

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

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

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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, 2015). 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 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).

## 1.2 Positive Living Skills

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 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), the program focuses on the development of skills to direct feelings, thoughts and actions. Six units provide activity-based learning experiences focusing on:

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

Activities within the six 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 several short sessions over a sustained period of time; and
- (3) Procedural Learning: A strategy of practice and repetition, whereby repeating an activity on multiple occasions promotes embedded, automatic responses (PLS, 2018).

Participating schools receive a PLS a 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.

As Positive Living Skills Wellbeing Programs (Primary School & Early Childhood) are currently garnering a great deal of interest, PLS Directors are commissioning a series of independent research studies into the efficacy of their programs, with the aim of building an evidence base to share with schools and Early Childhood settings. The current pilot study is the first in this series.

### 1.3 The Current Study

In 2018 Positive Living Skills Director Catherine Shaw commissioned early childhood researchers from Charles Sturt University to undertake an evaluation of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program. The program was about to be introduced school-wide into a metropolitan primary school in New South Wales (Australia) which provided the opportunity for an independent

pilot study into the efficacy of the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program, which would canvas the views of teachers and children.

Hence in order to understand how effective the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program is in promoting children's social and emotional well-being, four research questions were designed:

- RQ1 How effective is the PLS primary school wellbeing program in helping children to develop proactive and practical ways to look after their own mental wellbeing?
- RQ2 What are teachers' experiences of implementing the PLS primary school wellbeing program?
- RQ3 What differences do teachers perceive amongst children, and for their class as a whole?
- RQ4 What are children's experiences of participating in the PLS primary school wellbeing program?

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Approach

*Research methodology.* The purpose of this pilot 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 teachers and children at a Sydney-based 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 pilot study employed two qualitative data collection methods: a focus group discussion and a 'classroom chat' which were conducted with the groups of participating teachers and children respectively. These data collection methods were selected as the most appropriate type as they not only incorporate both open and closed questions (the content of which focuses on the issues that are central to the research questions) but also create the potential for flexible, conversational, two-way communication (Minichiello, Madison, Hays, & Evaluation of a trial of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program; March 2019



Parmenter, 2004). They also impact minimally on the busy daily lives of teachers and school children.

## 2.2 Ethical Considerations

*Ethics approval.* An ethics application for this pilot 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 early February 2019 and a final research report was submitted to PLS in March, 2019. The final research report will also be submitted to the Principal of the participating 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. Marton Public School has given permission for its name to be used in this report.

## 2.3 Research Participants

*Marton Public School.* Marton Public School is a New South Wales Government Primary School catering for children from Kindergarten to Year 6, and it is located in the South Western region of the Sydney metropolitan area. It was officially opened in 1973 and details obtained from the School's website (NSW Government Department of Education, 2018), showed that in 2017 (last reporting year) there were 21 full time equivalent teaching staff and five non-teaching staff. At the time of the pilot study (November 2018) there were 427 enrolments, 226 boys and 201 girls with an attendance rate of 95%. Five percent of all children enrolled were identified as having a language background other than English (LOTE), however no Indigenous children were enrolled. In 2018, Marton Public School's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) had a value of 1045, which was 45 points above the average value for the State. On its website the school states:

**Marton Public School** strives for excellence through the individual development of students in acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which enables them to be responsible members of society, now and in the future.

Marton Public School's motto is 'Strive to do my best' and the school's five values are Teamwork; Honesty; Kindness; Pride and Respect.

Marton Public School was chosen by the Positive Living Skills Directors as a potential site for a pilot study as the school had already purchased the PLS Primary School Wellbeing Program. They planned to implement it as a school-wide intervention (as part of their Strategic Direction for Children's Wellbeing and Community Connections), in the second half of 2018. The Principal and Deputy Principal at Marton Public were contacted by the Positive Living Skills Directors and approved all teachers of Stage 2 classes to consider participating in a short pilot study of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program at their school (see Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Stage 2 Teachers & Appendix 3: Consent Form for Stage 2 Teachers).

*Participating teachers and children from Marton Public School.* Research participants were recruited from five Stage 2 classrooms. Of these five classrooms two classes comprised students in Year 3, two classes comprised students in Year 4 and there was one composite class of Year 3s and 4s.

At the time of the study (second half of 2018) Stage 2 comprised six female teachers and 133 children (boys and girls). 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 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 133 children enrolled in the five Stage 2 classes, a sample of 13 children took part in the study. The children's parents had given prior consent for them to consider participating in the study (see Appendix 4: Information Sheet for Parents & Appendix 5: Consent Form for Parents). All 13 children assented to join in a classroom chat facilitated by the same CSU researcher, to share some of their views and experiences of the Positive Living Skills program. The children's sample was comprised fairly equally of boys ( $n=6$ ) and girls ( $n=7$ ), aged either 9 or 10 years.

## 2.4 Research Procedures

*Focus group discussion.* Five Stage 2 teachers participated in one focus group discussion with the researcher in November 2018 (see Appendix 6: Focus group questions). This discussion took place in the school staff room 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 Marton 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).

*Classroom chat.* A classroom chat with 13 assenting Stage 2 children was held on the same day in the children's classroom (see Appendix 7: Children's chat questions) and this classroom chat lasted for 20 minutes. One of the participating Stage 2 teachers was present in the classroom with the researcher throughout the classroom chat. Classroom chat questions were drawn from an understanding of how Marton Public School were implementing the PLS program (see Appendix 8: Scope and Sequence), and gave the children an opportunity to say what they had learned or remembered about the PLS activities with encouragement to share some examples, as well as state what they liked or disliked about the activities.

*Data recording and transcription.* The focus group discussion and the classroom chat 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. 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.

*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

Marion Public School began introducing the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program in Week 1 of Term 3 of 2018 (July 23<sup>rd</sup>). All teachers were following the same 'Scope and Sequence' (see Appendix 8 for details of this sequence) which was Marion 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 Marion 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. Marion Public School uploaded each of these six newsletters to their school website, although it is not known how many families read or downloaded them. 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 3 the teachers would introduce and complete lessons around Highlights, Feelings and Focus, and in Term 4, teachers would introduce and complete lessons around Relaxation, Co-operation, and Self-esteem.

Given that the focus group discussion and classroom chat took place in Term 4, Week 7, according to the Scope and Sequence (Appendix 8) all Stage 2 teachers should have been starting the final unit, and 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 schedule and while some Stage 2 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

*Introducing PLS.* The focus group discussion began by asking the teachers how they got started with PLS. One teacher stated that she had *"asked [the children] how to define what positive living was. I just remember doing a definition,"* while another added *"it was really easy to follow ... it actually made perfect sense and the kids really liked it and it was right at their level, I thought it was right at their level."* Another teacher stated the PLS lessons were *"very scripted but open at the same time ... they basically showed us where we needed to start and the first lesson was on Highlights."*

The discussion then unpacked the teachers' thoughts on the first Highlights lesson and they unanimously agreed *"that was a really good group of lessons to start off with, it really captured the children I felt, and showed what they knew and what they didn't."* One teacher stated, *"to have the hands-on counters and [the children] doing something ... actually got them captured I think into the start of that program."*

Two teachers said that not only did their children respond well to Highlights within the first week of teaching it, but that the children were still talking about Highlights some four months later. For example, one teacher shared, *"If somebody's sad they'll try and cheer them up and tell them to think about Highlights,"* and the other expanded on this saying:

*They even talk about it now ... like they're 'oh, that was a Highlight of today' or 'can I have the clicker to go out to the playground?' And they love coming in now and saying 'This is how many Highlights I found!' It's not how many clicks I've got, it's what I have done at lunchtime.*

*Teaching PLS.* A number of questions canvassed teachers' views of actually teaching PLS, so factors like the accessibility of teaching materials, and lesson content. In terms of accessing the materials, one teacher explained:

*The staff were supplied with a thumb drive, that the Positive Living Skills Program gave us. We also put it onto the school server, so everyone has access whenever they're in their classroom. Most lessons can be put up onto the Interactive Whiteboard for the kids, some lessons have got the worksheets, so I usually print one between two because they often don't need a whole sheet for themselves; but it's very paper friendly I found the program, very easy and no prep, it's ready to go.*

Another teacher added that in terms of preparation, "you just have to put all the stuff on your whiteboard or on your computer ready to go like with your visuals and with your listening stuff, videos," but her colleague said, "You can literally do it as you're getting ready to teach it ... it's very easy ... you don't have to go looking for anything."

In terms of lesson content, teachers were asked to reflect on whether some experiences were easier to teach than others, as well as whether they thought any of the concepts had been harder for the children to grasp, or if there were any surprises in how children responded to the content?

The teachers agreed that the lessons were "all really easy" to teach. One teacher specifically nominated the 'trust lesson' as being "quite easy" ... as "you could do lots of little games" though another mentioned that she found teaching self-esteem "a bit trickier than trust and cooperation", but wondered if this was more to do with her children's age. This prompted another teacher to remember an earlier activity:

*Where [the children] went around and said lovely things about each other... actually I was surprised at how nicely they did that, I was gob-smacked! They went and they kept going for a long time, much longer than what the lesson recommended.*

In regard to surprises, one teacher said she "was surprised by how positively it was received from the get go from the students, I was hoping for that, but I was still surprised by how much the kids loved it." Another teacher reflected that their own modelling of PLS language and concepts had probably attributed to how the children had accepted the program so easily, as she noted:

*How we were talking about the Highlights when we started off with that, we would talk about Highlights in front of the students too, so they could see we were using that terminology [when] talking to ourselves, so they probably saw it was acceptable.*

Teachers were also asked to reflect on whether their children had struggled with any of the content. They agreed that the children did not appear to struggle as the lessons were “very well tailored to that age group.” One teacher elaborated on the teaching process saying:

*A lot [of the lessons] are discussions ... on the floor, so they did ask a lot of questions and if they didn't understand something you just answered more questions until they sort of got it; but a lot of them were discussions.*

And another explained that even though some of the content took more time to explain “you don't want to cut it short.”

*Powerful lessons.* Teachers were asked to consider if any of the PLS lessons had made more of an impact on the children in their classroom. One teacher was very clear that Focusing had made a big difference in her classroom, saying:

*Mine was definitely Focus because I have a few kids in my class that struggle with focusing and really putting their head down and getting their work done. ... when we were doing focus I just felt like it just had a real shift in my classroom. We did a specific lesson and I kept referring back to that lesson.*

Two teachers nominated Feelings as being the most beneficial to their classrooms, as the first teacher explained:

*We still refer back to different things in the Feelings section now and about how ... it's not just an action that can hurt someone, it's words and things like that and how we can avoid that and ... it's not necessarily always what we say, it's the way that we say it as well that ... can hurt people. But then we talk about how we can recover from that and what we can say to our friends to help them feel better about themselves, so building that resilience in them.*

And the second added:

*It was definitely Feelings in my room. I've got quite a few kids with anxiety. This year three children lost grandparents and ... I really loved that every lesson really repeated that it's alright to have the bad feelings, it's alright to feel sad and to feel angry, but if you stay that*

*way this is what we need to do ... They were really powerful lessons in my room, yeah really helped the kids; it was full on for some of them, but it was good.*

Another teacher felt that the introduction of the notion of 'self-talk' (in the Self-Esteem unit) had benefitted children in her class, saying *"My kids actually became aware of what their self-talk was ... so when you talk to yourself in your head, and take note of it and the kids actually became aware of what they were saying."*

And lastly one teacher felt that the lessons around Co-operation were having the biggest effect in her class, noting that the unit resonated well with the children not only because it had links to the school's value of Teamwork, but also because the children were moving up to Stage 3 the following year.

*Impacts within the classroom.* Teachers were also asked if they could say whether particular aspects of the PLS program were having any impacts in the classroom or on their children. All teachers had noticed changes in children's behaviours, but agreed it was hard to say whether these changes were due to the PLS program or the children's maturity. Two teachers reflected on improvements in their 'anxious children'. One teacher said, *"a couple of my anxious kids have definitely improved. I can't say whether it's for this or because they're more comfortable, or they've grown up."* Another teacher had a similar view stating:

*I have a few anxious kids in my class, but I have noticed a change in them with their confidence even just recognising that they have the potential to do something whereas before they would've just not even tried. So again, I don't know if it's from this, or the fact that they're just nearly in year four.*

A third teacher commented:

*I think I've had a couple of children in there just thinking about themselves and their actions. And now self-reflecting on what they're doing and they have improved as the last part of the year has moved on, one especially ... and they're understanding how they should be thinking that it's acceptable or it's not acceptable at that time and able to express themselves a little bit more as well.*



And her colleague replied observing, *“I’m probably the same. The only thing I can say is that [the children] are more aware of their self-talk, that really has shown me and that would probably be attributed to [PLS].”*

Nonetheless the teachers were unanimous in saying *“everything’s been great,”* and as one teacher explained, *“There’s great repetition throughout the lesson plans, so really for that working memory it’s driving it home for the kids so that they remember – the way that [the lessons] open and close, very repetitive for the kids to remember.”* And one teacher summed up noting:

*It was a really beautiful and easy way to get to know the kids at another level and I think as a teacher on a personal level that helped me in the classroom because it helped you work out where they were coming from for a lot of different things, it was an open place where they could open up.*

*Impacts beyond the classroom.* Teachers were asked whether they thought implementing the Positive Living Skills Program had had any flow on effect in their personal or professional lives. All teachers agreed that there had been flow on effects in their personal lives and could identify which components of the program had helped them the most. One teacher shared her experience stating:

*Definitely for me; I’m a very anxious stressed person sometimes and I think the Focus has been really, really good for me instead of trying to do a million things all at once and stressing about a million things all at once, the Focus was really powerful. The highlights too, I took that home to my daughter ... and we really drilled the highlights, that this is a highlight ... this is something we need to notice, doesn’t have to be a big thing, so it’s helped her too. Yeah, it’s been awesome.*

Another teacher said *“I think it really helped me focusing, just knowing when to stop and focus and then also relax as well”* and another agreed, *“Certainly the relaxation because I discovered I really don’t do it. No, it did; it made you reflect and go I don’t relax.”*

*Final feedback.* When asked for their feedback on PLS program content, the teachers all nominated the same thing, commenting that some children had found it hard to listen to the *“very robotic, very monotonous”* voices on the Relaxation and Focus audiotapes (something the children had also discussed). One teacher said that in her classroom the *“computer generated voice gets*

*the kids giggling and laughing so it kind of takes away from the focus... it'd be a lot more effective if it was a person simply reading it in a normal voice."*

Reflecting on how they had delivered the program, the teachers also agreed that they would have liked longer to cover lesson content. By taking part in the pilot study the school had agreed to cover two lessons on each unit every week. The teachers were looking forward to the following year when they were continuing with PLS and would be presenting just one lesson from each unit each week. Their thoughts on program delivery were best summed up by one teacher who observed that she wasn't sure *"whether I've been able to implement it as well as I probably would've liked,"* and then added:

*Some lessons I've extended, and there's other ones that I've maybe cut down shorter because of being in a rush. Whereas next year we might be able to get more of a really good gauge because it'll be over the whole year, whereas we've only had six months.*

When asked if there was any final feedback that they would like to provide in terms of either the learning experiences or the lessons or the materials, or anything for the authors of the program or for other teaching colleagues, one teacher spoke for the group and replied:

*It's an outstanding program, so much effort, research and thought has gone into it. The way that [the lessons] have been written is so teacher friendly, it really suits the busy nature of a school. It also really compliments that a school environment is forever changing and ... you can miss a week and you can still catch up in the way that the lessons have been created. ... it's just such a worthwhile program. And while we couldn't actually answer whether we'd seen a definite correlation between the program and [children's] wellbeing, I think just the conversations it's made the kids start having and the language that they're now using has been more than worth it. I think mental health is something that we tiptoe around and [wellbeing] is a lot easier subject to talk about and tackle with the kids with those scripted [lessons] so yeah, it's just fantastic.*

### 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 each of the units that they had learnt about thus far (in this instance five: Highlights, Feelings, Focus, Relaxation and

Cooperation). The 13 children taking part in the classroom chat 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. When asked to nominate their favourite lesson from Term 3, eight children chose 'Highlights', three said 'Emotions' (Feelings) and two named 'Focus'.

*Highlights.* The children could easily recall what Highlights were:

*"It's like your favourite bit of the day,"*

*"A big or small happy part of your day,"*

*"A hobby,"*

*"Things that make you happy,"*

*"Things that are fun,"*

*"Things that make you relax," and*

*"Things that you enjoy."*

*Feelings.* Then the children were asked what they remembered about Feelings, and their responses included:

*"We learned about different feelings and when to use them,"*

*"Your emotions,"*

*"Like happy or sad," and*

*"That when you're like having trouble with something, just don't get stressed out, just put your hand up and ask for help."*

*Focus.* The last group of PLS lessons in Term 3 had been on Focusing. Again the children were asked what they remembered about Focus and what Focusing 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:

*"Focus on one thing,"*

*"If you block everything else out you'll be able to focus on just one thing,"*

*"When the teacher's talking, don't like do something else ... you want to focus on one thing and do the other things at recess or during lunch,"*

*“When you focus you’ve got to remember to use self-control,” and this means that “You’re not touching anyone, or doing something else.”*

The children also explained that Focus meant:

*“Concentration, you just, if you have too many things to think about, like if you get stressed just try and walk them out of your brain, or put them at the back and focus on one thing at a time,”*

*“If you have like lots of ideas and other things in your brain, to just like refresh and get it all out and refocus on the one thing,” and*

*“Focus on the thing you’re doing and block all the silliness out.”*

**Relaxation.** In Term 4, the children had been introduced to two more PLS units: Relaxation and Co-operation. All the children thought Relaxation had been fun. They remembered *“sharing things that we do to relax”*, and one child remembered that to relax you *“shut your eyes”* ... and imagine *“you’re on your bed or something”* ... *“and then you just feel like you’re floating on calm water out to sea.”*

As part of the PLS activities the children had enjoyed listening to the PLS relaxation tapes and lying on the floor to practice relaxing, but one child noted it was hard to relax at school *“because there’s a lot of noise going on and ... it’s hard to concentrate on one thing when there’s other stuff going on around you.”* Another child agreed saying, *“it’s hard to relax because if we listen to calm music, and it has a funny note in it, the people start to talk and laugh, and it’s very distracting and like you can’t shut your eyes and shut your mind out.”*

Interestingly when the children were asked what they might be able to do if they were having difficulty relaxing, one of the children said *“you might use focusing,”* and another added that if a friend was upset you could help them by saying *“take deep breaths and just like focus on trying to calm yourself [down].”*

**Co-operation.** The most recent unit that these children had started to learn about was Co-operation. Initially when asked, the children had trouble remembering the name of it, and

unsurprisingly confused it with one of their school's values: Teamwork. But when their teacher (who was present) jogged their memories saying *"we did it two weeks ago,"* they were able to remember its name and provide some quick definitions:

*"Cooperation means to get along with each other,"*

*"If somebody's not like working in your group, just tell them to ... work with us, so like to pull them into the group,"*

*"Working together with a team,"*

*"Working with groups and people,"* and *"Being a team."*

*PLS skills at home.* Children were also asked if they had used any of these new skills at home. All of the children put their hands up and were keen to share how they were using the skills at home. In the main they talked about applying what they had learnt in Focusing, Emotions and Relaxation. Some example of these are:

*"I used to always go outside but now I just focus on the thing I am doing at home,"*

*"I have to walk my dog ... but sometimes I don't really want to because she doesn't really do anything, but I still have to do it, and now I just use my calm and I just walk her down to the park,"*

*"I relax when my brother's annoying me,"* and

*"I used to not be able to relax because my sister would always annoy me, and now I can try to control my emotions and relax."*

Before concluding the classroom chat the children were asked if there had been anything that they didn't like about the PLS activities. Initially four children said that they *"Liked it all"* or liked *"most of it."* But when their class teacher prompted them with *"there was something you guys didn't like – remember when we did the relaxation and we listened to the voice?"* Several children quickly responded with *"oh yeah!"* ... before one said *"his voice was grumpy"* and two others added *"because the guy's voice was really, really deep,"*... *"yeah kind of like Darth Vader, really, really deep."*

These comments prompted another child to remember an additional PLS audio tape activity in the Focus Unit where the children have to listen to two voices at the same time and have to choose one and try to focus on it. They said, *"some people were getting stressed when you have to choose one voice and then see if you can try and listen to it."* Aside from these comments about the voices on

the audiotapes the children's feedback on the PLS was positive, and are typified by one child who said: *"I loved it because we got to relax during class after work, and I like when we learn about feelings and relaxing."*

## 4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this pilot study was to undertake an evaluation of a trial of the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program. The study canvassed the views of Stage 2 teachers and children attending Marton Public School to understand the efficacy of the PLS program in promoting children's social and emotional well-being. This discussion briefly addresses the four research questions 1) How effective is the PLS primary program in helping children to develop proactive and practical ways to look after their own mental wellbeing? 2) What are teachers' experiences of implementing the PLS primary program? 3) What differences do teachers perceive amongst children, and for their class as a whole? 4) What are children's experiences of participating in the PLS primary program? Some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are subsequently addressed.

### 4.1 How does PLS teach children to look after their own mental wellbeing?

When Marton Public School teachers introduced the PLS program to their children they began by sharing the PLS definition of 'Highlights' (PLS, 2018):

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

*Highlights help you feel good.*

Using the scripted PLS resource sheets the teachers gave the children examples of Highlights and asked the children to suggest their own examples, before providing the children with Happy Highlights Clickers, which are portable counting devices that the children used and clicked every time they registered something positive. As the teachers explained:

*We gave the kids a definition of a highlight ...it was a really good group of lessons to start off with, it really captured the children ... showed what they knew and what they didn't ... And to have the hands-on counters and doing something ... actually got them captured I think into the start of that program.*

The teachers reported that the children responded really well to the program, and that PLS *"made perfect sense and the kids really liked it and it was right at their level."* They added that the

children's *"language and the way they were speaking definitely changed, definitely... highlights had an impact straight away."*

Thus, PLS engages with the children at their linguistic and cognitive levels and teaches them about wellbeing strategies using learning experiences that the children enjoy, practice, repeat and ultimately remember and incorporate into other areas of their lives. For example, the children were able to give clear examples of how they were applying aspects of the PLS lessons about 'Feelings', 'Focus' and 'Relaxation' into their home lives.

#### 4.2 What were teachers' experiences of implementing PLS?

The teachers 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 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 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. One teacher observed that *"PLS was a really beautiful and easy way to get to know the kids at another level"* which had given her a better understanding of her children's individual needs. Additionally, most teachers identified one or two aspects of PLS that they had since incorporated into their own, or their families' personal lives, specifically 'Focus' and 'Relaxation.'

#### 4.3 What differences were perceived in children?

Teachers reported that collectively the children had taken to PLS very easily, that the children had *"really liked"* the first PLS unit 'Highlights' and were still after some months spontaneously noticing and talking about positive experiences in their school day. One teacher identified *"a real shift in my classroom,"* in terms of the children's abilities to focus, and another commented on the *"common thread through all of [the PLS lessons]"* that appeared to support the children's ability to use 'Self-talk' to support how they were feeling.

Given that Marton Public School had only introduced and begun teaching PLS in the last two terms of the 2018 school year (Terms 3 & 4), the teachers felt that it was difficult to categorically confirm that the positive changes they observed in their children were due to the sole influence of PLS. They acknowledged that perhaps some changes were attributable to the children's general maturity over the course of the school year. However, anecdotally a couple of the teachers commented on changes they had observed in their 'anxious children' and felt that they *had* become more confident, and other teachers reported that some children were demonstrating more self-reflection, and others were naturally integrating aspects of PLS language, such as 'Highlights' and 'Self-talk,' into their verbal repertoires.

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

The Stage 2 children who took part in the classroom chat were enthusiastic as they easily recalled definitions and examples of each of the lessons that they had undertaken. For the majority of the children 'Highlights' had been the most popular topic but several children had also enjoyed learning about 'Feelings,' 'Focusing' and 'Relaxation.' It seemed that in the main the learning experiences had been lots of fun as well as meaningful. The children recounted some of learning experiences that they had enjoyed, for example learning to relax in class had been a favourite activity for many, with one child sharing that this was because "*school is stressful.*"

Each child wanted to communicate an example of how they were using PLS at home, explaining how they were now either more calm, more focused or more relaxed. When prompted to think if there was anything in the PLS program that they had not liked, the children described the voices on the 'Focus' and 'Relaxation' tapes as being difficult to listen to, sounding like "*Darth Vader ... really really deep*" and "*very grumpy.*" This feedback from the children will no doubt be useful for the program's creators, as it could be a straightforward but important component to redress. Apart from this aspect though, the children gave a clear indication that participating in the PLS program had been a thoroughly enjoyable, meaningful and influential learning experience.

#### 4.5 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The purpose of this study was to evaluate a short trial (two school terms) of PLS in one public school, and as such it was beyond the scope of the study to compare PLS with other wellbeing frameworks or programs currently used within NSW schools. However, future research into PLS



could include questions for teachers that elicit their views of the different programs. Future research could also canvas and compare the views of teachers from other primary stages such as Stage 3 (Years 5 & 6) as well as Stage 2 in order to contrast teaching and learning of different activities and concepts across Stages. For this research to be successful, careful documentation of units, lessons, activities as well as specific examples of children's outcomes would be helpful. Additionally, future research into the efficacy of PLS could endeavour to 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.

At Marton Public School, the teachers were unsure as to how much the parents and families had engaged with the information that they posted on the school's website, such as the pre-prepared PLS newsletters. One suggestion for the school in future would be to track the number of PLS Newsletter downloads, 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 well received by the Stage 2 teachers and children who took part in this evaluation. The teachers reported that PLS was easy to implement, scripted yet flexible, sequenced appropriately, and cognitively aligned to the children's abilities. PLS learning experiences were enjoyable and meaningful, and teachers and children were embedding PLS concepts at school and transferring PLS skills to their home lives. Hence, early indications are that the Positive Living Skills Primary School Wellbeing Program has a positive impact on the social and emotional development of students in Year 3 and Year 4 settings.

Future research into the efficacy of PLS at a whole-school level is recommended with all teachers focusing on introducing one PLS lesson each week and over a longer period of time. Such research would not only enable comparisons between the teachers' experiences of implementing PLS into all classes of a Primary school (Kinder to Year 6), but also a more in-depth exploration of the impact of PLS on all the children's social and emotional development.

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6. APPENDICES

## 6.1 Ethics Approval



31 August 2018

Dr Loraine Fordham  
Email: [lfordham@csu.edu.au](mailto: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](mailto: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

## 6.2 Information Sheet for Stage 2 Teachers



### **Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of a trial of the Positive Living Skills Primary Program**

#### **What is this research project about?**

The Positive Living Skills primary school program is being introduced into **all** classes at Marton Public School in 2018. This program helps children to develop practical and positive social and emotional skills by focusing on their awareness and understanding of emotions.

All Marton 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.

Andrew Doyle, Marton Public School's Principal supports this research project and has agreed for Teachers of Stage 2 classes (children in years 3 and 4) 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 classes
- ii) Children in Stage 2 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 Loraine Fordham and Dr Tamara Cumming who are researchers at Charles Sturt University. They are working together with Marton Public School to undertake this research project. You'll find their names listed at the end of this information sheet. The research project will conclude in December 2018.

#### **How is the research project going to answer its questions?**

- Participating Stage 2 teachers will teach the Positive Living Skills program in 2018.
- Participating teachers will be asked to keep a record of which PLS lessons and activities they introduce to the children each week.
- Loraine will conduct a focus group discussion with participating Stage 2 teachers at the end of Term 4, 2018.
- Participating Stage 2 teachers will ask the participating children if they assent to take part in a group conversation with Loraine at the end of Term 4, 2018.
- Loraine will hold a classroom conversation with the children who give their assent at the end of Term 4, 2018.

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

Loraine Fordham will meet with Stage 2 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.

Loraine will ask participating Stage 2 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 Loraine 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, 2018, Loraine will meet with participating Stage 2 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 Marton Public School and will take about an hour.

At the end of Term 4, 2018, you will ask your participating children if they would like to take part in a group conversation with Loraine at the end of Term 4, 2018 to answer some questions about the PLS program. This is called giving their assent. Loraine will hold a group conversation with the children who assent to do so at the end of Term 4, 2018. Those conversations will be digitally audio-recorded but the children will not be identified. These conversations will take place in the children's classrooms while you are present. 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 Loraine 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](http://www.employeeassistanceprogramme.com.au)

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

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 Loraine Fordham, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Bathurst, NSW 2795

E: [lfordham@csu.edu.au](mailto:lfordham@csu.edu.au)

Ph: 02 6338 4414

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

E: [tcumming@csu.edu.au](mailto:tcumming@csu.edu.au)

Ph: 02 6338 4365

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

Loraine Fordham: Research Leader

Telephone: 02 6338 4414

Email: [lfordham@csu.edu.au](mailto:lfordham@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](mailto: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 Teachers



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

Name: .....

Name of Researcher: *Dr Loraine Fordham*

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, 2018, Loraine 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:**

## 6.4 Information Sheet for Parents



### **Promoting children's social and emotional well-being: An evaluation of a trial of the Positive Living Skills Primary Program**

#### **What is this research project about?**

The Positive Living Skills primary school program is being introduced into *all* classes at Marton Public School in 2018. This program helps children to develop practical and positive social and emotional skills by focusing on their awareness and understanding of emotions.

All Marton 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.

Andrew Doyle, Marton Public School's Principal supports this research project and has agreed for Teachers of Stage 2 classes (children in years 3 and 4) 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 classes
- ii) Children in Stage 2 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 Loraine Fordham and Dr Tamara Cumming who are researchers at Charles Sturt University. They are working together with Marton Public School to undertake this research project. You'll find their names listed at the end of this information sheet. The research project will conclude in December 2018.

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

Loraine Fordham will be meeting with Stage 2 teachers to explain the project and to answer any questions they have about it. If the Stage 2 teachers agree to participate in the research study Loraine will ask them to ask you, as a parent of a child in their Stage 2 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 chat is to take place. Loraine will then hold a group 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 chat time. I understand that my child may choose not to participate.

#### **How is the research project going to answer its questions?**

- Participating Stage 2 teachers will teach the Positive Living Skills program in Terms 3 and 4 2018.
- Loraine will interview the participating Stage 2 teachers at the end of Term 4.

- Participating Stage 2 teachers will ask the participating children if they would like to take part in a group conversation with Loraine at the end of Term 4, 2018. This is called giving their assent.
- Loraine will hold a group conversation with the children who give their assent at the end of Term 4, 2018.

### **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, 2018, your child's teacher will ask your child if they would like to take part in a group conversation with Loraine. If your child gives their assent to participate in this group conversation, Loraine 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 Loraine 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 Classes (2018) at Marton Public School.*

*Researchers at Charles Sturt University:*

Dr Loraine Fordham, School of Teacher Education, CSU, Bathurst, NSW 2795

E: lfordham@csu.edu.au

Ph: 02 6338 4414

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?**

Loraine Fordham: Research Leader  
Telephone: 02 6338 4414  
Email: lfordham@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**

## 6.5 Consent Form for Parents



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

Name of my child: .....

Name of Researcher: *Dr Loraine Fordham*

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, 2018, my child's teacher will ask my child if they would like to take part in a group chat with the researcher Loraine Fordham. This is called giving their assent.

Children who would like to take part in this activity will meet with Loraine in their classroom as a group and Loraine 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 Focus Group Questions

- 1) How did you get started with the PLS program... I understand that you have a scope and sequence plan ... but how did you actually introduce it to the children in your classrooms?
- 2) How did the children respond to the first learning experience - *highlights*?
- 3) 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?
- 4) Which of the 6 learning experiences have been most beneficial to the children? Least useful?
- 5) Were some of the learning experiences or lessons easier for you to teach than others? Have there been any surprises?
- 6) Did the children struggle to understand any of the learning experiences or activities?
- 7) How specifically did you access the program materials in your classrooms? Do you print things out? If so what sorts of things?
- 8) 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?
- 9) 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?
- 10) Have you noticed any positive behavioural differences in any of the children? Or in your class as a whole?
- 11) 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*?
- 12) Is there any 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?

## 6.7 Children's Chat Questions

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

Can you think way way back to the start of Term 3 ... who can remember what a **highlight** is?

- 1) What does 'highlight' mean I wonder?
- 2) Can you tell me some examples of a highlight?

A bit later in Term 3 I think you started to talk about **feelings** ...

- 3) So I wonder what did you learn about feelings?
- 4) Can you tell me some examples of feelings?

And then right at the end of Term 3 did you learn about **focusing**?

- 5) OK, so I wonder what did you learn about focusing? What does it mean to focus?
- 6) Are there different ways to focus? Can you tell me about them?

You came back in Term 4 and I think you might have started learning about **relaxation**?

- 7) What can you remember about relaxing?
- 8) How can you relax when you're at school?

I think just recently you have been learning about something called **co-operation**?

- 9) So what does co-operation mean?
- 10) How do you co-operate with your friends at school?
- 11) Have you tried to use any of these new skills at home? How did it go?
- 12) Have you talked about any of these new skills with your parents?
- 13) What have you liked most about these lessons?
- 14) Have there been any things that you didn't like about these lessons?

## 6.8 Scope and Sequence

### Marton Public School Positive Living Skills Scope and Sequence 2018

All lesson plans and resources can be found on the server. Go to Faculty - Teacher- Wellbeing -Positive Living Skills – Your grade level – Learning Experience – Lesson Title.

Please complete the lesson register attached each time you complete a lesson.

#### Term Three 2018:

Term	Week	Learning Experience	Lesson Title
3	1	Highlights	Any day Highlights
3	1	Highlights	Happy Highlights
3	2	Highlights	Opportunities to Appreciate
3	2	Highlights	Remembering Highlights
3	3	Highlights	Where are Highlights?
3	3	Highlights	Zing Highlights?
3	4	Feelings	Changing Channels
3	4	Feelings	Empathy
3	5	Feelings	How do you feel?
3	5	Feelings	Kindness
3	6	Feelings	Notice your Thoughts
3	6	Feelings	Reeling in Good Feelings
3	7	Focus	Focus in Positive Ways
3	7	Focus	Focused Listening and Seeing
3	8	Focus	Focused Learning
3	8	Focus	Focusing through Distractions
3	9	Focus	Focused in the Present Moment
3	9	Focus	I can focus



**Term Four 2018:**

Term	Week	Learning Experience	Lesson Title
4	1	Relaxation	Learning how to Relax
4	1	Relaxation	Quiet your Mind
4	2	Relaxation	Relax and Revitalise
4	2	Relaxation	Special Place Relaxation
4	3	Relaxation	Understanding Relaxation
4	3	Relaxation	Why Relaxation is Important
4	4	Co-operation	Followship
4	4	Co-operation	Let's Co-operate
4	5	Co-operation	Respect
4	5	Co-operation	Sharing
4	6	Co-operation	Teamwork
4	6	Co-operation	Trust
4	7	Self-Esteem	Building Confidence
4	7	Self-Esteem	Healthy Self-Esteem
4	8	Self-Esteem	Physiology of Excellence
4	8	Self-Esteem	Self-Respect
4	9	Self-Esteem	Self-Talk
4	9	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*

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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.

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### **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](http://www.positivelivingskills.com)**

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