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CHAPTER FOUR

The Third Pillar of the Student Wellbeing Pedagogy: Positive Educational Practices

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Introduction

Effective teaching and teacher education, according to Lovat and Toomey (chapter 1 this volume), is based on the troika or interdependent tripartite of values education, quality teaching and service learning. The troika constitutes a student wellbeing pedagogy wherein quality teaching is enabled by the effects that a well crafted values education program, including service learning, has on school and classroom ambience. These effects include a sense of calmness in the classroom, improved interpersonal relationships, improved student wellbeing including self esteem, greater levels of trust and care as well as more respectful behaviour. As described earlier, the third pillar of the pedagogy is the firmly held view that all students are capable of success in supportive circumstances. The theoretical basis for this third pillar lies in part in Positive Psychology and especially the work of Martin Seligman and his colleagues.

This chapter draws on the tradition of Positive Psychology research to outline a framework, the Positive Educational Practices (PEPs) Framework, for establishing circumstances that are supportive of student wellbeing, improved levels of trust and care, better self esteem and more respectful relationships that are cornerstones of the troika pedagogy. Consistent with the ideas of the Positive Psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), PEPs constitute a set of principles and related practices for establishing circumstances where positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, accomplishment and personal and emotional wellbeing flourish and institutions thrive. PEPs provide guidance for teachers and teacher educators alike on ways of nurturing and sustaining the positive ambience that is such an important part of the troika student wellbeing pedagogy.

Positive psychology

The PEPs Framework is an application of the core principles and directions derived from Positive Psychology, a relatively new field of psychology that focuses on wellbeing. Positive Psychology is defined as the scientific study of the conditions and
processes that contribute to optimal functioning in individuals, groups and institutions (Gable & Haidt 2005, p.104). The aim of this new psychological approach is to shift the focus in education and psychology from a preoccupation with repairing what is not working to identifying, building and enhancing each individual’s positive qualities and skills. Positive Psychology emphasises individual and collective strengths and capabilities rather than their deficits, focuses on positive experiences more than on problems, stresses competency building rather than pathology and highlights what is going well rather than what is not working (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The major focus of the Positive Psychology movement, when applied to education, is on fostering student wellbeing and building communities of learners (school and university) that thrive and flourish.

The PEPs are based on five foundations of wellbeing that have been drawn not only from research in Positive Psychology but also from research in other contemporary psychological and educational movements that are consistent with Positive Psychology. These five foundations are:

1. The development of social and emotional competency;
2. The building of positive relationships;
3. The enhancement of positive emotions;
4. The use of strengths-based approaches; and,
5. The fostering of a sense of meaning and purpose.

**What is student wellbeing?**

Student wellbeing is strongly linked with student learning outcomes. For school leaders and teachers, a robust definition of student wellbeing helps to guide the development of their school’s vision, policies and practices. For teacher educators, the same definition can help to articulate course priorities and identify appropriate pedagogy to prepare student teachers to effectively connect with, empower and engage students in learning and promote their wellbeing. Different professional disciplines take different perspectives on wellbeing. The clinical and health perspective tends to define wellbeing as the absence of negative conditions such as depression, anxiety or substance abuse. Sociologists and community workers focus on wellbeing in terms of “broader meanings and difficulties in social processes in young people’s lives and how those impact on individual behaviour” (Bourke & Geldens, 2007, p. 42). We take an educational perspective that focuses on student wellbeing in the social context of schools. Using a review of the relevant research literature, we define student wellbeing as a sustainable state of (predominantly) positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school.
The following section outlines how each of the five foundations of the Positive Educational Practices Framework contributes to the wellbeing of students and the implications of each of these foundations for pre-service teacher education.

**Foundation one: Developing social and emotional competency**

Helping students to develop competency in the social and emotional skills that have been shown to be related to wellbeing is the essence of the first foundation of the PEPs framework. It is now well established that explicitly teaching social and emotional skills that enable students to show empathy, care for and get along well with others, work cooperatively with others, manage their negative emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively enhances wellbeing (Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes & Moore, 2003; Huebner 1991a, 1991b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Previous research has identified that these social and emotional skills are also linked to other positive outcomes for students such as: higher levels of pro-social behaviour; a better understanding of the consequences of their behaviour; improved learning outcomes; better problem solving and planning; and greater use of higher level reasoning strategies (Devaney, O’Brien, Resnick, Keister & Weissberg, 2006.; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004).

Most researchers also agree that social competency is an essential part of a student’s capacity for ‘effective functioning’ in their school community (Pollard & Lee, 2003; Wyn, Cahill, Holdworth, Rowling & Carson, 2000). Examples of learning-related and friendship-related social skills include: sharing resources and workload; cooperating; respectfully disagreeing; negotiation; having an interesting conversation; presenting to an audience; and, managing conflict well (McGrath, 2005; McGrath & Francey, 1991; McGrath & Noble, 2003).

The teaching of pro-social values is always the starting point for helping students to develop pro-social behaviour. The values of ‘compassion’ and ‘respect’, once learned, become stepping stones to a disposition towards responding with empathy which, in turn, is an essential aspect of treating others with understanding and kindness, rather than behaving aggressively or engaging in bullying behaviour. When students adopt the value of ‘cooperation’, they are more open to learning and practising the social and emotional skills that enable teamwork and effective management of conflict. Acceptance of the values of ‘fairness’ and ‘honesty’ directs students to learn and use social skills such as playing fairly rather than cheating and being a good winner or loser.

Students with high levels of wellbeing are more likely to demonstrate more effective coping skills and self-reliance (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; Neto, 1993). Many
researchers (e.g., Martin & Marsh, 2008; Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2003) have argued that there are two types of student resilience. The first can be termed ‘general life resilience’ and the second ‘educational or academic resilience’. General life resilience has most commonly been seen in the form of effective coping responses to ‘acute’ situations or adversities (e.g., Lindstroem, 2001; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Werner, 2000). On the other hand, education/academic resilience has been hypothesized to involve coping with chronic educational situations, such as difficulties with reading, limited access to materials and equipment or living in a household that does not support school learning. Studies into educational/academic resilience have focused on students with chronic underachievement, such as: those with learning disabilities (e.g., Margalit, 2004; Miller, 2002); those in ongoing disadvantaging home situations characterized by poverty (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997); and, those with a minority group background (e.g., Overstreet & Braun, 1999) or parental drug and alcohol abuse. Such students are more likely to face chronic failure and threats to confidence (Martin & Marsh, 2008) and become de-motivated and disengaged in school.

Specific coping skills that can be taught to help students become more resilient include: rational and optimistic thinking, including the capacity to use optimistic explanations of why failure occurred (Gillham & Reivich 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; McGrath & Noble, 2003; Peterson 2000; Seligman, 1995; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox & Gillham, 1995); the capacity to ‘emotionally distance’ from distressing experiences (Benard, 2004); the ability to set, plan for and achieve personal and academic goals (Grant & Dweck 2003; McMillan & Reid, 1994; Waxman, et al., 2003; Wayman, 2002); and, the use of appropriate humour (Benard, 2004; Lefcourt, 2001)

A whole-class social and emotional learning curriculum can be the starting point for developing social and emotional competency. ‘BOUNCE BACK’ is one example of a social and emotional curriculum program that is based on Positive Psychology (McGrath & Noble, 2003, 2011), makes extensive use of Circle Time (Roffey, 2006) and cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson & Stanne, 2001) and is integrated with the literacy curriculum. The program provides developmentally appropriate curriculum resources and activities from school entry through to the end of junior secondary and is based on an acronym, BOUNCE BACK, that incorporates ten prompting statements that promote the use of resilient thinking and behaviour for both students and teachers (McGrath & Anders, 2000)

Teaching pre-service teachers about the importance of embedding a social and emotional learning curriculum within their classroom learning activities is the first
step. Many trainee teachers have doubts about their own levels of social competency and can benefit from opportunities to learn more about social skills and practices, and reflect on them in naturalistic settings such as small group cooperative activities and group assignment work. Assignments can also be developed which provide an opportunity to not only identify core resilience skills and compare and evaluate relevant classroom curriculum programs but also to examine and reflect on the resilience strategies they use themselves in their personal lives, their part-time working lives and during their practicum experiences.

**Foundation two: Building positive relationships**

Social and emotional competency is critical for the development of the second foundation of positive relationships. Positive Relationships encompasses both positive teacher-student relationships and positive peer relationships.

Lovat and Toomey (2007, 2009) conclude that values education is at the heart of quality teaching and positive relationships in schools. Values contribute to the ongoing development of a ‘moral map’ that guides behaviour and choices. Pro-social values are those that emphasize the importance of harmonious co-existence. A caring and supportive classroom environment with a focus on pro-social values and behaviours makes it less likely that students will behave in anti-social ways (Wentzel, 2003). Several studies in the US have provided evidence of a link between improved academic outcomes, the quality teaching of values and student wellbeing and social development (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn & Smith, 2003, 2006; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004). Many other researchers have identified the importance of teaching pro-social values as part of enhancing student wellbeing (e.g., Battistich, Schaps, Watson, Solomon & Lewis, 2001; Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Cross, Pintabona, Hall, Hamilton & Erceg, 2004; Flannery et al., 2003; Frey, Hirchstein, Guzzo, 2000).

The key pro-social values common to different values frameworks are: compassion, cooperation, acceptance of differences, respect, friendliness/inclusion, honesty, fairness, and responsibility. Values-based school practices that facilitate positive relationships mean that bullying is less likely to occur, student wellbeing is enhanced and there is a greater likelihood of higher student engagement with school (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Galloway & Roland, 2004; McGrath & Noble, 2003; Schaps & Lewis, 1999). Schaps (2003) has argued that a positive school culture, underpinned by the intentional facilitation of positive relationships, predisposes students to:

- Adopt the goals and values of the school;
- Show more compassion and concern for others and more altruistic behaviour;
- Be more prepared to resolve conflicts fairly;
Engage in more altruistic and pro-social behaviour; and,
Adopt an inclusive rather than exclusive attitude toward others.

**Positive teacher-student relationships**

In a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, the quality of the teacher-student relationship was found to be the most important factor in students' engagement in learning and in effective classroom management (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering 2003). Similarly, Hattie, Myers and Sweeney (2004) identified that one of characteristics of highly skilled teachers was communicating high respect for students. Deakin Crick and Wilson (2005) and Cawsey (2002) claim that quality classroom relationships are critical for promoting the values and dispositions that are necessary for students to undertake personal responsibility for life-long learning.

Caring, supportive and respectful teacher-student relationships are critical to many aspects of student wellbeing (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Osterman, 2000). A study conducted by Suldo, Shaffer and Riley (2008) affirmed the link between positive relationships with teachers and student levels of wellbeing. This is a finding consistent with other research that shows that students who perceive high levels of support from their teachers also experience higher life satisfaction (Natvig, Albreksten, & Qvarnstrom, 2003; Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Similarly, Opdenakker and Van Damme (2000) and Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) found that secondary students experienced strengthened wellbeing when they perceived that their teacher cared for them, was attuned to their needs and was willing to help and, conversely, that lower wellbeing resulted when their teacher was perceived as strict and admonishing. Wentzel (1997) conducted a longitudinal study of 248 middle school students and found that their perception of the level of 'pedagogical caring' in their teachers (i.e. how much the teachers cared about the student as a person and their learning, listened to them and provided helpful feedback and support) was strongly and significantly related to the students' levels of motivation and engagement in learning.

**Positive peer relationships**

One of the strongest themes in research into school wellbeing (e.g., Zins et al., 2004) is the significant contribution of positive peer relationships to student wellbeing and a sense of community. Feeling accepted by peers and engaging in regular positive peer interactions can enhance the confidence of vulnerable students and make it more likely that they will behave in ways that further encourage positive interactions with others. Friendships provide students with social support, opportunities to practise and refine their social skills and opportunities to discuss moral dilemmas and, in doing so, further develop empathy and socio-moral reasoning (Schonert-Reichel,
The more students get to know each other, the more likely they are to identify and focus on similarities between themselves and other students, be more friendly and inclusive and become more accepting of differences (Noble & McGrath, 2008).

Positive peer relationships are more likely when students are directly taught the skills for empathic responding and pro-social values and behaviour, and when students have opportunities to practise these skills and understandings in authentic and naturally occurring settings over time, rather than simply being urged to use them (McGrath, 2005). Prevention programmes that focus on teaching social skills and social perspective taking have shown considerable promise in promoting student wellbeing, and reducing anti-social and bullying behaviours (Dryfoos, 1990; Tolan & Guerra, 1998). Systematic programmes for teaching social skills and empathy can help to reduce aggression and contribute to higher levels of achievement and resilience (Caprara Barbranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, Hawkins, 2003; Schonert-Reichl, Smith & Zaidman-Zait, 2002; Wentzel, 2003; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). Several other research studies have provided evidence for positive associations between social skills and both social and academic success (e.g., see reviews by Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). A student's level of social competence and friendship networks are predictive of their academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Wentzel and Watkins (2002) point out that social skills are 'academic enablers', that is, skills that help students to make the best of their ability. They also note that students who enact pro-social values and behaviours, such as active listening, helping, cooperating and sharing, tend to function more effectively in both social and academic contexts because both contexts require those skills.

Cooperative learning is one of the most comprehensive, evidence-based teaching strategies that links student wellbeing with values education, quality teaching and academic and social-emotional learning. Over a thousand research studies have documented the many benefits of cooperative learning (Benard, 2004; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) which include improvements in academic outcomes, positive peer relationships, social skills, empathy, motivation, acceptance of diversity (ethnic, racial, physical), conflict resolution, self-esteem, self-control, positive attitudes to school, and critical thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson et al., 2001; Slavin, 1995). Cooperative learning and cooperative group work have also been associated with lower levels of bullying, an increased ability to tolerate different perspectives on the same issue and increased levels of assertive problem-solving skills (Johnson et al., 2001; Ortega & Lera, 2000).
Trainee teachers should graduate with a clear understanding and acceptance of their responsibility to develop a positive, respectful and supportive relationship with every one of their students. Strategies for teachers to develop positive relationships with their students is an essential topic in a teacher education course that needs to be covered in some depth, along with strategies for facilitating positive peer relationships (e.g., see McGrath & Noble, 2010).

Cooperative learning has been widely used at the tertiary level, particularly in teacher education. A major meta-analysis of cooperative learning at the tertiary level found that cooperative learning promotes higher student achievement than competitive or individualistic approaches (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998). The meta-analyses also found that cooperative learning promoted positive peer relationships, even among University students from different ethnic, cultural, language, social class, ability and gender groups. The students perceived that they had greater social support (both academically and personally) from their University lecturers and their peers than students working competitively or individually. Cooperative learning was also highly correlated with a number of student wellbeing indices, including being more socially skilled. Both Jones and Jones (2008) and Ferrer (2004) have argued that student teachers who experience cooperative learning in their University classroom are more competent in implementing cooperative learning in their own classroom teaching practice. Using cooperative learning with tertiary students, according to Johnson et al., (1998), also creates communities of learners at the tertiary level where the students are more socially adjusted and integrated into University life, and more committed to attending University.

The authors have adapted or developed a number of higher order cooperative learning strategies that can be used with both school and tertiary students (McGrath & Noble, 2010). These strategies can be employed in tutorial groups in any curriculum area. The following three strategies are briefly described below:

- Socratic Circle
- Ten Thinking Tracks
- Multi-view

In the Socratic Circle, students can explore a values-based controversial or provocative issue related to a current topic or text for which they have prepared and made notes. A leader begins with a question that is open-ended and has no right or wrong answers and then leads discussion. The class sits in two circles. Half the class constitute the speakers who sit in an inner circle and practise using good thinking questions and responses. The other half are the observers who sit in an outer circle, use a checklist that focuses their attention on the discussion process, as well as the
outcomes, and allows the observers to give the speakers feedback when the discussion concludes. The checklist includes values-based social skills such as respectful disagreeing and proof of good listening, as well as thinking skills such as seeking clarification, asking for evidence to support their reasoning and making links to other ideas or concepts. The speakers and observers then swap places. A Socratic circle can be used to discuss any ‘big ideas’ such as: current values-based controversial events or issues (e.g., can school bullying ever be eradicated?); social justice issues (e.g., how can we help students from disadvantaged backgrounds have higher aspirations?) or issues that arise from texts or in the media.

The Ten Thinking Tracks (McGrath & Noble, 2010) is a cooperative learning strategy that provides a scaffold to assist students to consider a values-based issue or proposition. Student discussion moves in sequence from track 1 to track 10 and each student in the group is responsible for leading and recording their group’s discussion from the perspective of 2 or 3 different ‘tracks’. Each track prompts different kinds of thinking from identifying what is already known or not known, identifying the positives and negatives and connections with other ideas, the emotional, ethical and legal aspects, how the issue/proposition might be improved, whether or not their thinking about it is sound, their individual positions on the issue and, finally, a negotiated group position. An example: The Ten Thinking tracks could be used at the tertiary level to encourage student teachers to discuss the issue of inclusion of a student with high support needs in the regular classroom.

In Multi-View, students work in groups of four to consider a controversial issue from each of the different perspectives of the people involved. They might identify four people who are likely to have different perspectives, and then identify each person’s likely needs, wants, concerns, rights and responsibilities. Finally, the students provide a summative statement based on the different perspectives. For example, student teachers consider the inclusion of a student with special needs from the perspective of this student, the parents’ perspective, the classmates’ perspective, the teacher’s perspective, and the principal’s perspective guided by school/system policy on inclusive schooling.

Foundation three: Enhancing positive emotions

Positive relationships promote positive emotions, better physical and mental health, fewer sick days and a quicker recovery from illness (Lyubormirsky, King & Diener, 2005). In the past, empirical psychologists have focused more on how to manage negative emotions and attitudes (e.g., depression, anxiety and anger) rather than how to amplify positive emotions. However, recent research in positive psychology highlights the role of positive emotions in broadening people’s capacity to learn and
in building an organisation’s capacity to thrive (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Positive emotions can increase ‘behavioural flexibility’ and build an individual’s cognitive and emotional resources. Positive emotions enhance people’s capacity for optimistic thinking, problem solving and decision making and lead to more flexible, innovative and creative solutions (Isen, 2001, 2003). Research has demonstrated that positive emotions also have the ability ‘to undo’ the effects of stress and encourage both emotional and physical resilience (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004).

A study by Reschly, Huebner, Appleton and Antaramian (2008) explored the links between students’ positive emotions, coping and engagement in learning in a sample of 293 students in grades 7 to 10. They found that students’ experiences of frequent positive emotions during class lessons were associated with higher levels of student engagement and that, conversely, students’ experiences of frequent negative emotions were associated with lower levels of engagement with learning.

The following section provides a brief overview of typical positive student emotions and some of the school-based practices that can assist in generating them.

**Feelings of belonging**

Baumeister and Leary (1995) have argued that the need to belong is a basic human and pervasive drive. In her review of research, Osterman (2000) identified trends suggesting that, when students experience a sense of belonging and acceptance, they are more likely to:

- Participate more at school, be more interested and engaged with classroom and school activities, show more commitment to their school and their schoolwork and have a positive orientation towards school and teachers;
- Act supportively towards others and demonstrate more pro-social behaviour;
- Have higher expectations for their own success;
- Demonstrate greater acceptance of authority;
- Accept more responsibility for regulating their own behaviour in the classroom; and,
- Achieve more highly through the indirect effects of higher levels of participation, interest and engagement.

On the other hand, when students experience feelings associated with a lack of belonging and rejection or isolation, such as grief, jealousy, anger and loneliness, they are less likely to conform to school rules and norms (Wentzel & Asher, 1995) and more likely to have negative perceptions of school and schoolwork, avoid school and leave school at an early age (Ladd, 1990).
Many classroom and school-based approaches have been suggested to increase a student's sense of belonging. These include:

- Maximizing opportunities for students to work together in small groups so that they can share ideas and get to know each other (Jones & Gerig, 1994);
- Using cooperative learning approaches to instruction. Osterman (2000) has argued that cooperative learning is especially effective as it increases the frequency of positive student interactions each day; and,
- Looking for opportunities to let students know that they are cared for. Baumeister and Leary (1995) have argued that a student's perception that they are cared about and supported is especially significant in creating a sense of belonging. This feeling can be developed in a range of ways such as: celebrating birthdays, sending home 'get well' cards when students are absent and establishing peer support structures such as cross age buddies (Stanley & McGrath, 2006), peer tutoring, peer mediators, and circle of friends (Frederickson & Turner, 2003; Newton & Wilson, n.d).

**Feelings of safety**

Students are most likely to report feeling safe in schools that have low levels of putdowns and bullying. Low levels of bullying are more likely in schools in which there is effective leadership that articulates a vision for school-wide wellbeing underpinned by pro-social values (such as respect and acceptance of differences) and an effective and consistent whole school positive behaviour management program (McGrath & Noble, 2007b).

**Feelings of satisfaction, affirmation and pride**

Students experience feelings of pride and satisfaction when they have opportunities to be successful and when their school focuses on the celebration of those successes. To provide such opportunities, schools need to value different kinds of achievements and not just success in the traditional academic or sports domains (Kornhaber, Ferros & Veenema, 2003; Noble, 2004). Dweck (2006) has also highlighted the importance of framing success in terms of student effort and persistence, as well as in terms of goal attainment.

**Feelings of excitement and enjoyment**

Research studies confirm that students find playing both physical and educational games engaging, motivating and interesting (Dempsey, Rasmussen & Lacassen, 1994; Jacobs & Dempsey, 1993). Games can also help students to remember and apply content (Dempsey et al., 1994; Jacobs & Dempsey, 1993; Mantyla, 1999) and
improve reasoning skills and higher order thinking (Rieber, 1996). When students have fun together or play games together (especially cooperative physical and educational games), they not only experience positive emotions, such as excitement and enjoyment, but they also gain opportunities to:

- Interact with classmates within a positive context and develop relationships; and,

- Practise emotional skills (such as self regulation of anger and aggression) and positive values and social skills (such as respect and acceptance of differences, honesty or being a good winner/loser) within a naturally occurring social context (McGrath, 2005; McGrath & Francey, 1991; Nemerow, 1996; Sugar, 2002).

Research also suggests that, during games, students are more likely to demonstrate more pro-social behaviour and less hyperactive and/or aggressive behaviour (e.g., Carlson, 1999; Garaigardobil,Magento & Etxeberria., 1996; Landazabel, 1999; Street, Hoppe, Kinsbury & Ma., 2004).

**Feelings of optimism about academic success**

Teachers can teach their students optimistic thinking and also commit to modelling it for students by focusing their attention on the things that are going well and the effort they have put into their work, not just their ability. Teachers can also challenge children’s negative or pessimistic thinking and helplessness and help them to track even the small good things in a difficult situation or what they have learned from their mistakes (Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox & Seligman, 1995; McGrath & Noble, 2003).

Trainee teachers need to be aware of the range of positive student emotions at school (and about school) that can enhance student engagement, learning and wellbeing and investigate different classroom-based strategies that can elicit positive emotions. Tertiary teachers can conduct discussions with pre-service education students, highlighting the important role of the teacher and how rewarding and satisfying teaching can be. A good basis for a discussion of this kind is the UK study (Morgan, 2005) involving an in-depth study with teachers in 8 schools as well as an online survey with over 1000 teachers. Morgan found that teachers, compared to 300 other professional careers, reported that their daily work was:

- **Fulfilling** because it gave them a sense of meaning and purpose and a sense of accomplishment through developing young people and making a difference in their lives;
Exciting because it offered variety, enjoyment, interactions with many different people where every day was different;

Satisfying because it enabled their self-development, as well as the pleasure from helping young people to develop both intellectually and emotionally; and,

Enjoyable because of the varied positive interactions with and feedback from young people and colleagues, as well as the broader community.

Using teaching strategies in tertiary classrooms that elicit positive emotions is also an effective approach to helping student teachers to understand how their own learning and engagement is affected by these emotions. They can be asked to reflect on this connection, for example, after participating in an enjoyable educational game that promotes thinking, such as Twenty Questions. They can also be asked to identify feelings of safety when the social skill of ‘respectful disagreeing’ is used during discussions and modelled by the lecturer. This skill involves stating any point of agreement before stating points of disagreement (e.g., ‘I agree that parents should be involved when their child is learning to read but I don’t think that asking them to hear their reading regularly every night is the best way for them to be involved’). They can be encouraged to reflect on their own emotional responses to good and bad teaching and how their own mood or emotional wellbeing affects their capacity to engage in learning.

Foundation four: Using strengths-based approaches

A converging message from many areas of Psychology and Education, and especially from the Positive Psychology movement, is that a strengths-based approach is important for the promotion of student wellbeing and academic engagement. Researchers in CASEL (the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning) explain this in the following way:

[T]here is no good alternative to a strengths-based approach to working with children. It involves a) establishing positive relationships with children based on their assets and their potential contributions as resources to their schools and b) finding naturally occurring contexts in which they can enact positive roles for which they must learn skills to be successful (Elias, Zins, Graczyk & Weissberg, 2003, p. 305).

A ‘strength’ can be defined as a natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that promotes successful goal achievement (Linley & Harrington, 2006). A strengths-based approach is based on the assumption that using one’s strengths in schoolwork (or in one’s work) produces more positive emotions, is more engaging
and productive and produces better learning outcomes than working on one's weaknesses, especially for those students whose strengths are not in the traditional academic domain (Noble, 2004). As Spreitzer (2008) states, individuals who are given feedback on their strengths are significantly more likely to feel highly engaged and to be more productive than those who are only given feedback on their weaknesses.

A strengths-based approach does not ignore weaknesses but rather achieves optimization when strengths are built upon and weaknesses are understood and managed (Clifton & Harter, 2003). When people work with their strengths, they tend to learn more readily, perform at a higher level, are more motivated and confident, and have a stronger sense of satisfaction, mastery and competence (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Linley & Harrington, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Controlled studies by Williamson (2002, as cited in Daly & Chrispeels, 2005) and Harter (1998, as cited in Daly & Chrispeels, 2005) had teachers providing strengths-based feedback to one group of students while the control group received no such feedback. Results for the strengths-based feedback groups included increases in grade point average, attendance and self-confidence.

In teaching and teacher education, educators can play an important role in helping students to first identify their relative strengths and weaknesses and second engage their strengths through a variety of diverse activities. ‘Strengths’ can be either intellectual/cognitive or character strengths and can be individual strengths or the collective strengths of groups or the whole school community working together.

**Intellectual or cognitive strengths**

Howard Gardner’s (1999) model of multiple intelligences (MI) is consistent with a strengths orientation and provides directions for the identification and development of students’ cognitive/intellectual strengths. MI theory has been widely adopted in schools and in teacher education since its publication over twenty years ago and identifies eight intelligences. The eight intelligences are: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalist intelligence, interpersonal intelligence (people) and intrapersonal (self) intelligence.

One of the significant challenges in teacher education is to effectively train student teachers to meet the educational needs of the diverse range of children and young people in every classroom. The importance of having high expectations for all students and providing a differentiated curriculum to ensure all students have a fair and equitable chance to succeed is a key message from the Australian Curriculum
Curriculum differentiation has been defined as consistently using a variety of teaching approaches to vary curriculum content, learning processes and products, assessment and the learning environment in response to the learning readiness and interests of academically diverse students (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003).

Kornhaber et al., (2003) evaluated outcomes in forty-one schools that had been using MI theory for curriculum differentiation for at least three years and found significant benefits of the MI approach in terms of improvements in student engagement and learning, in student behaviour, and in parent participation. There were particular benefits for students with learning difficulties who demonstrated greater effort in learning, more motivation and improved learning outcomes. MI theory is the only theory of intelligence that incorporates interpersonal (understanding others) and intrapersonal (understanding self) intelligences. Using MI theory as a framework for curriculum differentiation thereby encourages teachers to embed tasks that develop students’ skills in these social-emotional domains as well as the more traditional academic domains.

The use of MI theory for curriculum differentiation has been shown to build positive learning communities based on collective strengths in which students value and celebrate student differences and for students who struggle with learning to achieve more academic success (Kornhaber et al., 2003; McGrath & Noble, 2005a, 2005b; Noble, 2004). A widely used curriculum planning tool in Australian schools for curriculum differentiation is the MI/Bloom Matrix (McGrath & Noble, 2005a, 2005b). Teachers’ use of the matrix in two primary schools over eighteen months was shown to increase their sense of professional competency in effectively catering for diverse students’ learning needs and developed their competencies in helping their students to set goals and make meaningful choices about their learning tasks and products (Noble, 2004).

The use of the matrix by both primary and secondary pre-service teachers to plan a differentiated unit of work in their chosen curriculum area has also been shown to enhance their professional confidence and competence in catering for diverse students, including students with special needs (Noble, 2007). The student teachers used the matrix to plan a differentiated unit of work for a whole class and then nominated four activities suitable for a focus student with special needs. They first identified the focus student’s strengths before choosing the four activities and then explained how they would adapt the task, their teaching, the class environment and the assessment to effectively meet the learning needs of this student.
Character strengths and values

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have developed a model of 24 character strengths that are ubiquitous (widely recognized across cultures), contribute to individual wellbeing, are morally valued, are trait-like and measurable, and are distinct and malleable (Peterson, 2006). They have also developed an online self-survey titled values in action for use by adults and young people from ten years of age. Both the adult and youth version have been demonstrated to be reliable, valid and stable over at least six months (Park & Peterson, 2006). Peterson (2006) and Seligman (2002) argue that everyone has signature strengths (typically two to five top strengths) and that the engagement of these signature strengths at school or in the workplace enhances an individual’s wellbeing. One way this survey was used with student teachers was to encourage each student to complete the online survey (viastrengths.org) and then share one of their signature strengths in a tutorial (Noble, 2007). They also shared one way that they had engaged that strength at work or on their practicum and one way that they could engage their signature strength in their teaching practice. This self-reflection activity helped the students understand the value of strengths-based reflections for their own personal and professional development and their work with young people.

Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen (1993) have identified that young people are more likely to be fully engaged and experience ‘psychological flow’ when involved in an intellectually challenging activity that utilizes their intellectual or character strength(s) and has a degree of challenge that requires a reasonably high level of skill and attention in a specific domain (e.g., building a model or playing a musical instrument). This flow experience has been defined as a short-term peak experience at work that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic work motivation. During flow, time flies and the experience can be extremely pleasurable. Flow tends to occur in situations where people are challenged to use their strengths/skills to an optimal level (balancing challenge and skills) are stimulated and have sufficient support or resources to aid them. This understanding of student engagement or flow was supported by research conducted by Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider and Shernoff (2005) who found that the students in their study reported experiencing higher levels of engagement when the perceived challenge of a learning task or activity was high and they also perceived that they had the skills needed to meet that challenge. Cognitively challenging students is important for all students but appears to be particularly important for students who traditionally may be perceived as ‘poor learners’. When teachers collectively raised their expectations of their students, made their students clearly aware of this, and provided challenging learning experiences, they consistently observed improvements in their students’ learning, self confidence and behaviour (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004).
Being in a state of 'flow' also increases a person's satisfaction (from the completion of a task or the creation of a product or performance) and enables them to have some respite from worries and problems they may be experiencing. In their comprehensive review of studies of students with low levels of resilience, Waxman et al., (2003) found these students demonstrated low levels of student engagement in learning. Csikszentmihalyi's work indicates the importance of providing challenging and strengths-based activities that would help students develop new skills, focus their attention and providing them with relevant feedback and clear goals.

The UK study on teacher satisfaction (Morgan, 2005), referred to earlier in this chapter, showed that teachers reported experiencing optimal flow on a regular basis and more frequently than those in comparative professional careers. The 'highs' that teachers experience during flow, along with their long-term fulfilment from developing children and young people, are likely to be key reasons for their high levels of job satisfaction reported in this study. Flow has been shown to influence wellbeing in a positive way and even to transfer positive feelings to others.

Both Gardner’s multiple intelligences and Peterson and Seligman's character strengths offer systematic frameworks for adaptation in educational contexts. First, the two frameworks can be used by both teachers and teacher educators to help individual students or student teachers identify their own cognitive and character strengths. Second, they can be used to help educators make student wellbeing a priority by creating strengths-based learning communities that value different strengths and providing differentiated curriculum and instruction that actively engages different students. Although Gardner’s model has been widely used in education, the application of the VIA strengths in education is in its infancy.

Collective strengths or capabilities

The literature on school leadership, inclusive schooling, positive psychology, self and collective efficacy, and positive organizational scholarship, suggest a growing impetus for moving educational systems from deficit systems to strengths-based approaches. The school leadership and inclusive schooling literature strongly advocate that schools become 'learning communities'. This kind of community expects and embraces diversity and values the different strengths of both students and staff. Research on self and collective efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1996) suggests that reciprocal causality occurs. This means that the self-efficacy of individual students or teachers contributes to a school’s collective efficacy and this, in turn, contributes to an individual’s positive belief about self.
The research of Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) documents the importance of collective teacher efficacy or collective optimism. They found teachers' shared or collective optimism of students was more important than the students' socio-economic status, other demographic data and previous achievement history in determining their students' academic achievement. A large scale Australian study (Oswald, Howard & Johnson, 2003) showed that teachers attributed some students' low resilience to personal or family factors rather than factors under teacher control. These studies highlight the importance of enhancing teachers' and student teachers' academic optimism or efficacy about their capacity to 'make a difference', especially for less resilient students.

Other research studies (e.g., Stipek, 2002; Turner, Meyer, Cox, DiCintio & Thomas., 1998) have found that students are more engaged with learning, experience more positive emotions and are more strategic about their learning in classrooms where teachers provide intellectually challenging and socially supportive environments, pressed them for deeper understanding and support their autonomy. In contrast, where teachers focus only on academic content and create a negative social environment, students are more likely to be disengaged and more apprehensive about making mistakes.

The challenge for teacher educators is to establish a community of learners within their cohort of student teachers that promotes a safe and respectful climate in which students have opportunities to:

- understand the importance of a strengths-based approach to their teaching;
- identify and enhance their own intellectual and character strengths through the use of a range of assessment tools such as the MICA (Multiple Intelligences Checklist for Adults) (McGrath & Noble, 2005a), and the VIA Character Strengths Questionnaire (viastrengths.org); and,
- understand the importance of the pro-social values of Respect and Acceptance of Differences in others in valuing different strengths, in their own teaching but also as important values to teach their own students.

Foundation five: Fostering a sense of meaning and purpose

"I am so passionate about this experience that I feel it is an incredible advantage to pre-service teachers if they get this type of experience in the wider community." These are the words of a student teacher involved in community service learning partnership with Australian Catholic University, the 'Smith Family' Charity, teachers, children and families in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.
Community service learning is one way in which both schools and universities are facilitating educational experiences to provide students with a sense of meaning and purpose. A sense of meaning is defined as involvement in a task or activity that impacts on people other than oneself. According to Seligman (2002) "a meaningful life is one that joins with something larger than we are – and the larger that something is, the more meaning our lives have" (p. 260). He states that life is given meaning when we use our signature strengths every day in the main realms of living “to forward knowledge, power or goodness” (p. 260). A sense of purpose can be defined as involvement in a worthwhile task or activity (Noble & McGrath, 2008). In the classic book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, the Nazi concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl (1964) writes: “Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or to another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualises himself” (pp. 56-67).

In a review of work on the construct of ‘meaning’, Yalom (as cited in Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) found that a lack of meaning in life was associated with psychopathology, while positive life meaning was associated with strong religious beliefs, membership in groups, dedication to a cause, life values and clear goals. Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995) suggested that a critical component of mental health includes “beliefs that give one the feeling that there is purpose in and meaning to life” (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071).

Community service has been shown to enhance students’ academic learning, transfer of knowledge and critical thinking skills, as well as their personal efficacy and moral development, social skills, empathy, social responsibility and civic engagement (Astin & Sax 1998; Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999; Elias, 2006; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rhoads, 1997). Billig’s (2004) extensive review of service learning research concluded that students participating in service learning generally perform better than others on measures such as school engagement, attitudes towards school, attendance, communication with parents about school, test scores, grade point average and problem-solving skills. Positive outcomes for volunteers actively engaged in their community have been found for life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-rated health, educational and occupational achievement, and mortality (Warburton & Oppenheimer, 2000).

Student participation and voice is a recognized feature of high performing schools and has a positive effect on learning in the classroom and student engagement in school (Black, 2007). Participation in initiatives in school and community projects
like Education Foundation Australia's ruMAD (Are you making a difference?) program and Student Action Teams (Holdsworth, 2002) have been found to create genuine and meaningful contexts in which students have investigated issues of real concern to them and have taken action to bring about change, both in their school and in the community. In such initiatives, students worked in a team to identify and tackle a school or community issue, research it, make plans and proposals about it and take action on it. Many of the projects chosen were based on student wellbeing topics such as values, health, drug use, school safety, homelessness, sustainable environments and thread through programs addressing issues of civics and citizenship education (Chapman, Cahill & Holdsworth, 2009; Holdsworth, 2002). Such initiatives were part of the formal or informal school curriculum and engaged students in purposeful authentic learning activities that were valued by the students, had broader community value and met or exceeded mandated curriculum goals (Holdsworth, 2002).

The importance of acting out pro-social values to student wellbeing is powerfully illustrated by a longitudinal study that followed high school students into late adulthood, a time interval of over fifty years. Wink, Ciciolla, Dillon and Tracy, (2007) examined data gathered from two adolescent research cohorts first interviewed in the 1930s and subsequently interviewed every ten years until the late 1990s. They used a multidimensional measure of generative or ‘giving’ behaviour, defined as behaviour indicative of intense positive emotions extending to all humanity. They found that a giving disposition was linked to empathy and social competence. The results of the study indicated that ‘giving’ adolescents become both psychologically and physically healthier adults. This study lends support to the notion that ‘it is good to be good’ and there is a lifelong benefit for young people who begin being altruistic in their teens. The benefits of altruism accrue across the entire lifespan.

As well as community service learning, other school initiatives that have been found to foster a sense of meaning and purpose and enhance student engagement and learning include:

- Peer support programs (e.g., peer mediation, buddy systems, mentoring systems and peer tutoring) (Stanley & McGrath, 2006);
- Circle of friends (Frederickson & Turner, 2003; Newton & Wilson, n.d);
- Student participation in class-wide or school-wide leadership and decision-making structures (e.g., circle time, classroom councils, classroom committees or school-wide student representative committees McGrath & Noble, 2003); and,
- Participation in sports teams, art and drama groups and membership of pro-social youth groups has been identified as one of the most prevalent protective
Teacher education courses, both nationally and internationally, have begun to be more proactive in developing community service learning programmes. Anderson (1998) defines community service learning as both a philosophy of education and an instructional method. In such programmes, both the service provider and the recipient are beneficiaries. This then leads to a dual focus on the service being provided and the learning that occurs. Where community service learning facilitates student teachers' work with children and young people in diverse communities, it provides an avenue for student teachers to gain a deep and extensive knowledge of the contexts of their students' lives (Butcher, Howard, Labone, et al., 2003; Dunkin, 1996; Vickers, Harris & McCarthy, 2004). Reflections on their community service learning experiences helped pre-service teachers to assess their self-knowledge and scrutinize the various beliefs that underpinned their teaching practice (Butcher, Howard, Labone, et al., 2003). This knowledge ultimately helps student teachers to be flexible in their teaching (Duesterberg, 1998) and to be able to modify their lesson content, depending on the community context (Dunkin, Welch, Merritt, Phillips & Craven, 1998). Community engagement, such as student volunteering, has been found to benefit the helper as well as the helped and, for universities, is also an expression of their corporate citizenship (Butcher, Howard, Labone, et al., 2003).

**Conclusion**

The Positive Educational Practices Framework, based on the innovative application of the psychology discipline to education, in the form of Positive Psychology, establishes five foundations of student wellbeing and effective student learning. All five foundations are underpinned by pro-social values, such as Cooperation, Respect, Compassion, Fairness and Acceptance of Differences, and effective pedagogy that connects students with teachers and peers, as well as actively engaging them in learning. The research outcomes indicate that focusing on these foundations can enhance quality teaching and learning in both classroom teaching and in teacher education.