

# Student Well-Being Research Framework

## Introduction

Recent years have brought new and growing attention to the importance of measuring and monitoring children's well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2006). This is in part due to a shift towards accountability-based public policy, which requires reliable information on and accurate measures of the conditions children face and the outcomes that various programs achieve.

Research suggests that children who experience a greater sense of well-being are more able to learn and assimilate information in effective ways; more likely to engage in healthy and fulfilling social behaviours; more likely to invest in their own and others' well-being and in the sustainability of the planet, as they take up their social, professional and leadership roles in adulthood (Awartani, Whitman & Gordon, 2008).

Well-being is a commonly used but inconsistently defined term frequently included in the study of child development (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2004). As a result, there is no consistency in the indicators and measures of student well-being within the school context (school, classroom, student). Sometimes the term well-being is used interchangeably with mental health for example. Most often, however, well-being is a holistic concept that is multidimensional. Some definitions include:

- Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1946).
- Taking responsibility for your health means making a conscious commitment to your well-being. It involves a recognition that you choose a positive existence for the pursuit of excellence affecting all four aspects of being – the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realm (Ardell, 1982).
- An active process through which you become aware of, and make choices that you hope will lead to, a more fulfilling, more successful, more well life. As such, wellness is an approach that emphasises the whole person, not just the biological organism (Hettler, 1984)
- Wellness, or a sense of well-being, includes one's ability to live and work effectively and to make a significant contribution to society (Corbin, 1997).
- The ability to successfully, resiliently, and innovatively participate in the routines and activities deemed significant by a cultural community. Well-being is also the states of mind and feeling produced by participation in routines and activities (Weisner, 1998).
- A way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which mind, body, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community (Witmer & Sweeney, 1998).
- Well-being – to optimise health and capabilities of self and others (Tasmania, 2000).

- Well-being is a complex construct that concerns optimal experience and functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001).
- Well-being is a state of successful performance throughout the life course integrating physical, cognitive and social-emotional function that results in productive activities deemed significant by one's cultural community, fulfilling social relationships, and the ability to transcend moderate psychosocial and environment problems (Pollard & Davidson, 2001 as cited by Marshall, S., in Strengthening learning through a focus on well-being. Supporting Student Well-being Conference Proceedings, Adelaide, AU, Oct, 2004).
- Well-being is the 'realization of one's physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual potential' (Awartani *et al.*, 2007).

### **Well-being in the Canadian Context**

At a federal level, Canadian social policies, such as tackling poverty, providing affordable housing, improving health, and early learning and childcare, are using a broader, more comprehensive definition of the well-being of Canadians and Canadian Society than just the traditional socio-economic status (SES) indicators. Statistics Canada data presents a comprehensive, up-to-date picture of the well-being in Canada, the indicators include: *work* (un/employment rate, work-related injuries), *learning* (university participation, student literacy and numeracy, school drop-outs, computer access in schools), *financial security* (standard of living, low income persistence, family income), *family life* (age of mother at childbirth, divorce, young adults living with their parents), *housing* (rental vacancy rates, housing need), *social participation* (volunteering, charitable donations, social networks, sense of belonging), *leisure* (total leisure time), *health* (obesity, smoking, physical activity), *security* (crime rates, perceptions of personal safety), and *environment* (air quality, freshwater quality and use) (Human Resources and Development Canada, 2010). They have measures for the well-being of children and youth for most indicators.

### **Well-being in the Ontario Context**

On December 15, 2009 Bill 177, the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, came into effect in Ontario. Bill 177 provides that boards shall promote student achievement and well-being.

In addition, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), in partnership with ten ministries and researchers, led the development of *A Profile of Ontario's Children and Youth, 2009* a descriptive profile of child and youth well-being in Ontario. It includes over 100 measures for the general population of children and youth in four domains – health, education, social inclusion and economic opportunity. Also included are demographic data and two sub-population profiles – newcomer children and youth (recent immigrant and refugee) and children and youth served by Children's Aid Societies. The report is primarily intended for internal purposes but is available for external audiences upon request.

The concept of well-being provides a strong test of the extent to which policies are coming together to reduce inequalities and to promote sustainable development. A high level of well-being is a feature of strong and vibrant communities (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003).

### Student Well-being Indicators

A holistic approach to well-being was adopted for this research scan. Research shows that socio-economic status (SES) has a significant impact on student achievement and well-being. The research on student well-being considered here is on non-SES factors that affect student well-being and that can be supported in the school setting.

The various indicators of well-being can be positioned into the following research framework: (1) physical, (2) cognitive, or (3) psycho-social. Since what happens in a school and classroom can both influence and affect student well-being, Table 1 outlines examples of student well-being indicators within the school context (school, classroom, and student).

### STUDENT WELL-BEING RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Student Well-being Indicators	<i>Level of Analysis</i>		
	Student Measures	Classroom Measures	School Measures
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Activity</li> <li>Health Status</li> <li>Safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization</li> <li>Size</li> <li>Condition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environment</li> <li>Surroundings</li> <li>Equipment</li> </ul>
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Achievement</li> <li>Engaged on Topics of Interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good Teaching</li> <li>Value of Student Work</li> <li>Guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality Programs</li> <li>Leadership</li> </ul>
Psycho-social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships (Resilience)</li> <li>Self-Esteem</li> <li>Emotional Regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouragement</li> <li>Feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate/Culture</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Group Dynamics</li> <li>Early Identification</li> </ul>

### Physical Well-being

Certain physical symptoms in students (e.g. stomach aches, headaches, back problems) are negatively associated with well-being and are significantly affected by the physical school environment (Awartani, Whitman & Gordon, 2008). When schools provide a safe school environment, students report a more positive view of their emotional and physical safety and well-being.

Physical also refers to physical senses, sensory experience, general health status, and safety. Physical safety means not having to worry about being hurt, either physically or psychologically.

Significant evidence demonstrates the relationship between school physical well-being and learning. Physical well-being in the school and classroom include organizational conditions and policies and programs, like daily physical activity and healthy eating policies and programs indicators related to well-being.

The physical school environment also includes the buildings and grounds, routes to and from the school, and materials and equipment used by staff and students.

### **Cognitive Well-being**

Facets of schooling, quality programs, curriculum, leadership, teaching, achievement and student engagement, affect overall student well-being. Well-being is enhanced when schools can provide opportunities for students to: (1) select learning strategies to pursue and achieve their goals; (2) nurture and support their abilities to handle even difficult tasks; and (3) experiment, learn new things and take risks. Students' views about their competence and self-efficacy also influence their achievement and goal-setting (Awartani, Whitman & Gordon, 2008).

### **Psycho-Social Well-being**

A positive psycho-social environment at school affects the mental health and well-being of young people and improves student learning. Emotional well-being is a predictor of effective social behaviour, a key component of well-being and academic competence. When students acquire skills for social and emotional learning and the ability to maintain positive relationships, their well-being is improved (Awartani, Whitman & Gordon, 2008).

Student social and emotional well-being is improved in an environment where bullying, harassment, violence and physical punishment are discouraged. Having at least one intimate friend is strongly correlated with positive well-being and positive relations with peers in general are also a protective factor of well-being. Other characteristics of a positive psycho-social environment include a warm and friendly atmosphere that rewards learning, the promotion of cooperation, supportive, open communications, and equal opportunities for all students. Lastly, when students feel that their school is a caring community of which they are a part, they are less likely to engage in risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking, drug use and early sexual initiation. Students who feel connected to their school also perform better academically.

One of the most important connections noted through many international studies focusing on student well-being is that of students' feeling of connection to their teachers and overall school community. Students' learning in such conditions of positive social and emotional environments exhibit fewer risk behaviours and overall more positive well-being and academic performance (Awartani, Whitman & Gordon, 2008).

Appendix 1: Student Well-being Research	Student Well-being Indicators		
	Physical	Cognitive	Psycho-Social
Opdenakker, M., & Van Damme, J. (2000, June). <b>Effects of Schools, Teaching Staff and Classes on Achievement and Well-Being in Secondary Education: Similarities and Differences Between School Outcomes.</b> School Effectiveness & School Improvement, 11(2), 165-196.			
<p>Eight indicators of pupil well-being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. well-being at the school</li> <li>2. social integration in the class</li> <li>3. relationship with teachers</li> <li>4. interest in learning tasks</li> <li>5. motivation towards learning tasks</li> <li>6. attitude to homework</li> <li>7. attentiveness in the classroom</li> <li>8. academic self-concept</li> </ol>	✓	✓	✓
Konu, A., Alanen, E., Lintonen, T., & Rimpela, M. (2002) <b>Factor Structure Of The School Well-Being Model.</b> Health Education Research, 17(6), 732-742.			
<p>Divided well-being variables into four categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. school conditions (physical and organizational conditions and services, safety)</li> <li>2. social relationships (student, teacher, school personnel, student home)</li> <li>3. means for self-fulfilment (possibilities to study according to capabilities and abilities, feedback, encouragement)</li> <li>4. health status (psychosomatic symptoms)</li> </ol>	✓	✓	✓
Pollard, E., & Lee, P. (2003, January). <b>Child Well-Being: A Systematic Review Of The Literature.</b> Social Indicators Research, 61 (1), 59.			
<p>Through a systematic review of the child well-being literature spanning 1974-1992, child well-being research was assessed and five domains of child well-being were identified:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Physical well-being – nutrition, preventative health care, physical activity, physical safety and security, reproductive health and drug use</li> <li>2. Economic Well-Being – general income measures, parental occupation, parental education and support status (not included in Ontario framework).</li> <li>3. Psychological well-being – intrapersonal well-being</li> <li>4. Social well-being – interaction with the environment</li> <li>5. Cognitive well-being – empathy, trust, peer relationships and mutual obligation</li> </ol> <p>The physical, cognitive, economic, and social domains measure more positive indicators, while the psychological domain measures more deficit indicators.</p>	✓	✓	✓

Research	Student Well-being Indicators		
	Physical	Cognitive	Psycho-Social
The Australian Council for Educational Research, Fraillon, J. (2004, December). <b>Measuring Student Well-being in the Context of Australian Schooling: Discussion Paper</b> . Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.			
<p>A measurement model of student well-being in the school community should be categorized into two dimensions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intrapersonal - a student's internalised sense of self and consequent capacity to function in their school community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional regulation: monitoring, evaluation and modifying emotional reactions</li> <li>Resilience: capacity to manage, recover and move on from critical challenging events that tax or exceed a person's resources</li> <li>Self-efficacy: the degree to which a person believes themselves able to organize, execute and adapt strategies to meet desired outcomes</li> <li>Self-esteem: the way people feel about themselves</li> <li>Spirituality: a positive sense of meaning and purpose in life</li> <li>Curiosity: the intrinsic desire to learn more</li> <li>Engagement: Learning engagement - attention, interest, investment and effort, School community engagement - interactions with and participation in the culture and traditions of the school as well as in school community activities, sports teams and clubs</li> <li>Mastery orientation: the desire to complete tasks to the best of one's ability</li> </ul> </li> <li>Interpersonal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicative efficacy: the use of communicative skills in context to achieve a purpose. Communicative efficacy is relational in that it depends on the social impact of interactions</li> <li>Empathy: intellectually taking the role or perspective of another person and responding with the same emotion to another person's emotion</li> <li>Acceptance: interpersonal values of respect, tolerance and understanding</li> <li>Connectedness: subjective awareness of being in close relationship with the social world</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	✓	✓	✓

Research	Student Well-being Indicators		
	Physical	Cognitive	Psycho-Social
Awartani, M., Whitman, C., & Gordon, J. (2008, March). <b>Developing Instruments to Capture Young People's Perceptions of how School as a Learning Environment Affects their Well-Being.</b> <i>European Journal of Education, 43</i> (1), 51-70.			
Universal Education Foundation (UEF) Voice of Children Learning Environment observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-being is the realization of one's mental, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual potential.</li> <li>• "Mental" refers to that part of life which is primarily related to cognition and the processes of the rational mind (e.g., thinking, planning, creating, reflecting, evaluating)</li> <li>• "Emotional/social", links the emotional and social aspects referring to inner feelings, aspects of life, relationship to one's self and to others, communication, creative imagination, and self-expression.</li> <li>• "Physical" refers to those parts of life which are related to the physical senses and to sensory experience, to our bodies, and to the material and natural environments (e.g., doing, building, taking apart, detailing, producing).</li> <li>• "Spiritual" refers to the indivisible life energy that is reflected in the diversity (e.g., the expression of meaning and life purpose, inspiration, peaceful presence, empathy).</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓