons about 'Highlights', 'Feelings', 'Changing Channels', 'Focus' and 'Relaxation' into their school and home lives and these showed not only close engagement with the program concepts, but really positive growth in their social and emotional development.

4.4 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the PLS program with Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers and children, in a large, regional public school. The study aimed to determine how effective the PLS program was in supporting the social and emotional development and wellbeing of children, and also supporting the professional development of teachers in the curriculum area of Personal Development and Health. While it was beyond the scope of the current project to make

quantifiable comparisons between PLS and other wellbeing programs currently used in NSW schools (such as Be You and PBL), the teachers in the current project did offer some information about the connection between PLS and other school wellbeing programs. In future research this aspect could be explored in more depth, together with careful documentation of units, lessons, and activities, as well as specific examples of children's social and emotional outcomes.

Future research with PLS could incorporate a quantitative measure of children's wellbeing before the introduction of the program and at the conclusion of a given time period, such as a year. While it may be hard for such a measure to give a definitive view of a program's efficacy (as factors beyond school life can also impact on children's wellbeing), it may nonetheless provide useful evidence if a large sample were recruited, especially if combined and correlated with qualitative child data. Alternatively, as the Wellington Public School teachers suggested, perhaps future research could commence with focus group discussions exploring children's understanding of feelings, prior to implementing PLS, and conclude with follow up focus group discussions after a specified time.

At Wellington PS, the teachers were slightly unsure as to how much the parents and families had engaged with the information that they posted on the school's website or sent out on the school newsletter. One suggestion for the school in future would be to track the number of PLS Newsletter downloads on their website, and to regularly remind parents of the PLS newsletters within the school's own weekly newsletter. Future research might also consider canvassing the views of families to see whether they have noticed changes in their children's wellbeing, or noticed changes in what their children talked about during or subsequent to the implementation of the PLS program. This strategy may be especially useful with preschool or younger children who may not have the verbal or metacognitive skills to identify changes. Lastly, as the teachers themselves recognised, teaching just one lesson per unit per week would likely have enabled deeper learning, as there would have been increased time and opportunity for teachers to explore the wellbeing themes with their children.

To conclude, the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program was very well received by the Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers at Wellington PS and by the children who took part in this evaluation. The teachers reported that PLS was easy to implement, scripted yet flexible, sequenced appropriately, modifiable if needed, and cognitively aligned to the children's abilities.

Positive Living Skills learning experiences were enjoyable and meaningful, and teachers and children were embedding PLS concepts at school and beginning to transfer PLS skills to their home lives. Future PLS research at Wellington PS will include their preschool cohort. It is hoped that this will not only enable an evaluation of how the PLS program can support the social and emotional wellbeing of young children, but also track how these children's skills develop as they transition into a school where the PLS program is embedded.

Indications are that the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program has had a positive impact on the social and emotional development of students in Stage 2 and Stage 3 classes. Continued research into PLS at a whole-school level is recommended with all teachers focusing on introducing one PLS lesson each week, and perhaps over 12 - 18 months. Such research would enable a more in-depth exploration of the impact of PLS on supporting and sustaining children's social and emotional development throughout all years of primary school.

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6. APPENDICES

6.1 Ethics Approval



31 August 2018

Dr Loraine Fordham

Email: lfordham@csu.edu.au

Dear Dr Fordham,

Thank you for providing further information in response to a request from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee relating to your research proposal.

The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's [*National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*](#) (*National Statement*).

Based on the guidelines in the *National Statement* the Committee has approved your research proposal.

Please see below details of your approved research project:

Project Title:	Promoting children's mental well-being: A trial of the Positive Living Skills program
Approved until:	18 September 2019 (subject to annual progress reports being submitted)
Protocol Number:	H18181 (to be included in all correspondence to the Committee)
Progress Report due by:	31 August 2019

You must report to the Committee at least annually, and as soon as possible in relation to the following, by completing the 'Report on Research Project' form:

- any serious and/or unexpected adverse events or outcomes which occur associated with the research project that might affect participants, therefore, the ethical acceptability of the project;
- amendments to the research design and/or any changes to the project (Committee approval required);
- extensions to the approval period (Committee approval required); and
- notification of project completion.

This approval constitutes ethical approval in relation to humans only. If your research involves the use of radiation, biochemical materials, chemicals or animals, separate approval is required by the appropriate University Committee.

Please contact the Governance Officer on (02) 69334213 or ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any queries

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen Hannigan".

Ms Ellen Hannigan

Governance Officer

on behalf of Associate Professor Catherine Allan Presiding Officer, HREC

cc: Dr Tamara Cummings

Subject: HREC Extension Approval - Dr Elizabeth Alexandra Murray Reference: H18181

Dear Dr Murray,

Project title: Promoting childrens' mental well-being: a trial of the Positive Living Skills Program.

Protocol number: H18181 (Please refer to this number in all contact or correspondence relating to this application)

Revised approved end date: 31/03/2021

Thank you for submitting your request to extend the research proposal detailed above to the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee. Your request was considered on 08/01/2020.

Based on the guidelines in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research the Committee has **APPROVED** your request.

Please note the revised end date of your project above.

As previously notified, you must report to the Committee at least annually, and as soon as possible in relation to the following:

- anything that might impact on the ethical acceptability of the project (including, but not limited to, adverse events, unexpected outcomes or additional information coming to light);
- amendments to the research design and/or any changes to the project (Committee approval required);
- extensions to the approval period (Committee approval required); and
- notification of project completion.

This approval constitutes ethical approval in relation to humans only. If your research involves the use of radiation, biochemical materials, chemicals or animals, separate approval is required by the appropriate University Committee.

Please contact the Governance Officer on (02) 6933 4213 or ethics@csu.edu.au if you have any queries.

Further information regarding human research ethics at CSU can be found at the HREC webpages

<https://research.csu.edu.au/ethics-and-compliance/human>

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Sincerely,

Presiding Officer,

Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee

6.2 Information Sheet for Stage 2 and Stage 3 Teachers



INFORMATION SHEET: TEACHERS

Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program

What is this research project about?

The Positive Living Skills primary school wellbeing program is being introduced into **all** classes at Wellington Public School in 2019. This program helps children to develop practical and positive social and emotional skills by focusing on their awareness and understanding of emotions.

All Wellington Public School teachers will be introducing this program into their classrooms and working through the program in a flexible way, depending on the needs and interests of their children.

Darryl Thompson, Wellington Public School's Principal supports this research project and has agreed for Teachers of Stage 2 and Stage 3 classes (children in years 3, 4, 5 & 6) to consider participating in a short research study into this program. Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and there is no obligation for you to participate.

The research project is being conducted by two researchers from Charles Sturt University.

Who can take part in the project?

- i) Participating Teachers of Stage 2 & Stage 3 classes
- ii) Children in Stage 2 & Stage 3 classes whose teacher has consented to participate in this research project

Who is doing the research project?

This research is being carried out by Dr Libbey Murray and Dr Tamara Cumming who are researchers at Charles Sturt University. They are working together with Wellington Public School to undertake this research project. You'll find their names listed at the end of this information sheet. The research project will start in 2019 and will finish in January 2020.

How is the research project going to answer its questions?

- Participating teachers will teach the Positive Living Skills program in 2019.
- Participating teachers will be asked to keep a record of which PLS lessons and activities they introduce to the children each week.
- Libbey will conduct a focus group discussion with participating Stage 2 and Stage 3 teachers at the end of Term 4, 2019 at the end of the school day.
- Participating teachers will ask the participating children if they assent to take part in a classroom conversation with Libbey at the end of Term 4, 2019.
- Libbey will hold a classroom conversation with the children who give their assent at the end of Term 4, 2019. This will take place in a corner of the children's classroom. Children who are not participating will continue to undertake regular classroom activities supervised by their teacher in the same classroom.

What happens after I indicate that I am interested in taking part in the project?

Libbey Murray will meet with participating teachers to explain the project and to answer any questions they may have about it. Teachers who agree to participate in this study will sign the attached Consent Form. Signing the Consent Form means agreeing to be included in the research project.

Libbey will ask participating teachers to give the parents of every child in their class an Information Sheet and an attached Consent Form explaining the research project and asking parents if they would like their child to be included in the research project. If parents would like their child to be included in the research project they will sign the Consent Form and will return it to the teachers. Teachers will be asked to keep these Consent Forms in a safe place, and supply them to Libbey at a convenient time.

What action / information will the research project want from me?

If you agree to take part in the research project, you will be asked to keep a record of the PLS lessons and activities that you introduce to your class each week.

At the end Term 4, 2019, Libbey will meet with participating teachers to ask them some questions about the Positive Living Skills program. These conversations will be digitally audio-recorded but no teacher will be identified. These conversations will take place at Wellington Public School after school hours (usually in the school staff room) and will take about an hour.

At the end of Term 4, 2019, you will ask your participating children if they would like to take part in a classroom conversation with Libbey at the end of Term 4, 2019 to answer some questions about the PLS program. This is called giving their assent. Libbey will hold a classroom conversation with the children who assent to do so at the end of Term 4, 2019. Those conversations will be digitally audio-recorded but the children will not be identified. These conversations will take place in a corner to the children's classrooms while you are present. It is likely that these conversations will take no more than half an hour. Children who are not participating in a classroom chat will remain in the classroom and will be supervised by you.

What will happen to the information that is collected?

All information that is collected will be analysed by Libbey and Tamara and later stored at Charles Sturt University. All information will be de-identified. You will not be identified in *any* research findings. All information will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked room at Charles Sturt University that can only be accessed by researchers involved in this project. Only researchers working on this project will have access to information /data from this project. The data will be kept while the analysis of the data is being undertaken, and then for a sufficient future period as proof that the study was actually undertaken. (This will be for a minimum of 5 years after any publication of findings from the study).

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and if you decide you do not wish to continue, you can ask to withdraw at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data provided.

Should this research study raise any topics that cause you distress you can access the Employer Assistance Program at www.employeeassistanceprogramme.com.au

When the project is completed and we have analysed the results we will provide a summary of the study's findings to be published in the school's newsletter. In addition, findings from this research study will be published in a Research Report, and may also be presented at early childhood conferences and in early childhood professional magazines.

Who is involved in this research project?

Researchers at Charles Sturt University:

Dr Libbey Murray, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Dubbo, NSW 2795

E: emurray@csu.edu.au

Ph: 02 6885 7332

Dr Tamara Cumming, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Bathurst, NSW 2795

E: tcumming@csu.edu.au

Ph: 02 6338 4365

Who can I talk to for more information about this research project?

Dr Libbey Murray: Research Leader

Telephone: 02 6885 7332

Email: emurray@csu.edu.au

Who should I contact if I have concerns about the conduct of this study?

The research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Charles Sturt University, HREC protocol number: H18181

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project you may contact the committee through the Governance Officer:

The Governance Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Tel: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for considering this invitation

This information sheet is for you to keep

6.3 Consent Form for Stage 2 and Stage 3 Teachers



Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program

Name:

Name of Researcher: *Dr Libbey Murray* (Researchers' contact details are on page 2)

1. I consent to participate in this research project. I understand that my participation in the research project is voluntary.
2. Details of the research project have been explained to me, and I have been provided with and read an 'Information Sheet' which describes this research project.
3. I understand that after I sign and return this Consent Form, it will be retained by the researcher.
4. I understand that by agreeing to participate in this research project ...
 - (i) I will keep a record of the lessons / activities I use during the intervention period;
 - (ii) At the end of Term 4, 2019, Libbey will meet with all teachers who have taken part in the study in a focus group, and will ask them some questions about the Positive Living Skills program.
5. I agree that the researcher may use the results in the way described in the 'Information Sheet.'
6. I acknowledge that:
 - a) I have been informed that my participation in this research is voluntary;
 - b) I am free to withdraw from it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data provided;
 - c) This project is for the purpose of research;
 - d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information will be safe guarded;
 - e) I have been informed that information collected in this project will be kept at Charles Sturt University for a period required to undertake analysis for the project, and then for a period required by professional practice, after which it will be destroyed;
 - f) No information on my name will be kept as part of the information collected in this project;
 - g) I have been informed that a summary of the research findings will be published in the school newsletter.

Participant signature:

Date:



INFORMATION SHEET: PARENTS

Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program

What is this research project about?

The Positive Living Skills primary school wellbeing program is being introduced into **all** classes at Wellington Public School in 2019. This program helps children to develop practical and positive social and emotional skills by focusing on their awareness and understanding of emotions.

All Wellington Public School teachers will be introducing this program into their classrooms and working through the program in a flexible way, depending on the needs and interests of their children.

Darryl Thompson, Wellington Public School's Principal supports this research project and has agreed for Teachers of Stage 2 and Stage 3 classes (children in years 3, 4, 5 & 6) to consider participating in a short research study into this program. We are asking parents to consider giving consent for their children to participate in the research study also. The research project will be conducted by two researchers from Charles Sturt University.

Who can take part in the project?

- i) Participating Teachers of Stage 2 & Stage 3 classes
- ii) Children in Stage 2 & Stage 3 classes whose teacher has consented to participate in this research project

Who is doing the research project?

This research is being carried out by Dr Libbey Murray and Dr Tamara Cumming who are researchers at Charles Sturt University. They are working together with Wellington Public School to undertake this research project. You'll find their names listed at the end of this information sheet. The research project will start in 2019 and will finish in January 2020.

What happens after I indicate that I am interested in my child taking part in the project?

Libbey Murray will be meeting with Stage 2 & Stage 3 teachers to explain the project and to answer any questions they have about it. If the teachers agree to participate in the research study Libbey will ask them to ask you, as a parent of a child in their Stage 2 or Stage 3 class, if you would like your child to be included in the research project.

If you have indicated that you are interested in your child taking part in the research project, your child's teacher will have given you this Information Sheet and will ask you to sign the attached Consent Form.

Signing the form means you agree for your child to be included in the project. Your child will also be asked whether or not they assent to being part of the research on the day the classroom conversation is to take

place. Libbey will then hold a classroom conversation with the children who give their assent. Children who have not assented, or whose parents have not consented to them taking part in the study will complete alternative activities with their regular classroom teacher in their classroom during the classroom conversation time. I understand that my child may choose not to participate.

How is the research project going to answer its questions?

- Participating teachers will teach the Positive Living Skills program in Terms 2, 3 and 4 in 2019.
- Libbey will interview the participating teachers at the end of Term 4.
- Participating teachers will ask the participating children if they would like to take part in a classroom conversation with Libbey at the end of Term 4, 2019. This is called giving their assent.
- Libbey will hold a classroom conversation with the children who give their assent at the end of Term 4, 2019.

What information will the research project want from my child and me?

If you agree to your child taking part in the research project, at the end of Term 4, 2019, your child's teacher will ask your child if they would like to take part in a classroom conversation with Libbey. If your child gives their assent to participate in this classroom conversation, Libbey will meet with the children who give their assent and will ask them some questions about the Positive Living Skills program. Questions will concern things like children's experiences of taking part in PLS lessons at school, and if they have used any of their new skills at home. These conversations will be digitally audio-recorded but the children will not be identified. These conversations will take place in the children's classrooms. It is likely that these conversations will take no more than half an hour.

What will happen to the information that is collected?

All information that is collected will be analysed by Libbey and Tamara and later stored at Charles Sturt University. All information will have your name and your child's name removed from it. Your child will not be identified in *any* research findings. All information will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked room at Charles Sturt University that can only be accessed by researchers involved in this project.

Only researchers working on this project will have access to information /data from this project. The data will be kept while the analysis of the data is being undertaken, and then for a sufficient future period as proof that the study was actually undertaken. (This will be for a minimum of 5 years after any publication of findings from the study).

Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary and if you decide you do not wish for them to continue, you can ask to withdraw them at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data provided. There will be no repercussions for your child at their school if you choose not to give consent for them to participate.

How do I get information on what the research findings are?

When the project is completed and we have analysed the results we will send a summary of the study's findings to the school for publication in the school newsletter.

I understand that the information contained in the summary report will not be specific to my child. In addition, findings from this research study will be published in a Research Report, and may also be presented at early childhood conferences and in early childhood professional magazines. No individually-identifying details will be included.

Who is involved in this research project?

Stage 2 and 3 Classes (2019) at Wellington Public School.

Researchers at Charles Sturt University:

Dr Libbey Murray, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Dubbo, NSW 2795

E: emurray@csu.edu.au

Ph: 02 6885 7332

Dr Tamara Cumming, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Bathurst, NSW 2795

E: tcumming@csu.edu.au

Ph: 02 6338 4365

Who can I talk to for more information about this research project?

Dr Libbey Murray: Research Leader

Telephone: 02 6885 7332

Email: emurray@csu.edu.au

Who should I contact if I have concerns about the conduct of this study?

The research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Charles Sturt University, HREC protocol number: H18181

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the committee through the Governance Officer:

The Governance Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Tel: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for considering this invitation

This information sheet is for you to keep



CONSENT FORM: PARENTS

Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program

Name of my child:

Name of Researcher: *Dr Libbey Murray*

1. I consent to my child participating in this research project.
2. I have been provided with and read an 'Information Sheet' which describes this research project.
3. I understand that after I sign and return this Consent Form, it will be retained by the researcher.
4. I understand that by agreeing to my child participating in this research project ...
 - (i) At the end of Term 4, 2019, my child's teacher will ask my child if they would like to take part in a classroom chat with the researcher Libbey Murray. This is called giving their assent.
Children who would like to take part in this activity will meet with Libbey in their classroom as a group and Libbey will ask them some questions about the Positive Living Skills program.

I understand that my child may choose not to participate.
5. I agree that the researcher may use the results in the way described in the 'Information Sheet.'
6. I acknowledge that:
 - a) I have been informed that my participation in this research is voluntary;
 - b) I am free to withdraw my child from it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data provided;
 - c) This project is for the purpose of research;
 - d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information will be safe guarded;
 - e) I have been informed that information collected in this project will be kept at Charles Sturt University for a period required to undertake analysis for the project, and then for a period required by professional practice, after which it will be destroyed;
 - f) No information on my name or on the name of my child will be kept as part of the information collected in this project;
 - g) I have been informed that a summary of the research findings will be published in the school newsletter. I understand that the information contained in the summary report will not be specific to my child.

Participant signature:

Date:

6.6 Teacher Focus Group Questions

- 1) Ok, so the first thing I would like to know is how easy has the PLS program been to deliver?
- 2) How well has the PLS program supported your role as an educator in the school?
- 3) Have you noticed any positive behavioural differences in any of the children in your class, or your class as a whole? Can you give an example?
- 4) Have you noticed children using the positive language of the program concepts? (e.g., highlights, changing channels, relaxation, focus, awareness)?
- 5) Of the 6 learning experiences (highlights; feelings; focus; relaxation; cooperation; self-esteem) which ones have been the most beneficial or helpful to you in your classroom? Least beneficial?
- 6) What impact have you noticed the PLS program has had so far on the social competence of children?
- 7) What impact have you noticed the PLS program has had so far on the emotional maturity of children?
- 8) What impact have you noticed the PLS program has had so far on the communication skills of children?
- 9) Did the children struggle to understand any of the learning experiences or activities?
- 10) How specifically did you access the program materials in your classrooms? Did you download from the school server to you own device or did you project from the server to a smart board? Do you print things out? If so what sorts of things?
- 11) Have you used the PLS Family link? Can you tell me how that has been received? What sort of interest have you had from your families?
- 12) Did you find that you needed to adapt any of the activities depending on the needs and interests of your classroom children? Can you provide an example of how you did that?
- 13) Do you think that implementing the PLS has had any flow on effect into your personal lives / or your teaching practice overall? If so, can you perhaps give an example?
- 14) What feedback have you received from families about the PLS program?
- 15) Is there any other feedback that you would like to provide – in terms of the learning experiences or the activities or the materials? Anything at all that could be helpful either for this research or to the PLS authors or to your teaching colleagues at another school?
- 16) Anything else that you would like to say?

6.7 Children's Focus Group Questions

Exploring the children's experiences of participating in the PLS primary program:

1. Who can remember what a highlight is?
2. Can you give me some examples of highlights?
3. When do you use your highlights?
4. What do you remember about Focus?
5. What does Focus mean to you?
6. Can you tell me what you learnt about feelings?
7. Can you tell me about the feelings and emotions chart?
8. What can you remember about relaxing?
9. How can relaxation help you?
10. Tell me about a time where you used the idea of changing channels?
11. Have you talked about any of your Positive Living Skills at home?
12. What have you liked most about the Positive Living Skills lessons?
13. Do you think it would have been good to do the Positive Living Skills lessons earlier in school, maybe in year 1 or year 2?

6.8 Scope and Sequence

Wellington Public School Positive Living Skills Scope and Sequence 2019

All lesson plans and resources can be found on the server.

Term	Week	Learning Experience	Lesson Title
2	1	Highlights	Any Day Highlights
2	2	Highlights	Happy Highlights
2	3	Highlights	Opportunities to Appreciate
2	4	Highlights	Remembering Highlights
2	5	Highlights	Zing Highlights
2	6	Feelings	Changing Channels
2	7	Feelings	Empathy
2	8	Feelings	Kindness
2	9	Feelings	Notice your thoughts
2	10	Feelings	Reeling in good feelings
3	1	Focus	Focus in positive ways
3	2	Focus	Focused Listening and Seeing
3	3	Focus	Focused Listening
3	4	Focus	Focusing through distractions
3	5	Focus	Focused in the present moment
3	6	Relaxation	Learning how to relax
3	7	Relaxation	Quiet your mind
3	8	Relaxation	Special place relaxation
3	9	Relaxation	Understanding Relaxation
3	10	Relaxation	Why relaxation is important
4	1	Cooperation	Followership
4	2	Cooperation	Respect
4	3	Cooperation	Sharing
4	4	Cooperation	Teamwork
4	5	Self Esteem	Building Confidence
4	6	Self Esteem	Healthy Self-esteem
4	7	Self Esteem	Physiology of Excellence
4	8	Self Esteem	Self-Respect
4	9	Self Esteem	Self Talk
4	10	Self Esteem	We are unique

The Positive Living Skills Program: Parent and Carers' Newsletter

Unit Name: Highlights

Parents, carers and families are an integral part of the Positive Living Skills Initiative.

The Positive Living Skills program is a universal and practical program designed specifically for children from Preschool onwards, and the principles and positive effects of the learning experiences can reach teachers, school staff, parents, families and wider communities.

The goal is to prevent problems before they develop, by implementing a positive life skills program from an early age. The Positive Living Skills program assists to create habitual positive, healthy supportive behaviours by guiding children to learn to understand and self-direct their own thinking processes, emotions, actions, responses and outcomes, and build effective self-management and social skills.

Noticing and enjoying **highlights** is an effective way for us to bring our focus to the positive opportunities all around us, and highlights are available to almost every human being on any day. When students learn to bring their focus to highlights every day, they begin to build an optimistic and appreciative outlook for life, and learn to focus on building on their strengths and seeing the potential in themselves, in School and in life in general.

Definition of Highlights:

Highlights are happy things you see and do and happy times you share with others.

Highlights help you feel good.

Why Highlights?

A highlight is any simple pleasure, little treasure, joy, positive feeling, meaningful experience, magic moment or anything that lifts the quality of any day for any person.

Taking just a moment, at any time of the day or evening, to stop, and focus on the moment you are experiencing, can connect you with a sense of love and joy that can become a highlight in your day, and connect you with a positive feeling of happiness and appreciation that can be built on.

Science is showing us that if we allow our brain to fully take in the positive highlight we are experiencing, it can begin to re-wire our neurology so we can build skills to enable us to create a positive experience at any time and thus hard-wire ourselves for happiness and positivity.

According to Dr Terry Orlick, there are 7 Sources of Highlights, which are self-generated, and available in some form to virtually all human beings, almost every day.

1. Positive Human Interaction, e.g., *sharing a smile or laugh, a genuine positive comment, a hug or caring gesture*
2. Positive Interaction with Nature, e.g., *the smell of freshly cut grass, noticing a beautiful tree, a bird song, sunlight on the water,*
3. Positive Connection through Play, Games, Sport, Physical Activity, e.g., *teams or play, any movement*
4. Positive Personal Accomplishments, e.g., *finishing a project, achieving a goal in any pursuit*
5. Positive Personal Discovery or Creativity, e.g., *learning, creating, growing, solving a problem*
6. Positive Physical Sensations, e.g., *feel of a warm bath, cool water on a hot day, a relaxing massage*
7. Pure Relaxation, e.g., *a few deep breaths, a quiet moment*

Positive Living Skills Wellbeing Program © 2018

Highlight experiences allow children, young people and adults to self-direct their neuroplasticity to a more positive, realistically optimistic bias, by embracing simple positive moments that bring joy and an enhanced quality to life.

When children and young people begin to connect more fully with highlights, they also begin to feel the immediate effects of a positive fully connected focus, which can enhance self-esteem and learning. When children are guided to look for, acknowledge and appreciate the positive aspects in each day, their ability to perceive highlights improves and they begin to experience more highlights, experience more fulfilment, and share more highlights with others.

The Happy Highlight Clicker

A Highlight Clicker is a great way to help people of all ages learn how to click on to a Happy Channel and click off a Negative or Stressed Channel.

One of the fastest and most interactive ways to help children to bring their focus to the positive, so they feel happier, less stressed and more confident within themselves in any context, is to introduce them to clicking Highlights.

- Counting highlights in your day – any time of day – click!
- Counting the highlights you are looking forward to today, tonight, tomorrow, next week – click!
- Changing your channel from negative to positive – click!
- How many things can I appreciate about today / right now? -click!
- What and who do I have to be grateful for right now? – _click!
- How many things can I count that are positive about in my life in one minute?
- How many highlights can I find in a 5-minute walk outside?
- In Nature? Play? Discovery? Human Interaction? Click! Click! Click!

Sharing and counting highlights and reflecting on them brings a positive and lasting focus to children and adults alike.

Here are some ideas for how to apply highlight concepts into your home life:

As well as applying the Highlights lessons within the delivery of the Positive Living Skills program, here are some suggestions for how the concepts within this Unit could be applied at home:

Asking your children to share the highlights of their school day will embed and expand on positive experiences

Sharing highlights amongst family members over a meal is a powerful way for families to positively connect and enhance a shared positive outlook

When children have nothing to do encourage them to create their own Highlight games ie; think of new ways to teach people about highlights, to encourage their friends to share highlights

Encourage your children to think of people in their lives they could make a positive comment to and thereby giving the other person a highlight moment

Encourage your family to share one thing you each love, appreciate, value or respect about each other or appreciate about your family, friends, teacher etc

Encourage your children to share with you something they like or are proud about within themselves

*****For more information about the Positive Living Skills program, and to access free resources from the Positive Living Skills family link, visit www.positivelivingskills.com**

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