

CREATING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

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- Growing Great Schools Worldwide

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WHAT IS SCHOOL CULTURE?

- The way we do things around here!
- What is expected of everyone
- What is considered acceptable or not acceptable
- Comprises values, beliefs, words and actions
- Often led from the top – but not always
- It is developed, maintained or challenged by conversations
- The output is how people feel about coming to school – both students and teachers

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WHEN WELLBEING IS AT THE HEART OF A SCHOOL IT UNDERPINS...

- Better mental health and resilience
- A stronger sense of belonging
- More pro-social behaviour
- Teacher satisfaction
- AND
- Stronger engagement and better academic outcomes

Noble, McGrath, Roffey & Rowling (2008) Student wellbeing scoping study for the Australian Federal government

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WELLBEING FACILITATORS

- A focus on 'the whole child' within the 'whole school'
- Leaders who have vision, passion and credibility – and courage
- Authentic consultation, skilled communication and support
- Schools that see themselves as learning organisations
- Initiatives on resilience, positive behaviour, safe schools, restorative practices, social and emotional learning with an appropriate pedagogy
- Pro-active intervention, not just reactive intervention
- Professional training for staff
- Solution focused and strengths-based approaches
- Focus on student engagement rather than targets
- Focus on teacher wellbeing

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BRONFENBRENNER'S ECO-SYSTEMIC MODEL IN SCHOOLS

The diagram shows concentric circles representing different levels of the school system:

- Macro-level – Socio-political:** The total work and cultural socio-political context
- Meso-level – Organisational:** School culture and leadership
- Exo-level – Interpersonal:** Key school policies and practices that form relationships and interactions with each other
- Meso-level – Organisational:** School or educational system as a whole
- Micro-level – Personal:** Valuing each individual as part of the school

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ECOLOGICAL MODELS OF SCHOOL CULTURE

- Change is rarely linear – it is interactive, circular, bi-directional and accumulative.
- Sustainable change involves ownership
- Micro-level: Individual
- Exo-level: Interpersonal
- Meso-level: Organisational
- Macro-level: Socio-political
- Chronology also matters – culture is not static and things change over time in one direction or another

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 THE ECOLOGY OF SCHOOLS

- Schools are made up of these inter-locking systems
- Each affects the others both positively and negatively
- What is good for teachers is usually good for students and vice versa
- What happens in one part of the school has impact on what happens elsewhere
- Influence is bi-directional
- Staffroom conversation can determine what happens in the classroom - how students, families, priorities are seen
- The way schools are managed effects how teachers see themselves and their role
- Often we try and build wellbeing in a school in silos – rather than exploring what applies to everyone and everything all the time.

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 ASPIRE TO WELLBEING

- Six principles underpin a positive culture – important individually but together provide a platform for good practice for all stakeholders - they apply to everything that happens across a school – with teachers, pupils, support staff parents & community
- Agency
- Safety
- Positivity
- Inclusion
- Respect
- Equity

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 AGENCY

- Is empowerment
- Having a voice, choice and chances
- For students it includes being given responsibility for the culture in their class to ensure everyone is happy, safe and included
- For teachers it is being given the chance to contribute to policy decisions – authentic consultation
- The opposite of agency is control – control by the powerful undermines wellbeing

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 SAFETY

- Physical, psychological, emotional
- Mistakes welcome as part of learning – not aiming at perfection
- Reducing individual competition
- Being able to question and ask for clarification – not being put down
- Asking for help when needed – teachers and students
- Being able to trust others to have your best interests at heart
- Young people who have experienced adverse childhood events / circumstances might not feel safe anywhere. And their behaviour can reflect this. Schools can be a place that is secure, predictable, inclusive and constantly kind.

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 POSITIVITY

- Positive feelings enhance learning, positive words enhance resilience and a positive sense of self, positive attitudes create hope, optimism and shared humanity, positive actions build community
- Having fun together fosters belonging, resilience and collaboration
- Strengths and solution focused conversations
- Kindness, acknowledgement, forgiveness, support.

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 POSITIVE EMOTIONS BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL AND A CULTURE OF WELLBEING

- A feeling of being valued enhances cooperation
- A feeling of being cared for enhances understanding and compassion
- A feeling of being respected promotes respect for others and willingness to listen to them
- A feeling of being included enhances commitment and motivation
- A feeling of fun relieves stress and fosters belonging
- A feeling of belonging enhances resilience
- Feeling good improves creative problem-solving abilities

All of this promotes well being and caring communities

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INCLUSION

- Feeling you belong promotes motivation, cooperation and resilience
- Exclusive belonging is great for those inside the group but risks dehumanizing those outside
- Inclusive belonging welcomes all and values diversity
- School belonging means being valued and accepted for who you are but also seeing yourself making progress
- Mattering includes the importance of adding value – being able to participate and have your role appreciated .

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RESPECT

- Respect for individuals and their context
- Respect for culture and not imposing one way of being
- Active listening - not dismissing what people say or minimising what they feel
- Enacting the Golden Rule – treating others as you would have them treat you

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BARACK OBAMA IN 'THE AUDACITY OF HOPE' 2006

- *"The Golden rule is not simply a call to sympathy or charity but something more demanding, a call to stand in someone else's shoes and see through their eyes"*
- *After all, if (others) are like us, then their struggles are our own. If we fail to help, we diminish ourselves.*
- *No-one is exempt from the call to find common ground*

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EQUITY

- The literature indicates that **equality** is a factor underpinning societal wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).
- However, treating everyone the same does not respect diversity nor lead to what is essentially fair. This requires flexibility and adaptation. The construct of equity reflects this.

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EQUALITY
ILLUSTRATION ©ELIZABETH STANLEY

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EQUITY
(ILLUSTRATION ©ELIZABETH STANLEY)

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HOMOGENEITY IN EDUCATION DOES NOT REFLECT REALITY

- All students need basic skills so they can navigate the world they are in
- BUT
- Children and young people are not all the same – they are wonderfully unique. An education system fit for purpose in the 21st Century would develop their strengths, interests, critical thinking and engagement with learning. This is possible with a different set of beliefs, policies and pedagogies
- We do not need everyone in society to have the same aspirations – we need high level professionals but we also need people to be proud of being carers and other keyworkers. At the moment we only truly value a percentage of the population who demonstrate ‘academic excellence’.

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WHAT DO OUR CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN TO CREATE THE WORLD WE WANT TO LIVE IN?

- the value of each unique individual
- personal bests – developing personal strengths and abilities
- what we have in common – our shared humanity
- relational skills
- discovering what is meaningful
- ways to contribute

Rather than:

- How to pass exams
- The definition of ‘success’
- that some people are more ‘worthy’ than others

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BELIEF AND EVIDENCE

- Sadly people don’t often do things on the basis of evidence
- They do things on the basis of belief and what makes sense to them
- You cannot change belief by telling people they’ve got it wrong!
- And what’s more you are right!
- Belief changes in one of two ways.
 - Multiple mediated experiences
 - Conversations that influence the dominant culture

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HOW DO YOU GET AN IDEA TO BECOME MAINSTREAM?

- Hook ideas into what people really want – to feel good, have purpose, be connected
- We need a counter-culture for wellbeing where our voices are louder, stronger and more dominant
- “Getting enough people on board the same train going in the same direction”
- When this happens people either get on board too, or get off

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BUILDING WELLBEING IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS

- Changing culture is not just about policies
- It is what happens in the myriad of interactions that occur every day that facilitate participation, engender relational trust, promote reciprocal support and ensure everyone feels valued and that they matter.
- “Acts of tea, acts of love, acts of laughter”
(Mma Ramotswe in *The First Lady’s Detective Agency* by Alexander McAll-Smith)

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YOU MAY NEVER KNOW THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE



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 FURTHER INFORMATION

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