

<b>Institution:</b> Anglia Ruskin University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 4		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving emotional resilience and well-being through worldwide evidence-based positive education programmes		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014 to 2017		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Ilona Boniwell	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Category C Researcher <i>subsequently</i> Associate Professor in Psychology, FTE 0.5	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2014 to September 2017 <i>subsequently</i> October 2017 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 to 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The impact of this work is improved resilience in school children, greater emphasis on resilience in the workplace, and changed government education policy around the teaching of well-being and resilience. This impact is evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvements in resilience and well-being of children through the global implementation of evidence-based positive education teaching programmes in secondary schools throughout the UK, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Japan, Singapore, and Australia. The programmes have reached at least 44,410 children and 463 teachers/trainers.</li> <li>Increasing resilience of employees in the workplace through adoption of the <i>SPARK Resilience in the Workplace</i> programme by businesses in the UK, France, Japan, Singapore, Philippines and the UAE. The programme has reached 3,385 employees in 49 companies, with 636 trainers certified to deliver it in organisations.</li> <li>Influencing education policy on teaching well-being and resilience in schools in the UK and France.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Positive education brings together the science of positive psychology with the best practice of teaching and learning to develop the so-called life or non-cognitive skills. Given that positive education focuses equally on the prevention of mental health problems and the promotion of wellness, <b>Ilona Boniwell</b> conceived and designed two positive education programmes, the first building resilience (SPARK RP) and the second, promoting well-being (PWBL). Boniwell's research conducted while at ARU ensured her programmes were the first in the field of positive education to be underpinned by empirical evidence that demonstrated their effectiveness in improving well-being and resilience in children.</p> <p><i>SPARK Resilience Programme</i> (SPARK RP) is a universal resilience programme developed by Boniwell that builds on cognitive-behavioural therapy and positive psychology concepts with the explicit goal of fostering emotional resilience and decreasing depression. In collaboration with Pluess at Queen Mary University London, Boniwell conducted a study on 363 11-year-old girls in a secondary school sample in the UK that investigated whether the personality trait Sensory-Processing Sensitivity moderated the efficacy of the SPARK Resilience Programme aimed at the prevention of depression (<b>Reference 1</b>). Middle to highly sensitive children showed a significant increase in self-esteem scores and a decrease in depression scores, with both effects sustained</p>		

after a three-month follow-up.

In collaboration with Pluess at Queen Mary University and researchers from the University of East London, Boniwell conducted a further study that explored the efficacy of *SPARK* on depression symptoms and resilience in a high-risk population of 438 11-to-13-year-old girls in England (**Reference 2**). The study found evidence for a decrease in the girls' depression symptoms directly after the intervention and at a six-month follow-up, while resilience scores were significantly higher in the treatment cohort compared to the control cohort at post-treatment and follow-up assessments.

*Personal Well-being Lessons* (PWBL) is a school-based curriculum developed by Boniwell that targets every known major predictor and correlate of well-being using individually tested positive psychology interventions. The programme provides educators with a flexible and grounded resource with up to 36 lessons divided into six units: Positive Self, Positive Body, Positive Emotions, Positive Mindset, Positive Direction, and Positive Relationships. In collaboration with Osin from the National Research University in Russia and Martinez at the University of East London, Boniwell led a mixed-methods study undertaken to evaluate the impact of implementing the PWBL curriculum in a sample of 164 11- and 12-year-old pupils in secondary schools in London (**Reference 3**). Results indicated significant buffering effect of the intervention in protecting students against the decline of satisfaction with self, satisfaction with friends, and an increase in negative effect throughout the first year of middle school.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Pluess, M., & Boniwell, I. (2015). Sensory-processing sensitivity predicts treatment response to a school-based depression prevention program: Evidence of vantage sensitivity. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 82, 40-45.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.03.011>
2. Pluess, M., Boniwell, I., Hefferon, K., & Tunariu, A. (2017). Preliminary evaluation of a school-based resilience-promoting intervention in a high-risk population: Application of an exploratory two-cohort treatment/control design. *PLOS One*, 12(5).  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177191>
3. Boniwell, I., Osin, E. N., & Martinez, C. (2016). Teaching happiness at school: Non-randomised controlled mixed-methods feasibility study on the effectiveness of Personal Well-Being Lessons. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(1), 85-98, DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2015.1025422](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1025422)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The underpinning research provided empirical evidence demonstrating the efficacy of PWBL and SPARK RP for improving resilience and well-being. Global interest in the programmes leading to impact was then driven by Boniwell presenting the research at over 20 keynotes on positive education and resilience in major national and international events, including the Unilever (UAE, 2020), Chanel (France, 2020), International Conference for School Violence (Canada, 2018), GESS Education (UAE, 2018), Goldman Sachs (UK, 2018), BNP Paribas (Singapore, 2018), 9th European Congress of Positive Psychology (Hungary, 2018), 5th Happiness and Well-Being Summit (Mexico, 2017), 8th Congress of the European Network of Positive Psychology (France, 2016), the 5th Australian Positive Psychology and Well-being Conference (Australia, 2016), Positive Economy Forum (Italy, 2014), Printemps d'Optimisme (Belgium, 2015), 7th Congress of the European Network of Positive Psychology (Netherlands, 2014), and Action for Happiness (UK, 2014). The dissemination of the underpinning research demonstrating the effectiveness of PWBL and SPARK led to their adoption by the **Kids and Emotional Competencies Foundation, Japan Positive Education Association, Schools of Positive Psychology in Japan and Singapore, and Partnership for Children** (Evidence 1, 2, 3, 4).

### Worldwide promotion of improved well-being and resilience in school children

From 2015, the consultancy company **Positran** has handled distribution of the programmes in France and has trained 269 teachers and 35 trainers in SPARK RP and 63 trainers in PBWL, in addition to 1,400 school children. This generated income of 276,150 euros (Evidence 5). Two of the certified trainers gathered feedback from 54 young people who participated in SPARK RP in 2020, for example, “this adventure was a real discovery for me, it allowed me to meet new people, discover things about myself and how to handle situations that I encounter.” Content analysis showed a positive impact on their emotional resilience, including emotions/pleasure (54%), positive relationships (39%), self-discovery (33%) and use of emotion-regulation strategies (52%) (Evidence 6).

**The Kids and Emotional Competencies (KEC)** Foundation in the Netherlands has translated the PBWL into the Dutch language and delivered the programme to 31 schools since 2016. 114 teachers were trained, and 2,045 students have completed the programme. Teachers testify that adopting the PWBL has increased the self-confidence of individual pupils and helped them discover and become aware of their strengths, while overall classes are calmer due to better relationships (Evidence 1). 225 of these young people were asked to complete the Best Possible Self exercise in writing before and after receiving the programme and what they wrote was analysed using thematic analysis. Significant increases were found for the percentage of well-being-related signals (from 77% to 86%), behavioural intention signals (from 11% to 15%) and positive emotions (from 11% to 14%). A significant decrease was found for the percentage of factual descriptions (from 9% to 5%). These results are consistent with the original research (increases in well-being), but also indicate that the programme is helping young people to become more action-oriented, for example “*I want to become a heart surgeon. I want to achieve this goal by paying attention in class and by being serious about school*” (Evidence 7).

Since 2015 the **Japan Positive Education Association** has implemented the SPARK RP in over 57 schools (from elementary schools to universities and teacher trainings) and other organisations, with around 20,000 students completing the programme in its short-term (half- to one-day) and long-term (over a year) versions. PWBL were also delivered to around 20,000 children. Feedback from teachers and parents in Japan include “These ideas changed how they see things”; “They always use the technic [sic] they learnt because it is very fun and easy to use in daily life”; “The atmosphere in the class was changed after I introduced this programme” (Evidence 2). An empirical study of 407 high school students in Tokyo found SPARK RP was effective in enhancing students’ overall self-efficacy, and that students with significantly lower self-esteem had greater reduction in depression and promotion of self-esteem (Evidence 8).

In 2017, a major international educational charity **Partnership for Children**, with partners in 32 countries around the world and a global reach of 1.8 million beneficiaries, positioned SPARK RP as a follow-up for secondary school age children to their existing resilience programmes aimed at children in primary schools (Evidence 4).

### Increasing resilience in the workplace worldwide

SPARK RP has been delivered as a training programme to improve resilience in employees as *SPARK Resilience in The Workplace*. This has been implemented in the UK and France by **Positran**. Since the beginning of 2018, Positran has trained 240 trainers in *SPARK Resilience in the Workplace* and has delivered resilience workshops and webinars in 19 companies, including Chanel, Unilever and BNP in the UK, France, Morocco and UAE, reaching 2,185 employees (Evidence 5).

Since the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown in April 2020, Positran has delivered *SPARK Resilience in the Workplace* programme in the online format to 356 French-speaking participants, mainly employed, self-employed or in temporary unemployment. Data collected from the first 84 participants showed that their resilience, positive emotions, meaning and work engagement grew,

whilst stress perception and negative emotions decreased significantly in comparison with 96 participants in the waiting list control group. Content analysis of the feedback on the programme and end-of-programme resilience stories collected from 151 participants reported benefits in terms of awareness of emotion-cognition interaction (68%), knowledge and use of emotion regulation strategies (57%), relationships improvement (49%), solution-focus/behavioural intentions (74%), growth after adversity (63%) and mental health/well-being (50%). Feedback included: “*Finding motivation and energy to carry out daily activities and those related to work*” (behavioural intentions). (Evidence 6)

**The School of Positive Psychology in Japan and Singapore** adopted a version of *SPARK Resilience in the Workplace* and have delivered in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines. They have trained 396 trainers and delivered 48 workshops to 1,200 people in 30 different companies, generating income of 711,000 euros. 97% of the people who have completed the programme report being very satisfied/satisfied with the programme. Testimonials from clients state “*I learned how to build mental and emotional resilience against workplace stress*”; “*The program teaches new way of dealing with stress*” (Evidence 3).

### **Influence on educational policy around teaching of well-being and resilience in schools**

The educational system in France is relatively unusual amongst the OECD countries in an almost total absence of any type of teaching related to life skills or character education. Recent legislation calls the established system into question, opening the door to new programmes and provision. SPARK Resilience won two prizes in 2016: the **Positive Innovation in Education prize** by the University of Grenoble-Alpes and the **Pedagogical Innovation Prize** of the Foundation “Apprendre & Réussir”.

After winning these prizes, Boniwell has been called to advise the French Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health on how well-being and resilience should be positioned as key educational outcomes. **The French Ministry of National Education** nominated the programme as one of the top 30 teaching innovations in 2017 (Evidence 9). Consequently, in 2020 the Ministry’s training arm Réseau Canopé proposed SPARK RP as support to teachers during the Covid-19 period, resulting in the participation of 189 teachers (Evidence 5).

From 2017 Personal Well-being Lessons (PWBL) has been adopted as part of the **UNESCO Chair on Education for Global Peace Sustainability** programme aimed at developing positive education in Portuguese schools, and PWBL is featured as part of the 2019 UNESCO Chair Network Progress Report (Evidence 10).

As one of the founders of IPEN (International Positive Education Network), Boniwell was invited to take part in the Life Skills Working Group established by the **Youth Team, Cabinet Office (British Government)**. She took part in four meetings aimed at establishing a solid evidence base for the teaching of life skills. As one of the consequences of this work, **Public Health England (PHE) London** on behalf of the **London Health Board (LHB)** selected SPARK Resilience as one of the best resilience programmes in the UK and show-cased it on the London Grid for Learning portal (Evidence 9). Teaching training in SPARK RP resulting from the LHB promotion is delivered by the charity Partnership for Children (Evidence 4).

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Netherlands – Letter from the Director, Stichting KEC
2. Japan – Letter from the Chair, Japan Positive Education Association
3. Supporting letters from Directors, School of Positive Psychology in Singapore and Japan
4. Letter from Programme Director, Partnership for Children
5. Contact details for Positran Finance Director to collaborate impact
6. Content analysis document for online *SPARK Resilience in the Workplace* participation feedback
7. Netherlands - Goldberg, J. M. (2020). *Positive Education as a Whole School Approach*:

- Broadening the Perspective on Learning*. University of Twente Masters Dissertation  
<https://doi.org/10.3990/1.9789036549622> [in Dutch].
8. Kibe, C., Suzuki, M., Hirano, M., & Boniwell, I. (2020). Sensory processing sensitivity and culturally modified resilience education: Differential susceptibility in Japanese adolescents. *PloS one*, 15(9), e0239002. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239002>
  9. Links for websites that reference SPARK RP
  10. Letter from co-ordinator for UNESCO Chair on Education for Global Peace Sustainability