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4. A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO ADOLESCENT WELLBEING IN OPEN-PLAN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we report on the attempts of one Bendigo Education Plan (BEP) school to respond to identified wellbeing issues by developing a whole-school approach to foster the wellbeing needs of their Years 7–10 students. The school has a cohort of students from lower than average socio-economic backgrounds. Research points to the necessity of a multi-layered approach to building a positive school culture to improve student wellbeing. We agree that a whole-school coordinated approach is needed to foster the connectedness and relationships that are foundational to improved learning outcomes. However, the literature is generally speculative about the practical ways of achieving this and reticent about ways of tracking the effects on students of wellbeing measures taken. Quantitative data drawn from our multi-dimensional model of learning and wellbeing in open-plan settings (Prain et al., 2014) and qualitative data from student and teacher interviews are used in this chapter to track the effects of measures taken to improve wellbeing in our case study schools. The chapter highlights the challenges of setting up structures, processes, and curriculum content that work in an integrated way to enhance student wellbeing. In discussing one whole-school approach to meeting these challenges, we recognise that no one way of addressing issues of wellbeing is paramount because wellbeing is culturally specific and impacted by individual capacity.

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF WELLBEING AND SCHOOLING

The Role of Schools in Promoting Wellbeing

The powerful role middle schools can play in nurturing safe and supportive relationships for young people is widely recognised among educational researchers who have found a significant link between positive student wellbeing and improved learning (Seligman, Ernst, Gilham, Reichvich, & Linkins, 2009; Fredrickson, 1998; Bolte, Goschke, & Kuhl, 2003; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Rowe, Hirsch, Anderson, & Smith, 2007; Isen, Rosenzweig, & Young, 1991; Kuhl, 1983, 2000). These research findings increase the imperative on schools to develop integrated policies and practices that assist adolescents to negotiate a complex real and virtual world in which easy access to fast food, drugs, bullying, violence, and pornography

V. Prain et al. (Eds.), Personalising Learning in Open-Plan Schools, 57–76.

present daily challenges to their physical and mental health at a time when their self-identity is still being formed. Adolescents from low socio-economic backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to these challenges that are associated with low levels of social capital and community cohesion. A perception of connectedness or belonging to a school community has been associated positively with engagement, academic success, and completion rates of secondary schooling (Bond et al., 2007) as well as the development of a positive adult sense of self (Youngblade et al., 2007). Researchers also recognise that to nurture school connectedness, schools must consider themselves as an integral part of broader communities. The quality of the connections among the multiple groups that contribute to a school community, such as students, teachers, families, professionals from community agencies, and other involved local groups and individuals, reflects the degree of social capital in the school environment. Kawachi and Berkman, (2000), Putnam, (1993) and Wilkinson (1996) define social capital as cohesiveness characterised by strong social bonds, high levels of trust and reciprocity. An accumulation of social capital leads to the promotion of democratic systems to manage conflict, and associations to bridge social divisions, thus reducing social conflict and bullying (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000).

Threats to Student Wellbeing

It is acknowledged that attending school on a regular basis underpins academic, social, and language development, lessening the likelihood of dropping out of school, or future criminal activity, and increasing the likelihood of future financial independence through employment (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013). An indication of an absence of wellbeing is reflected in chronic absenteeism. Policies and practices that encourage attendance by promoting connectedness are important in reaching out to school-avoiding and school-refusing students. Addressing this issue is complex because the reasons for non-attendance are complex. They may originate from the child, the family, the school environment, or a combination, such as an underlying medical condition, separation anxiety, feelings of lack of safety at school because of unsatisfactory social relationships, trouble with teachers, peer rejection or bullying, or feelings of inadequacy because of lack of academic progress.

The highly visible nature of the open-plan settings that form the context for our study has the potential to exacerbate problems of exclusion and cyber-bullying. Girls appear to be more active on social media than boys and more covert in relational aggression. They appear to report more cyber-bullying than boys (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009; Walgrave & Wannes, 2011) with greater perceived negative effects on their wellbeing in terms of reputation, ability to concentrate, ability to make friends and suicidal thoughts. Cassidy, Jackson, and Browne (2009) suggest that a trajectory of relational aggression can be changed to one of relational support and mutual care by embedding a school culture that builds strong, caring relationships in an environment that is attentive to the voices of students.

The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Wellbeing

Understandings of wellbeing incorporate various notions of happiness, life satisfaction, flourishing, a balanced or meaningful life, reaching one's true potential, freedom and choice, resilience, emotional literacy, engagement, a positive sense of self, and the active pursuit of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health (Australian Catholic University (ACU) and Erebus International, 2008; Coleman, 2009). The complex nature of wellbeing is theorised by Allardt (1976, 1981, 1989) as being a state in which it is possible for a person to satisfy his or her material and non-material needs. Drawing on Allardt (1989) and Konu and Rimpelä (2002) these needs fall into three categories with objective and subjective indicators: 'having' (material and interpersonal needs, indicated objectively by the level of living and environmental conditions and subjectively by the degree of satisfaction with one's living conditions); 'being' (personal growth needs indicated objectively by people's relation to society and nature and subjectively by their personal experience of alienation or connectedness); and 'loving' (the need to relate to others and develop social identities indicated objectively by relationships with others and subjectively by their feelings of happiness or unhappiness with social relations).

BENDIGO EDUCATION PLAN CONTEXT

According to the Index of Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)[1], three of the four Bendigo Education Plan Year 7–10 colleges are below the Victorian state average. Community health and welfare statistics paint a picture of significant and entrenched adolescent health and wellbeing problems in a context of poverty and disadvantage. Experiences of bullying, rates of psychological distress, teenage pregnancies, and incidents of self-harm are all higher than the state average, while feelings of positive psychological wellbeing are lower than the state average (Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership, 2012, p.99). However, this depressing picture represents only one side of the story. The BEP steering committee, which was set up in 2005 to guide the rebuilding of Bendigo schools, recognised that Bendigo students are also highly resilient with strong community networks, and support from passionate and committed parents, teachers, and community members who work hard to increase their life chances (BEP Steering Committee, 2005; Prain et al., 2014). Our survey data over three years from 2011–2013 revealed that students in the BEP schools have high levels of self-efficacy and self-control, suggesting that students have a positive sense of their own ability to cope with school tasks (Prain et al., 2014). Self-efficacy and social competence were identified by Rutter (1990, p. 311) as "robust predictors of resilience".

Prior to the establishment of the BEP, a survey of 421 Year 10 students revealed that 25% left school without good memories (BEP Steering Committee, 2005). Attitudes to School Survey data from 2004 and 2005 were consistent with these findings.[2] The lower the academic achievement, the lower the level of satisfaction with school,

and the more frequently students represented the school negatively. Criticisms of disengaging pedgagogy, lack of challenge, and lack of subject choice were matched by requests for breadth, choice, and good teaching in an 'adult environment'.

The Bendigo Education Plan aimed to improve both the academic performance and wellbeing of Bendigo Years 7–10 students. The first step to achieving this aim was the rebuilding of four Years 7–10 schools between 2008 and 2012 (see Prain et al., 2014). All schools had an open, flexible design incorporating spaces that dissolved the boundaries between formal and informal education (Reh, Rabenstein, & Fritzsche, 2011), provided more freedom and independence for personalised learning experiences (McGregor, 2004a, 2004b), and offered an attractive setting for larger learning communities, team-teaching and multi-age groupings.

To counter possible negative effects on student wellbeing of large open-plan settings on some students, each school was structured into four learning communities, comprising two learning neighbourhoods of 150–300 students. These neighbourhoods were further divided into teacher advisor groupings of 25 students with the aim of providing a core groups of peers and teacher with whom all students could develop ongoing stable and close relationships. The learning communities were differently structured according to local school preferences. At Ironbark College for example, each learning community was vertically structured (comprising Years 7–10 students) and divided into junior (Years 7 and 8) and senior (Years 9 and 10) neighbourhoods.

TRACKING STUDENT WELLBEING IN BEP SCHOOLS

Our research aimed to understand student perceptions of learning in these new open-plan settings and their impact on wellbeing. To this end, we surveyed approximately 3000 students across all year levels (Years 7–10) in the four BEP schools each year from 2011 to 2013 using our Personalised Learning Experience Questionnaire (PLEQ) (Prain et al., 2014). The schools' annual Attitudes to School Survey data were also examined for the years 2010 to 2013. We aimed to gain insight into the factors influencing wellbeing in these open-plan settings, and to understand how students and teachers perceive wellbeing in these settings. As a further dimension, our research also explored perceptions of student wellbeing through student interviews undertaken in all of the BEP schools.

Attitudes to School Survey

In Victoria, all students' opinions on their schools are gathered on an annual basis through the "Attitudes to School Survey" (DEECD, 2014). The survey consists of 11 scales covering wellbeing (student morale and student distress), learning and teaching (teacher effectiveness, teacher empathy, stimulating learning, school connectedness, students motivation and confidence), and student relationships (connectedness to peers, classroom behaviour and student safety.

Table 4.1 includes data from the Attitudes to School survey for the Year 7 student cohort in 2010 and again when they were in Year 10 in 2013. Most of students in this cohort had experienced at least three of their four years in the new open-plan settings. Grevillea and Whirrakee were the last to complete their building program and as a result, their data includes a small cohort that did not relocate to the open-plan settings until mid 2011. The values in the table are the difference between the average cohort score and the state average. The arrows indicate where the differences were above (↑), below (↓) or within 0.1 (→) of the expected values based on state-wide data.

Table 4.1. Student relationships and wellbeing for cohort who commenced year 7 in 2010 and completed year 10 in 2013 in all BEP schools (the values are the difference between the average cohort score and the state averages)

School	*Year 7 in 2010*		*Year 10 in 2013*	
	Student relationships	*Wellbeing*	*Student relationships*	*Wellbeing*
Ironbark	–0.18	–0.29	–0.16→	–0.05↑
Whirrakee	0.01	–0.29	0.15↑	0.40↑
Grevillea	–0.23	–0.24	–0.49↓	–0.74↓
Melaleuca	–0.30	–0.36	–0.26→	–0.27→

Table 4.1 indicates that students in all schools, except Grevillea College, showed at least some improvement, albeit minor in the case of Melaleuca and Ironbark, in perceptions of student relationships. Similarly the students' ratings of their own wellbeing improved in all schools except Grevillea compared to the state average.

THE PERSONALISED LEARNING EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (PLEQ)

We developed a model based on our PLEQ survey that identified relationships among factors that indicated the perceived quality of the learning experience in the open-plan settings including factors that indicated student wellbeing: peer relationships (loving), self-report of disruptive behaviour (being), individualisation in tailoring learning tasks to students' interests and abilities (having), and opportunities for personal and social development (having) (Prain et al., 2014). Our model reflected the complexity of the environment and the relationship between key factors in the environment and wellbeing. Some factors in our model overlap with those in Konu and Rimpelä's (2002) model that drew on Allardt's theory of welfare although the context in which our model was tested was very different. Our multi-dimensional model revealed that the learning environment (including teacher support) and self-efficacy were positively associated with wellbeing. The results of the PLEQ from 2011–2013 suggest that there is a complex interplay of factors influencing school wellbeing and that changing only one or two factors will not necessarily

provide a direct effect on wellbeing. As in the Attitudes to School Survey, there was no significant change in student wellbeing in our case study schools over the survey period. However, age-based differences were found in the PLEQ results, with a decline in wellbeing from Year 7 to Year 8 followed by a gradual increase to approximate Year 7 scores by Year 10 (see Prain et al., 2014).

The results of the PLEQ survey also revealed significant gender differences. Scores from aggregating the four wellbeing scales (i.e., peer relations, self-report of disruptive behaviour, individualisation, and opportunities for personal and social development) in the PLEQ revealed a slight improvement in wellbeing for male students and a slight decrease in wellbeing for female students from 2011 to 2013. However, the wellbeing scores were slightly higher across all the survey years for female students than those for the males (Prain et al., 2014). When each of the wellbeing scales was examined, female students had significantly lower self-reporting of disruptive behaviour, and higher perceptions of opportunities for personal and social development, while males reported significantly more positive perceptions of peer relations. These results support Quenzel and Hurrelmann's (2013) argument that adolescent males are more likely to have more friends and spend more of their free time with them than females who are more socialised towards academic success. Though difficult to isolate from other factors, the physical environment may contribute to perceptions of wellbeing, particularly among male students. At Ironbark College, our survey analyses revealed a significant increase in perceptions of teacher support and peer relations for males in the new open-plan settings. However, there was a slight decrease in perceptions of teacher support and peer relations for females. These outcomes suggest that males are perhaps more responsive to changed school environments than are females and that it cannot be assumed that all changes will affect all students in the same way.

The multi-dimensional nature of the PLEQ may need to be further refined to account for the complexity of the interplay between factors impacting on student wellbeing. In a review of the literature regarding the measuring of wellbeing in a schooling context, Fraillon (2004) identified 12 aspects of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of wellbeing that should be included in such an instrument. The PLEQ was necessarily limited in its size, both to ensure students could complete the survey, and to incorporate perceptions of students' learning.

STUDENT INTERVIEWS

We conducted 61 interviews with Years 7 and 10 students in the BEP schools. Our questions sought their opinions of the open-plan setting, the quality of their relationships and learning, and their sense of wellbeing at school. Most students reported that they liked the open-plan learning spaces mainly because of the greater sense of freedom of movement they create, but also because of the potential for improved relationships. They appreciated the opportunities the space provides to

mix with a larger range of students and learn from a variety of teachers who have different skills and teaching styles:

> You are not with the same people all the time. You meet more students and when you have one teacher they are good at one thing and not at another thing. (Year 7 boy)

However, favourite spaces at school, linked to informal times of the school day, were generally intimate outside spaces where students socialised in their own 'territory' with a few friends. Cross-community friendships were common by Year 10.

Most students reported positive feelings of wellbeing in the open-plan learning environments. Common adjectives to describe Year 7 feelings included "happy", "relaxed", "good" and "safe", concentrating on the physical environment, while the more complex responses of Year 10 students suggested their feelings were closely linked to relationships with peers and teachers "relaxed", "calm", "belonging", "grateful", "respected", and "challenged". This sense of safety was also apparent in data from the Attitudes to School Survey. Students commented that the teachers spoke more quietly and tended to raise their voices far less than they had in the traditional classrooms, something that the students agreed created a much better social environment.

At Ironbark College organising the school into Years 7–10 learning communities had a positive effect on student wellbeing. This sense of belonging and connectedness to a community afforded students more consistency in their relationships because they stayed in the same learning community with the same teachers for four years:

> I think it's really good because you can connect and bond with the same people throughout your whole school life. It's good that we have the same teacher so you get more confident to talk to them about anything that's happening in school and with other classmates as well. (Year 8 girl)

Some students also identified the value of having older students and even siblings in the same learning community:

> Its good having older kids in there as well to try and help you out, its good having older kids and younger kids, its good having a bit of a range…my brother was in the same community as me [when I came in Year 7] so he was in the class next door which was completely open so he could help me. It was good. (Year 10 girl)

The visibility of the spaces seems to have lessened overt bullying so that most students feel safe and happy at school, confirmed by interviews with the principals and teachers. The presence of TA groups (see Chapter 10) gives students a sense of belonging. TA groups were established to mitigate the possible alienating effects of larger communities and open learning environments by the personal connections students could establish in these groups of 25 students.

> I could probably name every single person. I'm always friendly to people and smile, so I guess I know them quite well. (Year 10 girl)

Though friendship groups were much smaller (5–10), all Year 7 and Year 10 students felt they knew the students in their TA well, and reflecting their longer time at school, Year 10s had a much broader acquaintance with others in their community:

> I know a lot of people but they have their own friends. My friends have grown quite a bit over the years. We wind each other up and have fun. (Year 10 girl)

While both Year 7s and Year 10s suggested that new students need to work at making friends in order to fit in, Year 10s' stronger sense of identity was reflected in advice to new students to "be yourself".

Positive effects of new learning environments on relationships with teachers were evident in Year 10 advice to students. They warned of the consequences of "dumbing yourself down" on academic grades, showing off as "giving the wrong impression" and "being scared of the teachers" as missing an opportunity for assistance. The strong advice to "ask teachers" suggested a confidence in teacher/student relationships:

> We have a lot of fantastic teachers here who would do anything for students. A lot of people write them off and don't get to know them. Teachers are willing to do a lot for you. (Year 10 boy)

The biggest differences students noticed in the new learning environments were the improved teacher/student relationships (Year 7, 12 comments, Year 10, 12 comments):

> If you're having a few social issues, like you've got things going on at home, I've noticed they're nicer to you. They're easier on you and they ask you how you are going all the time. They really do care. (Year 7 girl)

Year 10 students were more aware than Year 7 students of the physical effect of the learning environment on teacher/student relationships:

> I think they can be more free such as us being more free. They feel they can interact better with the kids…you can actually have a chat with them about what they're doing at the weekend. The buildings have changed the people—it's good. (Year 10 boy)

Good relationships with teachers were particularly important for Year 7 students (11 of 33) whose advice to teachers included "to listen", to be "kind and helpful", to "give everyone a fair go" and importantly to "try and stay happy even if you're not feeling that way so kids don't think it's their fault". Year 10s were more likely to value a teacher who had established a respectful, egalitarian relationship with them: "he talks to me like I'm a friend—like we're equal" and one who is willing to "put

in the extra yards" of availability beyond class time. A sense of humour is a highly valued attribute at both year levels and both appreciate an enthusiastic, "joyful" teacher who communicates their passion to the students.

Open-plan settings do not suit every student's needs though few students expressed negative feelings. Adjectives such as "nervous", "scared" and "edgy" reflected the new status of Year 7s in the school, while negative Year 10 responses such as "frustrating", "disappointing" and "angry" reflected disappointment in their learning experience.

The interview data indicated that there was considerable overlap between the TA and the Physical, Health and Sport Education curriculum (PHASE), although this did not seem to be orchestrated. There may be opportunities to strengthen the links between these two areas in order to provide improved sequencing and time allocation to discrete topics. The extension of participatory learning strategies in both areas (see page 15 for further discussion) will be of considerable value in improving student perceptions of wellbeing.

Our tracking of student wellbeing in the case study schools demonstrates that these schools face major challenges in improving students' perceptions of their wellbeing. While in interviews, the students reported experiencing improved relationships with peers and teachers, and a sense of safety and even happiness in flexible open-plan settings, the survey data shows less definitive satisfaction. Interviews by their nature are personalised and informal, and allow teasing out of responses. Surveys and questionnaires are valuable as they enable the gathering of large datasets, but the language in which questions are framed can be misinterpreted and responses tend to be muted.

THE WHO HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK (HPS)

A multi-dimensional view of wellbeing suggests that, to improve student wellbeing, a multi-dimensional approach is needed that has a purposeful and systematic focus on wellbeing as a primary aim of schooling. The lens of the WHO Health Promoting Schools Framework (HPS) is applied to our case study school (WHO, 1996). The HPS framework is based on worldwide research that suggests that successful promotion of health and wellbeing can be achieved through three interrelated areas in schools: (1) organisation, ethos, and environment; (2) curriculum, teaching, and learning; and (3) partnerships and services (Clift & Jensen, 2005; Rowe & Stewart, 2009; Sun & Stewart, 2007). Rather than focusing on the individual components of the approach, Rowe and Stewart's (2009) focus on the interactions of a whole-school approach across all levels of the school community serves to demonstrate the powerful influence of the HPS model on school connectedness with positive effects for students' wellbeing, health and academic achievement.

CASE STUDY IRONBARK COLLEGE

School Organisation, Ethos, and Environment

At Ironbark College, interviews with the school principal, deputy principal, school chaplain, community leaders, teacher advisor coordinator, school engagement officer, and teacher advisors garnered descriptions of school ethos, organisation, and policies and were universally enthusiastic responses to the whole-school approach taken at this school to improve student wellbeing. The organisation of the school into four Years 7 to 10 communities was designed to address issues of wellbeing through creating a sense of connectedness and belonging. Students, and as far as possible, staff, remain in these communities for their four years at the school. The community design encourages a familial relationship among staff and students. Staffrooms are integrated into the community, students are welcome in their communities at all times, and bathroom facilities are shared. Therefore, staff and students mingle in formal and informal community spaces. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, each community is divided into Years 7 and 8 and Years 9 and 10 neighbourhoods. In Years 7 and 8 all classes are taken within the learning community, with teachers from their own community, while in Years 9 and 10 students join with students from other communities in a variety of specialist, elective subjects while their core subjects continue to be studied in their own community. Each student belongs to a teacher advisory class in which they remain for four years, The pivotal role of the teacher advisors in creating an accepting and nurturing environment for their students is discussed in chapter 11. Students are encouraged in their sense of connectedness by the close long-term relationships with peers and teacher advisor that they establish in these surroundings.

A welfare structure provides support for staff and students at this school. As the teacher who has the closest relationship with the students in their care, the teacher advisor is the first port of call for students and classroom teachers. However, teacher advisors are also supported by the neighbourhood and community leaders who guide and mentor them in issues arising with their students. In addition, a wellbeing team, consisting of social workers, a chaplain, a psychologist, a nurse, an indigenous worker, an attendance officer, and an intellectual disabilities coordinator, provides a framework of support. The referral system ensures that all teacher advisors and students are able to access the wellbeing team at any time, and that when necessary, the wellbeing team is able to refer students to the best external services available. Student referrals to the wellbeing team are discussed at executive level and involve the child psychologist, assistant principal, wellbeing coordinator, and attendance officer. They identify the best course of action, agency, or service for the referred student.

Policies and procedures and a positive school culture support the new structures. The ethos of the school is focussed on positive and respectful relationships (Principal interview). For example, student behaviour-management is based on a system of

restorative action (RA), a form of conflict resolution which seeks to make clear to the miscreant that their behaviour is not condoned, while at the same time being supportive and respectful of the individual (McCluskey et al., 2011; Morrison, 2007). In a staged response to poor student behaviour, classroom teachers take initial responsibility for dealing with the problems. If necessary, the teacher advisor is involved to provide, with their more intimate relationship with the student, both context and advocacy. The central premise of RA, that the community as a whole is harmed when one person belonging to it causes harm to another, is imparted to students, promoting a sense of responsibility in restoring community harmony (McCluskey & Lephalala, 2010). Community leaders support the teacher advisors, and the assistant principal, or principal, is the last step, usually in extreme situations. This provides for greater shared responsibility for students. School uniform policies are couched in ways that take into consideration the home circumstances of students who are not wearing school uniform and confidential guidance and assistance is offered where the family's financial or other circumstances warrant such intervention. Such policies contribute to the promotion of student and staff wellbeing.

Procedures for student management are perceived to be extremely important in developing a school culture of consistency and security. Explicit teaching about the school's core values relates to behaviour within the school community, making the most of opportunities, respect in relationships, and behaviours relevant to their expectations and achievements, including working hard, being organised, always persisting and doing one's best. Constant reference to these values when talking with students enhances the shared culture. One teacher suggested that, although the learning communities tended to function like four mini-schools due to variations in how teachers were implementing the procedures, there was enough consistency to ensure that all students and staff were aware of the expectations for learning and behaviour. Staff members knew what to expect from week to week and this allayed past fears about managing student behaviours. This sense of consistency is important for students' sense of security and fairness.

Clearly the development of this positive social environment within the learning communities requires more communication and connection among teachers and students. Discussion about school and community values encourages teachers to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, to reflect on their development needs and to draw on their colleagues' knowledge and skills. Community leaders and teacher advisors model communication strategies, or the implementation of TA learning activities, for their colleagues and then discuss these experiences. Such professional learning opportunities hone teachers' communication skills as they rehearse and practise them in a context of growing relational agency, (Edwards, 2011; Prain et al., 2014). The learning-team members learn from each other leading to new ways to understand and respond to student needs. One staff member who has been involved in student wellbeing for many years noted that referrals to the wellbeing team had decreased over the past few years. He put this down to improved relationships, communication, and shared responsibility for students.

Where possible, the wellbeing team works with the families of students and this assists in developing a closer relationship with the school. In answer to a question regarding where the line is drawn between the responsibilities of the school and others, the school chaplain stated that:

> [There is] no line [between school and home]. We deal with or work [with] the families. Myself, and I know other wellbeing team members, make a lot of home visits. Usually, or if not always, we speak to the parents in relation to what's happening at school with the students. If their behaviour is really questionable then usually the TAs have rung them, and often it will be a referral to the chaplain or wellbeing team to follow up, and then we keep in touch with parents.

While the community structures within the open-plan settings were designed to improve relationships and the overall culture of the school, the physical environment, including the design of the open-plan learning spaces, also contributes to students' wellbeing. The changes to the school's built environment were, and continue to be, welcomed by the students. A lack of graffiti and damage to the learning spaces is further testament to student appreciation. All the teachers interviewed commented on the significant decline in student misbehaviour in these new spaces.

The protocols for the use of inside spaces are perceived as contributing to a sense in students that their school cares about them. In interviews, while most students nominated outside spaces, some students referred to inside spaces as their favourites, including the library and the couches in the Einstein areas. Staff reported that another significant outcome of this arrangement was a decrease in problems in the school grounds during lunch and recess.

The physical environment outside the learning communities is considerable in size. Areas between the buildings are landscaped as passive recreation areas and spaces further from the buildings provide opportunities for major games such as netball, basketball, cricket, and football. In interviews, students from both Year 7 and Year 10 highlighted the lack of playing equipment. Playground equipment has been identified as inducing physical activity, thereby contributing to the physical and social health of students (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010; Parrish, Okely, Stanley, & Ridgers, 2013). The assistant principal acknowledged that students did not suddenly lose interest in playing games when they come to secondary school and down-ball squares, which had been introduced to meet this need, were extremely popular with the junior students.

A male leading teacher recalled being on edge when he was on yard duty in this first year of teaching at the school.

> I was always looking for trouble. Whereas now, my yard duty consists of playing down-ball with the kids or wandering around and having chats with little groups of kids who are basically sitting around having their lunch and talking. So it's a really good feeling.

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Research points to the school curriculum, an often neglected component of student health and wellbeing, as a vital link in the whole-school approach. Through their formal and informal learning in the settings, students learn awareness of issues that affect theirs and others' lives and the consequences of life style choices. In classroom discussions with peers and teachers, students consider a range of viewpoints and learn to deepen their understanding, reasoning, and judgment. The consequences of neglecting curriculum are that students do not learn, in a safe environment, the social and emotional skills that will enable them to manage relationships and academic learning at secondary school, as well as the critical health literacy that will enable them to make healthy life choices and prepare them to manage their future health and wellbeing needs. Ironbark College takes a two-pronged approach to student health and wellbeing through the school curriculum.

The TA program in this school (discussed in detail in Chapter 11) focuses on the development of close, positive, and supportive relationships between teachers and students, and between students. The informal social and emotional education that occurs in a cohesive small and supportive group, that remains together over a period of four years, is complemented by a formal curriculum in which students discuss issues relevant to their personal lives, and learn key generic skills that assist them in their academic subjects. The commitment to, and scope of, the formal curriculum is an indication of the value attached to the teacher advisory program as an integral part of the students' wellbeing at this school. Students report high levels of satisfaction with their TAs and almost always identify them as a key support person to whom they take their problems and concerns. These positive and caring relationships set the tone for the culture of care across the whole school.

Ironbark College also provides Physical, Health and Sport Education (PHASE) as a compulsory subject for Years 7 and 8 and elective health and physical education subjects for Years 9 and 10. Students at all levels are required to participate in sports with the opportunity for students to experience a variety of sports. Students are also encouraged to participate in community sporting clubs, and the school intentionally does not run school-based teams in most sports to support community-based sporting clubs. The teachers perceive sport and physical education as contributing to social, teamwork, and leadership skills, as well as physical health. The emphasis, in harmony with the ethos of the school, is on participation rather than excellence in performance. PHASE also includes the range of topics found in most health education programs including anatomy, fitness, body image, mental health, drugs and alcohol, and sexuality education.

Some overlap of content in the PHASE curriculum with the TA curriculum is indicated in interviews. Yet the approaches are complementary, with the former concerned with encouraging physical good health, and the latter concerned with developing social and emotional health. The intention of both is to contribute to student wellbeing. The development of health literacy is an important

aspect of PHASE, enabling adolescents to understand, negotiate, and manage information sources pertaining to their own health needs and interests. In their teacher advisory sessions (see Chapter 11 for more detail) students participate in embodied learning activities, role plays, circle time and small-group discussions with a familiar group of peers to learn to consider a variety of opinions, to value their own experience, and that of their teacher advisors and peers in broadening their perspectives on a range of relevant issues, deepening their reasoning and decision-making ability. Initial reluctance from TA teachers to employ participatory strategies because of time restrictions, concern about loss of control, and lack of training and confidence and lack of time (see Cahill et al., 2013; Ennett et al., 2003; Natvig et al., 2003; Stead et al., 2007; Tappe et al., 1997) has been largely overcome at Ironbark College as through practice, working in teams of two, and professional learning activities, teachers have improved "their understanding of the educational purpose of the activities" and their confidence in "their pedagogical function in promoting student engagement and their capacity to control the class" (Cahill et al., 2013).

Considerable research evidence (see Cahill et al., 2013; Herbert & Lohrmann, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011) suggests that participatory learning strategies or, learning strategies that employ student-to-student interaction rather than just teacher-to-student interaction, are integral to successful health education. These types of learning strategies include role-play and simulation, small-group problem- solving, discussions, critical thinking tasks, skills development exercises, and themes games (Cahill et al., 2013, p. 2). Such strategies serve a range of epistemological functions through the invitation to students to actively engage in their learning. In drug education, participatory learning tasks prompt students to explore drug-use norms of their age mates (often overestimated by adolescents), pressures and risks related to drug use, and require students to examine choices and options relevant to a range of authentic situations. Furthermore, participatory learning strategies allow students to practice strategies and solutions to minimise the harm they might otherwise experience in these situations. Through role play students develop skills in risk analysis, problem-solving and ownership of solutions; they engage empathetically with a particular predicament and acquire the help seeking or refusal skills needed to realise particular choices. Cahill et al. (2013) claim that role play in particular "assists student to identify the gap that might exist between the theory about what they would or could do, and challenge of application" (p. 3).

Partnerships and Services

Schools are not isolated entities but are part of the broader community that has resources to support the school and broaden the horizons of students. Contributing to the community and drawing on its resources is part of a culture that values connectedness and reciprocity. Ironbark College is part of a very close-knit community with fierce traditional community pride and loyalties. The school's close

identification with its community is visually signified by a shared totem and colours (school uniform and local sporting teams).

Each morning a free breakfast is made available to all students. Many of the students would otherwise start their school day without having had breakfast. The preparation and supply of the breakfast is another source of connectedness to the community. The breakfast is staffed by community volunteers and the school chaplain and the food is sourced from the local *Foodshare* organisation, a community volunteer organisation. A local youth worker often attends the breakfast and runs lunchtime games as well, using the time to build relationships with the students and inviting them to attend youth club activities in the local community.

The community connections of the school begin with the families of students. The wellbeing team works with families to develop close, comfortable relationships. Through the teacher advisor, who gets to know each parent through telephone calls and home visits, the parent always has a familiar point of contact with the school, a person they can talk over issues with. The broader wellbeing team also understands that student wellbeing depends on fostering a close partnership with the families of students and follows up with home visits to keep in touch with parents. This relationship is particularly important with disengaged students or those who refuse school.

It is a sign of the school ethos that Ironbark College ensures "no one gets lost or forgotten" (student engagement officer interview). Though there is no funding allowance, a student engagement worker, a teacher skilled in counselling 'at risk' students, has been employed to reconnect these students with the school. The student engagement worker's role is to work one-on-one with these students to provide the motivation and skills to return to school, and to work in partnership with parents where possible. This often involves phone conversations before school, or actually going to a student's home to coax him/her out of bed. The student engagement officer develops a trusting relationship with parents that sometimes results in parents gaining the confidence to assert themselves with their adolescent child. The engagement officer also prepares students for their return to school by coaching them on how to deal with the situations they are likely to face. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the student engagement worker is to create a teacher culture that understands the difficulties students experience beyond school and values students' rights to return and be respected in the same way as more motivated students.

Sometimes it is not possible to work with families as a number of disengaged students live in Out-of-Home-Care, with foster parents or in residential care homes. Some have been involved with the justice system. For these students the wellbeing team at Ironbark College maintains strong relationships with relevant service agencies in order to ensure suitable and relevant education plans are put in place for these students. The sphere of influence of school staff in this context clearly extends beyond their traditional roles and beyond the school boundaries. Development of relational agency (Edwards, 2005, 2007, 2011; Prain et al., 2013) among teachers, principals, the student engagement worker, and those from

outside services is necessary if student wellbeing for these at risk students is to be maximised.

Curriculum opportunities beyond the school boundaries have also been explored at this school to broaden student horizons. Some senior students visit local primary schools or pre-schools once a week in a cross-age tutoring program to assist the teachers and act as buddies and mentors to younger children. Students visit local aged care facilities to read to and talk to the residents. A dance troupe that links indigenous students with the local Aboriginal leaders, has led to improvements in indigenous students' engagement and wellbeing. Senior students can negotiate to undertake fundraising projects or community service projects for local community organisations as part of an elective subject. The students learn skills of negotiation, time management, responsibility and communication in planning for and projects such as collecting food to distribute to needy families or walking dogs to raise money for the RSPCA. Community members are also welcomed into the school to share their skills and expertise with students. Some are involved in a program that encourages success for boys by sharing their ICT and literacy expertise over breakfast and encouraging boys to see education as a vital preparation for the workforce. Others come to talk about their careers and show students possible future pathways. Community sports enthusiasts are also involved in assisting physical education teachers to instruct the students.

Positive signs are emerging of a whole school approach to wellbeing. Our case study, survey and interview data suggests that: (1) a focus on the school ethos and environment, (2) a focus on curriculum and teaching including social and emotional learning, (3) and partnerships with the parents and the community are essential to improved student wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that student wellbeing is not something that can be enhanced through knowledge and skills development alone, although this tends to be the focus in many schools. Positive and caring relationships developed between staff and students underpin a whole-school approach where all aspects of the school experience are geared towards enhanced wellbeing. The physical environment can create spaces that are pleasing to the eye, provide students with a sense that they are valued, reduce areas traditionally associated with bullying, and create a sense of both security and informality which enhance relationships.

The overall ethos driven by the school philosophy and policies can contribute to shared expectations for both staff and students, increased staff awareness of their role in student wellbeing and, draw attention to staff professional development that might be required to enhance the supportive ethos of the school. Shared expectations leads to consistent responses to student issues that arise providing a sense of security for both staff and students. Making time in the curriculum for social and emotional learning, personal development skills and relationship

building such as was observed in the Teacher Advisory program also creates opportunities for individualised support and high expectations for all students. It is evident in our case study school, that stronger connections between the Teacher Advisory program and the Physical, Health and Sport Education (PHASE) curriculum are possible and indeed preferable. It is apparent also that a comprehensive, developmental health and wellbeing curriculum that employs highly dialogic and participatory learning strategies can contribute to improved student wellbeing outcomes.

Strong partnerships built between the school, parents, and a range of agencies within the community are essential to ensuring students' wellbeing needs are met. In addition, stronger relationships with students' families can contribute to improved shared understandings about students' needs between parents and staff, as well as improved wellbeing in families. Strengths within the local community can be acknowledged, valued and drawn upon in the quest for improved wellbeing.

NOTES

[1] ICSEA is calculated using family background data including occupation, adults in family unemployed, educational level and single parent family status. The ICSEA values are produced on a scale that has a mean of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA scores range from about 500 representing schools with extremely disadvantaged students, to approximately 1300, representing schools with students from very educationally advantaged backgrounds (Australian ACARA, n.d.). Scores for all schools are available at the My School website http://www.myschool.edu.au

[2] In Victoria, all students' opinions on their schools are gathered on an annual basis through the "Attitudes to School Survey" (DEECD, 2014). The survey consists of 11 scales covering wellbeing (student morale and student distress), learning and teaching (teacher effectiveness, teacher empathy, stimulating learning, school connectedness, students motivation and confidence), and student relationships (connectedness to peers, classroom behaviour and student safety).

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