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Toni Noble
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The PROSPER School Pathways for Student Wellbeing

Policy and Practices

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Policy and Practices

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Chapter 1
Student Skills for Happiness and Wellbeing

Abstract This chapter outlines the key student skills and understandings for happiness and wellbeing at school and in their future, followed by a research-based definition of student wellbeing. The difference between student wellbeing and student welfare is clarified and then evidence-based guidelines are provided to help practitioners select effective student wellbeing programs. The chapter concludes by introducing PROSPER as an organising framework for the components of well-being that underpin positive psychological research and can be applied in positive education. The PROSPER components are **P**ositivity, **R**elationships, **O**utcomes, **S**trengths, **P**urpose, **E**ngagement and **R**esilience.

Keywords Student wellbeing · Positive psychology · Positive education · Social-emotional learning programs

1.1 Introduction

One of the most important goals for any country is that its children and young people enjoy their lives and acquire the skills and understandings to become happy, functioning adults. Education has a key role to play in equipping young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills they will need in order to live fulfilling lives and to be productive in the flexible and innovative workforce required in this 21st century. A school-based focus on supporting children and young people to develop a deep sense of wellbeing is a central component of effective education for their future, their country's future and for the future of our world.

1.2 Outline of Chapters

This chapter outlines the key student skills and understandings for happiness and wellbeing at school and in their future, followed by a research-based definition of student wellbeing. The difference between student wellbeing and student welfare is

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clarified and then evidence-based guidelines are provided to help practitioners select effective student wellbeing programs. This chapter concludes by introducing PROSPER as an organising framework for the components of wellbeing that underpin positive psychological research and can be applied in positive education. Chapter 2 then follows by applying the PROSPER organiser to the evidence-based school practices that can enhance student happiness and wellbeing. Chapter 3 reviews guidelines/actions for developing a student wellbeing policy at the school, system, national and international levels.

1.3 Why Does Student Wellbeing Matter?

About one-third of the world's population is under 18 years of age (UNICEF 2014). In any country (rich or poor) about 10 % or 220 million children and young people have a diagnosable mental disorder (mainly anxiety, depression or conduct disorder) (WHO 2003; Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 2012). Over half of the children who experience mental illness in childhood will also suffer from a mental illness in their adult lives (Kim-Cohen et al. 2003; Layard and Hagell 2015) which means their lives are likely to be unhappy and impoverished. Mental health also affects physical health. In the richest countries only 25 % of children with mental health issues receive specialist help and in the poorest countries very few have access to any help (Layard and Hagell 2015). From humanitarian perspective this is a great loss but it also comes at an economic cost. In most countries mental illness is reducing gross domestic product (GDP) by over 5 % (OECD 2014). Wellbeing is a set of skills that can be taught. The aim of all countries is for their children to be educated at school. So a core concern for all schools around the world needs to be how can they best develop their student's sense of wellbeing, not just their academic performance so they can thrive and prosper.

1.4 C21st Skills and Understandings for Student Wellbeing

A focus on student wellbeing is integral to the United Nations goals for education that are to make people wiser, more knowledgeable, better informed, ethical, responsible citizens who are critical thinkers, and capable of and motivated to become life-long learners. At the beginning of the 21st century the United Nations adopted four pillars for student wellbeing. These four pillars are learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be (Delors 1996). Here we describe and build on each pillar to provide a useful frame of reference for the essential skills and understandings that enable students to flourish firstly at school and then later in the workplace and in their life in the 21st century.

1. Pillar One: Learning to LIVE TOGETHER
   This Pillar highlights the importance of explicitly teaching young people the values and social-emotional competencies that connect people, build relationships, strengthen communities and enhance their valuing of social, cultural and religious diversity. This pillar also recognises the critical interdependence of a young person's local community with our global community and the importance of developing their skills to be able to work collaboratively with others both locally and globally to achieve mutual goals. This pillar extends to developing students as active and informed citizens who act with moral and ethical integrity and develop into responsible local and global citizens.
2. Pillar Two: Learning to KNOW
   This pillar identifies the importance of helping young people to '*learn how to learn*' along with the more traditional focus on the acquisition of structured discipline knowledge. Learning '*how to learn*' refers to developing students' skills in using effective thinking skills such as the capacity for critical and creative thinking, using evidence in support of propositions and initiatives, solving problems both analytically and ethically and making evidence-informed decisions. These skills enable students to adapt to change and to be critical and creative in finding new solutions to diverse and complex problems.
3. Pillar Three: Learning to DO
   The focus of this pillar is on the importance of supporting young people to develop capabilities in the diverse range of general work-related skills required for work success, whatever their chosen occupation. These capabilities include good communication skills, teamwork and collaborative skills and problem solving skills as well as the capacity to cope resiliently in difficult and challenging situations or in times of adversity.
4. Pillar Four: Learning to BE
   The emphasis in this pillar is on the importance of stimulating the imagination and creativity of young people through the provision of opportunities and encouragement to undertake aesthetic, artistic, scientific, cultural and social discoveries and to develop their confidence in experimentation.

These four pillars align with the outcomes from a recent major international project that involved a group of 250 researchers across 60 institutions worldwide (Griffin et al. 2012). Ten key skills for learners evolved from an analysis of international educational curricula and assessment frameworks. These ten skills fall into four broad categories:

1. **Ways of thinking** (*learning to know*)
   (a) Creativity and innovation
   (b) Critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making
   (c) Learning to learn and metacognition

2. **Ways of working** (*learning to do*)
   (a) Communication
   (b) Collaboration and teamwork
3. **Tools for working**
   (a) Information and communications technology (ICT)
   (b) Information literacy (includes research on sources, evidence, biases, etc.)
4. **Skills for living in the world** (*learning to live together*)
   (a) Citizenship-local and global
   (b) Life and career
   (c) Personal and social responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence).

These ten skills identified by Griffin et al. (2012) and the four pillars identified by the United Nations (Delors 1996) represent life skills, not skills that are mainly learned at school and relevant only to academic learning. One key difference between the two frameworks is the focus in the more recent study by Griffin et al. (2012) on the importance of young people becoming life-long learners of skills related to the use of ever-changing information and communications technologies. These skills have become increasingly important over the last 15 years in Western countries as well as in developing countries, with widespread mobile phone networks now available globally. A focus on skills related to information and communication technologies recognises that learning and working in the 21st century can occur at any time and any place, not just in schools or workplaces.

In 2013 the first author was invited by the King and Government of Bhutan to attend an International Expert Meeting in Thimpu co-sponsored by the United Nations. The goal of the meeting was to develop a new global model for happiness and wellbeing 'a new development paradigm'. The international team included participants from UK, Europe, USA, South America and Australia. Bhutan's focus on happiness and wellbeing began over thirty years ago when the fourth king of Bhutan famously proclaimed that gross national happiness is more important than gross national productivity. Following this historic declaration, Bhutan developed a Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index and screening tool to evaluate all their new policies. This index evaluates nine domains of happiness: education, psychological wellbeing, community vitality, time use, health, living standards, cultural diversity, good governance and ecological diversity The education domain is central to all nine domains of GNH. Education is intrinsically dynamic and transformative. Thus education serves as the key thread that connects all nine domains of GNH and offers the most leverage for individual, local and global happiness and wellbeing.

One of the key recommendations that emerged from this meeting in Bhutan was that the older concept of '*skills for living in the world/living together*' should be extended to focus on the roots of deep abiding happiness that comes from living life in full harmony with the natural world, with our own communities and fellow beings, and with our culture and spiritual heritage (New Development Paradigm).

The implication for schools is that identifying and implementing strategies for enhancing student happiness and wellbeing at school should become a major component of the work of teachers and schools.

In recent times school systems, governments and policy makers around the world are increasingly focusing on the role of coordinated school-based student wellbeing initiatives. Many researchers have identified the inter-dependence of student wellbeing and student learning (Zins et al. 2004; Durlak et al. 2011).

1.5 Defining Student Wellbeing

A logical starting point for educating for student wellbeing is to work from a robust and evidence-based definition of student wellbeing that has the power to effectively guide educational policy and school practices. Naturally a child's family, home and community all significantly impact on a young person's wellbeing. However an educational perspective focuses on the actions that schools and school systems can adopt to help children and young people flourish within a school context.

Although there are many definitions of wellbeing, a literature search revealed only three definitions of *student wellbeing* (Noble et al. 2008). One definition identified student wellbeing as:

> a positive emotional state that is the result of a harmony between the sum of specific context factors on the one hand and the personal needs and expectations towards the school on the other hand (Engels et al. 2004, p. 128)

Another simpler definition of student wellbeing was:

> the degree to which a student feels good in the school environment (De Fraine et al. 2005)

The third definition focused on student well being as:

> the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community (Fraillon 2004).

A more comprehensive definition of student wellbeing was sought that incorporated multiple dimensions. Noble et al. (2008) used a modified Delphi methodology to develop a robust and operational definition of student wellbeing. The first step was the generation of a broad definition of student wellbeing that integrated selected components from a range of definitions of general wellbeing plus the three definitions of student wellbeing cited above. The second step involved seeking the online involvement of thirty international experts who worked in the field of wellbeing and/or student wellbeing from a range of countries including Australia, Denmark, United Kingdom, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal and the USA. These participants were invited to give feedback on the definition. Their feedback assisted with the re-development of the definition. They were then asked to give feedback