

Occasional Papers about Social and Emotional Wellbeing in Education

EDUCATION CONNECT

ISSUE EIGHT

- **Gender and Wellbeing**
- **Gratitude in Education**
- **Teacher Education**
- **Professional Development**



WELCOME

to Issue Eight of this occasional papers series.

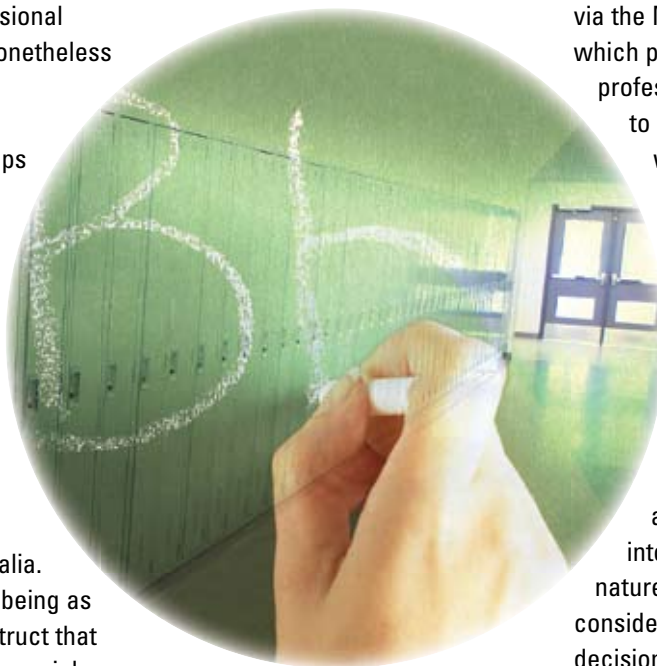
- Karen Stafford, Hunter Institute of Mental Health

Education Connect explores many themes about social and emotional wellbeing in educational settings. In this issue, we feature a number of diverse contributions that range across the domains of pre-service teacher education, classroom teaching and staff professional development. They are nonetheless unified in encouraging critical reflection on the principles and relationships that underpin good educational practice.

Dr Faye McCallum and Leigh Burrows outline how wellbeing is embedded as a key teaching and learning principle in the Bachelor of Education (primary/middle) degree at the University of South Australia. The course explores wellbeing as a multi-dimensional construct that includes physical, mental, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual domains. Students are invited to reflect on their own perspective on identity and wellbeing, with a focus on how this impacts upon their teaching and learning.

Another article in this edition explores issues of gender and wellbeing. Dr Janet Whitten encourages educators to be respectful of gender differences, while providing a safe environment where gender roles and behaviour can be discussed. She points out that males and females may be disadvantaged in different ways, within educational settings

and in broader society. Educators have a responsibility to support both boys and girls in the learning process, while being aware of the impact of gender roles and student relationships on wellbeing and life prospects.



Dr Kerry Howells examines the concept of gratitude and its application in educational settings. The practice of gratitude has been posited to promote wellbeing through improving mood and enhancing life satisfaction. Dr Howells facilitated workshops with school staff and students to explore the impact of the conscious practice of gratitude. The results suggest that a focus on gratitude in a learning community may have a positive effect on student-teacher relationships, staff relationships, student engagement and learning outcomes.

From Toowoomba in Queensland comes an account by Stephen Hughes about using the Staff Matters model to support professional development in a local school. Staff Matters is a web-based resource available via the MindMatters web site, which provides information and professional development ideas to support the health and wellbeing of school staff.

Through participating in an interagency working party aimed at building resilience in the local community, the author was invited to contribute to one school's annual whole-of-staff conference. This article reminds us to take into account the complex nature of school systems, when considering school renewal and decision-making.

We hope you will enjoy these diverse offerings. We invite contributions from readers to future issues of *Education Connect*. We publish articles on a wide range of topics that relate to the concepts of social and emotional wellbeing within education.

If you would like to see a particular wellbeing issue explored in this publication, please contact me at: Karen.Stafford@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au. Our project team may be able to produce a brief review of the relevant literature, or we could invite a special contribution for an upcoming edition.

- Janet Whitten - Senior Lecturer, Education, Tabor College Adelaide

INTRODUCTION

Gender identity - an awareness of being male or female - is a significant factor in how we see ourselves. While it is physically obvious from birth that girls and boys are different, it takes time for a child to develop a consistent gender identity.

In addition to their own biological makeup and personality, children and young people are open to influence by the examples, attitudes and expectations of those around them. They observe respective roles taken by men and women and begin to integrate this understanding into a broad sense of self.

There is evidence that some aspects of gender are inborn, but we also know that gender roles and behaviour vary from one culture to another and change over time. It is most likely that the acquisition of gender identity is the result of a combination of factors (Berk 2005).

The adoption of restrictive gender stereotypes may limit students' learning at school, and opportunities beyond school. Most importantly, rigid, traditional gender identity, particularly for girls, may result in lower self-esteem. Some androgyny (a mix of traditionally male and female characteristics) appears to be an advantage, as it allows people to relate confidently to both males and females and to adapt their behaviour to new situations (Berk 2005).

Educators can play an important role in respecting the differences

within their students and in providing a safe environment where gender roles and behaviour can be discussed and explored. They can also model behaviour that is flexible about the roles of men and women.

Teachers keen to do their best for a particular group of students can quickly be drawn into adversarial arguments about the relative needs of boys and girls. Such arguments may be unhelpful. Instead, this article briefly outlines ways in which both boys and girls may suffer disadvantage and suggests ways in which teachers can better support and include them in the learning process.

ISSUES IN GENDER

In Australia boys have been shown to lag behind girls, both in schooling and higher education. Their perceptions of schooling are also less positive: 'boys regard their school experience less favourably than girls and are less strongly engaged in the work of schools' (Cresswell, Rowe & Withers 2002, p.3).

Even before they start school, boys are more likely than girls to be injured, to have behaviour problems and to be fidgety (Blakemore 2005). This is, in itself, a concern, but even more so is the evidence that this disadvantage may continue throughout the years of formal schooling. Boman, in a study of 102 Year 8 students, found that whilst girls and boys experienced similar levels of anger, boys were more

likely to use 'destructive coping mechanisms' such as damaging property or disturbing others (2003, p.76). Sadly, Boman found that boys were more hostile towards school and less trusting than girls of adults in the school setting.

West (2005) is critical of academics and policy makers for taking so long to address the disadvantage of boys, but we should be careful of assuming that all girls are doing well. Even when girls achieve at school and obtain entry to tertiary education, they are less likely than their male counterparts to obtain permanent work and their earnings are likely to be relatively less.

Some advances in education for girls have not translated to the wider society (Moyle & Gill 2004). American research suggests that, even when girls are successful, they may suffer from what Silverstein and Perlick (1995) have called 'the cost of competence'. Whilst not acting out in such obvious ways, competent young women may be more vulnerable than their male counterparts to depression, eating disorders and illness. When adolescent girls are given increasingly narrow choices, they may see 'risky dieting' as their only remaining area of control (Ponton 1997).

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls have been shown to be especially limited by the combined effects of racism and sexism (Herbert 1995).

Girls from minority groups and poorer communities whose access to employment is limited may suffer serious disadvantage in relation to their more affluent sisters, as well as to many boys.

Despite clear cases of disadvantage, it is unhelpful to see girls and boys as passive victims in a gender conflict. Children and young people are active participants in their own learning and need to relate to one another. Rather than using a deficit model, Lingard (1998) suggests that it is most helpful to see gender in these relational terms. Both boys and girls need and deserve understanding and equity. It is the work of the educator to provide both.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SHOW?

Lee-Thomas, Sumison and Roberts (2005) studied the practice of four early childhood teachers. All were committed to gender equity. Yet, in practice, they often disregarded the impact of gender. For example, they provided resources and opportunity for 'free play' but failed to observe whether all of the children had equal access and freedom to participate in activities. They did not challenge or discuss children's assumptions or statements about gender roles. They seemed to see children as powerless victims of their own gender and to see themselves, as teachers, equally powerless to change the situation.

By contrast, Lee-Thomas, Sumison and Roberts observe that the teachers had many opportunities to introduce children to a diverse range of gender images and to ensure that all the children, both

boys and girls, had safe access to a range of play opportunities. They also suggest that closer observation of their students, dialogue about diversity and gender, and reflection on their own practice could all have contributed to a more equitable and optimistic climate in the early childhood settings they observed.

In a small-scale study of 100 secondary boys, Carr (2002) explored boys' perceptions of learning a language. It was clear that language study was seen as a 'feminine' pursuit and that for many boys it was unrelated to their sense of masculinity

or to their understanding of future employment. However, Carr found that for a minority of boys, the enjoyment of language study and their relationship with the teacher was sufficient to overcome the perceived unattractiveness and difficulty of learning a language.

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2002) worked with 700 young Australian men and women from a variety of backgrounds over a period of seven years. They explored subjects' understanding of gender and its relationship to schooling and they argue strongly for the recognition



and inclusion of student voice in the English classroom. Such an approach is not dismissive of standard texts or the role of the teacher; Arnold and Ryan suggest that 'teachers play a significant role in guiding students beyond knowledge to insight' (2003, p.11). However, this approach acknowledges that teacher-selected materials may marginalize some students and fail to address some of their most pressing interests. It was evident that many young people welcomed the opportunity to discuss gender roles, often quite critically.

It is sometimes assumed that children don't read much of their own accord, or that boys don't read. However, in a survey of the reading habits of young adolescents in New South Wales, Manuel and Robinson (2002) found that students were reading a wide range of materials, with both girls and boys sharing a love of action and adventure fiction. Interestingly, they also discovered that teacher-selected texts were amongst the most unpopular books encountered by boys and were often unrelated to their interest, suggesting a poor fit between teachers and the interests of the boys in their care.

Finally, teachers need to take care when categorising their students according to gender. In a study of 66 children in America, Bigler (1995) found that in classrooms where gender was used to categorise children, they were significantly more likely to describe others according to gender stereotypes. There may sometimes be good reasons to segregate girls and

boys. An example of this is where Indigenous girls expressed a preference for discussing gender issues away from the boys, as they feared embarrassment (Herbert 2002). However, it is important to remember that the ways in which teachers organise their classroom and designate tasks may reinforce stereotypes which are unnecessarily limiting.

CONCLUSION

Research suggests that teachers do not always exercise well their potential influence on the children and young people in their care. Through selection and arrangement of resources which interest both boys and girls, careful observation to ensure equitable access to resources, emphasis on active participation, and dialogue which critically explores rigid gender stereotypes, teachers can optimise the healthy development of self in the children and young people with whom they work.

Gender is an important factor in wellbeing and learning. Girls and boys can be disadvantaged by ignoring their different needs, but they also have much in common. Children are more likely to develop helpful notions of gender if they have opportunities for positive interaction and can see things from another point of view. Teachers can assist their students by modelling relational, rather than oppositional views of gender. These are qualities which enrich the learning environment and may enable boys and girls to consider less restrictive gender roles.

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USING THE STAFF MATTERS MODEL

to support Organisational Problem Solving

- Stephen Hughes, Lecturer, University of Southern Queensland

Background

In Toowoomba, Queensland, a group of professionals has come together to form a working group known as the Building Resilience Interest Group (BRIG). This consists of representatives from the University of Southern Queensland, local state and non-government schools and the mental health promotion profession.

The group formed in 2004 as a working party of the local Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) Board. BRIG aims to explore strategies for promoting social and emotional wellbeing in school communities and meets monthly to: share resources; discuss local issues; propose strategies; and provide mutual support for members, who are working in sometimes stressful and complex support roles.

In October 2006, I was invited by a BRIG member to review the Staff Matters model as part of their school's annual whole-of-staff conference. In particular, the brief was to present aspects of the model that may aid staff in understanding and better implementing organisational problem solving processes.

Staff Matters

Staff Matters is a web-based resource that provides information and professional development ideas to support the health and wellbeing of school staff. It is available on the

MindMatters web site at www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/staff.

The Staff Matters Model (Figure 1) provides a framework for exploring the relational nature of our working lives. It is holistic in its structure and encourages a multi-dimensional understanding of our experiences as workers in an educational context. The model presents five domains in an interdependent arrangement: the School in Community, the Thriving Self, the Interpersonal, the Professional and the Organisational.

Staff Matters provides a model for engaging in organisational reflection and problem solving as well as individual reflection. The individual, interpersonal, organisational and community domains can be considered

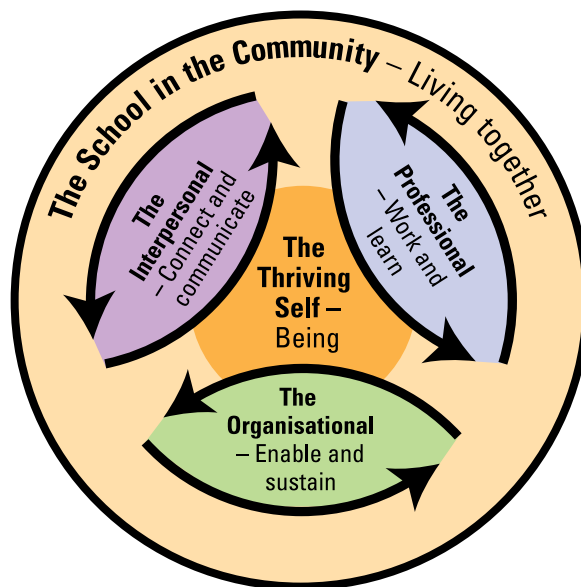
separately, yet they operate as part of a more complex interdependent system.

School activities reach across a number of these domains, but interactions within the system may occur outside of the conscious awareness of people who are working on a defined task. This systems view of human behaviour and being provides us with a convenient way to address complex organisational issues, without losing sight of the contexts that influence them.

The Workshop

The two-day staff workshop invited participants to make a collective commitment to working on 'real' workplace problems. Through the discussion and models used, I hoped to raise their awareness

Figure 1: The Staff Matters Model



of the contexts that operate simultaneously as they work in teams to address mutually agreed-upon workplace issues. The workshop provided an opportunity to give participants an experience of the now somewhat clichéd but still relevant axiom that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In addition to the Staff Matters model, the workshop made use of techniques and concepts drawn from a number of psychological models. These included: Solution Focused Brief Therapy (de Shazer,

1985, 1988, 1991, 1994); Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Beck, 1976); and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Ellis & Harper, 1961).

The first day of the workshop was devoted to reviewing Staff Matters, establishing priority issues for the staff to work with and addressing personal and cognitive processes that can sometimes act as a barrier to effective problem solving in the workplace.

The framework chosen for addressing barriers to problem solving was drawn from the

literature on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and dealt mainly with the eight major cognitive distortions described by Beck (1976) and used in programs such as Mood Gym (<http://moodgym.anu.edu.au>).

The cognitive distortions described were: mental filtering; mind reading; overgeneralisation; using should, ought and must statements; catastrophising; personalisation; magnification; and polarised thinking. We discussed the impact of these patterns of thinking when



they are coupled with a philosophy of demandingness, low frustration tolerance and a range of self-defeating belief systems. These additional comments were drawn from the literature relating to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Ellis & Harper, 1961).

To provide a sense of authenticity and relevance for all, the Staff Matters model was used to elicit from the staff a list of 'problemtunities' (a problem coupled with an opportunity). These were then pasted onto a white board under the headings of the Staff Matters model: Community; Thriving Self; Interpersonal and Organisational. Each participant was given three voting stickers to put next to the items they thought were priorities for the school. Votes were counted and the top six issues became the focus for discussion the next day.

On the second day, staff reviewed their progress and the process of prioritising 'problemtunities' from the previous session. The Staff Matters model was revisited to remind staff to be aware of themselves throughout the session as operating simultaneously in a number of contexts: intra-personal (thriving self), interpersonal, organisational and community. The first three contexts of the model were dealt with explicitly.

The intra-personal was dealt with in this instance by reviewing 'self-talk' and 'cognitive distortions'. The interpersonal was dealt with through raising the awareness of effective communication skills such as active listening; empathising; focusing on ideas and issues rather than people; and being assertive.

The organisational domain was dealt with by outlining the defining features of collaboration as expounded by Friend & Cook (2007), with a particular focus on shared accountability for outcomes.

Working in small groups, staff were invited to think of ways to deal with the issues raised. The method to be used was solution focused (rather than problem focused) and groups were given the following advice, drawn from Cauffman and Berg, 2002.

- Don't spend time seeking the root cause of the problem.
- Find out when the problem does not occur, and what conditions are related to this.
- Interrupt the pattern: Do more of what works and less of what doesn't work.
- Ask the 'Miracle Question' – how would you know if the problem was miraculously solved – what would you notice?
- What steps would we be prepared to take to move towards the 'solution'?

Groups were offered additional support or advice as required, particularly through the facilitator modelling various aspects of the process. Participants were also reminded of the need to be meta-cognitive and meta-communicative in relation to the domains of the Staff Matters model. Finally, time was spent sharing each group's collective wisdom.

Reflections

This was a challenging workshop for all involved, in which potentially confronting elements were not 'watered down' in any way. The

process challenged members to be more aware of themselves as interdependent beings sharing a common place and space for achieving collectively espoused and endorsed goals. The intention was to perturb the participants into a reflective space where they became aware of the multiple contexts influencing their own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

Frequently, these contextual features remain out of our conscious awareness and are not taken into account in organisational problem-solving processes. Bringing them to the fore is one of the keys to personal growth and to taking responsibility for one's own actions and reactions – cognitive and affective. The Staff Matters model proved a useful approach for facilitating this discussion about school renewal.

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WELLBEING:

A core principle on which to base teacher pre-service program development and delivery.

- Dr Faye McCallum, Senior Lecturer and Program Director, University of South Australia
- Leigh Burrows, Project Officer Learning Difficulties, DECS, South Australia; and Lecturer, University of South Australia

The theme of *wellbeing* is embedded as a teaching and learning principle in the Bachelor of Education (primary/middle) degree at the University of South Australia.

The Program Development Committee (PDC) designed the new Program (first introduced at the new Mawson Lakes campus in 2005) around seven core principles: social justice and equity; futures thinking; sustainability: education for one world; education for community living (place-based education); wellbeing and relationships development; professional competence; and program and course delivery.

This article describes how the principle of *wellbeing and relationships development* was embedded into the program, both implicitly and explicitly.

The PDC acknowledged that a Bachelor of Education (Primary and Middle) program must promote a notion of 'wellbeing' that encompasses social, emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive dimensions of learning and must demonstrate a commitment to the development of each.

Education is a fundamentally important means of transmitting social, cultural and physical

attitudes. The preparation of young people for roles within complex social and physical systems (such as schools and communities) can be empowered by viewing the world critically, experiencing it physically, and then acting independently, cooperatively and responsibly. The development of wellbeing embedded in this program implies the promotion of positive personal and physical identities as well as a sense of belonging.

This Bachelor of Education (Primary and Middle) Program is based on a number of learning outcomes, including several that relate to wellbeing. It explores how young peoples' wellbeing can be enhanced through developing positive identities, relationships, purpose (hope), empowerment, success, rigour and safe living. The program develops an understanding and appreciation of, and supports for, multiple forms of knowledge creation and communication. Students are encouraged to consider and value different forms of intelligence, including concepts of the self as an embodied and physical identity.

This degree prepares graduates for roles within complex systems where multiple literacies, bodily and thinking skills are essential.

The aim is to create and model learning environments that engage multiple perceptual modalities, allowing for broader student learning styles to be accommodated as well as stimulated. There is a focus on the use of the body and movement as an instrument of active learning, linking the physical with the conceptual.

This program is committed to a collaborative and teams approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, educational experiences are integrated across discipline and learning areas. Students are challenged to work together to know and understand young people in their care. They also have the opportunity to develop powerful pedagogical strategies to extend learners within supportive environments.

Throughout the four year degree, these principles are supported through various courses, teaching and learning episodes, as well as school practicum experiences. Wellbeing issues are drawn together in the final year of the program when students complete a compulsory course entitled *The Emerging Self: Health and Wellbeing*.

This course focuses on a multidimensional approach to understanding the nature and concept of wellbeing and the centrality of its relationship to learning. The aim of the course is for students to be able to clearly demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the physical, mental, social, cognitive, emotional

and spiritual dimensions of learner wellbeing and the interrelationship between these domains and the emerging self. The course is designed to assist students to reflect on their own perspective on identity and wellbeing and any impact this may have on their teaching and learning.

The focus on a multidimensional approach to wellbeing is presented within the context of emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive expressions of intelligence. Students are provided with a range of activities and opportunities to learn through emotional and social experiences, cognitive reflection and interaction, physical engagement, and spiritual connection.

'There is a focus on the use of the body and movement as an instrument of active learning, linking the physical with the conceptual'

The physical dimension of learning and wellbeing is approached through the notion of embodied knowing. Learning and meaning-making is grounded in our bodily experiences and we can learn through the body, thinking with the body through balance, posture and touch.

The course addresses the emotional dimension through the lens of emotional intelligence: self regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills as areas that can demonstrate emotional maturity. The cognitive dimension highlights the role of reflection, analytical understandings and making connections, while the spiritual dimension is linked to a sense of connectedness to others and nature.

The course readings, presentations and activities are designed to work with multiple dimensions of wellbeing and learning. Students are encouraged to see interconnections; for example, an experience in nature has the potential to heighten the sense of physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing.

The students who undertook this course in 2006 were invited to keep a journal that reflected their learning. While initially the course content was presented as being primarily about learner wellbeing in the primary, middle and secondary classroom, the students increasingly began to engage with the material on a more personal

basis. This may be attributable to the intensive nature of the course (which is presented over eight full days) and its timing at the end of a four year degree.

Student comments in journals included:

From the first day of this course through the discussion on emotional and spiritual wellbeing I was able to see that many of these problems could be repaired if I put myself first for a change and attended to my own wellbeing.

Students valued the multidimensional approach which allowed them to focus on areas of previous interest and experience, but also encouraged them to learn from each other about new dimensions and perspectives.

I have learnt/understood a new area I was unfamiliar with, so I can add a new dimension to my teaching pedagogies.

Discovering our strengths, working to them and developing the other areas of wellbeing has provided me with a framework to see the various ways in which I am able to reach my students.

While some students made the comment that they wished the course had been offered earlier in their degree, many were able to see the value of it being at the end of the program. It supports them in looking forward to their new careers with optimism.

The final assessment item for students in the Bachelor of Education Program involves them conducting an inquiry into an aspect of their teaching. This culminates with each graduate presenting at a conference for staff and colleagues, a highly successful and professionally rewarding experience. *Wellbeing* was a dominant theme permeating the conference day.

This final quote from a graduate student sums up the value of including wellbeing as a key principle in pre-service teacher education:

This course has given me the beginnings of a vocabulary and justification to devote class time to pursuing activities that traditionally are not immediately recognisable as important eg relaxation games, background music, aromatherapy and time spent in discussion about big questions. Essentially I feel liberated now to be a really effective teacher.

Practising Gratitude

to enhance learning and teaching

- Dr Kerry Howells, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania

Although still in its infancy as a subject of empirical research, preliminary investigation - mainly in the fields of positive and social psychology - has highlighted outcomes of gratitude that may be relevant to educational contexts.

Research points to the potential of gratitude to dissolve regret (Roberts 2004); increase optimism (Emmons & Shelton 2002; Roberts 2004); enable one to be less susceptible to disappointment, regret, and frustration (Roberts 2004); increase health and wellbeing (McAdams and Bauer 2004; Watkins 2004; McCullough et al 2002; Emmons & McCullough 2003); improve mood (Watkins et al 2003); provide greater satisfaction with life (Watkins 2004); build strength in dealing with adversity (Emmons & Crumpler 2000; Emmons & Shelton 2002) and have a positive impact in the treatment of depression (Watkins 2004). Empirical studies also demonstrate a correlation between a grateful disposition and 'prosocial' states such as empathy, forgiveness and willingness to help others (McCullough et al 2002).

This article reports on workshops for high school and university teachers and students, which have also explored the potential for gratitude to assist in learning and student engagement. Participants who choose to continue after the workshop with a 'gratitude project' report outcomes consistent with the empirical findings, as well as

a positive impact on teaching and learning activities.

DEFINING GRATITUDE

One of the imperatives to introducing gratitude into an education setting is that it is clearly defined. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* describes gratitude as: "Being thankful. Appreciation of, and inclination to return kindness". Using this concept as a starting point, the following definition has been refined in the light of the questions raised by workshop participants in a variety of educational settings:

Gratitude is the active and conscious practice of giving thanks. It finds its true expression in the way one lives one's daily life rather than as a thought or an emotion. It is an inner attitude that is best understood as the opposite of resentment or complaint. Gratitude is usually expressed towards someone or something.

Emphasis is given to gratitude as an active practice that involves giving to another. A person can gradually acquire a grateful disposition by taking up various practices and by reflecting on their inner attitude as the "lens" through which they view events.

One of the best ways of understanding gratitude is by exploring its opposite - postulated as resentment (Roberts 2004; Fitzgerald 1998) and complaint (Stein 1998). It is the term

"complaint" that educators and students resonate with most strongly when describing inner attitudes that are the opposite of gratitude. Most admit that complaint is a prevalent attitude during educational activities.

However, an important distinction must be made between two kinds of complaint. The first is that which is often used to relieve feelings of resentment or discontent, to gather support for one's position or emotions, or to harm or discredit the external situation/person seen as inflicting pain or suffering.

Behaviour associated with this kind of complaint includes back-biting, gossip, ridicule, cynicism, condemnation, disparagement, bickering, whinging, moaning, grumbling. In this kind of complaint, one's attitude is that of blaming and being a victim in the situation. If a student has an inner attitude of this kind, their state is the antithesis to engagement.

This is distinct from proactive complaint, which is characterised by active protesting, lodging a grievance, communicating with the person who has inflicted pain so that action can occur, or critically and objectively analysing with the aim of resolving a situation.

Rather than absolving oneself of responsibility for the situation, the latter kind of complaint implies that one has a responsibility to change from within and also do something about the situation.

This kind of complaint can be called critique and is recommended as a positive way forward in dealing with a negative situation, fostering better engagement.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES

To address challenges raised by workshop participants or problematised in the literature, the following caveats are emphasised, bearing in mind that there are certain situations where it may be inappropriate to recommend either gratitude or proactive behaviour.

- A starting assumption is that participants could already be practising gratitude and this is an invitation to practise more consciously in the educational context.

- When expressing gratitude, there is no intention to behold the beneficiary as indebted in any way.
- Gratitude is different to positive thinking in that it is a *practice* that involves *giving to another*.
- *One is not replacing* thoughts/ actions of complaint with that of gratitude.
- One is not expected to have grateful thoughts or feelings all the time, it is an outlook that is developed over time and with reflective practice.
- Practices of gratitude do not take up extra time, but rather call for a greater degree of consciousness.

TEACHERS PRACTISING GRATITUDE

On the principle that the impact of gratitude on students is greater if it is supported and practised by teachers, a two-hour workshop was introduced to executive staff at two Sydney metropolitan high schools - a boys' and a girls' school. Most of the 21 participants continued with the 'gratitude project', which involved the following:

- *Attend to inner attitudes before and during teaching or interacting with staff and students;*
- *Choose gratitude rather than complaint when doing this;*
- *Choose two or more daily practices of gratitude;*
- *Take note of any changes that occur as a result.*



The most favoured gratitude practices were: give back to those from whom you have received; smile for ten minutes each day; give bright and positive greetings; treat each student precious and thank them often; acknowledge the good points of others; and turn complaint into critique by becoming proactive.

Participants reported improved student and staff relationships; enhanced wellbeing; greater self-awareness; and improved student learning outcomes. For example, from starting with positives in conversations, a teacher noticed that *"in most instances positive outcomes were reached more easily and a generally positive climate was generated."*

Another participant noted that *"the awareness of gratitude has had a response from staff in raising consciousness of the consequences of their approach to teaching and to the work environment."*

STUDENTS PRACTISING GRATITUDE

A wider framework of student engagement was used when introducing gratitude to students. After exploring the importance of factors such as nutrition, hydration and sleeping habits, the group examined the possible effects on learning if one has an inner attitude of the first kind of complaint. Gratitude was defined and students were introduced to practices they could apply to their learning context.

The model in Figure One was used, with the example of the external situation being a class dealing with a topic that the majority found boring.

After introducing gratitude to year 12 students at the boys' high school, workshop evaluation showed that most students saw the practice of gratitude as relevant to their studies. Six students who took part in a reflective writing exercise after taking on the gratitude project reported that they were able to handle problems more easily, be more motivated, be more engaged,

have greater ability to manage their time and to withstand pressure.

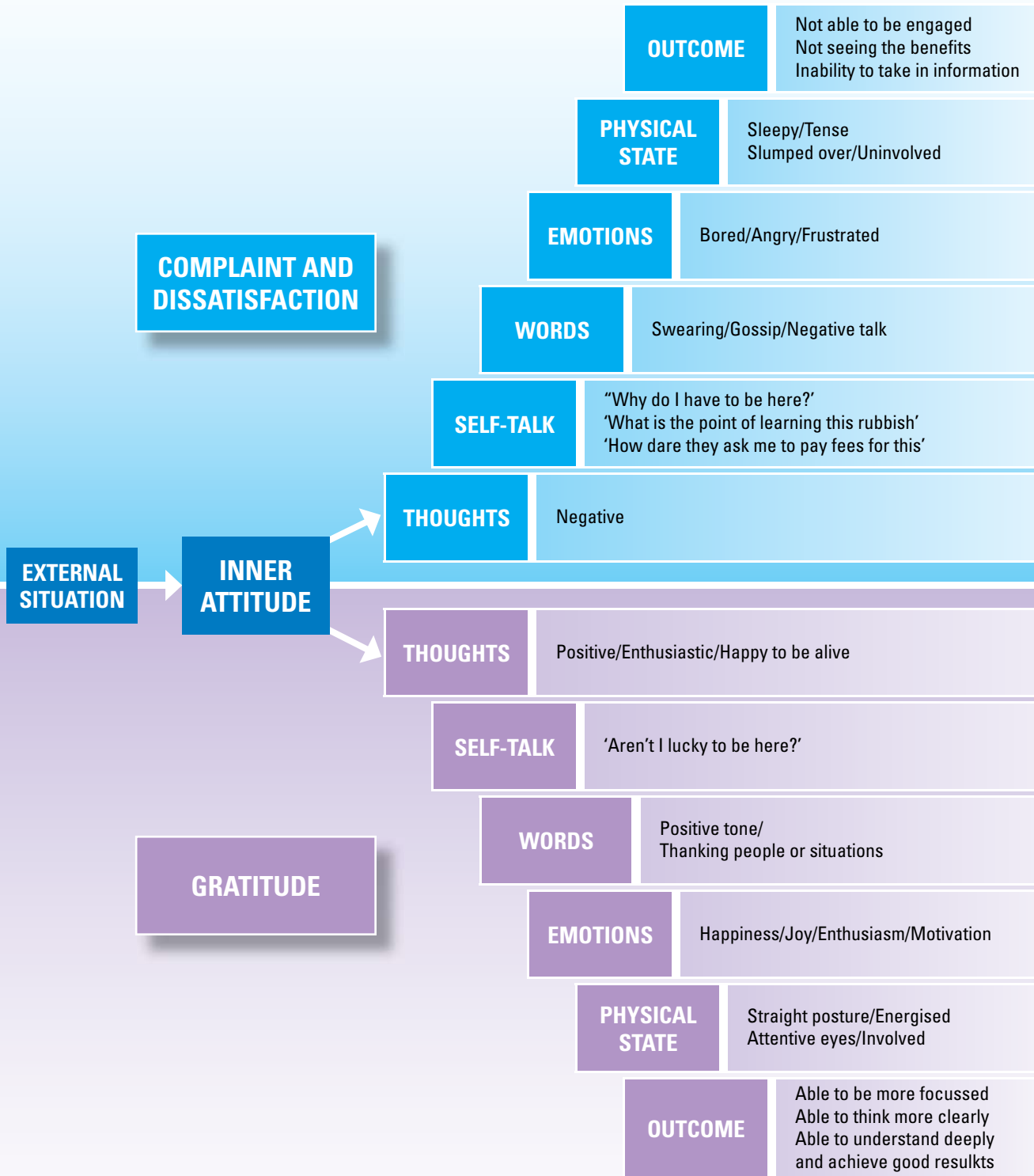
CONCLUSION

The positive outcomes and feedback from students and staff who participated in the workshops point to the potential for gratitude to be assimilated more fully into school programs and teachers' professional development. The approach taken could be that initiatives which aim to enhance well-being can be placed into the context of learning strategies, supported by staff who practise what they recommend for their students.

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Figure One: Complaint versus Gratitude



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This publication is intended primarily for teacher educators in Australian higher education settings, but will also be of interest to other educators, administrators and tertiary students. It is available as a PDF document on the *Response Ability* website.

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