

## Chapter 2

# The Prosper Framework for Student Wellbeing

**Abstract** This chapter introduces the PROSPER school pathways for student wellbeing. Sustainable student wellbeing is seen as an outcome of the school policies, structures and practices that are organized under the PROSPER framework. The research evidence for each PROSPER school pathway is discussed: Encouraging **P**ositivity, Building **R**elationships, Facilitating **O**utcomes, Focusing on **S**trengths, Fostering a sense of **P**urpose and Teaching **R**esilience. Case studies and Boxes that illustrate the research into practice are also included. Chapter two concludes with a series of questions that encourages school practitioners to reflect on their capacity to implement Positive Education structures, processes and practices in their schools. Using the term PROSPER easily communicates the purpose of a school framework for student wellbeing.

**Keywords** Positive education • Positivity • Relationships • Outcomes • Strengths • Purpose • Engagement resilience

**PROSPER** is employed in this section as an organizer for the school factors that contribute to student wellbeing and their engagement in learning. All the PROSPER wellbeing components and the school practices outlined in the following section are derived from the positive psychological literature as well as the educational psychological literature. PROSPER in the school context is not a program but an organizing framework for the evidence-based school and classroom practices that facilitate student wellbeing and build safe and supportive school communities. The more PROSPER components that a student is able to access at school, the better their education and the higher their level of wellbeing and achievement is likely to be. Sustainable student wellbeing is seen as an outcome of the school policies, structures and practices that are organized under the PROSPER framework.

## 2.1 Introducing the PROSPER Framework in the School Context

**Positivity** for students means experiencing positive emotions at school such as feeling safe, a sense of belonging, interested, content and cheerful and experiencing a sense of fun and amusement. Positivity also incorporates a gratitude and appreciation, positive mindset that includes a capacity for mindfulness and skills in optimistic thinking.

**Relationships** for students means experiencing ongoing positive relationships with peers and teachers; for parents it means experiencing ongoing positive relationship with teachers and the school; for teachers it means experiencing ongoing positive relationships with other school staff parents and their students. A focus on building positive relationships also means teaching the prosocial values and the social skills that enable such relationships and on identifying and implementing school-based structures that facilitate these relationships.

**Outcomes** involves making progress toward goals, feeling capable to do schoolwork, understanding that accomplishment depends on hard work and effort, being persistent, and having a ‘growth mindset’, and a sense of mastery and achievement. There is a focus on teaching these attitudes and skills, using evidence-informed teaching strategies that facilitate both positive school-based outcomes (both academic and co-curricular). There is also a focus on acknowledging and celebrating the accomplishment of all members of the school community in a wide range of school-based outcomes.

**Strengths** involves self knowledge about one’s character strengths and ability strengths and understanding how to apply these strengths in different contexts; there is a focus on assisting all members of the school community to identify their strengths, develop them further and find good ways to apply their strengths.

**Purpose** in the school context refers to believing that what one is learning at school is valuable and feeling connected to something greater than oneself; there is also a focus on looking for ways to be of service to the school community, to the general community and to people in need of care and support.

**Engagement** refers to student’s psychological connection to learning activities and to school (e.g. feeling absorbed, connected, interested, and engaged in school learning and in school life); there is also a focus on effective and evidence-informed teaching strategies for enhancing student engagement.

**Resilience** includes having the capacity to ‘bounce back’ after setbacks, mistakes and difficulties and being courageous when faced with challenging situations; there is also a focus on explicitly teaching coping skills and implementing support structures.

Section 2.2 provides an overview of the evidence base for each of the PROSPER school components and then offers some practical classroom or school examples of how each component can be implemented in classrooms and schools. The following table provides a summary of how each PROSPER component provides an organizer for the strategies that each school can implement to foster student wellbeing (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1** The PROSPER School Pathways

<b>PROSPER school pathways</b>	<b>Examples of school and classroom practices and structures</b>
<b>Encouraging POSITIVITY</b> Supporting students to develop a positive mindset and experience positive emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of opportunities for students to experience and amplify positive emotions and build positive learning environments e.g. through the use of music, dance, humour, cooperative learning tasks</li> <li>• Explicit teaching of the values and skills needed for a Positive Mindset <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Optimistic thinking, positive tracking, positive conversion, hopeful thinking and expressing gratitude</li> <li>– Mindfulness</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provision of opportunities to practise these skills</li> </ul>
<b>Building RELATIONSHIPS</b> Supporting students to develop the social skills and pro-social values that underpin positive relationships and building positive relationships within the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for developing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A safe and supportive school culture</li> <li>– Positive student–teacher relationships</li> <li>– Positive student–peer relationships</li> <li>– Positive school–family and school–community relationships</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Explicit teaching of social skills and pro-social values</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities to practise these skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal structures that facilitate relationships e.g. cooperative learning groups, circle time cross-age teams, cooperative games and performance groups</li> </ul>
<b>Facilitating OUTCOMES</b> Provision of optimal learning environments and opportunities to learn specific skills that enhance students’ outcomes and accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of evidence-informed teaching strategies</li> <li>• Explicit teaching of skills for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Organisation</li> <li>– Goal achievement (e.g. <i>effort, persistence + willpower (grit) and problem-solving</i>)</li> <li>– Effective studying</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Promotion of a growth mindset</li> <li>• The use of critical and creative thinking tools</li> </ul>
<b>Focusing on STRENGTHS</b> Taking a strengths-based approach with students, teachers and the whole school community	Adoption of strengths-based approaches to organisation, curriculum and planning which results in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student self knowledge in relation to strengths</li> <li>• Opportunities for students to further develop and use/demonstrate their strengths</li> <li>• Task differentiation based on students’ character and ability strengths</li> <li>• Recognition and application of teacher and parent strengths and collective strengths</li> </ul>
<b>Fostering a sense of PURPOSE</b> Supporting students to develop a sense of purpose and meaning	Provision of opportunities for students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in student-owned and student-directed activities</li> <li>• Be involved with community service or service learning</li> <li>• Make contributions to the school through ‘student voice’ and participation in decision-making about aspects of the school</li> <li>• Undertake roles requiring peer mentoring or peer support</li> <li>• Undertake leadership roles</li> <li>• Explore spirituality</li> </ul>
<b>Enhancing ENGAGEMENT</b> Providing opportunities for high student engagement	Adoption of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence-informed teaching and learning strategies</li> <li>• Relationship-based teaching strategies</li> <li>• Activities that incorporate critical and creative thinking</li> <li>• Curriculum differentiation so students experience ‘flow’</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching RESILIENCE</b> Supporting students to develop the skills and attitudes that underpin resilient behaviour	Explicit teaching of skills for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping and acting resiliently in both personal and academic contexts</li> <li>• Acting with courage</li> <li>• Good decision-making</li> <li>• Self management</li> </ul>

## 2.2 PROSPER Pathway 1: Encouraging POSITIVITY

Positivity can be defined simply ‘*as the state or character of being positive; a positivity that accepts the world as it is*’ (Dictionary.com; 2014). The term ‘positivity’ is employed by Fredrickson (2009, p. 6) to include the positive meanings and optimistic attitudes that trigger positive emotions. Positivity also incorporates the long-term impact that positive emotions have on one’s character, relationships, communities and environment. According to the British Cohort Study the best predictor of a child becoming a satisfied and happy adult is not their academic achievement but their emotional health in childhood (Layard and Hagell 2015). A focus on Positivity (see Table 2.1) encourages educators to provide the classroom and school opportunities to develop student’s emotional health. For example enabling students to experience and amplify positive emotions such as feeling connected, feeling safe and feeling amused. Amplifying emotions means ‘turning them up’ to maximise their effect and consciously ‘savouring’ them. Helping students to develop a ‘Positivity mindset’ also requires educators to explicitly teach students the values and skills associated with positivity such as expressing gratitude and thinking optimistically.

### 2.2.1 Positive Emotions

What role do positive emotions play in helping students, groups or schools to thrive? A great deal of research under the positive psychology umbrella has shown that people who experience and express positive emotions more frequently than others are more resilient (Fredrickson and Tugade 2004), resourceful (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005), socially connected (Mauss et al. 2011), and more likely to function at optimal levels (Fredrickson and Losada 2005; Mauss et al. 2011). Fredrickson’s (2013) ‘broaden and build’ model is helpful in understanding the key role of positive emotions for optimal functioning and prospering. The model proposes that even brief experiences of positive emotions such as interest, joy, security, gratitude, hopefulness and amusement can both broaden an individual’s thoughts and actions and accumulate over time in ways that can incrementally contribute to an individual’s collection of personal resources that can be employed as needed to enhance their resilience, confidence and relationships.

Understanding the significant role that positive emotions can play in schools and the impact they can have on learning and wellbeing is the starting point for schools to design policies, programs, structures and strategies that can ensure that students experience a range of positive emotions on a regular basis. We discuss the role of feelings of belonging, feeling safe, feeling satisfied in learning and feeling amused.

- (i) *Feelings of belonging and connectedness.* Belonging is one of the most significant factors that schools can build to improve the lives of their students across a host of outcomes. In a large study of over 12,000 adolescents school

connectedness emerged as one of the two most consistent and powerful protective factors against every measured form of adolescent risk and distress (Resnick et al. 1997). The other factor was family connectedness. The need to belong and feel connected (defined as ‘relatedness’ by Ryan and Deci 2000) is seen as one of the three basic human needs according to self determination theory. The other two needs identified in self determination theory are competence and autonomy. Goodenow (1993) described a student’s sense of belonging at school as not only being liked and treated with warmth but also a:

... sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. ....it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual. (p. 25)

A review of research (Becker and Luthar 2002) concluded that a sense of belonging at school is a key factor that contributes to the classroom engagement and academic motivation of middle school students from economically disadvantaged and/or minority backgrounds. For example, the students’ sense of belonging to their school emerged as the central and significant variable in explaining student psychological wellbeing in a study of almost 700 students in two high schools. In this study the more connected the students felt, the less likely they were to report feelings of anxiety, depression and display angry aggression and the less likely their teachers were to rate their behaviour as disruptive (Bizumic et al. 2009).

A review of the research by Osterman (2000) and studies by Blum and Libbey (2004a, b), and Militich et al. (2004) suggest that students who have a sense of belonging and connectedness at school are more likely to:

- actively participate at school, be more interested and engaged with classroom and school activities, show more commitment to their school and their schoolwork and have a positive orientation towards school and teachers
- act supportively towards peers and demonstrate more pro-social behaviour
- have higher expectations for their own success
- demonstrate greater acceptance of authority
- accept more responsibility for regulating their own behaviour in the classroom
- achieve more highly through the indirect effects of higher levels of participation, interest and engagement and be less likely to drop out early from school

Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that students who had a strong sense of belonging also demonstrated higher levels of academic motivation, enthusiasm and both behavioural and emotional engagement with school. In contrast, those students who felt unimportant or ignored by teachers reported more unhappiness, boredom and anger when participating in classroom learning activities. Furrer and Skinner suggested that a sense of relatedness may function as a motivational resource for students when they are confronted by a challenge or difficulty. Other studies (e.g. Newman 1991) have identified positive associations between adolescents’ sense of belonging at school and academic help-seeking behaviour. Joyce and Early (2014) surveyed 1852 adolescents across 132 schools and identified that higher school

connectedness and getting along with teachers were significantly associated with having fewer symptoms of depression.

Student-focused classroom environments (*characterised by student cohesiveness and support for each other, friendly teacher support, student involvement with decision-making about learning tasks, the use of investigation, peer cooperation, the extent to which the teacher treats students equally*) was positively associated with student avoidance of self-handicapping behaviours such as putting off a homework task or study until the last moment and deliberately not trying to do well on learning tasks (Dorman and Ferguson 2004). Students who feel a strong sense of connection to their school are also less likely to engage in health-compromising behaviour (e.g. Bond et al. 2001). On the other hand, when students experience negative feelings such as grief, jealousy, anger and loneliness associated with a lack of belonging, rejection or isolation, they are less likely to conform to school rules and norms (Wentzel and Asher 1995) and more likely to have negative perceptions of school and schoolwork, avoid school and leave school at an early age (Ladd 1990).

Classroom and school-based approaches that have the potential to increase a students' sense of belonging include:

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

Bower et al. (2014) investigated approaches to developing student social connectedness in three Australian high schools. All three schools used school-wide practices to involve the school community in the education process, taking into account the importance of cultural and background differences. Areas that were identified by teachers as being important for further improving students' social connectedness included using technology for building community and ensuring that teachers had opportunities for professional learning that would enable them to explicitly teach key social and emotional skills to their students.

- (ii) *Feelings of safety.* Students are most likely to report feeling safe in schools that have low levels of putdowns and bullying and in which students feel confident that if they ask a teacher for assistance with dealing with a bullying session then they will be supported and the bullying will be stopped. All students feel less safe when they know that unchecked bullying is occurring in

their school, even if they haven't been targets for this kind of behaviour themselves (e.g. Janson et al. 2009). Felson et al. (1994) found that tacit approval for the use of aggression in a school (e.g. through bullying) was associated with students' placing less value on academic achievement. Overall levels of achievement in both reading and maths have been found to be lower in schools with higher levels of bullying (Konishi et al. 2010). Feeling safe at school from being bullied or taunted allows students to give their full attention to their relationships and schoolwork rather than always being alert to potential threats to their wellbeing.

Bullying occurs at some level in all primary and secondary schools (Elias and Zins 2003) and all students can potentially become involved in bullying others or being bullied. Many students report occasionally taking part in some form of bullying and most students are teased or experience some form of peer harassment during their years at school (e.g. Espelage and Swearer 2003). However bullying can cause great suffering and can adversely affect a students' mental health and academic outcomes. It can also cause harm to the students who engage in bullying behaviour. Students who bully others frequently, as well as students who are bullied, are more likely to feel disconnected from school and to dislike school (Cross et al. 2009).

The explicit teaching and development of the social-emotional skills related to empathy should be part of this picture. Observing the distress of others and responding to it with empathy is what inhibits most students from taking part in bullying (Endresen and Olweus (2001). Those students who often take part in bullying have been found to be more likely to have lower levels of empathy than other students (Espelage et al. 2004; Gini et al. 2007; Jolliffe and Farrington 2006). A further argument for the implementation of a preventative approach that includes the teaching of pro-social values, social and emotional skills and resilience skills has emerged from studies such as that of Bosworth et al. (1999). They found that children who are the angriest within a classroom are also the most likely to bully others. Similarly Swearer and Cary (2007) found that students who often bullied others reported that the primary reason for their bullying behaviour was their need to relieve stress or not coping well when 'having a bad day'.

A meta-analysis of 30 well-designed evaluations of anti-bullying interventions identifies the specific components that appear to have had the greatest impact on decreasing bullying behaviour (Farrington and Ttofi 2009). The researchers concluded that the most effective anti-bullying programs reduced bullying incidents by an average of 20–23 %. The specific components that made the most impact were:

- Clear classroom and school rules against bullying that are consistently enforced and re-stated
- Intensive professional learning for teachers
- Effective classroom management
- Improved playground/yard supervision
- School conferences or assemblies that raised awareness of the problem
- The use of effective behaviour management strategies and the provision of training for teachers in their implementation

- Student-owned and student-directed approaches to prevent bullying.
- The use of video educational material for students
- Parent education about bullying

They also found that the most effective interventions were multi-faceted, of longer duration and involved school collaboration with other appropriate professionals in working with individual students.

Bullying is a multifaceted problem that requires a multifaceted solution (see NSSF 2011a, b). The first aspect to focus on in the prevention of bullying is through specific rules about ‘no bullying’ coupled with a preventative anti-bullying curriculum. The second aspect to focus on is equipping all school staff (including visiting and temporary replacement teachers) with the knowledge and skills that they need in order to manage any bullying situations in a fair but firm manner and to support those students who have been mistreated. The third aspect to focus on is the implementation of the components of the PROSPER framework that contribute to a positive and supportive school climate. Low levels of bullying are more likely in schools in which there is effective school leadership which articulates a vision for whole school wellbeing underpinned by pro-social values (such as respect and acceptance of differences) and an effective and consistent whole school positive behaviour management program (McGrath 2007).

- (iii) *Feelings of satisfaction, affirmation and pride in learning & school life.* Students experience feelings of pride and satisfaction when they have opportunities to experience success and when their school focuses on the celebration of those successes. To provide such opportunities schools need to value different kinds of achievements (such as peer support or volunteering) and not just success in the traditional academic or sports domains (Kornhaber et al. 2003; Noble 2004). See Outcomes for more discussion on students experiencing success at school.
- (iv) *Feeling amused and experiencing fun and enjoyment.* The provision of a range of activities that offer students opportunities to experience the positive emotions of amusement, and enjoyment through having fun has many benefits in terms of student wellbeing and classroom wellbeing. Laughter relaxes and calms the body and enhances pleasure and positive mood through the release of dopamine into the brain (Martin 2006). Laughter also has the capacity to reduce stress (Bennett and Lengacher 2008; Colom et al. 2011) and improve the functioning of the immune system (Berk 2001). Finding the humorous side or participating in humour-based activities can sometimes be an effective strategy for coping resiliently with difficult times in one’s life and for reducing anxiety (Booth-Butterfield et al. 2007; Yovetich et al. 1990). A review of several studies into the positive effects of humour in educational contexts concluded that the use of non-aggressive positive humour can contribute to a more engaging and relaxed learning environment, enhance student’s positive perceptions of the teacher who employs it, increase students’ motivation to learn about the content of the lesson, and result in more overall enjoyment of



the lesson content and tasks (Banas et al. 2011). Some research studies have found that humour can also enhance the learning and recall of information and creative thinking (e.g. see Morrison 2008). Teachers who make learning ‘fun’ are also more often liked and respected especially by boys (e.g. Keddie and Churchill 2003). Neuliep (1991) has proposed that, when used appropriately, humour can help to reduce some of the status-distance between teachers and students in a positive and warm way.

Humour can be used in many ways within a classroom context. It can be an interpersonal style adopted by a teacher when interacting with students or the class as a whole. It can be an approach to teaching and learning such as using humorous cartoons or images in a slide presentation or showing a short funny video clip that has some relevance to a topic. Humour can be built into a curriculum activity such as practising the relevant mathematics skills by conducting, collating and analysing the results of a class (or schoolwide) survey to identify the funniest of four different jokes or six funny stories written by class groups. When used appropriately humour can also be used as an effective coping skill. For example a teacher might make a joke of it when he or a student makes a silly mistake to help keep things in perspective.

### 2.2.2 *Positive Mindset*

A positive mindset incorporates the following attitudes and skills:

- (i) *Positive tracking*: This skill involves looking for and commenting on the positives that you encounter in your own life (however small) and in the actions of other people.
- (ii) *Positive conversion*: This skill involves finding small positive aspects, opportunities and learning experiences in negative events and mistakes that occur in your life
- (iii) *Using an optimistic explanatory style* (Seligman 1991, 1995): This is the skill of explaining and interpreting setbacks and difficult times in your life in a way that makes it more likely that you can cope well with them and move on from them. This involves:
  - Seeing bad times as temporary (*‘just now’*) rather than permanent (*‘always’*)
  - Perceiving that most setbacks and difficult times are ‘temporary’ (*‘things will get better’*), they happen to other people too (*‘not just me’*) and are limited to the immediate incident not the whole of your life (*‘just this’*).
- (iv) *Having a Sense of Hope*: Hopefulness has been shown to contribute to success and wellbeing (Lopez et al. 2009; Snyder and Lopez 2007). It contributes energy to goal-seeking and achievement. Hopefulness is

important to the achievement of all types of goals such as learning goals, social goals, physical goals and performance goals.

People who feel hopeful about achieving what they want have a positive orientation that incorporates three key components, all of which can be explicitly taught to students. Hopeful people:

- have clear, specific and achievable goals that they are really motivated to achieve; they are also able to articulate why they want to achieve these goals
- look for flexible strategies/pathways to help them to achieve their goals and respond constructively to obstacles that might get in the way
- sustain their motivation and confidence to achieve their goals by using positive self-talk about their ability and capacity for hard work and they remind themselves about why they want to achieve this goal

*Finding hope in difficult times:* This skill focuses on believing that when an outcome of a worrying or stressful situation is unclear, it is still possible that things will turn out okay

- (v) *Gratitude and Appreciation:* The expression of gratitude and appreciation is also an important component of a Positive Mindset. Gratitude has been described by Froh and Bono (2011, p. 1) as ‘a higher-level moral emotion that enables people to notice, understand and capitalise on beneficial exchanges with others’. It has been described as the most important cohesive element for an effective functioning society (Simmel 1996). Gratitude has two components:

- Acknowledging the supportive or generous actions of others towards you and expressing thanks to those responsible (Emmons 2007).
- Feeling grateful for the good things in your own day-to-day life and life in the bigger picture. Howells (2012) refers to gratitude as an inner attitude that can be understood as the opposite of resentment or complaint (Howells 2012).

In a study by Froh et al. (2008), young adolescents (aged 11–14) took part in an educational curriculum intervention in which they were asked to undertake a daily routine for two weeks in which they identified 5 things in their life for which they were grateful. These participants, in comparison to a similar group of same-age adolescents who did not participate in the intervention, were assessed three weeks after the intervention as being happier, more optimistic, and more satisfied with their school, family, community, friends, and themselves. They also gave more emotional support to other people in their life. There was also evidence that the gratitude intervention was linked to enhanced psychological and social functioning up to 6 months later (Froh et al. 2010).

There are many strategies that can be employed to teach and encourage students, teachers and other members of the school community to feel and express gratitude. However if gratitude exercises become inauthentic and not a genuine expression of a person's deep-felt 'attitude of gratitude' then the exercise is self-defeating.

- Very young children can begin to learn about gratitude if they are taught to notice the help or support others such as their teacher, parent-helper or another student or older buddy-helper have offered in some way and learn to say thanks. As children move through primary school they increasingly become capable of making accurate judgments about when an adult or another student is being generous or supportive towards them without advantage and at some cost to themselves (Froh and Bono 2011; Emmons and Shelton 2002).
  - A 'Gratitude Bulletin Board' can be located in classrooms, school hallways, school dining rooms and in the staff room on which people are encouraged to write down the things they are grateful for about the school and its members.
  - A 'Thank you' board placed in the staffroom specifically encourages staff to express their appreciation for support given by their colleagues.
  - A regular time each week can be set aside for students to write in their 'Gratitude Journal'
  - An 'Appreciation Station' strategy (McGrath and Noble 2011a, b) can be used as a weekly gratitude activity. This requires a specific area in the classroom or a shared general purpose room where a class of students can be given time to write cards or letters to genuinely express their appreciation and gratitude to someone. The activity can be linked with English, art and craft and design and technology (e.g. making a pop-up card)
  - Each student in a class can be asked to contribute one page each term to the creation of a 'Digital Classroom Gratitude Book' book. They are asked to keep notes throughout each term of things they are grateful for in their day-to-day lives as well as the kind and supportive behaviour by others that they have appreciated
  - Howells (2012) refers to the 'butterfly effect' of teachers' small gratitude practices with their students and parents that can have a transformational effect, especially on difficult students or parents. These practices may include saying thank you, greeting others by smiling or waving at them, looking for the good in others, sending notes of thanks or reflecting on what they are grateful for in their students on the way to work.
- (vi) *Mindfulness* In positive psychology there is increasing interest in the benefits of mindfulness and acceptance for mental health and wellbeing. Mindfulness has been described as the self-regulation of attention with the use of an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance (Bishop et al. 2004). It means paying attention to the present moment without judgement (Niemiec 2014). In contrast being on 'auto pilot' can mean people are less aware of what is

happening. This can mean they miss the details (often positives) of life and also miss opportunities to grow or challenge themselves (Niemiec 2014). Fredrickson et al. (2008) found the mindfulness practice of loving-kindness meditation produced increases over time in daily experiences of positive emotions that, in turn, increased personal resources (e.g. purpose in life, social support). A review of 14 studies integrating mindfulness training in schools found the following student improvements: social skills, academic skills, emotional regulation, self esteem, positive mood and academic skills and better memory and attention. Students also showed less anxiety, stress and fatigue (Meiklejohn et al. 2012).

*Practising mindfulness.* Niemiec (2014) refers to three ways in which mindfulness may be practised

- *Formally:* In this approach a certain time each day or each week is allocated for students to use mindfulness techniques. Niemiec (2014) suggests a maximum of 10 min per day for children (Niemiec 2014). The most common form is encouraging students to concentrate on their breathing. The Smiling Mind app <http://smilingmind.com.au> has free mindfulness scripts for age 7–11 years, 12–15 years and 16–22 years. A walking meditation where children walk in silence through a park or garden or similar attractive area in one or two long lines following each other can work well with young children up to ten years of age.
  - *Informally:* In this approach students are encouraged to practise mindfulness when they need to calm down i.e. ‘use it when you need it’. This may occur when students are feeling anxious, overwhelmed or depressed and the teacher encourages them to slow down, pause and ‘just be’. The teacher can assist them to breathe deeply, and become aware of their body, their feelings, their behaviour and their environment. They can also be encouraged to think about how they can help themselves feel better.
  - *In-the-moment approach:* Students are encouraged to return to the present moment whenever their mind wanders and do one thing at a time rather than multi-task. They can also be encouraged to pay full attention to what they are currently doing (*in terms of seeing, hearing, smelling and touching*) and to practise ‘being’ in the present.
- (vii) *Savouring* is a term that describes intentionally intensifying and prolonging a pleasurable experience or feeling by thinking deeply about the positive feelings and sensations involved. It can also encourage mindfulness. Students can be taught to savour small experiences at school or at home or focus in this way on past experiences and positive emotions or future eagerly anticipated experiences. They can do this through thinking, writing, drawing or explaining their experiences to other people. The following examples apply four ‘savouring’ strategies (suggested by Bryant and Veroff (2007) to the classroom context.

- (a) *Savouring by sharing experiences with other people*: At the end of each day, several students can be selected to share (e.g. in small groups or in whole-class Circle Time) one thing they enjoyed the most about the day or the previous weekend/school holiday, one new thing they did in class that really interested them etc. The teacher can use prompting questions such as: What did it feel like? Why did you enjoy it so much? What was the best part of it for you?
- (b) *Memory-Building*: students can be asked to create mental photographs of a positive event that they recently took part in such as an excursion or a performance that they saw or participated in. These positive reconstructions can be supported by photographs, souvenirs from the event such as a toy dinosaur from the museum or a shell from a visit to the beach. Two picture books for young primary aged children that promote the development of positive memory-building are *Good Mood Hunt* by Hiawyn Oram and Joanne Partis and *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas. A useful picture book for older students is *The Secret of Saying Thanks* by Douglas Wood and Greg Shed.
- (c) *Self-Congratulation*: Providing opportunities in class time or school assemblies for students to share their achievements allows them to savour the achievement and savour associated positive emotions such as satisfaction and pride.
- (d) *Sharpening Sensory-Perceptions*: Students can be encouraged to be more attentive to what they are experiencing by asking them to specifically focus on what they are seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing and feeling. They can also be asked to write a gratitude poem about, for example the beach, writing one line for each sense (I see, I hear, I smell, I feel, I taste, I am thankful for) (McGrath and Noble 2011a, b). Here is an example of such a poem written by a 14 year-old student

*Sun glistening on water  
 Waves crash on the sand  
 The air smells of seaweed  
 Water rushes through my hand  
 My fingers taste of salt  
 I love the beach*

A ‘wonder wand’ activity (McGrath and Noble 2011a, b) can also be used as a strategy for helping younger students to sharpen their sensory perceptions and sense of ‘awe’. Each child makes a wonder wand (a stick with a star on the end works well) which they use to touch or point at things they see on a class walk around the school playground or the local park and ask ‘wonder’ questions such as ‘I wonder why most of the flowers we saw are bright colours, I wonder why the roses smelled so nice’. These sensory perceptions are then followed up in a classroom activity where they draw and write about what they saw and research answers to some of the questions asked on their walk.

## **2.3 PROSPER Pathway 2.: Building Positive RELATIONSHIPS**

### ***2.3.1 Positive School Culture***

Schools are complex social environments. The culture of a school impacts on everyone in the school community: students, the school leadership team, the teachers and families. The contribution of positive relationships to student well-being and learning and to the development of a positive, safe, supportive and connected school culture is a significant and recurring theme in research studies. A positive school culture is characterised by positive student peer relationships, positive student–teacher relationships, positive staff relationships and positive family-school relationships. The intentional development of these relationships is the starting point not only for a positive school culture but also enhanced student engagement and success in learning (Cohen et al. 2010; Battistich 2001; Battistich et al. 1995; Benard 2004; Resnick et al. 1997).

The terms school culture and school climate are often used interchangeably. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is defined by the US National School Climate Center as patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects a school’s norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Thapa et al. 2012). In their document titled the *Foundation for Democracy: Promoting Social, Emotional, Ethical, Cognitive Skills and Dispositions in K-12 Schools*, Cohen et al. (2010) argued that measuring and working to improve school climate is the single most powerful K-12 educational strategy that supports a school to intentionally create a positive school community. Such communities develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions that support student wellbeing and their capacity to learn and become engaged and effective citizens. Researchers such as O’Malley et al. (2012) and Cohen et al.’s (2010) review of empirical research literature indicated that a positive school climate is associated with/or predictive of academic achievement, school success, effective violence prevention, students’ healthy development and teacher retention.

A study by McGrath et al. (2005) highlighted the importance of taking a positive psychology approach to the issues of school bullying. Eleven schools (6 primary and 5 secondary) with relatively low levels of bullying were identified in an attempt to look at ‘what works’ in reducing bullying rather than ‘what goes wrong’. Data were collected through one-to-one interviews with school leaders, observations, focus group interviews with students, teachers and parents and an analysis of these schools’ policies and school curriculum documents. Through a thematic analysis of the data, four positive factors emerged as having the strongest impact on (i) building a safe and supportive school culture and (ii) keeping levels of bullying low. These four factors were:

1. Making student wellbeing a high priority in the school
2. Having a school leadership team who empowered and worked effectively with key teachers and the whole staff to develop (or continue) a whole school vision based around the safety, wellbeing and personal growth of students
3. Having a whole-school positive behaviour management program in place that was working well (*even though no two schools had exactly the same behaviour management approach*)
4. Planning for a 'relationship culture' that focused on the intentional development of positive peer relationships through the adoption of strategies such as cooperative learning, explicit teaching of social skills and pro-social values, cross-age sporting and drama activities and lunchtime clubs

These four factors offer direction to school leadership. A clear message from this research is the importance of a whole school focus on student wellbeing and the intentional development of a safe, supportive and connected school culture.

This section reviews how a safe and supportive school culture is underpinned by a school's pro-social values and how these values are demonstrated through successful positive relationships.

*Endorsing and promoting positive values* A school's values are intrinsic to all that a school does. A starting point in building a safe, supportive, respectful and connected school culture is for a school community to clarify and reach agreement about the values that will guide their school's practices. If a school articulates pro-social values through its vision statement, policies, structures and teaching practices, then these values help to form a 'moral map' that helps everyone in the school community to make positive choices about how they interact with each other

The importance of a school's practice in articulating their school values to guide the development of a safe and supportive school culture is illustrated in the large-scale values education project funded by the Australian Government (Lovat and Toomey 2007). The Values Education Project involved 166 schools in 26 school clusters and 70,000 students. The starting point for many schools in this Values Project was helping their school community to clarify and reach agreement about the values that would guide their school's practices (Lovat and Toomey 2007). A key outcome from the project was the recognition by everyone in the school community that their wellbeing was derived from contributing to the wellbeing of others. The project's final report observed that '*involving more people in the enterprise takes more time but ensures deeper commitment, stronger consistency and durable continuity beyond personnel changes*'. (Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Final Report 2006, p. 2)

What are the values that resonate across cultures and are universally acceptable to both individualistic Western cultures as well as collectivist cultures of Africa, Asia and the Middle East? According to the former President of UNESCO, Lourdes Quisumbing values are an integral component of education and are essential if an individual is to 'survive, to live and work in dignity and to continue learning'. The values Quisumbing identifies for personal and social transformation are: peace,

human rights, dignity, democracy, tolerance, justice, cooperation and sustainable development. From surveys of more than 25,000 people in 44 countries, Schwartz (2011) identified ten types of universal values. These values fall on two dimensions: self-transcendence (i.e. *more concerned with collective interests*) and self-enhancement (i.e. *more concerned with individual interests*).

- *Self-enhancement* (individualism) is represented by nine values in Schwartz' research: social power, wealth, social recognition, authority, self-respect, ambition, influence, capability and success.
- *Self-transcendence* (collectivism) is represented by fifteen values: equality, a world at peace, unity with nature, wisdom, a world of beauty, social justice, broadmindedness, a protected environment, mature love, true friendship, loyalty, honesty, helpfulness, responsibility and forgiveness.

Of relevance to education contexts that support student wellbeing, people who give priority to self-transcendent values are more willing to engage in altruistic, cooperative and/or ecologically responsible behaviour that underpins the development of positive relationships than people who give priority to individual or self-enhancement values (Schwartz 2011).

*Teaching values:* How can self-transcendent values that accord with student wellbeing be readily communicated to children and young people in schools to effectively guide their behaviour? Several studies have linked the direct teaching of pro-social values with improved academic and social outcomes in schools (e.g. Lovat and Toomey 2007; Zins et al. 2004; Benninga et al. 2003; Battistich et al. 2001). 'Values education' initiatives in schools have been shown to extend the strategies, options and repertoires of teachers in effectively managing learning environments and in developing supportive and connected school and class cultures that positively connect learners with their classmates and teachers (Lovat and Clement 2008; Carr 2006). A focus on values has also been shown to increase students' sense of safety from bullying and harassment (Battistich et al. 2001; Cowie and Olafsson 2000; Cross et al. 2004; Flannery et al. 2003). From their experience in working with schools implementing the Australian Framework in Values Education, Lovat and Toomey (2007) concluded that values education is at the heart of quality teaching.

A whole school approach to defining and teaching values to guide behaviour is also the starting point for the highly successful model of School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). The purpose of SWPBS is to first establish a school climate based on positive values so that they become the norm. Typically each school chooses 3–5 values that can also become behavioural expectations. An example of this is the value of 'respect' which can then become expectations such as '*Respect Yourself, Respect Others and Respect Property*'. The SWPBS guidelines highlight the importance of at least 80 % of the staff making a commitment to the school's chosen values defined as behavioural expectations in order to ensure there is consistency in implementation from class to class (<https://www.pbis.org/school/swpbis-for-beginners>) To facilitate consistency across the school, it is suggested that each school develops an 'expectations matrix' of what the values in action look like in all



**Table 2.2** An expectations matrix

School setting	Safe	Respectful	Learner
Formal occasions	• Follow staff directions	• Be quiet, respectful and courteous	• Participate as required
	• Enter and exit in an orderly manner	• Use acceptable language, tone and voice	
Sport	• Play by the rules	• Wear correct uniform	• Actively participate
	• Use equipment safely	• Play fair	• Be positive
	• Stay with your teacher	• Be a good sportsperson	• Be respectful
Learning space	• Be on time	• Be ready to learn	• Be a good listener
	• Follow classroom rules and expectation	• Allow students to learn	• Do your best
	• Use equipment safely	• Allow teachers to teach	• Take responsibility for your learning
Corridors/transition/bus	• Walk safely	• Keep area clean	• Be respectful
	• Stay on your left	• Go straight to class	• Be safe
	• Move quietly	• Keep hands and feet to self	• Be on time
Playground	• Follow directions	• Respect others	• Report incidents
	• Stay in bounds	• Respect the environment	• Go to class on time
Toilets/canteen	• Walk	• Wait for turn	• Use good manners
	• Wash hand	• Be polite	• Keep the area clean
	• Go straight to class	• Save water	• Use bins

classes and non-classroom areas (see Table 2.2). Teaching behavioural expectations based on pro-social values and rewarding students for following them has been found to be a much more positive and preventative approach than waiting for misbehaviors to occur before responding. SWPBS is a set of intervention practices and organisational systems for establishing a positive school culture and intensive individual behaviour supports to achieve academic and social success for all students (Sugai et al. 2009). Multiple randomized control trials have documented improvement in student outcomes when SWPBS is implemented (e.g., Bradshaw et al. 2008, 2009; Horner et al. 2009). The following table provides an example of a large secondary school's expectations matrix developed in conjunction with staff and students. The matrix is displayed in every classroom, hallway and formal spaces.

The Australian Values Education Good Practice Schools Projects Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Final Report

(2006), found that effective values education is more likely to occur when a school's shared values are explicitly articulated, explicitly taught, modelled by staff and embedded in the mainstream life of the school. This means values education is most effective when it is integrated in the mainstream curriculum rather than being an 'add-on' or separate to the academic curriculum. It also means that teachers consciously create many opportunities for students to practise the values. The values most likely to be included in school—based values programs are: *Compassion, Cooperation, Acceptance of difference, Respect, Friendliness/Inclusion, Honesty, Fairness and Responsibility* (McGrath and Noble 2011a, b). These core values have been taught to both young and older children through the use of children's literature, media stories, video-clips, role-plays, writing activities and opportunities for students to engage in classroom and school community activities that provide service to others.

- *Compassion*: Caring about the wellbeing of others and offering kindness and support where needed;
- *Cooperation*: Working together to achieve a shared goal. Cooperating also includes cooperating for world peace and for the protection of our environment;
- *Acceptance of differences*: Recognising the right of others to be different and not excluding or mistreating others because they are different; acting on the inclusive belief that diversity is to be celebrated and other people are fundamentally good;
- *Respect for others*: Acting towards others in ways that respect their rights; for example to have dignity, to have their feelings considered, to be safe and to be treated fairly;
- *Friendliness*: Acting towards others in an inclusive and kind way; actively reaching out to others in friendship
- *Honesty*: Telling the truth, and owning up to anything you have done;
- *Fairness*: Focusing on equity and addressing injustices; and
- *Responsibility*: Acting in ways that honour promises and commitments and looking after the wellbeing of those less able.

## Case Study

### Values in action across the school

When we met Gerda v d Westhuizen she was the principal of the Observatory School for Girls, a school in a very impoverished area of Johannesburg where many families were refugees from other African countries, where often four families shared one room, and where there was no hope of work for most of these families who were just surviving. Gerda's explicit focus on values formed the core business of the whole school community. She chose one of the twelve values from the UNESCO's *Living Values* program every two weeks to become the central focus for everyone's work and behaviour across

the school. The twelve Living Values are freedom, cooperation, tolerance, happiness, honesty, love, peace, humility, respect, responsibility, simplicity, and unity. Gerda drew the children's attention to the school's current 'value' by making a visually stimulating and eye-catching display of the value and especially the actions the students could take to put that value into action. This display was on a notice board in a prominent place in the school playground. The most highly prized award in the school was the opportunity that a student from every class at each grade level had to wear the values gold sash award for a week that showed that this student had been observed putting this value into action through their interactions with others across the school.

### **Respectful language can change school culture**

Values education is also at the heart of one secondary school's approach to how language used in communication between students and teachers or between different students can be inclusive or exclusive. In a large Australian state government secondary school for boys all teaching staff were united in encouraging all the boys to use language that is inclusive of everyone. The staff noticed and reprimanded any boy who used negative language that was homophobic, racist, sexist or in any way was derogatory and served through what people said to each other to exclude certain individuals or groups from the school community. The principal reported that this one small action has had a huge impact on making their school a safer and supportive school community. The interview with the school principal can be seen at <http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/safe-schools-toolkit/the-nine-elements/element-5/case-studies/melbourne-hs-element-5/>.

### **Values captains**

Many schools have school captains but one primary school appointed two Values captains as well as two School captains. Values Captains helped the whole school community focus on noticing their values in action. A poster of the school's values was displayed in every classroom, hallways and staff room. Every two weeks the Values Captains gave out Values certificates in Assembly to those children who had been observed demonstrating one of the school's values. For example a student is awarded a certificate for Honesty because they handed into the office money they had found in the playground.

### 2.3.2 *Building Positive Student-Peer Relationships*

When students act in accord with pro-social values such as being friendly and inclusive, respectful of others and supportive, compassionate and kind, then they are more likely to develop positive and satisfying relationships with both their teachers and their peers. Students who experience predominantly positive and high quality peer relationships at school are more likely to experience better mental and physical health, improved learning outcomes and more successful relationships as adults (Engels et al. 2001; Rhodes et al. 2000). Positive peer relationships are also linked to higher levels of attendance at school, high levels of engagement with schoolwork and a higher likelihood of finishing high school.

Friendships are a significant source of emotional and psychological support for students and contribute to their sense of belonging (La Greca and Harrison 2005). Friendships can provide students with closeness, a sense of connection and safety, affirmation and, when needed, social and practical support. Friendships also provide a context in which students can practise and refine their social skills and develop empathy and socio-moral reasoning. (Hodges et al. 1999; Schonert-Reichl 1999; Thoma and Ladewig 1993). Students who experience considerable social isolation, or who are not well accepted or are actively rejected are less likely to be engaged with learning, and are more likely to be absent from school and have poorer learning outcomes and a reduced sense of wellbeing (e.g. Ladd 2003; Ladd and Burgess 2001; Marks 2000; Ladd et al. 1997; Boivin et al. 1995; Hatzichristou and Hopf 1996; Ollendick et al. 1992). Students who are chronically socially isolated or rejected are also more likely, as adults, to have less satisfactory and successful lives and be more likely to experience depression, erratic employment and involvement with crime (McDougall et al. 2001; Blackorby and Wagner 1996; Gresham 1986). Students who have poor relationships with peers are also more likely to use drugs, misbehave, report anxiety/depressive symptoms, and drop out before finishing high school (Bond et al. 2007; Doll and Hess 2001; Marcus and Sanders-Reio 2001; Barclay and Doll 2001; Resnick et al. 1997; Catalano et al. 1996). A student's level of social competence and their friendship networks have been shown to be predictive of their level of academic achievement (Caprara et al. 2000; Wentzel and Caldwell 1997). A study found that 3rd grade children's social competence predicted their grades in 8th grade better than their academic performance in 3rd grade (Caprara et al. 2000). A meta-analysis of 148 studies involving 17,000 students conducted in 11 different countries concluded that positive peer relationships explained 33–40 % of variation in academic achievement (Roseth et al. 2008).

Criss et al. (2002) have demonstrated that being accepted by peers and having friends can moderate aggressive and acting-out behaviour in young children with disadvantaged family backgrounds characterised by economic difficulties, family violence and harsh discipline. Research also suggests that having at least one best friend can help prevent children and young people from being bullied (Bollmer et al. 2005). However the number of friendships that a child has is less important than the quality of those friendships. In their study Werner and Smith (1992)

identified that resilient young people were not necessarily popular or very well accepted but had developed a small number of high quality, long-lasting friendships characterised by loyalty and support. High quality friendships are characterised by this kind of loyalty and support as well as a willingness to stand up for their friend (Bollmer et al. 2005). In contrast, poor quality friendships are associated with negative characteristics such as conflict or betrayal and, in some cases, with being bullied (Greco and Morris 2005; Mishima 2003; Mishna et al. 2008). It seems likely that the positive effects of school-based relationships are probably the result of a student's cumulative experience of such reciprocated friendships over time rather than the result of specific individual friendships (Hartup and Stevens 1997).

One way schools develop positive student-peer relationships across year levels is through the implementation of peer support programs. Stanley and McGrath (2006) conducted an investigation in 12 schools into the perceptions held by primary teachers and senior staff of the advantages they had observed from their experiences of using a 'buddy system' in which every child in the first two years of school (ages 5–6 years) had an older student (aged 11–12 years) as a 'special friend'. The advantages that were identified included that they helped build positive relationships and connectedness across the school, helped the younger students to experience a sense of belonging and feel supported and safe, and assisted the older students to develop responsibility, confidence, leadership behaviours and social skills. Several studies (e.g. Menesini et al. 2003) have identified that teachers report that their school environment becomes safer and more caring following the introduction of a befriending scheme, and that peer relationships across the school improve.

### 2.3.2.1 Teaching the Social–Emotional Skills that Underpin Positive Peer Relationships

Research indicates that there are potentially many positive outcomes from proactively and explicitly teaching students the following social and emotional skills (McGrath and Francey 1991; McGrath and Noble 2010, 2011a, b) and pro-social values that have the power to facilitate positive peer relationships.

- *Specific Social skills*: The key social skills that are related to both learning activities and out-of-class interpersonal interactions are skills for: sharing resources and workload (i.e. cooperation), respectfully disagreeing (*stating points of agreement before explaining where you disagree*), negotiation, playing fairly, responding empathically, having an interesting conversation, presenting to an audience, telling a funny story or joke, and managing conflict well. Social skills are not only 'relationship builders' but are also 'academic enablers' (Wentzel and Caldwell 1997; Wentzel and Watkins 2002)
- *Emotional literacy skills*: These include skills for managing strong feelings such as anger, fear and disappointment and skills for recognising and understanding the feelings of others and responding empathically.

Embedding the teaching and practice of these skills within the curriculum provides naturalistic opportunities for students to practise these skills once they have been explicitly taught.

The following section illustrates how (i) cooperative learning, (ii) cooperative games and (iii) using children's literature can assist teachers to embed the teaching of social skills into the curriculum and build positive peer relationships.

(i) ***Using Cooperative Learning to teach and enable practice of Social-emotional Skills.***

The use of cooperative learning structures creates opportunities for teachers to actively engage students in a curriculum activity whilst at the same time providing naturalistic situations for them to practise social skills and access peer support for their learning. The numerous research outcomes for cooperative learning can be organized under three broad categories: improving student *effort to achieve*; *building positive relationships and support*; and *enhancing student wellbeing* (Johnson and Johnson 2009). Roseth et al. (2008) carried out a meta-analysis of 148 studies that compared the impact of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning activities on adolescent students. They found that the use of cooperative group structures had the most impact on academic achievement and positive peer relationships. Similar conclusions were reached in earlier studies that linked peer learning methods to better social outcomes (e.g. Ginsburg-Block et al. 2006).

Cooperative learning structures promote positive social interactions that are associated with mutual assistance, encouragement of each other and the sharing of ideas, information and resources that contribute to the achievement of shared goals. The achievement of these collaborative goals enhances the likelihood that students will develop positive perceptions of each other and the contributions each group member made to group success (Roseth et al. 2008). This process also creates a sense of belonging that helps to facilitate student engagement and other adaptive school behaviors (Juvonen 2006). The essential principles of cooperative learning that are the key to achieving these outcomes are:

- the structure of the group learning ensures there is individual accountability and everyone 'pulls their weight' rather than leaving the hard work to just one or two people
- there is group interdependence in that everyone is responsible for both their own and their group's learning outcomes, and
- social skills (e.g. *listening, turn taking, sharing the workload and the discussion space, negotiating, respectful disagreeing*) are explicitly taught and then practised in the group work.

A reflection sheet that can be completed by the group as a whole can be helpful in identifying the social skills that each group member used well or needed to use more (e.g. see McGrath and Noble 2010).

(ii) ***Using Cooperative Games to teach social-emotional skills.***

Most students find playing games (whether they are physical or educational games) engaging, motivating and fun. When students play games together they have an opportunity to experience positive emotions such as excitement and enjoyment as well as opportunities to socially interact with classmates, practise emotional skills (e.g. *self regulation of anger and aggression*) and practise social skills (e.g. *conflict management, playing fairly and being a good winner/loser*) within a naturally occurring social context. Additionally, many educational games such as quizzes have the potential to reinforce curriculum content and provide opportunities for deductive reasoning and other higher order thinking skills (e.g. McGrath and Noble 2010). Hill (1989) has pointed out that structured co-operative games and tasks provide opportunities for more popular children to interact with lower status peers who they may choose to avoid in other situations. Through playing cooperative class games, the more popular children can get to know the other children and experience success with their less popular peers.

The rules and procedures that are a core part of any game provide both structure and limits. These features make it more likely that students will behave more pro-socially and less aggressively when playing educational games (Garaigardobil et al. 1996). It can also be useful to include a briefing session at the start of the game in which the rules and expected social skills that will make the game more successful and fun are highlighted and discussed (McGrath and Francey 1991; McGrath and Noble 2010). The 'Educational Games Tournament structure' (McGrath and Noble 2010, 2011a, b) is an additional feature that can further enhance the impact of practising social and emotional skills and the development of positive relationships. In this structure, students work with a partner to play (as a pair) a specific educational game (e.g. Hangman-see McGrath and Noble 2010 for other suggestions) against five different student pairs over a week or so. Pairs stay the same for the duration of the tournament (usually just one week) thus having a chance to get to know each other a bit better and to improve their game strategies and social skills. Over time, all students can have an opportunity to play in a partnership with every other student in the class. Each pair can complete a self-assessment rubric after the tournament has been completed, rating themselves on how well they (as a pair) used good thinking strategies, how effectively they set improvement goals and how well they used social skills such as listening to each other, managing conflict well, playing fairly, respectful disagreeing, winning and losing well, negotiation and respecting the effort of all players. The teacher can then conduct a Debriefing session after the tournament to revise and reinforce the social skills that were highlighted in the briefing session at the start of the tournament.

Cooperative games can also provide a naturalistic setting in which to conduct an assessment of the social and emotional skills of specific students. This can be the basis for further more intensive teaching of specific social skills in small group contexts.

(iii) *Using children's literature to teach social-emotional skills.*

Another strategy for embedding social-emotional learning in the curriculum is through the use of good quality children's literature. All countries have stories such as myths, legends, and fairytales that can teach children key messages about wellbeing and resilience. Infusing the teaching of social and emotional skills into the academic curriculum through picture books and stories and follow-up classroom discussions enables students to further increase their understanding of relationships and how to manage them.

Books can start conversations. According to Phillips (2008, p. 2) "*a well told story invites listeners to enter the world of the story, identify with the characters and accompany them on the journey of experience, then emerge with new insight and understandings*". Through books, students can engage with key real life issues such as friendships in a safe and comfortable way and a teacher can choose a book with relevance for one student or a group without specifically focusing on them. Students are able to discuss a problem that is linked to a book's character without owning that problem. Books can also 'normalise' a situation such as loneliness and help a student to realise that they are not the first or only person to encounter such a problem. Students can also feel and express empathy for a character in a specific situation and this can enhance their empathy for 'real people' in a similar situation. Books can prompt self-reflection and insight. A character in a book can be used as a positive model when they display a pro-social value such as kindness, solve a relationship problem through the use of a social skill such as negotiation or get on top of a situation by using an emotional skill such as managing their anger or being courageous. The use of books in this way is dependent on the quality of the book itself and the knowledge and insight of the author and illustrator. Gruwell and Freedom Writers (1999) provided powerful examples of how helping under-privileged high school students relate their life troubles to literary stories and social values can have dramatic positive effects on their engagement with school.

The use of children's literature to teach students about wellbeing and resilience was at the heart of the Bushfire Recovery Project by the Victorian Education Department (McGrath and Noble 2011b). In 2009 the Australian state of Victoria experienced the worst bushfires in the history of Australia with great loss of life, homes and whole communities. The Victorian Education Department implemented the Bounce Back Wellbeing and Resilience Program in seven regions affected by these devastating fires. Every school in the project was given a tub of forty picture books to support the implementation of the program. Findings from the implementation of Bounce Back over two school terms in 18 schools affected by the Victorian bushfires yielded 11 themes. The key themes emerged from the integration of data from an online teacher survey with focus group discussions in six schools with both teachers and children. The data showed that the Bounce Back lessons helped the children to cope better and be resilient with the aftermath of the bushfires. The teachers saw the use of children's literature as one of the strongest and most important features of the implementation. The following comments illustrate the teachers' enthusiasm for their use of children's literature: *The books helped the children to discuss problems more freely; I have*



*certainly used the books with students to encourage more positive/helpful thinking; The books have been terrific as they in some cases take the focus off particular children while addressing class or individual problems.*

### **2.3.3 Building Positive Student–Teacher Relationships**

Students' perception that their teachers care about them is among the strongest predictors of student performance (Dweck et al. 2015). Having a relationship with a caring adult other than, or in addition to, a parent has been shown to be a significant protective factor in helping young people to be resilient (Garmezy 1991). This person is often a teacher (Benard 2004). Hence it is perceived as the professional responsibility of teachers to be proactive in developing a positive relationship with each of their students (Krause et al. 2006; Marzano 2003; McInerney and McInerney 2006).

The quality of students' relationships with their teachers strongly influences how they feel about and respond to school and their schoolwork. Most students want their teachers to like and care about them and look for signs that this is or isn't the case. Positive high quality teacher–student relationships are characterised, depending on the age of the student, by many of the following features (e.g. Battistich et al. 2004; Hamre and Pianta 2001):

- Low levels of teacher–student conflict
- Low levels of student dependency
- High levels of mutually respectful behaviour
- Teacher acceptance, warmth, caring and closeness and predictability
- High levels of teacher support for the student

When students perceive that they have this type of relationship with their teacher (s) they feel more secure and hence are more willing to engage with learning activities and the school environment (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Deci and Ryan 1985; Furrer and Skinner 2003; Roorda et al. 2011). They are also more likely to have high rates of school attendance, (Klem and Connell 2004), demonstrate high levels of achievement motivation and academic effort and, at the high school level, to commit to finishing their schooling (e.g. Hattie 2009; Klem and Connell 2004; Martin et al. 2007; Marzano et al. 2003; Roorda et al. 2011) and achieve more highly (Battistich et al. 2004; Hamre and Pianta 2001). These patterns are illustrated in a comprehensive study of 3450 students in years 7–12 across six Australian high schools (Martin et al. 2007). Those students who believed that their teacher accepted and cared for them, were more engaged with learning, felt more confident and motivated to achieve and were more likely to adopt the teacher's goals and expectations in relation to school success.

Other positive student outcomes that have been identified as associated with caring and supportive teacher–student relationships include higher levels of academic resilience, social competency and overall wellbeing (Battistich et al. 2004; Howes and Ritchie 1999; Nadel and Muir 2005; Pianta et al. 2008; Pianta and

Walsh 1996; Raskauskas et al. 2010; Weare 2000). Feeling supported and cared for by teachers is also protective against bullying and being bullied (Flashpohler et al. 2009). Resnick et al. (1997), found that young people who reported having a close and positive relationship with their teachers were less likely to use drugs and alcohol, attempt suicide or self-harm, behave in violent ways or engage in sexual behaviour at an early age.

A study by Hughes et al. (2001) suggested that when teachers take the trouble to develop a positive relationship with socially vulnerable students, they make it more likely that other students will behave towards them in a more socially inclusive way. The quality of teacher–student relationships also impacts on the effectiveness of a teacher’s classroom management. In their meta-analysis of research studies, Marzano et al. (2003) found that, on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31 % fewer discipline and related problems in a given year than teachers who did not have this type of relationship with their students. This is well explained by students who experience such relationships with their teacher being more open and responsive to their directions and advice (Gregory et al. 2010), more reluctant to disappoint them by behaving badly or engaging in anti-social behaviour such as bullying, and being more comfortable with adopting the values and norms endorsed by their teachers and their school (Bergin and Bergin 2009; Masten and Obradović 2008; Stipek 2006).

When evaluating whether or not their teacher is a ‘good’ teacher’, students tend to focus most on the interpersonal quality of their relationship with them (Rowe 2004; Slade and Trent 2000; Werner 2002). Some of the components of positive and supportive teacher–student relationships may vary according to the age of the student and the level of involvement of the teacher, but the following teacher behaviours have been identified by either students, teachers or both as contributing to positive student-teacher relationships:

- Teachers acknowledge students, greet them by name and with a smile and they notice when the students are absent from school and follow up (Benard 1991; Stipek 2006)
- Teachers respond to misbehaviour or inattention with reminders and explanations rather than irritability, criticism, punishment or coercion (Bergin and Bergin 2009; Noddings 1992; Rimm-Kaufman 2011)
- Teachers take a personal interest in their students as individuals and get to know them both as students (Marzano 2003; Stipek 2006; Trent 2001) as well as people with a life outside school (Trent 2001). They demonstrate knowledge about individual students’ backgrounds, interests, strengths and academic levels. They strive to understand what each student needs to succeed in school and work with them towards that goal (Croninger and Lee 2001)
- Teachers are available and approachable when students need support or just answers to questions (Pianta 1999; Weissberg et al. 1991) and they take the time to listen to their students when they have concerns or worries and offer support in a timely manner where appropriate (Benard 2004)
- Teachers are fair and respectful when talking to students (Stipek 2006). Keddle and Churchill (2003) found that, when adolescent boys were asked what they

liked about the good relationships they had with certain teachers, they most often referred to the fair and respectful way in which these teachers had spoken to them and treated them.

- Teachers show their pleasure and enjoyment in being with their students and have fun with them when appropriate. They let students get to know them through some degree of self-disclosure and being ‘authentic’ with them (Davis 2003). In this way common interests and experiences can be identified and bonds start to form.
- Teachers use many learner-centered practices in their teaching (Cornelius-White 2007; Gurland and Grolnick 2003) such as showing sensitivity to individual differences among students, supporting them in the development of autonomy (e.g. by offering them choices and opportunities to be involved in decision-making), respecting and incorporating their views and ideas and noticing, acknowledging and addressing their individual developmental, personal and social needs. They differentiate learning to accommodate student differences and try to spend some individual time with each student (Pianta 1999; Rudasill et al. 2006). They intentionally develop positive peer relationships in a way that ensures that no student feels socially isolated (Charney 2002; Donohue et al. 2003).

## Case Study

### Buddy programs for whole school positive relationships

The implementation of buddy programs that involve all students and all staff including administration and support staff illustrate one school’s focus on the importance of building positive relationships across the whole school community. Like many schools, St Charles Borromeo Primary School in Melbourne for many years has successfully run a buddy program where the year 5 and year 6 children (10–12 year olds) become a buddy for a child (a 5/6 year old) in their first year of school. The buddies connect with each other during informal times in the playground as well as during formal lesson times where the Year six children act as tutors. But St Charles takes the concept of a buddy program further. The years 1/2 children buddy up with the years 3/4 children. Also the school teams up the year 5 children with ‘an oldie’ at a nearby residential home for elderly people. Once a term (4 times per year) the children and the elderly take turns at hosting a meeting at the residential home or the school and learning from each other. For example the children might teach their elderly buddy about technology such as sending emails etc and the ‘oldies’ might teach a card game or about their life when they were young. Another variation of the buddy program is that each year 6 child has an adult staff mentor as a buddy who meets their year 6 buddy regularly to prepare them for secondary schooling and early adolescence. Also all new parents/carers are ‘buddied up’ with existing parents/carers to facilitate the new parents’ entry into the school community. In all examples of the school’s buddy programs the

focus is on reciprocity where both ‘buddies’ benefit from the positive relationship, gain in-school-community support and value diversity in age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. See an interview with Sue Cahill about the Buddy program at <http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/safe-schools-toolkit/the-nine-elements/element-2/case-studies/st-charles-ps-element-2/>

## 2.4 PROSPER Pathway 3: Facilitating OUTCOMES

International assessments such as *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS), *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) and *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) have prompted nations to attach greatest importance on academic outcomes in schools. So it is not surprising that the outcomes that many schools focus on most are those related to academic learning and achievement. School reform initiatives therefore often look to changes in curriculum or pedagogy to improve student learning outcomes. However curriculum and pedagogy are often narrowly defined in terms of academic content and teaching students that content. Yet research on effective teaching and learning shows that this is not the complete picture.

Why do some students perform better than others even when they have the same ability? Research shows that the *psychological factors* encapsulated in PROSPER are critical for achieving positive learning outcomes and ongoing academic success. Students who PROSPER:

- **P:** feel they belong in school socially and academically; they can forgo immediate pleasures for the sake of schoolwork;
- **R:** have positive relationships with their peers and teachers;
- **O:** gain a sense of accomplishment by achieving positive learning outcomes;
- **S:** know their own strengths and limitations and are prepared to work hard;
- **P:** have a sense of purpose in what they are learning at school and it’s relevance for their future;
- **E:** are engaged in learning, view effort positively and seek challenging tasks that will help them learn new things rather than tasks in their comfort zone that require little effort but also little opportunity to learn;
- **R:** are resilient and not derailed by difficulty whether intellectual or social. They see a setback as an opportunity for learning or a problem to be solved rather than a failure.

Academic tenacity is a term used by Dweck et al. (2015) to encapsulate the various non-cognitive factors outlined in PROSPER that promote academic learning and achievement. These authors use academic tenacity to refer to the

mindsets and skills that allow students to look beyond short-term concerns to longer-term or higher-order goals and to withstand challenges and setbacks to persevere towards these goals. Students' beliefs about their academic ability influence their academic tenacity. Dweck and her colleagues' research found that a central factor in student's academic outcomes was their mindset about their intelligence. Students may view their intelligence as a fixed quantity that they either possess or not (fixed mindset) or a malleable quantity that can be increased with effort and learning (a growth mindset).

Students with a fixed mindset believe their intellectual ability is a limited entity that can lead to destructive thoughts (e.g. *I failed because I'm dumb*), negative feelings (e.g. *humiliated*) and negative behaviour (*giving up*). In contrast students with a growth mindset will often perceive the same challenge or setback as an opportunity to learn. They respond with constructive thoughts (e.g. *maybe I need to change my strategy or try harder*); positive feelings (*excited by the challenge*) and positive behaviour (e.g. *persistence*) (Dweck et al. 2015). What causes these mindsets? Several experimental studies by Dweck and her colleagues (Mueller and Dweck 1998; Blackwell et al. 2007) found that praising students for their ability taught them a fixed mindset (e.g. that's a really high score. You must be smart at these problems). In contrast praising them for their effort or the strategy they used taught them a growth mindset and fostered resilience (e.g. that's a really high score. You must have worked hard at these problems or simply 'that's a really high score').

Students with a fixed mindset tend to focus more on performance goals. For example they endorse performance avoidance goals because they prefer easy work in their comfort zone that helps them to avoid mistakes and setbacks but also creates little opportunities to learn. Students with a growth mindset tend to focus more on mastery goals or learning goals—choosing challenging tasks that could help them learn.

Research also indicates that students are often more motivated and achieve more academic success when classroom activities involve cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic goals (Johnson and Johnson 2009; Roseth et al. 2008). Cooperative learning goals foster a responsibility for your own and your team mates' learning and not wanting to let one's team down. In comparison, in a competitive environment students may be more likely to engage in self-handicapping behaviour by withholding effort so they can attribute their failure to lack of effort rather than lack of ability (Dweck et al. 2015). One student's accomplishment is at another's loss in competitive environments. Not only are competitive environments associated with lower achievement but also students like each other less (Roseth et al. 2008).

Dweck's research on mindset and Baumeister's work (Baumeister and Tierney 2011) on self-control or willpower and Duckworth's research on 'grit' (Duckworth and Seligman 2005) are all seen as factors contributing to academic tenacity. Self-regulatory skills that allow students to stay on task, rise above distractions and navigate obstacles for long-term achievement also contribute to academic tenacity and school achievement. A study by Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that 8th graders' capacity for self control (assessed by teachers, parents and self-report) was a better predictor of their academic achievement, including their performance

on standardised tests, than the students' IQ scores. In fact self control was seen as a better predictor of academic success than their IQ score. Their self control also predicted fewer absences from school, more time spent studying and less time watching television. Given that students encounter more and more distractions in our technology-rich world it is important to understand how to help students turn off distractions so they focus on difficult academic tasks.

Research over the last fifteen years has found that helping people to visualise possible obstacles that might stand in the way of their goals is an important aspect of developing self regulatory skills and achieving outcomes (Oettingen 2014). Oettingen uses the term 'mental contrasting' to describe the process of visualizing potential obstacles. This process involves the following four steps:

- Identify your goal
- Visualise the best possible outcome
- Identify potential obstacles that might get in the way of you achieving this outcome
- Think about each possible obstacle and plan a way to deal with the obstacle if it does occur

Students could also benefit from participating in pairs or in small group or class discussions to identify potential obstacles that might get in their way in relation to goals that many of them have in common such as a delivering an effective class presentation, completing an upcoming assignment or test, putting together a folio of artwork or finding part-time work. Typical obstacles that might be discussed and planned for might include: getting too involved in computer games, family demands, distractions by friends and lack of available time. Duckworth et al. (2011) found that using Oettingen's four step plan increased high school students' efforts to prepare for standardized tests by 60 %. A free app for college students that is based on mental contrasting can be found at: [www.woopmylife.org](http://www.woopmylife.org).

### **Box: Applying the key Outcome messages for success**

The WINNERS acronym in the Success unit in the Bounce Back program (McGrath and Noble 2011a, b) incorporates evidence-informed key messages to help students to achieve outcomes and experience a sense of accomplishment. The benefit of an acronym is that it makes it easier for students to remember and recall these key messages.

- What are my strengths (and what is my evidence?)
- Interesting mistakes will happen. (Don't be afraid to make them and learn from them)
- No effort, no results. (No one achieves anything without hard work and self-discipline)
- Never give up (well, hardly ever). See obstacles as problems to be solved and plan ahead.

- **Ethics** and honesty must be the rule (or it's not worth it)
- **Risk-taking** is sometimes necessary (but think about it first and be prepared)
- Smart goal setting helps you plan and succeed. (So choose a **Specific** and **Meaningful** goal, work out what **Actions** you need to take, be **Realistic** and estimate the **Time** you'll need to do it)

In the Bounce Back program (Book 3, p. 190) students are encouraged to make a 'if-then' plan by anticipating beforehand what obstacles might stop them from achieving their goal. For example

- *What if you want to finish your project and a friend texts you and wants to come over to your house. Plan what would you say/do? Or*
- *What if your goal is to eat healthier food and less junk food and a friend invites you to McDonalds for their birthday? Plan what you will order before you go.*

Explicitly teaching study skills and self-regulation skills also has the potential to assist students to achieve better academic outcomes. Some of the most effective strategies identified in a meta-analysis study by Lavery (2008) as having a positive impact on learning outcomes included: strategies that organise and transform knowledge (e.g. *by making a plan such as a mindmap or skeleton outline of an assignment*), encouraging students to self evaluate their assignment before submitting it, seeking support through a study partner or group, using a range of strategies to remember key information (e.g. *creating a mnemonic or acronym*) and managing time effectively. Other strategies suggested by Marzano et al. (2001) include helping students to identify similarities and differences, to summarise, and to generate and test hypotheses.

One program titled *The Student Success Skills Program* targeted 5th–9th graders who were below 50th percentile on their state achievement test in reading and maths (Brigman and Webb 2007). The students were taught skills linked to academic tenacity such as: having a growth mindset, learning how to set goals, monitoring their progress and strategies for handling high-pressure situations by learning to breathe deeply and imagine a safe place where they felt supported, protected and in control. Students participating in the program earned higher state test scores in reading and maths than those in the control group. Hattie's (2009) large scale meta-analysis of the in-school and out-of-school factors that contributed to positive learning outcomes highlights the importance of ongoing formative assessment that benefits both teachers and students. Ongoing formative assessment provides students with important feedback on their progress but also provides teachers with regular feedback on how well they are teaching a specific skill or concept so they can adjust their teaching accordingly. Hattie also highlights the



importance of providing students with the success criteria for tasks or, preferably, teachers co-developing success criteria with their students. These different strategies show the importance of teachers providing support to students to promote the positive psychological factors that are crucial to students achieving positive learning outcomes at school.

## 2.5 PROSPER Pathway 4: Focusing on STRENGTHS

Schools that focus on and value the different individual and collective strengths of all members of the school community demonstrate the fourth PROSPER component for sustained student wellbeing. A ‘strength’ has been defined as ways of behaving, thinking or feeling that an individual has a natural capacity for enjoys doing and which can assist them to achieve optimal functioning while they pursue valued outcomes (Govindji and Linley 2007; Linley and Harrington 2006). A more recent definition by Wood et al. (2011) describes ‘personal strengths’ as the characteristics of a person that allows them to perform well or at their personal best. Using one’s strengths in schoolwork has been found to be far more enjoyable and productive than working on one’s weaknesses, especially for those students whose strengths are not in the traditional academic domain (Noble 2004). A strengths-based approach does not ignore weaknesses, but rather helps students achieve outcomes by building on their strengths and understanding and managing their limitations. When people work with their strengths they tend to learn more readily, perform at a higher level, are more motivated and confident, and have a stronger sense of satisfaction, mastery and competence (Clifton and Harter 2003; Peterson and Seligman 2004; Linley and Harrington 2006).

A ‘strength’ can be a specific skill or ability such writing, reading, playing music, swimming, cartooning, leadership or using spread-sheets. It can also be a character trait such as persistence, bravery, kindness to others, sense of humour. Gardner’s (1983, 2006) theory of multiple intelligences for ability strengths and Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) model for character strengths are both useful frameworks for educators to utilise in school settings and have been applied in class and school settings (e.g. see Kornhaber et al. 2003; McGrath and Noble 2005a, b; McGrath and Noble 2011a, b; Chen et al. 2009; Peterson and Seligman 2004; Yeager et al. 2011).

The first step for teachers in using a strengths-based approach is to help students to select strategies for the identification of their strengths so they have an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of their relative strengths and weaknesses. The second step is to collaboratively design and implement educational programs and environments in which students can first explore and then apply their strengths in a productive and satisfying way. A strengths-based approach also encourages students to understand that any work that does not engage one of their natural strengths may require a lot more effort to develop competency and mastery in the domains tapped by that strength.



2.5.1 Ability Strengths

Howard Gardner’s (1983, 2006) model of multiple intelligences (MI) provides directions for the identification and development of ability strengths. MI theory’s main claim is that it is more productive to describe a student’s cognitive ability in terms of several relatively independent but interacting intelligences than a single ‘general’ intelligence. With MI theory the question changed from ‘how smart is this student?’ to ‘how is this student smart?’ In other words ‘what are the relative strengths of this student across all eight intelligences?’ However it is important that supporters of the MI model don’t fall into the erroneous trap of labelling students by their MI strength in the belief that this will raise their self esteem and motivate them to do well in school. Gardner defines an intelligence as a bio-psychological potential to process particular types of information to solve problems or create products that are valued in at least one culture or community. MI theory identifies the following eight intellectual strengths (Table 2.3).

Each person has an intelligence profile that is a description of their relative strengths and weaknesses across the eight intelligences. According to Moran (2011) what makes the MI approach so powerful is how the different intelligences interact and combine to achieve a purpose. Rich and challenging learning tasks do not isolate one intelligence but rather combine intelligences to achieve a purposeful learning outcome. Take the development of a careers booklet for example. Students are first encouraged to identify their strengths and a career that utilises those strengths (*Intrapersonal intelligence*). The students collaborate in a group of four (*Interpersonal intelligence*) to research, plan and write the booklet (*Verbal-linguistic intelligence*) on four different careers. The booklet contains facts and statistics about different careers (*Logical-mathematical intelligence*) but also strengths and skills checklists to help these students and others assess whether or not they have the capabilities for each career (*Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences*). The booklet’s graphics and layout engages *visual-spatial intelligence*. Feedback from teacher and other students enhances the participating students’ *interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences*. This exercise also heightens students’ sense of purpose by helping them to identify their strengths and target their beliefs about their ‘future self’—what career they could aim for, who they could become and ways to become that self. The benefits for students who may face significant barriers to academic success was illustrated in an intervention targeting students in USA from low-income African American and Hispanic 8th graders in an

**Table 2.3** Gardner’s multiple intelligences

Verbal-linguistic intelligence	Musical intelligence
Logical-mathematical intelligence	Interpersonal intelligence
Visual-spatial intelligence	Intrapersonal intelligence
Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence	Naturalist intelligence

inner-city school district (Oyserman et al. 2006). The students participated in a 10 session workshop which included describing what kind of adult they would like to be, obstacles they would encounter to becoming that person and how they could overcome those obstacles. Compared to a control group these students earned significantly higher grades in 9th grade, had fewer school absences, were less likely to be reported for disruptive behaviour and were 60 % less likely to repeat 8th grade. Having a sense of purpose in relation to their ‘future self’ motivated these students to work harder and achieve better grades.

MI theory has been widely adopted in schools across the world since its first publication over thirty years ago (Gardner 1983). The publication *Multiple Intelligences Around the World* (Chen et al. 2009) provides case studies of MI theory applied in education across Asia, Europe, South America and USA. It provides educators with a framework that allows and supports a wider variety of abilities and skills to be expressed and to contribute to the school community than the traditional academic classroom. A differentiated curriculum based on Gardner’s multiple intelligences model has the potential to build positive educational communities in which students value and celebrate student differences and for students who struggle with learning to achieve more academic success (Kornhaber et al. 2003; McGrath and Noble 2005a, b; Noble 2004). An evaluation of outcomes in forty-one schools that had been using MI theory for curriculum differentiation for at least three years found significant benefits of the MI approach in terms of improvements in student engagement and learning, student behaviour, and parent participation (Kornhaber et al. 2003). This evaluation found particular benefits for students with learning difficulties who demonstrated greater effort in learning, more motivation and improved learning outcomes when offered different entry points into the curriculum and different ways to demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum.

Gardner advocates the provision of multiple entry points into the curriculum to reach students with different strengths and to raise their level of interest and curiosity in the subject matter. The following table illustrates Gardner’s seven entry points with curriculum examples developed by McGrath and Noble (2005a).

**Box: Examples of Multiple Entry Points into the Curriculum**

<b>Narrative entry point:</b> Telling stories about the topic and people involved e.g. Charles Darwin for evolution; Ernest Shackleton for polar exploration	<b>Cooperative or social entry point:</b> e.g: Engaging in cooperative learning groups where each group member’s contribution is interdependent on others and everyone collaborates and is accountable
<b>Quantitative entry point:</b> Presenting data connected to the topic such as the twin study correlations for heritability of intelligence or mental illness,	<b>Aesthetic entry point:</b> Using powerful visual images or music e.g. analysing visual effects of DVD of Romeo and Juliet, displaying beautiful photos of a

(continued)

(continued)	
or introducing a topic on animals by posing questions about the fastest, heaviest, smallest etc	volcanic eruption or playing music to create a particular mood
<b>Logic entry point:</b> Exploring the logical connections between the key elements e.g. the effects of the sun on water evaporation or photosynthesis	<b>Hands-on entry point:</b> Using concrete materials such as blocks to understand mathematical computations, or mixing paint colours to understand the colour wheel
<b>Existential entry point:</b> Addressing the big questions such as the nature of truth or beauty, justice or freedom, life or death	

A curriculum planning tool that helps teachers to plan teaching tasks for different student strengths was developed by McGrath and Noble (1995, 2005a). The curriculum planning tool called the MI/Bloom Matrix (McGrath and Noble 2005a, b) assists teachers to develop tasks based on each of the eight multiple intelligences at each of the six Revised Bloom’s levels of thinking (from simple to complex and challenging tasks). The planner helps teachers to provide opportunities for students to make meaningful choices about their learning tasks and products (Noble 2004). The MI/Bloom Matrix is accompanied by a number of MI assessment tools that can be used to assist students to identify their own relative cognitive strengths. The use of the matrix helped all the teachers in two schools identify academic and other strengths in their students and increased the teachers’ confidence and skills in diversifying their curriculum tasks to effectively engage their different students in learning (Noble 2004).

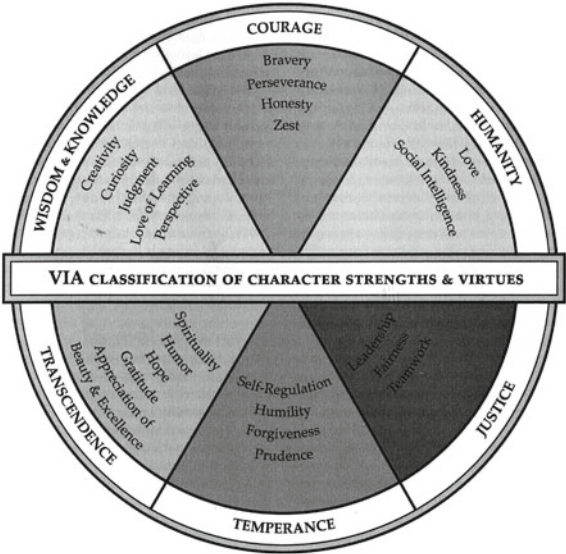
Research with teachers in two schools who had used the matrix for over 18 months found that teachers grew in confidence in catering for different student strengths and planning and teaching a diverse range of learning tasks for a differentiated curriculum (Noble 2004). Students were more likely to engage in intellectually challenging activities if they were working in an area of relative strength. Teachers’ observations of student engagement and achievements in the diverse learning activities, especially when given an opportunity to work in an area of strength, increased their academic expectations for all students (Noble 2004, 2002). Higher teacher expectations based on curriculum differentiation using multiple intelligences were particularly beneficial for those children from a non-English speaking background or children who struggled with the academic curriculum (Kornhaber et al. 2003; Noble 2004). The following box illustrates the key themes articulated by the teachers in the two research schools who used the MI/Bloom matrix for curriculum differentiation.

<b>Perceived benefits of MI/bloom matrix by teachers</b>
<b>Caters for different student strengths</b>
It (the matrix) helps me to know that I am catering to all the needs in my class because I have a huge range and looking at the activities suggested by the different intelligences (MI) and the levels suggested by Bloom helps me to feel confident that I am catering to those needs
What I like about it (the matrix) is the diversity of tasks. Some children are really extended and go off in directions that you would never even think of. I'm amazed by their creativity
<b>A teacher-friendly planning tool for curriculum differentiation</b>
The matrix helps me to clarify the whole thing in my mind. Just by looking at the matrix you can immediately see the different areas and the different levels and activities and how you are addressing the different intelligences and levels of thinking. It just makes it a clear picture to me; ...If it's clear in my mind in the shape of a matrix, then it's clear in my teaching
<b>A useful tool for planning units of work integrating one or more curriculum areas</b>
The MI/Bloom matrix is fabulous for integrating different curriculum subjects
I'm doing Water as my topic and it's an environment (Social Studies) topic and I'm able to bring in a lot of Language and Science and Technology and Maths such as measuring. Anything like that—it (the matrix) just helps, it gives you ideas to integrate if that's what you want to do
<b>Helps students develop deeper understanding of their ability strengths and the difference between easy and challenging tasks and ways to use and build those strengths</b>
The children got really involved when I started to explain what Bloom was and what Gardner was—I showed them my matrix and where I had placed different activities. They started discussing whether they put this activity there and they were saying things like 'no, that's easier' and then they would turn it around. The kids who really talked it through and developed a better understanding have given me really good work on different tasks. But the other kids who thought it was easy have given me complete rubbish or not what I want. So it's helped some of the kids to talk about what Understand is, what Analyse is, what Space and Vision activities are, Self activities are and so on

2.5.2 Character Strengths

The Values In Action (VIA) model of character strengths developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) has become popular in positive psychology/positive education. The VIA is based on a review of currently and historically universally valued character traits and defines psychological or character strengths as morally valued traits whose use contributes to fulfilment and happiness (Peterson and Seligman 2004). The VIA shown in the table below incorporates twenty four character strengths organised under six ‘virtues’ (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4** Peterson and Seligman’s character strengths



From *Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing* (2014), by Ryan M. Niemiec. Used with permission. All right reserved.  
A great colour poster of the strengths can be found at <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/poster2.png>.

Teachers can help students to identify their character strengths. A useful tool for this purpose is Peterson and Seligman’s online VIA (Values in Action) Strengths Questionnaire ([www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)). The children’s version of the questionnaire is for children from 10 years to 17 years of age. For younger children, Park and Peterson (2006) successfully asked parents of children who were too young to complete the questionnaire to identify their children’s strengths. A person’s top 3–5 strengths are referred to as their *signature strengths*. A signature strength is defined as a deeply held character trait, that defines one’s essence of being. Using our signature strengths are seen to infuse us with energy. They are seen as the core of our identity and thereby help individuals to function at their best and maintain a sense of authenticity (Niemiec 2014).

The use of this framework for fostering wellbeing in school students is relatively new but holds great promise (Quinlan et al. 2014). White and Waters (2014, 2015) presented a case study of a K-12 Australian school that described the potential benefits of a whole school strengths-based approach for enhancing student well-being. They outlined how character strengths have been embedded in English literature classes, in the primary curriculum, in sports coaching, in training students for school leadership positions and in counselling students. The authors demonstrated how students from the beginning of their life at school are developing a deep

knowledge of how to identify, explore, further develop and apply their character strengths. They argue that the combination of these different initiatives under the umbrella of positive education has contributed to “*a cultural tipping point where the strengths initiatives across the school are fusing to create a strengths-based culture*” (White and Waters 2014, pp. 6–7).

Other examples of the VIA framework used in education include Proctor et al.’s (2011) examination of the Strengths gym. Adolescents who participated in exercises in the program that were based around character strengths experienced a significant increase in life satisfaction and positive affect from baseline to post test. The Strath-Haven Positive Psychology program also used the VIA character strengths framework in their Language Arts classes (Seligman et al. 2009). Pre-test to post-test comparisons showed that the students in these classes reported greater enjoyment and engagement in school compared to students in a control group. Teachers also reported that the program improved the students’ strengths related to learning such as curiosity, love of learning and creativity and parents and teachers reported improvements in the students’ social skills. Quinlan et al. (2014) also describe a six-session classroom-based strengths intervention with 9–12 year old students. Students reported higher levels of positive affect, classroom engagement, autonomy and satisfaction of relatedness needs, class cohesion and strengths use. A useful model for practising character strengths is offered by Niemiec (2014). He provides guidelines on how people can first become ‘Aware’ of their character strengths, then ‘Explore’ what it feels like when they engage a strength and finally learn how to ‘Apply’ the strength in ways that ensures the strength is embedded into life routines. McGrath and Noble (2011a, b) provide examples in the *Bounce Back* program of how teachers can help students, from the first years of schooling, become aware, explore and apply their character and their ability strengths.

### 2.5.3 Self Respect

Self respect has been defined as a character trait (Ferkany 2007). We define self-respect as an attitude of self-acceptance and approval for one’s own character and conduct and consideration for one’s own wellbeing. According to Dillon (1997, p. 226)

individuals who are blessed with a confident respect for themselves have something that is vital to living a satisfying, meaningful, flourishing life, while those condemned to live without it or with damaged or fragile self respect are thereby condemned to live constricted, frustrating lives cut off from possibilities for self-realisation, self-fulfilment and happiness.

As noted in chapter one we suggest that the construct of self respect is a more useful construct for educators and parents than the construct of self esteem. Although the two constructs are similar, the differences between them are crucial (Langer 1999). To esteem anything is to evaluate it positively so self-esteem is an evaluation of one’s ‘worth’ as a person and ranges from low to high. Self-esteem focuses more on successes, what one can do, what one looks like, and/or what one

has. Therefore self-esteem fluctuates because it is usually very dependent on feedback from others.

To respect something on the other hand is to accept it. Therefore self respect can be viewed as an attitude of self acceptance. Self respect is not contingent on success because there are always setbacks and failures to deal with; nor is it reliant on comparing ourselves with others because there are always people who are better than us. With self respect we accept ourselves because of who we are and not because of what we can or cannot do.

Young people can be taught to behave in ways that develop and also demonstrate their self-respect. Students with self-respect are more likely to behave in the following ways.

### **Box: Self Respect**

#### **Self-knowledge**

They focus more on their strengths than their limitations, work towards self-improvement and don't over-focus on comparing themselves with others. They believe it's OK to be different and OK to be yourself. They consider themselves to be neither inferior nor superior to other people. They continually seek self-knowledge in relation to their ability and character strengths by looking for evidence rather than using 'wishful thinking'.

#### **Self management**

They have clear moral values and try to put them into practice. They try not to let themselves down. They try to respond to challenges and difficult times in their life with dignity, courage and resilience. They try to adopt a positive approach to life, focusing on things that go well, expressing gratitude to people who support them and feeling grateful for the good things in their life. They are pleased to receive positive feedback but are not dependent on it nor controlled by it.

They enjoy and feel satisfied with their achievements but avoid being arrogant about them. They balance pride with humility.

#### **Self-protection**

They act in ways that protect their physical and psychological safety and their reputation. They believe that they matter and that it is their right to be treated respectfully and fairly and not to be mistreated by others. They are prepared to take appropriate and non-aggressive steps to protect this right. They don't let others put them down and don't put themselves down either. They respect their own body and wellbeing and make an effort to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

#### **Self-kindness**

When they feel 'down' they try to be as caring and supportive towards themselves as they would be towards other people they care about. They

understand that everyone has self doubts occasionally and they try not to let their self-doubts overwhelm them nor get in the way of achieving their goals. They recognise that they are imperfect but continue to like and accept themselves in spite of difficulties, mistakes or failures; they work hard and feel satisfied with their efforts, even when unsuccessful. They reflect about where they could have managed things differently and try to learn from the experience. They avoid over-criticising themselves and don't give themselves a 'hard time'. They remind themselves about their positive qualities and previous successes.

### **Self-confidence**

They take an optimistic approach when they take on a new or difficult task or challenge. They put in the effort that is required to complete the task and make sure that they have the necessary skills to do it. They use positive self-talk (*e.g. I think I have prepared well enough to be able to do this*) and think realistically but optimistically about any possible risks involved, knowing that they will cope if they don't do as well as they hope.

### **Self-trust**

They trust their own judgment and have faith in themselves; they consider others' viewpoints but are not automatically swayed by them. They try to make sound decisions about what is best for them but also listen to, and incorporate advice and wisdom from people they know they can trust.

### **Respect and Compassion for Others**

They try to treat others with respect and compassion and acknowledge their right to dignity. They accept differences in others and don't see 'differences' as 'defects'. They try to focus more on other people's strengths than their limitations. They don't mistreat or deceive people. They show compassion and support towards others and try to help others in trouble.

## **2.5.4 Collective Strengths**

Moving educational systems and schools from deficit systems to strengths-based systems is a common theme in the literature around school leadership, inclusive schooling, positive psychology, and positive organisational scholarship. A focus on collective strengths and collective responsibility for both student learning and student wellbeing brings together the strengths of the whole educational community in a school including the leadership team, teachers, support staff, administration staff and families. A focus on the collective strengths of everyone in the school contributes to the development of a professional learning community (Hipp and



Huffman 2010). The development of a well-functioning professional learning community has been highlighted as a desirable and perhaps even an essential process within a school for building capacity for improving student achievement (Fullan 2002).

Wenger et al. (2002) described communities of practice as ‘groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion for something they do and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on a regular basis’ (p. 4). The following components of a professional learning community within an educational context have been suggested:

- A collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all and collective enquiry into best practice for teaching and learning (DuFour et al. 2006)
- An action and results orientation and a commitment to continuous improvement (DuFour et al. 2006)
- Supportive and shared leadership (Avenell 2007; Hipp and Huffman 2010)
- Shared values and vision (Bolam et al. 2005)
- Collective learning and the application of that learning (DuFour et al. 2006)
- Shared practice (Mitchell et al. 2001)
- Linkages between school and community (Avenell 2007)
- Supportive conditions that enable ongoing maintenance of the learning community (Fullan 2006).

In practice, a focus on collective strengths often involves processes such as identifying the strengths of individuals and making others aware of these strengths, teachers exchanging feedback about their practice, teachers visiting each other’s classrooms and teachers sharing teaching and learning resources.

Technology has facilitated the development and outcomes of professional learning communities, and many educators now extend their professional connections by meeting online with peers to focus, for example, on student wellbeing (see: [www.pesa.edu.au](http://www.pesa.edu.au)). Many learning communities focus on the strengths of people within their school families as well as in the wider community as part of their learning community, embracing and valuing their diverse strengths.

Professional learning communities expect and embrace diversity and value the different strengths of both students and staff. Hoy et al. (2006) research has documented the importance of collective teacher efficacy, also described as ‘academic optimism’. Hoy et al.’s. (2006) research in 96 high schools (Years 9–12) indicated that the teachers’ collective academic optimism and their belief that they could improve student learning outcomes enhanced their students’ academic achievement and minimised the impact of socio-economic status and other demographic data and the students’ previous achievement history. The importance of enhancing teachers’ academic optimism and efficacy about their capacity to “make a difference”, especially for non-resilient students who are struggling, was also highlighted in a study by Oswald et al. (2003). In this study teachers were more likely to attribute their students’ low resilience to personal or family factors rather than factors under their control or a lack of skills that the teacher could teach at school.

Research over the last thirty years or so has clearly demonstrated the effect of teacher expectations on student wellbeing and learning. As Weis and Fine (2003) have observed, low teacher expectations about what students are capable of often reproduces and reinforces social inequalities based on racial, ethnic, social class and gender stereotypes. Seventy four schools in an Australian Priority Action Schools Program (PASP) were identified as schools in communities that had sustained periods of cumulative disadvantage and where community strengths and student wellbeing were not thriving. Many teachers in the PASP program noted that when they took a strengths-based approach and collectively raised their expectations of their students and made their students clearly aware of their raised expectations, these teachers were consistently rewarded by improved student learning performance, keep confidence in their learning increased and their behaviour improved (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis 2004). One school noted that just supporting students without also intellectually challenging them can lead to ‘learned helplessness’. This school demonstrated that a shift to teachers communicating high expectations to their students accompanied by a challenging curriculum was needed to encourage students to reach their ‘personal best’ levels of performance in both their learning and behaviour.

### ***2.5.5 Using Appreciative Inquiry***

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a collaborative and strengths-based approach to change developed by Cooperrider et al. (2008). It builds on the core principles of the new disciplines of positive psychology and positive education. The approach is built on the assumption that every organisation has a positive core that has contributed to its previous successes as well as its current strengths, potentials and assets. The essence of AI is the art and practice of asking powerful questions that will further strengthen a school’s capacity to be a positive learning community.

Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative, strength-based approach to organisational change and development that energises and motivates individuals to work together to achieve positive outcomes by identifying what’s best about the organisation and its people. AI is based on the positive principle that the positive emotions and energy associated with identifying, celebrating, and building on strengths enable people to transform organisations and move them in new directions. In contrast analysing and solving problems can lead to downward spirals of blame and negative energy, whereas discovering and building on collective strengths leads to upward spirals of aspiration, possibility, and the collective efficacy for transformational change (Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran 2011; Fredrickson 2009). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) provide a comprehensive overview of the use of AI to transform schools and school districts in USA and Europe. The most common version of AI follows 5 stages that are outlined in the following Box.

### **Box: 5 Stages of appreciative inquiry into student wellbeing in a school**

**Stage 1: DEFINE** (*prior to staff workshop*) The facilitator(s) define the inquiry's key focus. The questions you choose for your AI are crucial to the success of the process, for example:

- (i) how can we enhance student wellbeing within our schools in a cost-effective way?
- (ii) how can we improve student achievement at all year levels? or
- (iii) how can we improve student engagement in a range of different ways?

**Stage 2: DISCOVER** (*Individually first; then in small groups; then in the full group*). This 5-step Discovery process is used to discover what can be learnt from the collective past of the participants about 'what has worked well in the past' and what are the 'best features, assets and potentials' of their school that we can build on as we work towards enhancing student wellbeing

1. **Individual Reflections:** Each participant reflects as follows. *'Think back over your experiences at your school (or in other schools); identify a specific situation or experience or a peak time that really stands out for you when you felt energised, satisfied and proud of being associated with the school because it seemed to be 'getting it right' in regards to defined issue. Consider these prompting questions and jot down some notes:*
  - *What was working so well and why? What was happening that contributed?*
  - *What actions were being taken? What structures were in place? What values were being promoted?*
  - *What key people made a difference and how? How did you contribute to the defined issue and what strengths did you use to do so?*
2. **Story-telling In Pairs:** Participants form pairs. One person tells the other person the story of the personal experience/situation/time they have just reflected on. The listener uses prompting questions (see above) and 'tell me more' prompts and takes down some notes. Then they swap over.
3. **Re-telling of Stories in a Group of 4:** Two pairs join up to make groups of four. Each person re-tells their partner's story to the other pair i.e. 4 stories are retold
4. **Group Analysis in the Group of 4:** The 4 people in the group work together to identify the main 'themes' that emerged when their four stories were combined, focusing on:
  - What they have learnt from the past about factors that can 'make a difference' to enhancing student wellbeing
  - What they have identified as the 'best things' (past and present) about their school (e.g. *assets and potential such as people, school*)

*community, resources, leadership, values etc*). These contribute to a school's 'positive core' to be utilised and built on

Each person also has a specific role in this step:

- One person is the group's note-taker and one person will be the spokesperson
- Two people work together to make a mind-map of the themes (*to be placed around the room for viewing by the full group before step 5 begins*)

**5. In the Full Group:** Each group's spokesperson summarises what was 'discovered' about what could make a difference to the defined issue and the best features/assets/potential within their schools that can help to do this. The facilitator creates a list of each group's themes and identifies commonalities.

**Stage 3: DREAM** (*In the full group*). Participants co-construct a vision of how their school could be if everything they could think of that could contribute to student wellbeing was in place. What would the school and its people look like, act like, think like, feel like?

What would the physical layout and organisation of the school be like? What structures might be in place? How would different teaching and learning processes support this culture? What resources would be available?

**Stage 4: DESIGN** (*In the full group*). The full group continues to co-construct by identifying the best actions that could be taken to turn the vision into reality. Decisions are made about:

- Two small actions that could be taken immediately that would make a significant difference to student wellbeing
- One 'bold' action that could be taken that has the potential to be a 'game-changer'.
- Who will do what, how and when? How to measure progress and keep it going?
- What ways can everyone in the school 'improvise' informally and make their own contributions to the changes?

**Stage 5: DELIVER** Make decisions about who will be involved in each of these 'actions' and how and when they will report back. Plan to follow up fairly soon with interim observations/reports.

## 2.6 PROSPER Pathway 5: Fostering a Sense of PURPOSE

Motivating students to find purpose and meaning in their life is seen as a critical step in enhancing their sense of wellbeing. Purpose is a reliable marker of flourishing (Seligman 2011), thriving (Bundick et al. 2009); psychological wellbeing (Keyes et al. 2002), resilience (Benard 1991; Masten and Reed 2002) and life satisfaction (Mauss et al. 2011; Bronk et al. 2009; Bronk et al. 2010). The two constructs of purpose and meaning share an intention to see one's life as guided by an overarching aim (Steger 2009), and many definitions use the two terms inter-changeably. Finding a sense of purpose in life to shape their sense of identity has long been identified as a primary developmental task for adolescents (Erikson 1968) and an important developmental asset for young people (Benson 2006). In contrast, a life without purpose means that students can drift with no direction (Damon 2008). Moran (2011, p. 123) uses a boat metaphor to explain the difference between being purposeful and purposeless; *“without purpose, a person is like a sailboat, going whichever way the wind blows; with purpose, a young person is like a powerboat, moving forward using a controlled power source toward some marker on the horizon”*. A lack of purpose appears to contribute to poor mental health and is linked to poorer psychological health and higher psychological distress in both young people (e.g. Shek 1993) and adults (e.g. Debats 1998).

Of course it's possible for a young terrorist to have a deep-seated sense of purpose in causing harm to as many people as possible that he perceives do not share his beliefs. He may experience positive emotions, be resilient, be strongly connected to his terrorist gang or organisation, be highly engaged and achieve outcomes deemed as successful by this group and be very satisfied with his life. This example illustrates the importance of Damon's (2008) warning that we should carefully distinguish a noble purpose, which is morally acceptable and admirable, from an ignoble or evil life goal (such as the goal of youth terrorists). Damon defines purpose as *‘a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self’* (Damon et al. 2003, p. 121). Therefore purpose indicates engagement in a meaningful activity, perceiving how to extend that activity into the future and having an orientation to have a prosocial impact (Moran 2011). Purpose has three main components: a long-term intention or goal, an action plan and commitment, and a beyond-the-self motivation (Damon 2008).

Research at the Stanford Youth Purpose Project (Malin et al. 2014; Moran 2011) found that only about a quarter of young people aged 12–22 have a sense of purpose in how they can contribute to the big picture and are actually engaged in relevant activities. One in ten understand there is a big picture but they don't know where they fit; and another quarter are oriented to goals like college, jobs, and making money with an intention to benefit primarily themselves. 40 % did not have a clear picture of their strengths, nor a sense of purpose. Not surprisingly non-purposeful students were found more in younger grades, and the purposeful

and self-oriented life goal students were more prevalent in 12th grade and college. It would appear that young people who form and sustain a purpose show an exceptional initiative by proactively seeking opportunities and building for themselves a support network to help them achieve their particular purpose (Moran 2011; Malin et al. 2014). According to Moran (2011) it is not so much the particular task or event that is important in fostering a sense of purpose but how the young person perceives and makes use of the initiative. In other words the personal meaning they gain from the experience is more impactful in fostering a sense of purpose than the event itself. The personal meaning the students attribute to the opportunity or challenge facilitates how they perceive the event can contribute positively to others, such as their class, school or local community, now and in the future. Malin et al. (2014) have found that young people with purpose are more likely to talk about seeking out situations to engage their purpose and about how challenges and struggles are opportunities not barriers. For example being teased or bullied or observing bullying might contribute to their drive to make their school a safe and supportive place for everyone.

A sense of purpose also fuels academic tenacity and better academic outcomes. One study that illustrated this encouraged high school students to write in their science lessons every 3 or 4 weeks over a school term a brief essay describing how the content they had studied that week could apply to their lives (Hulleman and Harackiewicz 2009). Students in the intervention group expressed more interest in science at the end of the term and earned higher science grades than students in the control group. Importantly students' grades only improved if the students themselves came up with the reasons why the schoolwork was relevant and not when their teachers simply told them why the material should be relevant to their lives.

So what can schools do to foster a sense of purpose? One example of empowering students to develop a sense of purpose is through their participation in Student Action Teams (Holdsworth et al. 2003). A student action team is a group of students who identify and tackle a school or community issue: they research the issue, make plans and proposals about it, and take action on it (Holdsworth et al. 2003). They demonstrate a sense of purpose by their active engagement in committing time, energy, resources, and knowledge to achieving their goal. To ensure the success of these student-led initiatives Holdsworth et al. (2003) has argued that it is important they are recognized within the 'authorised activities' of a school, and within the 'authorised approaches' of the Education system and not as something that is outside 'proper' school work. Schools that have implemented student action teams indicate a substantial positive change in areas such as knowledge, skills, attitude and connectedness, and students who took part specifically identified their increased level of engagement at school (Holdsworth et al. 2003). Encouraging students to have a deep self knowledge (intrapersonal intelligence) of their character and ability strengths would clearly help them to identify purposeful goals. Moran (2011) argues that without self-understanding young people won't know how to develop, make meaning of or make use of their relative strengths and weaknesses across the eight intelligences. McGrath and Noble (2011a, b Book 3) provide guidelines on how students can work together to use their collective character and ability strengths to help others

in their school, local or global community. These guidelines include tools for self reflection on their contributions to their community to enhance their sense of purpose.

Community service (or service learning) is another way schools are facilitating educational experiences that develop student wellbeing and give students a sense of purpose by contributing to the needs and wellbeing of others. Community service has been shown to enhance students' academic skills, transfer of knowledge to 'real world situations', critical thinking skills, as well as a sense of personal and social responsibility and civic engagement, social skills and empathy (Elias et al. 2006; Hanson et al. 2003; Astin et al. 1999; Eyler and Giles 1999). Other school initiatives that can foster a sense of purpose include: encouraging students to participate in peer support programs (e.g. peer mediation, buddy systems, cross-age or same age peer tutoring, mentoring systems); finding ways for students to participate in class-wide or school-wide leadership and decision-making structures such as classroom councils, classroom committees or school-wide Student Representative Committees; arranging for the local community to have access to student products and performances by, for example, organising for students to perform in community centre, displaying their work in a local shopping centre or asking the local library to host a collection of student-made books. Students could also demonstrate their sense of pride in and commitment to their school and local community through the establishment of student-directed 'School Pride' or 'community pride' Committees' at each year level). All these examples provide real-life, purposeful, problem-solving contributions that illustrate how a student or group of students can and do intentionally and purposefully contribute to their school or local community.

### **Case Study: Students taking action and gaining a sense of purpose**

An academic inquiry unit on '*caring for our environment*' inspired children at one primary school to take action to make a difference in their school and local environment. The children set up their student action team titled the environmental impact team made up of students from kindergarten (5–6 years of age) to year 6 (11–12 years of age). The student action team initiated a number of environmental projects that include (i) a schoolwide 'nude food' campaign where all children are encouraged to bring their lunch to school without plastic wrap; (ii) the installation of 3 rubbish bins in every classroom for (a) recycling, (b) their school worm farm and (c) non-recyclable waste and (iii) a project to raise funds titled '*living gardens*' where the children have made packs of different seeds of herbs and vegetables to sell to their school community. The funds has helped the children set up their own herb and vegetable garden and install chickens in the school grounds as well as buy trees to replant in the local community (Cahill 2012). An interview with Sue Cahill talks about the use of student action teams in their school to reduce school bullying <http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/safe-schools-toolkit/the-nine-elements/element-7/case-studies/st-charles-ps-element-7/>.

A second example at the secondary level was initiated with a group of year 10 students who were disengaged from school and alienated from their neighbourhoods. Appreciative inquiry questions were used to help the students identify their strengths and create purposeful community projects of their choice designed to show how ‘*we will make a difference in our community*’ (Morsilla and Fisher 2007). The projects included a public underage dance party, and the development of children’s activities at a refugee cultural festival. These two examples illustrate the key aspects of a Student Action Team; the students are challenged, their participation enables them to make decisions about what’s important to them; they learn how to apply their knowledge, skills and attitudes to ‘real world’ situations; and they gain a real ‘authentic’ sense of meaning and purpose by contributing to making a difference within their community.

A third example is a *Student Wellbeing Action Group* or SWAG that is a student-initiated and student led group designed to improve student wellbeing across the school. Each year the students in this Government-funded high school held a student wellbeing conference with invited speakers on topics such as cybersafety, or mental health and wellbeing and included the participation of students from 6 other schools. They also initiated a number of school-wide student wellbeing projects such as an anti-bullying campaign. See <http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/safe-schools-toolkit/the-nine-elements/element-7/case-studies/melbourne-hs-element-7/> for an interview with the SWAG team.

## 2.7 PROSPER Pathway 6: Enhancing ENGAGEMENT

Engagement can be defined as an observable manifestation of student motivation to learn (e.g. Fredericks et al. 2004; Meyer and Turner 2002). It is most often demonstrated through expression of interest, participation, effort, contribution, enthusiasm and enjoyment. When students don’t engage with what is happening at school they can become bored and disaffected or misbehave. In the short term student engagement in learning has been shown to be a reliable predictor of academic outcomes. Over the longer term it is linked to student attendance, academic resilience and school completion (e.g. Jimerson et al. 2003; Klem and Connell 2004). A few studies (e.g. O’Farrell and Morrison 2003) have also suggested that academic engagement may also be protective against the adoption of high-risk student behaviour such as substance abuse. Slade and Trent (2000) established a clear link between student disengagement and pedagogy that was ‘boring, repetitive and irrelevant’ (p. 221). Fullan (2012) refers to Jenkin’s interviews with thousands of teachers that suggested that the level of student engagement drops from 95 % in Kindergarten to 37 % in Grade nine (for a review see Wigfield et al. 2006).



Viewing student engagement from four perspectives can be helpful for educators in planning for curriculum and instruction. Fredricks et al. (2004) talk about behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. We add social engagement (McGrath and Noble 2010). When students are highly *behaviourally engaged* they are actively involved and stay absorbed in the learning process. When they are highly *emotionally engaged* in learning in a positive way they are interested, curious, enthusiastic, excited, confident and satisfied with their learning and proud of their learning products. When students are highly *cognitively engaged* they are intellectually challenged and stretched and employing critical and creative thinking. When students are highly *socially engaged* they are positively communicating with their classmates and teacher, cooperating well in a team and using social skills such as turn taking, active listening, and negotiating.

There are qualitative differences in the level or degree of engagement that occurs for each component of engagement (Fredricks et al. 2004). For instance *behavioural engagement* can range from simply doing the work and following rules to actively participating in a student representative council. Similarly emotional engagement can range from simply liking school to deeply valuing their school, social engagement from having one friend to being very popular and well liked. Cognitive engagement can range from simple memorisation to the use of self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and expertise. These qualitative differences within each dimension indicate that engagement can vary in intensity and duration and be short term and situation specific or long term and stable.

When teachers provided both intellectually challenging and socially supportive environments for all students, their students demonstrate higher levels of engagement, more positive emotions and applied more strategic approaches to their learning (Stipek 2002; Turner et al. 1998). In contrast when teachers focus only on academic content and create a negative social environment, students are more likely to be disengaged and more apprehensive about making mistakes. However if teachers focus only on the social dimensions of a learning task and fail to intellectually challenge students, then they are less likely to be cognitively engaged in learning (Fredricks et al. 2004). Cognitive engagement is enhanced when students have opportunities to actively discuss ideas, debate different points of view and critique each other's work in an emotionally safe learning environment (Guthrie and Wigfield 2000; Meloth and Deering 1994).

### ***2.7.1 Engagement Through Use of Effective Teaching Strategies***

The meta-analyses of Hattie (2009) and Marzano et al. (2001), discussed earlier in this section under 'Outcomes' (refer to page 56) also have relevance in terms of enhancing student engagement through the use of effective teaching strategies.

According to Hattie (2009, p. 159) teacher effectiveness is “*less about the content of the curricula and more about the strategies teachers use to implement the curriculum so that students progress upwards through the curricula content*”. Effective evidence-based teaching strategies include cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching and concept mapping (especially when used within a group context (see Box Below).

BOX: Different ways to use concept maps	
Fill in the gaps	Students, working in pairs, are given a half-completed concept map and asked to fill in the missing words and links. Prior preparation by the teacher includes creating a concept map and then identifying which parts to leave out. Each pair will need two copies of the incomplete concept map-one for drafting and one for their final concept map. A list of words that go in the concept map can be provided for some students
Put the jigsaw together	Students work as a pair or group of 3 to put together (e.g. with blu-tac on a wall or laid out on a desk) an enlarged concept map ‘jigsaw’ made by the teacher. The jigsaw components would be text boxes, links and label cards. Each group will need one complete cut-up concept map made from light cardboard
Put this information into a concept map	Students are given a sheet of information and asked to work in a small group to make a concept map to fit that information. Use the DASLER strategy with this version: Draft your product Agree as a group on why you did it that way Share it with another pair Listen to their feedback and give them feedback Evaluate the feedback Revise your product
Start from scratch	Students can be asked to make their own concept map for a specific topic. This can be very challenging!
From: McGrath and Noble (2010)	

Many countries have a crowded educational curriculum. Arguably the most effective teaching strategies are generic strategies that can be used by teachers in any subject at any year level. The content can be any curriculum area whether it is literature, mathematics, history or the sciences. The strategy can combine the social-emotional skills, thinking skills and the technology skills that promote student engagement and student wellbeing. This can be likened to the Russian doll effect where one strategy fits inside another and another and another. The three key ingredients for exceptional teaching that actively engage students in learning fall into three broad categories: *challenge, scaffolding and belonging* (Dweck et al. 2015). Effective teachers and schools *challenge* their students with high

performance standards and tasks that promote higher order thinking, provide instructional or cognitive *scaffolding* or motivational *scaffolding* so students can reach the high standard set and cultivate students' sense of *belonging* through the cooperative group structures—a sense of fellowship with their peers and teachers. The topic should be challenging and intrinsically motivating for the students; and the scaffolding and cooperative structure of the teaching strategy are key factors in promoting deep student engagement in learning. The topics that are relevant to real life situations and help promote student voice also help to promote students, sense of purpose in their learning. Highly engaging topics for students are often topics that are values-based controversial or provocative events, issues or 'big ideas', or issues that arise from texts or the media that capture the students' interest (McGrath and Noble 2010) and further their sense of responsibility to their school and their local or global community.

### **Box: Engagement through use of Higher-order Thinking Tools**

The following strategies all combine instructional and cognitive scaffolding that promote critical and/or creative thinking skills, plus scaffolding for cooperative learning and the use of social-emotional skills. (McGrath and Noble 2010). The topics the students research and discuss could readily be issues that contribute to their sense of purpose; for example contributing to a just and peaceful local and global community.

- *Ten Thinking Tracks* is a sequenced cooperative problem-solving/decision making scaffold where students work in groups. Each student in the group takes turns in leading the discussion and recording their group's answers in relation to two or three tracks. The tracks challenge children to think of the bright side, the down side, their feelings, suggest improvements, think ethically and to consider issues of social justice and finally to negotiate a group solution e.g *arranged marriages, microchip for all children under 16 years of age, students to be paid to attend school, no religious clothing or other items to be worn by students to school*
- *Multi-View* encourages perspective taking and empathy. Students consider a problem such as *cyber-bullying, or organ donation from the different perspectives of the people involved*.
- *Under the Microscope* encourages students to explore a controversial issue through different lens that includes their responsibility and the impact of the issue or event on their own lives and on others' lives e.g. *compulsory conscription to army, unemployment benefits*.
- *Cooperative Controversy* provides a scaffold for conflict resolution. Students work in groups of 4 where pair A identifies two arguments in support of a topic-related controversial proposition and pair B identifies two arguments against it. Each pair presents their arguments to the other pair. Then each pair's perspective is reversed and pair A thinks of new

disadvantages and pair B advantages. Finally the group of 4 negotiate the strongest argument for and against. Eg *closing all zoos, compulsory community service for all students*

- In *Socratic circles* half the class becomes the inner circle as discussants and the other half work in the outer circle as observers. The observers have a checklist to provide constructive feedback to the discussants on the quality of their thinking and their use of social-emotional skills. The two groups then swap roles and responsibilities e.g. *can school bullying be eradicated from all schools, why are so many people homeless?*

From: McGrath and Noble (2010).

**Engagement through technology.** The digital world of the 21st century is a highly engaging one for students, providing opportunities for ‘any time, any place’ learning 24 h per day, 7 days a week. Dewey’s famous quotation ‘*if we teach today as we were taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow*’ (Dewey 1944, p. 167) has more relevance now than ever before. Educators need to keep pace with technology to keep students actively engaged in learning. Helping children learn how to use technology are essential skills in the 21st century. Engagement can be enhanced through learning activities that promote online communication with children in other classes, schools and countries, social networking and the use of gaming principles. Students’ use of ICT also increases their capacity to take responsibility for their own learning and to be creative and innovative in the way they learn, in defining problems, in problem solving and decision-making and in the multi-media products they produce. Through technology students can now connect and collaborate with children in other parts of the world. For example primary school aged children can now work collaboratively with others in different countries to compare the different seasons across countries or study different ways of celebrating birthdays or other key events. Secondary aged students can collaborate to engage in a discussion of world issues by videoconferencing with students from the countries in which they are occurring. Such experiences can enhance children’s capabilities to be more creative problem solvers, self-directed learners, better communicators and life long learners. They can also be challenged to develop a greater capacity for empathy and social justice as they become more aware of different local and global perspectives.

Technology also offers a cost-effective way of helping students in impoverished or remote communities access education without the requirements for the physical infrastructure that has limited learning opportunities in the past. Providing internet facilities in local libraries, sponsoring the reconditioning of old computers so they can be sold more cheaply within needy communities, offering free training courses for young people and adults hosted by schools, and teaching about new technologies all encourage greater involvement with online education. The potential benefits from such initiatives are especially valuable for children and young people

in remote communities who have access to ICT but not access to high quality schooling.

Although many low and middle-income countries have limited access to personal computers, the majority of the world's population now have access to a mobile cellular signal and around 40 % have access to mobile broadband (ITU 2013). The extraordinary worldwide uptake of mobile subscriptions grew from less than 1 billion in 2000 to 6 billion in 2011 of which nearly 5 billion were in low and middle income countries (World Bank 2012; Layard and Hagell 2015). The UN estimates that more people have access to mobile phones than a toilet (6 billion compared with 4.5 billion respectively) (UN News Center 2013). Hence the potential for the development of mobile telephone apps is vast—30 billion were downloaded in 2011 and the number is rising (Layard and Hagell 2015). Layard and Hagell are strong advocates for the development and distribution of mobile apps designed to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of children. Examples of two Australian organisations developing such apps to enhance youth mental health and wellbeing are Reachout ([www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)) and the Young and Well Foundation. The potential of such apps is that billions of children and their teachers and parents could access these apps anywhere in the world. The role of an adult such as a teacher or parent is still pivotal to ensure that children understand and have opportunities to apply the app's key messages, especially for young children in the early and primary years. Two programs, one in India and one in Kenya illustrate the benefits of technology for engaging children in education in developing countries. Both programs use media, including television, radio, and comics to teach literacy skills and to connect and educate young people through the power of storytelling.

## Case Study

### Planet Read-India

India ranks 147th out of 177 countries for literacy based on UNESCO data. Hundreds of millions in India are either illiterate, or 'neo-literates'—possessing only rudimentary literacy skills despite having attended several years of primary school. Recognizing that literacy skills have to be constantly reinforced, *Planet Read* appropriated the method of 'Same Language Subtitling' (SLS)—the practice of subtitling television programs, films or video clips in the same language as the audio track—and applied it to the wildly popular Bollywood music videos aired weekly on television throughout the country.

With hundreds of millions of viewers keen to learn the words to their favorite songs, *Planet Read's* program has a huge reach. When exposed to 30 min of SLS per week, the functional literacy rate among students who had at least five years of Hindi schooling grew from 25 to 56 %. The organization estimates that

its weekly broadcasts reach an audience of approximately 200 million neo-literates nationwide. <http://theglobaljournal.net/article/view/508/>.

### **Well Told Story-Kenya**

Well Told Story engages Kenyan youth (more than half of Kenyans are under 18, and nearly three quarters are under 30) via a multi-media approach, that includes a monthly comic, a Facebook page, downloads for mobile phones, and a daily syndicated radio show. The multi-media approach engages different segments of their young audience, and helps motivate young people to more engaged forms of media participation and real world action. The radio show and comic reaches out to Kenyan youth with practical ideas on how they can improve their lives. The subjects that have been the focal point have ranged from seed soaking, to helping street children, to national cohesion. <http://www.welltoldstory.co.ke>.

### **2.7.2 Engagement and ‘Flow’**

‘Flow’ is a term coined by Csikszentmihalyi (2002) that defines a high level of engagement with an activity. People are more likely to be fully engaged and experience ‘flow’ when involved in an activity that utilises their strength(s) and has a degree of challenge that requires a reasonably high level of skill (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993). Being in a state of ‘flow’ increases students’ satisfaction with the completion of a task, whether it be a complex puzzle, a research activity, or the creation of a product or performance. ‘Flow’ also has the potential to provide some respite from worries and problems that a student may be experiencing. Tasks that engage student strengths in the service of others have the potential to create flow and at the same time provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

Students experience flow when they are so immersed in an intrinsically rewarding activity that hours pass like minutes, their mind is totally focused and they are completely absorbed in the activity. A student who is fully engaged with a learning task finds it enjoyable, may practise or study it a lot and is more likely to persist with it despite challenges (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2005). Athletes often refer to this state as ‘being in the zone’ and it occurs when they encounter a sporting challenge that they know that they have the skills to meet. If the challenge of a task exceeds a student’s level of skill, he/she may become anxious and disengage from the task. If their skills exceed the challenge of the task, then they are likely to be bored and this can also lead to disengagement. This may occur, for

example, when highly able students are in class in which the teacher has a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach rather than an approach based on curriculum differentiation. Activities in which a student can use his/her strengths are especially likely to produce ‘flow’.

## 2.8 PROSPER Pathway 7: Teaching RESILIENCE

All students face adversity at one time or other. Typically these difficult times are related to family or friendship changes or losses, poor academic performance and setbacks and disappointments when things don’t go their way (e.g. not being selected to be part of a team or cast of a play or missing out on an award). Some students also have more serious adversity to deal with such as ongoing poverty and disadvantage, abuse or serious illness. Resilience has been defined as ‘*the ability to persist, cope adaptively and bounce back after encountering change, challenges, setback, disappointments, difficult situations or adversity and to return to a reasonable level of wellbeing. It is also the capacity to respond adaptively to difficult circumstances and still thrive*’ (McGrath and Noble 2011a). Skills for being resilient are essential for both academic and personal success in school and in life. The resilient skills that can be taught to students are: optimistic thinking skills, helpful thinking skills, adaptive distancing skills, using humour and seeking assistance when needed (McGrath and Noble 2011a).

- *Optimistic thinking skills*: MacLeod and Moore (2000) have concluded that an optimistic way of interpreting and adjusting to negative life events is an essential component of resilience. Hope and an optimistic explanatory style are two components to optimistic thinking for school-based resilience programs. *Hope* is having a disposition to *expect* things to work out, and to be proactive and persist when faced with setbacks or adversity (Carver and Scheier 1999). *An optimistic explanatory style* is believing that bad situations are temporary, acknowledging that bad situations are usually not all your fault, and believing that bad situations are specific, and don’t affect everything else or necessarily flow over into all aspects of your life (Gillham and Reivich 2004; Seligman et al. 1995). These skills have been outlined in greater detail under ‘Positivity’
- *Helpful thinking* is rational thinking based on reality, not on how an individual would like things to be. Such thinking helps a student feel more emotionally in control and hence be more able to solve problems. It’s underpinned by Cognitive Behaviour Therapy model (CBT) (Beck 1979) based on the understanding that how you think affects how you feel which in turn influences how you behave.
- *Adaptive distancing* includes being able to detach from individuals whose influence is negative (Werner and Smith 1992) and finding ways to emotionally distance oneself from distressing and unalterable situations instead of constantly immersing oneself in a negative situation and continually thinking about it.

The Bounce Back program (McGrath and Noble 2011a) illustrates how the teaching of resilience can be embedded in the school curriculum. It is a whole school kindergarten to middle school program that integrates the use of CBT principles for teaching resilience in a curriculum unit called *People Bouncing Back* with 8 other units. The other units are *Looking on the Bright Side* that teaches optimistic thinking; *Courage*; *Core Values*; *Emotions*; *Relationships*; *Humour*; *No Bullying* and *Success* (strengths and goal setting linked to purpose). The implementation of the program in 16 primary schools in Scotland enhanced students' personal resilience skills, social skills and class connectedness, as well as teacher wellbeing and contributed to the development of a more positive and school culture with higher levels of peer acceptance (Axford et al. 2011). Similarly its implementation in 18 bushfire-affected schools after the devastating 2009 Australian bushfires with great loss of life and property demonstrated an increase in students' capacity to behave more confidently, resiliently and pro-socially (McGrath and Noble 2011b). There is also an adapted version of Bounce Back! for colleges.

Dweck and her colleagues (Dweck 2006; Yeager and Dweck 2012; Blackwell et al. 2007) have shown that low resilience impacts negatively on students' academic and social outcomes. Low academic resilience is linked to students developing a fixed mindset where they perceive their intelligence is unchangeable. In contrast, high academic resilience is linked to a growth mindset. A growth versus fixed mindset in regard to intelligence shapes students' *goals* (whether they are eager to learn and grow or care more about looking smart or at least not looking dumb); their *beliefs about effort* (whether effort is perceived as the key to success and growth or a signal that they lack natural talent), their *attributions* for their setback (whether a setback means they need to work harder and alter their strategies or whether it means they are 'dumb') and their *learning strategies* in face of setbacks (whether they work harder or give up, cheat and/or become defensive). Blackwell et al. (2007) showed that these variables explained why students with a growth mindset were more resilient and achieved higher grades. Dweck's model of a 'growth mindset' is also addressed under 'Outcomes'.

Similarly students' 'mindsets' can influence their social resilience. Yeager and Dweck (2012) found that students who were bullied or excluded by their peers and who had a 'fixed mindset' about their personality saw the situation as unchangeable, concluding that they must be unlikable and those who were being mean to them must be nasty people. These students not only reacted more negatively in the short term to this social adversity but also showed high levels of stress, worsening health and lower grades over the school year. However other students who were also bullied or excluded but who had 'a growth mindset' in regard to their personality and the social behaviour of the other students, were significantly less likely to endorse aggressive vengeful responses and reported feeling fewer negative emotions such as shame or hatred. Although attempts to teach students to adopt a 'resilience mindset' have been successful, Yeager and Dweck (2012) have warned that such training needs to be customised for different student populations. For example Blackwell et al. (2007) improved high school students' growth mindset by teaching them that greater effort in learning could strengthen their brains. However



Yeager and Dweck (2012) found that college students frequently put forth great effort but used very poor strategies and do not ask for help. Teaching these students to focus on *effort + strategy + help from others* significantly improved their results and course completion.

2.8.1 PROSPER: Pulling It All Together

PROSPER is a useful organising framework for assisting schools and teachers to be self-reflective and act as change agents by addressing the components in the framework to enhance students’ capacity to flourish and thrive. The box below suggests some key questions that need to be asked

Box: Teacher Reflection on School Practices that assist students to PROSPER	
PROSPER pathways	Reflection on practice
<b>Positivity</b> Supporting students to develop a positive mindset and experience positive emotions	What actions can I take to ensure that students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feel safe and have a sense of belonging?</li><li>• Feel curious and interested about what they are learning?</li><li>• Feel satisfied with their learning experiences?</li><li>• Experience a sense of fun, pleasure and amusement?</li><li>• Learn skills for mindfulness?</li><li>• Learn to feel and express gratitude and appreciation?</li><li>• Develop skills in positive tracking, positive reframing, optimistic thinking and hopefulness</li></ul>
<b>Relationships</b> Supporting students to develop the social skills and pro-social values that underpin positive relationships and building positive relationships within the school	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build positive relationships with my students?</li><li>• Develop positive relationships with my colleagues?</li><li>• Teach pro-social values and social-emotional skills to guide how we all interact with each other?</li><li>• Use more cooperative learning structures so that students learn, play and work successfully together in a variety of contexts?</li></ul>
<b>Outcomes</b> Provision of an optimal learning environment to enhance students’ outcomes and accomplishment	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help students to develop ‘grit’ and a ‘growth mindset’ with a focus on effort, willpower and persistence?</li><li>• Use more evidence-informed approaches that have been shown to be effective teaching strategies</li><li>• Include more formative assessment in my teaching</li><li>• Give students opportunities to co-develop assessment criteria and provide more helpful feedback about their learning</li></ul>
<b>Strengths</b> Taking a strengths-based approach with students,	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a differentiated curriculum for students with different ability strengths</li></ul>

(continued)

(continued)

PROSPER pathways	Reflection on practice
teachers and the whole school community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Embed a focus on students’ character strengths in the curriculum, and through different school practices</li><li>• Help students to identify, explore and apply their character and ability strengths</li><li>• Acknowledge and build on the strengths of my colleagues</li></ul>
<b>Purpose</b> Supporting students to develop a sense of purpose and meaning	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help students formulate a purposeful ‘beyond-the-self’ goal and support them to achieve their plan commitment</li><li>• Encourage student autonomy, initiative and student voice</li><li>• Help students self-reflect on the big picture purpose or future purpose of their activities</li></ul>
<b>Engagement</b> Providing opportunities for high levels of student engagement	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase my students’ engagement with the curriculum</li><li>• Ensure my students are challenged in their area of strength(s)</li><li>• Use more evidence-informed approaches in my teaching to maximise student engagement</li></ul>
<b>Resilience</b> Supporting students to develop the skills and attitudes that underpin resilient behaviour	What actions can I take to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help students to develop a ‘resilience mindset’</li><li>• Teach students the skills and attitudes that will enable them to be more resilient in both their academic and personal lives</li></ul>

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