



Presentation

Dr Denise Quinlan: Saturday 6th June

Title of Presentation: Walking our talk: The South Dunedin Cluster's collaborative positive education journey

Presenter Name: Dr Denise Quinlan

Abstract:

The field of positive education stresses the importance of supportive, positive relationships: 'other people matter' is the famous summary of positive psychology by Chris Peterson, developer of the VIA inventory of strengths. However, most schools implement positive education alone. Some schools have a mentor school to learn from. In contrast, seven low-mid decile primary and intermediate schools formed the South Dunedin Well-being Cluster in 2007 to work together to support student well-being – to our knowledge, the first such collaboration in positive education. The Cluster helped create individual school pathways based on a shared philosophy and through this collaborative approach, schools experienced important benefits.

The Cluster provided positive psychology training to staff personally to support staff well-being. The philosophy was applied first in the staffroom – and used for staff meetings. Only when staff were convinced of the benefits of the approach did they implement positive education in the classroom. The philosophy of positive education and how it could be implemented in a New Zealand school was debated within the group. Although the group shared the philosophy of positive education, they recognised each school's unique environment and situation, and implemented unique positive education plans that responded to their school needs. A lively and supportive cycle of feedback and new ideas enlivened implementation and allowed faster learning and improvement across the schools.

The Cluster has provided peer support at Principal and Lead teacher level over an eight year period. The Principal group especially supported each other through school closures and mergers, illnesses and staff and student challenges. Working as a cluster meant that training costs were shared. Cluster teachers – attending overseas training shared information with their colleagues. As a group, the cluster were able to bring international trainers to NZ, and able

support the development of a classroom-based strengths programme specifically designed for primary and intermediate students.

Presenter Biography:

Denise Quinlan, Ph.D., is a researcher, programme designer and trainer. She has worked with schools in New Zealand, Australia, and the UK implementing positive psychology for teachers and students since 2008. She developed the Awesome Us strengths programme, demonstrated to enhance student well-being, engagement for learning, relationships and class climate for 9-12 year olds. She is a co-founder of Living Well With, an organisation providing positive psychology and mindfulness programmes to support people living with chronic illness. Denise has a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the University of Otago, New Zealand.