



An applied framework for Positive Education

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Abstract: The increasing momentum of the Positive Psychology movement has seen burgeoning research in positive mental health and adaptive functioning; a critical question is how this knowledge can now be applied in real-world settings. Positive Education seeks to combine principles of Positive Psychology with best-practice teaching and with educational paradigms to promote optimal development and flourishing in the school setting. Interest in Positive Education continues to grow in line with increasing recognition of the important role played by schools in fostering wellbeing, and the link between wellbeing and academic success. To date, however, a framework to guide the implementation of Positive Education in schools has been lacking. This paper provides an overview of the Geelong Grammar School (GGS) Model for Positive Education, an applied framework developed over five years of implementing Positive Education as a whole-school approach in one Australian school. Explicit and implicit teaching in combination with school-wide practices target six wellbeing domains, including positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships, and positive health, underpinned by a focus on character strengths. The Model provides a structured pathway for implementing Positive Education in schools, a framework to guide evaluation and research, and a foundation for further theoretical discussion and development.

Keywords: positive psychology, Positive Education, wellbeing, flourishing

1. An applied framework for Positive Education

There is increasing recognition that good mental and physical health consists of the presence of wellbeing in addition to the absence of pathology and illness (Keyes, 2006), and the emergence of the Positive Psychology movement has seen a significant redirection of scientific inquiry towards the exploration of optimal human functioning (Rusk & Waters, 2013). A wealth of new knowledge has been generated as a result, but a remaining question is how this knowledge can be applied in real-world settings to promote wellbeing across the general population. This question is particularly salient in regards to young people, given levels of mental health difficulties observed during adolescence and the transition to adulthood that are cause for concern (Sawyer, Miller-Lewis, & Clark, 2007).

Schools are one of the most important developmental contexts in young peoples' lives, and can be a key source of the skills and competencies that support their capacity for successful adaptation (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2009). Furthermore, schools provide accessible and relatively stable sites within which to locate interventions to promote wellbeing (Bond et al., 2007), and represent a common setting for children and adolescents, thus facilitating universal promotion-based interventions (Short & Talley, 1997). Hence, schools are uniquely placed to



promote the wellbeing of young people and of school communities more broadly (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

Capitalising on this potential, Positive Education is a recently developed paradigm that, broadly speaking, refers to the application of Positive Psychology in educational contexts (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011). Seligman (2011) further defines Positive Education as traditional education focused on academic skill development, complemented by approaches that nurture wellbeing and promote good mental health. In addition, the significant and transformative contribution that best-practice teaching and educational theories bring to the process of applying principles of Positive Psychology in educational contexts should also be acknowledged. Thus, Positive Education could more completely be described as bringing together the science of Positive Psychology with best-practice teaching to encourage and support schools and individuals within their communities to flourish.

While this goal is relatively clear-cut, the practical implementation of Positive Education is complex, and to date there has been no empirically-based operational framework to guide its application. In 2008, during a six-month visit by Professor Martin Seligman and with extensive support from a team of international experts, Geelong Grammar School (GGS) began a pioneering journey in applying Positive Psychology as a whole-school approach. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Geelong Grammar School Applied Framework for Positive Education, which provides an empirically-informed roadmap for how Positive Psychology can be applied and embedded in schools. More specifically, following the approach of Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) in explicating employee wellbeing, this paper will explore Positive Education by discussing *what* flourishing is, *why* the promotion of positive mental health in schools is so important, and, finally, the practical *how* of implementation. Together, this will provide a structured pathway for implementing Positive Education in schools, a framework to guide evaluation and research, and a foundation for further theoretical discussion and development.

2. Flourishing: What?

The fundamental goal of Positive Education is to promote flourishing or positive mental health within the school community. To achieve this outcome first requires a clear definition of what flourishing is. Exploration of what it means to live a good life is frequently characterised as being consistent with one of two philosophical traditions: the hedonic approach and the eudaimonic approach (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Hedonism is a philosophical school of thought that focuses on feelings and experiences (Keyes & Annas, 2009), and is often associated with the maximisation of pleasure and the minimisation of pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From this perspective, a good life is one where a person frequently experiences positive emotions, and feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Eudaimonia as a philosophical tradition posits that happiness results from the actualisation of individual potential and from fulfilling one's *daimon* or true nature (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Where hedonic approaches focus on how people feel, eudaimonic approaches focus on what people do, how they act, and the choices they make (Keyes & Annas, 2009). From a eudaimonic perspective, being psychologically well involves more than feelings of happiness and entails personal growth, giving to others, and living in accordance with values (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

While research has tended to focus on either hedonic or eudaimonic approaches, recently there has been increased recognition that both feeling good and functioning well are important elements of psychological health (Keyes & Annas, 2009). Therefore, recent definitions of flourishing combine hedonic and eudaimonic elements to create a comprehensive and holistic

approach. For example, Keyes (2002) defines flourishing as comprising three components: (1) emotional (hedonic) wellbeing or the presence of positive feelings about oneself and life; (2) social wellbeing, which includes feeling connected to others and valued by the community; and (3) psychological (eudaimonic) wellbeing that focuses on functioning well. Seligman (2011) proposes five elements of optimal wellbeing: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Similarly, Diener et al. (2010) define flourishing as a psychosocial construct that includes having rewarding and positive relationships, feeling competent and confident, and believing that life is meaningful and purposeful.

While each of these various definitions takes a slightly different approach, the common element is that recent conceptualisations of flourishing recognise that optimal wellbeing is a multi-dimensional and holistic concept, and includes both hedonic (e.g., positive emotions and emotional stability) and eudaimonic (e.g., self-esteem, growth, meaning) components. Hence, within the GGS model for Positive Education, flourishing is seen to reflect both 'feeling good' and 'doing good' (Huppert & So, 2013). *Feeling good* is consistent with hedonic approaches and includes a wide range of emotions and experiences such as feeling content about the past, happy in the present, hopeful about the future, and able to cope with difficult emotions and experiences in a healthy and adaptive way. *Doing good* is aligned with a eudaimonic approach and focuses on equipping students with the skills and knowledge that help them to thrive when faced with both challenges and opportunities. Doing good embodies functioning effectively across a wide spectrum of human experiences. Also important is a commitment to pro-social behaviours and choices that benefit others and the wider community. The simplicity of the phrase 'feeling good and doing good' serves to ensure that even the youngest members of the school community can begin to understand what it means to flourish.

Flourishing in schools exists on multiple levels. Individual students may be considered to be flourishing when they are happy, thriving in their social relationships, achieving their goals with competence and confidence, and making valued contributions to others. A staff member may be flourishing when he or she experiences positive emotions throughout the day, obtains a deep sense of value from his or her work, and feels like a valued member of the school community. A class may be flourishing when students feel included, where the teacher feels confident and satisfied, and where all members of the class feel engaged and committed to learning. A school community may be flourishing when members of the community feel a deep sense of commitment and belonging to the school and the culture promotes positive emotions, effective learning, and social responsibility. Hence, the goal of promoting flourishing relates to multidimensional outcomes across multiple levels within the school system.

3. Flourishing: Why?

Alongside their homes, schools are one of the most important developmental contexts in students' lives (Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2009). Evidence suggests that relationships with peers and school staff (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010; Hawker & Boulton, 2000), and the overall school climate and culture (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007), are integrally linked with a range of student wellbeing and mental health outcomes. As schools are central to students' physical and mental health, a whole-school commitment to creating a nourishing environment and cultivating wellbeing is imperative.

A focus on flourishing in schools is particularly important because adolescence is a pivotal stage of development that carries implications for functioning over the life-course. Adolescence is often viewed as a critical stage in the emergence and trajectory of mental illness (Paus, Keshavan, & Giedd, 2008), and rates of mental health problems, especially depression and

anxiety, are consistently reported as problematically high (Sawyer et al., 2007). Equally important to the prevention of ill-health is building good health and wellbeing. The inclusion of flourishing as a valued outcome explicitly recognises that mental health is more than the absence of mental illness, and that young people who do not have a diagnosable disorder may nevertheless not be functioning at their optimal level (Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011). For example, in a large sample of American adolescents, Keyes (2006) found that over half did not meet criteria for flourishing, and rates of flourishing decreased as adolescence progressed.

Cultivating flourishing may also carry benefits for academic skill development. A common assumption is that a focus on wellbeing within education takes time and resources away from academic pursuits. However, there is good evidence to suggest that students who thrive and flourish demonstrate stronger academic performance. Suldo et al. (2011) found that students with higher wellbeing demonstrated the highest grades and lowest rates of school absences one year later. Similarly, Howell (2009) found that students who were flourishing reported superior grades, higher self-control and lower procrastination than students who were moderately mentally healthy or languishing. In addition, there is consistent evidence that positive emotions are associated with broad, creative, and open-minded thinking whereas negative emotions restrict focus and narrow attention (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Hence, flourishing is a complementary rather than competing goal with academic development.

4. Flourishing: How?

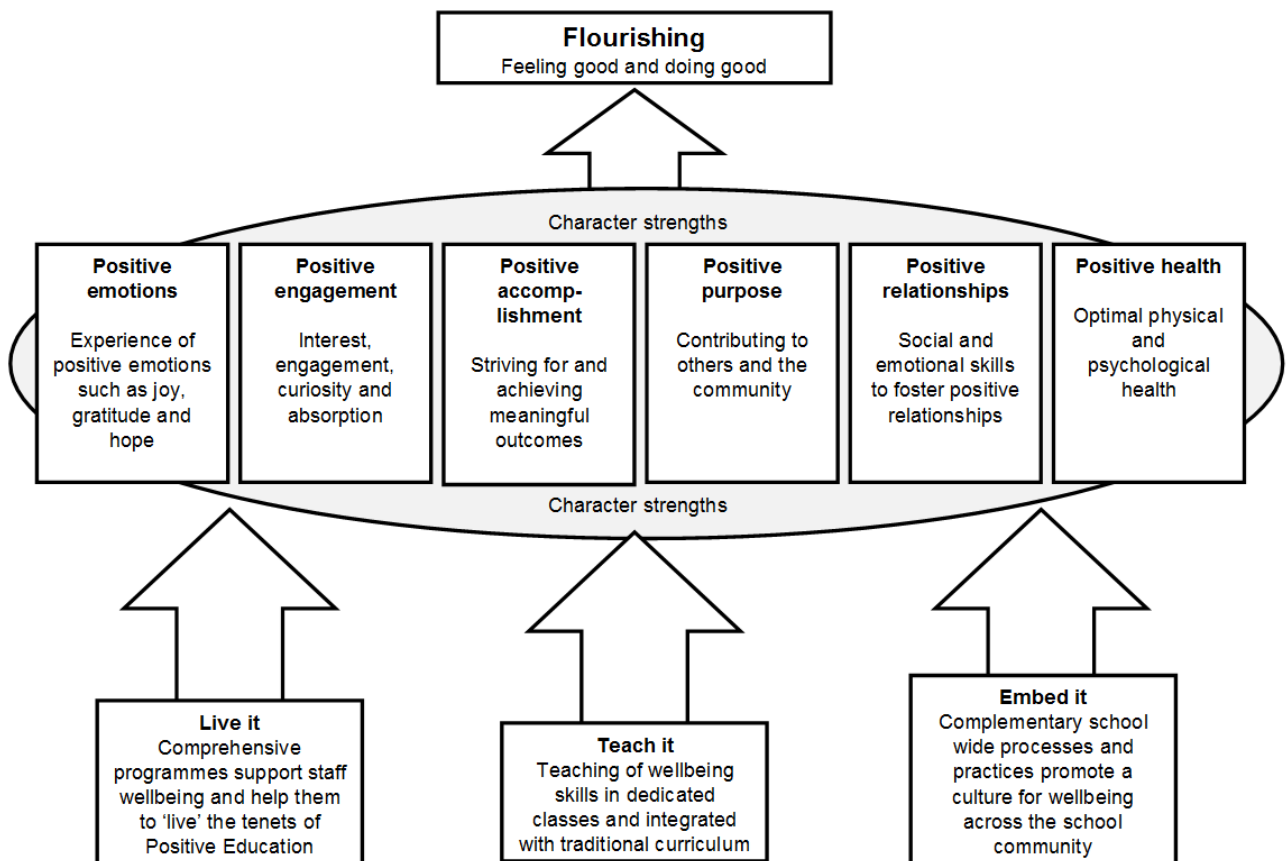
The goal of promoting flourishing within schools is clearly a worthwhile pursuit, but how can this be achieved at a practical level? Implementation within the GGS model focuses on six domains central to wellbeing—positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships, and positive health (these areas are defined and discussed below)—underpinned by a focus on character strengths. The wellbeing domains are integrated into the School on three levels, referred to as: live it, teach it, and embed it (see Figure 1 below).

4.1 Live it, teach it, embed it

Live it. Comprehensive programmes support staff wellbeing and help staff to 'live' the skills taught within Positive Education and to act as authentic role models for students. Across the campuses, the vast majority of staff—both teaching and non-teaching—participate in multi-day training programmes to develop their knowledge and application of Positive Education to their personal lives and in their work at the school. Refresher workshops are provided for teaching and non-teaching staff each term to develop individual understanding and practice, and the school strives to create a community of practice through activities such as discussion groups and a Journal Club.

Teach it. The teaching of Positive Education helps students to understand key ideas and concepts, engage meaningfully in exploration and reflection, and apply the skills and mindsets for flourishing in their lives. The teaching of wellbeing is further divided into explicit and implicit learning. The explicit teaching of Positive Education—where students attend regular, timetabled lessons on Positive Education in the same way that they attend Maths and History classes—now occurs in Year 5 through to Year 10 of the school. Initially based on the Penn Resiliency Program (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009) and the Strath Haven Program (Seligman et al., 2009), the explicit teaching programme has evolved and grown to reflect a diverse range of skills, knowledge, and mindsets covering the breadth of the Model for Positive Education.

Figure 1. Summary of the GGS Applied Model for Positive Education



Positive Education is also implicitly embedded into the academic curriculum across a broad range of subjects, creating links between Positive Psychology concepts and curricula in ways that remain true to core academic objectives. For example, in History, students explore the topic of genealogy through the lens of character strengths by interviewing family members about their own and relatives' strengths. In art, students are asked to explore the word 'flourishing' and to create a visual representation of their personal understanding; and in Geography, students examine how flourishing communities can be enabled through the physical environment of towns and cities. Teaching pedagogy is also informed by Positive Education, for example through teaching staff integrating mindfulness practices into their class routines and fostering a growth mindset in their students.

Embed it. Complementary school-wide processes help embed a culture for wellbeing across the school community. Some of the most powerful school-wide practices include devoting assemblies or chapel services to character strengths, having 'what went well' boards that create visual displays of gratitude, and regularly running projects devoted to random acts of kindness. Consistent with a whole-school approach engaged with all stakeholders of the school community, parents are also invited to take part in multi-day, residential training programmes to support their understanding of Positive Education and personal growth.

Character strengths. A focus on character strengths, operationalised through the Values in Action survey (Park & Peterson, 2006), underpins all of these efforts. Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as a ubiquitously recognised subset of personality traits that are morally valued. From a strengths perspective, everyone has unique abilities and capacities that can help them to flourish and perform at their best (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). Individuals who use their strengths have been found to report increased vitality

and subjective and psychological wellbeing (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010), increased progress towards their goals (Linley et al., 2010), and enhanced resilience after stressful events (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Research also supports the relevance of strengths to children's wellbeing and healthy development (Park & Peterson, 2008; Rashid et al., 2013). An example of how character strengths are integrated into the programme is discussed below in relation to positive engagement.

4.2 Targeted wellbeing domains

Six broad and interrelated wellbeing domains are targeted within the model. The *positive emotion* domain encourages individuals to anticipate, initiate, prolong and build positive emotional experiences and accept and develop healthy responses to negative emotions. The *positive engagement* domain examines pathways to complete immersion in activities to support understanding and experience of optimal functioning. The *positive accomplishment* domain focuses on developing confidence and competence through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes. The *positive purpose* domain develops an understanding of the benefits of serving a greater cause and engaging in activities to support that. The *positive relationships* domain develops social and emotional skills to enable the development of nourishing relationships with self and others; and the *positive health* domain aims to help individuals develop a sound knowledge base from which to establish habits that support positive physical and psychological health across the lifespan. These broad overarching domains of wellbeing are targeted through a range of concrete behavioural skill areas. Although an exploration of all of the implicit, explicit, and school-wide practices used to support the six wellbeing domains targeted in the model is beyond the scope of this paper, illustrative examples are explored below in relation to each domain.

Positive emotion. This domain reflects students' capacities to anticipate, initiate, experience, prolong, and build positive emotional experiences. Helping young people to live lives where they experience positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, hope, and inspiration is a worthwhile goal in itself. In addition, recent research has found that experiencing positive emotion has benefits for mental and physical health, social relationships, and academic outcomes (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). For example, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 293 studies (resulting in a sample of over 275,000 participants) and found that positive emotions benefited social (e.g., social interactions and relationships), work (e.g., productivity and absenteeism), physical (e.g., immune functioning and vitality), personal (e.g., creativity and energy), and psychological (e.g., resilience, self-confidence, and self-regulation) outcomes.

As an example of the explicit teaching of positive emotions, in the Year 10 Positive Education programme at GGS, students learn about broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) to develop their understanding of the benefits and importance of positive emotion. They explore the concept of 'positivity' (Fredrickson, 2009) as a broader and richer interpretation of positive emotions and look at the positivity toolkit for specific strategies to increase their frequency of experiencing positive emotions day to day. Students develop awareness of their own balance of positive to negative emotions by completing Fredrickson's positivity ratio exercise in a variety of circumstances, across different classes, days, activities, and environments. Appreciating the danger of promoting the idea that positive emotions and thoughts must be experienced continuously (Held, 2004), students are encouraged to cultivate and enhance positive emotions without avoiding, suppressing, or denying negative reactions

or emotions. An overarching objective is to help students understand that all emotions are normal, valid, and important parts of life.

Positive engagement. Being engaged involves living a life high in interest, curiosity, and absorption, and pursuing goals with determination and vitality. There is substantial evidence that engagement is associated with wellbeing, learning, and the accomplishment of important goals (Froh et al., 2010; Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Engaged individuals are curious (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004), interested (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), and passionate about worthwhile pursuits (Vallerand et al., 2003). Closely related to engagement is the concept of flow, defined as a state of intense absorption and optimal experience that results from taking part in intrinsically motivating challenges, a key feature of which is a close match between individual skill level and task complexity and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is conceptualised as the peak experience of engagement when people are most immersed, focused, and energised (Bakker, 2005). Promoting engagement within the GGS Model for Positive Education focuses on cultivating flow, nurturing intrinsic motivation, and applying signature strengths.

An example of developing this understanding in an implicit classroom setting is the application of signature strengths as a path to enriched engagement. Wesson and Boniwell (2007) propose that using a strengths approach can lead to flow as improved awareness of strengths and can enhance individuals' perceptions of their skills, thereby increasing the likelihood of challenge-skill congruence. Prior to attending camp in Term 2, Year 6 students at GGS undertake a multi-disciplinary project around character strengths. In their class groups they discuss the 24 VIA Character Strengths (Park & Peterson, 2005), and explore their individual strengths and ways in which they action them. The students then create a representation of their strengths in Visual Arts by making 'shields' that depict their top strengths. Back in their class groups, ideas are further developed through discussion about ways in which they could use their 'shield of strengths' to engage fully in the camp activities and to support them in overcoming challenges that they may face. Helping students to explore and apply their strengths in this way creates pathways towards activities that are consistent with their values and interests and supports the development of student self-efficacy when faced with challenges.

Positive accomplishment. Positive accomplishment is defined as the development of individual potential through striving for and achieving meaningful outcomes, and involves the capacity to work towards valued goals, the motivation to persist despite challenges and setbacks, and the achievement of competence and success in important life domains. Research suggests a bi-directional relationship between flourishing and positive accomplishment. Mental health is a requisite of effective learning (Hendren, Weisen, & Orley, 1994), and positive emotions contribute to creative and flexible thinking (Fredrickson, 2001); in turn, accomplishing worthwhile goals leads to positive emotions and wellbeing (Sheldon et al., 2010). Helping students to strive for meaningful outcomes and persist despite obstacles is especially important as young people today face challenges such as an increasingly global and competitive workforce. Hence, it is essential to help students to develop skills and resources that will allow them to devote effort to important goals, capitalise on opportunities, and cope adaptively with disappointments and challenges.

An example is a school-wide practice relating to implicit theories of intelligence. According to Dweck (2006), individuals generally embody one of two mindsets: either a fixed mindset, where intelligence and talents are viewed as naturally determined and unchangeable, or a growth mindset, where talent and intelligence are seen as malleable and can be developed

further with effort and persistence. Dweck (2006) suggests that praise is especially salient in influencing whether a person develops a fixed or growth mindset; specifically, praise focused on effort and persistence (e.g., “you worked so hard”), as opposed to praise focused on abilities or outcomes (e.g., “you are so clever”), is imperative for helping students to develop a growth mindset. This premise has received strong empirical support (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). At GGS, teaching and non-teaching staff attend a training workshop specifically designed to develop their understanding of mindsets and the significant impact that they have on a broad range of life domains. They are given opportunities to reflect on their mindset in different areas of their lives and are encouraged to explore the strategies developed by Dweck and colleagues to promote a growth mindset. Teaching staff also participate in a workshop specifically designed to help them to understand recent research on the most effective forms of feedback under different situations.

Positive purpose. The intrinsic value of contributing to others and the community provides a strong rationale for a focus on purpose within schools. In addition, there is evidence that doing things for others, and having a sense that life is purposeful and meaningful, contributes to students’ psychological and physical health (Post, 2005). The importance of purpose in life is reflected in eudaimonic approaches to wellbeing, where a sense of meaning and direction is viewed as integral to optimal health (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Purpose provides people with a central mission or vision for life and a sense of directedness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Having a purpose in life has been found to be associated with good physical health, high life satisfaction, and strong social relationships, and to be protective against depression, risky behaviours, and somatic complaints (Cotton Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Meaning, altruism, and spirituality are explored as pathways to a purposeful and flourishing life with students in Year 10 as part of the explicit Positive Education programme.

The following example focuses on work around the concept ‘meaning’. Strategies for living a life high in meaning include acting in accord with one’s values (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008) and using signature strengths in the service of others (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). In the Year 10 Positive Education programme students are asked to reflect on what it means to live a meaningful life, to explore diverse sources of meaning, and to consider the complex relationship between meaning and happiness. Stories from inspirational people who exemplify meaning in life, such as Dr Viktor Frankl, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, and Jim Stynes, are used to stimulate students’ thinking about their own purpose. Students are asked to commit to one short-term and one long-term action that would add meaning and purpose to their lives. This in-depth exploration of meaning and purpose enhances the students’ personal experience of participating in community service activities during their time at the school.

Positive relationships. Central to this domain are strong social and emotional skills that help create and promote strong and nourishing relationships with self and others. Child and adolescent development does not occur in isolation and social context has a powerful impact on adaptive and healthy growth (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). There is an abundance of evidence suggesting that social support is integral to wellbeing and mental health. For example, social isolation is a risk factor for depression, substance abuse, suicide, and other symptoms of mental ill-health (Hassed, 2008). Supportive school relationships have been linked with child and adolescent wellbeing and resilience (Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle, & Hardie, 2004). Social relationships have also been found to be important predictors of subjective wellbeing (Myers, 2000), and meaning in life (Hicks & King, 2009). There is substantial evidence that, in addition to benefits for mental health and wellbeing, social support is good for physical health (Uchino,

Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), and for student accomplishment (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

The following example related to positive relationships focuses on a school-wide practice relating to active-constructive responding (ACR). ACR refers to responding to others' good news with authentic, active and supportive interest in order to build strong relationships (Gable & Reis, 2010). At GGS, ACR is taught to staff and all senior school students and has become invaluable in nurturing supportive communication and positive social interactions. According to Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004), reactions to good news that are active and constructive enable capitalising, which takes place as people tell their story and re-live and savour the experience, enhancing the positive emotions drawn from it. Students and staff role-play different types of responding and discuss ways to authentically engage in ACR with their peers. They are then given time to become fully absorbed in a discussion with a partner where they can practise listening mindfully and respectfully and capitalising on good news. Applied learning such as this encourages staff and students to be genuinely and sincerely supportive of the accomplishments of their family, friends, colleagues and peers.

Positive health. There has been an increased focus on holistic health in recent times, whereby the entire person is considered as an integrated and interconnected entity (Hassed, 2008). Within the GGS Model, health is defined as practising sustainable habits for optimal physical and psychological health. Health is important for effective learning and there is evidence that students who thrive physically and psychologically also perform well in their studies (WHO, 2011). The importance of promoting mental and psychological health is also underscored by high rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems during adolescence (Sawyer et al., 2007). In addition, developing positive health behaviours in adolescence can carry a beneficial impact over the life course in preventing adverse health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease. Health is a broad and comprehensive concept, ranging from physical health (such as healthy sleeping and eating habits), to psychological health (including resilience), and the Model takes account of the strong interconnection between physical and mental wellbeing.

The following example related to positive health focuses on resilience in the explicit Year 9 Positive Education programme. Resilience refers to the capacity to bounce back from challenges to adaptation or development (Masten, 2001). The Penn Resiliency Program (PRP; Gillham et al., 2007), is a school-based resiliency programme underpinned by the cognitive-behavioural framework. The programme aims to enhance resilience and prevent depression by teaching young people social problem solving skills and cognitive and behavioural skills including cultivating an optimistic explanatory style, disputing automatic negative thoughts, and generating alternative actions when faced with challenges (Gillham et al., 2007), and has received consistent empirical support (Brunwasser et al., 2009). Year 9 students at Geelong Grammar School complete their academic year at Timbertop, a full boarding campus based in the Victorian Highlands. Alongside a full academic curriculum, there is a focus on exploring the natural environment through hiking, running, camping, and skiing. During this year, students spend one lesson per fortnight studying Positive Education, particularly focusing on learning a set of resilience skills, based on the PRP, which can be applied to the real-life challenges that arise during a student's Timbertop journey.

5. Issues for further exploration

The GGS Model for Positive Education is underpinned by a growing body of research on the nature and promotion of optimal developmental pathways. However, rigorous evaluation is

now needed to explore the impact of Positive Education programmes on students, staff, and the school community (Norrish & O'Connor, in preparation). To this end, GGS is currently embarking on a three-year longitudinal research programme under the direction of Dr Dianne Vella-Brodrick from the University of Melbourne and Associate Professor Nikki Rickard from Monash University. The study will follow Year 9 students across three years from 2013 to 2015 to determine the effects of Positive Education on students' daily functioning and wellbeing using a mixed methods approach, including surveys, biosamples, focus groups, and experience sampling to understand how students are applying skills 'in the moment'. Recent funding will also allow an exploration of how the programme translates to other school settings. This research will provide invaluable insight into how various activities and strategies influence students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours as they go about their daily lives. Better understanding of the critical elements of the programme will also help in prioritising areas of implementation in other schools.

Character strengths can be illustrated in concrete behavioural examples and so provide an accessible entry point for exploring wellbeing, particularly with younger children. The aim is to develop a shared language for strengths across the school community, creating a sense of belonging and connectedness. A focus on spotting strengths in the self and in others helps people of all ages to develop self-confidence and enrich social interactions. Possible applications of character strengths in schools are virtually endless, and further consideration should be given to exploring creative ways in which character strengths can be used to support students' wellbeing, ranging from how young children can learn acceptance of others to how senior students can make more informed choices about their further study and careers.

As noted previously, the GGS Model ultimately aims to promote flourishing across multiple levels of this school system, at both an individual and institutional level. However, most research to date has focused on understanding Positive Education at the level of individual students, probably because there have been so few schools implementing Positive Education as a whole-school approach, thus providing limited opportunity to explore systemic elements (Seligman et al., 2009). Research is now needed to contribute to understanding of the school as a positive institution, including what a flourishing school looks like and how positive organisational functioning can be promoted (Kristjánsson, 2012). Similarly, while the focus of this applied framework has been at the individual level, further exploration is needed as to how this model could be utilised to understand pathways to organisational thriving. This will have important implications for maximising programme sustainability as Positive Education becomes ingrained at the institutional level.

6. Conclusions

As the field of Positive Psychology progresses and the mechanisms and predictors of flourishing are more fully understood, the question moves to how this knowledge can be used to improve society. In this regard, schools are uniquely placed to teach Positive Psychology to wide audiences, thereby moving closer towards mentally and physically thriving individuals, communities, and societies. The GGS Model provides a flexible framework through which schools can identify areas in which they are already doing well and targets for improvement. Capacity in each domain is cultivated through a whole-school approach that involves explicit and implicit learning in the classroom and positive practices integrated throughout school life. The GGS Model for Positive Education facilitates the planning, implementation, and evaluation of knowledge derived from Positive Psychology within school settings, providing a sustainable and flexible framework for moving towards flourishing school communities.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

All named authors are employees of Geelong Grammar School, Victoria, Australia.

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