Student Wellbeing

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

What is wellbeing?

Introduction

The NSW Department of Education and Communities has developed a wellbeing framework for schools to underpin the work that goes on in education in NSW in regard to student wellbeing and school excellence. This paper explores how student wellbeing is defined; the relationship between wellbeing, schools and outcomes; school elements in improving student wellbeing; and student wellbeing policies in Australia.

Definitions

Wellbeing is difficult to define. This is largely because the concept of wellbeing has so many applications across a broad range of disciplines. Different definitions can be found in relation to health, education, psychology and philosophy, to name just a few. Broadly speaking, the clinical or health perspective, defines wellbeing as the absence of negative conditions, whereas the psychological perspective defines wellbeing as the prevalence of positive attributes[1]. A useful working definition may be to see wellbeing as the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced[2].

In terms of education, a study commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) into approaches to student wellbeing, found that there were three definitions of wellbeing in the literature specifically focusing on student wellbeing (as opposed to wellbeing in the general population)[3]. These all relate to student wellbeing in the school environment. Fraillon further notes that while educators certainly advocate a focus on student wellbeing, there is very little consensus on what student wellbeing actually is. Fraillon came up with his own definition of student wellbeing, which states that 'wellbeing is the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community'[4]. The DEEWR report drew on this definition and broadened it, to come up with the following definition of student wellbeing:

> A sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school[5].

This definition, according to the report, synthesises the most common and relevant characteristics that appear in most definitions of wellbeing, namely – positive affect; resilience; satisfaction with relationships and other dimensions of one's life; and effective functioning and the maximising of one's potential – and applies it to an education setting.

Many definitions of wellbeing also refer to types of wellbeing, for example cognitive, emotional, social, physical and spiritual. This appears to lead to confusion as to what exactly wellbeing means or is referring to. The DEEWR report suggests that it is perhaps more useful in the educational context, to view these types of wellbeing as dimensions of wellbeing, rather than separate categories of wellbeing. Thus, cognitive, emotional etc types of wellbeing can all be seen to contribute to overall measures of wellbeing[6].

1   Fraillon, J. (2004) *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion paper.* Commissioned by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services as an agent of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

2   Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J. and Sanders, L. (2012) The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing. 2(3)*

3   Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review. R*eport to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

4   Fraillon, J. (2004) *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion paper.* Commissioned by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services as an agent of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, p.6

5   Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing:* Literature review. Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

6   Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

Importance

In education, wellbeing is important for two reasons. The first is the recognition that schooling should not just be about academic outcomes but that it is about wellbeing of the 'whole child'; the second is that students who have higher levels of wellbeing tend to have better cognitive outcomes at school.

The focus on the 'whole child', rather than just the cognitive development of a child as measured by educational achievement, has become of increasing policy significance over the last five to ten years[7]. The policy significance of the whole child concept and how this relates to education in particular, was highlighted in 2008 in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. This declaration produced by the (former) Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs and signed off by all Australian Education Ministers, stated that:

> *Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion[8].*

This was the first formal recognition in Australia that schooling has a broader role to play in the development of Australian school children, above and beyond academic outcomes.

Research evidence shows that students with high levels of wellbeing are more likely to have higher academic achievement and complete Year 12; better mental health; and a more pro-social, responsible and lawful lifestyle[9]. By ensuring that wellbeing is a focus of Australia's education system, Australia can also ensure greater participation in the workforce, more social inclusion and more effective building of Australia's social capital[10].

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7   Social Policy Research Centre (2010) *Conceptualisation of social and emotional wellbeing for children and young people, and policy implications.* A research report prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Sydney

8   Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (2008) *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.* Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs: Melbourne

9   Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

10 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

Improving student wellbeing in schools

The literature consistently identifies a number of elements that affect student wellbeing. These can broadly be grouped into the following: creating a safe environment; ensuring connectedness; engaging students in learning; promoting social and emotional learning; and a whole school approach. While these groupings have been distinguished for the purposes of outlining the evidence base related to student wellbeing, it is the nature of wellbeing that the categories are intrinsically interconnected and that they should not necessarily be viewed as separate entities in and of themselves.

Safe environment

Much of the language and talk around wellbeing in schools today, relates to the notion of 'safe schools'[11]. A safe school is one where the physical environment is safe and does not lead to harm or injury for students; the emotional environment is one of positivity and free from negative behaviours such as bullying which can affect mental health; and where a healthy lifestyle is promoted through initiatives such as increased participation in sport and/or healthy food at the canteen. The concept of 'safe schools' can also be extended to refer to schools' attention to the individual health requirements of students.

The physical safety of a school is crucial to ensuring students are safe from injury and harm. The physical school environment can be seen to encompass: the school building and all its contents including physical structures, infrastructure, furniture, and the use and presence of chemicals and biological agents; the site on which a school is located; and the surrounding environment including the air, water, and materials with which children may come into contact, as well as nearby land uses, roadways and other hazards[12]. It is self-evident that schools need to ensure they identify and modify aspects of the physical environment that jeopardise safety and health to ensure a physically safe environment for students. This can be achieved through risk and asset management documents that are kept updated on issues such as asbestos, tree safety and other issues that may influence the physical wellbeing of school communities[13].

Another important element of a 'safe school' is an emotionally safe environment. This is one where students feel safe to attend school and know they will be supported on an emotional level should they encounter any issues. In schools, the behaviour most likely to undermine a safe emotional space is bullying. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological, and is intended to cause fear, distress and/or harm to the victim[14]. Many studies have shown the link between bullying others at school and later violent, antisocial and/or criminal behaviour. For example, Olweus found that approximately 60 per cent of boys who regularly bullied others were convicted of a crime by the age of 24[15]. Students who are victims of bullying are also more likely to display a range of mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression[16]. Some studies have also found links between bullying and low academic achievement[17]. Ttofi and Farrington, in a meta-anaylsis of 44 bullying evaluations, found that overall, school-based, anti-bullying programs are effective. On average, bullying decreased by 20-23 per cent and victimisation decreased by 17-20 per cent in the programs evaluated[18]. The authors found in particular, that more intensive programs were more effective, as were programs including parent meetings, firm disciplinary methods, and improved playground supervision[19].

11 See, for example: Department of Education (2014) *The Safe Schools Hub. A*ccessed 19 August 2014: http://safeschoolshub.edu.au/

12 World Health Organization (2004.) *The physical school environment: An essential component of a health promoting school.* Accessed 18 August 2014: http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/physical_sch_environment.pdf

13 See, for example: Department of Education and Training (2008) *Asbestos Management Plan.* NSW Department of Education and Training: Sydney

14 Ttofi, M. and Farrington, D. (2010) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology.* 7(1)

15 Olweus, D. (1993) *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do.* Blackwell: Oxford

16 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

17 Glew, G., Fan, Y., Katon, W., Rivara, F., Kernic, M. (2005) Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.* 159

18 Ttofi, M. and Farrington, D. (2010) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology.* 7(1)

19 Ttofi, M. and Farrington, D. (2010) Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology.* 7(1)

Health is also acknowledged as an important aspect of wellbeing. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that childhood and adolescence is a critical time for the development of health behaviours and patterns that develop during school years often continue into adulthood[20]. WHO, recognising the importance of schools and health, initiated the Health Promoting Schools strategy in 1995, which is a whole school approach designed to improve the health of students, school personnel, families and other members of the community through schools. The initiative has been adopted in countries and regions across the world, including Europe, Australia, Asia-Pacific and South Africa[21].

Schools can have direct and indirect impact on students' health – both their physical and mental health. This includes levels of physical activity, eating habits, substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol and drugs), sexual practices and individual health needs (e.g. allergies). For example, since 1985 the proportion of Australian children who are overweight has doubled and the prevalence of obesity has trebled[22]. This could be addressed to some extent in schools through physical education programs and a healthy food canteen[23]. It is also known that allergies are on the rise and that many more students are now at risk from anaphylaxis than in the past. Policies, procedures and training can be implemented at the school and broader departmental level to ensure the effective management of anaphylaxis in schools and other specific health needs of students. For example, in NSW the Department for Education and Communities has an anaphylaxis procedures for schools policy in place[24].

Connectedness

School connectedness can mean school belonging, school attachment, school bonding, school climate, school connection, school engagement, and teacher support. More broadly, definitions of school connectedness can also include members of the extended school community (e.g. community leaders, grandparents) and how these individuals interact with primary caregivers, teachers, and students to affect education[25]. Within the school environment, connectedness is realised and promoted in the quality of the relationships between students and their teachers, between students and the school, between students and other students, and between schools and the local community, including parents.

A sense of belonging to the school environment is an established protective factor for child and adolescent health, education, and social wellbeing[26]. However, students do not always feel this sense of connectedness. For example, an Australian longitudinal study of adolescents showed that 40 per cent of the students reported that they did not believe they had anyone in or outside school who they perceived knew them well or who they could trust[27]. Particular groups of students may also be more vulnerable to experiencing low levels of connectedness, including those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, students with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students[28]. Students with low connectedness are two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared to more connected peers[29].

20   World Health Organization (2004.) *The physical school environment: An essential component of a health promoting school.* Accessed 18 August 2014: http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/physical_sch_environment.pdf

21   Stewart-Brown, S. (2006) *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* WHO Regional Office for Europe: Copenhagen

22   Hardy, L. (2010) *Schools physical activity and nutrition survey: Executive summary.* University of Sydney: Sydney

23   See, for example: NSW Department of Health and NSW Department of Education and Training (2004) *Fresh tastes @ school: NSW healthy school canteen strategy.* NSW Department of Health and NSW Department of Education and Training

24   See, for example: Department of Education and Communities (2012) *Anaphylaxis: Procedures for schools.* NSW Department of Education and Communities: Sydney

25   Sulkowski, M., Demaray, M. and Lazzarus, P. (2012) Connecting students to school to support their emotional wellbeing and academic success. *NASP Communique.* 40(7)

26   Rowe, F. and Stewart, D. (2009) *Promoting School Connectedness: Using a Whole-School Approach.* Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany

27   Cited in, Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

28   Sulkowski, M., Demaray, M. and Lazzarus, P. (2012) Connecting students to school to support their emotional wellbeing and academic success. *NASP Communique.* 40(7)

29   Glover, S., Burns, J., Butler, H., and Patton, G. (1998) School environments and the emotional wellbeing of young people. *Family Matters. 49*

Better school connectedness is also linked to increased engagement at school, higher levels of academic achievement, school completion, reductions in anti-social or disruptive behaviours, and lower rates of health-risk behaviour[30]. For example, Osterman found that when students experience a sense of belonging and acceptance they are more likely to participate more at school, show more commitment to their school and schoolwork, and be more interested and engaged[31]. Marzano et al found that 'higher quality' teacher-student relationships led to 31 per cent fewer discipline and related problems than for those who had lower connectedness with their teachers[32]. It has also been found that positive peer relationships are important to establishing a sense of community and student wellbeing[33]; and that parental involvement in school is another aspect of connectedness that is associated with high levels of student wellbeing[34].

There are many strategies that can be used to improve school connectedness. McNeely et al examined the association between school connectedness and the school environment using data from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and hierarchical linear models. They found that positive classroom management climates, participation in extracurricular activities and tolerant disciplinary policies were associated positively with higher school connectedness[35]. Other strategies can include increasing the time, interest and support given to students by teachers, empowering students to have a voice, engaging community partners to provide a range of services at the school that students need, and developing a shared vision of high standards and behaviours for the school[36]. Involvement in extra-curricular activity and exposure to a challenging curriculum can also assist with connectedness[37].

Learning engagement

There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between engagement, wellbeing and outcomes. Engaged students do better and doing better increases engagement. As Professor Douglas Willms, a leading expert in student engagement describes this: engagement and learning go hand in hand[38]. Students can engage with school at social, institutional and intellectual levels. Social engagement is how a student is involved in the life of the school and can refer to a sense of belonging, positive relationships and participation in clubs and sports etc. Institutional engagement is how a student values school and strives to meet the formal requirements of schooling such as attendance, positive behaviour and homework, and intellectual engagement relates to emotional and psychological investment in schooling such as interest, effort and motivation[39].

A 2009 American study of 78,106 students in 160 schools across eight states found that a one-percentage point increase in a student's engagement was associated with a six-point increase in reading achievement and an eight-point increase in maths achievement scores[40]. Other studies of student engagement have shown that increased student engagement has a flow-on effect in regard to educational and occupational success many years into the future. For example, an Australian study which used data from the Childhood Determinants of Adult Health study and a school engagement index, found that each unit of school engagement was independently associated with a ten per cent higher chance of achieving a post-compulsory school education at some point during the next 20 years, including as a mature age student. This was true over and above the influence of family background and personality[41].

30 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

31 Osterman, K. (2000) Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research.* 70(3)

32 Marzano, R., Marzano, J. and Pickering, D. (2003) *Classroom management that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA

33 Zins, J. Weissberg, R., Wang, M. and Walberg, H. (eds) (2004) *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* Teachers College Press: New York

34 Suldo, S., Shaffer, E. and Riley, K. (2008) A social-cognitive-behavioural model of academic predictors of adolescents' life satisfaction. *School Psychology Quarterly.* 23(1)

35 Clea A, McNeely, J, Nonnemaker, R. Blum. (2002) Promoting School Connectedness: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Journal of School Health.* 72(4)

36 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) *School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:* Atlanta, GA

37 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

38 Ontario Ministry of Education (2011) Student engagement: A leadership priority – An interview with J. Douglas Willms. *In Conversation Summer 2011.* 111(2)

39 Willms, D. (2013) *Student engagement in New South Wales secondary schools: Findings from the Tell Them from Me pilot.* The Learning Bar

40 Gallup (2014) *State of America's Schools: The path to winning again in education.* Gallup Inc: Washington DC

41 Abbott-Chapman, J., Martin, K., Ollington, N., Venn, A., Dwyer, T., and Gall, S. (2014) The longitudinal association of childhood school engagement with adult educational and occupational achievement: findings from an Australian national study. *British Educational Research Journal.* 40(1)

Students become disengaged from education for many reasons, including the learning environment not meeting their needs, homelessness, family breakdown, poverty, mental health problems, low self-esteem, previous poor educational experiences, low educational achievement and challenging behaviours[42]. Ways of ensuring students stay engaged and/or become re-engaged with learning are varied but may include differentiated learning, quality instruction and 'positive education'.

Differentiated learning can refer to differentiated learning for all students within schools (from gifted and talented, to those with English as a second language, to those with a learning disability) or intensive programs for just some students who may require specialised and individually tailored support in order to re-engage with learning. Goddard and Goddard state that well implemented differentiated learning should involve: adjusting teaching and learning activities in terms of both content and complexity; pacing the provision of appropriate resources; development of appropriate support levels; and scaffolding to meet students' differential readiness to learn[43]. Quality instruction may mean student participation in design, delivery and review of the program and/or active participation in parts of their education, from consultation to decision-making. Personalised pathways or flexible learning opportunities may also need to be provided for some students to ensure opportunities that are relevant and meaningful and that lead to an increase in how school is valued, so that students do not become disengaged from education[44].

Positive education refers to activities that aim to increase wellbeing through the cultivation of positive feelings, thoughts and behaviours[45]. This is similar to a strengths-based approach which identifies and builds on an individual strength, and is consistent with differentiated learning and personalised pathways. When people work with their strengths, they tend to learn more readily, perform at a higher level, are more motivated and confident and have a stronger sense of satisfaction, mastery and competence[46]. Much of the interest in positive psychology in schools has stemmed from the work of Professor Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania who, among other things, developed a whole school positive education program for Geelong Grammar School in Victoria[47]. This was the first time anywhere in the world positive education interventions had been applied to a whole school. Waters reviewed evidence from 12 schools that had implemented positive psychology interventions focusing on gratitude, hope, serenity, resilience and character strengths, and found that these interventions were significantly related to student wellbeing, relationships and academic performance[48].

42 Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010) *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options: A policy direction for consultation.* State of Victoria: Melbourne

43 Goddard, Y. and Goddard, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in public elementary schools. *Teachers College Record Volume* 109 (4)

44 Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010) *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options: A policy direction for consultation.* State of Victoria: Melbourne

45 Sin, N. L. and Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology.* 65

46 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

47 Green, S. (2011) Positive education: Creating flourishing students, staff and schools. *InPsych* April 2011

48 Waters, L. (2011) A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist. 28(2)*

Social and emotional learning

Well-developed social and emotional skills are important elements of wellbeing. These are the skills that allow students to work cooperatively with others, manage emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively[49]. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is also the process through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL programs are based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging and meaningful[50]. Examples of SEL programs used in Australian schools include KidsMatter and MindMatters.

One of the main proponents of SEL has been a consortium of researchers and educators based in the US at the University of Illinois called the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL promotes the adoption of SEL in US schools. They also produce the *CASEL Guide*, which rates and identifies well-designed, evidence-based SEL programs and provides best-practice guidelines for schools on how to select and implement SEL programs[51]. CASEL has identified five basic categories of social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making[52].

Various SEL studies and evaluations have shown that students who experience opportunities for social and emotional learning participate more in class, demonstrate more pro-social behaviour, have fewer absences, have improved attendance, show reductions in aggression and disruptive behaviour and are more likely to complete school[53]. In 2011, Durlak et al conducted a meta-analysis of 213 studies of SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students in the US. They found that compared to control participants, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement[54].

Whole school approach

Wellbeing itself is a holistic concept and efforts to promote student wellbeing demand a whole-school rather than a siloed approach. This means a focus on the protective factors that schools can provide as well as the skills, knowledge and understanding schools can teach to enhance student wellbeing. It entails an integrated, comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach which links curriculum with the school ethos/environment and the community[55]. Fraillon states that student wellbeing cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader school context and that school communities not only provide the defining context, they also have the potential to significantly influence wellbeing. He defines school communities in terms of belonging, participation and influence, values and commonality[56].

49 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

50 CASEL (2013) *What is social and emotional learning?* Accessed 14 August 2014: http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning

51 CASEL (2013) *CASEL Guide.* Accessed 21 August 2014: http://www.casel.org/guide

52 CASEL (2013) *What is social and emotional learning?* Accessed 14 August 2014: http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning

53 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

54 Durlak, J., Weissberg, P., Dymnicki, A. and Schellinger, K. (2011) The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development.* 82(1)

55 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

56 Fraillon, J. (2004) *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion paper.* Commissioned by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services as an agent of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

The DEEWR study, as part of its research, invited all Australian jurisdictions to complete a questionnaire asking their views of student wellbeing. Respondents to this questionnaire highlighted the importance of a whole-school focus to strengthen the links between student wellbeing and learning outcomes. Respondents agreed that any effective school wellbeing framework needs to encourage schools and educators to change their traditional emphasis on welfare, student deficits, targeted populations and specific programs, to a focus on universal student wellbeing and an emphasis on whole school change[57].

Critical elements to supporting wellbeing at the school level are: strong school leadership which emphasises and promotes the importance of wellbeing at the school and within the broader school community; and a culture of high expectations for all students with teachers who emphasise continuously improving[58]. In other words, wellbeing must be integrated into the school learning environment, the curriculum and pedagogy, the policies and procedures at schools, and the partnerships inherent within and outside schools including teachers, students, parents, support staff and community groups[59].

Conclusion

Wellbeing is a complex issue which can be difficult to define, particularly in an education setting. Nonetheless, both research and education practice have recognised the significance of student wellbeing and the interdependent and reciprocal relationship between learning and wellbeing. There are a number of elements that affect wellbeing, which this paper has grouped into: safe environment; connectedness; learning engagement; social and emotional learning and whole school approaches. In Australia, all jurisdictions have a commitment to, and policies regarding, student wellbeing in schools which centre around the importance of the whole school approach and the interdependence between learning and wellbeing.

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57 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

58 Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

59 Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (2012) *Learning and wellbeing framework.* Queensland Government; South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services (2007) *DECS learner wellbeing framework for birth to year 12.* Government of South Australia

Student wellbeing and government policy

Commonwealth policy

In 2008, DEEWR commissioned a study into student wellbeing in Australia[60]. The Commonwealth Department of Education's website supports the vital role schools play in promoting the social and emotional development and wellbeing of young Australians[61]. This support presumably follows on from the *MCEETYA Four Year Plan 2009-2012*, arising out of the Melbourne Declaration, which states that Australian governments will assist to:

> ensure a nurturing, positive school culture and learning environment that promotes student mental health and wellbeing and assists young people to develop resilience when managing challenge and change[62].

The Department of Education states it is improving student wellbeing by:

- Helping students develop capabilities which promote health and wellbeing and lead to success in life (e.g. Australian Curriculum)

- Ensuring the school and home learning environments are supported (e.g. safe & supportive schools)

- Strengthening engagement with parents and the wider community (e.g. parent engagement)[63].

The main policy relating to student wellbeing at the Commonwealth level is the *National Safe Schools Framework*. The Framework provides school communities with a vision, a set of guiding principles and the practical tools and resources to help build a positive school culture. There are nine elements to the *National Safe Schools Framework*:

- Leadership commitment to a safe school

- A supportive and connected school community

- Policies and procedures

- Positive behaviour management

- Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum

- A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership

- Early intervention and targeted support

- Partnerships with families and communities[64].

In addition to the overarching safe schools policy, the Commonwealth also has resources and policies made available through its website and in hard copy, on the Safe Schools Coalition - the first national program funded by government with the aim of creating safe and supportive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse people; and bullying, including cyberbullying[65].

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60 See, Australian Catholic University and Erebus International (2008) *Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review.* Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: Canberra

61 Department of Education (2014) *Student resilience and wellbeing.* Accessed 13 August 2014: https://education.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing

62 MCEETYA (2009) *MCEETYA Four Year Plan 2009-2012.* A companion document for the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, p.11

63 Department of Education (2014) *Student resilience and wellbeing.* Accessed 14 August 2014: http://education.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing

64 Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (2013) *National Safe Schools Framework.* Accessed 14 August 2014: http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/documents/nationalsafeschoolsframework.pdf

65 See, Department of Education (2014) *Student resilience and wellbeing.* Accessed 20 August 2014: http://education.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing

State policies

All states in Australia have a commitment towards whole school approaches to student wellbeing, incorporating the elements discussed earlier in this literature review. However, the degree of implementation and nuances of each policy differ to some extent between jurisdictions.

New South Wales

NSW released Wellbeing for Schools, a strengths-based approach, in May 2015. Based around the concepts of Connect, Succeed, Thrive, it includes a Wellbeing Framework, the provision of student engagement and wellbeing surveys, additional funding for more school counsellors, resources to support students and a new Behaviour Code for Students. It also links to the NSW DEC School Excellence Framework[66].

Victoria

In 2010, Victoria undertook an audit into the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services in the state. The audit concluded that while student wellbeing was improving, there were some gaps in the way student wellbeing programs were delivered, namely: the lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date overarching policy framework for student wellbeing; and inadequate measurement of the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services[67].

Since then, Victoria has produced a document named *Principles for health and wellbeing: Underpinning effective professional practice across DEECD services*. This document supports training, joint planning, priority setting, service improvement, innovation and the development of common practices between services in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The main principles for health and wellbeing in this document are:

- Maximise access and inclusion
- Focus on outcomes
- Evidence-informed and reflective practice
- Holistic approach
- Person-centred and family sensitive practice
- Partnerships with families and communities
- Cultural competence
- Commitment to excellence[68].

Victoria also produces Student Engagement and Inclusion Guidance information which, among other advice, requires each school in Victoria to have a student engagement policy. The student engagement policy needs to articulate the expectations and aspirations of the school community in relation to student engagement, including strategies to address bullying, school attendance and behaviour. It also needs to incorporate a range of universal (school-wide), targeted (population-specific) and individual (student-specific) strategies needed to positively engage students in learning and engage them in the school community[69].

Individual wellbeing strategies, programs and advice that are suggested for schools on the Victorian DEECD website include: Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support[70], restorative practice[71], National Safe Schools Framework and the Healthy Together Achievement Program[72].

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66   Department of Education and Communities (2015) *Wellbeing for Schools.* Accessed 20 May 2015: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing

67   Victorian Auditor-General (2010) *Audit summary of the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services.* Tabled in Parliament 3 February 2010

68   Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2014) *Principles for health and wellbeing: Underpinning effective professional practice across DEECD services.* State of Victoria: Melbourne

69   Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2014) *Student engagement and inclusion guidance.* Accessed 20 August 2014: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/participation/Pages/studentengagementguidance.aspx

70   Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) is a whole-school framework which helps schools to create positive learning environments. This is achieved by developing proactive systems to define, teach, and support appropriate student behaviours. SWPBS was developed by leading educational experts in the United States where it is used in more than 18,000 schools. It is also used in Canada, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, with Finland commencing a SWPBS trial in 2013.

71   Restorative practice is a strategy that seeks to repair relationships that have been damaged, including those damaged through bullying. It does this by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the offender and forgiveness by the victim.

72   Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2014) *Whole school engagement strategy and support.* Accessed 15 August 2014: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/participation/Pages/wholeschoolengage.aspx

Queensland

Queensland has a student wellbeing framework for use in all state schools. This framework is called the *Learning and Wellbeing Framework* and was developed in 2012[73]. The main tenets of the framework are to:

- acknowledge the importance of wellbeing to the learning process
- develop a rich school culture and positive ethos that creates a sense of belonging and self-responsibility, leading to positive behaviour, improved student attendance and achievement
- embed personal and social capabilities within the general curriculum
- improve educational outcomes for all students.

The framework also acknowledges the importance of a whole-school approach which covers incorporating wellbeing practice into four domains: the learning environment, curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures and partnerships[74].

Individual wellbeing strategies, programs and advice that are suggested for schools by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment include: Health Promoting Schools initiatives, the National Safe Schools Framework and Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support[75].

South Australia

South Australia has been a leader in embedding student wellbeing into the public education system. As early as 2007, South Australia had developed a student wellbeing framework called the *DEC Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12*. This framework recognises the wellbeing for learning connection: that wellbeing is central to learning and learning is central to wellbeing. It also acknowledges that the relationship between learning and wellbeing is interdependent and reciprocal. Like Queensland's student wellbeing framework, South Australia's framework acknowledges the importance of a whole-school approach and incorporating student wellbeing practice within the school learning environment, curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures and partnerships.The framework recognises that positive relationships are paramount; a whole of site approach to inquiry and improvement in education is the most effective; a holistic approach to wellbeing ensures maximum benefit for individual learners; an educator's wellbeing impacts on their ability to influence learner wellbeing; and everything educators do has the potential to influence wellbeing[76].

More recently, South Australia also released a progress document on building a 'state of wellbeing' in South Australia. This document arose out of a residency provided to Professor Martin Seligman by the South Australian government in 2012-2013. The progress document includes comprehensive information on positive psychology and its application to resilience and wellbeing across a whole school community. In particular, it provides information on the application of positive psychology strategies within various case study schools in South Australia[77].

Western Australia

Western Australia does not have a publicly available student wellbeing framework, although resources relating to wellbeing are found on its Department of Education website. These resources support whole-school approaches to health and wellbeing. In particular, acknowledgement is made of the importance of social and emotional development, and the Health Promoting Schools initiative in promoting student wellbeing at school[78].

73   Department of Education, Training and Employment (2012) *Learning and Wellbeing Framework.* Queensland Government

74   Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (n.d.) *Learning and Wellbeing Framework.* Accessed 15 August 2014: http://deta.qld.gov.au/initiatives/learningandwellbeing/

75   Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (n.d.) *Learning and Wellbeing Framework.* Accessed 15 August 2014: http://deta.qld.gov.au/initiatives/learningandwellbeing/

76   South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services (2007) *DEC Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12.* Government of South Australia

77   Seligman, M. (2013) *Building the state of wellbeing: A strategy for South Australia. A summary of progress.* Government of South Australia

78   Western Australia Department of Education (n.d.) *Behaviour and wellbeing: Whole school approaches.* Accessed 15 August 2014: http://det. wa.edu.au/studentsupport/behaviourandwellbeing/detcms/navigation/wellbeing/whole-school-approaches/?page=2#toc2

Tasmania

Tasmania has a *Learner Wellbeing and Behaviour Policy* written in 2012. The policy applies to all staff who provide and support learning in early learning settings, schools and colleges. The policy supports a whole-school approach that is cohesive, collective and collaborative. Schools are required to include information about their student wellbeing and behaviour support policies within their School Improvement Plans[79].

Tasmania also has a health and wellbeing curriculum for years K-10. Within this syllabus, five dimensions of wellbeing are identified: physical health, social health, emotional health, mental health and spiritual health. The curriculum focuses on developing health and wellbeing skills, knowledge and understanding across three strands: understanding health and wellbeing; concepts and skills for movement and physical activity; and skills for personal and social development[80].

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Department of Education supports the Health Promoting Schools initiative in regard to student wellbeing. Health Promoting Schools NT assists Northern Territory schools to apply the principles of Health Promoting Schools through professional learning opportunities and policy development in the following areas: health (nutrition and sexuality) education; physical education; drug education; and school sport coordinators[81].

Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) curriculum framework acknowledges the needs of the whole child and the importance of student wellbeing in education. The specific focus of student wellbeing in the ACT is on supporting students to take positive action and responsibility for their physical, social, emotional, moral and spiritual health. The Student Wellbeing team at the ACT Education and Training Directorate provides curriculum support, professional learning and manages the following programs: drug education; physical education; and road safety programs[82].

Table 1 provides a summary of student wellbeing policies in Australia.

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79 Tasmania Department of Education (2012) *Learner wellbeing and behaviour policy.* Tasmania Department of Education

80 Tasmanian Department of Education (n.d.) *The Tasmanian Curriculum: health and wellbeing.* Tasmanian Government

81 Northern Territory Department of Education (2013*) Physical health and wellbeing.* Accessed 21 August 2014: http://www.education.nt.gov.au/

82 ACT Education and Training Directorate (2014) *Student wellbeing.* Accessed 21 August 2014: http://www.det.act.gov.au/ teaching_and_learning/curriculum_programs/student_wellbeing

Table 1: Commonwealth and state policies on student wellbeing*

Policy papers	Year	Department	Website and comments
Commonwealth			
National Safe Schools Framework	2013	Department of Education	http://safeschoolshub.edu.au/
Scoping study into approaches to student wellbeing: Literature review	2008	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	
New South Wales			
Wellbeing for Schools	2015	Department of Education and Communities	https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/wellbeing NSW launched Wellbeing for Schools, a strengths-based approach which includes a wellbeing framework, in May 2015.
Victoria			
Principles for health and wellbeing: Underpinning effective professional practices across DEECD services	2014	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/default.aspx
Audit summary of the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services	2010	Victorian Auditor-General	
Queensland			
Learning and wellbeing framework	2012	Department of Education, Training and Employment	http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/
South Australia			
Building the state of wellbeing: A strategy for South Australia	2013	Department of Premier and Cabinet	http://stateofwellbeing.com/about/ Includes chapters on education and positive education in SA
DECS learner wellbeing framework for birth to year 12	2007	Department of Education and Children's Services	http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/learnerwellbeing/pages/wellbeing/
Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion paper	2004	Department of Education and Children's Services/ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs	This paper focused on student wellbeing Australia-wide issues, not just in South Australia
Western Australia			
		Department of Education	http://det.wa.edu.au/studentsupport/behaviourandwellbeing/detcms/portal/ WA does not have a framework on student wellbeing per se, but there are resources on the Department of Education website regarding student behaviour and wellbeing
Tasmania			
Learner wellbeing and behaviour policy	2012	Department of Education	http://www.education.tas.gov.au/Students/schools-colleges/Pages/Health-and-Wellbeing.aspx
The Tasmanian Curriculum: Health and wellbeing. K-10 syllabus and support materials		Department of Education	
Northern Territory			
		Department of Education	http://www.education.nt.gov.au/students/support-assistance/safety-wellbeing NT does not have a framework on student wellbeing per se, but it follows the WHO Health Promoting Schools initiative in regard to student wellbeing. Resources are available on the Department of Education's website
Australian Capital Territory			
		Education and Training Directorate	http://www.det.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/curriculum_programs/student_wellbeing ACT does not have a framework on student wellbeing per se, but there are resources on the Education and Training Directorate's website regarding student wellbeing

*Note, this table only includes wellbeing policies per se, not policies that make up elements of wellbeing, such as anti-bullying policies