

How positive is positive psychology in an enabling program?

Investigating the transformative power of positive psychology for enabling students

Trixie James
Vikki Walters

CQUniversity Australia

Positive psychology is one of the newest branches of psychology to emerge, and there is a growing research base of scientific study to validate the significance of this psychological approach in people's lives. This research investigates a unit of study that was developed for students entering university through an enabling program in order to introduce them to proactive solutions and strategies to develop their strengths, capacity and virtues rather than focusing on past weaknesses. Currently, only anecdotal evidence exists indicating that this unit is having a positive impact on the students who have completed the unit. As this research wants to identify the effectiveness of this unit in facilitating change in a student's life, the core tenets of Appreciative Inquiry guided the overall process of formulating the research approach and designing the questions for the survey. Past students became the change actors and their voice and experiences became the data.

Keywords: *positive psychology, positive learning, enabling programs, tertiary access, first year, transitioning to university, mature age students, support networks*

Introduction

Enabling programs within the Australian higher education system focus on developing student's study skills and applicable knowledge to assist with the transition into a degree-based program. However, for many of the students who enter university via an enabling pathway, they come with disparate expectations of their ability to undertake such a program and often have to counter-balance low self-confidence alongside a sense of uncertainty and fear. Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) offers a unique and innovative unit which introduces students to Positive Psychology through the unit Positive Learning for University (PLU). The underlying core purpose when designing this unit was to improve student's psychological well-being which can often inhibit learning if allowed to continue in the negative. Therefore, PLU was specifically designed to take students on a personal learning journey where they learn about the theories that underpin positive psychology and are encouraged to apply these concepts to their role as students and further into their personal life. For the students who undertake this unit, the goal is to develop their psychological wellbeing, which may impact positively on their personal, social and academic performance and assist them to perform at optimal capacity in their role as a tertiary student. The unit looks at proactive solutions and strategies which assist in breaking the mould of the victim paradigm and guides students with examples, strategies and concepts that can be implemented into their lives in order to make their educational journey more meaningful. The concepts taught should assist students to gain valuable skills that are transferable to life and thereby, may contribute to significant improvement in their mental health, well-being and self-efficacy whilst studying. Since 2012, PLU has undertaken a few changes due, in part, to student feedback, review of curriculum and keeping abreast with the growth of research in this field. This paper reports on the findings from a research project that strove to determine whether the unit was effective in its aims of increasing student's psychological wellbeing and mitigating distress.

Literature review

Background

The advent of positive psychology can be traced back to Martin E.P. Seligman's 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). His emergence into this position was instigated through a couple of serendipitous events that made him question whether the current state of psychology had in fact neglected its core mission of curing mental illness, helping people to lead more productive and fulfilling lives, and identifying and nurturing high talent (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006). As the leading advocate of positive psychology, Seligman united the efforts of many leading psychologists who in turn have become the key players in this field (see Ben-Shahar, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Fredrickson, 2010; Leaf, 2009; Leimon & McMahan, 2009; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 1992; 1999; 2005; Sharp, 2007; Weiton, 2005). The development of positive psychology (PP) has been clearly shaped by these pioneers in this field and it is through their deliberate sociological scientific approach that has validated PP through bringing in major research funding, providing research leadership, opening training institutes and attracting other researchers into the field (Linley et al., 2006).

Positive psychology provides an interpretative lens and different worldview to that of traditional psychology. It could be said to shine the light of 'scientific inquiry into previously dark and neglected corners' (Linley et al., 2006). Although the terms positive and negative are used to describe the two poles of the human condition, it is not meant to imply or support the dichotomisation of human experience into either positive or negative. Instead, it is meant to infer the state of being along a continuum with the aim of living 'above the line'. Sheldon and King (2001, p. 216) define PP as 'the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues'. Positive psychology revisits the 'average person' with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving ... positive psychology is simply psychology'. A common perception suggested by Held (2004) and Lazarus (2003) is that PP emphasises the positive at the expense of the negative. With traditional psychology's focus on mental illness, dysfunctional conditions and disorder of the functioning brain, this is an easy juxtaposition to

make given that the early emphasis of PP was 'independent' from the traditional viewpoint (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). However, PP's antithesis is that psychologists should also focus on well-being, health and optimal functioning with the futuristic view that this become synonymous within the field of psychology. Thus, when viewed at the meta-psychological level, PP is an attempt to redress what is perceived as an imbalance in the focus of research attention and practice objectives in psychology (Linley et al., 2006).

At a meta-physical level, positive psychology aims to readdress the imbalance of current practices by calling to attention the positive aspects of human functioning and counterbalancing the negative implications. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) consider that PP is viewed at two different levels: the individual level is about positive individual traits which include, but are not limited to, capacity to love, courage, interpersonal skill, perseverance, future mindedness, wisdom, hope and optimism. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues that move individuals toward better citizenship, responsibility, altruism, tolerance and work ethic (2000, p. 5). At a pragmatic level, it is about understanding the wellsprings (foundations of well-being and early experiences that develop strengths and virtues); processes (factors that contribute to optimal functioning and those that prevent it); and mechanisms (extra psychological factors that facilitate or impede implementation) that lead to desirable outcomes (states of mind that lead to a fulfilling life) and allow for the interactions between them (Linley et al., 2006. p. 8). PP should seek to understand the factors that facilitate optimal functioning as much as those that prevent. The mechanisms of interest to PP can be defined as those extra-psychological factors that facilitate, or impede, the pursuit of a good life. For example, these mechanisms may be personal and social relationships, working environments, organisations and institutions, communities, and the broader social, cultural, political and economic systems in which our lives are inextricably embedded (Linley et al., 2006. p. 7).

Enabling students

Enabling education has a respected position within Australian universities whereby the primary objective is to provide an alternate pathway into higher education for students from minority and under-represented groups within society. The cultural capital required for thriving in

university suggests that some students, such as enabling students, who are often the first-generation in their family to attempt university, may not have an exemplar or role model to follow, nor may they fully appreciate what it takes to succeed in this foreign environment (Pismeny, 2016). Klinger and Tranter (2009) suggest that students who enter via an enabling pathway may present with family and employment responsibilities; low academic confidence levels; socio-cultural displacement and even lower English language proficiency. Bourdieu refers to habitus as the physical embodiment of cultural capital where students recognise the ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that have been developed through life experiences (Power, 1999). Enabling programs acknowledge a student's habitus and scaffold the skillset and knowledge acquisition required for transition into university through engaging students and helping them to flourish in this new environment. Schreiner (2010a) suggests that the five factors of thriving include positive perspective, engaged learning, academic determination, social connectedness and diverse citizenship. He has labelled these five features into three categories being academic thriving, intrapersonal thriving and interpersonal thriving. Schreiner (2010a) highlights the necessity for a paradigm shift where universities change from a failure prevention model, to a success promotion model. Pismeny (2016) suggests that developing a healthy attitude about oneself will benefit the learning process and, in turn, enable a change of perspective helping them to proactively cope better (Carver, Scheier, Miller, & Fulford, 2009; Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2006; Schreiner, 2010a), be more optimistic about their study (Carver et al., 2009) and employ a long-term view when situations arise (Schreiner, 2010b). Therefore, it is hoped that by exposing students to PP concepts and strategies through PLU, the students' enrolled will have an opportunity to broaden their worldview, change ingrained mindsets, and identify personal strengths, capacity and virtues (James & Seary, 2018). In turn, these characteristics are transferrable to life, and it is hoped, they will find improvement in their mental health, well-being and self-efficacy.

Methodology

The core tenets of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as discussed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) guided the overall process of formulating the research approach and designing the questions for the survey. AI is an evaluative tool that assists in facilitating positive change; its core

approach engages change actors in defining positive change (Harrison & Hasan, 2013). As this research wanted to identify the effectiveness of PLU in facilitating change in a student's life, past students became the change actors and their voice and experience became the data. The ideology behind this is identifying the 'positive core' of the past experiences in order to consider what worked well and what requires further development. In turn, investigating what elements were common to the moments of greatest success and fulfilment felt by the students.

Research design

An email to participate in this study was sent to 168 students who had achieved the minimum of a Pass grade for the Positive Learning for University (PLU) unit between Term 1, 2012 and Term 3, 2016. A link to a survey via Survey Monkey was included in the initial email with a consent form and information sheet that outlined the aims, purpose and risks involved by participating in the study.

The survey consisted of 14 questions. The first five questions related to the demographics (age, gender) of the student group and asked what their passing grade was at the end of their term of study. The following question asked them to rank the ten modules from one to ten as to which concepts they felt they gained the most benefit in their own lives. Following this, the students were asked open ended questions relating to their experience in PLU. The first six questions related to their own experience of the unit and the concepts that had the most impact on them personally. In addition, they were asked to share personal stories of success that can be attributed to the concepts learnt, a single word to describe the impact the unit had on them, positive experiences and any epiphanies that may have resulted from the unit. The last section of questions related to how the concepts may have relevance to their community and further into their personal lives. They were asked to suggest some innovative ideas that could be introduced to help students apply the concepts to their lives.

Limitation of the research design

As this research was seeking to hear from the voice of the student and their reflection of past experiences, it is acknowledged that the findings are subjective and relate solely to each student's personal perceptions around their experience undertaking this unit of study. Another

limitation was the total sample number of qualitative responses (n=18) as some respondents (n=7) did not share their responses in the open-ended questions. Therefore, we recognise this may be regarded as a limitation, but within the scope of a highly qualitative and reflective research approach, the findings contain rich data that reflect each student's perceptions and perspectives around their personal lived experience of how the concepts taught in this unit impacted their lives.

Analysis

The open-ended responses were scrutinised and the analytical framework of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied as it allows the data to guide the findings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach was used whereby the data from Survey Monkey was downloaded and the responses were reviewed a few times to get a deeper appreciation for what was being shared. Then the responses were coded and descriptions written to inform the context behind the codes until finally themes were revealed and correlated, then written into findings.

Participants

Twenty-five students responded (return rate of 15.47%). Eight of these respondents did not answer any of the questions other than grade achieved and so were not included in the final analysis, leaving a total sample group of 18. Students ranged in age from 18 to over 56 with the majority being in either the 26–40 or 41–55 age range (see Table 1). Fifteen of the final survey respondents were female, two males and one respondent who did not denote their gender (see Table 1).

Table 1: Age groupings of respondents Age / Gender Breakdown

| | | Male | Female | Unknown |
|-----------------|---|------|--------|---------|
| 18–25 age range | 2 | | 2 | |
| 26–40 age range | 8 | 1 | 7 | |
| 41–55 age range | 7 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| 56+ age range | 1 | | 1 | |
| did not answer | 8 | | | |

Findings

Students were asked to rate the modules based on how useful the concepts were to them in their own lives (1 (not useful) to 10 (very useful) on a forced choice 10-point scale. These rankings were then averaged to identify the units that students found most useful to them. Module 2 – Positive meaning was rated the most useful (with an average score of 6.5) and the module deemed least useful was Module 3 – Positive health (4.4) (see Figure 1).

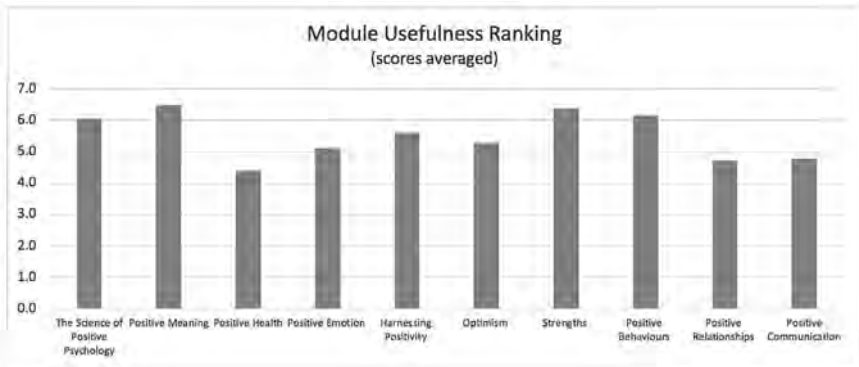


Figure 1: Usefulness of module in student's lives

When looking at the two age groupings with the largest number of respondents, 26 to 40 years old (n=8) and 41 to 55 (n=7), there was a marked difference between the modules they saw as being most useful in their lives and that which they saw as least useful. The younger group were most drawn to the module on Positive Meaning and least drawn to Positive Communication. The older group felt that the module on Strengths was most valuable but were not so enamoured with the module on Positive Health (see Figure 2 and Appendix A for descriptors of modules).

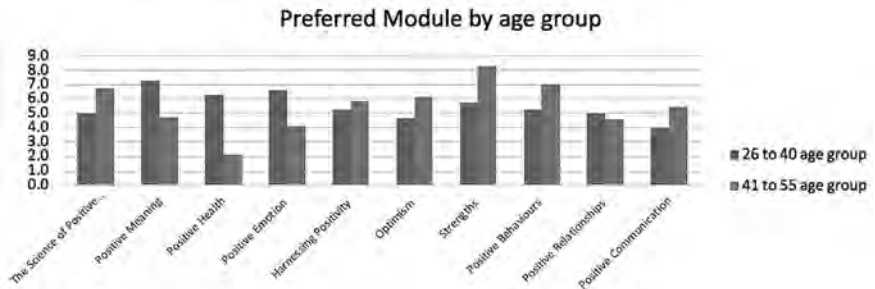


Figure 2: Comparison between age groups

The average scores when including the other two age groupings (18 to 25 and 56+) showed a skewness in the data. When these two groups were included, Positive Meaning and Positive Behaviours were deemed to be the most useful modules and Positive Emotion was seen to be the least useful (see Figure 3).

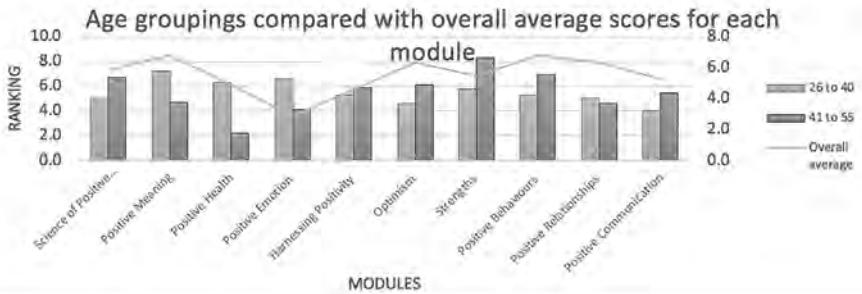


Figure 3: Age grouping with comparison of overall mean for each module

Most valued concept

Students were asked to qualify their reason for choosing the module they found most valuable. These qualitative responses were themed in order to identify whether it was the concepts shared in the modules or particular aspects that they valued. The analysis identified that the largest response area was around ‘thinking processes’, which does not align to one specific module but has links to a number of modules that develop understanding around the value of both positive and negative thinking. One student shared ‘I have gained clarity and understanding on why and how people make negative decisions ... instead of reacting to people’s negative decisions, I can react to why they are making them. Consequently, I am a lot calmer’. Another shared how a couple of earlier modules had a ‘profound effect’ on understanding how her thought patterns have affected her life in the past. She shared that the tips and strategies given were the beginning steps in a long journey of recovery. For another student, looking at her past thinking errors has ‘helped me to stop sabotaging myself and to overcome negative thoughts, especially about my ability to believe in myself’. She gained a stronger sense of self and used affirmations to reinforce that she has what it takes to improve herself and her situation in life.

The strengths module had a strong response from all age groups, but limited qualitative responses to justify why. Whereas, the positive behaviours module that discussed the stress spiral and how to catch negative thinking had lower ratings but one student shared that 'as a person who suffers from clinically diagnosed anxiety, this module was the most helpful as it suggested way of coping with stress and encouraged me to think about resilience'. The communication module was also one of the lowest rated modules, but again a student found value in learning strategies around positive communication that they shared 'has allowed my experiences with the university to exceed beyond all my expectations'.

Health was a module that was highly valued by the younger generation compared to the older generation. For those that chose health, they shared that it helped them to realise that the choices they make in what they eat, their level of physical activity, and the amount they sleep, all play a role in achieving better clarity of mind. One student shared that not only did it assist with the decision to give up smoking, but the family now make better food choices and they participate in exercise together. She states that 'I am a better person when I'm healthy'. Another shared 'If I am healthy, I can live life to the fullest'.

Personal stories of success

When asked to share personal stories of success that can be attributed to PLU, there were three themes that came through strongly:

1. Improved mental health
2. Personal physical health
3. Success with education

The strongest of these was the positive impact on mental health with students openly sharing how the unit helped improve their mental capacity. Students shared that by applying the strategies learnt, they were able to 'understand/mend/alleviate issues and mental challenges which has been carried for years'. Another shared 'I was cleared of my serious depression and negativity. I am now a positive and happy person that values my life and my image'. For another, it has given them clarity about the negative thinking process. This student has learnt how to deal better with a negative family member and has shared strategies with his

nephew and niece to help them as well. Further to this, some students entered the unit with negative feelings about the content, yet this next response demonstrates how impactful the unit can be on a student's mental health.

There was much hesitation beginning PLU. I was at a stage in my life where not much was positive and it was difficult to relate to the material. Throughout the course the content taught me how to have a better mental perspective.

Personal physical health was another theme that was evident with comments like 'I have successfully lost 6 kgs since the unit ended', to 'it helped me to quit smoking, choose healthy options and try to be the best role model I could be ... I sleep more ...'. Another student had a slightly different slant as this one entered university with chronic back pain after major surgery and therefore began with a physical disability which impacted negatively on her mindset and nearly caused her to drop her studies. PLU was very relevant to her situation and provided her with confidence and motivation to continue her studies.

The final theme was around the educational capacity of students. One student shared that she entered university with the expectation of failing, yet she realised that 'I needed to change my attitude to suit my goals'. Another had hesitations about whether this subject would be beneficial in their life but this student shared how 'I have gained skills and understanding of people and the complex relationships that exist' and it has allowed her to step up into student leadership roles in the university.

Epiphany – that 'ah-ha' moment

Students were asked if there was a single moment in time that they experienced an epiphany about either a deep-set belief system or a circumstance that had been positively impacted whilst undertaking PLU. This question achieved the largest number of responses with these falling into five key themes: deeper self-awareness; changes in personal beliefs, expanding worldviews; changes in beliefs around academic ability and social interactions.

Deeper self-awareness

Changes in 'self' were the strongest two themes that were identified.

The first theme was around growth and confidence and higher levels of personal self-awareness. Students shared phrases like 'I realised I am enough. I am good enough. I am worthy of respect. I am a good person' and 'belief in myself' showed that their inner dialogue had themselves talking more positively into their own lives. Alongside this, clarity was also mentioned where students shared 'I did have moments of clarity in which I could see the right choices to make during the term, but it wasn't until the term had ended that I started to put them into action. I still think back to my lessons and try to instil it in my life'. Another shared around mood and the impact it can have on them and those around them. One student stated 'understanding the effect that thought has on mood and how this can affect one's whole life was one of my lightbulb moments'. Even though positivity and the effects of positive thinking was highly evident, one student shared how her life had been so negative that her epiphany was related to bringing positivity into her world. She shared 'I was deeply negative about life with a lot of issues and would feel depressed and dragged down. I now see myself in a different light and am a more positive and encouraging person that wants to be around others to help and support'.

Changes in personal beliefs

The second part of the themes around 'self' related more to student's personal beliefs in and of themselves. In these responses, students shared around gaining a greater understanding about themselves; helping to clarify negative thoughts; boosting self-confidence; gaining a better outlook on life with attitudes that have changed and improved ability to handle stress. Some shared that they don't judge others or themselves as harshly as they had in the past, with another confidently stating that 'I can achieve anything I put my mind to'. For one student, the epiphany came in the realisation that they had the capacity to change. 'I had always thought that emotions and ideas of how to act could not be broken down. I now believe they can be and that has helped me self-improve in areas I used to struggle in'. Another shared that 'I gained an insight into my strengths and weaknesses as a person and my characteristics' and change came from that new knowledge. Some students shared that the changes they experienced were witnessed by friends and family. One shared 'others have seen a new me' and 'I have developed in my thinking and approach. Many have said they have

seen me grow and my thinking change.” Another shared ‘my family, friends and acquaintances noticed a change in my confidence, which was positive all around’.

Expanding worldviews

For many enabling students that have not experienced critical thinking or research to expand their knowledge, their worldview can be quite narrow (Armstrong & James, 2018). Changes around broadening of their minds and being more open-minded came through consistently in the responses. One student shared ‘my perception of others was changed – I was more open minded’, whilst another shared ‘I learnt a lot about the different aspects of the course which helped me to understand myself better and to view others from a different perspective’. Some found that this broadened worldview was evidenced by their family with one sharing ‘my family said they noticed I was more accepting of changes and ideas’. Another angle presented was that of external influences. For one student, the epiphany was around accepting that she can view the world differently to others, ‘I learned something about myself and my up-bringing ... I realised it’s ok to see the world differently from her. My way is neither right nor wrong, but it is my way of living to my beliefs’. Another’s worldview and trust in people had improved; ‘I realised that the world really is not such a bad place after all and not all people are horrible’. One student shared that stepping out of their comfort zone and completing the assessment where they had to perform random acts of kindness gave her a deeper appreciation for how she can impact the world around her. ‘I enjoyed the assessment where I performed random acts of kindness. This gave me the realisation that doing something small for a stranger is not only nice for them but also makes you feel good as well.’

Changes in beliefs around academic ability

Gaining belief in their capacity to study at university was another theme that was evident. One student who entered the STEPS course with low levels of confidence in her ability to handle academic study, found that ‘focusing on my strengths and thinking positively helped change all that’ and in-turn students gained increased confidence to learn. As one student states ‘I study more now that I realise the benefits it has’ whilst another shared ‘I viewed study differently. Rather than being a chore,

I can see it as enlightenment'. As their confidence in their ability to study increased, this gave many students a renewed vigour to continue on with their studies to complete a bachelor degree. One shared that 'I became determined to complete a uni degree' whilst another shared that it gave them 'confidence to apply for an undergrad program'. Students shared how the unit assisted them to change mindsets. One shared that although confident within themselves to study academically, the unit helped them to overcome some of the more physical challenges and the mental challenges that came with that. Another shared, 'I have used my strengths to accentuate my study methods and know that any small success is still a big step for the future'. Finally, this thought from another student demonstrates the mindset change that was uncovered 'nothing is impossible, just challenging'.

Social interactions

The final theme related to students' ability to positively interact with others on a more social level. One student shared 'my interactions with people were different, improved' whilst another shared 'socially, PLU made a positive impact. It strengthened some of my interpersonal skills, and helped me address some aspects of my personality that I've found socially challenging'. Ways of thinking about the role they play in relationships was highlighted where one stated 'I have become much better at accepting the differences in other people which has made interactions, social and academic, much easier'.

For some students, their epiphany was on understanding and appreciating the different types of relationships they were in and whether they had positive or negative effects. For some, it was about allowing others into their personal circle of influence where 'I made friends and allowed them into my life without expecting them to hurt me or abuse my friendship' whilst another shared that it 'allowed me to see the positive in my life and enabling me to build positivity into friendships'. Some looked deeper into the core of the relationships and shared 'I try and not make every situation about me and I listen more' where another understood that not all relationships are positive and this one shared 'I have given up toxic relationships'.

Word cloud

Students were asked to share one word that represented what they gained from undertaking PLU. These single word descriptors were put into a word cloud as a visual representation of the impact that PLU had on their lives, personally, emotionally, mentally and academically. As one student shared ‘the subject became one that I really enjoyed and have been grateful for participating in ever since’. These words share the positive impacts that the unit had on each of these students as each and every word expressed the essence of gratitude (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Word cloud of student's descriptors.

Discussion

There is value to be found in investigating the benefits of psychological wellness and personal well-being as it is an often overlooked construct in research. This is evident with research output on depression and anxiety exceeding the research output on subjective well-being extraneously. Although as Linley and Joseph (2004, p. 6) point out, there are encouraging trends with research into psychological well-being increasing since PP was introduced by Seligman in 1998. PP develops a person's strengths, capacity and virtues rather than solely focusing on weak areas. The PLU unit aims to see positive outcomes for each student that should be evident in their approach to study and further afield in their personal lives (Walters & James, 2020). The goal of this paper was to investigate whether this unit had positive impacts on the students' personal lives through improved mental capacity,

wellbeing and changed mindsets and whether this infiltrated into the world around them. The stories and examples expressed by the students overwhelmingly demonstrate the power that an optimistic mindset has through changing the neuro-pathways to think in a more positive manner, which in turn leads to better consequences both internally and externally on the world around them. Recent research by Walters and James (2020) found that students valued changes that improved their mindsets whereby refuting negative thought patterns and replacing them with a more optimistic outlook. These students firstly looked at how they could implement these strategies to employ change in their lives and this then infiltrated into the world around them. This was further supported by the research findings as students shared that they used this more optimistic outlook within their personal lives and in their student journey and they had a stronger sense of wellbeing and contentedness. There is an alignment between these findings and self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (1985) asserts that a person's values, motives and goals are inherently and positively associated with well-being. Sheldon and Elliot (1999) suggest that a positive sense of well-being results from psychological need satisfaction. Sagiv, Roccas and Hazan (2004) contend that a positive sense of well-being is more likely to occur when the person is in a place where they feel secure within a supportive environment so they can find out what their internal motives are and are encouraged to follow them.

When considering the role that positive emotions play on developing student's emotional wellbeing, Fredrickson (2001) shares that 'positive emotions serve as markers of flourishing, or optimal well-being'. Certainly, when students experience positive emotions such as joy, interest and contentment, these are moments that are not plagued by negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness and anger. Therefore, when reflecting on the positive experiences they had whilst undertaking a unit such as PLU, students are recalling those experiences and times that have brought positive change, in turn, promoting flourishing within their 'self' and the world around them. Fredrickson (2001, p. 1) claims that 'positive emotions are worth cultivating, not just as end states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved well-being over time'. Students entering into an enabling pathway prior to undergraduate degree, often enter with very low self-confidence in themselves and in their ability to handle academic study

(James, 2016). For many of these students, undertaking a unit such as PLU introduces them to a new way of thinking that may be foreign but in turn challenges them to reflect deeply on themselves whilst applying new concepts and strategies. The participants shared many stories of personal growth, changes in self-belief, improved confidence in their academic ability, and deep impacts on their external situations.

Friedrickson (2001) shared that positive emotions predicted greater enjoyment of social activities and therefore, may have a deeper impact on the way people interact with each other. This was evident in the research with students sharing that their social and interpersonal skills had improved and they were more likely to step out and trust other students. Erez and Isen (2003) theorised that feeling a 'positive affect' activates the dopaminergic system in brain areas responsible for executive control and flexible thinking. The affect infusion model (Forgas, 1995) proposes that when people are engaged in open, substantive, interpersonal interactions that engage a positive affect, they produce pro-social behaviour through engaging positive emotions, positive memories and more positive interactions and interpretations of social cues and communication. When considering the word cloud and the words that students used to describe their experience in PLU, the words demonstrate the value of the unit. Words such as empowering, enlightening, transforming, affirming, fulfilling all used to describe the impact that PLU had on their lives personally, emotionally, mentally and academically.

Conclusion

The overall mission of positive psychology as a branch of psychology is to better understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this paper, the vision was to investigate the impact that PLU had on students who undertook the unit whilst enrolled in an enabling program and to see whether it increased student's psychological wellbeing and reduced instances of stress. Through drawing on the tenets of Appreciative Inquiry, the study was designed to review the positive effects that this unit had on the students personally, emotionally and more broadly into their circles of influence. What was evident is that this unit had a profound effect on the students' sense of self and this had a flow-on effect into their personal sphere of influence. As their belief in self grew, so did the way they viewed the world, and the way they believe they can be a

better influence on the world around them. Their improved psychological well-being impacted on their own personal sphere, extended into their social sphere and enhanced their educational journey as well.

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About the author

Trixie James is a Lecturer within the School of Access Education STEPS program at CQUniversity. Trixie's research interests centre on the support and engagement of under-represented adults in the tertiary sector, with special interest in student engagement, quality teaching practices and positive psychology. Her breadth of research encapsulates her many research interests which is reflected in her research outputs

Victoria (Vikki) Walters is an Associate Lecturer within the STEPS program at CQUniversity on the Noosa Campus in the areas of Mathematics and Computer Skills. She is a registered Psychologist with a Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice. Vikki's research interests centre on the support and engagement of students facing mental health issues and their engagement in tertiary education.

Contact details

Trixie James
School of Access Education
CQUniversity, Australia

Email: t.james@cqu.edu.au