

Student Perceptions of Engaging in Intentional Happiness Intervention Activities (4 week, small scale study)

Humber College ITAL



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Research Problem

“Mental Health Tsunami” (McCloskey & Mesiner, 2013, para 1)

- ▶ Canadian post-secondary institutions are experiencing increased reports of anxiety and depression among students with less than 24% receiving the treatment they need (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013).
- ▶ Stigma attached to the issue of mental health sometimes holds students back from seeking support, however, even when support is sought the demand outweighs the services (Burns, Lee & Brown, 2011)

Reordering of Post-Secondary Priorities

- ▶ Restructuring frameworks as a way to defend against depression (McCloskey & Mesiner, 2013, para 12).
- ▶ Realistic to academic life for student through creation of additional interventions for promotion of well-being.

Research questions

Goal of Study/Big Idea

- Small Scale/Short Term Intervention to increase student happiness

Gaps in the Literature

- Student subjective perception is missing from research

Methods: Two groups

Group #1: POSITIVE INTERVENTION

1. Pre-Test.
2. Choose 3 positive interventions from a list and implement them each week for four weeks.
3. Journal about experiences at the end of the week .
4. Post-Test.

Group #2: PLACEBO GROUP

1. Pre-Test.
2. Choose 3 Placebo Activities from a list and implement them each week for four weeks.
3. Journal about experiences at the end of the week.
4. Post-Test.

Group Interviews were conducted to maximize data collection due to the small sample size.

SUBJECTIVE HAPPINESS SCALE

1. In general, I consider myself:

not a very happy person 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a very happy person

2. Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself:

less happy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 more happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a great deal

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 a great deal

Intentional Activities

Happiness Interventions

5 Random Acts of Kindness (Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2012); (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Count your Blessings (Lyubomirsky, & Della Porta, 2012); (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005); (Seligman, 2011); (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006)

Write a Gratitude Letter (Seligman, 2011)

Best Possible Self (Blackwell et al, 2013); (Emmons & McCullough, 2003); (Layous, Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2012); (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Savour the Small Things (Hanson, 2013); (Quoidbach et al, 2013)

One Door Closes, Another Door Opens (Gander et al 2012); (Rashid & Anjum, 2008); (Seligman et al, 2005)

Three Funny Things (Gander et al, 2012); (Rashid & Anjum, 2008); (Seligman, et al, 2005).

Gifts of Time (Gander et al, 2012); (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Three Loving Connections (Fredrickson, 2013)

Imagine Yourself (Fredrickson, 2013)

Counting Kindness (Lyubomirsky, & Della Porta, 2012); (Seligman et al, 2005)

What's My Positive Impact? (Gander et al, 2012)

Stop and Breath (Reig-Ferrer et al, 2014)

Placebo Interventions

Typical Day (Layous, Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2012); (Reiter & Wilz, 2015).

Detailing Activity (Watkins et al, 2003).

Life Details (Watkins et al, 2003).

Online Journaling Early Life Memories (Gander et al, 2012); (Seligman et al, 2005)

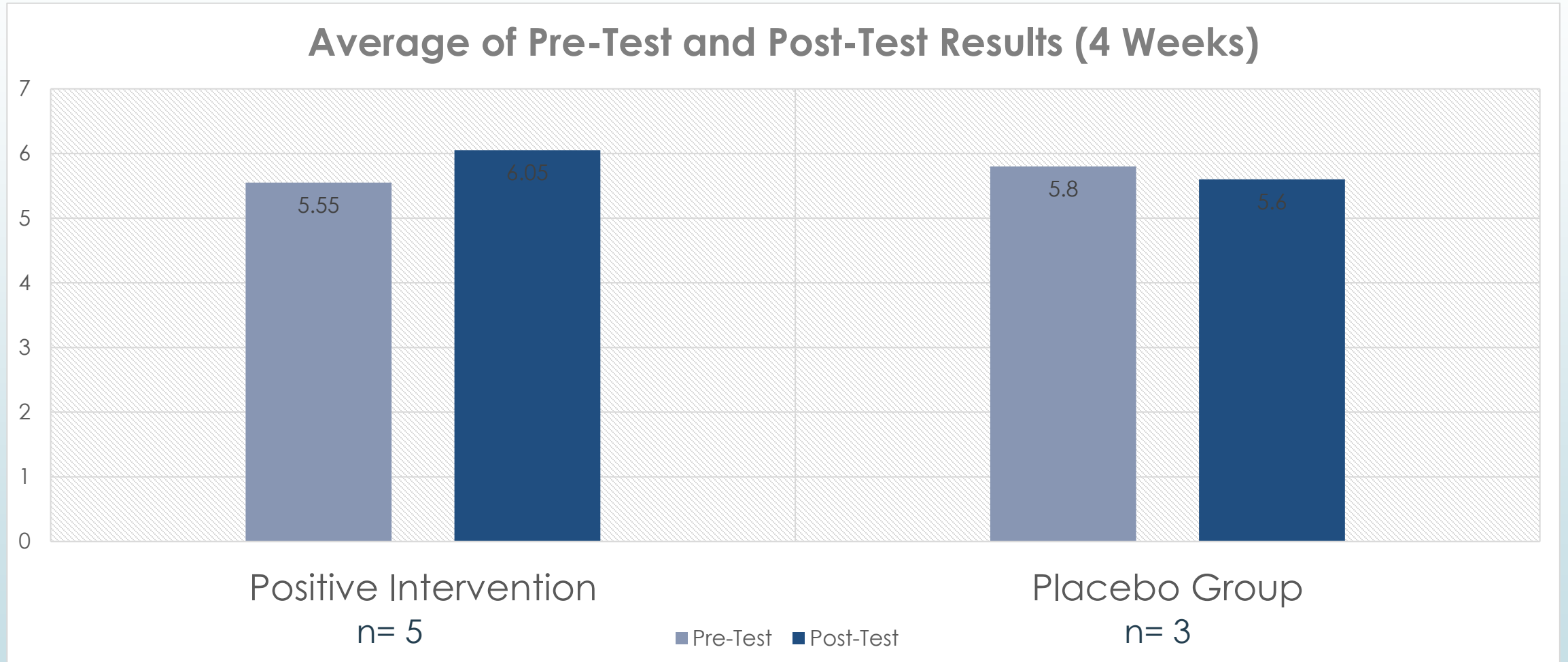
The Past Two Hours (Kruse et al, 2014)

Whereabouts Activity (Layous et al, 2012)

Life Events (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Make a Plan (Lumley & Provenzano, 2003).

Positive Intervention VS Placebo



Themes

- **BROADEN YOUR MIND:**

Participants identifying experiences of social connections and attunement.

- **ACTIVITY HAD DIRECT EFFECT:**

Participants experience a change, result or consequence as a direct result from the activity

- **PARTICIPANT SELF TALK:**

Identify statements made by the participant that identify their thought processes as a as a way to create meaning as a result of the activity

- **(COMBO) SELF-TALK AS EFFECTED BY ACTIVITY:**

Participants make direct connections between what they are feeling, thinking, internalizing of visions of themselves as a direct result of the activity. Change in the participants' sense of self.

- **REPORTS OF RELUCTANCY:**

Reports of participant reluctance or hesitation to participate in activities.

- **SIMPLE REPORTING AND LISTING:** Participants merely reported with no relation to the effect of the activity in neither a negative or positive way.

Themes for Positive Intervention

1. Broaden Your Mind
2. Activity had Direct Effect
3. Participant Self-Talk
4. (COMBO) Self-Talk as Effected by Activity
5. Reports of Reluctancy
6. Simple Reporting and Listing

1. "It had showed me that every negative situation has a cloud of silver lining where throughout any situation which we may feel that nothing good could come out but it may teach us a life lesson or help us to better understand the aspect of life"
2. "I found joy in counting my blessings. On days that are more challenging than others, it made me feel as though the hard times are worth it when you realize how fortunate you really are"
3. "Overall, I think that I have been a positive impact on her life recently..."
4. "At the end of the day, I really savour the time I have to myself in my room. I take time to reflect on my day and it makes me feel peaceful to have time to myself"
5. "I found it hard choosing which activities to take on for the first week. Yet, after I had picked them, I found it difficult to act upon and reflect on them"
6. "Imagine yourself: loving, selfless, empathetic, supportive, good listener, and generous."

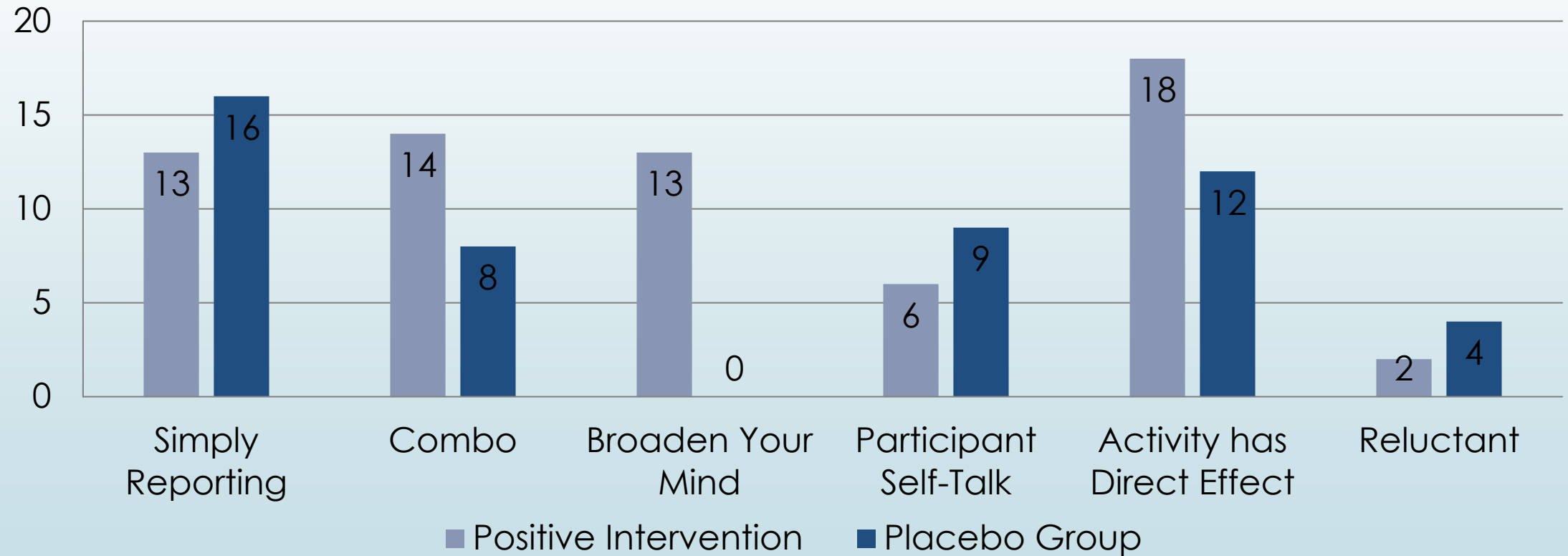
Themes for Placebo Group

1. Broaden Your Mind
2. Activity had Direct Effect
3. Participant Self-Talk
4. (COMBO) Self-Talk as Effected by Activity
5. Reports of Reluctancy
6. Simple Reporting and Listing

1. None
2. "The experience was quite interesting. It gave me an opportunity to really think about how I spend my days and how I might better organize them"
3. "I felt proudly to know that I am utilizing my days constructively"
4. "There always seems to be more than I can possibly accomplish in the time frame of the plan, so I tend to worry as I am making it"
5. "By the end of the week, I started getting a little bored writing every thing about a typical day"
6. "Whereabouts Activity: Placement, Humber College, Walmart, No Frills, Dollarama, Toronto Downtown, Tim Hortons, Scarborough Civic Centre"

Themes for Participants

Full 4 Weeks



n= 8

Current Literature

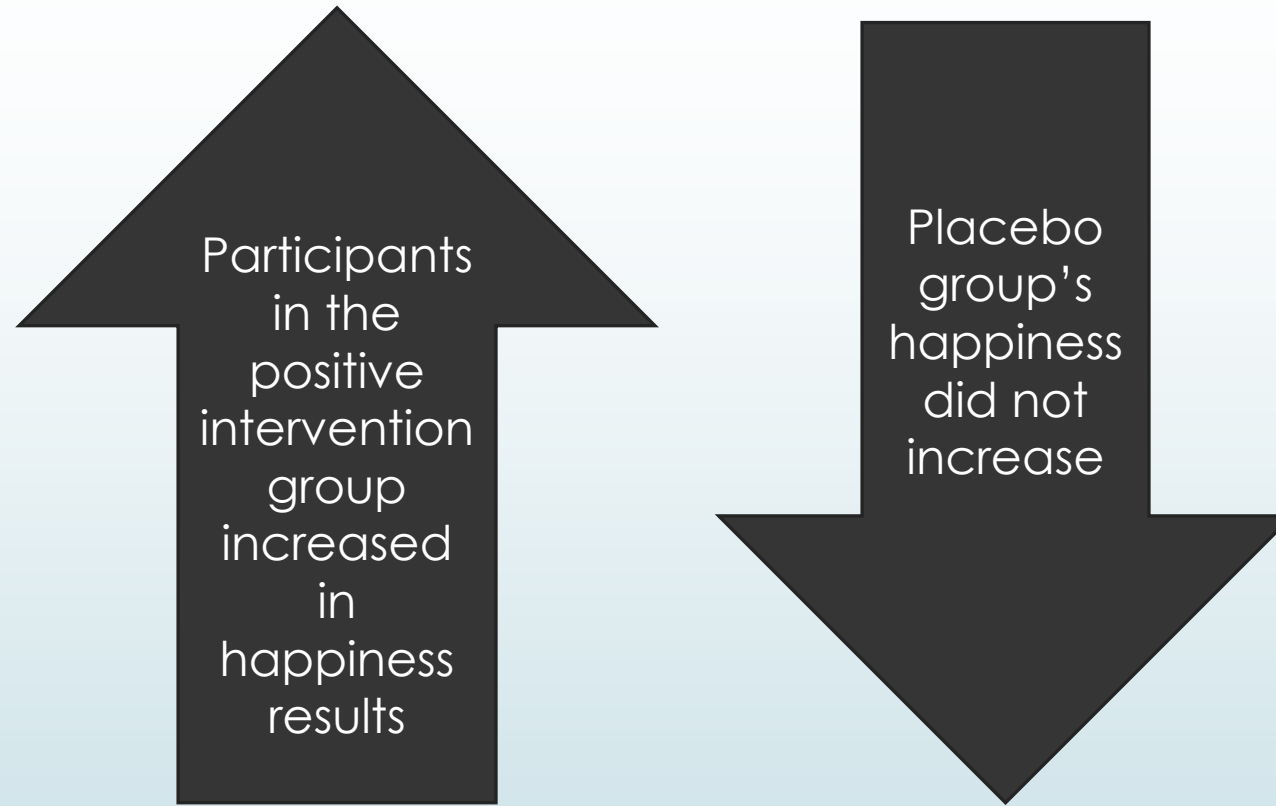
Autonomy has been defined as “...an ability to govern oneself, make decisions, and choose one’s own pathway and to think for oneself” and is considered an essential need for mental health (O’Donnell et al, p. 229).

Research has demonstrated happiness and well-being levels increase in individuals when they choose to enact intentional activities which encourage one to think and act in positive ways (Lyubomirsky, et al 2005); (Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2012)

“Happy” people are more social, have a greater sense of connection to others, a greater sense of control and resiliency in their lives, are more physically and mentally healthy, more successful, and live longer lives (Nickerson et al, 2010; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005; Seligman et al, 2009).

Choosing to think and act in positive ways increases positive emotions, changes our neurochemistry, and strengthens our relationships and social connection (Kjaer et al, 2002).

Findings



Except...

2 partial participants in the placebo group who experienced an increase in their happiness....
and we wondered why ?

Upon closer examination of qualitative data we found these 2 participants wrote entries in their journal similar to the reflections recorded in the positive intervention group.....

Placebo	Positive Intervention
<p>Life Events “I was able to reflect upon my week in a calm fashion and look at everything that has happened good or bad with a neutral view. I feel that this is something that I want to do at the need of every week to remain calm and look at everything as a lesson.”</p>	<p>Stop and Breath “I realized at that point that had not taken time to deal with the other things that had happened earlier in the week. I am going to make sure that I journal at least a little bit every day to help me work through emotional or stressful issues that may come up.”</p>
<p>Earliest Life Memories “It has been awhile since I really thought about those memories and I don’t think I have ever written about them. It was interesting to write some memories down and see what stood out in those memories. Things like colours, feelings, small details were interesting to recount”.</p>	<p>Savour the Small Things “By looking at it a lot of feeling came to me such as happiness and sadness. The polar bear brought me happiness because my boyfriend truly makes me happy and I don’t know where I would be without him. It also brought me sadness because we have a long distance relationship and it has been about 2 weeks since I saw him last and that isn’t always easy to handle.”</p>
<p>Stop and Breathe “This made me feel amazing because for a minute all my problem disappeared and when I snapped back into reality and realized the problems were still there, I realized that they don’t have to be there.”</p>	<p>Past 2 Hours “Describing what I had just been doing (finishing my day at placement, picking up my son and traveling home) helped relief some stress. Also because I was describing the couple of hours that had just happened, I found that it brought me into the present moment.”</p>
<p>Stop and Breathe “I took a moment to stop and breath. I really enjoyed on being able to reflect on the bigger picture...taking a step back really allowed me to clear my head and minimize stress”</p>	<p>Past 2 Hours “I felt more relaxed because I had just written about and ‘got out’ some stress”.</p>

Findings

- ▶ **Broaden your Mind Theme:** *Participants identifying experiences of social connections and attunement. Appeared **13 times** in positive intervention and **0 times** in the placebo group.*
- ▶ Some themes emerged within Placebo Group –
 - ▶ **Simply reporting:** Instances of simple reporting of events, facts, or details.
 - ▶ **Reports of reluctance:** Statements participants wrote that indicate reluctances, feelings and hesitation to complete activities and online journals.

Implications for Teaching

1. Creating Connections
2. Focus on Strengths
3. Creating Conversations
4. Classroom Environments
5. Reminders
6. Putting it into Practice

1. "Even if we don't write it down, we can always have a quick chat with family before we go to sleep. To get emotions out, good, bad, both. In that way, good we will at least start thinking two or three goods in our lives"
2. "If I am happy, I want them (family) to be happy too. It spreads positivity and builds relationships"
3. "Before you start your class, just have a nice conversation. Don't really have to tell what you did or what we did. Share what you want. Just if you want to share something, just share it"
4. "Have a welcoming environment. Exactly how we would do for the children, have a welcoming environment with family. It's the same way for us"
5. "Somebody has to remind you, this week you are doing it. Supposing if I'm doing anything continuously for 3-4 months, maybe it would be my practice"
6. "It was the words, the positivity and the words, the encouragement. Letting us know that you'll be okay. We're students too. Don't worry. You'll get through it. Yeah times can get hard but at the end of the day, you have a goal to go to. To graduate. It was nice to know that someone else was going through the same struggle as us. It was nice. It was probably maybe 20 students who wrote us those letters".

The unexamined life was not worth living
(Socrates).

When life is examined, we find it rich in
potential, full of joy and happiness.

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