

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
FROM RESEARCH AT GGS

DOES POSITIVE EDUCATION TRAINING FOR PARENTS CONTRIBUTE TO FLOURISHING IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY?

Background

Positive Education aims to promote flourishing schools, whilst parents play a vital role in school communities. To date, Positive Education programmes have only engaged with parents in a limited way. This is despite the strong links between parent wellbeing and their children's wellbeing, and evidence suggesting that students tend to benefit when parents feel a strong link to their child's school.

Recognising this, GGS began providing a two-day Positive Education course for parents in 2013. The course focuses on teaching parents positive psychology skills to enhance their own wellbeing. The hope is that improving the wellbeing of parents will create a ripple effect that contributes more broadly to a flourishing school community.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the GGS Positive Education for Parents training by assessing its impact on parent wellbeing, their relationship to the School and their child's wellbeing.

Participants and Procedure

Data was collected from 24 parents who participated in the course in June 2014 (the 'intervention' group). In addition, data was collected from 16 parents who were interested in the programme but had not yet taken part; this group provided a point of comparison (a 'control' group). Parents were surveyed before the training began, after the programme and then 2 months following the programme. All surveys were completed online.

Given that the group of participants in this study was relatively small, the following results can be interpreted as pilot data that provides valuable initial insights into the impact of the training. Data will continue to be collected as additional parents take part in the training.

Materials

Parents were asked to answer questions about the domains outlined below via an online survey. The same questions were used at each time point, so that change over time could be explored. Parents were also provided with the opportunity to offer their insights via a number of open-ended questions.

Parents' perspectives were gained across the following topic areas:

- **Parents' own wellbeing**
Parents provided information about both their levels of positive mental health, and their level of psychological distress. Assessing both health and difficulties provided a comprehensive picture of parental wellbeing.
- **Parents' character strengths use and knowledge**
Parents indicated the degree to which they were able to easily identify and use their own strengths.
- **Parents' feeling of connection to the School**
Parents answered questions about their level of connection to the School.
- **Child's wellbeing**
Parents rated their children's wellbeing according to both their strengths and difficulties. Parents also responded to questions about how well they and their child were getting along.

Results

To evaluate the impact of the training, parent responses in each of the domains outlined in Box 1 were compared before the intervention, just after the programme, and two months later. The intervention group were also compared to the control group in order to be more confident that changes over time were due to the programme itself and not to other factors. The results revealed promising effects, as well as opportunities to further enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

PARENTAL WELLBEING

The findings revealed that parental wellbeing tended to increase as a function of participating in the intervention (see Figure 1). The increase in wellbeing reported by the intervention group was significantly different to the wellbeing levels reported by the control group, which tended to remain stable over this period. This pilot data therefore suggests that the programme appears to be making gains towards its primary aim of enhancing parent wellbeing.

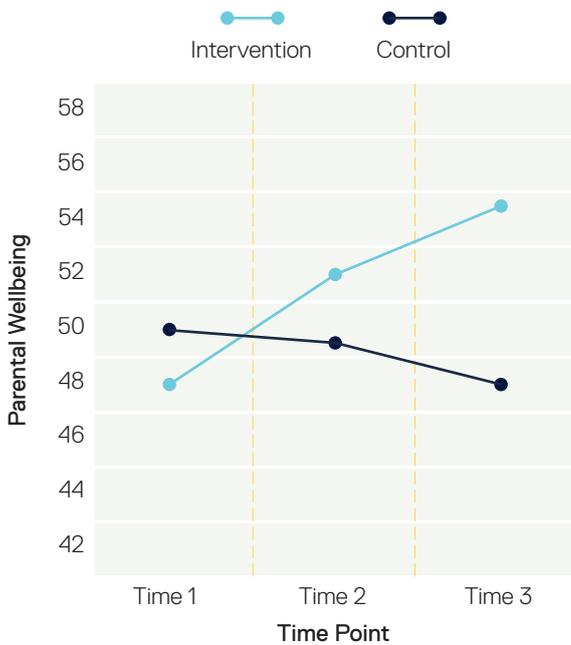


Figure 1. Changes over time in parental wellbeing

Similarly, there was a trend for parents' mental distress to decrease for the intervention group compared to the control group (see Figure 2). However, this difference was not statistically significant, meaning that we cannot be confident that this change was due to the training and not to chance.

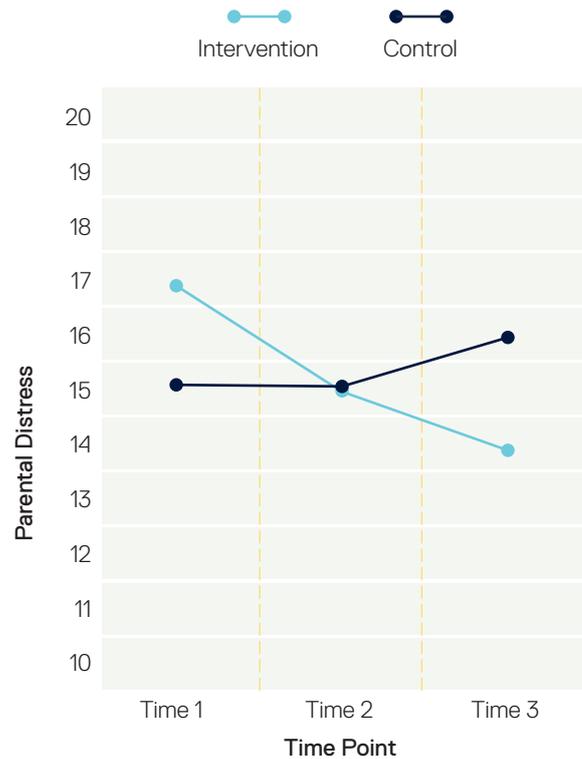


Figure 2. Changes over time in parental distress

CHARACTER STRENGTH USE AND KNOWLEDGE

Character strengths is a key topic within the training. However, in this sample, strengths knowledge remained relatively stable over the three time points, perhaps because parents had already gained a high level of knowledge about character strengths through their previous experience with Positive Education. There was a slight increase in strengths use observed for the intervention group over time, but this was again similar to the control participants (see Figure 3).

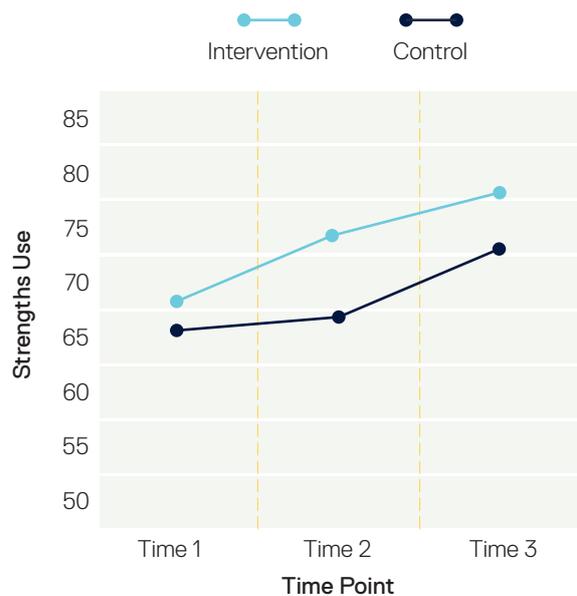


Figure 3. Changes over time in strengths use

PARENTAL CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL

After the training, parents who completed the programme reported feeling a closer connection to the School, and this change was significantly different to reports from the control participants. However, as displayed in Figure 4, by the two-month follow up, this difference had reduced such that the intervention and control participants now reported similar feelings of connection to the School. This suggests that parents' perceptions of their connection to the School improved immediately following the intervention, but these gains were not maintained at the two month follow up, and further efforts may therefore be needed to sustain these gains

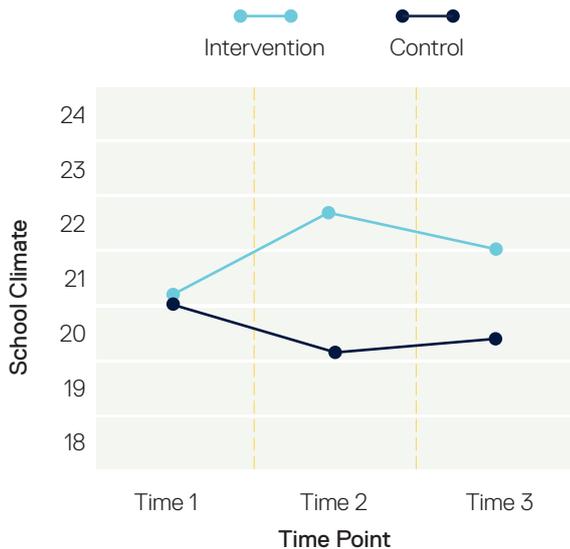


Figure 4. Changes over time in parental connection to the school

CHILD'S WELLBEING

Finally, we explored the parents' impact on their child's wellbeing after completing the training (as reported by the parent). No significant changes were observed in relation to how well parents and their children were getting along, or in their child's strengths and difficulties, as reports from the intervention and control participants remained similar over time.

PARENTAL INSIGHTS

Parental perspectives were also gained through open-ended questions. Themes emerging from parents' responses included:

- **Developing a greater understanding of Positive Education**
Parents indicated they gained a greater understanding of what Positive Education 'looked like' by attending the training. They reported that this was a key motivation in attending the course, so that they could support their child's learning at home.
- **Developing a shared language with their child around Positive Education**
Parents reported that their explicit knowledge of course content provided stimulus for conversation with their children and allowed them to reinforce teaching at the school by using the same language around wellbeing.

- **A greater sense of connection with the School**
Parents reported a greater connection to the school and school staff.
- **Suggestions for improvements**
While the course was well received, some parents provided feedback as to how the programme could be further improved. These ideas included reducing the amount of content in the course, incorporating online reading material, providing an opportunity to attend their children's Positive Education class, providing examples of how to use Positive Education at home and including Positive Education on school reports.

Conclusions

This is the first study to explore the impact of Positive Education training for parents and the current pilot data provides valuable early insights. Overall, the findings showed promising preliminary evidence for the benefits of engaging parents in Positive Education, as well as indicating areas for potential improvement.

The findings are compelling in suggesting that a two-day training course was able to achieve measurable increases in parental wellbeing that was maintained two months following the course. Parents' open-ended responses also indicated that a perceived key benefit of the training was that it provided them with a shared language around wellbeing, which enhanced their communication with their child and allowed them to reinforce Positive Education teaching at home.

While parents reported a greater sense of connection to the School immediately after finishing the programme, this positive impact was not sustained in the two-month follow up. It may be that the observed benefits require continuing opportunities for engagement if they are to be maintained. Possible ways of achieving this are already being trialled, including establishing a Positive Education parent support group.

A continuing challenge is how to encourage more parents to attend the training. Greater engagement of parents may be achieved if information provided about the programme aligns with parents' main motivations for attending. These include learning about how Positive Education strategies can be applied in the family context and the potential to develop a shared language with their child around wellbeing.

These results provide preliminary evidence to inform decisions on how and why it is important to strategically engage parents in Positive Education.



FOR FURTHER DETAILS

Research snapshots provide a brief and accessible overview of study findings. A full academic article, including technical details and references, is in preparation; once published, details will be available at www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/Research.

PROJECT TEAM

- Ms Karina Dubroja completed this project as part of her Masters of Educational Psychology studies. She is now a qualified Psychologist who works in schools to support student wellbeing.
- Dr Vicki McKenzie is a senior academic at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne.
- Dr Meredith O'Connor is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Positive Education, Geelong Grammar School, and an Honorary Fellow at the Department of Paediatrics, The University of Melbourne.

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