



# **Positive Psychology in Education**

## **A humane approach in an inhumane world?**

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<p>Positive psychology in education is an ideological umbrella term for an educational approach that has an emphasis on the well-being and happiness of the individual. There are many schools that had elements from positive psychology before its creation but the first school to adopt a school wide Positive psychology in education approach in 2007 was Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Australia.</p> <p>This study is a holistic approach with the attempt to understand how the teachers at Geelong Grammar School look at education and the students from a positive psychology perspective. A qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic research design was applied so that the focus could be put on the ten teachers lived experience in the school environment. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method to gather the needed data, which was thematically analysed.</p> <p>The results demonstrate how the teachers are impacted by the environment; the way in which the teachers deal with and view a very diverse group of students reflect the positive psychological perspectives. The teachers report clear benefits both in their class environment and also offers distinct tools in how they approach the students. Most of the teachers reported an individual benefit from a self-growth perspective. Geelong Grammar school does not demand a certain level of positive psychology, that choice is up to the teachers. This choice is reflected in the research results and shows how it impacts them personally in a positive way, and how they think it impacts the students. The results show both common universal challenges, typical for a school, but there are also challenges unique to the positive psychology environment they live in. This study facilitates the understanding of adopting positive psychology in education seen from the teachers perspective. This study also highlights some of the broader challenges in our culture and life dictated by the consequential demands of economics.</p>		
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<p>Positiv psykologi i utbildningen är ett ideologiskt omfattande begrepp som har sin tyngdpunkt hos individens välmående och lycka. Ett flertal skolor har haft element från positiva psykologin innan det vetenskapliga fältet skapades. Den första skola som helt och hållet tog till sig positiv psykologi i utbildningen år 2007 var Geelong Grammar School i Victoria, Australien.</p> <p>Den här studien har en holistisk infallsvinkel i ett försök att förstå hur lärarna i Geelong Grammar School ser på undervisningen och sina studenter från ett positivt psykologiskt perspektiv. En kvalitativt hermeneutisk fenomenologisk metod har använts för att sätta fokus på de tio intervjuade lärarnas upplevelser i deras skolmiljö. En semi-strukturerad intervjumetod användes för att samla in den nödvändiga informationen, som senare analyserades tematiskt.</p> <p>Resultatet visar på att lärarna är påverkade av den positivt psykologiska miljön vilket påverkar sättet de hanterar en mycket mångsidigt elevmaterial. Lärarna rapporterar klara fördelar i klassmiljö och i förhållande till verktyg att bemöta sina studenter på. De flesta lärare rapporterade även personliga utvecklingsfördelar. Geelong Grammar School kräver inte att lärarna upprätthåller en specifik skolnivå av positiv psykologi, utan det är upp till var och en att besluta själv. Den personliga friheten att själv få besluta reflekteras på ett positivt sätt i forskningresultaten, både direkt för läraren, och indirekt för studenterna. Resultaten påvisar även på typiska utmaningar för en skola men även på unika utmaningar för en miljö som står på positiva psykologiska ideal. Denna studie hjälper att förstå hur man kan anamma positiv psykologi i utbildningen från lärarens perspektiv. Denna studie belyser även några av de större utmaningarna i vår kultur och i vårt liv dikterat av ekonomiska krav och dess följder.</p>		
Keywords <b>Positive psykologi, utbildning, lärare, skola, dynamiskt tankesätt, positiva förhållanden</b>		
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# 1 Introduction

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” – Albert Einstein

This study aims to investigate how Positive Psychology methods can affect students, teachers, and the school and its environment. Most Schools today follow a very similar setup in regards to curriculum, structure, and goals; with the goal to produce knowledge filled spare parts for the economy, called humans, with a quality label attached (Mitra, 2014). Schools have become an institution where tests have become the qualitative measurement of the school’s performance and its product standard on the expense of human creativity (Robinson & Aronica, 2016), here Finland is an exception to this rule as they do not perform such tests (Sahlberg, Ravitch, Hargreaves, & Robinson, 2015). There has been some very interesting experiments using a pedagogical method called Minimal Invasive Education (Mitra, 2003) that started with a project called “the hole in the wall” in 1999 and went on for five years in different parts of India, which clearly indicates that children can learn some skills on their own without any teachers present, irrespective of their cultural, social, or economic backgrounds (Mitra et al., 2005). Minimal Invasive Education builds on a model of Self-Organised Learning, which means that some children figure something out and collectively teaches the rest of them. According to the test-results from these experiments, Self-Organised Learning in places of extreme poverty with no schools can outperform poor institutionalised education lead by teachers (Mitra, 2010). In one study children taught themselves and each other molecular biology and scored equal to a mediocre standard school (Mitra, 2010). We also have to recognise there is a difference between learning, education, and school; only by being in school does not automatically lead to learning (Robinson & Aronica, 2009), as can be seen from Mitra’s experiments. Children are curious and will learn if the opportunity presents itself, but learning should not be at the expense of play, art, or creativity, which could help set them on their unique path to their individual happiness (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Considering that the main human traits will be the last to be taken over, if ever, by more sophisticated Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems (Frey & Osborne, 2016), we should give more thought to a different kind of society that would be completely possible thanks to automation (Bruun & Duka, 2018; Varoufakis, 2017). One of our most prominent economic contributors John Maynard Keynes (1933), predicted in the 1930s that automation would give us much more freedom to his and others grandchildren who would have the opportunity to work a lot less and spend their time to valuable social interactions. Sadly the opposite has happened, most of the world works more and everyone

is essentially trying to sell everyone something while every company strive for more growth. It is impossible to look at the educational model without touching on the topic of economics, which I will do in this paper.

The school in the past in the Finnish society was recognised to be one of the main culprits that weakened the nation itself, it was hierarchical and only eligible for a minority (Benn, 2018). The Finnish education system evolved away from a hierarchical school system after World War II (Benn, 2018), where every child attends the common school funded by the state without the legal right for higher tuition fees (Finnish Ministry of Education And Culture, 2020). The difference between rich and poor children was abolished from an institutional point of view by giving equal access to every student to a qualitative educational institution. Despite that Finland has been seen as one of the global education success stories of the modern era (Benn, 2018), Finland as well as most other Nations have devalued subjects with creativity as a foundation, like art, dance, and drama, which have had to give way to more science prone subjects (Robinson, 2011). This has been an evolving trend all around the world that is reflected up the educational chain, where at least half of the university applicants are given more scores for math and science subject grades and matriculation examination grades, but the Schools have a lot of freedom within these guidelines and can choose to accept entry based on entrance examinations (Ministry of Education, 2017). Robinson (2016) argues that when creativity is stifled by more cognitive heavy subjects, we easily lose our purpose as human beings. An individual without purpose, or a purpose that an educational system has made harder to find, easily leads to more anxious and depressed individuals (Hari, 2019; Seligman, 2004). Schools have come to resemble industrialised production lines delivering business parts to a huge machinery (Mitra, 2014). This institutionalised version both for and as a consequence of our economic system easily makes us more narrow in our thinking and we are forced to align to what is expected by that system . Studying to pass or achieve higher scores on tests makes students adapt to the scope of the test, which undeniably not only diminishes critical thinking as an important element and ability but also suppresses what it is to be human (Fredrickson, 2004; Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Aronica, 2016; Robinson, 2017). Studies have shown that when something is expected of us, right versus wrong, we narrow our answers to fit the scope of what is considered to be right, thus making the answers less creative and more in line with what is expected (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Ironically the business community values creativity and problem solving skills, which makes the discrepancy between the educational institution and the business sector very interesting. A fairly recent study in 2014 conducted by

Adobe and Forrester found that creative practices and cultures in companies outperform in both revenue growth and market share, and are 50% more likely to report a commanding market leadership position (Wadhvani, 2014). There also seems to be a paradox in all main stream economic theory as none of them give any priority to regenerative science or human health, these are considered to be externalities unless they can boost profits (Collier, 2018; Korten, 2015; Varoufakis, 2017).

In a world where most children and young students grow up seeing their parents stressing and struggling to make ends meet, it is not surprising that the young might question the path that lies ahead of them. The school is supposed to be a safe environment for the student as well as preparing them for the future. But the future might not look that promising, offering a lot of uncertainty, which in a world full of negativity and fixed mindsets easily leads to stress and anxiety (Dweck, 2008; Lee, 2010). There is a high prevalence of depression among young students in society of today (Seligman, 2004). However, studies have revealed that there is a significant correlation between positive learning and positive emotions (Dweck, 2008). Adopting positive psychology in education has been argued to make students happier (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) with the possibility of higher performance through a growth mindset, where the individual learns to trust in his/her own abilities and effort that would evidently show as higher grades on the individual level (Dweck, 2008) as well as a happier existence (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Schools teach skills like accomplishment, success, conformity, competitiveness amongst peers, but they have been poor in separating the individual self and performance (Dweck, 2008; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Robinson, 2011). One of the answers to a happier student might be to integrate the ever more diminished creative subjects into all subjects (Robinson & Aronica, 2009), and to learn to distinguish between self and effort (Dweck, 2008). On an individual level, this might be a good approach if the individual's well-being and happiness is the goal, which it only partially is for the educational institutions. However, we still have to recognise that this partial goal is secondary to the primary goal of educational institutions, which is to give a broad foundation to most of the basics to then later be shuffled into more specialised education based on an ever changing requirements and scoring systems. The industries that are deemed to be the most successful or most prestigious, scoop up the students with the highest scores in the scientific fields. But successful is measured from a very limited angle based on human created financial theories, which dictate human life, without a link to the very living and complex environment that these theories and we depend on.

All these confusing variables may be hard to explain due to the complexity when adding different personalities and goals into the mix with culture, nationality, international influencers in a world that is dictated by the same abstraction ultimately running our lives, money. Education, politics, and money are very interconnected with group-hierarchies, usually connected to different socio-economic-statuses with vested interests in gaining more influence over others. This competitive nature defines most adult human life on this planet today, which unnecessarily mimicking the scarce circumstances of our ancestors. In addition, this abstract competitive scarcity embedded in the financial system is amplified in the political games in our system, where even the most powerful get trapped in their own power and end up powerless while still having to play the power-game to survive on that level or to further climb the ladder of “success” (Varoufakis, 2017). This complexity in our system and the outcome, which is globally connected, trickles down all the way to our education system and our young children, awaiting to become a perpetuating force in the same system that stifles humanity’s innate social drive, where creativity constitutes an integral part, and because of the competitiveness sadly often bring out the worst in us, ironically by using creativity. All the dominant financial theories advocate infinite growth on a finite planet (Ferguson, 2008), usually measured through Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth or the value in the stock market where a business or organisation that makes the same result as last quarter or year is deemed to not be successful, reflecting a diminishing stock value (Ferguson, 2008; Varoufakis, 2017). Not giving any value to externalities, which are things happening to someone or something else because of the activity of another, and only addressing them through regulations opens up loopholes for individuals and organisations with a profit driven motive to exploit (Varoufakis, 2017), once again building on an abstract concept of infinite growth without a direct built in ecological finite balance. The imbalance has had very visible dire consequences and has created a lot of anxiety and worry in young students, as well as in many adults. The ironic part is that most environmental organisations and even some business organisations advocating for sustainability have had less of an impact in thirty years than the impact followed by the corona virus had on for instance Air traffic where most EU airports CO2 emissions were reduced by a factor of 1.8 to 3.5 with approximately 89% less air-travels from January 2020 to April 2020 (Nižetić, 2020), indicating that the issue is systemic.

It is pretty obvious to me that change is needed, but it might not be the change many are looking for as it is far harder for humans to change their own behaviour than to hope for a technological

fix that would preserve their comfortable habits (Korten, 2015). Business as usual, awaiting an external solution, will change nothing, which is why I am interested in fundamental changes in our organisations that will produce our predecessors. John Maynard Keynes predicted in the 1930s that we would all enjoy a 15 hour work week due to automation (Keynes, 1933), the economics of today have seen the gains of automation being distributed to the top while the rest of us work 40+ hour weeks or as temporary, as well as many long term unemployed. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking over more and more in the business sector and has already breached the cognitive levels that was stated and predicted in . Most recent realisations where AI has taken over business tasks from human workers have been more rapid than previous predictions in the Oxford study of future Machine Learning and Automation by (Frey & Osborne, 2016). In a similar paper about a decade earlier it was predicted that the transport industry wouldn't be affected for decades to come, stating that such work would be very hard to automate (Levy & Murnane, 2004). Before the end of the same decade, google created their first version of an autonomous driving car. Many car manufacturers have released a semi-autonomous self-driving feature in the cars for a few years already. The point is that the AI field is progressing at a stunning speed, while our social institutions have trouble keeping up, including our educational system. We are far from an ideology that Keynes wrote about in the 1930s, where the benefits and gains of automation would be more equally shared. Trickle-down economics, also called neo-liberal economics, that has been the dominant economical driving force the past 40 to 50 years has had a significant impact on the world and our educational institutions.

It is very obvious to most, especially our young students, that the system they are growing up in does not offer them a shiny future full of opportunities (Mason, 2015; Pfeffer, 2018; Varoufakis, 2016; Varoufakis, 2017). Many students want to succeed but might not believe in the methods. Could we reinstate the trust and hope by reintroducing more human centred values into our educational institutions; emphasising our core human values that remind us of our unity not only between each other, but also with the living environment we depend upon? These changes might also reconnect the adults to the reality we live in, realising that we can only change when we are willing to do the work from within by changing our own habits. I am hopeful that this could lead to long overdue structural changes in society in the long term while seeing students not only do better, but also feel better with increased well-being, resilience, self-esteem, which will not only protect them in a world full of adversity and personal challenges but also grow through perseverance.

## **The aim of this study and research questions**

The main part of this study is done using qualitative methods by investigating the teaching environment as seen by the teachers at Geelong Grammar School (GGS), located in Victoria, Australia. The school is renowned for its encompassing Positive Psychological methods and ideologies throughout the whole school, designed and initiated by Seligman and his team in 2008-2009 when the school was converted from a more traditional boarding school to a boarding school with a positive psychology as an ideology. Furthermore, there will be some reflections from Finnish schooling system, which is a more homogenous nation-wide system without any private schools that can stand on the framework of the national learning framework. The Finnish part of the study will mostly be handled in the discussion section only, as a comparison towards the main study. That information is gathered by using the well documented Finnish education system in conjunction with interviewing four principals and two educational directors in two different municipalities how they see elements of positive psychology in their schools. Information from a research project, about positive psychology in education in several schools in the southern parts of Finland (Pentti, Fagerlund, & Nyström, 2019) will also be used to highlight some of the conclusions. The main part of the Finnish conclusions will be used in the discussion, as the main part is focused on the qualitative study done in GGS.

In this study I am trying to answer these research questions:

1. How does an education environment rooted in Positive Psychology affect the mindset of the teachers and their view of the students?
2. What kind of benefits are there for the Teachers and in their view for the Students in promoting well-being and happiness in the school?
3. What are the challenges in a positive educational environment, according to the teachers?

In a school with almost a decade of experience, utilising Positive Psychology in Education, I expect to find answers to the presented research questions and gather enough data to be able to draw some conclusions. The main goal of this paper is to present the answers to the research questions based on the interviews of the teachers at Geelong Grammar School and their view on the students and the environment. The Finnish interviews and presentations will be visible as slight comparisons and reflections in the last chapter as they are not the main part of this paper, but they might give some perspective of the main findings.

## 2 Background – foundations of well-being and happiness

“Learning is personal kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel” - Socrates

I was one of those “odd” kids that read a lot in line with my own interests, fascinated by human achievement and its underlying facilitators, or even underlying prohibitors. I followed technological trends very closely through popular science magazines as well as a lot of time spent in the local library’s facts section. Finland was and still is a hub for many technological trends (Sahlberg et al., 2015), so when I was growing up, Nokia became known for technological achievements in the mobile sector. In my teens, Linus Torvalds launched the Linux operating system and basically gave birth to the open source realm. A lot of interesting things made me plunge into the world of science and technology in my spare time, mostly because school covered only the basics, but in my opinion very little that actually were in line with my own interests. I was amazed by what humans were able to achieve, considering we had barely started the information society. I was also disturbingly intrigued by how the world operated, how everyone seemed to bow to the same physical monetary “God,” regardless of what religion they followed. I also quickly noticed that money, the initial driving force of many of our technological achievements, also prevented technology from reaching its true potential; proprietary rights easily prevented good practices, solutions, or the best techniques merely on the premises of control, influence, affordability or rather the inherent scarcity built into it. Even though I started my education in the Bachelor’s program of Economics, almost completing my degree, I eventually concluded that I did not want to work as an economical engineer within a field that according to my views basically stifles technological progress, to serve or uphold a profit incentive on the expense of a living earth. Human life is connected and dependent on Nature through a delicate balance, which I did not see being directly built into the economic system, only indirectly through regulations, which means they can be modified and lobbied. I did not, nor do I now see a way of maintaining a balance within a system that is driven by a model of unlimited growth in a limited world driven by human competition for more growth. A complex living earth is totally dependent on a balance between several unquantifiable but crucial systems, which have no value within frameworks of financial theories. To only value things that can be quantified as commodities to be sold and profited by, whereas things that cannot do not hold any value at all, and even seen as something that negatively impacts the profit, is as far away from a balanced sustainable model you can come. A system like that is both suppressive and exploitative. Within such a framework, how much humanity can we literally afford? Who are we, who will we become? Will we be a prisoner of our own creation or

awaken to something in need of a greater balance omitted from our own creation that seems totally incompatible with the world we live in?

I think we have to be aware of some very important existential questions: (a) what is the education system for and what or who does it serve? (b) What are we sacrificing and for what reasons? (c) Is there a better way? However, in this study I am going to focus on what I would deem to be more tangible questions. I will at times reflect on some economic issues that seem to contribute towards certain behaviour or outcomes, especially if I think they might appear in the interviews. Some of the economic “realities” seem to directly or indirectly affect emotions like stress and anxieties for both students and staff. Whether we like it or not, the financial framework sets the boundaries for how human life is organised, both within and beyond the educational organisation we might be a part of, or have been a part of in the past. This framework will create a confined space by limiting resources and guiding practices, affecting both Geelong Grammar School and the educational organisations brought forth within the Finnish education system.

School is the transitional unit in between (a) a more or less shielded childhood where we learn the value of sharing between siblings and peers; (b) A highly competitive and individualistic market driven system most of us enter as adults; (c) An organisation: government, public or private institution, that is a part of an economic or political sphere tied to group interests driven by economic interests. Naturally, there will be challenges and issues an institution, or the individuals within the organisation, have to struggle with from many angles beyond the scopes of the theories in Chapter three. Hence, I will reflect on these “other” external but important forces in this chapter and reflect upon some of them in the analysis and discussion section.

In this chapter I will briefly describe the effects of society, culture, personality, upbringing, peer influence, stress responses, the effect of technology on the individual, and the economy’s effect. Aside from the individual, my focus will be on the teachers and students, especially where there are differences. I will be using these concepts later on in the study when presenting the results and in the discussion.

## **2.1 The individual in a demanding society**

“The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* if he has it not. An education which

should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about.” - William James, Principles of Psychology (1890)

Obviously there are a lot more than educational institutions tied to the challenges presented by the quote above; from an individual’s perspective one’s personality, temperament, attachment style, cultural background, parents socio economic status, parents parental model, peer influence affects in synergy with the society’s culture, economic model, and values. All these variables will contribute to how life is organised in a society and for the individual. The challenges an individual faces in the modern world are less threatening when it comes to the individual’s direct survival, but far more complex compared to our ancestors who “only” had to know and learn the close environment to find food and shelter for the individual and the group he or she depended upon (Harari, 2015). I have always been fascinated by the ingenuity and the potential dormant in humans on the verge of being discovered via our own unique journeys. Having been brought up in a multi-cultural and multilingual environment with a high standard of living, I have been sheltered from many global atrocities and devastating circumstances that have a negative impact on the individual and the society he or she depends upon. This early awareness of differences has always fascinated me, as I noticed it is usually the differences that challenges not only ourselves but also the close environment. The connection of similar personality types can be very strong (McCrae & Costa, 2004).

We live in a world where we share a very similar gene make-up, more genetically similar than different (Sapolsky, 2017), albeit very different cultures we can find even stronger bonds with people on the other side of the world. All these differences aside we are undeniably bound together in an ever shrinking world through globalisation. We all share a certain curiosity, we get bored, our attention shifts, we are bound by habits, we have a strong social connection to our “clan” or group we identify with, although the meaning and strength of the bond varies between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Brown, R., 2011). We as a species share a structural similarity of brain regions that react in the same way to sensory stimuli, emotional reactions, although the latter does show differences especially in socially contexts, where culture and environment have influenced the neural connections between brain regions (Harris, 2012; Pinker, 2003; Sapolsky, 2017). We are inherently and socially similar by favouring our in-group by sacrificing necessity, and even life, on the expense of the out-groups (Brown, 2011; Sapolsky,

2017). We humans, as the only species on this planet, share the capacity for empathy, theory of mind, the ability to abstractly project oneself into someone else's life and simulate that life, different from our own. We ultimately strive to be happy, although the source of our happiness might elude us. Our psychological and social behaviour are influenced by many intrinsic and extrinsic factors and can be very complex, sometimes our expressed behaviour might be in opposition to our values. The good Samaritan study from the 1970s showed that human behaviour can shift because of time, or lack thereof. The good Samaritan study ironically showed that people studying to become priests that were pressed of time while crossing a very short physical distance between buildings to give a lecture of a bible passage about the good Samaritan neglected to help someone in need. While passing between the buildings they encountered a human in need but only about 40% of them stopped to help the one in need, whereas ironically 60% of them neglected the one in need for the sole reason of being on time to lecture about the good Samaritan who helped people in need (Darley, 1973). The environment poses an ambiguous reality, where the silent voice from the inner self has to compete with outside stimuli and gratification. This conflict and individual strive could be simplified as a dichotomised question: do we want value in life, or a life with value (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

In this study however, I have to limit the variables by focusing on education, specific aspects of humanistic and positive psychology, social psychology related to groups and hierarchy, and some economical elements in relation to socio-economic-status (SES) that tie into the former concepts.

## **2.2 Well-being from a biological, psychological, and sociological perspective**

“What was an unexpected pleasure yesterday, is what we feel entitled to today, and what won't be enough tomorrow” - Robert Sapolsky

In education we are continuously dealing with human beings and relationships. We are social beings driven by biological and sociological factors, influenced by our environment. In this study I do have to draw upon some of those factors as they greatly affect the behaviour and outcome of the individual and the cohort. I think it is important to acknowledge that we are a product of evolution, hardwired to behave in certain ways both thanks to and because of the way our brains operate and are constructed. We are all built to seek out reward and our human brain is literally wired to force us to look for things that give us pleasurable feelings (Sapolsky, 2017). We will remember things, places, contexts that made us feel that rush. Be it food, pleasurable acts, events,

or other substances that will release dopamine (feel-good neurotransmitter) in our brain (Maté, 2009; Sapolsky, 2017). We store them in long term memory and know when we “need” to seek out that trigger again to make us feel a certain way (Maté, 2009). The happy feeling we felt yesterday, is however usually not enough to satisfy our need for feeling happy in the long run. We tire easily without new stimuli; we always seek new dopamine releases, which usually means more than before or better than we had because we get used to what we have (Maté, 2009; Sapolsky, 2017).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have urged social and behavioural scientists to “show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities”, and also “what kinds of families result in children who flourish”. This is no small and simple task as so many influencers could be variables of either cause and/or effect. Becker and Marecek (2008) have critiqued Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi for not taking societal contexts into account, something that highly regulates the access to happiness, well-being, and flourishing, limiting it only to privileged members of society. In a well-known study, King and Napa (1998) examined people's conceptions of what makes a good life. Samples of college students and community adults were asked to judge the moral goodness and desirability of certain life paths. The variables “happiness” and “meaning in life” were most closely associated with high desirability ratings of different life paths. The authors concluded, based on the findings, that happiness occupied the top spot, much before riches and worldly goods or for knowledge. According to some critics to these findings and conclusions, one cannot just reach a conclusion that happiness is the blissful state one has to be in to have a meaningful life (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Kristjánsson, 2012). According to Seligman (2009), positive psychologists have produced further evidence showing that what parents report wanting for their children is primarily for them to be happy. (Kristjánsson, 2012) therefore critically draws the conclusion, based on Seligman’s argument, that the good life thus is a happy life, and that education is successful insofar that it is conducive to happiness. Up until the Geelong Grammar School’s transition to Positive Psychology ideology, by Seligman and his team in 2009, such a large scale “experiment” hadn’t been done (Kristjánsson, 2012; Norrish, 2015; Seligman, 2009). Now, about a decade after the GGS transition, such claims should be possible to study and analyse. I will dive into many of these aspects in my interviews, like happiness, well-being, flow, hope, and positivity in this paper, albeit from a qualitative perspective. I still see that these aspects are interdependent on and entwined with other factors and not easily quantifiable or explained.

### **2.2.1 Culture, personality, temperament, upbringing, and peer-influence**

“No one today believes that the mind is a blank slate; to refute such a belief is to tip over a straw man. All behaviour is the product of an inextricable interaction between heredity and environment during development, so the answer to all nature-nurture questions is “some of each.”” (Pinker, 2004)

Human society is built upon a myriad of groups, with both overlapping as well as completely different cultures. These groups, or so called in-groups, will automatically have out-groups, favouring their own in-group (Brown, 2011). The function of these groups is to maintain or gain power, influence, and resources for their own in-group(s) over other out-groups in a world built on a system of scarcity, the monetary system. This ties into how not only humans build their hierarchical social system, but also how for instance our closest animal relatives function, the chimpanzees and bonobos also structure and maintain their social hierarchy (Sapolsky, 2017). They also share a drive and a strive for a happy environment for the individual, by means of social behaviour and political play (Sapolsky, 2017). The neural structures and hormonal effects of this social game has a direct effect on the individual's feeling of happiness (Fowler, Christakis, & Kahneman, 2010), be it humans or Chimpanzees or Bonobos (Sapolsky, 2017).

When dealing with an individual's behaviour one also has to acknowledge what influences an individual's actions as well as the environment. In this paper I am going to focus on what teachers have picked up on in regards to students behaviour reflecting their personality, temperament, and peer-influence. Naturally there will be a variety of behaviours that stand out for the teacher. Personality does affect how an individual reacts and acts towards the source of the stimuli, and the environment with all other individuals in a social constellation (Sapolsky, 2017). Personality theories like the big five personality dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism will give some insight into an individual's behaviour and reactions (McCrae & Costa, 2004). These theories usually build on old models like Allport's study on adjectives clustered together to form measurable traits, which have been used in trying to circle in on human behaviour using dichotomised dimensions (Allport, 1966). Personality models tries to categorically show few but clear dimensions while still preserving human uniqueness and individuality. These thoughts were first addressed by a well-known psychologists like Carl Jung and his work on human archetypes, which bare a close resemblance to personality theories like the big-five. Although some argue it is more a result of genes (Pinker, 2004), others emphasize

upbringing and environment (Sapolsky, 2017), we can still find that human behaviour is fluid and contextually based even largely absent of free will (Harris, 2012).

Personality is only one of the dimensions constituting an individual. It is also very important to acknowledge the attachment styles based on Bowlby (1970) and Ainsworth and Bell (1970) research and the parental styles (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby, 2000; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) as well as peer-influenced (Fowler et al., 2010; Sapolsky, 2017). Despite the personality at birth, solely based on genes, it is not hard to understand that an individual's behaviour will be influenced by the way he or she grows up, influenced by their environment. There is a huge difference between a person that had a secure attachment towards his or her parents compared to someone with an insecure attachment. Naturally the reactions and behavioural patterns will be different due to the absence or presence of stressors, which will form more or less permanent pathways in the brain. Sapolsky (2017) also ties this into adult depression, as childhood adversity substantially can increase the chances of adult depression. These early childhood stressors can lead to chronic stress, which depletes the mesolimbic system of dopamine, generating anhedonia, which is the inability to feel, anticipate, or pursue pleasure (Sapolsky, 2017). The behavioural differences get even more complex by adding the possible parental styles a child is faced with beyond its own control. The original parental styles according to Diana Baumrind (1966) are: 1) permissive - "you're the boss", environment with few rules, indulgent, accepting, low expectations; 2) authoritative - "let's talk about it", proven to be the best parental style for kids in many western cultures, responsive, reciprocal, democratic, assertive, clear standards, flexible; 3) authoritarian - little warmth, autocratic, high expectations, clear rules, punishment, power-over, "because I said so!". Baumrind's (1966) model later got a parental-style addition called 4) the uninvolved - little time, absent, competing priorities, neglectful based on the work by Maccoby and Martin (1983), which have been continued by Maccoby (2000). The combined environmental influence can wire the brains of a child to produce elevated levels of glucocorticoids, which suppresses the immune system, along with other negatively associated hormones that regulate glucocorticoid release, and hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system (Sapolsky, 2017). These children will be more reactive even to seemingly normal circumstances and they will always have a delayed recovery from any stressor (Sapolsky, 2017; Wilhsson, Svedberg, Högdin, & Nygren, 2017). This brain-wiring is sadly also preserved into adulthood (Sapolsky, 2017), where the state of imbalance also appears as bad coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wilhsson et al., 2017). As if this would not be enough already for an individual suffering from these consequences, the higher levels

of glucocorticoids impair memory functions to the same degree that can be seen after damage to the prefrontal cortex (Sapolsky, 2017). The irony here seems to be that recent studies have shown that the skills and values needed to thrive in a given culture actually take place in the peer group rather than the family (Brown, 2011; Pinker, 2004; Syvänen, 2016).

It seems pretty apparent that these behaviour-affecting-models and theories progress and evolve over time, some get replaced by better ones, as is and should be with the normal development of science in any field. But, it also clearly points out the complexity and a multitude of contributing factors when it comes to human behaviour. As stated by Pinker (2004), there is naturally both nature and nurture in this formula. I will however not poke the hornet's nest and will thus avoid such debates later on in this paper.

### **2.2.2 Stress affects well-being negatively - in general and teachers stressors**

“What we do when we get stressed is the same old, faster and more intensely, until the prefrontal cortex stops us and tells us it is time to change! Except for constantly stressed individuals.” (Sapolsky, 2017)

A teacher's occupation is said to be one of the most stressful of occupations (Heffernan, 2020). Stress is a sort of signal that some of our needs are not being met; these needs can be basic needs or psychological needs. Naturally stress creates a lot of challenges, even anxiety and fear, which if left unresolved will lead to problems. In this paper I am looking at the impact of stress and how it might affect a school environment in a positive psychology in education setting.

Our ancestors stressed about safety and having their basic needs met for themselves and their close family. Even though most of us in Finland and Australia have our basic needs met on a far greater level than our ancestors, the stress we feel today is triggered in the same way and will cause the same bodily reaction as it did for our ancestors (Sapolsky, 2017). A stress response does not distinguish between different causes or underlying reasons and will be the same for a predator sprinting towards you, a large bill that you cannot afford to pay; one could even argue that our stress response we feel today is self-inflicted and systemic and very ill suited as we neither can run from them nor fight them. Our natural stress response is triggered by human created abstractions embedded in a system; we stress to meet deadlines, we stress to have a job that pays enough for what is deemed to be a decent life, usually based on unrealistic expectations but still a reality that

far exceeds the life of our ancestors. When we have a job, we very easily stress to earn the money we want to be able to achieve our goals. Goals that for most families today are far beyond the living standard of the upper class and even royalty a few centuries ago.

Much of what we actually know, we know in a nonconceptual way (Kabat-Zinn, 2015a). We base our conception of our outer world on inner subjective creations, standing on values, culture, and our own experience as well as unrealistic expectations that constantly bombard us via digital media. We form our opinions often based on what our own in-groups tend to value and perpetuate (Brown, 2011) as well as on glorified and often manipulated images that the people we follow share. In other words, it is very common that we have an imagined and fixed view of the world around us (Dweck, 2008), people's behaviour and values are formed by their experience and observation of their surrounding environment.

We easily adopt a sort of learned helplessness that moulds our beliefs through the experiences we have in our close environment, which then affects our motivation (Maier & Seligman, 1976). The problem with a learned helplessness is that it has moulded our brains accordingly, releasing high levels of glucocorticoids not only makes us chronically stressed but also suppresses our immune system, which can lead to all sorts of other illnesses that further deepens the stress response (Sapolsky, 2017). We also live in the information age that has brought with it interesting new possibilities to share parts of one's life like never before. This sharing mixed with a high level of individuality, prestige, status, and competition also makes it possible to choose what you share. More often than not the images and stories shared are cropped, manipulated through filters, and even photoshopped, which creates a very warped sense of reality that easily creates a gap between expectations and reality. This gap easily leads to unhappiness and the alleviation of learned helplessness (Dweck, 1975).

Change in itself is a stressor and the rapid changes that technology has brought with in its wake can be very stressful for some individuals. The digitalisation of work has also seeped into the teacher's occupation and affected the way of educational work (Syvänen, 2016; Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan, & Ragu-Nathan, 2014). The mere thought of using technology in education can cause something that has been termed as technostress, which in itself seems to influence teachers' intentions to use technology (Syvänen, 2016). It is not only the technology itself, but the way it is used and implemented that causes stress. In a study by Pareto and Willermark (2014) in a Swedish

primary school, teachers stated that a fragmented work environment and high working-day tempo diminished their willingness to adopt technologies. The educational institutions are fully aware of the technological implications and their importance in educational settings; even the unspoken demand can put stress on teachers (Prensky, 2012; Syvänen, 2016).

Aside from deep and primordial psychological and biological factors that can induce our stress-response (Sapolsky, 2017), we also have another highly significant external factor affecting us and our environment, the economy. School is meant to gradually make us ready for adult life and the “reality” of it. However, that reality is driven by a market driven system with little tolerance or even understanding for human biology or new psychological findings and breakthroughs. It is easy to contemplate why we have a system that seems to play the role of an antagonist to not only the human self-actualising protagonist, in search for happiness for oneself and those close to you, but also stands in direct opposition to the environment that the system depends upon. Naturally, the discrepancy between the uncontrollable driving factors in life and the feeling of how one’s life should be can cause a lot of stress (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2015a). Without specific methods and good coping mechanisms like mindfulness, the perceived stress can be imminent and overwhelming (Kabat-Zinn, 2015b). Stress and anxiety seems to be caused primarily by environmental and social factors and has a huge cost saving attached to it if dealt with properly (Chisholm et al., 2016). Stress and anxiety does not seem to be due to imbalance within the individual (Hari, 2019). There is increasing evidence that shows a link between financial insecurity and depression and anxiety (Hari, 2019; Jebb, Tay, Diener, & Oishi, 2018; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). This has a direct impact on the family environment, the parents and therefore on the children in the family.

### **2.2.3 Students well-being is negatively impacted by stress and anxiety**

“All the problems in the world can be seen as systemic, and comes from the inability to sit quietly in a room alone” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

There is an element of mindfulness embedded in the field of positive psychology. It is important to understand the stress and anxiety for especially a young individual can feel by just being alone with their own thoughts. When we look within we have to be prepared to face some pain, especially when we reflect deeply (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Especially adolescents avoid pain, even when there might be a possible reward in the future. The prefrontal cortex, associated with cognition is still

undergoing development during adolescence until the age of 25 (Luna, Padmanabhan, & O’Hearn, 2010). Despite an under-developed prefrontal cortex, the students experience stress and anxiety much in the same way as adults do (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wilhsson et al., 2017). There is an increasing concern in relation to adolescent’s stress and health in general in western societies and how many of the adolescents lack good coping strategies (Wilhsson et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, children grow up in a highly fixed environment where they are labelled and categorised early on in their life according to prominent abilities or lack thereof in comparison to others. Humans are a highly social species and children learn to live in the boxes they are put into by society; typical categorisation include smart, artistic, strong, fast, mathematically adept, and other labels alike. The problem with these labels are that the children, or adults, start acting according to the social label they are assigned. The better or the higher the titles, the more pressure it creates, which easily translates to stress while at the same time stifling learning and progression. An individual labelled as smart will easily avoid tasks that do not make that individual appear smart. More complicated tasks in need of more effort easily create an individual paradox where more effort put into a task means the individual appears less smart, which is also called a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008).

The inability for most students to properly plan their daily life not to mention to gradually reach their goals will cause a lot of stress and even make some students give up (Häfner, Stock, & Oberst, 2014). Schools are designed to fulfill the need of our economy and tend to forget the individual; they are not designed according to human creativity, which through the school-mass-production-mentality easily diminishes the inner individual creative spark that drives human beings which causes stress (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). On top of all the students demands in the world today we have also had a major shift because of technology. Adolescents in general have disrupted sleeping patterns but technology has shown to make it worse, affecting sleep quality and duration, which leads to biological impairment that leads to stress (Walker, 2017)

#### **2.2.4 The difference in gender: coping, peer influence, and academic performance**

Adolescence usually is a time of challenges with physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood. The transition can be a more or less stressful period in a young individual’s life depending on characteristics and differences (Hollenstein & Loughheed, 2013). Self-esteem seems to be a relatively stable aspect of individual

differences beyond the childhood years of development (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2016). However, there seems to be a general decline in students' self-esteem, especially among girls, during primary school and especially in the transition to secondary school (Arens, Yeung, Craven, Watermann, & Hasselhorn, 2013). Girls seem to experience more stressors than boys during adolescence but they also have greater flexibility and variety of coping strategies in comparison to boys (Malooly, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). Social and school demands generally increase for both boys and girls during adolescence, but the norms and values related to demands in different social contexts seem to have a stronger impact on girls and their health (Östberg et al., 2015; Schraml, Perski, Grossi, & Simonsson-Sarnecki, 2011). Girls report school burnout more frequently than boys (Walburg, 2014). Boys easily prioritise activities with their friends who provide them with a social capital, which can have a positive impact on both their performance in school as well as their well-being (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Rethon et al., 2012). Girls tend to create social capital through the use of social media, which is consistent with previous research where social media is described as a place where girls can recover and rest from stress (Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski, 2013). Social capital and physical activity has a positive effect and function as a buffer to academic stress (Gerber et al., 2015).

Socioeconomic status has been found to affect resistance to peer influence in longitudinal analyses, where individuals of higher socioeconomic status report lower resistance to peer influence at age 14 (Steinberg, 2007). Steinberg and colleagues concluded that individuals become more susceptible to peer influence between the ages of 10 and 14, after which the susceptibility to peer influence decreases between ages 14 and 18. Their findings show that girls are more likely than boys to stand up for what they believe in, instead of changing their behaviour to conform to the expectations of their peers. In general, Girls seem to be more resistant to peer influence compared to boys, which seem to be the case both during as well as after adolescence (Steinberg, 2007). Consistent with this, other studies have found that adolescent girls report greater feelings of self-reliance than adolescent boys (Steinberg, Laurence & Silverberg, 1986).

In regards to gender differences in academic achievement, the results show that girls perform significantly better than boys (Pullmann & Allik, 2008). It may be considered a paradox that girls perform better in school despite having weaker self-esteem and academic self-efficacy compared to boys. A possible explanation might be that boys have a higher degree of academic

misidentification; their self-beliefs are higher than their academic performance (Pullmann & Allik, 2008). Furthermore, students who perform better in school might be more aware of their inadequate personal standards (Hattie, 2009), which might explain lower self-esteem among girls. Whereas students with modest academic achievement might compensate their inadequacy by elevating their self-esteem as a compensatory effect (Rosenberg, 1982). It seems boys might have a stronger tendency to elevate their self-esteem as a compensation for lower academic achievement (Diseth, Meland, & Breidablik, 2014). Students' awareness of themselves at the cognitive level has been described by self-efficacy theory in terms of the capacity to execute according to required actions to be able to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 2010). Research findings have shown a relation between self-efficacy and self-esteem (Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004). To enable equal conditions for girls and boys in school, there seems to be a need to highlight predominant structures and interpretations of gender in school (Diseth et al., 2014).

### **2.3 The Information Age - digital teaching and the AI transformation**

“Important to notice is that all new technology brings changes to teaching strategies. They might take a long time to implement, but changes will still happen nonetheless.” (Mitra, 2014)

Most of what we currently teach and also preserve has a very small importance, if any, because of the radically changed context (Prensky, 2012). With the dawn of the Industrial revolution in the 19th century, school became even more “mechanised”, with the foundation based on the old pre-industrialised education paradigm, with more emphasis on skills needed for the industry (Mitra, 2014; Robinson & Aronica, 2016). This system had (and still mostly has) one main agenda, which was to maximize yield and at the same time minimizing loss, which encapsulates the education system of today and how it is connected to the past. The system is highly focused on meeting the standardised requirements in the “Industry of education”.

Some developed countries were quick to introduce Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education in the 1990s, Finland and Australia being two of these countries. The first wave in Finland was backed up by the national strategic plan “Finland Towards an information society” and the related development undertaken by the National Board of Education and Ministry of Education in 1995. A very high percentage of the country’s teachers (75%) took part in the national program called *ope.fi*, which consisted of a series of technical and pedagogical skills development programs coordinated by the Finnish National Board of Education (Niemi, 2016).

The trend has continued, but the concern lies in the fact that it isn't spreading extensively enough throughout the school system. International comparisons of the use of media and ICT in teaching show that Finland is rather average in its use of ICT in education in Europe (Niemi, 2016). Internationally, Finland has managed better than many, being one of the top ranking countries in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) measurement (Niemi, 2016). In some countries, handling educational challenges are fragmented between institutions (Prensky, 2012). In Finland and the Nordic countries, the Ministry of Education handles the general national objectives for basic education. The use of ICT in education should be a natural part of all school activities (Niemi, 2016). This has also been expressed by Prensky (2012), who also argues that a lot of money is being spent on trying to fix the educational system, when it is not the system that we need to get right, it needs to be redesigned (Prensky, 2012). The reforms and development in the Finnish education system have focused on the skills needed in the twenty-first century (Niemi, 2016). The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has proposed a summary of skill set for the future as follows: (1) thinking skills - critical thinking, creativity, problem solving; (2) ways of interaction and working - communication and collaboration; (3) crafts and expressive skills - the use of ICT; (4) participation and initiative; and (5) self-awareness and personal responsibility - agency, social responsibility. The skill sets presented are almost identical to the definition used in the International Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S), a project conducted at the University of Melbourne (Niemi, 2016).

It has been said that everyone qualifying as a teacher has the right to acquire the basic knowledge and know-how needed for using media in his or her teaching, supporting the subjects pedagogically when designing, and assessing his or her teaching with the use of ICT (Niemi, 2016). However, the right to acquire does not mean a teacher will necessarily understand how to acquire the needed skills, which also implies that the teacher should know what to acquire in the first place. Instead of using the full potential of technology, the ICT-illiterate easily transfuses the old material by using the new technology, basically only digitising the old material (Prensky, 2012). Carol Dweck (2008) argues that the right mindset is crucial in overcoming this obstacle; the teachers need support while also having to be open and humble in realising his or her own limitations. It can be hard to give up the accept that the new knowledge required is a part of a field in which the students might be more proficient (Mitra, 2014; Prensky, 2012).

The last decade has had a rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), which have been quickly adopted into our businesses and thus substituted human employment (Bruun & Duka, 2018). Based on recent trends, the technological displacement of human labour is predicted to be significant in the future. In a recent report we now have 2.7 million robots working in factories around the globe (IFR, 2020). Most of the displacements are happening with the use of AI and ML in all sectors (Frey & Osborne, 2016). However, there is a disturbing trend with the arise of social media, together with the smartphone. According to the social dilemma, social media and other web services many people have come to rely on are targeting individuals on a sublime psychological level never seen before in human history. Powered by AI and ML the users personality, values, political aspiration, desires and dreams, and even moods and mood swings of every person participating in these services are known (Orlowski, 2020). These companies have commodifying their users with the intent of profiting by selling targeted commercials, which means they rely on technology that competes for our attention, and they have become scarily good at it (Orlowski, 2020). AI are the first truly self-learning “universal machines” for which there are applications in every industry, across all types of work (Bruun & Duka, 2018). The irony is that instead of individuals utilising the power embedded in technology for own beneficial purposes, the technology uses the individual by pulling them in by the power of addiction, competing for our attention on a level so far beyond a level a teacher or a school can compete on (Orlowski, 2020). We got the economics, the politics, and the values wrong (Stiglitz, 2019), and we are still far away from working less thanks to automation as predicted about 90 years ago (Keynes, 1933). Hence, it is questionable how we are dealing with technology both within our education system as well as on our spare time.

#### **2.4 The market economy - factors affecting Teachers and students life**

With the capitalistic system, things with value are quantified and commodified, whereas things that don't have value are excluded and removed or they are a threat to the quantified value and are either excluded or forced upon another. The “outside” forces to the capitalistic system is usually called externalities (Varoufakis, 2017).

I am expecting global and local finance, and what we call climate change effects to emerge in some form in the interviews. In many countries there seems to be a growing awareness among the people about human activity affecting the ecosystem negatively, also called climate change. This awareness seems to be spreading throughout the world, especially because of young activists like

Greta Thunberg being more visible about it and also connecting it to the main source, the economy that literally run our lives. The climate debate reaches a lot deeper into the economics and how it affects our lives. Joseph Stiglitz (2016) has suggested tax on carbon and other strategic products with a negative consequence on our environment with the purpose of promoting a greener technology. I am not going to debate for or against human affected climate change, or make arguments for or against capitalism or socialism. I am however acknowledging both the psychological effect on both students and teachers as well as how the financial framework influences our educational institutions and our lives. The young do raise very important questions in regards to a sustainable balance in the human controlled system, of which many could be summed up to one phrase: "is this a sustainable model?". The capitalistic system either addresses no interest to externalities or a huge interest in controlling for externalities, both have the sole purpose of protecting profits. Corporations or entities usually make sure that externalities get transferred onto someone else, both in relation to the costs attached to them directly but also to whatever implications or indirect affect they might have on our ecosystem by blaming other things or diminishing the organisation's contribution. One can argue for or against human influence on our ecosystem, but it sure would be a massive coincidence that we are experiences what has been called the sixth mass extinction on this planet at the same time as humans ravel in their capitalistic success with its infinite debt driven growth model. These conflicts are highly visible in the world today and can be found all over the news, social media, or highly prevalent in political campaigns. The conflicting interests can also be seen in a lot of huge global industries like the fossil fuel industry that want to internalise the profits by not only externalising the danger and cost, both locally and globally, but also socialising the costs by collect massive government subsidies because they have made themselves central to the modern way of human life. In a report from the International Monetary Fund (2017) it is estimated that the fossil fuel industry receives combined global subsidies of US\$5.2 Trillion in 2017, equivalent to 6.5% in global GDP. Finland's subsidies 2015 were US\$1.45 Billion, which makes it about 0.6% of its GDP (Hayer, 2017). In 2016 Finland spent 6.9% of its GDP on Education in total (World Bank, 2020), or about US\$2950 per capita. Australia gave the fossil fuel industry US\$29 Billions in subsidies in 2017, equivalent to 2.3% of its GDP (Coady, Parry, Nghia-Piotr, & Naoping, 2019), and spent 5.3% of its GDP on Education in total (World Bank, 2020), or about US\$2645 per capita. The shift, or rather the slow shift to a greener energy has created a lot of anxiety among younger people, at least in Finland and Australia. As a clinical psychologist from Oxford pointed out, the more people feel something is bigger than

their capacity to enact meaningful change, the higher the risk for anxiety, burnout, and a sort of professional paralysis (Taylor & Murray, 2020).

Through behavioural economics we have also seen how we are easily swayed in one direction or the other through manipulative strategies targeting our subconscious and inner most feelings and values (Kahneman, 2011). Dan Ariely has through his marvellous down-to-earth experiments showed how easily we make emotional judgements on seemingly insignificant details like what kind of t-shirt someone is wearing while wanting our attention (Ariely, 2012). As stated before, the good Samaritan study also clearly shows how we stray from our deepest values while under personal pressure (Darley, 1973). Even though a CEO at a large corporation, or even a global conglomerate, usually have very selfish goals and differ a lot when it comes to human values when compared to a priest, they both still act in a very similar self-centred way when under personal stress and pressure. At this point it would be important to point out an important research finding that found a global satiation point of US\$60,000 to US\$75,000 for emotional well-being (Jebb et al., 2018; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). The individual drive for more and higher income above the satiation point, which is already four times higher for Americans compared to World War II while also being able to offer health care and education for all, indicates that the problem is political than a matter of funds (Stiglitz, 2019). This political stance can also be seen in the rescue packages issued by all G20 nations in April 2020, where the whole US\$7.3 trillion in spending are preserving the environmental status quo, instead of activating a green package that would stimulate the economic recovery as well as be environmentally more sustainable (Hepburn, O'Callaghan, Stern, Stiglitz, & Zenghelis, 2020). The point I am making is that a high level of individualism is inherent in the dichotomised financial framework of today, which cause a lot of similar issues and challenges for the individual experiencing them, but the outcomes driven by self-interests also have a collective impact on others and our environment. Under stress and pressure, we are less inclined to think about others, the greater good for our community, or how the ecological balance might be impacted on a larger timescale.

The reason I bring up these economical frameworks and examples in this paper is simple; it will highly impact your life, your choices, your values, and who you aspire to become, either by offering possibilities or limiting them. The concept of positive psychology in education focuses on a myriad of things that I would argue makes humans humane. Geelong Grammar School is the only school in the world, so far, that has fully adopted the ideology of positive psychology in

education. Many schools have adopted elements of the positive psychology ideology in their teaching, some countries, like Finland, have a wide fundamental educational framework that has incorporated parts of this ideology, which will be explained later in this paper. If you find the positive psychology in education ideology to be appealing and want to study at Geelong Grammar School, which is a full time boarding school, you had to pay AU\$41,260 (approximately €25,000) for the 2019 school year (Colangelo & Precel, 2019). Geelong Grammar School is one of the most expensive private schools in Victoria (Colangelo & Precel, 2019), and it goes without saying that a median income earning family will not have access to such a school without external help of some kind or a scholarship program. The median income in Victoria, Australia, in 2019 was about AU\$65,000 for full time working women and AU\$76,000 for full time working men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The Socio Economic Status of the family greatly impact their choice of school. Many may have the belief that attending a high ranking or prestigious school automatically will pave the road to greater success later in life. You can either access such a school by being able to pay the monetary price or by having higher grades than your possible fellow students competing for a limited number of student placements, which is the only option in Finland. Contrary to beliefs, attending a very good and prestigious school does not necessary lead to greater success later in life, as it is more about studying together in a group with other high achievers (Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017).

### **3 Theoretical framework**

“Life is a journey, not a destination” - Ralf Waldo Emerson

Psychology has undergone a rapid change the past 70 years, and especially during the 1950s and ‘60s, which were considered even revolutionary in more fields than psychology. Up until that time one of the only methods of treatments was psychoanalysis, which was kind of a gold standard for treatments set by Freud. New visionaries like B. F. Skinner, Albert Ellis, Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, and Viktor Frankl broke free of the Freudian constraints and gave us new insight into the human psyche as well as new therapies that focused on the “here and now” instead of diving into the past. There is no denying that emotions both define and drive humans and the society we live in, but it’s not holistically clear how this happens or to what extent. Emotions are universal in humans and have played a vital role in the survival as a species; we solve problems in a wider way using emotions; we also overcome life challenges and struggles better together (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015).

The same could be said about positive psychology, we have a lot of research that shows us that certain things work, like flow, growth mindset, hope, optimism, Resilience, Self-efficacy, well-being and so on, but it is hard to point out the exact mechanics or the mix that leads to a certain outcome for the general population and even harder for the individual. We are all very similar but still very unique (Robinson, 2011), out of the approximate 107 billion people that have been alive since homo sapiens came to be (Kaneda & Haub, 2020), not one of them has been completely the same as another, they have all been completely unique individuals. Let that sink in for a moment, you as you are, your life, will be one out of over one hundred billion. There have never been anyone like you, and there never will be anyone like you after your time is up. This is especially important as the psychological and the sociological fields work with generalisations (averages and medians), there is not one size fits all, which can be a common general misconception.

The same goes for education where we also teach according to averages and medians; we teach using a model of one size fits all, with small timely allowed adjustments, to a group consisting of completely unique individuals. I'm going to define a few theories that will be a central part in making sense of the phenomenon that emerges from the interviews as well as help answering the research questions. Many of the theories are related to effort and well-being in social constructs and some of the theories both overlap and have close relation to other theories in other psychological fields. All these theories put together will, for the most part, explain the positive or negative outcomes for an individual that operates within an environment of well-being and positivity. As one of the leading psychiatrists Aaron T. Beck, the father of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, has pointed out "emotions stand on cognitive thought, not the other way around". We as social individuals are highly affected by our thoughts, which are linked to our environment and our close caretakers and peers. Our thoughts and efforts set the path to either success or failure in our personal lives.

Positive psychology is meant to be the preventive method of how to build resilience and self-belief, which will fine tune each individual to operate according to our best abilities. Positive attitudes also set the parameters for a life in line with the individual's true potential and builds on our character strengths (Fredrickson, 2004). In many ways our western society is very focused on negative things. we very easily and naturally ask "what went wrong," "what did you do? (inferring to something negative)," "how can we fix or avoid this failure now or in the future". All the theories

presented in this section have one thing in common, they all focus on the positive aspect of life, relationships, the individual and his or her efforts. We are more likely to progress if we focus on and build on our efforts in reaching our goals (Dweck, 2008). Instead, we should ask questions like “what went right,” “how can I focus more on the efforts leading to a successful outcome,” “What did I do (positive reflection on what was good but still unknown),” “What happened (giving space to everyone involved to express what happened instead of looking for an excuse or a scapegoat)” (Dweck, 2008). Studies have shown that people are most effective when feeling happy and when they feel their effort contributes the whole (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Seligman, 2004). Studies have also found a significant correlation between overcoming severe diseases by having a positive attitude and outlook on life (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In this paper however, I’ll focus on individuals deemed to be normal and healthy in a school environment, and try to work out how different aspects of positive psychology affects their daily life.

### **3.1 Positive Psychology**

“No society can be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.” – Adam Smith

Positive psychology, the scientific study of the “good life”, was created as a field of science by Martin Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), who wrote the Positive Psychology introduction, which is sometimes called the positive psychology manifesto. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) concluded that psychology had become distorted by increasingly been focused on mental illness and they thus argue that the more exceptional side of human life is missing, which in itself is the argument for Positive Psychology. Csikszentmihalyi noticed that the field of psychology focused on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning, mostly after the devastation after World War II, but knew very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Martin Seligman started working towards the field of positive psychology after having spent decades as a clinical psychologist with a lot of negativity, realising early on that helplessness is a learnt behaviour (Maier & Seligman, 1976; Seligman, 2003). Seligman observed that suffering patients might get slightly better, many who temporarily reached neutral whereafter most relapsed or regressed, with the conventional treatments of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) and the International Classification of Disease (ICD) ailments (Seligman, 2003). Positive psychology aims to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from the preoccupation of only repairing the worst things in life to also

building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At the individual level it is supposed to be about positive individual traits and at the group level it is about civic virtues and the institutions that help citizens move towards better citizenship with more fulfilling, meaningful, and happy lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Barbara Fredrickson has spent decades concluding through research that positive emotions transform us in a progressive way. Fredrickson has developed a theory called broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, stating that when we work with positive traits and experiences, it changes us and we see a progressive development towards more positivity and a life filled with more contentment (Fredrickson, 2004). The majority of research publications in psychology have been about the negative effects of feelings (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Once attention was brought to the positive aspect and building programs for the health of the mind, instead of recovering a sick mind, he found that not only does it add to life but it can also be used to increase resilience preventing sickness in the first place (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Seligman, 2011; Seligman, 2018). Seligman used the rigorous program in the army, and it has, according to him, demonstrated the effectiveness on the field and after (Seligman, 2003; Seligman, 2009).

The field of positive psychology has not suddenly come up with a lot of own ideas unknown to the field of science, but it has gathered more or less parts of older ideas and theories from other disciplines of psychology (Kristjánsson, 2012). Carol Dweck came up with the initial seed that eventually progressed to the fixed and growth mindset, before positive psychology existed as a concept (Dweck, 1975). The same applies to Snyder's (2000) hope-theory; and Flow-theory by Csikszentmihalyi, the psychology of happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992); and the positivity ratio (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

Some critical comments have been raised against Positive Psychology, calling it a movement and some of its claims to be exaggerated and a cult-like aspiration (Kristjánsson, 2012; Lazarus, 2003). The critique is usually about the findings that the researchers within positive psychology report and how they make claims about how it connects to the whole or the lack of an over-arching theory for positive psychology (Kristjánsson, 2012). It goes without saying that the human mind is extremely complex and it should not be a surprise that there are many influencers that affect the individual's behaviour. In my opinion, neither for or against, it is very hard for such complexity to have an over-arching theory without a certain level of abstraction embedded. Seligman (2018) has

tried to make such attempt, to create an over-arching theory of positive psychology, which he calls Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA).

### **3.2 Well-being – PERMA**

Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment (PERMA) is Seligman's take on an over-arching positive psychology theory that make up well-being (Seligman, 2011). More concretely it is a model where we can reach flourishing by increasing our positive emotions; engaging with our hobbies, work, and the world; developing deep and meaningful relationships; finding meaning and purpose in our lives; and lastly but not least, achieving our goals through cultivating and applying our talents and strengths. Put in another way, to flourish is to find fulfilment in our lives, connecting with others at a deeper level while accomplishing meaningful and worthwhile tasks; living the "good life" (Seligman, 2011). It is something everyone can learn to achieve, therefore it is not an immutable piece of who you are, but a process requiring individual effort through various actions. It is a theory that is built on the earlier positive psychology construct that Seligman called Authentic-happiness, which included positive emotions, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2002). The PERMA concept might seem abstract and a wide at first glance but is actually rooted in a very sturdy and extensive research based on several studies, with control groups. Seligman has worked extensively with the U.S. Army, where he implemented a lot of successful educational programs based on the PERMA concept (Seligman, 2011). He claims that his education program actually prevented PTSD from developing in returning soldiers, compared to soldiers in the control that did not participate in the program (Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) also talks about signature strengths, by which he means that if you find out about your own strengths and practice through them, it will increase you happiness. The signature strengths seem to be synonymous to the term character strengths, which are used interchangeably (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011). Character strengths will be explained in chapter 3.5.

Although there is still much debate about the aspects of flourishing, at least the scholars have agreed on one thing when it comes to flourishing, it is not simply the opposite or absence of depression or mental illness. Research in positive psychology has revealed that there are two spectrums: (a) Mental illness, and (b) mental health/flourishing. The core principles in the PERMA-theory stands on the conclusion "emotions stand on cognitive thought, not the other way around," by Aron T. Beck, the father of cognitive therapy. What Seligman has done is to connect

the PERMA to a feeling of flourishing, which moves beyond the confines of only happiness and well-being, which naturally are subjective individual feelings. He argues that a combination of these five feelings in PERMA and their outcomes, regardless of personality, will lead to a feeling of both happiness and well-being, and eventually flourishing. Even though most psychologists agree that flourishing encompasses happiness, well-being, and life-satisfaction (Ryan et al., 2019); many researchers are sceptical towards the PERMA model as its elements have their own subcomponents that also argue for subjective well-being (Kristjánsson, 2018): purpose, autonomy, self-acceptance, optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), mastery, self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), resilience (Masten, 2001), personal growth, self-regulation (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), self-esteem, and more.

Seligman's PERMA theory is considered to be very close to other theories like subjective well-being-theory (SWB) (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, & Kauffman, 2017) and flow-theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), to name but a few, where similar or the same variables affect the "same" outcome. Especially researchers Keyes and Haidt published an edited version of their book on flourishing in 2002, which included findings from leading psychologists on well-being, happiness, and living the best life possible. It was written at the same time at which positive psychology was emerging as a field, promoted by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi. Seligman (2018) clarifies that PERMA constitutes the elements of well-being and not that it forms a new kind of well-being. He argues against the advocates of SWB, who claims the PERMA theory is theoretically arbitrary and redundant with SWB, by stating his angle and focus is different to that of the SWB (Seligman, 2018). The fundamental difference here would be, according to Seligman (2018), that SWB stands on direct psychometric data, e.g. "be happy to feel happy," whereas PERMA is a theory of the building blocks of how to reach well-being, "do these things to add to your happiness". Kristjánsson (2018) also points out that Aristotle already defined happiness and wellbeing as "eudaimonia", which also sometimes interchangeably gets translated to subjective well-being. According to Kristjánsson (2018), philosophers are baffled why psychologists often ignore established philosophical distinctions. In reality there are also people who can be unhappy but flourish, like miserable thinkers; not happy enough flourishers; happy non-flourishers; and not unhappy enough non-flourishers, such as the happy slave (Kristjánsson, 2018). A very important note, based on several longitudinal studies, is that there is a strong correlation between religious communities and human flourishing (VanderWeele, 2017), although a correlation does not imply causation, it is hard to know if Seligman's PERMA model would be applicable on them without

studies. In a sense self-concordance (Sheldon, 2013), which is people pursuing personal goals with intrinsic self-interest and self-exploration, and those who attain it may achieve flourishing-happiness concordance as a result. But there are both psychological and philosophical reasons to think that many achieve neither and yet can either flourish or be happy (Kristjánsson, 2018).

### **3.3 Fixed and Growth Mindset**

“The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance; the wise grows it under his feet.” – James Oppenheim

It is important to recognise that many theories adopted by the umbrella-term Positive Psychology, once originated from the work of researchers not directly connected to it, which is the case with growth- and fixed mindset. In the Renaissance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola argued that the very dignity of humans, as the only species, lies precisely in their potential to make themselves into what they aspire to be (Pico della Mirandola, 2012). Dweck’s and her colleagues became interested in the subject when they noticed that some students seemed devastated by the slightest setback, whereas some seemed to be invigorated by the challenge. The mother of the terms growth- and fixed mindset, Carol Dweck, started investigating this phenomenon in the 1970s. Interestingly enough her research used Seligman’s and Maier’s research about learned helplessness from 1967, from which she linked that phenomenon to reinforcement responsibility, i.e. internal versus external attributions for outcomes. She and her colleague demonstrated that following failure, a certain group of children do not perform the needed response to succeed despite being capable and willing to do so solely due to the fear of failure (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973). In a paper from 1988, Dweck and Leggett described what they termed at the time as mastery-oriented, later to be named the growth mindset, individuals as learning goal oriented in pursuit of opportunities to increase their competence and new skills. They described the helpless individual, later called the fixed mindset, as an individual who might be pursuing a performance goal, in which they avoid giving evidence of inadequacy and therefore never challenge themselves (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The underlying individual factor is our motivation, in a world that easily categorises things and people, we are prone to put each other and our behaviours in a fixed box, which enforces us to act accordingly (Dweck, 2008). Dweck combines elements from developmental psychology, personality psychology, social psychology, and later also from neuroscience in explaining the mindset people use to structure and regulate themselves and how they guide their behaviour. Through her work she has shown how the mindset of the teacher, or a parent, affects how they

approach the child and how that in turn affects the child's response. One's view on oneself can determine everything; if you believe in the label you have been given, you most likely want to live up to that label or you feel doomed or cursed by the label and act accordingly. Someone who is said to be smart, wants to appear smart, whereas someone who is said to be stupid, might accept they are; the irony is that neither of them will challenge themselves and put up the needed effort because they both have a fixed mindset where the outcome is either failure or success (Dweck, 2008).

The hand you are dealt in regards to genetics, opportunities, and upbringing can be very different and Dweck does not dismiss innate talents, however, there is a huge difference if those variables are seen as fixed or as an individual starting point for further development driven by effort and hard work, the growth mindset. More importantly, innate talents and traits are not fixed, they can be developed through practice by pushing individual boundaries, which a smart person easily avoids as effort is antithetical to being smart (Dweck, 2008). She exclaims that in a growth mindset, failure can be a painful experience but it does not define you, it is however interpreted as a challenge to be faced, to be overcome and learned from through relentless effort. Dweck (2008) has performed many field experiments using the growth mindset intervention: (a) in one year a fourth-grade class in the South Bronx that was behind compared to the norm, became the number one fourth-grade class in the state of New York on the state math test after Dweck's intervention; (b) in one to one and a half years, Native American students in a reservation school went from the bottom of their district to the top, which included an affluent section of Seattle, outperforming the Microsoft kids in a private school (Dweck, 2008).

The key, according to Dweck, is to be pushed slightly out of your comfort zone, to get that feeling of "not yet" opposed to feeling hopelessness if the challenge is too hard. Children have a natural curiosity and an innate drive to learn (Robinson, 2011), they will naturally push their own limits in a self-organised learning environment (Mitra, 2014). It is easy to fall into the trap of obsessing and focusing on getting a good grade for a subject in an assessment, which both removes creativity and easily stifles the learning process as well as the reason for learning (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Another by-product of assessment is that we make students dependent on the validation that we are giving them (Dweck, 2008). In such an environment, students can easily come to believe that certain attributes, such as intelligence, is fixed (Dweck, 2008; Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Both Yeager and Dweck have proven that intelligence can be affected through challenge-

seeking and resilience to develop a growth mindset that also affects well-being positively, whilst also enhancing motivation. Dweck still points out that despite decades of research, we still know far too little about how to best transmit a growth mindset to individuals in different contexts. Through experiments and observation she noticed that it is far too easy for people to implement a growth mindset poorly. This is one of the reasons Dweck advocates more research in this field, as researchers are now beginning to realise how mindset and related concepts fit into larger theories of motivation, personality, and development (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Research and progress in neuroscience have shown us that the brain is much more malleable, neurologically called brain plasticity, than we first thought. However, this process requires mindful and goal-oriented effort.

### **3.4 Positive relationships and the positive ratio**

“If you want to make a better world, you should alleviate the circumstances that produce bad actions, rather than waste your time trying to change character by punishing bad behaviour or even by rewarding good behaviour” (Seligman, 2011).

The original positivity ratio in relationships came from the work of John Gottman, and later on with his wife Julie Schwartz Gottman, and Robert Levenson in studying married couples. It is important to acknowledge their rigorous contribution to the psychological research community as it might get tainted by the now debunked claim by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) of the critical positivity ratio, stating a four decimal 2.9013 tipping point, to reach a state of flourishing in relationships. The critical positivity ratio will be discussed later in this chapter, as will the legitimacy of a relationship ratio in general.

Medical research has demonstrated that when patients depend on others and are not alone, they recover faster from a whole host of problems like heart attacks, strokes, and cancer. Research has also demonstrated that people who are in committed relationships tend to live longer and are happier and more successful than those who live alone (Stavrova, 2019). When Gottman began his research in 1972, there had only been seven studies that had tried to predict the future of couples' relationships using only questionnaires (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Gottman had a quantitative and experimental approach in analysing couples and he videotaped them and coded their interactions using a system he and his graduate student Cliff Notarius invented, known as Couples' Interaction Scoring System. In 1976, John Gottman and Robert Levenson teamed up and set up a lab environment where they could instrumentally measure heart rate, sweat gland

production, blood velocity, and overall bodily movement, which were synchronised to the timecoded 15 minute video. Despite seemingly looking calm, the data indicated that they were experiencing an attack, triggering a fight-or-flight response. To find out how these couples fared, they were asked to return three years later to the lab, where the same procedures were repeated. Gottman and his colleagues were astonished to find that they had a 90 percent accuracy in their predictions (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). That kind of accuracy was unheard of in psychological research, and earlier research about behavioural predictions could only reach nine percent accuracy (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Gottman and Levenson studied some couples for as long as 20 years, even minority couples like gay and lesbian for 12 years, and Gottman studied even violent couples for nine years with most of the findings replicated. Gottman extended his experimental studies with his wife, Julie Schwartz Gottman, in an apartment lab, from which they concluded that the smallest moments told an important story (Gottman 1996). In sum, these small moments of turning toward each other's bids for connection were crucial for relationship happiness. The newlyweds who turned toward each other's bids an average of 86 percent of the time remained happily married six years later, compared with 33 percent of the time for those ending in divorce. Across all the studies made, they learned enough to watch a couple at the first meeting to accurately predict, with better than 90 percent accuracy, whether the couple would stay together or separate six years later (Gottman, 1996). All in all, they studied more than 3,000 couples and participated in studies of 3,500 more (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Gottman and Levenson identified both powerful predictors of relationship demise as well as effective methods of interventions. The predictors they called the four Horsemen and they were: Criticism; contempt; defensiveness; stonewalling, which means that the partner disengages by turning away and is impossible to reach. They concluded that almost everyone uses them from time to time, but the difference is how you deal with it after the disagreement. The most effective intervention was a short break to calm down before continuing a discussion (Gottman, 1996).

Early research on flourishing claimed that positive emotions in relationships play an important role in flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). The critical positivity ratio was considered to be a gem of positive psychology, and it went beyond an abstract claim into widespread applications in marriage counselling, organisational consulting, and school settings aimed at getting relationships positive balance over the so-claimed 2.9013 tipping point into flourishing (Friedman & Brown, 2018). Even the largest applied social science research program ever, the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, that trained literally every member of the U.S. Army, based its scientific

legitimacy on this alleged finding (Jonas et al., 2010). However, it was later determined that the mathematical modelling used in Fredrickson and Losada's study had severe weaknesses and was misapplied, and hence is invalid (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013), the general findings about positive relationships are argued to be true, because those who are flourishing report more positive emotions than those who are not (Fredrickson & Losada, 2013). The critical positivity ratio received more than 2,000 citations in the scholarly literature up until April 2017 (Friedman & Brown, 2018). The flawed mathematics was finally acknowledged by Fredrickson and Losada and they retracted the specific critical positivity ratio of 2.9013 and its underlying mathematics (Fredrickson & Losada, 2013). Fredrickson continued to assert that there is still ample empirical evidence for a tipping point somewhere around "3" (Fredrickson, 2013) but that claim was also shown to be invalid (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2014).

Despite the misplaced mathematical model in trying to find a universal positive relationship ratio, the original work of Gottman and Levenson should not be tainted by this, nor should the mathematical model of nonlinear dynamic systems. Gottman and Levenson's work relates to married couples and their predicted outcome based on the spouses behaviours and attitudes towards one another (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). To increase the complexity by including all relationships, not only married couples, while also trying to make the ratio universal via a simple formula, does seem to be a rather ridiculous undertaking considering the variety in human experience and behaviour (Friedman & Brown, 2018). If such an endeavour would succeed in the future, the ratio would probably be very generalised and therefore less valuable as well as less applicable to an individual's relationship, totally different from another relationship. However, what Gottman and Levenson's research shows, is that positive and supporting behaviour and attitude matters in a relationship. They showed that relationships destined to fail have an average ratio of 0.8 to 1, or around one positive interaction for every negative one. They also calculated that the ratio that predicted success had to be much higher during non-conflict times, around 20 to 1, which indicates that relationships need a buffer of positive interactions to survive and thrive (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015).

### **3.5 Character strengths**

"Gratitude is seen as a human strength that enhances one's personal and relational well-being and is beneficial for society as a whole." – Simmel

Different cultures around the world have always valued human virtues and strengths; different cultures express or act on virtues in different ways based on differing societal values and norms. Martin Seligman and his colleagues studied all major religions and philosophical traditions and found that the same few virtues were shared in virtually all cultures across three millennia. The six shared virtues are as follows: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology practitioners focused their attention on the strengths of character created by virtues, because the virtues are considered too abstract to be studied scientifically.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) exclaimed that a multitude of positive outcomes result from high levels of Character Strengths (CS). When an individual exercises her or his CS, it is argued to lead to a sense of authenticity while feeling intrinsic motivation and excitement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The constructs of CS are difficult to conceptualise and the Values in Action (VIA) Institute initiated an attempt to operationalise CS, supported by the field of Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Take “Gratitude” for example, it has been conceptualised as a moral virtue, a personality trait, a habit, an attribute, and an emotion (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The VIA efforts yielded 24 CS and are as follows: appreciation of beauty, bravery, creativity, curiosity, fairness, forgiveness, gratitude, honesty, hope, humility, humour, judgement, kindness, leadership, love, love of learning, perseverance, perspective, prudence, self-regulation, social intelligence, spirituality, teamwork, zest. The strengths specified in the VIA classification system is argued to reflect individual differences and are approached as continuum, not as categories (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The CS are trait-like in the way that they manifest across context and time (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and yet, unlike temperament and personality, they are relatively receptive to change (Hogan & Sinclair, 1997). It is also thought that strengths can be shaped through different life experiences and by the individual’s environmental setting (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggested that CS are somewhat stable but malleable, and they encourage the idea that character can be developed and nurtured. A study by Park and Peterson (2006) showed that some of the more sophisticated CS usually require a degree of cognitive maturation that develops during adolescence, which means that although gratitude is associated with happiness in adolescents and adulthood, this is not the case in young children. Park and Peterson’s study showed that the association of gratitude with happiness starts at the age of seven (Park & Peterson, 2006). They also concluded that most young children are not yet cognitively mature enough for sophisticated CS, there are many fundamental CS that are

developed at a very early stage. The strengths of love, zest, and hope are associated with happiness starting at a very young age (Park & Peterson, 2006).

Based on the VIA classification of the 24 CS, the 240-item self-report questionnaire, VIA Inventory of Strengths Scale (VIA-IS) was developed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The most foundational and notable study using the VIA-IS scale to measure CS (Park et al., 2004), included over 5,000 adult participants who completed the VIA-IS scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985) via the Internet. The participants were mostly, 80 percent, U.S. citizens and most were between the ages of 35 and 40. Controlling for gender, age, and demographics, it was revealed that the following 5 CS were significantly related to life satisfaction: hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity. Using a multiple regression analysis, Park, et al. (2004) showed that love was the strongest predictor of satisfaction with life, followed by zest, hope, gratitude, and curiosity. CS also appears to reduce the risk of psychological disorders: spirituality and hope predict less depression, and gratitude interventions may directly reduce self-reported depressive symptoms (Karris Bachik, Carey, & Craighead, 2020). Gratitude also seems to be associated with reduced risk for major depressive disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, bulimia nervosa, phobia, nicotine dependence, alcohol dependence, and drug dependence and abuse (Kendler et al., 2003).

### **3.6 Mindfulness**

“Your vision becomes clear when you look inside your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens” – Carl Jung

Mindfulness is valued by its qualities, in virtually all contemporary and ancient cultures (Kabat-Zinn, 2015b). Paying attention is something we often do very selectively and haphazardly, we often do not see what is right in front of our eyes or even hear sounds that are uttered close to us and are clearly entering our ears (Kabat-Zinn, 2015b). Mindfulness can be thought of as a moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way (Kabat-Zinn, 2015a). Strictly speaking, the application of mindfulness gives rise to awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2015a). If mindfulness is an innate quality of mind and it can also be refined through systematic practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2015b).

Jon Kabat-Zinn is considered to be the “founding father” of the U.S. mindfulness trend. In his college days he was introduced to mindfulness through his exploration of Buddhist philosophy, which he then incorporated into his practice as a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He was the founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the UM medical school in 1979, where he developed the program that today is known as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Since then, mindfulness has grown in popularity and is increasingly the subject of studies on ways to reduce stress, as well as increase positivity and the quality of life (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Generally speaking, mindfulness and mindfulness meditation refer to the same concept, which is to stay open and aware of your own inner workings and allowing your thoughts and feelings to come, from moment to moment, without judgment. By utilising the following techniques individuals can get the most out of mindfulness practice: firstly, pay close attention to your breathing, especially if you feel intense emotions; secondly, be aware of what you feel in a given moment by using all of your senses; thirdly, realise that your thoughts are fleeting and do not define you, also called being aware of the monkey-brain; fourthly, tune into your body's physical sensations; and finally, practice mindfulness in your daily life while doing normal chores. Jon Kabat-Zinn has developed a few simple mindfulness programs: (a) Mindful breathing, (b) Body scan meditation, (c) Raisin meditation, (d) Walking meditation, (e) Loving-kindness meditation) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). According to Davidson and colleagues, even a short time of mindfulness practice can lead to positive structural changes in the brain (Davidson et al., 2003).

Mindfulness is not so much linked to positive psychology as it is interwoven into its very fabric. Mindfulness in positive psychology can lead to: being aware and mindful of your own thoughts and emotions which in turn promotes well-being; being mindful can improve working memory (van Vugt & Jha, 2011); Mindfulness acts as a buffer against the depressive symptoms (Brown-Iannuzzi, Adair, Payne, Richman, & Fredrickson, 2014); Mindfulness can help you make better use of your own character strengths (Niemiec, 2012); Mindfulness can make you more resilient (Tang et al., 2009); Mindfulness can shrink the stress region in your brain (Taren, Creswell, & Gianaros, 2013). The close ties between mindfulness and positive psychology make sense considering the outcomes of mindfulness: more empathy, more satisfying relationships increased positivity, better quality of life, and greater hope (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

### **3.7 Broader and build theory**

“Emotions are the chief source of all becoming conscious. There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotions” – Carl Jung

Barbara Fredrickson (2004) argues that the broadened mindsets arise from positive emotions, in contrast to the more narrowed mindsets caused by many negative emotions, especially when the fight or flight response is triggered. She exclaims that by broadening an individual’s thought–action repertoire, whether it is through play or exploration, positive emotions promote creative actions, which in turn will develop the individual’s personal resources. The personal resources, physical and intellectual, will also affect the close environment through social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2004). Positive emotions have received little empirical attention compared to negative emotions, much due to the traditional focus on psychological problems alongside remedies for those problems (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). When people experience positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, and love, they are not plagued by negative emotions, such as anxiety, sadness, and anger. The overall balance between peoples’ positive to negative emotions has been shown to contribute to their subjective well-being (Diener, 2000). Prolonged negative emotions can produce many serious problems for the individual as well as for the society, ranging from phobias and anxiety disorders, depression and suicide, aggression and violence, to a host of stress-related physical disorders (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Fredrickson (2004) argues that that positive emotions also produce optimal functioning, over the long-term and not just within the present moment.

Positive emotions are also often confused with positive moods. Emotions differ from moods in that emotions are about some personally meaningful circumstance that are typically short-lived and occupy the foreground of consciousness. Moods are typically objectless or free-floating, more long-lasting, and occupy the background of consciousness (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996; Rosenberg, 1998). The experiences of positive emotions prompt individuals to engage with their environments and engage in activities, many of which were evolutionarily adaptive for the individual, its species, or both. This particular link between positive emotions and activity engagement offers an explanation for the tendency for individuals to experience mild positive affect frequently, even in neutral contexts (Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999; Diener & Diener, 1996). Without such a reward, through the feeling of positive emotions, individuals would most often be unmotivated to engage with their environments (Fredrickson, 2004). Traditional approaches to the study of

emotions have tended to ignore positive emotions and squeeze them into supposedly emotion-general models.

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions seems to make positive emotions to broaden peoples' momentary thought–action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 1998; 2001). In a life-threatening situation, a more narrowed thought–action repertoire promotes quick and decisive action that carried direct and immediate benefit for our ancestors' by facilitating their survival. In contrast to negative emotions, the broadened thought–action repertoires triggered by positive emotions are beneficial by broadening our mindsets with indirect and long-term adaptive benefits through enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 2004).

Fredrickson (2005) tested the broaden hypothesis, together with Christine Branigan, by showing research participants short emotionally evocative film clips to induce the specific emotions of joy, contentment, fear and anger. The neutral control group used a non-emotional film clip. Immediately following each film clip, they measured the breadth of participants' thought–action repertoires. The participants were asked to step away from the specifics of the film and imagine being in a situation themselves, to evoke similar feelings. Fredrickson and Branigan then asked them to list what they would like to do right then, based on their experienced feeling.

By broadening a person's momentary thought–action repertoire, a positive emotion may decrease the negative emotion on that person's mind and body by undoing the preparation for a specific action. Evidence for the undo effect of positive emotions suggests that individuals might improve their well-being, and maybe also their physical health, by cultivating experiences of positive emotions to cope with negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2000).

### **3.8 Grit – talent, effort, and achievement**

I will briefly mention this theory as it is a part of the positive psychology repertoire and the theory intersects with other theories like growth mindset and broader and build that are used in this study.

Grit is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals; the combination of talent and effort needed to achieve ones goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). According to Angela Duckworth and her colleagues (2007), grit is not positively correlated with Intelligence, but it is highly correlated with conscientiousness from the Big Five personality traits model, consisting of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism

(OCEAN). In her research she concluded that some teachers are drastically more effective than other, which she through her quantitative research findings attributes to grit and life satisfaction (Duckworth, Angela Lee, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009). Grit also predicts retention beyond established context-specific predictors like intelligence, physical aptitude, job tenure, and Big Five personality traits in soldiers, sales employees, students, and married men (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). Seligman mentions grit in conjunction with positive psychology since it's the positive attitude behind that drives the individual, he also refers to studies where only self-discipline out-predict IQ with a factor of two (Seligman, 2011). The grit theory also connects the learned traits to parenting model, where the authoritarian style correlates with grit (Duckworth, Angela, 2016).

## **4 Research methodology**

This chapter will describe the aspects of the research methodology. Firstly, a description of how the research area was implemented. Secondly, the research design, including a comparison between Finland's and Australia's education system in regards to private schools before a brief introduction of GGS, before the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach will be presented as well as the sample selection. Thirdly, what kind of questions were asked in the interview. Fourthly, the data analysis will be presented. Finally, the validity and the ethical considerations will be discussed in chapter 6, after presenting the results in chapter 5.

### **4.1 Research implementation and process**

The research area was selected due to a personal and professional interest in education said to be rooted in positive psychology; people usually thrive if they feel not only content but happy in an environment. The idea was to investigate one of the first schools in the world to implement positive psychology-ideology throughout the whole school, Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, Australia. My personal as well as my professional interest stem from my over two decade long experience working in educational organisations as a teacher, learning developer, and IT manager. To me, Positive psychology stands for human values that should positively affect the educational environment as well as the individual's well-being and performance. The focus in most schools are on the success of the school, the group, and the individual; in the majority of schools success is defined as how well you perform and how high your grades are in comparison to others. As a teacher and professional in educational organisations I noticed how important it is to motivate and even have fun while learning, without inner motivation and drive learning becomes hard and

heavy. Even though well-being is considered to be very important in the Finnish school system, it does not have a specific theoretical framework it stands on in regards to well-being, that part is mostly up to the school and its leaders to deal with and implement. Why I chose Geelong Grammar School in Victoria was because it has a specific approach to the well-being challenge, positive psychology in education, implemented by Martin Seligman and his team in 2009. The school continues to have the same framework, positive psychology in education, guiding the emotional side of education for over a decade now.

Positive psychology in education is a very young field and hence both complex and sometimes abstract considering we are dealing with complex emotions where correlation and causality might not be determined. I did an extensive review starting with the history of education, the reasons behind why the masses of people gradually were emancipated from endless back-crunching labour and instead put through an education. I then thoroughly analysed the literature, policies, and driving factors that have led to the education system we are seeing in the information era today. The discrepancy between the remnants from an old era are still in existence in many school system today and the accumulating neurological, psychological, and social research about human needs and limitations was very obvious. The clash between human traditions and habits, and the aim of this research made this subject even more interesting to me.

The theoretical framework was built utilising Seligman's and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) joint paper on positive psychology, also called the positive psychology manifesto, as well as a wide range of books, articles and online journals, news articles, and governmental sites. The method of data collection was chosen based on the aim on this paper as well as the value I saw that a semi-structured interview could add to understanding the phenomenon through the eyes of the interview subjects. The design of the interview was important as I also needed to get a lot of information without specifically asking some direct questions, which would have guided the subject and tainted the answers and decreased the value and validity of their experience. A semi-structured interview method also allowed me to guide the process while conducting the interview, which gives the necessary space to manoeuvre within each and every interview.

Ten teachers were interviewed using qualitative semi-structured interview (attachment 2). The subjects had been informed what the study was about (attachment 1). All my data was gathered from only adult persons, the staff at Geelong Grammar School, approached by their own principal

via email with my letter attached as a cover letter. All ten of the interviewees chose to participate in the study of their own free will by contacting me directly via email or phone. The teachers were given the opportunity to choose a suitable space on the premises of the school to their liking. Most chose very quiet rooms or spaces, some even their own classrooms, and a few chose a public space with background noise. The important part was to make it their choice under the assumption that they would choose a space they felt comfortable in. The technical setup of the interviews was the same for every interview, using a two recording devices simultaneously both for backup purposes as well as quality and assisting the transcribing process.

All the interviews were transcribed and analysed using specialised audio software, importing both recorded channels. The transcribing process will be presented in more detail in chapter 4.4. After which the results are presented in line with the research questions. The discussion chapter will further discuss the findings as well as reflect on the difference and similarities between the GGS results and the Finnish school system. The reflection of the Finnish school system will be based on literature and seven separate interviews gathered from five different schools in two different municipalities in Finland, as well as one researcher conducting instrumental positive psychology research in Finnish schools.

## **4.2 Research design**

In Finland it is not common to have private schools, but they do exist. It is however illegal for private schools to collect tuition, as the Finnish law states that everyone has to have the same right and possibility to be admitted (Finnish Ministry of Education And Culture, 2020). Additionally, all private schools also have to provide the same benefits as the purely state funded schools. For this reason, the only compulsory education private schools in existence in Finland differ in ideology, such as Waldorf (also known as Steiner) schools or Montessori schools, to name the most common ones. The shift happens after the nine year compulsory schooling in secondary school, either High Schools or VE schools. The major difference between Australia and Finland is that everyone can apply to a Private School, no other criteria, e.g. extra tuition, is allowed (Finland's Ministry of Justice, 1998). Through amendments to the original Education Act (1998) it has also been made clear that the student should have no extra cost attached to the learning journey, that includes: teaching, the necessary textbooks and other learning materials, school equipment and materials, and a hot meal every day. In addition to this, if free transportation to and from school cannot be arranged according to law, the student is entitled to free accommodation

closer to school (Finland's Ministry of Justice, 1998). Even though the Secondary School is optional, only a few things are transferred to the student to pay for, like school material and books in High School. Equal access to different schools means that the quality of one school mostly differs in relation to the students GPA, which is the only variable schools can limit their intake by. Naturally, this means that the higher GPA in some schools is correlated with the overall higher results in the final examination at the end of High School. There is however not a statistical significant difference in the final matriculation exam scores between public and private High Schools (Kortelainen & Manninen, 2018). The Finnish Higher Education is also fully subsidised by the government for both Finnish citizens and EU-citizens. The Australian model doesn't require the student to pay up front, but the accumulated cost is a loan that has to be paid back once the student enters the workforce and meets the income threshold to repay the loan. One could ask why privilege, as in family wealth or income, should dictate the outcome of a child's options in life.

Nussbaum (2012) presents some very valid questions in relation to positive psychology's happiness ideal: are both positive feelings and valuable activities necessary and jointly sufficient for happiness? Must the positive emotion be suitably linked to the good activity, in a way taking delight in one's good activity? And, is one more important than the other? According to Aristotle's teaching: that activity is far and away the main thing and with that pleasure will normally follow, by doing good activities without struggle, the way a virtuous person does them. The Aristotelian conception of happiness was dominant until Bentham's influence dislodged it by changing the very way that many people hear the English word "happiness" (Nussbaum, 2012).

GGS is considered to be one of the most prestigious schools in Victoria, founded in 1855, and it is very renowned for its fifth evolutionary step towards positive psychology in education that started when Martin Seligman laid the foundation of that step in 2007 (Norrish, 2015). The intention to cultivate wellbeing was already there within the School for about all its history, albeit under the program "nurturing of well-rounded, confident students" (Norrish, 2015). GGS is recognised as the leading co-educational boarding school in Australia with eight senior School boarding houses, four for girls and four for boys, as well as two day boarding houses, where more than 80% of school students being full boarders (Geelong Grammar School, 2020). GGS has four campuses with about 1,500 students total and about 200 faculty members (Seligman, 2009). I conducted my interviews at the Corio campus, which is the largest with just under 1,000 students.

I have chosen a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews as a data gathering method. Positive Psychology in education is an interesting phenomenon in itself, hence a phenomenological approach could have been used, which refers to the study of the phenomena actually is (van Manen, 1997). However, I am interested in the interviewees view and interpretation of the phenomenon than the phenomenon itself, hence I have chosen a Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach in the construction of the research, which means I am interested in the experience, interpretation, and understanding of the phenomenon made by the interviewees.

Different methodological approaches will give you different answers and the first obvious step is to choose from a quantitative or a qualitative approach (Widerberg, 2002). The choice of research design also depends on the research goals as well as on personal talents and preferences (Tracy, 2013). The field of positive psychology in education is a complex matter constituting of several similar intricate human emotions like happiness, well-being, and flow that subjectively can be felt in different contexts. When the researched phenomenon is complex and multifaceted, a qualitative research methods have several benefits because it is holistic while preserving a chronical flow and explains why chronology has occurred (Tracy, 2013). Qualitative research can thus grasp experiences that otherwise easily might be overlooked in a quantitative approach. The researcher is the observer of the phenomenon and therefore has a very important role, although the different qualitative methods interpret the role slightly different for instance between phenomenological- and hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Laverly, 2016). Both the methods share the same term “phenomenon”, which means “to make manifest” or “to bring to light” (Larsson & Holmström, 2009). However, in the phenomenological methodology the researcher is meant to be as a separate being watching from the side without personal influencers; in the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology it is argued that it is impossible to completely remove the biases and values from the researcher, that might influence the research, and thus the researcher should approach the phenomenon with own interpretations and analysis with these biases and values clearly written for the reader to follow (Laverly, 2016). In short, the hermeneutic phenomenology sees reality and consciousness as a co-creation, where human understanding arises from the relationship between the two acting upon each other. I have opted to use the hermeneutic phenomenological method in this study as I see it is a better fit in trying to understand how the teachers try to make sense of a complex phenomenon like positive psychology in education manifests in their reality.

### **4.2.1 Why not the phenomenological approach?**

To better understand hermeneutic phenomenology, I will shortly introduce the phenomenological method first as it both predates and functioned like a stepping stone towards hermeneutic phenomenology. I also want to make it clear that a phenomenological approach could have been an option for this study, although the research questions, aim, and results would have changed.

Edmund Husserl, the father of the qualitative phenomenological approach believed that researchers who only gravitated towards quantitative methods focused too much on external physical stimuli, which could be isolated and correlated with isolated responses, ignored context and also missed important variables when creating a highly artificial situation (Jones, 1975). Phenomenology is basically the study of lived experience with the emphasise on the world as lived by a person, not a world or a reality as something separate from the person (van Manen, 1997). It is also important to point out that van Manen (1997) describes six different directions of phenomenology. Husserl saw the phenomenological method as a way of reaching true meaning through an ever deeper dive into reality (Jones, 1975). It is important to point out that Husserl's main focus was the study of phenomena as they appeared through consciousness as both mind and object both occur within experience, essentially eliminating the mind-body dualism (Lavery, 2016). The phenomenological method also includes Husserl's process of phenomenological reduction or bracketing, which means the process of suspending one's judgement or bracketing specific beliefs about the phenomena to be able to see it clearly (Lavery, 2016). Bracketing poses an issue worth considering; we may be able to perform the bracketing but that does not bring with it rich phenomenological insight, because that can only be attained over time (Klaskow, 2018). In addition, if you overcome the bracketing issue, simply finding a way to state descriptions does not guarantee that they are effectively communicated. This is one of the main reasons I did not choose the phenomenological method is because I see the phenomenon I chose to study, positive psychology in education, as very hard to bracket one's personal judgment or values when forming an opinion of it or when communicating it. One of the expressions Husserl (1995) is famous for using is "Zu den Sachen," which means "back to the thing itself," but I do not think or believe that is possible from my angle of approach for positive psychology in education. Another reason would be that phenomenology is more focused on the phenomenon and how it manifests in the real world, but I do not see that is possible without taking people and their values into consideration, something that phenomenology tries to bracket out.

### **4.2.2 The hermeneutic phenomenological approach**

"Hermeneutics invites participants into an ongoing conversation, but does not provide a set methodology. Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information." (Koch, 1995)

When hermeneutic phenomenology came into existence it was considered to be a radical ontological fusion of language and being (van Manen, 1997). Martin Heidegger was the father of hermeneutic phenomenology and was, like Husserl, born in Germany. Heidegger originally considered himself to be a follower of Husserl's teachings although he never was a formal student of him (Jones, 1975). They both taught at Freiberg where Heidegger worked with Husserl, who trained him in the processes of phenomenological intentionality and reduction (Jones, 1975). Once Heidegger overtook Husserl's professorship he disassociated himself from Husserl and his work (Jones, 1975). Heidegger did not ascribe to consciousness being the core, as it is in phenomenology, rather he argued that phenomenon cannot be separated from its context as the individual is a part of the same world and context (Heidegger & Krell, 2011). Phenomenology is also called descriptive phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology is called interpretive phenomenology, which might help distinguish between them (Reiners, 2012).

In hermeneutic phenomenological research meanings are conceived in both being and language (Klaskow, 2018). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research, constructs an interpretive description of some aspect of the life world, or the world as it is lived (van Manen, 1997). The hermeneutic phenomenological approach is used when the researcher is interested in the meaning of the phenomenon while not dismissing values or prior biases through bracketing (Reiners, 2012). Although Heidegger shared Husserl's view on intuition, he criticized Husserl's understanding of evidence and expanded the meaning of "sight" and "seeing" into the realm of understanding compartments (Klaskow, 2018). Max van Manen (2016) offers six research activities that can be used when developing a hermeneutic phenomenological research: (a) deep commitment to a phenomenon; (b) investigate the experience as it is lived; (c) reflect on essential themes; (d) describe phenomenon through writing; (e) allow the phenomenon to teach you something; (f) think in terms of parts of a whole. The hermeneutic phenomenological research approach is an active ongoing interpretation of the phenomenon that is never really final, hence the real challenges lies in the communication of what is interpreted (Klaskow, 2018).

### **4.3 Data collection methods**

It is imperative to have a data collection method affiliated with research questions and the research design (van Manen, 1997). As this is a qualitative study I will be using interviews as my main data collection method. The interviews will be of a semi-structured design as it fits the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The semi-structured interview format is the most frequently used technique in qualitative research and it has also been proven to be both versatile and flexible (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). One of the main advantages in general and in this study is that the semi-structured interview method has been found to be successful in enabling reciprocity between the participant and interviewer (Galletta, 2012), also allowing the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and allowing space for individual expressions by the participants' (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006). It is important to build a certain level of trust, to consider cultural norms, and to be sensitive to other possible issues before and during the interview (van Manen, 1997). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that despite the flexible structure of the semi-structured interview method, which is meant to facilitate reaching the research goals, it is ethically dubious to collect data that is not necessary for the research (Gibbs et al., 2007).

#### **4.3.1 Interview guide**

Despite the popularity in the semi-structured interview technique, there is a lack of uniform and international advice how to develop a semi-structured interview guide (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). However, there are some general commonalities: the questions are determined before the interview and formulated using the guide (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The semi-structured method offers a focused structure for the interview and is not meant to be followed strictly, instead the researcher is meant to gather similar type of information from the participants (van Manen, 1997). Many of the questions I wrote are leading questions, designed to get the participant to talk about and around the subject, where I am able to lead the discussion towards the areas I need them to talk about. The interview guide consisted of a framework for the participants, sent via email (attachment 2), and an interview sheet for myself conducting the interview (attachment 1). It was very obvious in the interviews that the participants liked talking about the subjects.

### 4.3.2 Sample selection

A sample selection plan was constructed to be able to ensure a structured and organised way of finding the participants. It is crucial to get access to the participants as a first step when planning the research approach (van Manen, 1997). Furthermore it is important to choose a design that will yield the data needed for the research to be able to reach the research goals and answer the research questions (Tracy, 2013). I had to apply for a research permit to be able to conduct my study at Geelong Grammar School. The school is one of a kind and the first to adopt a school wide positive psychology in education and hence get a lot of research requests. Once I was granted the research permit I sent out a short informational letter about the study that was shared to the School staff via the principal. It is important for the researcher to bear in mind that the sample will always partly be defined by random variables in regards to who will be a part of the study (van Manen, 1997). I did time most of the interviews to take place during the two week break between periods, to maximise the staffs possibility to participate. The only requirements I had for the participants were: (a) they had to be a full time staff member; (b) if not a teacher, their main work involves the students; (c) they had to have at least one term of experience within the GGS and prior teaching experience to be able to participate. No pilot study was planned or performed before the actual interviews.

I received 11 replies from possible candidates via email, of which I respectfully rejected one because it arrived after I already had finalised my 10 interviews. I conducted all the 10 interviews within a three week period, starting the first week of the two week school break before the commencement of the spring period. That way, per design, most of the teachers were less stressed and had an advantageous and appropriate mental space for the interview. I was also happy to notice that I got a really good variety in my sample, covering many different subjects, gender, age, and level of experience. Due to the GGS structure, it would be easy to identify my participants and I will therefore not present them any further aside from the following general information. Three of the ten participants were men, seven women; four of the teachers had teaching experience from another country; the participants GGS experience had a span of under one year to 17 years; general teaching experience from two years to several decades; a variety of different subject teachers, which will not be specified due to anonymity reasons; the youngest teachers were in their late twenties and the oldest in their fifties; most of the teachers were living on campus, GGS is after all a boarding school were the teachers are involved in care-taking duties as well as teaching. I got a very extensive material from the interviewees; about an hour of interview recordings on average.

#### **4.4 Data analysis and processing**

The qualitative content analysis (QCA) could have been chosen as the analysis method over the thematic analysis (TA) method as the former allows for both quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the material, whereas the latter focuses more on a rich and pure qualitative analysis process. Although I will make short numerical references that could be considered to be partly quantitatively, my main goal is still to find thematic connections and answers to my research questions as well as qualitatively convey the richness of these answers. Considering the complexity and construct embedded in positive psychology in education, that TA seemed like a better fit considering the scope of this research paper.

Both QCA and TA rely on breaking the narrations into smaller units on which to perform data analysis on (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Both methods ensure a reliable and rigorous line of reasoning, consistent with the identity and construct of developed knowledge (Thorne, Stephens, & Truant, 2016). Following methodical rules in handling the stepwise process of data collection, along with a thorough detailed, systematic analysis, and interpretation should facilitate the intended research process and could even further the investigation by reveal findings that have not been intended to be explored (Morse, 2015; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Such an approach is both considered as standardised and required to progress from coding to theme development (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Theme refers to something that occurs frequently in the text and theme analysis thus refers to the process of recovering the themes that are embodied in the evolving meanings of the work (van Manen, 1997). In both QCA and TA, linguistic symbols, metaphors, and underlying messages are additional assets to the process as they convey subjective meanings that individuals use in their effort to help others make sense of their inner world (Carter & Fuller, 2016). In TA, phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience, where we try to determine what the themes are that lead to the experiential structures that make up the experience (van Manen, 1997). QCA researchers are free to develop the category instead of the theme, which may serve as an important function in the initial analytic phase of a study with the aim of developing a taxonomy for identifying relationships between pieces of data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Van Manen (1997) also points out the importance of paying attention to silence as the absence of speaking can be telling and valuable. Kvale (2007) emphasises the importance of paying attention to what is said in between the lines. However, there can be an infinite set of procedures to structure the interpretive process, because interpretation

arises from both a pre-understanding and a dialectical movement between the parts and the whole of the texts of those involved (Laverty, 2016). The result of this process includes the self-interpreted constructions of the researcher and each interviewee, thus reflecting many constructions, or multiple realities (Laverty, 2016).

Kvale (2007) has formulated a process that he calls the six steps of analysis: First, when the subject describe their life world during the interview by spontaneously telling what they experience, feel, and do in relation to a topic; Second, the subjects themselves realise new meanings in what they experience, discover new relationships on the basis of their spontaneous descriptions independent of the interviewer; Third, during the interview, the interviewer will condense and interpret the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and paraphrases that meaning back. The interviewee then has the opportunity to confirm, add, or offer a correction. This process continuous until consensus has been reached between the interviewee and interviewer; Fourth, the recorded interview is analysed by the interviewer alone, or with co-researchers. The interview setup is usually structured for analysis by transcription by using a computer program for textual analysis; Fifth, a possible re-interview might be needed after the researcher has analysed the interview texts and he or she might have given it back to the interviewees. The interviewee then get the opportunity to correct or comment on the interviewer's interpretations as well as to elaborate on their own prior statements as a form of membership validation; Sixth, a possible extension of the continuum of description and interpretation to include action due to the fact that the interviewees might have begun to act on new insights they have gained during their interview. In such a case, the research interview may approximate a therapeutic interview or larger in larger social settings, such as action research, where both the researcher and interviewee act on the basis of the knowledge derived from the interviews.

The data from the interviews was recorded using two devices, both for back-up purposes but also for quality reasons because recording devices can pick up a background noise and overlay words or parts of words, making it harder to transpose the audio into text. Having two devices made the transcription process easier as I could switch between the recordings if a spoken word or phrase was unclear. Transcribing the audio recordings into text is an important process in getting the needed raw data for later processes and analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). To transcribe also means to transform as the interview changes from one form to another, which also raises many questions about the process as the transformation needs translation from oral to written language

(Kvale, 2007). In this process we lose information, only available in the interviews oral and visual form, as we cannot transfer the tone of voice, intonations, breathing, pauses, body language, facial expressions, posture, and gestures, which in short creates an impoverished version of the interview (Kvale, 2007). I have followed Van Manen's (1997) and Kvale's (2007) recommendations and methods in my transcribing and data analysis process.

The actual analysis process already started while doing the transcription and continued throughout the whole process. It is very important to start the analysis while conducting the interview and many times even before the actual interview itself (Kvale, 2007). This approach is typical in hermeneutic phenomenology, which includes a process of co-constructing of the data with the participant as they engage in a hermeneutic circle of understanding (Lavery, 2016). In fact, one of the key aspects of the process are the use of imagination and the use of the hermeneutic circle, while paying attention to language and writing processes (Lavery, 2016). To see something in a new imaginative way is to see what it was, transformed and integrated into a new semantic context (Madison, 1988). In the first pass the data was coded with some notes and thoughts from the interview itself, in accordance to Kvale's (2007) and Van Manen's (1997) recommendations, reflecting both the theories in this study and the research questions. During the second pass themes and groups were identified and created so that the data interpretation could be condensed as suggested by Kvale (2007), in line with the theories used. On my third pass I solidified the themes and groups and interpreted the meaning of them, according to Kvale's (2007) recommendation. All this was made fairly easy thanks to the atlas software, which means the emphasis could be placed on the actual process and analysis. An accumulative research diary was kept for writing analytical memos throughout the whole analysis process. The rich data was managed using both colour coding and own notes, from my diary and directly in relation to the codes, which made it possible to aid the analysis of the richer meaning and a possible interconnectivity between the outcome. The process used also reflects the hermeneutic circle, meant to be used in hermeneutic phenomenological research. The features built into the computer software, which made the process a lot more versatile compared to a manual system, the grouped and interconnected data could be further analysed to validate the interpreted reality that emerged from the interviews. Finally, I reached a point, as a researcher, where I had to realise that further analysis of the data I had only would have led to the same conclusions and findings, still critical to my own findings while seeking reasonable ways to convey my findings. The findings are presented in chapter "5. Results",

whereas further discussions and reflections about the findings will be presented in chapter “7. Discussion”.

## **5 Results**

The results of the analysis made on the interviews on education staff at GGS will be presented in this chapter. The themes presented will reflect the research questions and are thus separated into three chapters. The results are presented in a way that reflects the research question: question one will be handled in chapter 5.1 and 5.2; question two will be handled in chapter 5.3 and 5.4; and the final question three will be handled in chapter 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7.

### **5.1 The environment’s effect**

“You have been told that, even like a chain, you are as weak as your weakest link. This is but half the truth. You are also as strong as your strongest link.” – Kahlil Gibran

Adopting an ideology throughout the whole school is not an easy task, considering the complexity behind what positive psychology in education entails. Every culture and organisation is best measured by the sum of their participants’ individual input and efforts, which seems to have resonated very well with GGS since the founding of the school in 1855. GGS get student all over the world but a large number arrives from Asia (Geelong Grammar School, 2020). Aside from international students’ English skills, there are no entry requirements in regards to grades. This means that whoever can afford their tuitions of about 40,000 a year can attend (Colangelo & Precel, 2019).

The wide variety of students also translate to a very diverse culture at the school, where the common nominator is a higher socio-economic status for the family of the student attending, except for the minority that are there through a scholarship program. Another very special environmental aspect worth mentioning is GGS’s Timbertop program, a boarding campus located near Mt Buller in Victoria’s Alps, where the 9<sup>th</sup> year students spend an entire school year living, working, and studying in the Australian bush (Norrish, 2015), which gives a significant boost in broad mental health and well-being (Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, & Chin, 2014). The researchers concluded that even though resilience training and positive education are a part of the school’s program prior to and after the 9<sup>th</sup> year, there seems to be a higher impact due to the contextual

change in year nine. One of the differences are that the students are being closer to nature for about 50 nights, which are spent outside camping. In general, the teaching environment offers a great deal for the students, but it also offers and demands a great deal from the teachers, who all seem very enthusiastic about their various work obligations.

*“there's a high level of accountability, and there's a very high level of personal responsibility... ummm... and you are expected to work really hard” (Interviewee #5)*

Every teacher attends an induction package of up to two weeks, where the positive psychology in education is introduced (Norrish, 2015). After this The school offers frequent personal development courses around positive psychology in education (Seligman, 2009), aside from other supportive courses (Norrish, 2015). Even though they are voluntary, most teachers both value the trainings, want to attend them, but also feel somewhat obligated to attend. After all, it is a condition of the teachers employment, but they also confirmed PPE resonated with their values and beliefs and they are allowed to pursue everything they ever have wanted in line with these values, as can be seen in the following quote.

*“I've done trainings that Seligman proposed, well, every staff member really has to, so... it's a condition of our employment, but it resonated very much with what I believed anyway /..I it's more than enough, every single thing that I had ever wanted to... explore, has been granted, they are so generous” (Interviewee #7)*

It is also very important to point out that most of the teachers have a role called “triple treat” – academic, pastoral (duties in a boarding house), and cocurricular activities – where the teacher spends a lot more time with the students on top of the normal about 20 hrs in class per week (Geelong Grammar School, 2020). This easily impacts the relationship bidirectionally between the teachers and the students as they get to know each other in different contexts, emphasising the teacher’s role for the students. The fact that GGS is a boarding school and that about 80% of the students spend all their time there, except for holidays, naturally affect the environment for both students and teachers. As can be seen by interviewee #1, the teachers emphasise the building of relationships, that it makes the students more comfortable around them, which clearly builds the needed trust that later can be utilised in the classroom. This observation was shared by many of the teachers I interviewed.

*“they... are more comfortable... because they are more comfortable with themselves and their peers... they are also more comfortable with their teachers /.../ some of my best work at school personally is not being around the classroom, but it's about fostering relationships with kids in those boarding houses, ummm, so it's not a tangible, quantifiable, grading a test paper... it's about building human relationships and knowing that there are going to be good and bad interactions with them” (Interviewee #1)*

As can be seen in the response by interviewee #8, GGS is geographically secluded, with its own houses for both teachers and students on campus and rather far away from the nearest store or settlement, which creates a community around the PPE where the teachers automatically become the constant adult role model. Even though this was mostly seen as a good thing in fostering a good environment, it was expressed to be mentally taxing: (a) because of the continual exposure; (b) because of the different roles they take, aside from being a teacher in their subject; (c) and because of a high diversity of student cultures the teachers have to take into account, which also is intellectually very rewarding.

*“the difference was coming here and living on campus... and... being quite unique that it is its own little suburb... there is not like a neighbouring suburb, you've gotta drive... five minutes before you find a shop /.../ you are not just a teacher... you are a role model... all the time... you are role model for sporting, for... ummm, pastoral times... ummm, and in the classroom /.../ you are getting exposed and experiencing different cultures and ideas and people and... that diversity will teach you a lot more” (Interviewee #8)*

## **5.2 Teacher's mindset in GGS**

The teachers were all very different, but also similar in some aspects as most of the teachers I interviewed mentioned they had found a great fit for them, some even expressed it as they had found their home in GGS. The scope of my sample was very wide; I had teachers with experience abroad, in various age-groups, and teacher's with or without families. With such a variation in my sample I was curious to know how they interpreted the different aspects constituting positive psychology in education. Some picked specific parts within PPE, whereas others described what the umbrella term PPE means to them, a few had an almost identical view of PPE, which some of the teachers refer to as “pos ed” in the interviews.

As expressed by interviewee #2, you have to implement the elements of PPE into yourself to be able to teach it, because it is possible to teach, but not as a separate subject. It needs to become a part of yourself, the teacher. When you live the parts of PPE you want to teach, it has a much higher possibility to be received by the students.

*“it is something you can learn, it is something you can teach, it is something you can preach... but unless you are a role model modelling it on a day to day life, ummm, it just becomes a subject, and for it to be effective it can't be a subject, it needs to be a part of your DNA” (Interviewee #2)*

More specifically, expressed by interviewee #7 below, teachers pick and mix things from the PPE repertoire and build on their choices. The mix between character strengths, growth mindset, and building positive relationships was expressed as a preferable approach by several teachers. The teachers try to make the students aware of their own individual character strengths and help them in that self-exploration process with the help of their interests and competencies. It is simultaneously also a process of building their self-confidence.

*“there is so much about positive psychology concepts that you could implement, but to me the major ones that I've built on really, are the character strengths, open or growth mindset, transitional relationships, transformational relationships /.../ it's very much about going back and getting them to explore their own, what do they excel in, what do they feel they are competent at, what are their interests and build that, which sounds kinda basic, but I think it's quite profound” (Interviewee #7)*

What several interviewees pointed out, in line with interviewee #8 words below, was that PPE (referred to as “pos ed” by the teachers) both defined what they already did as well as allowed them to exercise PPE even more. Because of this mindset, they became more aware of elements within PPE and how they could be mixed. This awareness was expressed as mind-opening, a development towards what they felt was in line with their values and beliefs.

*“everything is a learning chance or learning environment... ummm, for me coming to this school... doing pos ed put a language on a lot of things that I was already doing /.../ it made*

*me aware of other things that... I could be doing better or putting more emphasis on /.../ introducing new bits, a bit of meditation, a bit of visualisation /.../ it opened... ummm, mind frame, mindset, everything can be done if you have a go at it” (Interviewee #8)*

Even though most omitted relationships in their own interpretation of PPE, they emphasised it many times and connected it back to the environment at GGS. Once again, the term “triple treat” was mentioned in conjunction with relationships. Most interviewees expressed that they had a better holistic picture of the students’ and could use examples and past mutual experiences from sports, or from their pastoral care, in the way they approached the students’ in the classroom. This was very elegantly expressed by interviewee #1 as an analogy about every shared moment is like lighting another candle, that gradually adds to the whole picture. This is connected to a certain level of trust, otherwise the next candle would never be lit. It beautifully describes how the strong relationships are built.

*“if you imagine a relationship being two people in a dark room when they first meet, and then they share and it's like lighting a candle, you know, the other person doesn't blow it out, and so, another candle is lit, and eventually the room becomes bright and warm, and that's what relationships are like, and I think, so it's the sharing of stuff that lights the candle” (Interviewee #1)*

Interviewee #6 brought up the freedom to express your own individuality and finding an adult role model similar to that at GGS. The openness of the staff, not only teaching staff, allows for such relationships to form. The GGS staff seem to have a very open mindset towards each other and the students, which together with the environment and community is a prerequisite for unique relationships to form. This experience appeals to the teachers as well, most likely strengthening their bonds to the community because of the inclusiveness of diversity.

*“it was based on the relationship, ummm, so, and pos ed fits nicely into that, it really does dovetail beautifully... and that was one of the reasons that I really wanted to be involved /.../ I'm talking about all staff... and... people... find their niche... so that if you are really nerdy, and don't particularly like socialising... there's likely to be a member of staff here that is a bit like that... if there is someone really outgoing, and you are the same and you connect... there's likely to be a member of staff here like that... ummm... but it might not be*

*a member of the teaching staff, it might be someone who works in the boarding house, in the sports field, or in the co-curriculum... ummm, and that's... there's a breadth there that I just see as really, you know, amazing opportunity for all of us to tap into" (Interviewee #6)*

The environment at GGS Campus in Corio, Geelong, is anything short of amazing, with perfectly cut huge green lawns and a waterfront view from the main buildings and the library. It is a small community in itself with teachers and students both working and living on campus. It clearly seems to facilitate the building of relationships, but it also has its drawbacks of which one would be a feeling of isolation. Interviewee #8 also brought up something that many teachers seemed to share, that they needed to get off campus to “air” their mind. This was an underlying emerging theme, the obligations at GGS in its beautiful and positive environment versus the need to have a contact with the “outside world”, allowing them to feel and create a needed balance and distinction between work and life.

*"I've spent a lot of proportion of my time... living in residence /.../ I've always been connected with the boarding houses /.../ the difference was coming here and living on campus... and... being quite unique that it is its own little suburb... there is not like a neighbouring suburb, you've gotta drive... five minutes before you find a shop /.../ so you don't pop out for a coffee as much and those sort of things... so you become, contained within the school... and so, for some weeks I would go and do the groceries just for the reason to get off campus... I would stay on campus for two three weeks, without leaving" (Interviewee #8)*

Teachers help each other at work and many of them also hang out in their spare time with their families; they are not only working in a PPE environment, they are also living in it. As a community, it is dependent on its people and there is a natural inherent care about the environment and its inhabitants, realising the importance of relationships. Human communities also depend on a diversity of talents, not a singular conception of ability (Robinson, 2011), which clearly can be seen in some of the teachers answers. Furthermore, in a community built on the ideology of positive psychology, it is understandable that there might be a broader and more frequent reflection about growth mindset, character strengths, and positive encouragement. According to earlier findings about GGS, a higher score in well-being for students is a result of such an environment

compared to other schools (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014). The emphasise on well-being, relationships, and the community clearly seems to be reflected onto the students and how they turn out. Interviewee #1 emphasised the relationship with themselves as fundamental in being comfortable with their peers and teachers, which stand on an emotional awareness and social skills.

*“Geelong Grammar understood that the social and emotional... skill, was as important as the academic /.../ they... are more comfortable... because they are more comfortable with themselves and their peers... they are also more comfortable with their teachers”*  
(Interviewee #1)

The GGS students emotional awareness in conjunction with them practicing their social skills, seems to make them more adept at their interactions with other adults and peers compared to other students the same age. Some teachers expressed what interviewee #6 stated below, that there is a level of maturity to them, that seems to stand on a healthy environment and mindset, thanks to a diverse experience of relationships at GGS.

*“I can have... meaningful relationships with any child that I can interact with /.../ anyone that works on this campus can /.../ and over the years I've seen it, in terms of the students that leave here and go out... and... they have a maturity about them in terms of... ummm... their interactions... that a lot of other kids of the same age don't have... so they... almost like they instinctively know how to treat other adults, by the time they leave, they are adults”* (Interviewee #6)

To allow what seems to be a humane approach embedded in most humans, and at least all the teachers I interviewed, seemed to naturally align the individual's mindset to the positive environment at GGS. This seemed to have a very positive impact, as expressed by interviewee #7, on the teachers approach towards education, as well as their approach towards themselves. By feeling accepted, it allowed them to express and grow as teachers and as individuals, according to their values and views.

*“it [PPE] changed my... approach to education and that because I felt like it was more acceptable... that what I had often known to be true... became... acceptable whereas prior to that it wasn't acceptable”* (Interviewee #7)

### 5.3 Benefits for the teachers

Most of the teachers I interviewed had a very extensive experience being a teacher. Four of the teachers had teaching experience from abroad. One of the things they all seemed to agree on was the open and free mentality at GGS. They seemed to really enjoy the freedom how to teach and implement their view on PPE. Despite the higher demands because of the “triple treat”, they mostly had a very positive outlook on their teaching experience overall, some of the challenges in regards to that will be handled in chapter 5.5-5.7. The freedom and the sense of actually being in a community that supports them stuck out to me. Several teachers agreed with the views expressed by interviewee #5 below. They brought up the willingness to share and help each other, which doesn’t seem to be common elsewhere. There is an implication in “sharing the burden,” indicating that there is a care for each other’s well-being.

*“in terms of dividing up... tasks, I think that's quite universal, but I think to the extent I've seen... people share resources and share notes with each other... ummm... that hasn't happened a lot in... all I've seen in my career, except for maybe if I was a graduate teacher and being mentored by someone /..I there's a great deal of what I call sharing the burden”*  
(Interviewee #5)

Despite the community feeling where everyone cares about each other and help out where they are able to, there was a clear distinction between individual freedom and homogeneity. Individual interpretation and implementation is encouraged, which resonates deeply all the way to Aristotle’s saying that the parts make up the whole. In fact, the individual’s emphasis on some aspects of PPE was seen as beneficial, as expressed by interviewee #3, as it builds a more complete picture for the receiving part, the student, who deals with several teachers.

*“there are some parts that maybe resonate more strongly with me... yet, with another colleague they might find another part of it that resonates more strongly with them, which is okay, because we work... in that holistic... fashion”* (Interviewee #3)

One of the surprising parts to me was the use of mindfulness, both in class and personally. It is a part of their personal development (PD), and it did come up in some of the interviews; half of the teachers I interviewed mentioned mindfulness in some form. However, I did not have a direct

question about mindfulness but it was indirectly embedded in my questions and should have come up if they used it as a frequent tool. The ones that mentioned it, I had them elaborate on how they used it. One of the reasons why some didn't mention it could be because it seems to be applied as a part of an activity and not thought about as mindfulness. Although, the ones mentioning it saw a value in practicing some form of mindfulness. These interpretations are reflected in interviewee #3's and #7's answers below.

*“whereas if you invest in mindfulness... and students developing a clear mind and actually... being in the right... ummm, space to learn, then they are going to be able to achieve all those things anyway, so I think I wouldn't have... ummm... I just wouldn't have thought to do it if I hadn't come here and learnt... the benefits of it” (Interviewee #3)*

The benefits of mindfulness were acknowledged, but there was also expressions of unfamiliarity towards the concept, as expressed by interviewee #7, where other methods than mindfulness were preferred or seen as more beneficial. My interpretation of this is that mindfulness does require a deep understanding about its simplicity, which ironically is what makes it hard for many to use or utilise.

*“I originally used to think it was mindfulness, was the skill to develop, like practicing mindfulness for a period of time every day, but I really find more and more students find that quite difficult to commit to as do staff, and sometimes myself, but, if it's coaching, then it's an interactive positive experience from both sides” (Interviewee #7)*

Something that all of the teachers interviewed did mention was growth mindset. That was clearly something that most of them saw as the key ingredient in PPE. The notion that something is fixed, many of them did not believe in before joining GGS. Some practiced it before coming to GGS, while others did practice something similar before they really learned what it was all about through the GGS PD program and through the work of Carol Dweck. Many of them frequently came back to growth mindset in the interview, and they also reflected on their own lives and behaviour, not only the students, while talking about growth mindset.

*“a very big focus is on the growth mindset /.../ I think the Dweck stuff is important there, because... I think, and this is really my own personal experience, but I grew up with a very*

*fixed mindset and I couldn't do things and I would walk away from them, because I thought you had natural smarts /.../ so I think Dweck's stuff is useful because it opens the door to understanding, the role of discipline” (Interviewee #1)*

*“I had a slight understanding of it... but coming to Geelong, and hearing the names and looking at the science and research behind it has actually raised its profile for me in terms of one of the fundamental areas of pos ed that... I deem to be sort of the back bone of it, because if you can't improve as a human, you can't improve as a professional /.../ you see, that is quite interesting because half of my body is yes, and half of my body is no. Certain elements of my life, yeah, I'm very fixed on certain, ummm, certain elements but in terms of personal development and growth, I think if we stop doing that then, then the world is in a bad place” (Interviewee #2)*

One of the privileges of being at GGS is that the staff got access to many of the original figureheads in a specific field of science related to PPE. I do consider it to be more beneficial if you get a presentation by someone who has dedicated a huge amount of time and research on what they are presenting, which clearly can be seen in the quotes below:

*“Seligman and Karen Reivich, and the team that came out here, and I did the nine day course /.../ it was incredibly uplifting” (Interviewee #6)*

*“we had Dweck come and it completely turned around our students, and our staff” (Interviewee #7)*

*“we were very fortunate to have Seligman and twenty team members from the university of Penn coming join us in 2008” (Interviewee #9)*

For a teacher to have access to the students beyond the classroom was considered to be very beneficial in relation to both building relationships and in the classroom. One of the main reasons for this is of course the fact that GGS is a boarding school, where about 80% of the students live on campus. The same teachers that teach the classes also lead sports activities with them after school, and they also take care of them in their boarding houses (pastoral care). It was very obvious

that the teachers considered this to be very helpful, although demanding, which can be seen in the second quote by interviewee #8.

*“in that sense we see the kids a lot more, it's easier for us to build a relationship with them, ummm, we also have to be involved with sports and their boarding house, the pastoral care, and because we see them so often and in different aspects of their lives, ummm, we end up seeing all sides of the student, and I think that, that helps us build a relationship with them, it might not help us... relate to them, but definitely... helps us build rapport” (Interviewee #4)*

*“I've got 72 kids that are in my pastoral care that I look after, so I live... my house is part of the boarding house /.../ it's all about relationships, it's all about taking the time to get to know people and to effectively... communicate and respect... that relationship /.../ that pastoral side it's... to... listen... and in the teaching side it's to be positive... to, to... to try and get the best out of each student /.../ so that pastoral and that sport helps you build that relationship... for me it makes the teaching easier” (Interviewee #8)*

Needless to say, when a teacher is set on giving the best they are able to, having the possibility to build a relationship in an environment that advocates positivity in education, easily leads to positive relationships. These relationships were seen to be foundational in the classroom, and will most likely have a positive impact on not only learning, but also the personal development of the student. An interesting aspect brought to my attention by interviewee #1, was the fact that you cannot teach well-being by teaching how to live well, it has to be mediated in a subtle and personal way.

*“I think for me it is that positive relationships drive everything /.../ my natural thing is encourage... ummm, and then demand when necessary... until I know what's gonna work for each student /.../ students are highly sensitive to any suggestion of how to do things, and particularly they say if it's how to live well” (Interviewee #1)*

To be forgiving and focus on rebuilding a broken trust instead of passing judgement, as expressed by interviewee #2, is pivotal and very in line with PP teachings and ideology.

*“maybe it's our ability to... forgive students... when they... make bad judgements... or do things that break the trust with other students or staff... and the why we will work with them to repair those relationships in a restorative framework... I think potentially could be different to other schools” (Interviewee #2)*

There is undoubtedly a closer relationship between teachers and students in a boarding environment with triple treat. As stated by interviewee #4 and shortly emphasised by interviewee #8, it is similar of being a parental relationship. For a student to learn from a teacher in class, having them as a sports coach (co-curriculum), and having them tend to their pastoral care in their boarding house, the normal student see their teachers more than they would see their own parent. Naturally, that will affect the relationship, seemingly in a positive way.

*“having lunch with head of house is like having lunch with dad or their mom [small laughter], it's very easy to touch base and see how they are going outside of class /..I know what they are like based on them being last year and this year, I coach a lot of them in sport and I have a lot of them in boarding, so I know what their personalities are like, probably more than an average teacher because I see them so much, and I know... which ones to push, which ones need to be pushed, which ones don't need the pressure, which ones, ummm... aren't coping” (Interviewee #4)*

*“you become more the facilitator of their growth and their knowledge” (Interviewee #8)*

I was also interest in if the teachers paid attention to the positivity ratio in relationships, first developed by John Gottman (2015). He had extensive experience studying relationships and concluded there had to be a positivity ratio affecting the relationship (Schwartz Gottman & Gottman, 2015). Although the teachers I interviewed emphasised positive relationships and they all had their individual methods how to reach that and encourage good behaviour, only one of them knew about the positivity ratio in having a good relationship. The relationships seemed to be based on what could be considered a good parenting style, as described by interviewee #5, where good behaviour is acknowledged by giving the student the teacher's attention, whereas bad behaviour is neglected in favour of the good one. It is a subtle and kind method to show the students the proper way of behaviour, and to make the rest fall in line to that behaviour, and also very much in line with Seligman's (2011) recommendations.

*“I'm very much into encouragement /.../ focus is always first on the positive, because a lot of kids will do the right thing and get no attention... it's better to give them the attention first and then... the naughty kids come around /.../ and, always state what I want, rather than what I want to stop happening” (Interviewee #5)*

A few teachers were using the rather popular positive formative feedback system consisting of two positive comments and one recommended improvement, also called two stars and a wish. This was used by a few of the teachers, but most, except one, of them reacted with confusion to any ratio between positive and negative interactions in a relationship:

*“when I ask them to give feedback on my teaching, I do a little quick survey called two starts and a wish /.../ but I never... I never thought of that... I never, I don't know, it was never in the front of my mind that that balance was imperative to relationship” (Interviewee #4)*

#### **5.4 Benefits for the students**

The environment at GGS has always had a holistic student centred philosophy of sorts. With the start of headmaster John Bracebridge Wilson (1863-1895), who believed that education should be about the whole child and not just about the academic achievements and through his leadership the school developed the well-rounded student concept (Norrish, 2015). The cultivation of such an ideology throughout the history of the school set a very good foundation for a PPE environment in 2009. It is in particular the positive environment that should be emphasised by promoting the parts that elevate good behaviour and alleviate the circumstances that produce bad actions (Seligman, 2011). How the positive and good rubs off onto the rest is expressed nicely by interviewee #6 below:

*“I often use the analogy that ummm... it's the opposite to the rotten apple here... you put a kid in, and... there is so many good kids with shared values that they rise to that, they rise to the bobbing apple, rather than sinking to the rotten apple.” (Interviewee #6)*

Even though I didn't interview the students directly, there were some interesting insights based on the teachers' observations in relation to what they had noticed about the students. As stated earlier,

growth mindset seemed to be very important for most teachers and many of them saw it as one of the main cornerstones in their work using PPE. The hurdles for the students' progress very easily came down to a fear of failure that easily hinders them from even trying, which is the outcome of a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008). Most of the teachers that I interviewed had a very supporting way of approaching this fear by first acknowledging the fear and the reasons behind it; making the students aware of what was going on, while also encouraging them to try without negative judgment. To let the students know that failure is nothing to fear, it is a part of the learning process. Some teachers also brought up the connection to social media, which is said to elevate the individual's expectations of oneself and lower self-esteem, making it harder for students to adopt a growth mindset approach.

*“the bottom end of the spectrum, those who find it really difficult... I'm relating it back to a subject now, but if you can create the ability to show that you can make a mistake... screw up the piece of paper, throw it away, go back to it, life goes on and no one is going to judge you for it, no one is going to humiliate you for it, you achieve far more /../ how do you expect to move somebody on... if they, if they are too scared to fail /.../ you gotta take away the barriers in between /.../ kids fear failure, they fear... especially in today's day and age with social media, with complex and relationships that we as adults might never understand because we haven't experienced it in the same way” (Interviewee #2)*

*“the growth mindset, so the students might be struggling on a question and I'd be like "you don't get it yet", "you are not fluent in it yet, but once you do more practice and you do a couple more of these you will become more confident", "you won't feel like you're drowning, forever", "you'll get there" /.../ it's important for them to recognise that... just because they feel uncomfortable with it or it doesn't make sense now, it's okay, like, own it, recognise it, and just know that if you keep trying and you are on the right track you will go over that mountain, and you'll feel much better on the other side” (Interviewee #4)*

Obtaining a growth mindset is a slow progress of awareness and acceptance, dealing with internal resisting emotions, overcoming an old fixed way of thinking and replacing it with something new, based on effort (Dweck, 2008). The teachers seemed to have realised that it is an ongoing process where they have to keep pushing, gently, by assisting their internal transformation through questions and play.

*“if anyone wants help to achieve anything it has to come from them, but they don't know how to do it, but if you ask the right questions and their own thinking and growth mindset and hopes and aspirations for the future can be acknowledged and heard and humility is there to listen” (Interviewee #7)*

*“a nature of play... you take a formula and play with it... don't just shut down, and don't just sit there and do nothing, just play with it. /.../ for the really intelligent kids it's getting them to do that play” (Interviewee #8)*

And finally, how to help students to continuously push themselves further and not accept a lower standard of work. It can be a typical behaviour from a student to stop when they feel they have reached a certain goal, set by themselves or the teacher. This is a typical behaviour for students that might understand things easily, that they settle for something less even if there is time left to push further (Dweck, 2008). The danger of a fixed mindset is more imminent for the “smart” ones, as they want to preserve that label, therefore seeing effort as a threat to their smart-label (Dweck, 2008). It is especially in this stage the teachers felt they had to be careful and subtle about the growth mindset. As expressed by interviewee #2, one cannot promote the growth mindset as a method, the method has to be camouflaged in the support or in how the limits are pushed, without literally promoting growth mindset. Many teachers interestingly exclaimed that the students do not want to hear about PPE, but they are willing to listen to concrete methods and reasons why to be pushed.

*“I'm happy with a B grade and that's where I'm gonna go, ummm, and that's where I need to do my best to try to put it out to them, why are you just happy with that level of understanding, try and push it to the next level /.../ if you demand someone to do pos ed the shutters come out straight away. If I demand that they achieve or work hard or do the work it comes down , it's gotta really come from within” (Interviewee #2)*

To be able to get the best growth mindset results with children it starts with a good relationship as they have to be able to trust you have their best interest at heart (Dweck, 2008). To build that trust, the teachers have to be clear and consistent in their demands and feedback. If the feedback is critical or even negative, which sometimes cannot be avoided, many teachers saw that as

challenging as many of the students are very sensitive and easily take negative feedback personally. A few teachers had taken the more blunt approach, as expressed by interviewee #1 below, and only warns the students that they are going to give critique that might not feel pleasant hearing, without instantly trying to provide a positive balance. These teachers avoided mixing the positive with the negative simultaneously as they had noticed that the students will mostly focus on the negative, rendering the positive comments affectless.

*“so the message really is, it doesn't matter, as soon as you have given something negative, you have given something negative, that's what they are gonna attend to... so in that moment, I see it as a longer term thing that I'm gonna give them negative feedback and I don't couch it in anything positive, I'm gonna say something negative, it's gonna hurt... you know, but pain is what drives learning forward in the long run” (Interviewee #1)*

It was also made clear by many of the interviewees that they were fully aware that they function as a role model for the students as an adult male or female, beyond only PPE behaviours. From that perspective there is a lot of pressure on the teachers to work on themselves as everything has to be a genuine part of the teacher if they want to have a good chance in passing it on to the students.

*“whether you realise it or not, they are taking cues from your behaviour... of what it is like to be a male” (Interviewee #8)*

Because the teachers spend so much more time with the students at GGS due to the triple treat program, the students are also more open about certain matters in their relationship. The valuable feedback that comes from this kind of relationship certainly seems to be beneficial because it is easier to adapt the way the teachers and the institute passes on information, which sometimes can come down to really small but important changes in an approach. No teenager wants to be told how to live or do things, but especially in a PPE environment this can be more challenging as the pressure is there because the school promotes that environment.

*“so we have a phrase that goes along the lines of, that came from a student chatting with me... and saying, "I don't particularly wanna be told how to live my life," ummm, "I don't particularly wanna be told I must wake up in the morning and do ten minutes of*

*mindfulness, throughout the day look for the good things and before I go to bed get out my gratitude journal and write my three good things and find I'm flourishing," and so, from those, that story and others, came this idea that our role... is not to prescribe well-being, but to describe well-being" (Interviewee #9)*

The PPE framework at GGS does function as a general toolbox that seems to facilitate well-being from several angles. It also became clear that even though many of these tools had been used before by teachers prior to joining GGS they admitted that they would not have thought about combining some of these tools without the PPE framework.

*"I never would have thought about doing mindfulness with students... and I don't know that there would be a framework in many schools where they would give you time to do that, because they would think that's a waste of time, and then it's more about the traditional academics" (Interviewee #2)*

## **5.5 Common challenges**

Because we are dealing with youngsters, there will also be some common challenges regardless of where they would attend school. I am trying to siphon out those common challenges in this separate sub-chapter and focus on what I consider to be specific to GGS in the coming chapters. As with all schools, they are guided by a national curriculum, or dictated by the state as is the case in Victoria, of what schools need to teach, what the student is supposed to know, and how they will be measured by then end of their 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year in their VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education). Typically there is a lot of subjects and a lot of content, some of which is considered to be more useful and less useful by the students. We also easily see the typical ramification of our testing-culture influencing what we put value into.

*"I also believe in year ten there's probably too many subjects that aren't assessed for our students, so they do values and ethics, they do positive education, they do careers education and they do some religion... so, those four subjects is a lot of work... but in their mind they don't have to do anything because there is no assessment, there is no report coming out about these subjects, and it's a shame because initially I thought I could teach regardless of an assessment, like just teach because it was... intrinsic value, a valuable subject" (Interviewee #7)*

As a human culture we are in the information age, which means that we also use a lot of the technology that comes in its wake, like smartphones and laptops in a school environment, and maybe smartwatches in sports. The use of technology can be both innovative or disruptive in the classroom depending on the content, subject, teacher, and school policy. It seems that GGS have taken a more open stance in regards to technology use in classrooms, following similar principles like with the PPE, where much of it is up to the teacher what is being used and how. This is very common in many schools, that the school has recommendations but it is very much up to the individual teacher what eventually is being used.

*"there isn't an official policy on technology use, I think for the students the rule is they shouldn't have their mobile phones visible... but in terms of teachers using technology... ummm... there isn't an explicit expectation" (Interviewee #5)*

From a social standpoint, teenagers are going through a huge transformation, regardless of what school they attend, or in what country they are born in. Young people observe and easily judge others if they deviate from the perceived norm. For teenagers this is revealed in a lot of different typical behaviours, which are considered to be very important for them although they can seem trivial in the eyes of an adult.

*"nobody in this school feels comfortable to walk into that dining room without someone else, because they are judged and that's social suicide, they will tell you, everyone will tell you that, it's sad /.../ I often see in here the really bright kids failing because they can't manage their stress, so they can't manage their... if they break up with their girlfriend or their boyfriend their life is over you know" (Interviewee #7)*

The way school is organised, putting students of same age together as a group, poses its own challenges regardless of school, or country. It is well known that girls mature earlier than boys, which presents the teacher with an extra challenge, making the groups more complex.

*"some strategies that work on boys might work on some type of girls, and some approaches and strategies I use with the girls will work on boys and that's why it comes down to breaking*

*down all the barriers and seeing students as individuals rather than as a specific type of student i.e. gender based or behavioural based” (Interviewee #2)*

*“boys and girls by nature are very different... ummm... I haven't had much contact with the boys in boarding, but I know in my classes the boys need to be, ummm... pushed a lot harder for them to do something whereas the girls to do the same thing it would, be a lot less effort on my part, ummm, but I think that's just a maturity thing /.. / you have to hold their hands for a little bit more, but if you put a year seven girl, next to, in the same room as like... year eleven or year ten boy, I think they'd be the same, so very similar in nature in that I need to give the same level of instruction, yeah, so that's why I think it's just a maturity thing” (Interviewee #4)*

As a species, humans are social beings in need of a social construct and want to be a part of a community. The way human life is organised today where we gather in growing cities, challenges this underlying notion. Ironically the more people that surrounds us, the further away from the biological norm we might find ourselves. As interviewee #9 exclaims, it is about waking up to and fighting the hedonic nature driven by the economic system, having us believe we need things that will not make us happier.

*“there's a recent survey in Australia that show that... ummm, approximately 50% of Australians wouldn't recognise their neighbour in the street... ummm, now that's moving further and further away from a village raising a child /.. / and I don't necessarily need a bigger television, and so it's kind of fighting the hedonic nature of society /.. / and not feeling that schools are the only one to do that wake up, like if we can do that, you know, we very much building a nurturing character of well-being, is the role of society, and the role of governments, ummm, and of course the role of parents and families.” (Interviewee #9)*

Future challenges in the education sector seem to be both structural and financial related. The grading system where students get assessed as a group instead of a standard that would be comparable from year to year was mentioned by several teachers.

*"I think both the way the UK and Australian system do their bell-curves and working out what is an A-grade this year, no, it doesn't work that way, in life, this is the standard... you*

*know... how can a question this year be worth an A-grade, because only a certain x-percentage of the population got it right, but next year it could be worth a C-grade because fewer people got it right /.../ I think if we ever get to the point where we think the education system is okay is we're doomed, it gets back to that point where I constantly improve on it"*  
(Interviewee #2)

Other changes they would want to see for the future was that the textbooks should not have to change so frequently, which was seen as a consequence of the financial system. This also translates into other resources, how students are taught, graded, and for what purpose. The school is a part of society, and thus also a part of the financial system that dictates human life. Ironically, the financial system holds the necessary progress hostage, preventing the development of more holistic learning like project based learning or problem based learning. These require more time, but time is politically and financially locked into a framework that leaves little time for inquiry based learning.

*"I would take away all the exams /.../ Gone... gone, writing on bits of paper for two hours is the most ridiculous way of assessing student learning, it's archaic, it's demoralising, it's boring"* (Interviewee #3)

*"project based learning, ummm, in that you are, the way which you teach to students is getting them to discover themselves /.../ I find here we teach to the text too much and it's because we don't have time to do otherwise"* (Interviewee #4)

Which leads to my final point. Some teachers advocated a major restructure of the system, which was argued to influence how the students could take more responsibility, which in turn would affect how they look at their place in this world. However, we once again find ourselves hindered by the same forces, politics and finance dictating the framework to which everything else needs to align. This alignment might deprive a student of their personal drives and interests, forced to follow a script that might hinder individuals in following their calling how to contribute to the world.

*"we just whip kids around school, like we whip them to sport, we whip them to class, whip them to lunch, we whip them off to co-curricular activities, we whip them into prep, we whip them off to bed, we whip them out of, you know, give us your phone... and they poor kids they*

*are just like [makes sound] exhausted, and they don't really have to do much for themselves... so if you flipped it... and the underlying assumption is that all our kids are here cos they wanna be here, I believe it'd be a very different energy, very different story" (Interviewee #7)*

*"a want to contribute to society for the benefit of others, you know, want to serve, ummm, and help and that collectively we tolerate, except, understand, welcome, appreciate one another, ummm... you know, see that, love the differences amongst our people, ummm, celebrate the similarities, love and respect and honour the differences, and you know, aim to be moving collectively for the well-being of our world" (Interviewee #9)*

## **5.6 Challenges for the teacher**

Teachers are one of the most overworked in the workforce today (Heffernan, 2020). As a teacher it can be hard to switch off that part of the brain that keeps looking for new teaching material or new ways to facilitate teaching. Although, more specific to GGS is that they seem to offer their whole ideology as a free choice. The teacher can freely choose what to implement in their classes and also freely choose how to implement it.

*"it has never been you have to, it's been an offering, and that was how they got, managed to get staff on side, the ones that were like, oh, here we go again, another... another ideological change, you know, because teachers aren't particularly open to change, and they literally... crossed their arms and sat back, and so... by making an offering... and particularly by offering it for us to use for ourselves and our families... that, ummm... that was a very gentle way of actually getting them onboard" (Interviewee #6)*

The irony is that the individual teacher's also seem to feel a pressure being offered this choice and tries their best to live up to the school's ideology. It seems to be the triple treat that keeps the teachers extra busy compared to only being a subject teacher. Although, there seems to be a shared opinion among the teachers that colleagues are very helpful and that GGS supports practically any reasonable demand they have in regards to Personal Development (PD) requests. The teachers frequently came back to the lack of time.

*"they call it the triple treat, so academic, boarding, and sport... so that's a requirement at this school that you part take in all three... ummm, so it takes a special type of person who chooses to teach here because you gotta be happy doing all three" (Interviewee #8)*

*"ummm, colleagues, supportive, but often overworked... it's a very demanding workplace... it's unusually demanding this place" (Interviewee #1)*

*"if I wanted to go on a PD they'd definitely say yes, so I know I have the freedom to do whatever PD I want, but I think it's just the, there is no time [laughter]" (Interviewee #4)*

Everyone have their own challenges and a few of my interviewees pointed that out. They also have to live as they learn aside from also having to embed it into their classes. Once again, the lack of time and energy was deemed to be the culprit preventing a proper integration of PPE methods and ideas.

*"you can't just talk the good stuff, you need to walk and act the good stuff, and also, it need to be integrated into the content /.../ time restraint makes it hard to reflect properly /.../ to be able to help we need both time and energy" (Interviewee #10)*

As I pointed out earlier, GGS does not appear to have a central strategy about using technology in class. There are centralised systems and tools they can use, with frequent PD sessions being offered. Technology use in GGS seems to be mostly up to the teachers and their teaching style. The lack of some interactive tools was pointed out by a few teachers, as expressed by Interviewee #2. Many of the interviewed teacher positively pointed out the OneNote system, and some teachers used it as their main tool in their teaching, as stated by interviewee #4.

*"I think Geelong is extremely advanced in some ways but is also extremely stagnant in some ways /.../ the collaborative technology here is absolutely fantastic /.../ I grew up and used interactive whiteboards in the UK, and I think they are a fantastic tool, ummm, which we don't have here" (Interviewee #2)*

*"I'm using technology more than most teachers but it's still not to my... to a standard that I'm happy with I guess /.../ I just picked up OneNote and run with it... ummm... the minute I*

*saw it I just fell in love and I was like, I'm using this to, yeah, for everything" (Interviewee #4)*

Regardless if the teacher have a family or not, they all brought up the same major challenge, the work-life balance. Most of them also lives on campus, as they spend most of their day there, teaching, doing sport activities with the students, and tending to their assigned boarding house (pastoral care). It is easy to understand that it can be challenging to distance oneself from work if you both work and live at your workplace.

*"my challenge is to maintain the balance in my life... between my work and my home /.../ if I have my children with me on this walk and I'm talking to my student then I'm not talking to my children... so it's, when do I... how do I, ummm... allocate my resources to... give me, what I want to achieve in my work-life but also in my family life" (Interviewee #3)*

*"sometimes you don't relax as much as you could... so that's probably been the biggest strain /.../ to not be consumed by the job and to make sure I got a quality... in my time with my family, my wife, my kids, and myself /.../ because I could work 24 hours a day... looking after these kids, and doing the job I want to do, or how I want to do it" (Interviewee #8)*

## **5.7 Challenges for the students (according to the teachers)**

Some of these could be considered common challenges and therefore should have been handled in sub-chapter 5.5, but as they also are both specific to GGS and tie into other challenges unique to GGS, I decided to present them here.

### **5.7.1 Environment**

As previously have been stated, the GGS environment is pretty unique in many ways, both in terms of location and the PPE ideal. Even before PPE started more than ten years ago, GGS was about the well-rounded student, a holistic education. This was something that many of my interviewees pointed out.

*"this is one of those schools where it's not just about academics, it's about... everything else too... so, there's arts, there's music, there's sport, ummm... so if a kid doesn't just focus on*

*academics there are five other things that they could be putting their energy in and effort towards" (Interviewee #4)*

Even though the teachers expressed this mostly from a positive side, there were some challenges embedded about the environment, especially in regards to the community, which makes them live in an artificially created bubble, protected from the outside world. They only compare amongst themselves, as they do not see how much others in other schools are working. GGS emphasis is on the whole being and tries to make its students aware of their inner world, hence the well-rounded student is still very central, more so with PPE as an base ideology.

*"I think a little bit of them... living here... are living in a little bit of a bubble... and they look around and they see... others who are working... and they say, oh gee, he is working hard... or they're working hard, the girls... boys look at girls and go, jeez those girls are doing a lot of work... and they are doing five hours... and they think that's a lot... and then, what they don't see is outside Geelong Grammar, outside the bubble, and the kids at the private schools in Melbourne, they are doing a lot more /..I there's one other things about students being in here, a bit different from others, ummm... the other thing is, the expectations of this school, it's not... it's not a... results machine... the nature of this school is about ... and this is what I pick within schools myself... is the notion of... holistic education /..I you are getting... an education, a personality, a development of your personality, of your nature, of your... you know, your conscious... ummm, your ethics... your core values that you are gonna be living with, for the rest of your life have been shaped here" (Interviewee #8)*

### **5.7.2 Diversity**

I think it is important to mention the fact that GGS is very diverse, mainly because the school accepts almost everyone, who can afford the tuition. This student diversity is obviously both beneficial but also challenging. The background of and difference between the students coming to GGS is extremely wide, both in regards to nationality, but also in regards to values, and in some cases a very different socio economic status.

*"I think they have a very, ummm... high pressure existence, ummm... I know... some of them are on scholarships and they are under pressure to perform to maintain their position, some*

*of them are from families that are not so well off, and they are actually putting a big sacrifice to send them to this school” (Interviewee #5)*

A few teachers brought up the “new reality” of children today, which means a lot more students get diagnosed today compared to about 10 to 20-years ago. Interestingly, these differences seem to vary a lot from year to year.

*“there are more mental conditions nowadays /.. / hard to take constructive criticism, getting offended more easily than before, but it differs between years, year ten is weaker than year eight for instance” (Interviewee #10)*

### **5.7.3 Privilege**

The majority of the students attending GGS comes from financially well off families. As previously stated, that is not the case for all students, and this might even be the student’s first broader contact with other students who actually represent the majority in the society. This interesting first contact seem to be a crude wake up to a reality where the economics do not correlate with well-being or connections; where other less off students and their families might be happier than themselves and their affluent families.

*“The biggest shock to students here, is that people with nothing are happier than them, you know, people who go to work and shun the corporate life, and work in petty fields are genuinely more content and better connected... that just rocks their world, it's so difficult for them to see... themselves as separate from the economic system, and I think that's Australia wide... it's probably more focused here because their parents own the companies and, you know, they grew up with economic conversation around them” (Interviewee #1)*

Despite most of the students being more well of than the majority of the society around them, this can actually work against them on a deeper level. I did expect some of these things prior to my interviews but I was still a bit surprised how some teachers brought up the affluent disconnected mindset observed in many students.

*“motivation... I think with affluence comes a disconnect... it's like, I find they lack drive... or even ambition, not that they need to be ambitious but, ummm... purpose, they lack purpose” (Interviewee #3)*

Affluence and wealth is not a universal cure for all negative things in life. The students at GGS are still like normal teenagers, bringing forth the same changes that age entails. It might even be amplified because they might feel they have less reasons for hardship having the opportunity to attend a renowned school like GGS. Expecting a better outcome due to affluence can easily lead to a rude awakening.

*“our students are suffering... so whether it's anxiety, whether it's ummm, perfectionism, whether it's lack of motivation, abuse like lack of care from home, it wouldn't matter... just because we are kind of a wealthy school, the issues for students are still the same, they still suffer on a personal level, in their emotional well-being” (Interviewee #7)*

GGS is not the only boarding school and is thus not alone in saving time on traveling to and back from school. The students at GGS have a lot of opportunities to get help from an engaged staff, which can be hard to take use of as they do not know how much work they do compared to other schools. Despite the availability, many students might not seek out the assistance they need due to a misconceived perception about what hard work means.

*“I got boys in my boarding house... that... what they think is hard work, what they think is doing a lot of work... is not... really, or comparatively... and unfortunately because it is a competition, it is a ranking... and in the end it probably does come down to how much work you've done /.../ I try and have discussions with them about what a student would be doing... at another school... /.../ and that they have an advantage because they don't spend an hour on public transport... to and from school each day so, how are you making, taking advantage of that? /.../ and then also the notion that... if staff work here, they are pretty giving of their time anyway... so you can ask for that extra bit from staff here, and they'll give it, that's their nature” (Interviewee #8)*

#### **5.7.4 Relationships**

Relationships for a boarding student can be both rewarding as they form connections they otherwise never would have. It can also be very complex, especially towards their home family they are away from. Many children can also start to internalise and blame themselves for family disruptions at home in their absence.

*“and... relationships... I think it's more about families and family values, because many of our students that have become boarders here lose their relationship with their parents, they become... I think it's wonderful that they are independent, but it's almost like they are too independent, that they feel like their family hasn't been here for them, even though it was probably part of their decision to come /.../ many of the families anyway have suffered a relationship breakdown, so the kids go back and it's only one of either mom or dad, not both together” (Interviewee #7)*

#### **5.7.5 Self-discipline**

I was curious about this question, asking about intelligence and self-discipline as an open ended question, as it was designed to be very fixed-mindset-like. Although most of the teachers tackled the question in an open minded manner, with hints from the growth mindset ideology, only one teacher made the full connection. Most of the teachers answered similar to interviewee #5 and #7:

*"I think there are some incredible intelligent people... have hardly any self-discipline... and you can have... ummm, people who are not highly intelligent with incredible levels of self-discipline /.../ motivation and goal settings are what currently inspires... self-discipline... and I think it's more than just... nature and nurture, I think there is also community factors as well" (Interviewee #5)*

*"I believe sometimes that is detrimental if that is what they have been all their life, highly intelligent, known all that, because the stress and the anxiety that comes along with maintaining that can be very destructive /.../ it will depend on your personality type as to how self-disciplined you are" (Interviewee #7)*

Many of the interviewees circled around the concepts of the grit theory, where talent and effort equals the best achievement, but none of them connected any PPE concepts in their answers.

However, some of them summarised the description of the grit theory, similar to interviewee #8's answer

*"plenty of kids who're disciplined will get just as high as those students who got the intelligence... and it's when you've got both... that the kid really go through the roof, it takes both... some kids just get it [flicks his fingers]" (Interviewee #8)*

Most of the teachers directly connected the stress associated with students who has been labelled as smart by their surroundings. The fixed mindset is also typical in an environment that labels someone as smart, making them avoid effort as that is seen as antithetical to being smart and intelligent, to which no effort should be required. I earlier made it clear that most of the teachers see the growth mindset as foundational to PPE, and they obviously deal with it in class. But the teachers are clearly dealing with the outcome, the student, of a fixed mindset environment-produce prior to them coming to GGS.

*"if you take a kid who is very disciplined... like intelligence-wise... the average intelligence but very disciplined, and you take a student who... who pick thing up quickly, so very intelligent but is not self-disciplined, they could end up with the same scores and end up in the same place in life, but then if that intelligent student disciplines himself, they would push themselves that much further." (Interviewee #4)*

*"because they're so smart, or doing so well or get so high grades... ummm, so it takes a bit of bravery in a way to step forward /.../ to make the extra effort" (Interviewee #8)*

It is important to bring up technology and self-discipline because human attention is limited. Aside from all the other reasons for not having adequate self-discipline, technology is the most sophisticated competitor of our attention. All these social media apps weakens our self-discipline, and we are after all wired to seek out dopamine rewards, however short lasting they might be. Interestingly enough, it seems that a few teachers had noticed a difference in self-discipline between more or less intelligent students, where the more intelligent ones can resist the use of social media better.

*"students who have self-discipline ... in my class... are the brighter students /.../ the once with self-discipline do that... because of their interest in learning and their ability to... do the work or their capacity to do it, but the less able ... don't, they don't have the discipline... to do it, and therefore will disengage or, I've found that one of our biggest problems here is technology /.../ the bright ones can be distracted just as easily, but I find they can get themselves back on track quicker... they are the ones that are able to talk to someone else and still do their work, but the other poor kid can talk but not do their work" (Interviewee #3)*

### **5.7.6 Tech**

Technology use can be disruptive, and as previously stated, especially social media have tapped into human psychology on a whole new level. All of these technologies are literally competing for our attention, but the way social media has done this makes them one of the most treacherous compared to other technologies. Social media has literally made a science out of how to make us as addicted as possible to their service, because our attention is their product on which they profit from advertisement. This is of course highly disruptive when it comes to education in a group setting, which is very different from the world they have become used to with everything tailored individually to their preference and liking.

*"I worry about the impact of that level of distractibility, it's too easy to flick, and it's too easy to not hear people" (Interviewee #1)*

*"Distractions... their phones and laptops... that's the main challenge, it's so hard for them to stay focused because they are conditioned to wanna check their phones every five minute /.../ I know that's like a self-discipline thing, the kids might not wanna do that cos they wanna stay connected, so, for sure, the phones and laptops, the biggest challenge for them" (Interviewee #4)*

### **5.7.7 Gender**

Both female and male has co-existed on this planet since humans came to be, but not in GGS. The school was originally a boys school only, and the girls started attending the school in the 1970s during what was called the fourth step in GGS development, co-education (Norrish, 2015). What

was interesting to me was that many teachers felt like this was an area that had not been handled well or at all, that it just sort of happened.

*“I don't believe it's an area we have... tackled /.../ like so many other schools... girls in many ways have come out better off... ummm, and boys in many ways have come out worse off... and our... lower achievers academically, and probably socially... ummm... tend to be predominantly boys /.../ the tradition of being a boys school... and... and then with girls coming in... ummm... there was confusion amongst, in terms of the ideology, and really all they did was, oh, the girls are here now, so they'll just join in... ummm... and I don't know that there has ever been a... deliberate, ummm, ideological, we need to address this”  
(Interviewee #6)*

In regards to positive psychology classes, many teachers felt that the boys and girls should be handled at least partly separately as they have completely different reflections about the topics being addressed. This was said to be the case especially for PPE classes for the students. Individuals do not express their thoughts freely in gender mixed groups and there seems to be a clearly observed psychological and social benefit in having separate classes with boys and girls. Having separate gender PPE classes also seems to alleviate stress. Interviewee #1 suggested that some classes could work with smaller predefined mixed gender groups.

*“one part of me thinks we should have gender streamed pos ed classes, because there is a very big difference in the girls approach to it to the boys approach to it /.../ so I think the curriculum should be tailored for both, that there will be strategies that will work for boys, some boys, obviously there's much variation in the genders as between them /.../ potentially small groups would work... yeah... yeah, yeah, I can see it working that way, I just think... they need to be personalised groups, you know, who will we put in them with and why”  
(Interviewee #1)*

*“No, I don't believe it tackles it academically. Yes, I think it might be on the radar, I think they are becoming more and more aware of the issues and the problems related to running a co ed school /.../ we used to run our pos ed classes in house groups so we were separated for female houses and male houses, and for an economic reason I believe, and I think I'm right in saying that we combine them back again into class groups and it's the worst thing*

*that ever happened /..I and I think girls just felt it as an absolute joy to be able to relate to their female mates without the judgement of boys, which is what's... very... dangerous at this school is the pressure of always feeling socially on edge, that you always have to present in a way that's... you always look your best” (Interviewee #7)*

### **5.7.8 Mindfulness**

Mindfulness seems to be considered important enough to have frequent PD sessions about it for teachers. However, mindfulness meditation or mindfulness actions for students seemed to be used in a very limited setup, if used at all. It was a bit surprising to me that mindfulness seemed to have an opposite effect on students than what the research findings about mindfulness presents. Some of the teachers had tried to use it in class, and still embed parts of it in some class activities.

*“we did one example of meditation, but ummm, I felt that the kids that I had wouldn't, ummm, really use it /..I there were some lessons of mindfulness where I was like, I know you're all stressed and busy with your own subjects at the moment so, like, feel free to do work on that... ummm, and... yes, so it was less, they had the lesson plans and the structure, but I didn't always follow it if I felt like there was something that would be more useful to the students” (Interviewee #4)*

*“Thinking about mindfulness, I think it's still very alien to a lot of youngsters, it's, it's sitting there listening to yourself is so opposed to the world they have been brought up in /..I if there is some trauma there, it's gonna ripple up and that's... they're not wanna spend that time facing stuff they can't deal with” (Interviewee #7)*

### **5.7.9 Future**

Although this chapter emphasises how the teachers try to give the students the support they feel they can benefit from while the student faces their future challenges, which should have placed it in chapter “5.4 Benefits for the students,” I still decided to present it in this section as it ties into their contemplations about their future challenges. The teachers clearly take a holistic and individual approach towards the students well-being and future.

*“you don't want to try and fix the little problems, you are actually trying to support them on their journey, with... positive education so that they make good decisions to benefit themselves and their community” (Interviewee #3)*

*“I think it's our responsibility to always look to better our student well-being, and that is what Seligman's data from the word go... saying that too many of our young people are suffering, and it's true, and they still are” (Interviewee #6)*

The seemingly lack of hope for the future was brought up by several teachers and they both found it to be concerning but also expressed their understanding. Many students seem to understand the possible implications of the digital disruptions happening at a very quick pace, clouding the path in front of them, aside from making them anxious. The GGS path is meant to lead them into universities, but it does not seem to be as clear a choice for the students as it is for their parents who might not see any other option. Some of the teachers slightly agreed, that the old best path for the future might not necessarily be only via Universities to get a job.

*“hope for the future, ummm... competitiveness, like they really have to compete to get where they wanna go /..I think digital disruption is one of their major anxieties, and I think it's real, you know, many of our students are thinking, well Uni may not be the way to get a job anymore... and part of me thinks they could be right, like there's other ways as well... but you know, parents don't allow that sometimes, it's gotta be, you gotta get the right of passage through a university degree” (Interviewee #7)*

The impact and challenge it seems to have on many students is understandable. Digital disruption not only accelerate change in society, but it surely can make many question their role in it, and which path to take. Aside from digital disruption, media continuously reports biodiversity failures, which naturally can cause students to worry. The seemingly lack of interventions by the biggest polluters is disturbing to more than just students, although they are the ones that statistically are going to live in this world for longer, and hence have to face the legacy handed over to them.

*“I don't think they have a lot of hope for the future... like I believe they're worried about the environment, they're worried about America, they're worried about China, they're worried*

*about... yeah, their own success and how they be somebody in this society... I think that's pretty relevant for this generation that we're working with" (Interviewee #7)*

## **5.8 Summary of Results**

The results presented show that the teachers have an amazing environment with a lot of opportunities at their disposal not common elsewhere. I will present the summary so that it reflects my three research questions.

### **5.8.1 Environment and its effect on the mindset**

All the teachers highlighted the heavy workload at GGS, leaving very little time to a personal life, especially because most of the teachers were living on the campus with the students. Despite the seemingly long weeks, most of them expressed finding “home” in the GGS ideology promoting PPE. It was made very clear by the teachers that they felt a sort of privilege to be a part of GGS. The presented opportunities to learn more were considered to be both vast and encouraged by the GGS administration, where almost everything they applied for in regards to PD gets approved. Most teachers expressed how fortunate they were being able to learn directly from the researchers that have created or played a prominent part in their fields. The privilege of being able to attend lectures on campus by Seligman, Ravech, Dweck, and other researchers from the Penn Resilience Program. In such a positive environment, the ideology seems to rub off more easily as the teachers feel that they want to be a part of it.

Taking part of a PPE program by attending PDs will only take you so far. The teachers interviewed made it clear that they applied many of the teachings and techniques on their own life; by living as you teach they concluded they could have a better chance of getting across to the students. The personal self-exploration needed could be considered to be both daunting as well as very beneficial for their own well-being and personal development. It was also made abundantly clear that relationships were the cornerstone in the GGS environment. The teachers contact hours with the students is a lot higher mainly due to the triple treat program, compared to a non-boarding school where the teachers usually only meet the students while teaching their own subject.

### **5.8.2 Benefits in the promotion of well-being at GGS**

The teachers’ benefit in promoting well-being and happiness in the school were very similar with a few small differences. There is a high level of freedom to choose what to implement of the PPE

ideology in the teacher's individual classes. Many teacher also emphasised the friendly and open mentality among colleagues, who openly shared whatever they needed. The growth mindset played a pivotal part in all the teachers' work, both on a personal level as well as in dealing with the students. Many of the teachers also expressed that PPE opened their eyes to how certain techniques could be used in class, or combined with other techniques they would not have thought about. Once again, all teachers emphasised the relationship as the foundation on which the rest of the PPE ideologies could be built. Even though the teachers saw the triple treat as being time consuming and resource heavy on an individual level, they also saw the importance of it in building positive relationships and a deeper understanding of the students. The benefit of getting to know the student more directly translated into a better class where they were able to angle their approach on a more individual level.

The students benefit, based on the teachers view, in promoting well-being and happiness in the school were interesting to say the least. Some teachers had observed that a good overall environment made a positive impact on everyone, especially transforming the weaker or struggling students to a higher personal level and standard. Typical for a student in this stage of life is the fear of failure, and the fear of being judged by their peers, which indicates a prior fixed mindset environment. The teachers made it clear that growth mindset was something they worked on continuously with the students to connect effort to success instead of possible previously assigned labels to the students. The holistic nature of the school, promoting the well-rounded student by not only emphasising the academic side, but also sport, art, and music seems to have a very good effect on the students. The teachers were aware that they also functioned as role-models, considering that they were the only adults in the students' life.

### **5.8.3 Challenges in a PPE environment**

The normal challenges that I considered to be the same for all students at a similar age, regardless of where they attend school, were handled separately. It was still important to present what the teachers expressed about normal challenges for the students, as it ties into the more specific GGS related challenges. Some of the challenges mentioned are on the state and national level and relates to the national or state curriculum, which guides the school curriculum. Many subjects were considered to be too strictly formulated, and some even unnecessary to have or teach. The lack of technological school policies easily results in a teacher centred heterogenous approach, easily creating confusion among the students. This can also translate into a feeling of general uncertainty

for the student, who already is in a transformational phase in life with a lot of personal changes physically and psychologically. The students are very aware of their surrounding and some actions are deemed to be social suicide, like walking into the dining hall alone without a friend. Students at this age easily judge and label each other, which could be considered to be a part of the human social makeup. On that note, there is both a secure feeling of being told what to do and where to go by the teachers and it can be detrimental in not taking a certain level of own responsibility in daily chores. It is hard to know where the perfect balance lies.

Specific teacher challenges in a PPE environment, aside from the teacher occupation alone being very stressful, would be the triple treat obligations. Most teachers considered it to be very time-consuming although they fully supported the benefits and valuable outcomes from it. Many teachers said they easily work very long weeks and do their planning late in the evening, after pastoral care in the boarding houses. The technology use as a teacher is mostly up to the teacher and there are a lot of PD they can attend covering technology use in class. The teachers still wished for some school wide policies that could be more clear, especially in regards to students mobile phone and laptop usage. They knew there was a very wide spectrum in the approach to mobile phones and laptops in class, where some teachers used them for class, and others gathered the phones in a box before class. This wide and diverse approach was seen as challenging for the students, and counterproductive to well-being and happiness. The teachers also saw their presence on campus beyond their teaching obligations as mostly beneficial, but all of them expressed that they cannot find a good work-life balance in their work.

The students challenges in a PPE environment is partly the environment itself, according to the teachers. They are aware of the renowned school and feel a certain pressure of just attending. For many students this is the first time they open their eyes to less fortunate students, although they are in minority at GGS as most families are financially well off. The diversity in student profile at GGS is both a very good learning opportunity as it is challenging because of groups being very heterogenous it can be hard to find likeminded or similar personalities in your own group. Aside from the diverse student material, they all live in a GGS community, which makes them live in a bubble shielded from the outside world. It is a privilege to attend GGS, which many of the students are well aware of and that is a stressor in itself, to meet the expectations put on them. Some of the students suffer from lack of motivation, partly because they come from an affluent environment and do not always see the point in the education, whereas other students suffer for other personal

reasons. The relationships for a boarding student can be challenging, especially towards their parents and former homes. Some students experience their families breaking apart while attending GGS. The personal effort needed to deal with their studies might not mix well with their possible predefined labels, e.g. being smart and thinking that putting effort into something will remove their fixed mindset label. Regardless of the student, they are all a victim of technological disruption, where social media successfully competes for their attention. Some students need to look at their phone every five minute, and stay connected with other friends while in class. This seems to be a similar trend between both boys and girls, despite there being other major differences in how boys and girls mature and behave in school. According to many teachers' opinion many positive psychology classes should be given separately to girls and boys because they are not as open if they know they are being watched by the opposite gender. Teachers also, surprisingly, realised that both genders have a hard time taking on mindfulness practices, and for many students it even increases anxiety when they do not know how to deal with the things that emerge while sitting alone with their thoughts and feelings. The mindfulness practices seem to be silently embedded as an indirect approach to mindfulness, if used at all, which is not in line with the research showing clear benefits for young people and students. The students also seem to be very worried about the world and their place in it. The world both changes so quickly due to technological disruptions but the students are also concerned about the lack of environmental care by the world and greatest polluters. The future seems unclear to them, more so than what was considered to be normal 10 to 20 years ago.

## **6 Validity**

This chapter will demonstrate how the data and its interpretations are credible. The validity and ethical part is many times entwined, also in this study. For clarity purposes I have separated the ethical part and it can be found in sub-chapter 6.1.

According to Van Manen (1997) the research and writing needs to be oriented, strong, rich, and deep to have a convincing validity. He also argues that these four conditions also are evaluative criteria of any phenomenological human science text; I will clarify these four conditions a bit further. (a) Oriented means that we seek to reach understanding through answers to questions with the help of observation and listening. This might seem trivial but it is in fact a very important awareness in relation between content and form, speaking and acting, text and textuality so that we do not separate theory from life; (b) Strong refers to whatever interest we develop in talking

and thinking it always needs to be the strongest interpretation of a certain phenomenon. As Nietzsche said about the art of reading “every strong orientation is exclusive”; (c) A rich text means that a text is concrete, rich, and thick in its description while exploring the phenomenon in all its experiential ramifications; (d) depth is what invigorates the phenomenon or lived experience and gives it its distinct meaning. A rich description explores the meaning and structures beyond what is immediately experienced (van Manen, 1997).

As a researcher it is important to continuously self-reflect and be aware of the possible individual biases that might interfere or affect the research process (Kvale, 2007; van Manen, 1997). This is especially important in qualitative research as the researcher is the instrument gathering, processing, and analysing the data (Tracy, 2013).

As a researcher, I am very reflective and considered to be self-aware of my own biases, especially in relation to values and standpoints towards education, which I openly have declared in the introduction and the background chapters. I am an educated teacher in Finland and I am interested in education as a teacher and as an educational developer in several subjects, on different levels ranging from high schools, vocational education, and higher education, in different organisations and countries. I have had no previous connections to GGS. My diverse experience have made me observe things from several angles, widening my horizon and understanding. Being a part of several school environments and their culture I have observed how it reflects on the student’s behaviour, relationships, and well-being. My personal experiences have enforced the belief that a positive environment where a growth mindset is applied and mixed with a frequent mindfulness-like self-reflective practice promotes self-growth, meaning, and well-being. These biases and values cannot be eliminated from me as a researcher, but I have taken them into account and I have described my own views where appropriate and applicable. In other words, the researcher’s opinion has been taken into consideration, acknowledged, and discussed to demonstrate a good and valid study.

The last important piece of the study is the quality assurance of the interview and analysis process. The researcher had followed good research principles when conducting the semi-structured interviews. I did not ask leading questions and always asked them to elaborate on something they brought up to get them talking about it. The interviewees were very interested in the Finnish education system and I answered most of their questions at the end of each interview. This extra

addition did not affect their response in any way as no questions from the same theme were asked after that information was given. It was very easy to engage the participants in the interview questions and I had no trouble getting the information. The majority of questions were easily understood and they started talking about their experience straight away. To ensure this research can bring added value to the phenomenon of positive psychology in education, the research is published in an unbiased way and made publicly accessible. Other researchers' work has been respected and appropriately cited through this thesis. I also want to point out that my native language is Swedish, but my home language is English.

## **6.1 Ethical consideration**

Ethical consideration permeates the entire research from start to end. According to van Manen (1997), research cannot step outside the moral values that grant their meaning. Moral issues of interviewing also go beyond the micro-ethics of an interview project and also includes the macro-ethics of the broader social effects of the interview-produced knowledge (Kvale, 2007). Van Manen (1997) concludes that the researcher needs to be aware of the following: (a) The researcher may have certain effects on the ones involved in the study. They may feel all sorts of feelings all the way from discomfort, anxiety, false hope, self-doubt, and irresponsibility but also hope, increased awareness, moral stimulation, a sense of liberation, and insight; (b) There are possible effects of the research methods on the institutions where the research is conducted; (c) The methods used might have lingering effects on the actual interviewees that were involved in the study, where intense conversations may lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible changes in life-style and living. But if the interview and research is done badly it might lead to feelings of anger, disgust, defeat, insensitivity, and intolerance; (d) Phenomenological projects and their methods often have a transformative effect on the one conducting the study. Phenomenological research is often a form of deep learning that may lead to a transformation of consciousness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and heightened perceptiveness (van Manen, 1997), which is arguable also the case in this study.

The general guidelines for conducting research using good scientific practices have been followed in this study. Furthermore, the responsibility for abiding to good scientific practices rests with the whole research community and each and every researcher. In this research, no approval from the ethical board was needed, only a research approval from the Geelong Grammar School, which was required. The interviews, data acquisition, analysis, and evaluation has been made in an open and

responsible way. The participation in this study was completely voluntary, as well as freely being able to choose to leave the study.

## 7 Discussion

The main results in this study will be discussed and linked to the theoretical framework with some references to the background chapter. Potential limitations and weaknesses will be expressed as well as recommendations for further research. This thesis was designed to get a holistic view on how the teachers view the elements of positive psychology in education and how it impacts their environment, themselves, and in their opinion, how it affects the students. My background as a teacher and educational developer has aided me on this journey, aside from having done extensive research around direct and indirect subjects as well as having followed trends in society. The research questions were answered by using a qualitatively designed approach, gathering data by conducting interviews with 10 teachers at Geelong Grammar School. The three research questions were as follows:

1. How does an education environment rooted in Positive Psychology affect the mindset of the teachers and their view of the students?
2. What kind of benefits are there for the Teachers and in their view for the Students in promoting well-being and happiness in the school?
3. What are the challenges in a positive educational environment, according to the teachers?

**The first research question** focused on the environment in the whole school and how that environment impacted the mindset of the teachers, and in their view how the students' mindset were impacted. The findings indicate that there are many contributing factors in a positive psychology environment that has a positive effect on both the teachers and students mindset. It seems that the school has a very open attitude in how the teachers are allowed to implement PPE in their classes; although there is no expressed requirement, it was felt by the teachers that the environment itself indirectly pushed them towards implementing PPE. PP is very much concerned about the individual and his or her well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which is in line with the school mentality and environment where every teacher is allowed to be unique and have their freedom to choose how they approach PPE. Every teacher is required to attend personal development sessions, which most of them agreed had an impact on their mindset, both professionally and personally. It seems clear from the opinions of the teachers that the school

ideology does have a general positive impact on the environment (Norrish, 2015; Seligman, 2009). The interesting part in regards to an environmental impact on the students is that a study measured the highest well-being in students after their year nine Timbertop year (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014), indicating that more than PPE impacted their well-being.

A positive learning environment also allows for a more creative-mindset (Robinson, 2011), which a school with a growth mindset facilitates (Dweck, 2008). GGS has always emphasised the students well-being, especially considering the well-rounded confident student is largely what the school had been about for the 150-years of its existence (Norrish, 2015). Furthermore, considering that GGS is also a boarding school where the majority of the high-school students live on campus, the increased time between the students and the teachers do allow for a better relationship to emerge. Positive relationships emphasise both learning and personal growth (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Seligman, 2009), for both the student as well as for the teacher. Some of the teachers expressed that GGS was its own community, where the students were considered to be in a protective bubble. Considering it takes about five minutes to reach the closest shop outside of campus, it is rather secluded; GGS does have an environment that can be more easily confined and perpetuated according to an ideology without too many external influencers, affecting the behaviours for everyone in that community (Sapolsky, 2017).

It is important to notice that even though many schools have adopted some parts of what could be considered PPE, GGS is one of its kind in Australia, having adopted PPE throughout the whole school, with seemingly higher levels of well-being for its students (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2014), which is supported by my findings. Attending GGS also comes at a pretty high price, beyond the affordability of most families (Colangelo & Precel, 2019). Some argue that good practices should be directed from Federal or State level and offered to all schools with sufficient funds to implement these programs, making them more homogenous, which would be closer to the Finnish education model (Sahlberg et al., 2015). The Finnish education model does allow for variations between schools without jeopardising their academic standard, in fact, a model that creates a more levelled playing field guarantees a higher level of education for everyone, regardless of socio economic status (Benn, 2018; Sahlberg et al., 2015). Schools are not merely a factory, creating spare parts for the needs of the business-community and the society, schools are about learning, which happens naturally, providing that the right environment is provided (Mitra, 2014). To further emphasise the importance of individuals' well-being through a positive environment, supporting

each and everyone's personal interest, is what all schools should do (Robinson, 2011). The right environment in schools, aids all individuals' to find their unique calling in life, which increases happiness (Robinson & Aronica, 2016).

**The second research question** focused on the possible benefits for the teachers, and in their view, for the students, by promoting happiness and well-being in the school. The teachers talked a lot about growth mindset and how it affected them personally and their teaching. A majority of them considered growth mindset to be one of the most important abilities, some said it was the key to PPE. There is a fundamental shift in an individual who realises that the label they might have been given, good or bad, does not define them and that they through effort, by adopting a growth mindset, can increase their output and well-being at the same time (Dweck, 2008). Learned helplessness is very common in our society that tends to be more fixed in its view of individuals and their outcomes (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973; Dweck, 2008; Maier & Seligman, 1976). It was very obvious that most of the teachers had put a lot of thought into growth mindset and used it continuously in class. Several teachers exclaimed that more positivity, belief in self, resilience, well-being and happiness relies on the student being able to feel accomplished (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Dweck, 2008; Fredrickson, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). I did find it a bit interesting that none of the teachers connected my question about Intelligence and effort back to the growth mindset, although they all had the same opinion about it, "that intelligence can only get you so far without effort". The finding that all of the interviewed teachers had a growth mindset approach, which support this research question, without any of them connecting it back to the theory itself, implies how important it is that the environment sets the parameters of the right mindset, which highlights the interconnectivity between the research questions.

Many teachers exclaimed they used the character strengths a lot, trying to elevate the individual process of self-exploration, with the teacher's help. The way they expressed their experience further indicates the interconnectivity between PP theories, like growth mindset, PERMA, and broader and build theory, to name but a few. Even though only a third of the interviewed teachers directly mentioned character strengths (CS), the purpose of increasing motivation, self-confidence, and other positive outcomes in their students by working through CS was indirectly mentioned by the other interviewees while they reiterated their experiences between themselves and their students. The nurturing aspect of CS, in line with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) theory about CS

was mostly indirectly expressed by all teachers, of which half directly expressed it through CS, and the rest expressed it indirectly while talking about growth mindset.

Once again, the relationships between the teachers and the students was emphasised as being fundamental to build something positive, which is fully in line with Gottman's (1994) extensive longitudinal research of relationships. The triple treat program, where teachers have co-curriculum activities as well as pastoral services in the boarding houses aside from normal teaching responsibility, was said to be a very good way to build the relationships. In an environment like GGS, there was a clear benefit between positive relationships and triple treat, which also facilitated learning in classrooms. Building positive relationships broadens the mindset on which the individuals' can increase their positivity and well-being (Fredrickson, 2004), and their creativity (Robinson, 2011). A clear majority of the teachers I interviewed considered the relationships towards their colleagues to be very friendly, even family-like, and helpful as in getting support as well as sharing resources. Most of them also considered the school's administration to be very supportive, approving most of their suggestions for further personal development and other activities. Despite that most interviewees experienced the work-demands being very high, they all expressed a sense of belonging, work-satisfaction, and a clear indication of well-being, in line with Seligman's (2011) PERMA model.

One of my biggest surprises in my finding was in relation to mindfulness. I had admittedly a higher expectation and an interest in how they had applied elements of it in the students' lives. This could also have been due to my research design, as I did not specifically ask about mindfulness using that exact term, although I embedded it into my follow up questions. Still, half of the interviewees mentioned using it, but mostly for their own benefit. Only a few teachers used it in class, and some of the teachers said they deferred from using it as many students started feeling anxious using mindfulness. I could understand why some teachers did not mention using mindfulness, as it is very easy to embed being mindful in various activities, in line with Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1990) teachings. That mindfulness increased anxiety in students was very surprising, contrary to research about the benefits of mindfulness in adolescents (Pepping, Duvenage, Cronin, & Lyons, 2016), and other health benefits with additional positive mind altering effects (Davidson et al., 2003).

Many teachers expressed their opinion that the majority of students entering life after attending GGS have a better understanding of themselves, are more resilient, and arguably more happier than other students from other schools. This has been the focus of GGS even before the introduction of PPE in 2007, by aiming for the well-rounded confident student (Norrish, 2015). That students from GGS have a higher well-being compared to some other schools was seen in Villeroy and colleagues' study in 2014.

**The third research question** is about what the teachers perceived as challenging in a positive educational environment. I will focus mostly on the challenges that are directly specific or indirectly related to a PPE environment. I do however want to point out that despite some reports showing a higher well-being in GGS, anxiety among students still seem to be relatively common despite a PPE environment, according to the teachers I interviewed. The age in itself, adolescence, is a time full of changes and GGS offers an environment that can be very different and therefore demanding for the majority of students. To transition from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset requires effort (Dweck, 2008), alongside all the other PP information and ideologies that the teachers and the environment itself offers. An interesting challenge brought up by a few teachers, considering the PPE environment, was that there seem to be a lot of students that resist the growth mindset, or that it sinks in very slowly. One possible reason for that could be due to learned helplessness (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973; Dweck, 2008; Maier & Seligman, 1976), which takes time and effort to overcome. However, the possible direct reasons for this are hard to pinpoint due to a high diversity of students. The only demographic similarity is that the majority of them come from families that have a higher socio economic status. Some teachers pointed out that they had never worked in a school with a more diverse student base, with such a wide gap between academically weak and strong students, and with so many different nationalities.

The interviewees brought up the fact that most students start resisting information if it is labelled as positive psychology, it has to be embedded in their lessons in a subtle way and practically adapted into the methods of delivery that is on their level. This is very much in line with the idea that children have a natural propensity for learning and prefer to be self-driven (Mitra, 2014; Robinson & Aronica, 2016). Teachers at GGS get a lot of information through their personal developmental sessions that the school frequently offers them, which content are up to the teachers what they apply and how. Freedom within certain boundaries is very important, which some teachers pointed out was a very smart choice from the school to prevent teacher resistance.

However, the question still arises, is the free choice for the teachers too confusing for the students, due to the lack of a homogeneous approach? The students are ultimately the ones that have to receive a wide variety of different kinds of PPE approaches based on the teachers interpretation and understanding, which could be confusing depending on the teachers interpretation. In comparing the teachers' answers, I did not notice a considerable difference in how they interpreted within a PP or PPE theme/subject, but I did notice a huge difference between teachers in regards to which elements and themes were taken onboard and applied in class. Some interviewees mentioned that there are teachers that hardly use any PPE at all in their teaching, although their guess was that they are a minority. Most of my interviewees had the opinion that the majority of teachers at GGS pick and choose from PPE, and use what they feel can be applied in their classes and subject, adapted to the students in their class. A few of my interviewees also brought up the saying that it is important to live as you teach, and not preach how to live. According to the teachers, PP and PPE needs to be integrated into the teacher's behaviour and methods of delivery to be well received by the students. According to some of the teachers who had been working at GGS for longer, there have been several methods in how PP and PPE has been taught to the students. Many of the GGS experienced teachers shared the opinion that most of the PP and PPE content should be delivered to gender-specific groups, separately to boys and girls. They guessed the recent change to deliver to larger gender mixed groups was due to financial reasons, because they saw more benefits in separating the groups in most cases. Males and females behave very differently in each other's presence (Sapolsky, 2017). Furthermore, regardless of country, boys and girls mature at different ages and the gap can be considerable at certain ages.

Wherever there are people, there will be feelings like stress and anxiety, as well as positive feelings. The balance between positive and negative feelings depends on more than the environment, it depends on influencers early in life, temperament, personality, and peers (Fredrickson, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Despite the positive environment, the interviewees still reported a lot of different kinds of stress, both for themselves as well as what they had observed in their students. One could imagine that a rather wealthy private school, with Victoria's highest tuition fee (Colangelo & Precel, 2019), would be able to do more? As already stated, the diverse student base, and other factors affecting the situation, are hard to overcome by money alone. All the interviewed teachers' biggest challenge was work-life balance. Although they did love their work, it was apparent that their obligations were too many to be able to maintain such a work-life balance, especially as most of them lived on campus. Society, school, and

basically life that in some way involve what we consider to be normal work-day or work-week, revolves around what we consider to be a norm. The work week norm was changed to 8 hours per day in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which only happened due to a social movement with the help of labour unions. With the information age and better tools and automation we have had a rapid increase in productivity over the past decades, but the normal wages have hardly increased, and the amount of hours worked per week has stayed the same, and unofficially it has even increased (Pfeffer, 2018; Stiglitz, 2019). GGS is not directly to blame as it suffers from what the entire society suffers from, especially in regards to some occupations, teachers being one of them (Mansfield, 2021). John Maynard Keynes (1930) predicted that his grandchildren, that would be generations X and Y, would work a lot less thanks to automation and could more freely choose to spend their time on individual interests. The monetary framework of today is not Keynesian economics, we are mostly dictated by a free market ideology, also called neo-liberalism, which dictates our work week and what is considered to be our share of wage labour, and our lives (Varoufakis, 2017). This leads into subjects that many of my interviewees brought up about what students worry about and feel anxious about: they worry about their future in the job market, the environment, further automation, and the political climate especially in the United States. As Frei and Osborne (2014) pointed out, the next wave, which is already in progress, is very different from previous job disruptions and will make a lot more jobs totally obsolete. There are no signs of a market slow-down in regards to artificial technology, machine learning, and smart automation, in fact, the opposite has been happening (Bruun & Duka, 2018). The financial framework does not have any built-in balance for the environment we depend on, that has to be handled by regulations. Although it is possible to be more ecological, it is not inherent in the system, and almost impossible to regulate in advance (Korten, 2015). We know from history and economic theory that markets alone are ill-suited in managing major changes until there is a financial incentive to do so (Stiglitz, Joseph, 2020). In recent years, some countries have experimented with a universal basic income (UBI). A few years ago a UBI experiment was conducted in Finland for two years between 2017-2019, and in Canada during the same time period. The latter was prematurely terminated because of a change in government (Mohammad, McDowell, Lewchuk, & Ross, 2020). A recent theoretical study conducted in Australia about UBI supporting a full-scale transition towards UBI for all citizens, arguing for many benefits in such a transition (Spies-Butcher, 2020). The findings are in line with previous studies about UBI. It is argued that a UBI system would guarantee a basic level of living, removing the stress, indirectly reducing health care costs, and increase well-being in the community (Mohammad et al., 2020; Spies-Butcher, 2020). In the decades to come, such a system

might be the only system viable, within capitalism, when jobs are substituted by AI and ML systems. Even though previous transitions also have created jobs, it is argued that this transition is different (Bruun & Duka, 2018; Frey & Osborne, 2016). Besides, possible new jobs in other sectors will not help millions of truck-drivers replaced by autonomously driven vehicles; it takes time to retrain individuals into other job sectors.

Habit is a very powerful force, which easily keeps humans shackled in old behavioural patterns (Sapolsky, 2017). It was an evolutionary advantage, but it has become a disadvantage in our modern world (Kahneman, 2011). Technology change is one good example of the habitual force, both against when it comes to teachers trying to adopt new technologies for teaching, and against when it comes to social media usage by students. Teachers get used to certain methods that work for them in a demanding occupation, which means change is a slow process because few are early adopters (Prensky, 2012). Teaching technology also fade in comparison to the technology used in social media, with AI and ML driven algorithms, specialised in getting our attention (Orlowski, 2020). On one side we have high tech solutions, fine-tuned to dig deep into our psychology, making us want to use social media and alike; on the other hand, we have education technology, which can be good correctly used, but it cannot compete on the same level when it comes to our attention. In both cases, we are dealing with human habits, which from an evolutionary perspective is connected to a feeling of safety and contentment (Sapolsky, 2017). The changes needed to break free from the thought patterns of a paradigm, or what most consider the norm, are paradoxically counteracted by the feelings of safety within the system we want to break free from. It was very apparent that my interviewees were limited by this norm when they answered my question about what they would want to change in the future. The changes of no tests, more time for problem-solving and investigative questions and so on, were knocking on the door of a paradigm shift, but they can never be utilised within this paradigm because they are counteracted from within the system. Everything is too interlocked to be changed without a major social movement, a similar one that has inspired the previous changes. We once considered child labour to be the norm, as well as education only for the few and privileged; things we today take for granted were only dreams a few generations ago.

## **7.1 Conclusion**

Does Positive Psychology in Education make the world more humane? There are a lot of recorded benefits in the mindset of teachers and students at GGS. There are clear benefits in the way GGS

teachers think about themselves, the students, education, and society. There are still a myriad of challenges to be solved, most of which depend on factors outside of GGS, PP and PPE. A recently published paper about a study where parts of PPE was implemented in a few schools in Finland, including parent involvement, with the purpose of increasing well-being and mental resources, concluded that there seem to be an improvement in parent-child interaction, applied in a parenting context (Pentti, Fagerlund, & Nyström, 2019).

But, what about my main question, the title of this paper, if “Positive Psychology in Education is a humane approach in an inhumane world?” I think we need to acknowledge the issues within this framework and paradigm as structural issues that lead to stress, pressure, hierarchical issues perpetuated by the financial framework, and socio-economic consequences that prevent a grander more humane change. I would want to answer my question embedded in the title of this paper by using an analogy:

Positive Psychology in Education is like cultivating very beautiful and diverse plants in a garden, a permaculture approach. The plants grow and prosper, by guaranteeing a good environment, making sure there are bees around and natural fertiliser. In every direction, next to that beautiful garden, you can see massive fields of mono-cultured plants, gene-manipulated crops maximising the yield, sprayed by pesticides and chemically fertilised.

We want to have a full human experience, but we do have to acknowledge that we live in a world dictated by inhumane forces that are man-made constructions, not natural law. GGS seems to be a working environment with a lovely holistic approach, now driven by positive psychological ideals. But, GGS is like some of the interviewees expressed it, a bubble, a greener oasis, and maybe a reminder of what we all should strive for. Further studies could investigate the connection to nature, which seems to have had the most impact on the students in year nine (Timbertop). Studies should also focus on analysing the impact of PPE on less wealthy school environments and students, and preferably compare findings between them. Future studies should also compare the well-being levels in Finnish schools with GGS.

A humane world might need stronger nature-like connections, after all, we depend on nature; the economy can be adapted to fit humans, nature, and a living earth, it does not work the other way around.

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## **Attachment 1 – cover letter**

Dear Teacher,

You have probably heard about the high standard and good quality of education in Finland through the worldwide testing system PISA. Finland has always done really well in that test and been among the top countries in the world. Education is constantly evolving and many top educators and officials in Finland have started to incorporate positive psychology in our education system, but not to the extent as Geelong Grammar school has.

You now have a very special and awesome opportunity to meet a highly interesting and interested fellow teacher with a diverse background from the Finnish High School and Adult Education System! I'd want you to sit down with me for a relaxing 30 min personal interview (qualitative), which will be more like a stress free guided talk about your work as a teacher in Geelong Grammar School. You will of course also have the opportunity to compare and ask me about the difference in our Education System, totally in line with your time and interest. No preparations will be necessary to participate. I would prefer to have the interviews done between the 1st of October and the 19th of October. I can be available at any time of your choosing: early morning, day, afternoon, evening, weekend, and even midnight at a full moon if preferred.

If you are interested, please send me an email stating what subject you teach and for which age-group, or give me a call and I'll give you more information and list you as participant.

Between all ten participants two gift-cards for a massage therapy will be drawn, a whopping 20% chance for you to get a complimentary pampering on top of a nice interaction. Yes, this is serious and intentionally written with a positive undertone.

Who am I and why am I doing this?

I'm a 44-year-old teacher and developer from Finland with about a decade of experience as a Psychology, Philosophy, Business, and ICT teacher in upper High schools (our system is a bit different with High school being only three years, with students from 16-19 year of age) and adult education. I've also been working as a developer of e-learning processes and ICT for our education system in educational organisations, nationwide projects, and also European projects for almost ten years.

At the moment I'm doing a qualitative research paper about positive psychology in education at The University of Helsinki. To my gratefulness, I've been approved to interview 10 teacher from

Geelong Grammar School (most, if not all, of which I would want to be high school teachers). The interview is semi-structured and would take about 30 min of each teacher's time.

Kind Regards,

Sebastian Nordstrom, The University of Helsinki

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## **Attachment 2 – interview questions**

- Tell me about your experience of coming to Geelong Grammar school?
- How would you describe yourself as a positive psychology educator?
- What kind of skills do you consider are beneficial as a teacher in a School with a positive psychology ideology?
- What are the main differences from a traditional school that do not use positive psychology ideology?
- In what way would you say you have transformed the way you educate after the mandatory introduction course before working in this school?
- what do you do to stay up-to-date in your profession?
- Does the school have extra requirements in regards to the positive psychology ideology?
- What role do you see you have as a teacher to pass on the values of positive psychological education towards your students?
- what is your own opinion about self-discipline vs IQ?
- how do you keep track of individual's optimal progress?
- how would you say you balance between an encouraging and demanding approach towards your students?
- Research has shown that boys learn differently from girls, how would you say positive psychology in education tackles this problem?
- How would you describe your technology use in your teaching?
- How would you describe the colleague, team, and administrative support in the school?
- What are the main challenges in regards to the students?
- What are the main challenges you yourself struggle with?
- What do you feel about the education system in general in Melbourne or Australia?
  - And in the world?
  - how should the educational system look like according to you?