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A PROPOSED PILOT STUDY OF A GRATITUDE PRACTICE PROGRAM TO INCREASE GRATITUDE AMONG EDUCATORS: THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF GRATITUDE PRACTICE TO INCREASE WORK ENGAGEMENT AND BUFFER AGAINST AND DECREASE BURNOUT

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Abstract: Burnout in educational settings is an international issue. Drawing on practitioner experience in Flexi schools for disenfranchised young people and the methods of positive psychology, this paper outlines a gratitude practice program (GPP) as a proposed intervention to address burnout within Flexi schools. The proposed intervention comprises a full-day workshop and 10 weekly group coaching sessions that aim to develop gratitude practice among teachers. The intention of the paper is to consider the GPP's capacity to increase gratitude and the potential benefit of the program to participants. This proposed pilot study will be delivered to 14 educators in a single school. A pretest-posttest, multi-method design of evaluation will be presented and discussed. The GPP's capacity to increase gratitude will be evaluated utilising a gratitude questionnaire. A focus group will be used to ascertain the benefit of the program. It is predicted that the GPP will increase gratitude and will be found beneficial by participants. The potential of the GPP to increase work engagement is discussed in terms of future studies. This proposed pilot study offers a practical intervention that can potentially address the real-world problem of burnout in alternative educational settings.

Keywords*:* gratitude, work engagement, burnout, gratitude practice

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This proposed pilot study of a gratitude practice program (GPP) was developed as part of a Master of Applied Positive Psychology that I was completing for professional development as a leader of a Flexi school reengaging disenfranchised young people. The proposal was informed by nine years' experience, seven in leadership positions, within the Flexi school setting. It combines the knowledge and experience of working in the field, with the science of positive psychology.

Flexi schools aim to re-enfranchise young people through holistic education. The young people who attend Flexi schools often have layers of complexity in their lives resulting from trauma, neglect, poverty, generational unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental illness. Due to social, economic, structural, and operational factors, young people attending Flexi schools have often experienced exclusion and failure in conventional school settings (Morgan, Pendergast, Brown, & Heck, 2014). The learning centres are staffed with multidisciplinary educators including, but not limited to, teachers, social workers, youth workers, and student support workers. Collaborative practice among the diverse professionals in this setting is key to achieving positive outcomes for young people with complex needs (Edwards, 2004).

However, Flexi schools can be a challenging environment in which to maintain staff well-being. The staff at Flexi schools are responsible for creating a safe learning environment that provides innovative academic education as well as, social, emotional, physical, and well-being programs and support. Staff are often challenged by what can feel like competing multiple demands. For example, in a single day staff can be required to support a young person who is suicidal, to facilitate classes on and off site, and to be constantly supporting young people to negotiate safe and respectful ways of engaging with each other. These demands can lead to ongoing emotional strain.

Positive Psychology (PP) became a recognized branch of psychology in 1998, presented as an initiative by Martin Seligman (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). PP is the scientific study of the optimal conditions for individual, group, and organisational flourishing (Gable & Haidt, 2005). PP aims to broaden the understanding of well-being from clinical psychology's perspective of relieving suffering to a more complete view, encompassing the factors that increase happiness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Over the past 15 years there has been significant growth in size, reach, impact, and breadth of the field of PP: for example, Rusk and Water's (2013) quantitatively study, analysed data from 1992 onwards and found there were 216 citable PP-related journal documents in 1992 compared to 2,300 in 2011 (Rusk & Waters, 2013). This growth has led to different PP topics being investigated across a diverse range of disciplines (Rusk & Waters, 2013). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) offer an introduction to PP in a special journal issue in the *American Psychologist*.

Positive psychology provides a new perspective when addressing real world problems by focusing attention on cultivating the desired phenomena, rather than fixating on what needs to be mitigated. Utilising this perspective, this proposed pilot study aims to explore gratitude practice as a means to addressing burnout through focusing on building work engagement. This paper will provide a literature review of burnout and work engagement. The outcomes of gratitude practice applied in varied contexts will also be presented, demonstrating the effectiveness of gratitude practice in promoting factors of optimal functioning. Thus, the transferability of gratitude practice as a pathway to foster work engagement in the Flexi-school setting is worth exploration. Finally, an overview of the proposed pilot study will be provided.

Burnout

Chronic stress leading to burnout in education is an internationally recognised issue. Burnout is defined as a prolonged response to stress in the workplace (Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). More precisely, burnout is conceptualised as a multidimensional model operationalised as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and inefficacy (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). Emotional exhaustion represents the dimension of the basic stress experience; it gives rise to feelings of being overextended and depleted of resources. Depersonalisation often develops in response to emotional exhaustion and refers to a negative detached response to aspects of work. Inefficacy has been shown to develop either as a consequence of or in parallel to the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Inefficacy (reduced personal accomplishment) refers to feelings of incompetence and reduced productivity at work (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Numerous international studies on burnout in the education setting highlight an ongoing concern (Brouwers & Tomic, 2014; Demir & Kara, 2014; Khani & Mizaee, 2015; Park & Lee, 2013; Ventura, Salanova, & Llorens, 2015). Specifically, the detrimental effects of burnout include: physical and mental illness of the educator requiring treatment; a decrease in teaching quality and student outcomes; and negative job performance indicators including absenteeism, staff turnover, and a decrease in productivity and effectiveness. Burnout affects the educator, students, and the school as an organisation (Kyriacou, 1987; Mancini, Wuest, Vantine, & Clark, 1984; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Studies of the predictors of burnout provide insight into what areas interventions need to target to be effective. Leiter and Maslach (2004) evaluated six areas of worklife as a model to understand the organisational context of burnout. This model suggests that workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values mediate burnout. The greater the misfit between these six areas of worklife and the individual, the greater the likelihood the individual will burnout. Leiter and Maslach's (2004) cross-sectional analysis drew on a large sample size of 8339 participants, across five countries and included nine different occupations. These findings were supported by longitudinal analysis with a different set of participants (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Consistency of the psychometric data of the areas of worklife scale "across a variety of occupations, organisation settings, national contexts and language" support the six areas of

worklife as a mediating model to burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2004, p.125). Leiter and Maslach's (2004) model highlights the complexity of the development of burnout as the relationship between the six areas of worklife and burnout could not be explained by a simple additive model. Furthermore, contrast among findings indicates that an individual's relationship to burnout may be unique to the perspectives they bring, the position they hold, and their personal characteristics. Therefore, interventions fostering best fit between the individual and the six areas of worklife may buffer against burnout.

The job demand-resources model (JD-R) also offers insight into developing effective interventions against burnout. JD-R proposes that the interaction between job demands and the job resources can explain the process of burnout. In this model, job demands are defined as the physical, psychological, social, and organisational aspects of work that require sustained effort; and job resources are defined as the physical, social, physiological, and organisational aspects that may be functional in achieving goals; reducing job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; or stimulating personal growth, learning, and development (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). The JD-R model is supported by numerous empirical studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Of particular interest is the buffering effect of job resources on burnout. Bakker, Demerouti, and Euwema's (2005) study of 1012 employees of a higher education institute demonstrated that job resources including autonomy, receiving feedback, social support, and high-quality relationships with their supervisors buffered against burnout beyond the strain of job demands. Therefore, interventions that increase job resources may be a viable pathway to combating burnout.

Work Engagement

With the emergence of positive psychology (PP), research into burnout has turned to its antithesis, "work engagement". PP focuses on the elements that build individual, community, and organisation flourishing (Carr, 2013). Work engagement focuses on the positive qualities of the individual's interaction with work. Early on, in the conceptualisation of work engagement in academia, Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined work engagement as the opposite ends of the burnout dimensions, exhaustion–energy, depersonalisation–involvement, and inefficacy–efficacy. More recently, work engagement has been conceptualised as a distinct concept, rather than the polar opposite to burnout, that is related negatively to burnout and defined as "a persistent, positive motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli, Slanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). In this context, vigour refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience; it sits on the opposite end of a continuum of energy to exhaustion. Dedication is characterised by a strong involvement in one's work and sits on the opposite end of a continuum of identification to depersonalisation. Based on Schafeli et al.'s qualitative study, absorption, defined as being fully engrossed in one's work, is included despite not being the opposite of inefficacy (as cited in Schaufeli et al., 2002). This paper utilises work engagement operationalised as "vigour, dedication and absorption"

(Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Work engagement is a viable path to combating burnout and is worth further investigation (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Fostering work engagement may be a viable pathway to alleviate burnout. Kern, Waters, Adler, and White's (2014) evaluation of 153 school employees' well-being demonstrated that "well-being factors predicted health, life and job outcomes independently of negative emotion" (p. 507). Thus, interventions targeted at building on strengths may obtain results above and beyond reducing negative affect (Kern et al., 2014).

Furthermore, engaged workers are happier and healthier than non-engaged workers (Bakker, 2009). Schaufeli, Taris, and Bakker's (2007) large study of 2164 participants from a wide range of occupations found significant health benefits for engaged workers. This study operationalised well-being as perceived health, overall life satisfaction, and absent days due to sickness and demonstrated that work engagement was positively related to perceived health and life satisfaction, and negatively related to absent days. Schaufeli et al.'s (2007) inclusion of objective indicators (reported absent days) strengthens the findings in this study as subjective measures may be distorted (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Furthermore, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Van Rhenen's (2009) study adds support for the expectation that engaged workers have less frequent absent days than disengaged workers. However, Schaufeli et al.'s (2009) longitudinal study also highlights the complexity of the related constructs of work engagement through the JD-R model. Job resources are negatively related to absentee frequency but not duration, while job demands in burnout are positively related to absentee duration (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Thus, work engagement is related to healthier and happier workers, but factors of burnout may need to be considered as well when developing interventions to promote work engagement to its potential.

Additionally, engaged workers are more resourceful, leading to further engagement and buffering against burnout. Job resources are an antecedent to work engagement (Sarti, 2014). Schaufeli et al.'s (2009) study adds significant value to this concept, with evidence that work engagement may be self-maintaining through job resources. Moreover, Schaufeli et al.'s (2009) finding of the presence of gain cycles adds further value to Bakker et al.'s (2005) discovery of the buffering effects of job resources against burnout. Schaufeli et al. (2009) found that high work engagement predicted an increase in resources a year later, which predicted further engagement at the end of that year. Extending on Bakker et al.'s (2005) work, Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, and Xanthopoulou (2007) provide additional evidence of the buffering effects of job resources in the educational setting by exploring job resources effects on the relationship between pupil misbehaviour and work engagement. Bakker et al. (2007) found that five job resources, including supervisor support, organisational climate, innovativeness, and appreciation, moderated the impact of pupil misbehaviour on work engagement. Thus, interventions increasing engagement may buffer against educator burnout and be self-maintaining.

Furthermore, engaged workers perform better (Bakker, 2009). Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke's (2004) study, involving 146 participants, revealed that job resources were related to extra-role performance. That is, autonomy, social support, and the high possibility of professional development were positively related to pro-organisational behaviour. Likewise Schaufeli et al. (2007) demonstrated a positive relationship between work engagement and job performance where job performance was operationalised as in-role performance, extra-role performance, and innovativeness. An example of the outcomes of engaged workers is empirically demonstrated in a study by Salanova, Agut, and Peira's (2005) involving 342 employees from 58 hotels and 56 restaurants. Their findings indicate that employees who perceived available resources were more engaged, which related to higher levels of service climate. The positive association between resources, engagement, and service climate was also true at the group level and in turn was positively related to collective customer performance appraisal. Implementing the GPP in Flexi schools would provide empirical data to determine whether work engagement would also be positively associated to student appraisals. Together, these studies demonstrate the value of job resources' effect on job performance through work engagement. This paper will further the knowledge on work engagement by addressing the imperative calls to focus on interventions targeting engagement (Maslach, 2003; Sonnentag, 2011).

Job and personal resources offer a pathway to fostering work engagement. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli's (2009) longitudinal study of 163 participants found strong empirical support for a reciprocal model linking job resources, personal resources, and work engagement. Additionally, Hakanen, Perhoniemi, and Toppinen-Tanner (2008) found support for positive gain spirals between resources and work engagement. That is, resources at time one predicted work engagement at time two, and reciprocal gain spirals were evident over time. Therefore, interventions aimed at increasing resources are a viable pathway to increase work engagement and may initiate a sustaining, broadening, and building relationship between resources and work engagement.

The practice of gratitude may offer a pathway to foster work engagement (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Experiencing the emotion of gratitude: leads to high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect, and life satisfaction (Polak & McCullough, 2006); is associated with relationship formation and may play a significant role in building and maintaining relationships (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012); is central to pro-social behaviour (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Grant & Dutton, 2012; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001); creates an upstream reciprocity flowing from one individual to the next to influence the organisation (Chang, Lin, & Chen, 2012); is significantly correlated with job satisfaction (Waters, 2012); is incompatible with resentment (Roberts, 2004); and fosters resilience (Fredrickson, 2004). Acts of gratitude are related to: emotional catharsis, generating reciprocity and a "flow-on effect" of engaging in further grateful actions (Waters & Stokes, 2015); improved relationships, increased resilience,

improved coping, decreased depression, and a general optimistic perspective (Howells & Cumming, 2012); and positive transformation (Howells, 2014). The outcomes of gratitude practice foster the antecedents of work engagement suggesting gratitude may be a pathway to work engagement.

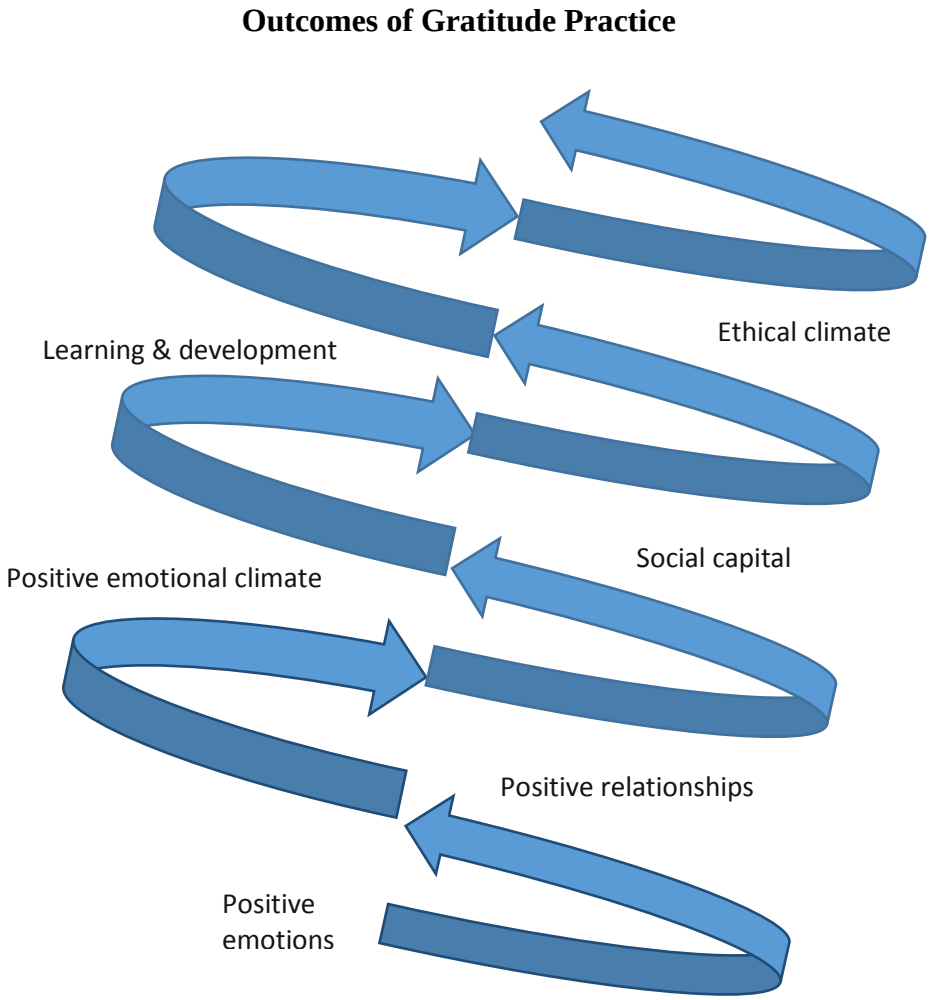

Figure 1. Broadening and building in a workplace.

Specifically, gratitude practice may increase work engagement and buffer against burnout through increasing job resources, personal resources, and fostering the six areas of worklife. The formation and maintenance of positive relationships has been identified consistently as an outcome of gratitude practice (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Howells & Cumming, 2012; McCullough et al., 2001). Positive relationships are associated with an increase in numerous resources including: improved cognitive performance (Ybarra et al., 2008); physical and emotional support leading to improved recovery from illness

or loss in the workplace, and increased commitment to the organisation (Lilius et al., 2008); psychological safety and learning behaviours (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009); interpersonal helping with work tasks (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007); and upward spirals of trust and cooperation (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kolhles, 2008).

Positive emotions are also consistently identified as an outcome of gratitude practice (Howells & Cumming, 2012; Polak & McCullough, 2006). According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions broaden one's attention and build one's cognitive, social, psychological, and physical resources. Positive emotions are associated with broadening and building positive relationships that lead to productive and supportive teams (Sekerka, Vacharkulksemusk, & Fredrickson, 2012). The broadening and building effect of positive emotions on positive relationships continues to foster job resources, including: a positive emotional climate, creating social capital, and fostering learning and development (Fredrickson, 2003); and, meaning and purpose in one's work and an ethical climate (Arnaud & Sekerka, 2010). These resources reinforce the experience of positive emotions and continue to broaden and build as demonstrated in Figure 1. Though further research is need to see if this is generalisable to Flexi settings, it is expected that the benefits of positive emotions are boundless (Sekerka et al., 2012) and will continue to build job resources and foster positive developments in areas of worklife.

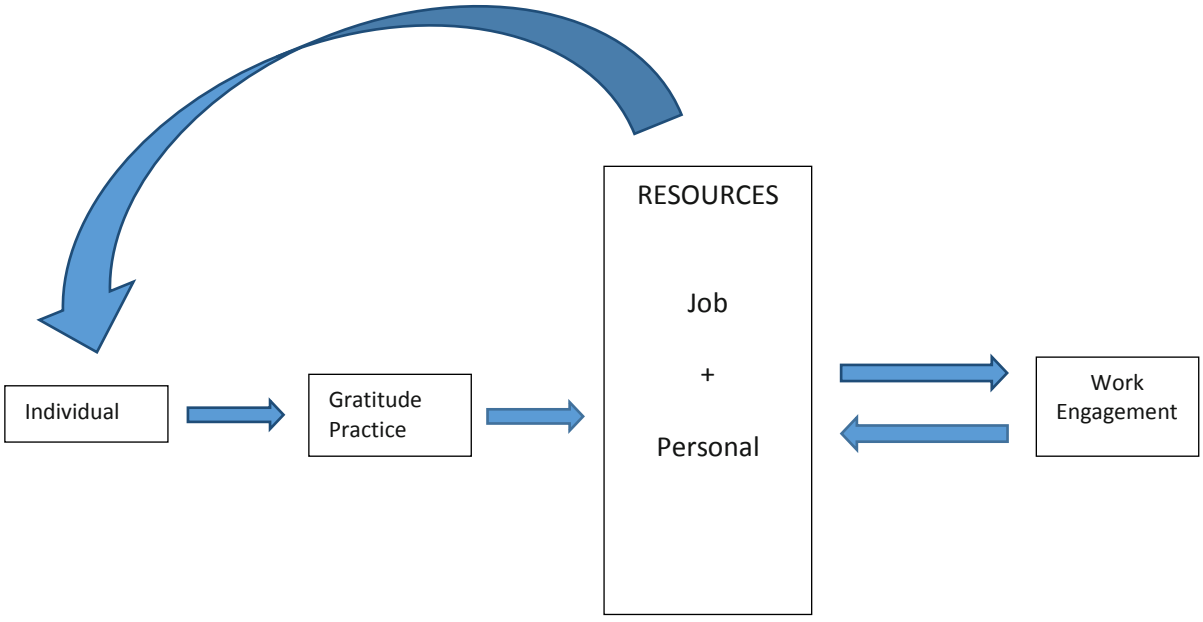

Figure 2. Reciprocal relationships between resources, work engagement, and the individual.

The upward spirals of reciprocity evident from gratitude practice (Chang et al., 2012; Waters & Stokes, 2015) and then subsequently from positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), suggest that the practice of gratitude may be self-maintaining in fostering job resources. Further,

the reciprocal relationship between job resources, personal resources, and work engagement, together with the reciprocal nature of gratitude and its outcomes, suggest that gratitude practice may be self-sustaining in maintaining work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2008; see Figure 2). These same resources may also contribute to a better job-person match by contributing positively to the six areas of worklife. The possible contributions the outcomes of gratitude could make towards the six areas of worklife are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Contributions the outcomes of gratitude may make towards the six areas of worklife

	Six Areas of Worklife (Leiter & Maslach, 2008)					
Outcomes of Gratitude	Control: perceived capacity to influence work, exercise autonomy, and gain access to resources	Workload: job demands	Reward: monetary, social and intrinsic rewards are consistent with expectations	Values: the underlying ideals and motives for doing the work	Community: quality of social interaction	Fairness: Perception of fair decisions and respect amongst colleges.
Positive Relationships	Positive relationships are associated with high levels of trust. High trust levels may suggest an increase in autonomy. Further positive relationships lead to an increase in resources.	Positive relationships lead to social, psychological and physical resources. Resources buffer against the effects of work demands.	Positive relationships are associated with increased commitment to work.	Positive relationships may positively influence values through the development of positive emotions.	Positive relationships are high quality relationships	Respect and fairness are elements of a positive relation.
Positive Emotions	Positive emotions may positively influence control through the development of positive relationships. Additionally, positive emotions lead to an increase in resources.	Positive emotions lead to social, psychological and physical resources. Resources buffer against the effects of work demands.	Positive emotions foster individuals to find meaning and purpose in their work.	Positive emotions foster individuals to find meaning and purpose in their work.	Positive emotions promote positive relationships	Positive emotions promote supportive teams. It may be expected that fairness and respect are required for this.

Conceptualising Gratitude Practice

This proposed research project will draw upon Rusk, Vella-Brodrick, and Waters' (2015) conceptualisation of appreciative functioning as a complex dynamic system, wherein they define a system as "a set of regular interacting components that work together" (p. 20). Further, they propose that gratitude and gratefulness (appreciative functioning) are a complex dynamic system with multiple interacting components. The lack of a perceived agent is the distinguishing feature between gratefulness and gratitude (Rusk et al., 2015). That is, gratefulness can be triggered by materialistic goods, activities, and religion (Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub, & Dalrymple, 2004), while gratitude is triggered by the "perceived agency of a benefactor" (Rusk et al., 2015, p. 11). Howells (2012) argues that gratitude must involve an action of expression. For example, you can be grateful for the plants in your garden but unless you act on this from a place of gratitude, such as watering the plants with a sense of thanks, then you will not experience the full effects of gratitude. However, Waters and Stokes (2015) contend that the emotion of gratitude (gratefulness) is a valid and central component. Drawing from these perspectives, gratitude will be operationalised as emotion-gratitude and action-gratitude that interacts at an interpersonal, transpersonal, and intrapersonal level. Specifically, emotion-gratitude can be defined as a state of feeling grateful (Emmons & Mishra, 2011), It can be felt in response to a human benefactor (interpersonal) or a spiritual or worldly entity (transpersonal), but is experienced internally (intrapersonal); while action-gratitude is defined as a behavioural response expressed towards someone (interpersonal) or something (transpersonal; Howells, 2012). Together, emotion-gratitude and action-gratitude are conceptualised herein as gratitude practice.

The Proposed Pilot Study

This proposed pilot study consists of a GPP to build resources and contribute to the six areas of worklife in order to increase work engagement and buffer against burnout experienced by educators working with disenfranchised young people. The GPP builds on the existing literature on gratitude interventions to develop a holistic, individualised approach. This approach incorporates two key elements:

- Gratitude practice sits within context. That is, it incorporates and builds upon the individual's understanding of gratitude. For example, lay people's definition of gratitude varies and is influenced by their cultural backgrounds (Morgan, Gulliford, & Kristjánsson, 2014). Their cultural also influence how individuals engage with interventions and the effectiveness of interventions (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Additionally, individuals may benefit from customising gratitude to suit their needs (Waters & Stokes, 2015).

- Gratitude practice is, specifically, the habitual performance of exercising gratitude. Empirical evidence suggests the practice of gratitude can develop the momentary feeling of gratitude (state gratitude) into a more permanent disposition (trait gratitude) via the consolidation of neuron pathways (Rusk & Waters, 2015). Further, trait gratitude is

positively correlated with life satisfaction and negatively correlated with burnout (Chan, 2011).

Thus, through the practice of gratitude, the benefits may be accessible to those with and without trait gratitude. Ultimately the GPP furthers the knowledge of how gratitude influences people by showing how it can be taught to those in central roles, such as educators (Carr, 2013).

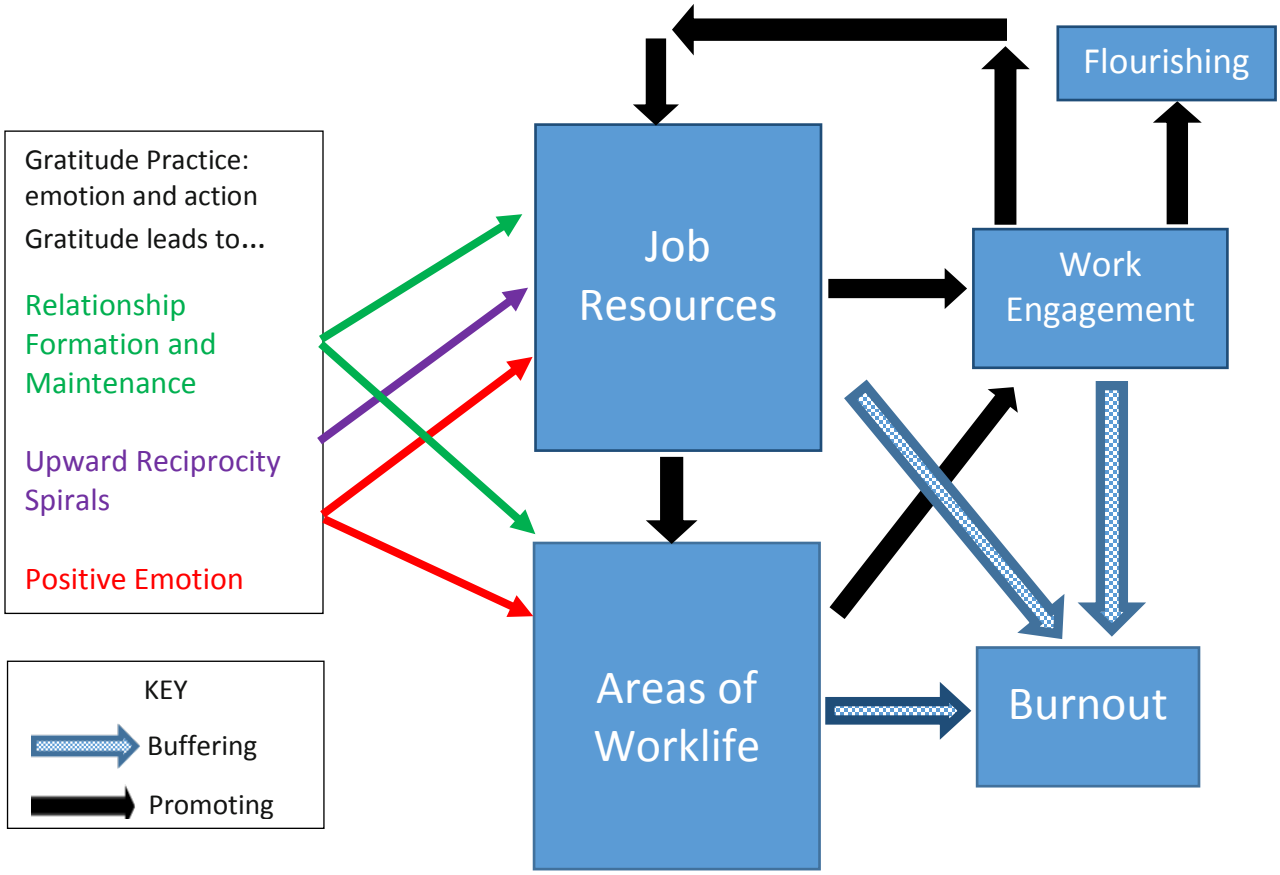

Figure 3. Conceptual model.

The aim of this research project is to develop a gratitude program that increases work engagement and simultaneously buffers against and decreases burnout in multidisciplinary professionals working with disenfranchised young people. By conceptualising gratitude practice as a complex dynamic system, the objective is to activate the full potential of gratitude's qualities through exercising gratitude to build resources and foster the six areas of worklife to promote "vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74) and to buffer against and or reduce exhaustion, depersonalisation and inefficacy (see Figure 3). The first intention of this proposed pilot study is to establish whether the GPP increases gratitude. The second intention is

to determine whether the participants find it beneficial and enjoy the program. Thus, the proposed pilot study provides a foundation to explore the potential benefits of gratitude practice.

Overview of Approach

The approach to developing and delivering the GPP draws on the existing literature on gratitude practice in education. To gain greater understanding of the phenomena of gratitude, Howells and Cumming (2012) delivered two one-hour workshops with the aim of conceptualising gratitude, acquiring strategies to apply gratitude, and exploring the application of gratitude in the classroom. In order to further understand the phenomena of gratitude in education, Howells (2014) delivered a two-and-a-half-day workshop aimed at developing gratitude practice. The first day of the workshop involved conceptualising gratitude, and drew on scientific findings about gratitude and the participants' individual understandings of gratitude (Howells, 2014). The focus on the second day was on developing strategies that were relevant to, and exploring the challenges associated with, the practice of gratitude (Howells, 2014). Participants were then invited to practise gratitude with their class daily and to buddy up with another teacher for support. Building on the knowledge gained by Howells (2014) and Howells and Cumming (2012), the GPP involves a one-day workshop and ten subsequent one-hour group coaching sessions delivered weekly. The combination of a workshop and the coaching sessions will help participants meet the challenges that may be experienced with conceptualising gratitude and its paradoxical nature of causing feelings of indebtedness (Howells, 2014). It aligns with the suggestion that interventions of longer durations increase the likelihood and magnitude of well-being outcomes (Sin & Lyubmirsky, 2009). To this end, the GPP workshop will involve four key components: conceptualising gratitude from the participant's perspective; exploring the challenges and caveats of gratitude; examining both gratitude as a complex dynamic system and the benefits of gratitude; and finally, providing an overview and invitation to explore a way forward with GPP.

Method

The content of each component of the GPP workshop is grounded in the literature of gratitude interventions in the education setting. The sequence, aim, content, and structure of the gratitude practice workshop is illustrated in Table 2.

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Table 2

Gratitude one-day workshop

Workshop Sessions	Aim of the Session and Justification	Content	Structure
Session 1 Conceptualizing Gratitude – Part 1 (90 minutes)	1. Develop an appreciation for the different definitions of gratitude. 2. Expand individuals understanding of gratitude. 3. Develop a shared understanding of participants context. Component one acknowledges that individuals have varying conceptualizations of gratitude and that there are further differences between cultures (Morgan, Gulliford & Kristjánsson, 2014). Additionally, component one sets the foundation to ensure that the gratitude practices that are formulated in subsequent coaching sessions are embedded in context (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).	Reflection and discussion around the following questions: 1. What does gratitude mean to you? 2. When do you feel gratitude? 3. How does it feel? 4. How do you express gratitude?	Think-Pair-Share (TPS) 1. Participants reflect individually on the questions. 2. Participants partner up and share their reflections with each other. 3. Participants form a small group and share their reflections – identifying the similarities and differences. Then share findings with all participants. TPS is a cooperative learning strategy that provides and supports conceptual understanding of a topic through increasing critical thinking (Kaddoura, 2013). TPS supports increased participation and processing of information (Fitzgerald, 2013).

Session 2 Challenges and Caveats of Gratitude (30 minutes)	1. Develop an awareness of the challenges and caveats associated with gratitude. Despite the association with the negative feelings of indebtedness and obligation, recent studies have shown it is inconsequential to the gains from gratitude practice and that gratitude practice may in fact reduce this experience (Howells, 2014; Waters & Stokes, 2015).	Share information and invite discussion. 1. Gratitude can be associated with feelings of ineptness and obligation (Gulliford, Morgan & Kristjánsson, 2013; Howells, 2012). 2. One does not need to feel grateful all of the time (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cummings, 2012). 3. There may be times when it is inappropriate to feel and express gratitude (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cumming, 2012).	Whole group approach: Facilitator shares the information as outlined in the content and invites participants to partner up and share examples of when this may be the case. Finally participants will be invited to share examples with the whole group. Face to face discussions that allow people to connect purpose and meaning for the conversation to their learning are associated with increased learning outcomes (Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, & Piggott, 2010). Purpose and meaning may be cultivated by providing the opportunity for participants to possibly share personal experiences one on one.
Session 3 The Practice of Gratitude – Conceptualizing Gratitude (part 2) and Exploring the Benefits of Gratitude (60 minutes)	1. Develop an understanding of gratitude practice as a complex dynamic system involving emotion and action gratitude. 2. Explore the outcomes of gratitude in relation to well-being, work engagement, and student outcomes. Howells (2012) identifies that teachers are often motivated when they can see their work will contribute to improved student outcomes.	1. Discuss Gratitude Practice as a complex dynamic system incorporating emotion and action gratitude as described in the paper. 2. Discuss outcomes of gratitude, including well-being outcomes, links to building resources, work engagement, and burnout as described in the paper. 3. Explain that students can benefit the same as the staff from gratitude and can increase learning outcomes (Froh and Bono, 2011; Howells, 2012).	Whole group approach: Share the findings from studies mentioned above.

Session 4 Overview and Invitation (60 minutes)	1. Understand the coaching component of the GPP. 2. Identify who would like to be involved. Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found that self-selected participants benefited the most from interventions. Due to the flow-on effect and upstream reciprocity effect of gratitude those who do not participate in the GPP may still benefit. Furthermore, group coaching is only effective if participants are willing (Brown & Grant, 2010).	1. Explain the commitment of the coaching program as mentioned above. 2. Stipulate it is professional development and delivered during work hours. 3. Invite people to participate in the program.	Whole group approach: Explain the process and time commitment of the coaching program as mentioned above. Small group approach: Participants to read and complete a Plus, Minus, Interesting chart (PMI) to help participants evaluate the value of gratitude and their interest in committing to the program. Encourage participants to discuss. Ask participants to identify their interest at the end. PMI is a tool for examining and evaluating ideas (de Bono, 2014). It requires three columns to be drawn up on a page and labeled plus, minus, and interesting. Participants then add their thoughts to the columns.

The 10 coaching sessions will utilise Brown and Grant's (2010) GROUP model of practice that was developed specifically for group coaching. GROUP stands for five phases:

- Goal: Identify what the group would like to achieve from each session.
- Reality: Develop awareness of the current situation and its impact on the goal.
- Options: Identify and assess available options.
- Understanding others: Connect to a shared understanding through deep observation of internal responses to what is being discussed.
- Performance: Develop individual and group action plans.

The GROUP model (Figure 4) is used for the first session and is then followed by the RE-GROUP model (Figure 5) that allows for review (R) and evaluation (E) of the previous coaching session. The GROUP model is designed to be flexible, allowing the coach to provide a participant-centred approach. Therefore, the participant's goals, challenges, and insights drive the coaching sessions (see Figure 6 for the action-plan template). The benefits of group coaching evident in the research literature include improvement in self-awareness, communication, collaboration, individual and team performance, and transformational learning (Anderson, Anderson, & Mayo, 2008). The GROUP model provides a framework to develop individual and group goals that take into account a system's environment, thus fostering change at the individual, group, and organisational levels (Brown & Grant, 2010).

Context and Participants

Employees at a Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) will be invited to participate in this pilot program. The FLC is a secondary education setting for young people who are disenfranchised from education. Young people who attend the FLC have often experienced complexities in their lives including education, social, psychological, legal, and developmental issues (Edmund Rice Education Australia, 2013). Kyriacou (2001, p.27) associates higher rates of burnout with teachers serving in "deprived" areas. The FLC's philosophy of education is that all staff are educators, and have valuable skills and knowledge to contribute to the education of the young people (Morgan, Brown, Heck, Pendergast, & Kanasa, 2012). From this perspective, the pilot will invite the whole staff of fourteen educators, to participate — five teachers, one social worker, three youth workers, two teacher aides, one student support worker and two auxiliary staff. The program will be offered as professional development and held during work hours.

GROUP COACHING SESSION

Session No. 1 Date: Coachee:

Pre-session information gathered about the group from workshop:

	Checklist Questions	Session Notes
Goal	What do you want to achieve this session in relation to developing gratitude practice? How would you like to feel afterwards? What would be the best use of your time?	
Reality	How have things been going? What has worked? What hasn't worked?	
Options	What are some possible strategies and options for expressing gratitude? What has worked in the past? What haven't you tried yet that might work?	
Understanding Others	What is your view on the best option? What did you understand by his or her view? What was your internal dialogue when you were listening to that? Can you integrate the broader group perspective?	
Perform	What is the most important thing to do next? What can be learnt? What might get in the way? Who will be able to support you? How will you feel when this is done?	

Figure 4. GROUP Coaching Template based on the GROUP Coaching Model (Brown and Grant, 2010).

RE-GROUP COACHING SESSION

Session No. Date: Coachee:

Pre-session notes:

	Checklist Questions	Session Notes
Review & Evaluate	*Review and evaluate the progress and implementation of the action steps from the last session.* How did you do with the action steps from our last meeting?	
Goal	What do you want to achieve in this session in relation to developing gratitude practice? How would you like to feel afterwards? What would be the best use of your time?	
Reality	How have things been going? What has worked? What hasn't worked?	
Options	What are some possible strategies, options of expressing gratitude? What has worked in the past? What haven't you tried yet that might work?	
Understanding Others	What is your view on the best option? What did you understand by her view? What was your internal dialogue when you were listening to that? Can you integrate the broader group perspective?	
Perform	What is the most important thing to do next? What can be learnt? What might get in the way? Who will be able to support you? How will you feel when this is done?	

Figure 5. RE-GROUP Coaching Template, based on the RE-GROUP coaching model (Brown & Grant, 2010).

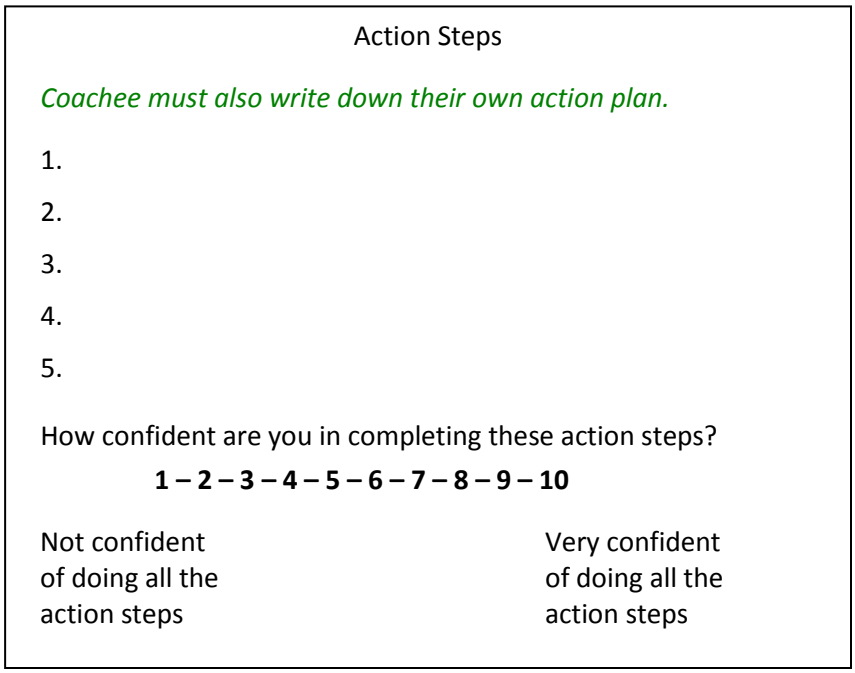

Figure 6. Action-plan template (Grant, 2012).

Evaluation

The effectiveness of the GPP will be evaluated using a multi-method approach in a one group pre-test and post-test design. The effectiveness of the pilot program will be assessed by two key indicators:

- An increase in gratitude amongst participants; and,
- The participants' evaluation of the program as beneficial to them.

Participants will be asked to complete the gratitude questionnaire (GQ-6) prior to the workshop and then again at the end of the program. The GQ-6, shown in Figure 7, has good psychometric properties, is founded on gratitude as a disposition, and the six items seem to relate to gratitude and gratefulness (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Rusk et al., 2015). Thus, it is expected to tap into both emotion- and action-gratitude and may provide insight into individual shifts in gratitude over the program.

The Gratitude Questionnaire

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1. strongly disagree
2. disagree
3. slightly disagree
4. neutral
5. slightly agree
6. agree
7. strongly agree

___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for

___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.

___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.

___ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.

___ 5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.

___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

(Items 3 and 6 are reverse scored)

Figure 7. The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

At the end of the GPP participants will attend a focus group. Focus groups are an effective way to collect qualitative data about participants' understandings and opinions, and to demonstrate "how people make collective sense of their individual experience and beliefs" (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 49). As the intervention involves group coaching and thus is a relational form of learning and development, a focus group method to collect data is appropriate. The aim of the focus group is to determine how beneficial the GPP was for participants. The schedule involves key questions guiding the discussion (Figure 8). The dialogue from the focus group will be recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed according to the emerging themes using two coders for interrater reliability.

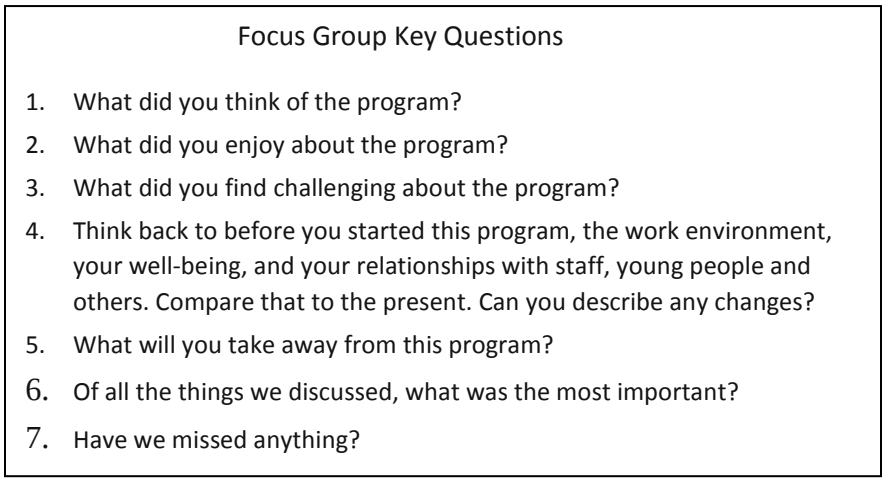

Figure 8. Focus group key questions.

Discussion

This proposed pilot will provide a set of data unique to the Flexi setting. Based on previous studies on gratitude, as noted above, it is anticipated that an increase in individual scores on the GQ-6 from pre-test to post-test would occur; however, the data will require further research to confirm or contrast the outcomes. This program is modelled on existing gratitude programs that found participants benefited from the reciprocity of gratitude between giver and receiver (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cumming, 2012). The reciprocal nature of gratitude is expected to manifest through the GPP and may partly explain an increase in gratitude. Furthermore, the aim of the explicit coaching of gratitude is to increase awareness and strategies to apply gratitude with the intention of increasing gratitude (Brown & Grant, 2010).

Previous studies have shown that educators have found the practice of gratitude beneficial (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cumming, 2012). It is predicted that participants may experience improvement in relationships with staff, young people, and others; improved well-being; and an improved work environment (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cumming, 2012). The potential outcomes are further supported by Chan's (2010) gratitude intervention study of 88 school teachers demonstrating that gratitude is positively associated with personal accomplishment and negatively associated with exhaustion and depersonalisation. Together, these findings suggest the GPP may be evaluated positively by participants, if the outcomes are generalisable to the Flexi setting.

However, participants may experience challenges. Previous gratitude programs have identified that participants struggle with the caveats of gratitude, including the need to express gratitude all the time and the appropriateness of expressing gratitude (Howells, 2012; Howells & Cumming, 2012). Based on the recommendations of Howells (2012), incorporating ongoing coaching sessions in the GPP may help address these challenges. Furthermore, recent studies

have shown that these caveats may be inconsequential compared to the gains from gratitude practice (Howells, 2014; Waters & Stokes, 2015).

This proposal has potential to contribute to the development of gratitude interventions for educators. Studies on the benefits of gratitude in the school environment have found that gratitude enhances positive emotions and pro-social behaviour (Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010) and is associated with improved self-efficacy, positive behaviour, and satisfaction with school (Weber & Ruch, 2012). However, according to Howells (2014), only four studies, including her own, have focused on teachers' gratitude. The pilot program provides a foundation for establishing an empirically sound intervention to build gratitude among educators, and has the potential to enhance understanding of the benefits of gratitude.

Furthermore, the development of the GPP may have pertinent and practical benefits through indirectly increasing work engagement and buffering against burnout. Chan and Hui's (1995) findings suggest that an increase in resources mediates work engagement and buffers against burnout above and beyond job demands. It is expected that GPP may foster the development of resources, as gratitude is associated with relationship formation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Algoe et al., 2008; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Howells & Cumming, 2012; McCullough et al., 2001) and positive emotions (Howells & Cumming, 2012; Polak & McCullough, 2006). Furthermore, there is a reciprocal relationship between resources and work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2008; see Figure 2). Thus, this pilot program has the potential to provide a foundation for empirically exploring the implications of GPP on work engagement and burnout.

Limitations

A major limitation of this pilot study is the ability to identify the causation of the positive effects. While it is expected that it will be the gratitude practice that is activating the positive change, there are numerous research artifacts that could threaten the validity of the study, including participation in group sessions, interaction with others, and being involved in a study (Strohmetze, 2008). For example, it could be questioned whether or not positive emotions experienced from the relationships formed during coaching sessions are the active component. However, because gratitude is defined as a concept distinct from positive emotions (McCullough et al., 2002) the GQ-6 may clarify this potential confounding factor. Further investigations limiting the potential research artifacts are also needed.

A limitation of qualitative methods is the element of human interpretation. "Data collection is influenced by the knowledge level, experiences, biases and perspectives of the researcher, as well as by what information the participants are willing and able to provide and what sources of data are available to the researcher" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 315). Thus, the data collected through the focus group is influenced by both the researchers and the participants. Agreement reliability is one of the most pertinent forms of reliability in a qualitative approach

(Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). This study aims to limit the researcher bias through interrater reliability, with two raters independently coding the same data.

Finally, the small sample size of this pilot provides limited data. The focus of this study is to determine if the GPP increases gratitude and is beneficial to participants. While the study may indicate the program is successful, replications of this study would allow the findings to be generalisable to the greater population.

Future Directions

If the GPP is found successful in increasing gratitude and is found to be beneficial to participants, the next stage of investigation would be to further explore the effectiveness of the GPP with a larger number of participants. An increased sample size would add credibility to the findings. The FLC in which the proposed pilot will be implemented is a part of a larger network of 18 FLCs across Australia working towards enfranchising young people through liberating education. This network of schools provides a significant sample size to further investigate the efficacy of the GPP in settings conducive of high burnout.

A specific point for further investigation is to explore how gratitude practice influences work engagement by investigating its effects on job and personal resources and on the six areas of worklife. Understanding the relationship between gratitude practice and resources and the six areas of worklife may validate the conceptual model shown in Figure 3 and explain the pathway of influence between gratitude and work engagement.

Conclusion

The proposed research project represents an important step in developing an effective intervention to increase work engagement and buffer against and decrease burnout among multidisciplinary professionals working with disenfranchised young people. Developing a program that increases gratitude and is beneficial for participants would directly provide well-being outcomes for the individual and indirectly provide well-being outcomes for others they interact with including other staff and young people. Thus, this research provides the foundations for a program that may address international concern about burnout by increasing work engagement through gratitude practice.

However, as this proposed study is only a pilot, further investigations are needed. Due to the small sample size the findings of this study should be viewed with caution. The potential of the GPP relies on further studies with larger sample sizes, specifically exploring the relationship between gratitude practice and work engagement. Nevertheless, the development of the GPP has potential to address a real-world problem in a low cost, realistic, and manageable time frame.

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