

# RESEARCH SUMMARY

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## Educator Perceptions of Resilient IMPACT: An Intentional Program to Build a Wellbeing-Responsive School Community<sup>1</sup>

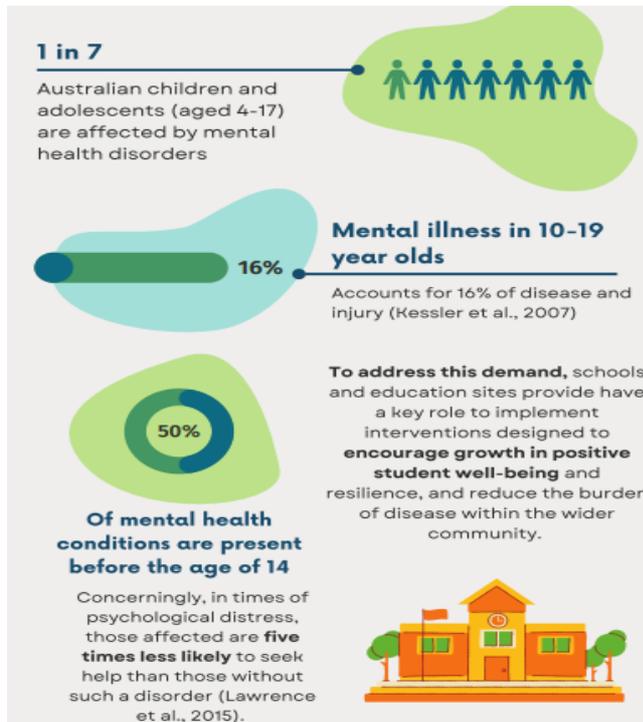
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### Background: Schools as Sites of Prevention and Early Intervention

**Mental illness and poor well-being amongst young people are a global concern:**



There are a range of programs and interventions delivered within schools that are designed to build wellbeing, mental health, and whole-of-life student outcomes.

**Positive education** has been significantly influential in this regard:

- Seligman et al. (2009) describe positive education as “education for both traditional skills and for happiness” (p. 293).

The **increase in evidence** relevant to the benefits of positive psychology and positive education in children and adolescents has created a compelling case for the **inclusion of well-being as an operational goal for educational systems** (White, 2016).

Teaching positive psychology concepts to young people that are considerate of their mental health and well-being potentially equips them with skills to flourish and greater awareness that can have a lifelong positive influence on their lives (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

### Taking a “School Community Approach”: Wellbeing Responsive Communities

It is problematic that social-emotional learning and positive education programs are rarely **embedded** within teaching practices and the culture of the school, and in general, these programs place an over-reliance on individualistic factors (e.g., a student’s knowledge, skills, mindsets) in understanding student functioning.

What is needed are programs that consider the **school as part of a broader community** system, identifying the systems and changes that need to take place to support a **culture of well-being and resilience** for individual and collective students.

1. Summary of: Burrowes, S. (2021). Perceptions of educators of the most significant change within the school community where intentional practice has been implemented. Submitted to fulfill the requirements of Masters in Applied Positive Psychology. Central Queensland University.

The concept of ‘well-being responsive communities’ (LBI, 2021) is purported to do this. It moves away from a reductionist approach to well-being and mental health, but instead values complexity, multi-disciplinary approaches, and the role of systems and communities to understand human functioning.



Concepts integrated in ‘well-being responsive communities’

## Resilient IMPACT: A Systemic Approach to Building a Wellbeing Responsive School Community (Tenison Woods College)

‘Resilient IMPACT’ is a LBI Foundation program that is designed to build wellbeing-responsive educational communities (or connected thriving communities), where the school community has sustainable methods to:

- **Respond to the deeper needs** (e.g., developmental, growth, trauma) that drive educational and wellbeing outcomes through intentional education, coaching, shared growth planning and local wellbeing solutions.
- **Build student capacity for wellbeing**, resilience and educational outcomes through intentional strategies and coaching methods, as personalised to individual student need and context.



The program was delivered in collaboration with Tenison Woods College, which is a large K-12 school in regional South Australia. The program was delivered from April 2019 to late 2021, with the current study implemented in mid-2021. Resilient IMPACT is founded upon the following key features:

Logic Model	• Co-designed Strategic and Implementation/ Communication Plan
IMPACT training and workshops	• Foundational Awareness Raising
Visible Capacity Building	• Side-By-Side Coaching and Support
IMPACT Coaches	• Community Champions
Community of Practice	• Embedding Tools and Strategies
Resources	• Resource Library and Extension Tools/ Modules
Community Ownership	• Dynamic Community Owned Evaluation & Implementation Review

## Study Aims

The purpose of this study was to evaluate Resilient IMPACT program and its effects on Tenison Woods College (TWC). The study was designed to establish the following three points:

1. Educators’ perceptions of the **most significant change** within the school community.
2. The **‘stickiness’** (or degree the program is embedded within practice) of Resilient IMPACT.
3. The specific **areas of change** and where intentional practice has been implemented and subsequently embedded in the school community.

## Study Methodology

The study employed the **Most Significant Change evaluation methodology**, as detailed by Davies and Dart (2005). This represents a qualitative or “**participatory**” evaluation process.

The researcher assessed written accounts of educators of the most significant change perceived (primary and secondary teachers and school leadership) ( $n = 49$ ). They then conducted focus groups ( $n = 18$ ) to further investigate the initial themes identified and gain deeper understanding of the impacts.

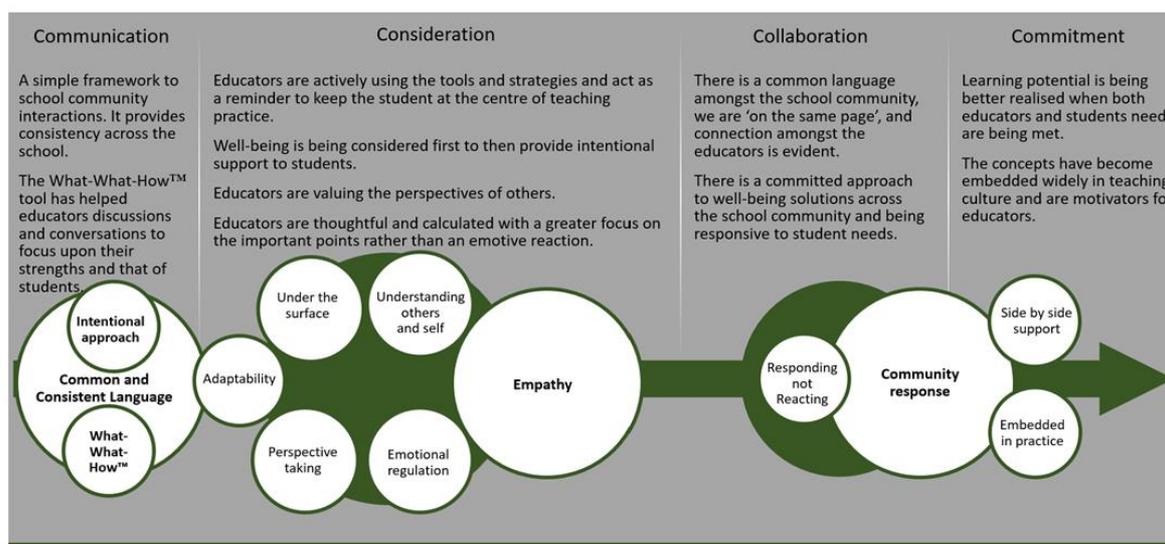
Analysis of data was undertaken focusing on educators’ perspectives of the most significant changes following program implementation (Davies and Dart, 2005).

## Results

The study found that Resilient IMPACT had led to the following four key outcomes:

- **Communication** - Educators identified that the adoption of a common and consistent language and framework, the What-What-How® embedding tool, has been widely accepted and integrated into practice. They are being deliberate, thoughtful, and calculated with the use of the What-What-How®, referring to their approach as being ‘intentional’ with both colleagues and students.
- **Consideration** - Educators demonstrated empathy and a deeper understanding of others and themselves by looking ‘under the surface’. Being aware of using perspective to assist in the regulation of their own emotions, in turn educators found they are being more considerate of the emotions of students and of colleagues.
- **Collaboration** - The importance of forming strong, meaningful relationships has been enhanced by staff, with exercises such as the ‘Community of Practice’ demonstrating the wider collaboration across the TWC community. Educators are working together, responding to student and staff needs, rather than being reactive to surface or presenting factors such as poor behaviour.
- **Commitment** - committed approach to sharing and connection with one another and a well-being first approach to staff and student interactions.

### Most Significant Change Themes demonstrated from Resilient IMPACT



**Figure 1.** Themes from the Most Significant Change validation for Resilient IMPACT implementation and acceptance at TWC. Intentional well-being and resilience principals into practice.

## Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to identify educator perspectives of the most significant changes that have occurred following the implementation of Resilient IMPACT.

### Meaningful outcomes were evident and sustainable

The study found that the Resilient IMPACT program delivered meaningful outcomes for the Tenison Woods school community, in a manner that was **aligned to the stated outcomes of the program** (building a wellbeing-responsive school community). It was found that the changes identified offer adaptability and were seen to be sustainable post intervention.

### The Resilient IMPACT approach “stuck”

There is evidence that core program content and methods (e.g., What-What-How®, intentionality, responding not reacting, under the surface) have “stuck” and **are embedded within the practice culture** of the school. In turn, Resilient IMPACT has supported a greater appreciation amongst staff of their ‘impact’ and an increased understanding of where students are coming from.

### Implications for policy and practice

This research **supports the value of school-based wellbeing responses** drawing upon (1) positive psychology and education principles, (2) intentional practice and (3) and broader holistic approaches to wellbeing. Importantly, a ‘**well-being first**’ approach to education is founded upon fostering positive relationships amongst educators and students to build student whole-of-life outcomes.

The study has highlighted the importance of education policy and leaders **allocating resources and time** to ensure **wellbeing-responsive approaches** are **embedded** within teaching practices and overall school culture.

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