
Students' and teachers' perspectives on wellbeing in a senior secondary environment

Anne K Soutter, Billy O'Steen and Alison Gilmore

*School of Educational Studies and Human Development
University of Canterbury
New Zealand*

Abstract

The Student Wellbeing Model (SWBM: Soutter, Gilmore and O'Steen 2011; Soutter, O'Steen and Gilmore 2012) conceptualises wellbeing as a multi-dimensional, complex phenomenon involving seven interdependent and mutually enhancing domains, (having, being, relating, thinking, feeling, functioning, striving), organised into three categories (assets, appraisals, actions). In this study, the SWBM provided a lens through which to examine New Zealand senior secondary students' and teachers' perspectives on the meanings of wellbeing. Although all seven domains of the SWBM were represented in participants' understandings of wellbeing, not all domains were experienced to a similar degree in the school context. Student and teacher commentary indicated that educational experiences reflected a 'top-down' approach that focused on developing wellbeing-enhancing *assets* including *having* resources and support, *being* an independent individual, and *relating* well with teachers. In addition, participants viewed *functioning* efficiently in assessment-related activities and *striving* towards acquisition of credits as important aspects of engaging in *actions* that will lead to wellbeing in the future. In contrast, they considered cognitive and affective *appraisals*, such as *thinking* creatively, critically, or meta-cognitively, or *feeling* and expressing a wide range of emotions to be peripheral to their current educational experiences. These results suggest that a conscious focus on all seven domains in school increases the likelihood that students experience wellbeing as integral to, rather than a desired outcome of, education. Our analysis indicates that the SWBM provides a viable guide for those seeking to design educational experiences that allow student wellbeing to unfold organically within the diverse classroom cultures that characterise schools today.

Introduction

The United Nations (1966, 1989) has established that both education and wellbeing are basic human rights, and the school has been recognised as an important context for realising these essential goals (Burke 2009; Abeles 2010; United Nations 2010; Eccles and Roeser 2011; World Health Organization 2011). In recent years, interest in research on wellbeing and education's role in it has grown, and the resulting scholarship has provided important insights into various causes, correlates and outcomes of wellbeing in school settings (e.g. Konu, Lintonen and Autio 2002; Konu, Lintonen and Rimpelä 2002; Huebner et al. 2004; Konu and Rimpelä 2004; Wyn 2007; Seligman et al. 2009). Yet how students, particularly those in the final years of their secondary school education, experience and make meaning of wellbeing remains poorly documented and understood (Fraillon 2004; Ereaud and Whiting 2008).

Wellbeing has typically been defined by educators using terms such as 'academic achievement', 'educational success' or 'student engagement' (Eccles et al. 1993; Roeser and Peck 2003; Fraillon 2004). Economists, psychologists, sociologists and health scientists contributing to the growing field of wellbeing studies have employed a different vocabulary, however, drawing upon constructs such as 'life satisfaction', 'quality of life', 'happiness' and 'subjective wellbeing' (for a review, see Soutter, Gilmore and O'Steen 2011). While educators have relied on students' performance on standardised tests to gauge student wellbeing, wellbeing scholars have employed measures such as income levels, divorce rates, health status or happiness ratings (e.g. Easterlin 1974; Argyle 1987; Emerson, Graham and Hatton 2006; Helliwell and Wang 2010). To what extent are educators' and wellbeing scholars' conceptualisations of and approaches to studying wellbeing compatible? Is it accurate to assume that students labelled as 'academic achievers' are adequately prepared for what wellbeing scholars have referred to in Aristotelian terms as the 'well-lived life' (Deci and Ryan 2008; Ryan, Huta and Deci 2008; Waterman 2008)?

Consider the following three examples. Student A scored impressively on her high school exams, but as an adult confronted life's inevitable challenges with difficulty, with significant impacts on her health, relationships, and ability to meet work and family obligations. Student B met little academic success in high school, and failed to earn a university degree, yet she went on to develop technological innovations that have utterly transformed how the world communicates. Student C engaged in the school program 'effectively', yet had few, if any, joyful experiences, or a sense of clear purpose or meaning in her work.

To the extent that a definitive classification of student wellbeing is feasible, or even desirable, which student stands out as 'having' it? The answer may depend upon the evaluator or method of evaluation. For example, those drawing upon standards currently in place may consider that students A and C are sufficiently 'well'. To those whose opinions reflect what has been the dominant political discourse, student B's career success and the resulting impact she has had on her nation's gross domestic product (GDP), make her a model of one who lives a 'well-lived life.' Still others would argue that each of the above conceptualisations of wellbeing represent

limited aspects of what it means to be well, thus the term should not apply fully to student A, B or C.

How might students in the final years of their secondary school discuss the wellbeing of the students in the above scenarios? To date, few studies exist that provide an in-depth understanding of how senior secondary students talk about what it means to be well, particularly in relation to their educational experiences (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2006; Bourke and Geldens 2007; Ben-Arieh 2008; White and Wyn 2008). Moreover, with the exception of Konu and Rimpelā (2002; see also Konu, Lintonen and Autio 2002; Konu, Lintonen and Rimpelā 2002), theoretical work explicitly addressing wellbeing in school contexts is limited. Thus, questions remain:

- How do senior secondary students conceptualise wellbeing?
- How do senior secondary educational experiences relate to wellbeing?
- How does the current wellbeing literature align with the views and experiences of those in the final years of their schooling?
- How might students’ perspectives complement the current literature and inform the development of educational experiences that enhance and sustain wellbeing within and outside of school?

This paper presents data generated during a year-long investigation at Monte Vista High School (MVHS, not its real name), a 750-student co-educational New Zealand public (state-funded) school. The inquiry’s findings are organised as follows:

- a description of the research design and an outline of the conceptual framework of the analysis
- analyses of students’ understandings and experiences of wellbeing, organised within the seven domains of the conceptual framework
- discussion of emergent themes
- consideration of findings for their potential contribution to the design and implementation of wellbeing-enhancing educational experiences.

Methods

To address the above questions, we drew from a combination of qualitative inquiry and analytic approaches chosen to suit the aims of the study (e.g. Lincoln and Guba 1985; Miles and Huberman 1994; Åkerlind 2005; Marton and Pong 2005; Bogdan and Biklen 2007). We collected the data for the study from classroom observations, interviews and students’ journal entries, collected during 35 visits throughout the 2009 school year, along with classroom, school and national curriculum documents. Forty-nine Year 13 students (33 females, 16 males, age range 17–21), and their teacher Jan (a pseudonym), agreed to be observed in their English class and during school-related activities. Classroom observations took place in two of Jan’s Year 13 English classes: Year 13 English (13Eg) and Independent English (IE).

Twenty-four students attended 13Eg, a class designed for students interested in pursuing university-level study. Twenty-five students were enrolled in IE, a course that provided a more individual program for students’ learning. Assessment of

student work in both classes was guided almost entirely by the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) program. The NCEA is the primary means of scholastic assessment for secondary students in New Zealand, and involves two main types of assessments: internally assessed exams that occur periodically throughout the year, and externally assessed culminating exams. Secondary students typically work towards one of three levels, with senior secondary students tending to aim for Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications (for a review of the NCEA system in New Zealand see Hipkins 2004; Hipkins et al. 2005; New Zealand Qualifications Authority [NZQA] 2011). The 13Eg curriculum was largely standardised for the class, and focused on Level 3 requirements for the NCEA. 13Eg students were assessed both internally and externally. IE students worked at their own pace, working one-on-one with Jan, and were assessed solely by internal examinations. IE students worked towards NCEA credits for NCEA levels 1 to 3, although the majority of students focused on levels 1 to 2.

Twelve IE and Y13Eg students (8 females, 4 males) participated in individual or small group interviews, depending on their preference, which lasted approximately 30 minutes. We sought students' views of wellbeing and its relationships to educational experiences by: (1) listening to how students talked about school, classroom learning, wellbeing and related issues that appeared to matter to them; and (2) observing students in their daily negotiations of school tasks, challenges and relationships. Further questions emerged as the study evolved, and were informed by participant responses and classroom observations. In this article, we have combined all the data collected from IE and Y13 students to illustrate the range of perspectives and experiences related to wellbeing; we are not attempting to argue that responses relate to particular course affiliations.

Jan was an experienced teacher (21 years in the profession) who had been teaching at the participating school for seven years. She agreed to be interviewed periodically throughout the year ($n = 4$), to exchange regular emails, and to share written documents such as her educational philosophy and course outlines. Interviews took place on campus during her 'prep' periods, and lasted 50 minutes on average. Health and physical education (HPE) teacher Mary (a pseudonym) also agreed to one hour-long interview. Of the eight learning areas included in New Zealand's curriculum (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2007), HPE most clearly and specifically utilises the term wellbeing. Mary contributed to the findings of this study by commenting upon how the participating school gave effect to the national and school curricula with respect to wellbeing.

Formal interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Email exchanges were printed and deleted immediately. Following each interview, participating teachers received the transcript via email and hard copy, and were asked to confirm that it was an accurate portrayal of the conversation that took place.

Analysis

Data were analysed for areas of alignment with a conceptual framework derived from a multi-disciplinary review of the wellbeing literature emanating from economics, psychology, sociology and the health sciences (Soutter, Gilmore and

O’Steen 2011). This framework, explained in greater detail elsewhere (Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen 2011; Soutter, O’Steen and Gilmore 2012), views wellbeing as a complex, adaptive, growth-minded (learning) system, with emergent, nested properties (for a discussions of complexity thinking in relation to education, see Davis and Simmt 2003; Davis and Sumara 2006; Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler 2008; Horn 2008; Mason 2008; Morrison 2008). In this conceptual framework, wellbeing is viewed as involving seven interrelated domains: having, being, relating, thinking, feeling, functioning and striving, organised into three overarching categories: assets, appraisals and actions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Conceptual framework for wellbeing (Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen 2010)

Categories	Domains	Literature foci
Assets	Having	Research located within the having domain focuses on assets, typically external to the individual, and gained through either one’s efforts or through gifts or exchange. The ‘paradoxical’ relationships between wealth and happiness, and the implications of privileging GDP as a measure of personal and societal wellbeing are focal points of this domain’s research base.
	Being	Scholarship exploring an individual’s internal assets comprises the being domain. Research in this area examines aspects of one’s genetic make-up, as well as the socio-cultural and historical circumstances and conditions of one’s life. Research also explores the extent to which one’s wellbeing is stable, fluctuates or significantly alters throughout one’s lifespan; the roles of autonomy and independence in wellbeing; and issues related to identity – personal, social and role-oriented.
	Relating	This domain includes a broad array of scholarship investigating assets that are relational. These include the interpersonal connections experienced, felt and aspired, and which influence experiences, emotions, thoughts and choice of actions. Research situated within the field of place-based education has contributed to understandings of relationships to place. Relationships as meaning are also explored here, as are experiences of transcendence: feeling connected to other people, places, ideologies or beliefs.

Appraisals	Feeling	Research focusing on happiness and depression have traditionally characterised the feeling domain, although in recent years scholarship has expanded to include the full spectrum of affect. The literature also addresses how one's affect relates to cognition, behaviours and interactions.
	Thinking	Affective appraisals are often complemented with cognitive appraisals as means to gauge people's sense of wellbeing. Thinking-related scholarship explores phenomena related to cognitive appraisals, as well as those related to cognitive strategies, decisions and errors. Cognitive appraisals of one's life are growing in popularity as a metric to complement existing (pecuniary) measures of wellbeing.
Actions	Function-ing	Scholarship organised under functioning explores the activities, behaviours and involvements individuals experience and with which they are engaged. Researchers examine both volitional and obligatory involvements, as well as questions about how the number and breadth of one's involvements impact on wellbeing.
	Striving	Striving represents the empirical and theoretical scholarship on the influences, processes, content and outcomes of one's goals. Motivation and goal theories constitute a large part of the literature in this domain. In addition, age-old questions regarding relationships between process and product, future and present are explored.

As Table 1 illustrates, assets include external, intrapersonal and interpersonal variables, conditions and circumstances associated with wellbeing. These are summarised within the domains having, being and relating. Appraisals include the affective and cognitive processes, indicators and outcomes discussed within feeling and thinking. Actions involve the use and pursuit of those assets, or the functioning and striving that motivates and directs one's involvements and engagements. These actions may then function as the means to develop future resources, which the system appraises as assets for wellbeing.

Table 2: Literature- and national curriculum-informed indicators of wellbeing (Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen 2011; Soutter, O’Steen and Gilmore 2012)

Categories	Domains	Research-informed indicators	NZC-informed indicators
Assets	Having	resources tools opportunities	resourceful effectively uses communication tools economic wellbeing
	Being	autonomy identity integrity	positive in own identity resilient values integrity manages self competently high expectations cultural diversity inclusion physical wellbeing autonomy independence individualism
	Relating	interpersonal relationships relationships to place relationships as meaning transcendence (connections to someone/something beyond the self)	reliable able to relate well to others connected to the land and environment member of and engaged in communities international citizen values diversity values equity values ecological sustainability uses languages, symbols and texts competently Treaty of Waitangi experiences coherence social wellbeing cultural wellbeing environmental wellbeing spiritual wellbeing
Appraisals	Feeling	full emotional spectrum socio-emotional education pastoral care	values respect mental wellbeing

	Thinking	curiosity creativity decision making mindfulness meta-cognition	<i>enterprising</i> and entrepreneurial literate and numerate critical and creative thinker informed decision maker values innovation, inquiry and creativity thinks competently learns to learn mental wellbeing
Actions	Function -ing	involvements • breadth, depth, volition • what is done • how it is done	enterprising and <i>entrepreneurial</i> contributes to the wellbeing of New Zealand: social, cultural, economic, and environmental participates competently in a range of life contexts active seeker, user and creator of knowledge values community and participation engaged citizen engaged in employment
	Striving	motivation goals future orientation	motivated values excellence future focus orientation sustainable future development

For each of the seven themes (domains) that emerged from the literature review, we identified research-based indicators we anticipated would be found in the data (see column 3 of Table 2). We then conducted a content analysis of New Zealand’s national curriculum guiding teaching and learning for Years 1–13 (NZC: Ministry of Education 2007). Explicit and implicit references to wellbeing in the NZC provided an additional set of possible domain indicators that add a New Zealand influence to the conceptual framework (see column 4 of Table 2). The present study sought to enhance the relevance of the conceptual framework for the school community under study by exploring areas of alignment between literature- and curriculum-informed indicators with those provided by students and their teachers.

Throughout the process of reading the curriculum to identify indicators aligning with the seven domains, we engaged in an iterative process of considering how each aligned with the current wellbeing research, to the curriculum, and to the participants’ understandings and experiences of wellbeing in the school context. We were also interested in how domains related to one another, looking for particular orientations, coexistence of domains and dominance of particular domains. Over the course of multiple readings, we located similarities and differences between the data

and the conceptual framework, and we checked assumptions about potential alignment against the original data. We will address these in the discussion. We ensured the trustworthiness of the data and data analysis through prolonged engagement in the classroom, and member checking of the initial analyses.

Findings

Wellbeing’s assets: having, being and relating well

Having well

When discussing wellbeing in general, without specific reference to the school context, some students explained that *having* things and opportunities can make life ‘easier’ or ‘more enjoyable’. Examples included a house, money to buy food, clothing and other ‘things you need to live’, as well as items such as cars, music, iPods or vacations.

Although references to material objects and possessions, a salary, wealth or purchasing power were evident in students’ conversations about what wellbeing meant to them, explicit discussion of money matters in the school context appeared to be viewed as inappropriate. Many students were, themselves, employees, and accepted the value in, benefits from and potential necessity of earning a pay check. However, some students referred to those who ‘teach to get *paid, not to educate*’ (emphasis original). The following students felt that, as an underlying motivation, financial gain got in the way of important aspects of their educational experiences:

How would it affect your learning if teachers knew more about you?

Um, some teachers it probably wouldn’t matter.

Why is that?

Ah, I’m just saying that some teachers just teach for a job. Like you get a vibe from some of them that they’re just here for that. Pay at the end of the week.

Jan expressed her opinion about how students viewed pecuniary issues:

I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but in the last 10 years, I’d say, that younger people have become more right wing, much more judgemental. Much more status and property orientated, much more not even what money can buy me, but what version of this can money buy me.

Observations yielded little evidence of conspicuous consumption, however. The school had a strict dress code up to Year 12 and, while Year 13 students were out of uniform, or dressed ‘mufti’, the students interviewed did not speak of fashion as a distinguishing factor in a peer’s status. Several students made use of Jan’s relaxation of the school’s ban on iPods and cell phones, but again possession of these items did not appear to impact on peer status. However, only one Spanish exchange student brought a laptop to class. Staff vehicles filled the school car park; most students walked to school or rode public transport.

The data indicates that in the school context *having* was considered important to wellbeing, although students identified a different set of items than those listed above. For example, books, ‘qualified’ and ‘professional’ teachers, the structure and quality of the physical plant and ICT access were considered necessary for students to ‘do well’ in school. Not all felt their school provided these adequately, however. As reflected in the following exchange, some students voiced concern over the quality of some resources available:

Honestly, these books, you see them, and it’s like you’re in kindergarten. And then you do the test, and it’s so much harder, it’s like, it’s no comparison to the book. (1)

And it doesn’t help when the book has mistakes in it. (2)

Like the book that we use has like, heaps of mistakes. (1)

And they’re really old as well, like 1990. (3)

Jan viewed ICT access, in particular, not only as a scarce resource, but a necessary asset for academic achievement:

And the computers of course, you know, I’ve got a plus in having those [pointing to the 5 six-year-old machines in class], but you can imagine that if we’ve got, let’s say, 12 senior classes, all doing writing, so we’ve got to spread our program out to get the computer access [in the school lab]. And handwritten [NCEA standards assessments] fail more frequently.

Although the school had recently undergone renovations to its physical plant, the buildings that had received focused attention were the ones most visible to the community, including the main office, library and hospitality training facilities. Jan’s classroom, which was located at the rear of the campus, was situated in a block of classrooms that were poorly lit and insulated. Jan dressed some of her classroom windows with curtains she had purchased, and she painted over others to keep the sun from shining in students’ eyes. Noise often permeated the thin walls, though Jan encouraged students to try to ignore the lawn mower, or the soundtrack to the movie playing in the classroom located on the floor above. While the desks and chairs in Jan’s room appeared to be clean and functional, one student argued that ‘a lot of the classrooms have old and uncomfortable chairs/desks and the [Year 13] common room is disgusting’.

Aside from the above comment, students did not address how the conditions observed above impacted on their perceived sense of wellbeing in school, although the research suggests that these factors may impinge on students’ comfort levels and abilities to focus, which have been considered by others as wellbeing indicators (Jones et al. 2007; Booth and Sheehan 2008; Cohen et al. 2009). Identified items appeared to be valued for their utility in achieving educational goals, but not necessarily because they made educational experiences ‘easier’ or ‘more enjoyable’.

Being well

Students also spoke about wellbeing by referring to constructs associated with who they are, have been and will be, including identity, roles, independence and

autonomy. Responses in this domain typically reflected a personal, rather than collective, point of view. For example, one student described wellbeing as a product or outcome of 'knowing who you are, where you stand (in your family, friends)'. Another student explained that wellbeing is something that 'varies; [being] content with [our] lives; happy, healthy, goal-orientated'.

For students, *being* well in the school context involved teachers noticing them, as well as recognising in them the potential to be independent individuals. HPE teacher Mary, valued by her students for her ability to 'make students feel known', referred to this as acknowledging, but not judging, a student's 'reality'. She shared her difficulty with assessing students on whether or not they are being 'responsible', a component of the HPE curriculum in which students are to demonstrate they can 'contribute to healthy communities and environments' (MOE 2007, p. 22):

You know, and who is it – and for any other person – who is it for me to judge if you are? The only judge if you are doing a lot of these things is if you believe it. And if you generally believe it, well, then that is your reality. Where's my place to actually then say that you're not? So that, in itself, requires a lot of the questioning and conversation and skills to really develop the student's concept in their own mind of where they're at ... Yeah, and if that's where they're at, that's where they're at.

While accepting that in their role as students they were being continually assessed, some students felt that teachers' judgements had potentially deleterious effects on their sense of themselves as well as their abilities to function well in school. The following conversation with three students details student 1's experience in photography class in Year 12, during which a teacher was judgemental about her ability to produce an original piece of work:

Have you always liked to do art and drawing?

Yeah. (1)

Did a teacher see [your work] and say, 'Hey, you should take this [photography course]'?

(All laugh, almost sarcastically)

[The photography teacher] thought that one of [1's] photos were, like, professional, so she thought she had copied it, but it was hers. Like, she did it herself. And she had to like get the negatives to prove it. (2)

So she didn't believe you? She didn't give you the benefit of the doubt?

No, cause she asked the Y13s and, apparently it just, yeah. (1)

How did that make you feel?

I was, like, gutted. (1)

You can feel, like, good, 'cause it was like hers, you know, and she thought it was that good that it wasn't hers. (2)

I didn't think it was that great, just a picture. (1)

In New Zealand students are assessed not only on the traditional academic subjects, but also on students' competencies in five 'key' areas: thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing (MOE 2007, p. 12). This excerpt suggests that student 1's creativity and confidence, components of the key competency thinking, were called into question by her teacher in ways that appeared to impact on her experience of *being* well in school.

Jan also mentioned 'judgements' in her description of wellbeing:

For me, a lot of the wellbeing stuff is about judgements and which they're hearing stuff at home, they're hearing stuff at school, but they still, they've got to weave amongst that and find out what they want to actually believe themselves.

Jan's comment suggests that she saw her responsibility as helping students develop a personal identity, as they 'weave through' the 'judgements made about them'. As the following quotation suggests, success in this endeavour appears to involve the development of both independence and competence:

And what I hope I provide them is an oppor— like an environment that they feel safe to take risks. Because if somebody puts them down, I'll deal with it so that they don't have to. But ... If they can't stand as an individual, strongly, they sink.

These quotations suggest that teachers' judgements have the power to enhance, as well as detract from, students' experience of independence, both in the present and the future. The following excerpts suggest that one mitigating factor for students may be their status as Year 13 students, which students believed meant experiencing more independent, agentive and adult-like experiences:

[In Year 13, there is] a lot less restriction, and a lot more freedom. You get treated differently (like an adult). You are expected to be a leader/role model and manage your time wisely.

[Jan's] firm and, you know, like straight up, but she's not one of those who are like, 'do this, do this, do that', you know? She's not like, you know, like, we're not her robots like.

[Year 13 teachers] don't force much. They treat you like adults so you feel like one aswell [sic] and I think that is so you can respond to situations with an adult approach.

However, as the following exchange suggests, not all students appeared to want to experience their education completely independently:

We need to be learnt the stuff before we sit [the exam]. (1)

Rather than just reading a book I'd rather a teacher teach it to you. (2)

What kinds of questions would you need to ask her for her to be able to help you?

That we need you to help us with – not self-help, we need teacher to be taught. (1)

Similarly, one student described the tension between being recognised as an individual, and not wanting to stand out conspicuously amongst peers:

[Adults] don't, like, realise that it's actually quite hard to grow up as a teenager. They give you rules and stuff and, yeah, you want to abide by them but sometimes you can't 'cause it's like the peer pressure and stuff and it's up to you to say not, but (pause) you don't want to be different to everyone else.

It appears that knowing *who one is* and developing into *who one will be* involves negotiating others' expectations and one's personal desires. The student above suggested they are not always compatible, particularly when those expectations come from adult figures. Her comments challenge a stereotypical view of youth desiring to sever ties from adults (see Eccles et al. 1991; Eccles et al. 1993; Oldfather and Thomas 1998; DeSantis King et al. 2006). In effect, students appear to view relationships – with peers, family and other adults – as significant assets for *being* well in school.

Relating well

The data revealed that students conceptualised wellbeing in terms of their interpersonal relationships. Analysis of the school curriculum also indicated a school-wide emphasis on not only 'academic' but also 'social' achievement. Although 'social achievement' was not described further, students and staff at MVHS appear to have defined it as the strength of the teacher–student relationships:

I do think MVHS is unique in that the teachers do care for the students and they get to know us quite well (and they treat each of us differently accordingly, which is good in some ways). It's probably the only thing I think is good about MVHS at the moment.

MVHS makes great relationships with their students. I find I can interact with different teachers in different ways either joking around having a go at each other or just general conversation. Fact is all the staff make the effort to get to know you and the rest of your family.

Similar to evidence addressed in the *being* domain, the following excerpt highlights the perceived significance of students' year level on the extent to which close teacher–student relationships influenced wellbeing:

Why can't Year 9 students have those relationships with teachers?

It's because we're mature and we're at the age of becoming, like, adults. So [teachers] talk to us like an adult. (1)

Do you think it's more in how they treat you or in how you feel?

I think it's both. Because in Year 9 I think teachers want to get to, they want to know they have the respect first, like, from Year 9s, because you know how Year 9s, they're still kind of maturing and stuff and so getting used to high school, so it's kind of, like, you're not, you're more open. And in order for them to get that respect. (2)

(interrupts) ... But they teach you differently than when you're, like, juniors. (1)

How so?

Because they've felt more respect because you have more respect for them, I guess.
(1)

Year level also appeared to influence how some teachers related to students. Jan explained how students' age impacts on how she approaches classroom management:

To me, they're children until they're Year 11. They're young teens until they're Year 13; they're young adults when they're Year 13. I have that delineated. I don't think I've expressed that at all to them. I hope through my behaviour, and the way that I do things ... I also know that at times I've had to draw them, and speak to them, like I do with my Year 9 class. They should be able to tell from the tone that they've overstepped the boundaries.

This 'tone', interpreted by students as being 'told off', was an experience most students associated with their junior years. The following student explained that he experiences his relationships with teachers differently as a Year 13, 'Cause people, like, kind of act like a friend ... Yeah, a respect. Like the respect goes both ways.'

Another student commented that 'MVHS has a great community atmosphere, it's like everybody is [sic] friends', reflecting a school culture of friendship and community, which he felt influenced wellbeing. In contrast, Jan voiced her discomfort with how some students defined wellbeing-enhancing student-teacher relationships:

But yes, it does worry me at times what some of them do say, and how much ... but that's part of my problem with this whole emphasis on relationship. It's that if I am the most responsible adult or the most significant adult that they have in that day's interaction. *Wow!* You know, I chose not to be a parent so I wouldn't have to do that. I really don't want to be seen in that light. I don't mind being a significant person in their life, but not *the* person, for *the* day, even. I'd rather what I said was the significant moment of the day. But that's also my, my personality, and I don't want to have lots and lots of closeness or intimacy with them. (emphasis original)

While students appeared to suggest that wellbeing involved having relationships with teachers that could be described as respectful, adult-like or as friendships, Jan's comments indicate that, for her, wellbeing involves clearer boundaries between teachers and students. Students seemed to want to be 'known' and noticed, but Jan expressed limits to the level of 'closeness or intimacy' she felt marked appropriate relationships in school. The literature reflects a significant emphasis on student-teacher relationships as important to wellbeing (see Davis 2003; Suldo et al. 2008). However, the data here suggests more research is needed to explore if and how teachers' and students' conceptualisations of their mutual relationships align, and the impacts of any mismatch on their wellbeing.

Wellbeing appraisals: feeling and thinking well

Feeling well

Discussions about wellbeing invariably included examples of affective states associated with *feeling* well. For example, responses to the question 'How would you describe someone with wellbeing?' included phrases such as being 'happy,

healthy, fulfilled', and students' visual representations of wellbeing included smiley faces, and one that depicted a sad, crying friend being consoled. These initial responses were expressed without specific reference to educational experiences. When probed, one student explained that how one feels is a personal and private experience and therefore not necessarily related to their experiences in school:

The only thing is, really, you don't know what's going on in people's heads, and what they're going through.

Should you? Do you think it would make education more meaningful if you did?

If teachers knew what students were going through, then I really reckon it would.

Do you like it when teachers come up to you and say, hey, it looks like you're down today, are you ok? Is that good, or does it feel intrusive?

Umm, sometimes it's annoying, but (inaudible), I guess if they didn't do that, we'd be complaining ... Yeah, you want to know someone's there.

While the above student viewed it as 'annoying', it appears that students consider that being recognised and acknowledged by others is an important component of *feeling* well. Yet data indicated that school was not viewed as an appropriate context for addressing all that might be 'going on in people's heads' or all that 'they're going through'. Three students discussed how some teachers and administrators handled the sudden death of a classmate's [Jon's] father:

And like, even when like being disappointed about the whole [Jon] thing the way it was broadcast, it was like he actually died, not his dad. (1)

How was it broadcast?

Cause it got broadcast in assembly. (2)

And in the English room, and then I heard it from another teacher, and they all broadcast to the whole class and I thought that was a bit too extreme. Yeah, it's really sad that he died. But, it's like you were saying, they didn't need to do that, like, [Jon] might not have want that. I mean, it's like they made it sound like [Jon] has died. (3)

Jan's views appear to align with the students'; she argued that at times the school had the tendency to 'pull out the grief wagon', overemphasising the assumed impacts of the tragedy when she believed some students really needed to 'just get on with it'.

Use of the term 'broadcast' in reference to articulated emotions appeared to reflect an unwritten school protocol about what should and should not be openly expressed. For example, students cited the requirement to carry conspicuous, coloured notifications to the counselling office as a reason why many did not seek out pastoral care support. A discussion with a local teen helpline officer indicated this may be common to other area schools as well; she mentioned her organisation had received more than 10,000 texts during the previous month. This high number of contacts in a city of less than 400,000 suggests that schools may not be fully serving

the emotional needs of students. Moreover, the officer described a relatively recent shift from phone and email contact to the more anonymous text messaging, suggesting that even within chosen support networks some issues may be considered too personal to seek necessary support and care. However, public displays of positive emotions appeared to be common. For example, on several occasions, Jan called out '*Pakipaki!*', a Māori term for 'clap', when students earned credits towards their qualifications or were recognised for an in-school accomplishment such as election as a class officer or involvement in sports.

These findings invite further study into how cultural mores in New Zealand regarding expression of how one feels may influence these findings. For example, those who make public show of their relative gains over others, particularly in the realm of financial success, are referred to derisively as 'tall poppies'. In addition, New Zealand's relatively high ranking among OECD countries for suicide attempts and completions (Ministry of Social Development 2010) calls into question how well people are *feeling* when the socially acceptable response to 'How are you?' is 'It's all good', or, as the students tended to declare, 'Sweet as'.

Thinking well

While the data indicates that specific or detailed expressions of *feeling* were considered best addressed after school hours, how one was *thinking* was acknowledged as integral to educational experiences, and to wellbeing in school. Spoken about generally, students' understandings of *thinking* well appeared to resonate with the literature (i.e. 'being contempt [sic] with your life', 'making my own decisions' or 'makes you think'), although what it meant to think well in school differed somewhat in some respects. For example, scholars have identified wellbeing indicators such as critical thinking, meta-cognition, mindfulness, creativity and informed decision making (e.g. Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Jacob and Brinkerhoff 1999; Vohs, Mead and Goode 2006; Fredrickson et al. 2008; Noddings 2008). In contrast, students identified 'keeping to the word count' and proper grammatical usage as components of *thinking* well. As one student explained, 'For this year, we're supposed to put in lots of punctuation and stuff, and use big words.'

Effective decision making was one aspect of *thinking* well that aligns with the literature (Kahneman 2003; Mortimer et al. 2002; Loewenstein, Rick and Cohen 2008). Jan's description of her educational philosophy reflects her view of how making effective decisions impacts on wellbeing in school, which she framed in terms of opportunities to learn:

The more opportunities then the more I think a person can make their own decision – informed decisions – and that's what I like about education. You can make informed decisions. Even if in the end the decision might be wrong *for you*, you've made that decision; therefore you can rationalise the consequences. If you were to go to some of our less able classes, you would find they are still at the same point of needing to be given some direction. They don't know what information *can do* to their own learning opportunities. Yes, tricky one. (emphasis original)

Here, Jan made a distinction between the 'more' and 'less' able classes, suggesting that for the latter teachers play a larger role in assisting students in the decision-making process. However, even students enrolled in classes identified as 'more able' felt that many of their choices were limited, if not decided for them, by teachers or school managers. As one student explained, '[At school] you can't really do the things that make you happy because you have to do things that you don't really like and get forced into it.'

Observations revealed several instances when NCEA-related activities, intended to provide a 'variety of methods and approaches (appropriate to the learner and the context) that give the learner the opportunity to show evidence of achievement/competence' (NZQA 2010), were delivered more narrowly. For example, when introducing a NCEA standard that offered more than 5 options from which to choose, Jan stated, 'I strongly, strongly suggest that you take options 2 or 3.' It remains unclear how pervasive this practice was in other classes, which raises questions about how limiting choice impacts on other identified indicators of *thinking* well, such as openness to new ideas or situations (Peterson and Seligman 2004). Jan believed that the educational experiences of students, referred to below using the Māori term *ākonga*, may not have effectively developed their abilities in this area:

Open-minded is not the first term that comes to mind! Sometimes they are exposed to new viewpoints but need time and more experiences to formulate their own values. Some polarisation of view is evident within different groups/levels of the *ākonga*. Confusion of cultural identity, sexual disorientation and gender complexes are all recognised but not acted on without staff guidance. While diversity is supposed to be celebrated, many *ākonga* tend to 'hang' with those they know and those *ākonga* help to form the MVHS view of the world.

The educational experiences observed in this study appeared to offer few challenges to students' comfort zones, thus possibly compromising their ability to be 'open-minded'. According to the literature, opportunities to practice critical thinking skills, to develop meta-cognitive strategies, are important wellbeing indicators not only for school, but for life (Craft, Gardner and Claxton 2008; Noddings 2008; Wagner 2008).

Wellbeing actions: functioning and striving well

Functioning well

Out-of-school involvements were the most commonly cited examples of what students were doing when spending their time well. Students frequently mentioned employment, sports, listening to or playing music, 'hanging out with friends', shopping or involvement in their cultural group. The ways in which students spoke about these experiences resonated with Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) descriptions of a state of 'flow'; a sense of timelessness and focus characterised their descriptions.

When probed about if and how wellbeing was tied to their in-school activities, students typically referred to experiences associated with the NCEA, and the unit and achievement standards they worked towards to acquire credits towards their school qualifications. According to Jan, students have some choice regarding which

type of standard they will choose to spend their time on. Here she explained how the approaches and philosophies of each standard differ:

I *love* unit standards. I like, I *like* achievement standards, you can hear the difference. The unit standards are broken down with much more easier [sic] marking type criteria so the tasks that make up those pc [performance criteria] are not the final standard ... The achievement standards were like the old, what we called the school certificate and the university entrance, the old academic exam thing, [and] you have the more intelligent, now that's my word, the more intelligent, the academic-based ones. The unit standards were set up for like us in transition [class] ... the core generics, the 'practical skills', using a telephone book, holding a conversation which, you know, that is an *immensely* attractive thing for an employer to see that a person can hold a conversation. Yet, the unit standards have now developed across into English, and science, and all that. Because what was happening was that these less academic children were having success, they were becoming empowered, and they said, 'We actually don't want to have study hall, what else can we do in English?' So then they started writing these new ones when they found that these were a success. (emphasis original)

Not all students felt that the current system was fair, however. The excerpt below details one student's frustration with what he perceived to be an unequal workload between the types of standards offered to all students:

The main reason for my hate of NCEA is 2 reasons:

Example 1: Japanese speech – 3 credits [achievement standard]

This takes about 2 weeks to write a speech in another language, aswell [sic] as editing and such – then you must present it

Childcare macaroni cheese – 3 credits [unit standard]

You spend half a period following a recipe and making macaroni cheese. Dead easy + You get to eat aswell!

Both are the same thing kinda (even though different subjects) you see my point?

The achievement and unit standards are also distinguished by how they are evaluated; only the achievement standards involve a multi-tiered evaluation of the students' performance involving scores of achieved, achieved with merit or achieved with excellence. However, as this next example illustrates, these distinctions were not considered universally standardised:

Calculus is the hardest NCEA subject there is, i [sic] struggle with a lot of it but i do my homework and i study. There is only 1 internal [assessment] for Calc so it's pretty important. I studied and tried extremely (sic) hard [for] the Merit. In our class there were about 5 people who did the bare minimum. No study. Only did the [tasks necessary to receive status of] achieved stuff in class. They also only did the achieved questions in the test and thus they got an achieved with no effort. I myself put in a lot of hours study for the Merit, and when the test came i ended up getting 3 or 4 merit questions and i was ONE off getting the merit. Yet the people who did the bare minimum get the exact same mark as me, and when we apply for things our marks will both say Achieved. What i would like to see if (sic) something like Achieved +, Merit -, Achieve -, Merit +, opposed to just the 3 marks. I am still angry with my test

results (because i put in tonnes more work and i feel i deserve a better mark than those who did the bare minimum) So i get punished for not getting ONE question (my mark was only Achieved) and i didn't get rewarded for getting the 3 merits.

Presently, the NCEA program is in a state of transition, and there is a move towards streamlining many unit and achievement standards, although this is criticised by many who feel that the unit standards have provided many students who had struggled under the previous, more traditional, system with multiple pathways to success.

Whereas a sense of timelessness characterised discussions about outside-of-school engagements, close attention to time typified daily educational experiences, which appeared to be compartmentalised within class periods into discrete, manageable units. Jan was frequently observed calling out the remaining time for in-class activities, using a stopwatch to stay consistent with her warnings (e.g. 'You have one more minute to talk and then there will be silence'; 'We'll be having 5–10 minutes of adjustment, you are allowed to chat during that time'). Jan typically introduced NCEA standards by dividing the academic term into units of time devoted to assessment-related tasks, at times breaking this down to an almost infinitesimal level:

Please look up [Standard #] 90720 in your folders to see when the deadline is.

6th of March.

6th of March. 3 weeks. You have 10 periods to write it. 600 words. 60 words a period.

Jan shared that she never felt she had enough time to meet curricular and assessment-related goals, but felt it was her responsibility to help students manage their own time effectively, some more than others. As she explained, 'Time is a completely different concept for a number of them who are: a) focused, b) cultural, and I definitely think gender, and I definitely think age.'

The following student agreed that students should be competent in time management, but also doubted that one summer holiday following Year 12 prepared him for this:

I see the amount of work my older sisters had [sic] to do [for university] and they don't get much free time, if you are not taught how to manage yourself you will get slaughtered. I guess the freedom you get as a Year 13 doesn't really help because teachers assume you will manage your time well, even though most of us don't. I don't feel school teaches you self-managing skills.

This student's desire for direct instruction suggests a different, less autonomous, pathway towards achieving the NZC's key competency 'managing self' (MOE 2007, p. 12), and reflects data addressed earlier that some students appeared to place the onus on teachers to develop competencies in self-management, both with their time and with their learning.

One area in which students voiced particular difficulties in management was in negotiating their in- and outside-school involvements:

My personal difficulty I find with school is at this age, trying to find time to do homework and/or revise a days [sic] worth of notes. I have a pretty hectic schedule (For example I have 4 football trainings on Thursday) and finding time for those things usually comes out of my sleeping time, and sleep is very important to give me energy and motivation at school. The cycle goes in a circle as well, e.g. I take an extra hour at night to cover my notes, I go to school tired and unmotivated, I get told off for not paying attention, I go home and go to my commitments whatever that may be for that day, come home, and I find I am too tired to do school work, so I sleep and get told off for not doing homework or can't remember much from what we took notes on yesterday. I don't know what the solution should be, I don't really want special attention or privileges because of this, I just feel like we should get more understanding (for lack of a better word) rather than just being told off.

The data revealed that teachers rarely asked students about, or appeared to integrate, out-of-school activities with students' educational experiences. Research suggests that forging connections between in-class and extracurricular involvements significantly impacts on multiple aspects of wellbeing (Patton et al. 2002; Feldman and Matjasko 2005; Miller, Gilman and Martens 2008; Waters, Cross and Runions 2009; Eccles and Roeser 2011). For the following student, however, doing so was viewed as a hindrance, rather than a potential opportunity for *relating* different spheres of their lives:

I'm sick of the time wasters such as cross country, which is a kiddy event and year 13s should not be forced to miss class just so they can walk around the block? Those sorts of events are fine for juniors who can miss class. But for seniors, year 13s especially, there should be no need to force us to miss class for a pointless walk. ... What annoys me the most is that i [sic] no power to change anything, and even if i [sic] do – it won't be until i'm [sic] long gone before they make and [sic] real changes.

These comments appear to align with research findings that, while these activities may be beneficial in their own right, personal choice and a sense of personal agency appear to play important roles in the degree to which one's involvements enhance wellbeing (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade 2005; Holder, Coleman and Wallace 2010).

Striving well

When asked about what motivated them in school, students most typically referred to credit acquisition for the NCEA program, as the following exchange succinctly illustrates:

When you're given a new assignment, what's your goal?

Finish.

Do most of your friends feel that way?

Yeah, like to get the credits.

The current structure of the NCEA program appears to impact not only on *what* students spend their time doing in class, and *how* that time is spent, but also *why*; the outcomes students' expected from their efforts appear to influence the quality and quantity of effort devoted. For example, as one student explained, 'Employers don't know the system yet anyway so I'll just do what I need to do to get an achieved.'

Only one student shared her sense of the purpose of educational experiences in a way that suggested a focus more on the process than the product:

I care about the credits. But I also care about how fun learning is. Like we said before, the more fun it is, the more I get out of it [sic]. I find that if you just go to school just to get credits or just to sit there and listen, it's boring. Then, you're not going to be, you're just going to be, 'oh yeah, I passed'. You're not going to be over the moon about it. As much as if you have fun and then, like, do all that kind of stuff then you get to your exam and you're like pass, you feel like so over the moon and then you start to think on how fun it was to get it. Where if you just get it, you don't really just remember.

Notably, this excerpt also represents one of the only examples in which students discussed their educational experiences in terms of affect. The following exchange, however, is a more typical representation of students' rationale for why they function as they do in school:

[School is] like, the thing that gets you to the next stage in life? So you need qualifications in order to get the job that you want? And school helps you in that. (1)

How?

It gives you credits and stuff, and that's what matters when you, like have a CV or you like take on Uni and that Uni person takes a look at it. (1)

You've got to get the qualifications to come out with a good job to be able to do well, because everything's going to go up. And, you know, otherwise you're not going to be able to live. Well, you will (1 and 2 laugh), but it will be a struggle. Like if we want a house, well, we've got to be able to have the deposit. (3)

According to students, qualifications afforded opportunities to gain a secure job, which they viewed as particularly important given the recession-like conditions characterising the current economy. In the following excerpt, a student shares concerns about her friends who chose to leave school early in the year to enter the workforce:

Well, two people from my [year] group that have dropped out this year. They're working full time at their supermarket job.

And what do you think they're going to be able to say five years from now?

They're going to be hating it; they're going to have no money.

And what are the options available to them?

Um, well, they will probably go off and get further training and stuff, but it's up to them if they want to do that or not.

So school is good in that it makes it easier to get on those pathways?

Well, when my parents were at school, you didn't, like, if you dropped out at 15, there's a possibility you could get a good job. But not these days, the way the economy is going, and you actually have to get, like, they're not going to take a bum over someone who went to Uni.

So it's about your qualifications, really.

At the moment it is.

In alignment with the students' views, the research indicates that employment status is a significant factor in adult wellbeing (Frey and Stutzer 2002; Bruni and Porta 2005; Dolan, Peasgood and White 2008). For students, employment represents a mark of adulthood and independence from the constraints of youth, indicators discussed earlier in relation to *being* well. However, the data suggests that appraisals played a minimal role; participants viewed *the* job as less critical than having *a* job:

Does school matter, down the track, after you get your first job?

Not all the time. You can get those qualifications from that job. (1)

And what if you don't like that job?

You change. (2)

New Zealand offers myriad pathways for working adults to get 're-skilled' and change jobs, through both job training and low-cost university study. The data revealed an overarching view that training opportunities available upon leaving school would matter more to their eventual wellbeing than how or why they engaged with their present educational experiences beyond meeting basic expectations for completion. For example, the school career guidance counsellor confided, 'School is irrelevant once they are into the workplace and are gaining skills there.'

These examples suggest an emphasis on *earning* and a conspicuous absence of how achieved credits represent the *learning* gained. Credits, in effect, were viewed as a sort of 'currency'. For example, students engaged in 'credit counting', a practice that resembled keeping tabs on one's bank account and continually ruminating over its exchange value for the future. Teachers also referred to credit value in terms of standards achieved rather than learning gained. One substitute teacher was observed to explain to the class that she would find work for students if they had not brought any to class. As she pointed out, 'No point in wasting your time, better to do something that's worth standards.'

These views appear to contrast with the ministry's vision of 'lifelong learners' who, in the process of acquiring the credits, are to be 'critical and creative thinkers' or 'active seekers, users, and creators of knowledge' (MOE 2007, p. 8). Nor did they align with Jan's definition of the 'lifelong learner':

The school motto for my own high school was 'Not for school but for life we are learning'. In my opinion a 'lifelong learner' is someone who is open to trying or experiencing new situations, discussing theories or premises and open to other methods of operation. I believe learning is a dynamic process and a 'lifelong learner' is self-motivated to expand their understanding of the world and its inhabitants.

Here, Jan mentions a motivation to understand things beyond the self, although she had also articulated her belief that her students were 'egotistical' and 'present-focused'; the data also revealed that most students spoke about *striving* in terms of what they hoped to gain personally. However, there was evidence of students considering how *striving* for wellbeing involved others. Most commonly, students cited commitments to their family as motivating factors: 'My family is not the richest, and I know at times my mum struggles with money even though she won't admit it. I hope to get a decent job so I can make life easier for my future family.'

Another student discussed the importance of her family ties and cultural pride as a Pacific Islander (Pasifika) in motivating her efforts in school:

Pasifika ... That's why I come to school. I think a lot of people also come because of not only their relationship with teachers, Pasifka, there's sports as well, also friends, also wanting to be (pause), like Island people, they come ... for all those things, as well as making their parents proud, and their family back home proud, and because like after all this stuff bringing pain, your parents try to get all the way here. To others, some feel like they owe it to them ... because they want to do it so that maybe they have kids and, you know, generation and generation it just, you know, gets better and better.

These examples of students *striving* to benefit their family and cultural group suggests students understand that wellbeing involves more than just oneself, a concept discussed in terms of experiences of *transcendence* in the literature (Cloninger 2004; Diener and Seligman 2004; Peterson and Seligman 2004). However, students did not mention other examples of transcendence, such as experiences of spirituality and religion, or service to the wider community, as impacting on what they were *striving* for, despite their recognition in the literature as important to many people's understanding and experience of wellbeing (Youniss et al. 1999; Dolan, Peasgood and White 2008; Holder, Coleman and Wallace 2010).

Discussion

In this study, we observed and engaged in conversations with New Zealand Year 13 students and their teachers to gain a better understanding of how wellbeing is conceptualised and experienced in relation to senior secondary educational experiences. The data from this study present a set of school-based wellbeing indicators that reflect the perspectives of a cohort of New Zealand senior secondary students, and thus provide an interesting comparison of indicators informed by the multi-disciplinary wellbeing literature and the New Zealand Curriculum (see Table 3). An important outcome of this study is to establish a starting point from which to explore the applicability of research- and curriculum-informed indicators to the lived experiences of a broader range of senior secondary students.

Table 3: School-based, participant-informed indicators of wellbeing

Categories	Domains	Research-informed indicators	NZC-informed indicators	School-based, participant-informed indicators
Assets	Having	resources tools opportunities	resourceful effectively uses communication tools economic wellbeing	books 'qualified' and 'professional' teachers quality and structure of physical plant ICT access
	Being	autonomy identity integrity	positive in own identity resilient values integrity manages self competently high expectations cultural diversity inclusion physical wellbeing autonomy independence individualism	having one's 'reality' acknowledged self-awareness independence personal agency managing judgements
	Relating	interpersonal relationships relationships to place relationships as meaning transcendence (connections to someone/something beyond the self)	reliable able to relate well to others connected to the land and environment member of and engaged in communities international citizen values diversity values equity values ecological sustainability uses languages, symbols and texts	teacher–student relationships • mutual respect • friendship • 'being known'

			competently Treaty of Waitangi experiences coherence social wellbeing cultural wellbeing environmental wellbeing spiritual wellbeing	
Appraisals	Feeling	full emotional spectrum socio-emotional education pastoral care	values respect mental wellbeing	having others ‘know what you’re going through’
	Thinking	curiosity creativity decision making mindfulness meta-cognition	<i>enterprising</i> and entrepreneurial literate and numerate critical and creative thinker informed decision maker values innovation, inquiry, and creativity thinks competently learns to learn mental wellbeing	‘using big words’ proper grammatical usage effective decision making choices
Actions	Function -ing	involvements • breadth, depth, volition • what is done • how it is done	enterprising and <i>entrepreneurial</i> contributes to the well-being of New Zealand: social, cultural, economic, and environmental participates competently in a range of life contexts active seeker, user, and	NCEA assessments efficiency in involvements

		creator of knowledge values community and participation engaged citizen engaged in employment	
Striving	motivation goals future orientation	motivated values excellence future focus orientation sustainable future development	product orientation credit acquisition secure employment striving for others

Two broad orientations towards wellbeing were observed in the data. First, wellbeing appeared to be viewed as a phenomenon involving three main categories consisting of multiple, interrelated domains. Students appeared to conceptualise a clear relationship between developing assets (having, being, relating) and engaging in actions (functioning, striving) related to wellbeing. In addition, they discussed appraisals (thinking, feeling), particularly in terms of making independent decisions and thinking positively.

Second, when considered specifically in relation to their current educational experiences, wellbeing appeared to be viewed differently from how it is conceptualised through the lens of the framework as a complex, adaptive learning system involving a balance or systemic exchange among all domains. Specifically, the data revealed that students paid attention to both the assets and actions categories. For example, particular domains such as *having* resources – informational and material – *being* independent and having one’s ‘reality’ recognised, and *relating* well to teachers were considered salient aspects of their educational experiences. In addition, *functioning* in relation to, and *striving* towards successful completion of qualifications were central to students’ educational experiences, and each of these were viewed as critical domains for future wellbeing. In contrast, appraisals were viewed as separate from their schooling experiences. Specifically, *thinking* constructively, creatively or critically, or *feeling* a broad range of emotions and freely expressing them, were viewed as existing more to the periphery. Thus, while assets, actions and appraisals appeared to be viewed as key components of wellbeing, the ways in which they were understood and experienced independently, and in relation to one another, varied. This was particularly true in the context of schooling. These interpretations of the relationships between the different domains present a particular view of wellbeing in the schooling context that does not necessarily represent all of its complexity.

Conclusion

For a complex, multi-dimensional view of wellbeing to be realised, schools must consider how to support a 'bottom-up' versus 'top-down' approach to students' educational experiences. The data suggests that students perceive that specific aspects of schooling, including program design, curriculum, social structures and teachers, play a central role in the development and management of educational experiences. Consequently students view these factors as impacting on the extent to which they are agents of their own wellbeing. Even if multiple routes to wellbeing are potentially viable, imposition of strong advice about the 'best' pathway to follow may restrict the potential outcomes one may reap by allowing the journey to unfold for the individual traveller.

A perceived division between a public and private realm may also hinder the realisation of wellbeing as a multi-dimensional phenomenon within the very public domain of schooling. Presently, how one thinks and feels about wellbeing appear to be less emphasised than just 'getting on with it' and engaging in the set school program.

Finally, focusing on wellbeing as the product of, as opposed to being embedded in, educational experiences, places a linearity upon it that appears to comprise its organic nature as an emergent system in continuous, dynamic exchange with its environment. In many schools today there is a perception that engaging in the actions of schooling determines whether and how wellbeing will be achieved. For many who are not engaged in the school program, wellbeing may therefore occur in the distant future, conditional upon re-training or returning to school as an older student. Conceivably, under these conditions, some may never arrive at that point, falling short of the goals educators and society have for their students.

This study does not provide a universal standard for wellbeing by which students should necessarily be evaluated, or to which schools should be made accountable. Here, we present the voices of Year 13 students and some of their teachers who, collectively, present a view of wellbeing requiring considered attention to its complexity. How wellbeing's multiple dimensions can be incorporated into educational experiences will depend on how the dynamic, complex cultures of modern schooling unfold. At certain times, with particular populations of students in given contexts, some domains may receive more considered attention than others. What the data suggests may be needed is to remain cognizant of continued emphases, and to allow for other domains to 'emerge' in appropriate times, populations and contexts. Thus students and teachers may be best served by viewing wellbeing as a complex phenomenon that deserves recognition as an integral component of a continually evolving educational process.

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