

First Australian Positive Psychology in Education Symposium
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**"Playing with Positive Psychology: an investigation
into the application of positive psychology in early
education programs"**

Anthony Semann, Colin Slattery and Lorraine Madden
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**Number and percentage distribution of
children attending by service type in NSW**

	Number	%
Long Day Care	128,023	57
Family Day Care Schemes	28,581	13
In-home Care Schemes	1,077	0
Outside School Hours Care	39,285	18
Vacation Care	22,688	10
Occasional Care	2,468	1
MACS	568	0
Mobiles and Toy Libraries	926	0
Aboriginal Playgroup	147	0
TOTAL	223,763	100

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Overview of the early childhood sector

- Delivers regulated and approved education to children aged birth to school aged
- Estimated 90,485 paid staff and 11,926 family day care and in home care caregivers (2006 childcare census)
- 61% of all long day care staff held a formal qualification in a children's services related field
- 21% held their highest qualification in teaching, 2% in nursing, 77% in a field relating to child care or other children's services and 1% in other relevant fields.
- 77% of all staff and 94% of caregivers undertook in-service training related to child care, financial or management subjects.

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Challenges within the early childhood sector

- Society perceptions of the place/value of early childhood education and care
- Poor conditions and low pay leading to high staff turnover
- Finding suitably qualified staff
- Increasing organisational and accountability requirements
- Ongoing changes to the profession
- Remaining competitive
- Providing and maintaining quality
- Leadership

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Support to the early childhood sector

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) is an Australian Government program introduced across Australia in 2006.

Professional learning and development support provided through a range of activities including:

- Face to face training
- Mentoring
- Individual service support
- Tele-links

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Using Gratitude and Best Possible Self

- Expressing gratitude and visualising best possible self found to enhance positive emotion (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) and in some cases effects last up to six months (Seligman et al., 2005)
- Concepts relatively easy to describe and implement after short explanation
- Possibly easier to implement than other interventions in the sector and can be completed at individual or team level

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Method

- 2 groups of early childhood directors (total $n=20$)
- Tele-coaching through telephone linkups
- Primarily directors in rural and remote NSW
- Two cycles of two sessions:
 - 1st introductory session of one hour facilitated introducing positive psychology and gratitude and best possible self interventions
 - Participants were encouraged to keep a gratitude journal (Lyubomirsky, 2007) until the 2nd session 3 to 4 weeks later as well as develop a best possible self statement
 - 2nd session discussed results and reported changes

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Results

All anecdotal!!!!

Within self

- Reported feeling better able to cope with issues as they had more perspective through exercising gratitude
- Reported that best possible self was energising and the majority of participants were able to see a vision for themselves

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Results

Within team

- Gratitude reported on the most
- Directors reported that some staff members “got it” while others didn’t
- In teams, directors noted less bickering among team members and an increased willingness to contribute to the team
- For those who didn’t “get it” – may not have been the correct intervention fit (Lyubomirsky, 2007)

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Supporting the supports to the early childhood sector

- Inclusion support is provided through regionally based Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) and a team of Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) who work directly with child care services.
- Across Australia there are 67 regionally based ISAs. This includes 18 regionally based ISAs.
- ISAs build the capacity of child care services to successfully include all children, including those with additional needs.
- The model of support is strengths based, and utilises coaching as a key capacity building strategy.

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Using strengths

'Strengths are natural, they come from within and we are urged to use them, develop them, and play to them by an inner, engaging desire.....when we use our strengths, we feel good about ourselves, we are better able to achieve things, and we are working towards fulfilling our potential'.

(Linley and Harrington, 2006b, p41)

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Method

A range of professional support is provided to ISFs including:

- Orientation training, which includes a one-day strengths-based and solution focused coaching program;
- Optional follow up coaching clinics to practice and refine skills;
- Team leader training, with a focus on leadership and coaching skills.

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Results

145 ISFs have attended strengths-based and solution focused coaching training as part of an introductory training package.

In a Training Needs Analysis distributed to all ISFs in 2008:

- 75.8% either strongly agreed or agreed that coaching training was effective in increasing confidence and skills;
- 85.7% either strongly agreed or agreed that team leader training was effective in increasing confidence and skills.

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Case studies: stories from ISFs

How are you currently using your strengths on a daily basis?

What have you noticed when you use your strengths – for yourself and others?

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How are you currently using your strengths on a daily basis?

'I do use humour during my day and I really think this puts people at ease'. (Humour and playfulness)

'I am using my listening skills daily. I now don't get too uncomfortable when there are long pauses in conversation, it leaves time for the person I am talking to, to think of what they are wanting to say without me trying to finish their statements or put words into their mouths'. (Perspective and wisdom)

'I always look to see what is working in a situation and encourage others to see the whole picture. Often we can become very focused on the negative aspects'. (Perspective and wisdom; Hope, optimism and future mindedness)

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How are you currently using your strengths on a daily basis?

- Encouraging staff to tell their story (Curiosity and interest in the world)
- Listening (Perspective and wisdom)
- Re-framing the story; Looking at positives not deficits (Hope, optimism and future-mindedness)
- Valuing all points of view; Recognising and acknowledging we don't have the answers (Judgement and critical thinking)
- Providing positive feedback (Appreciation of beauty and excellence)
- Realistic goal setting (Industry, diligence and perseverance)

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What have you noticed when you use your strengths - for yourself and others?

'I have noticed that people around me, (my team and myself), all seem to be happy to be at work and enjoy the work they do. I notice that people are more willing to open up and have genuine discussions about work and personal related topics'.

'I feel more comfortable when talking to staff at centres about their concerns, and feel by not asking too many "Why?" questions, staff seem more confident in their teams skills, and happy to develop new goals and action plans to work towards'.

'It helps me to stay focused and really listen to what is being said. It also helps staff feel more confident and begin to see what good things they

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What have you noticed when you use your strengths - for yourself and others?

- Reinforcement of own beliefs
- A sense of satisfaction and emotional well-being
- Building confidence in self and others
- Sharing knowledge and skills
- Building trust and mutual respect
- People build on current capacities extending to positive outcomes

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The challenges and opportunities in applying positive psychology

Challenges:

- Lack of autonomy
- Dominant discourses e.g. traditional ways of understanding leadership, team work

Opportunities:

- Positive well being
- Building resilience in staff/adaptive coping
- Ethical considerations of working with children
- More robust research around the use of positive psychology in early childhood education

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Contact Us

Anthony Semann

Director Semann & Slattery
anthony@semannslattery.com

Colin Slattery

Director Semann & Slattery
colin@semannslattery.com

Lorraine Madden

Manager Training, Research and Innovation
lorraine@semannslattery.com

W: www.semannslattery.com

P: 02 9557 1460

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