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> indicates that further information is available on the Learner Wellbeing website:

Quote

Findings

Inquiry

from

literature

from

sites

questions

from

sites
Introduction

The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12 is the outcome of an extended inquiry, involving sites, Central and District offices and partners, including families, other agencies and experts. A forum for leaders was held in 2004 to generate views about a framework for learner wellbeing and a working paper entitled Wellbeing is central to Learning (DECS 2005a) was then developed by the DECS Learner Wellbeing Matrix Team for broad circulation in 2005. Responses to the working paper were used to construct a draft framework, entitled Towards a Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12 (DECS 2006). During 2006, 53 sites and clusters of sites used the draft to guide their own inquiries into a locally relevant aspect of learner wellbeing.

This framework is a summary of current knowledge about learner wellbeing that is strongly grounded in local practice. It has been developed to support sites from child care to senior secondary schools to take an inquiry-minded approach to the improvement of wellbeing for all learners, beginning with a particular focus in Site Learning Plans in 2007.

Rationale

The strong and mutual interconnection between wellbeing and learning has meant that learner wellbeing has always been an integral part of educators’ work. The influence of continuous and rapid change upon today’s learners and the consequent complexity of their lives require educators to inquire into new ways of working that support the wellbeing and learning connection. The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework supports educators to build upon and improve on current effective practice through the use of an inquiry approach.

Consistent with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1959) and the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (MCEETYA 1999), the DECS Statement of Directions 2005–2010 (2005b) identifies wellbeing and learner engagement as key directions for educators: ‘Staff in all sites...play an important role in fostering engagement and wellbeing so that each child and student is able to achieve their best and enjoy their educational experience’ (p. 8).

One target in the DECS Statement of Directions, under Goal 3: Wellbeing and engagement, is to ‘develop and implement a Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12 by the end of 2007’ (p. 8).

Purpose

The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework is designed to support the development and improvement of the wellbeing of all learners by:

- promoting a common understanding, consistent approaches and shared commitment to the development of learner wellbeing
- providing a strategic framework that connects and makes coherent a range of initiatives, projects, policies and practices, including the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework (DETE 2001)
- providing a tool that can be used to map, audit and strengthen site and educator capacity to support and improve the wellbeing of all learners
- encouraging the participation in an inquiry approach to the improvement of learner wellbeing of all site community members: leaders, educators, learners, parents and other partners
- assisting sites to identify learners whose wellbeing may be at risk and allocating appropriate support
- promoting collaborative and cross-agency pathways of support to improve wellbeing.

Principles

- Wellbeing is central to learning and learning is central to wellbeing.
- Educators make a positive contribution to learner wellbeing.
- Wellbeing is built on the strengths of individuals, groups and communities working together.
Wellbeing is integral to the learning process. A learner will engage readily with learning when in an optimum state of wellbeing. There are learned skills, abilities and understandings important to the development of wellbeing, for example:

Gaining the ability to understand our own emotions and using it to shape our own actions are competencies that are not only essential for our mental and emotional health: they are meta-abilities that are highly linked to school and career success (Goleman, cited in Weare 2000, p. 69).

The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12, as illustrated, shows the dimensions of wellbeing within a care or education setting. An inquiry-minded approach links care and education practices to the wellbeing of learners. This approach enables sites to improve their practices to enhance learner wellbeing.

Wellbeing can be characterised in the following ways:
- Wellbeing is dynamic and changeable.
- Wellbeing may be enacted differently in different cultures.
- Wellbeing is about feeling well and functioning well.
Dimensions of wellbeing

In this framework there are five dimensions to wellbeing that overlap and interconnect with each other: cognitive, emotional, physical, social and spiritual. Collectively these dimensions provide learners with resilience and confidence in their ability to influence their world. In their work on the foundations of wellbeing for UNESCO, Pollard and Davidson (2001) expand on some of the dimensions and their various aspects.

Figure 2: Dimensions of wellbeing

- **Cognitive** aspects include information processing, memory, curiosity, mastery, motivation, persistence, thinking and intelligence.
- **Emotional** aspects are closely linked with social aspects and include emotional development and control, coping, autonomy, positive self-development, trust and attachment.
- **Physical** aspects include nutrition, physical activity, physical safety, preventive health care, reproductive health and substance abuse.
- **Social** aspects include parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, peer relationships, positive social behaviour, empathy and sympathy.
- **Spiritual** aspects include beliefs, values, morals and ethics; a sense of meaning and purpose; altruism; and a sense of connectedness to something larger than oneself.

Mental health is another term for the social and emotional aspects of wellbeing—it refers to our thoughts, feelings, behaviour and relationships (Hunter Institute of Mental Health 2006)

The Framework enabled us to look at our inquiry question while keeping all dimensions of wellbeing in view. It served as a good checkpoint.

Nuriootpa Primary School
Influences on wellbeing

All children and students have the potential for high levels of wellbeing. The broader environmental context contains a range of factors which influence wellbeing for each individual. These factors are either protective or risk factors and the dynamic relationship between them means their impact will vary for each individual. Educators have the greatest potential to positively influence the range of factors within care and education.

Figure 3: Influences on wellbeing

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Our parents, through our genes and our upbringing, influence about 50% of the variation in happiness between people. Our circumstances, which include our income, as well as other external factors such as climate and where we live, account for only 10%.

Our outlook and activities, like our friendships, being involved in our community, sport and hobbies, as well as our attitude to life, account for the remaining 40%. This is where we have the most opportunity to make a difference to wellbeing.

(Shah & Marks 2004, p. 2)
Examples of individual characteristics identified as risk factors include low birth weight, disability, and low self-esteem, but protective factors include attachment to family, and social and intellectual competence. Risk factors associated with family include young maternal age, abuse, and lack of warmth and affection, while protective factors are supportive, caring parents, responsibility for chores or required helpfulness, and family harmony. Community risk factors include socio-economic disadvantage, social or cultural discrimination, war or natural disasters, and population density and housing conditions. Community protective factors include access to support services, a strong cultural identity, and community norms against violence (National Crime Australia, 1999).

Domains of practice

The dimensions of wellbeing need to be considered in the context of four domains within the site or service as a whole. The learning environment, curriculum and pedagogy, partnerships, and policies and procedures interact and are interdependent. What is learned through the curriculum will be practised in the learning environment, supported by partnerships with family and other agencies, and made explicit in the policies and practices of the site.

Learning environment: the ethos/culture of a site or service and the aesthetics, infrastructure and physical environment

Curriculum and pedagogy: the twin processes of teaching and learning, which create involvement and success

Partnerships: the numerous relationships that need to exist to support learners and their learning within and between sites, services, families, agencies and community members

Policies and procedures: system and local statements and directions on significant issues that affect learner wellbeing, such as how particular situations will be managed and which values are promoted.

It is most effective to take a whole of site or service approach. This approach acknowledges that everything has the potential to influence wellbeing and, within any site, it is important that attention be paid to each of the four domains.
Why inquire?

Using a rigorous inquiry approach allows educators to reflect deeply on learner wellbeing as a component of a continuous improvement cycle. This facilitates learning sites to develop strategies to respond to specific local circumstances.

There are a variety of inquiry models to assist and facilitate:

- identification of an area of focus
- formulation of an initial inquiry question
- translation into an inquiry cycle
- refinement of the initial inquiry question if needed.

Each step requires dialogue and documentation leading to consensus.

A culture of inquiry allows site reflection, which both affirms existing good practice and highlights dimensions and domains of practice that need improvement. To build a culture of inquiry, educators need to scrutinise their practices and their impact on learner wellbeing. Inquiry can be messy and confronting, but can lead to new learnings, insights and new questions: time spent by educators inquiring together, building on strengths, being willing to take risks, being open to new ideas and change, also ensures improvements will be significant and sustainable. This approach supports educator wellbeing.

Inquiry-minded improvement recognises that each site has specific issues relevant to their context. It is a process of continuous improvement involving each educator’s commitment to:

- Reflect, by examining one’s work to challenge familiar ways of viewing issues
- Question, by gathering data, mapping current practice, making connections and sorting out thinking
- Plan, by utilising data to make informed decisions and demonstrate change
- Act based on reflection, questioning and planning.

What is inquiry?

Inquiry is a process of systematic, rigorous and critical reflection about professional practice, and the contexts in which it occurs, in ways that question taken-for-granted assumptions.

(Reid 2004, p. 4)

Inquiry…is a fancy way of saying let’s study what’s happening at our school and make it a better, more equitable place.

(Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, cited in DECS 2005c)

Inquiry is an active search for understanding which is facilitated by carefully constructed questions.

(Yorke-Barr et al 2001, p. 37)

The basic [inquiry approach is to]
look, think, act [which] should be read as a continually recycling set of activities.

(Stringer 1999, pp. 18–19)

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There are a number of models one can use in inquiry-minded improvement. The model used by 2006 inquiry schools was the ‘structured inquiry model’, which provides a series of stepped questions:

**Structured inquiry model**

**Step 1:** Have we clarified our thinking about learner wellbeing?
**Step 2:** Site analysis: What are we doing well? Where can we improve? What data do we have?
**Step 3:** What is our area of explicit focus for improvement?
**Step 4:** Using data, what is our initial reflection on our area of focus?
**Step 5:** What is our overarching inquiry question for our area of focus?
**Step 6:** Does our strategic action plan include monitoring and documentation?
**Step 7:** Is it time to reflect?

A number of other models can be found on the Learner Wellbeing website.
Research has indicated there are many connections between learning and wellbeing. The process of learning is dependent upon the learner making complex neural connections. The ability to build these connections is constrained in a state of prolonged or high anxiety or when subject to distracting outside influences. Within safe, secure learning environments, where basic needs are met and, furthermore, wellbeing is addressed, stress and anxiety lowers (Caine & Caine 1994; Goleman 1996).

Positive learning environments allow the connections to be made within learners’ brains and, consequently, learning flows (Sylwester, cited in Weare 2000). Achieving mastery in an area of learning increases feelings of wellbeing. There are also skills, abilities and understandings important to the development of wellbeing. Collectively, these may be referred to as “capabilities for wellbeing” and they can be learned and taught explicitly. Directly related to the dimensions of wellbeing, these might include, for example, problem solving, resilience, diet and exercise, effective communication skills and explicitly teaching altruism.

A state of relaxed alertness and a balance of low threat and high challenge are the ideal states for higher order functioning and the optimal emotional climate for learning (Caine & Caine 1994).

Early experiences influence the development of these brain pathways, especially in the areas of memory, learning and behaviour. There is ‘increasing evidence that the early period of child development affects cognition, learning and behaviour in the later stages of life’ (Mustard, 2002, p.23). Further significant neural development occurs in adolescence as a learner matures into adulthood.

Our society is continually changing and becoming increasingly complex. The challenge for educators is to think and act responsively in their changing world. Learning needs to provide learners with skills and strategies to cope with and respond to change; to have a say; and to develop agency that allows them to influence their current and future world.

Positive relationships are paramount. Educators who are respectful, interested and caring build positive relationships with learners and those associated with them. Partnerships are fostered through reciprocal communication and sharing of information. These relationships create optimum conditions for wellbeing and successful learning. In positive relationships, learners will interact with others; participate; ask questions; seek help; take risks; and be reassured of their capabilities and worth. These interactions are central to any new learning. Positive student to student relationships are also influential in fostering wellbeing.

A whole of site approach to inquiry and improvement in education is the most effective. Learning is scaffolded with consistent approaches and inclusive policies and practice. A common and agreed approach will have the greatest educational influence on the future of a learner. At the same time it also maximises conditions of security and safety. ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ (African proverb)
What are the implications for practice?

A holistic approach to wellbeing ensures maximum benefit for individual learners. It assists educators to map and inquire into the effectiveness of their practice across the domains and within the dimensions of wellbeing for individuals, classes and a whole site. Some learners require additional support and others an individualised strategy to address their wellbeing and learning needs. These needs may be short term or ongoing. Additional support and tailored strategies build on the universal approaches that promote the wellbeing of all learners in a site. Figure 6 illustrates a holistic approach to the promotion of learner wellbeing.

An educator’s wellbeing impacts on their ability to influence learner wellbeing. An educator’s wellbeing is central to their own learning, and continuous learning is central to educator wellbeing. How an educator deals with their own stress or high anxiety can impact on their ability to create safe, secure learning environments for their learners.

Everything educators do has the potential to influence wellbeing.
What are the links to South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework?

Wellbeing is an integral aspect of curriculum and pedagogy. The processes used for curriculum delivery have the ability to improve or hinder wellbeing. **Constructivist learning is the optimum process for promoting wellbeing.** This process builds on and respects a learner’s prior knowledge, experiences, interests, differences and culture. It encourages learner dialogue, questioning, initiative, creativity and reflection. The learner makes choices in their learning and is an active participant, both in the learning and in the assessment of their progress and achievement. This learning cycle model, whilst it takes time, also assists learners to make learning connections and accept differing perspectives.

In particular, the Essential Learnings within the SACSA Framework outline capabilities crucial to developing learner wellbeing:

- **Futures:** developing the flexibility to respond to change and have a say in one’s future
- **Identity:** developing a sense of self, and respect for other individuals and groups
- **Interdependence:** developing the ability to work in cross-cultural harmony with others for common good
- **Thinking:** developing the ability to question, appraise, make decisions, and to be innovative and creative
- **Communication:** developing the ability to communicate across a range of media.

**Connections and coherence**

The Wellbeing Framework assists sites to draw together, connect, and make coherent a range of DECS policies, programs and projects that equip learners to act for their own and others’ wellbeing. Some are listed below and sites may add their own:

- health promotion
- being active
- mentoring/buddying/cross-age tutoring
- behaviour management
- learning and transition pathways
- individualised learning plans/learning styles
- child protection
- attendance
- student voice/community projects/citizenship
- beliefs and values
- drug strategies
- safe schools

What are the implications for practice?
How do we know we are making a difference?

Evaluation is an element throughout the inquiry process. As the word suggests, evaluate means placing a value, a standard or making a judgement of worth on information gathered (Smith & Lovat 1990). Effective site-based evaluation will demonstrate the improvement or the ‘distance travelled’ in a rigorous inquiry into learner wellbeing. It allows a site to collect evidence, reflect on changes achieved and to be accountable to their community. Key components of change include improvement in outcomes for learners, educator practice, and site policy and practice.

Evaluation can incorporate existing, site adapted, and/or site developed material and tools such as:

- audits
- mapping
- rubrics
- data collection
- socio-grams
- surveys
- questionnaires
- video records
- photographic records
- observations
- learning stories
- professional journals
- dialogues
- reports
- vignettes
- and more

Existing data collection tools include the following:

- social and emotional wellbeing surveys
- audits of site practices
- levels of involvement indicators, for example, from Ferre Laevers
- annual report surveys, for example, in the DECS Improvement and Accountability Framework (DIAF)
- behaviour and attendance data, for example, from EDSAS and Dux Assists
- achievement software, for example, in SACSA.

Using both qualitative and quantitative forms of data will deepen an inquiry. Data collection needs to respond to the local context: it is most useful and relevant when developed inside the inquiry process. It can be used to inform and document significant learning in the inquiry journey. Dialogue about developing evaluation processes, the information a site decides to collect and what it implies can be as important as the actual data collected.

Examples of reflective questions to deepen the dialogue are:

- What is the most effective way to gain the information we need for our inquiry?
- What is actually happening here?
- What are we doing well?
- Are all voices being heard: leaders, educators, learners, parents and other partners?
- Who is being advantaged and/or disadvantaged?
- What is the evaluation telling us?
- How do we build sustainability into our change practice?

In conclusion we will know we have made a difference when our indicators and evidence show:

- Learners are engaged in learning and their wellbeing is optimised.
- Educators are professionally excited and engaged in their work together.
- Community partnerships are strongly interconnected.
- Curriculum and pedagogy, policy and practice are congruent and coherent.
- Wellbeing initiatives and changes are ongoing and sustainable.
References


Department of Education and Children’s Services (2005a) Wellbeing is central to learning, DECS, Adelaide


Department of Education and Children’s Services (2005c) Moving forward with SACSA Strategy, CD-ROM, DECS, Adelaide


Wellbeing is the combined physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual state of being. Positive wellbeing includes being optimistic and engaging with life. It means having a sense of purpose, self-acceptance and positive relationships.

The DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12 has been constructed in response to and with the input of stakeholders across all levels of DECS. It is both theoretically sound and grounded in practice. Through an inquiry-minded approach, the DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework for birth to year 12 will assist sites in laying the foundations for ongoing sustainable improvements in learner wellbeing, both now and in the future.