

This essay will explore the avenues and ways in which pupil well-being in schools can be improved upon. It will discuss the importance of teacher well-being in relation to student well-being and the importance of emotional intelligence being included in the curriculum to enhance the experience of the learning environment and to create happier healthier children and young people. It will briefly look at definitions of well-being and emotions, ways in which to enhance personal well-being and the responsibility of teachers regarding the mental health of their pupils. The critique of emotional literacy is included as well as a comparison to the current and future aspirations of The Welsh Government in relation to well-being in schools. Reflecting on the current educational climate, according to (Young Minds, 2017) both pupils and teachers are given a clear message that the prioritised goals within places of education are qualifications and league tables. The political and medical message is different and achieving parity of esteem between physical and mental health is a current priority, (British Medical Journal, 2014) therefore this essay will consider the argument that children at school need just as much education centred on emotional health as they receive regarding their physical health.

One is not born with an inherent element of well-being. It is not a vitamin that can be manufactured into a milk formula, or a mineral that can be injected into finger foods. Positive emotional and physical health and well-being depend very much on the environment and circumstances one is born into and the way in which one is socialised and educated as a child. Not to be confused with either happiness or mental illness, well-being defines how life is evaluated as a whole. (The New Economics Foundation, 2012) explain that this combines how people feel, in relation to mood and how they function. This refers to a sense of confidence, connectedness and life satisfaction. High levels of well-being reflect a physically and emotionally stable individual compared to a person with low levels that may appear to have a negative outlook on life, lack of motivation and makes little effort to function well.

(The National Health Service, 2018) provides a model on how to improve personal well-being levels and suggests that five key principles guide the way. The first is connection. Spending time, developing relationships with the people around us, family, neighbours and friends helps us to feel connected, more engaged in our communities and more linked socially. Secondly is activity. Being active is a great way to stay fit, stay at a healthy weight and exercise releases chemicals within the brain to improve emotional wellness. Thirdly is to

learn. This is linked to confidence, esteem and achievement. Learning can also bring about a sense of purpose, satisfaction and optimism. Number four is giving and whether that is time, attention or a bowl of sugar to a neighbour, small acts of kindness make people feel good about themselves. Lastly, there is being mindful. There is much evidence and hype surrounding mindfulness currently and research suggests that just simply taking moments to be calm and reflective can help maintain a sense of inner peace, vital to keeping an external element of control. There is no upper or lower age range mentioned within these guidelines, neither is there a specification as to whether these tips support physical health or mental wellness. This is because the information is for all to attempt to apply to their lives for all aspects of health. A classroom environment is an ideal platform from which to encourage this advice and if promoted correctly could be a spring board to improving well being in both student and teacher.

In understanding the contexts in which mental health problems in children and young people emerge, there is recognition of the many supportive elements which promote and help maintain resilience, defined by (Mind, 2013) as an ability to adapt to ever changing and challenging situations whilst keeping stable emotionally. Childhood and adolescent mental health problems are on the increase in Wales and suicide statistics continue to rise, (Public Health Wales, 2018) state that on average three hundred people in Wales die by suicide each year. This is of great concern and is not improved by government budget cuts, benefit reform or the U.K. s political uncertainty. (Laevers, 2005) defines child well-being beautifully by referring to it as a feeling of ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tension' and the (Anna Freud National centre for children and families, 2019) describe it as a broad spectrum of factors including family, community and school relationships, alongside physical health and social intelligence. Promoting staff well-being, the promotion of emotional intelligence and a strong connected whole school approach to one another's emotional health is an example of how to improve pupil well-being in schools.

Gutman & Vorhaus, (2012) on behalf of the department of education, have evidenced that children and young people with positive levels of behavioural, social and emotional well-being are able to achieve better results both creatively and academically within classroom settings. However, (Mainstone-Cotton, 2017, p.147) states that children become unsettled when a teacher has low levels of well-being, that the presence of an adult in a negative mood

can severely affect the atmospheric conditions of a classroom. These statements create a sense of need for staff and student partnership and that the quality of their relationship is vital to maintaining mental well-being for all. In fact (Martin and Dowson, 2009, p.351) agree that 'positive relationships with significant others are the cornerstones of a young person's capacity to function in social, affective and academic domains'. With that in mind, it is important then to attempt to create an environment in a school where both pupil and staff members are happy to access the classroom and not feel like it is an obligation to turn up. Staff well-being can be implemented in so many ways. (Heads Together, n.d.) explain that implementing co-produced staff well-being policies, providing opportunities for relaxation or exercise, fresh air and outdoor learning, team building and staff appraisal all contribute to staff feeling appreciated and that they belong to the school. Katherine Merseth (2019) a senior education lecturer from Harvard University writes that there is a need for a mutual dependency within the classroom, a culture of reciprocity and where both the children and the teachers are expected to learn from each other.

Many psychologists have famously studied childhood and emotion. (Goleman, 2005) writes his own theory and states that emotional intelligence consists of five components. These are self regulation, self awareness, motivation, empathy and social skills. Goleman, 2005, p.284) records that the investment of time spent realising and embracing the concept will turn around an academically poor school into one of high achievers. Emotional literacy, as emotional intelligence can also be known, is defined by (Sharp, 2001, p.1.) as 'the ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions'. He describes the importance of the concept as a need to recognise emotion in order to define it, understand emotions in order to learn and to establish management of emotion to support healthy attachments. (Forster, 2015, p.49) describes the sequence of positive emotional well-being stages as the promotion of self, handling feelings and moods, strategies for maintaining positivity, developing empathy and enhancing sociability. These skills all begin to develop within childhood and continue well into adulthood, feedback from others will help to form a sense of self, creating independence and confidence and a positive approach towards learning socially, emotionally and academically.

(Biddulph, 2003, p.55) states that emotions in their simplest form are a set of sensations within our mind and body that are experienced in all kinds of different

circumstances and situations. Emotions are constant though interchangeable, fluid yet stagnant. The combinations of which are endless, crying tears of joy as well as sadness or combining fear and anger to create jealousy. Fortunately, society appears to be moving away from the gender assumptions that boys don't cry or that girls should not display anger and there is now an air of more equal rights within the emotional landscape. (Chivers, 2013, p.7) states that it is much easier for a person to learn when they are armed with an emotional toolkit made up of the key characteristics of resilience. These being confidence, self esteem and a healthy sense of well-being. These attributes are essential to a classroom becoming focused on nurture and sensitivity.

Young minds (2017) report that demands on teachers are rising and it can be argued that the mental health of a child is not the concern of a teacher, however, statistics show that especially in more economically and socially deprived areas, children need the support of their school in more than just academic ways. For some children, school dinner maybe the only meal they have that day. In winter the only warmth they feel and the playground the only chance of socialisation. A child should never be judged by the circumstances they have inherited but by the strengths and skills, they can deliver. Positive well-being is just the same concept. There are many reasons why a child may arrive at school with low morale, lack of confidence or little self esteem. This may be a direct result of violence, alcohol or drugs at home. It may be due to caring responsibilities or parental divorce, any number of negative circumstances impacting on their life; however, the same can be said for the adult staff.

A whole school approach to emotional intelligence or emotional literacy as it can also be referred to has well documented positive outcomes. Peter Sharp, (2001) describes it as the appropriately recognising, understanding and the expressing of emotions. Learning how to use emotion to guide one's own needs and be supportive of others. It can support a sense of self, benefit personal relationships and form foundations for career success. Dr foster (2015) believes that a universal framework providing provision for emotional strength and regulation is essential to meet individual and personal need. Her layered approach rests on the belief that children and young people have a better experience within a school setting when a whole school approach creates an environment that openly values emotional well-being and positive mental health. Her three tiered model consists of firstly, a universal provision for all, a top

down approach to delivering high class social, emotional and behavioural skills. Secondly, small group interventions for targeted children in key areas of difficulty and thirdly that emotionally vulnerable children are given personalised individual support.

An example of a school focused on the emotional well-being of its pupils is School A in Llanelli. The school anti bullying and harassment policy is within the public domain on the website and states a determination to ensure every child feels ‘safe, secure, confident and happy’. The policy delivers a framework to support the whole school responding consistently to negative behaviours and it shows that the children who attend this school have a pre agreed covenant displayed with their rights in every classroom. Much like the United Nations (1989) convention of the rights of the child (UNCRC) but agreed by pupils themselves. They sign an agreement annually in their homework planners in a promise to adhere to the rights displayed for the benefit of others. Children then are awarded or have points removed from a system that rewards the children for their behaviour towards others and not their academic achievement. This work is reflected in the 2017 Estyn inspection report. School A attained the top award of ‘excellent’ in all 15 aspects of the inspection. This includes the well-being of students stating that most pupils show exceptional care and concern for others, are highly respectful to each other and to adults and that behaviour in the classroom is exemplary. These were reported as ‘outstanding features’.

Of course, it can be argued that the popularity of emotional literacy has caused serious harm. (Murphey, 2014, n.d.) writes that the concept can be problematic, making impossible promises and papering over cracks with little value. He claims that the sweeping claims of its importance are damaging, poorly defined and impossible to measure adequately. He also suggests that emotional literacy be more a personality trait than a sign of intellect. Another critique is that perhaps emotional intelligence generalises the emotions. Most definitions refer to an individual being able to manage their emotions, however (Murphey) writes that someone skilled in happiness may not necessarily be skilled in jealousy. It can also be evidenced that a large amount of professional education staff do not wish to be burdened with the mental health of their pupils. However, the House of Commons Health Committee (2014) recommends that all teaching staff should be trained, in child development, resilience and mental health so earlier intervention is made and referrals to external services can be made.

Referring to policy, the Welsh Government has recently released its draft education plan for Wales. This is currently being circulated for feedback and expected to be refined by July 2019. Currently, there is a small recognition of well-being in the curriculum and all welsh schools have to provide an element of personal and social education. This focuses on careers, work, relationships and sex. This is delivered at a designated time in a pupil's week; however, the individual schools decide the content of these sessions. In addition, counselling services are made available for 11-16 year olds, by external companies such as Area 43, again schools are responsible for sourcing and maintaining these contracts. Within the newly proposed plan's well-being takes more precedence. The learning is organised around six key areas of experience which are, expressive arts, humanities, science/technology, numeracy, language and Health/well-being. With obvious regard to physical health, the latter chapter heavily recognises the importance and value of mental health and emotional well-being as 'key enablers' to successful learning. Within the language used and the attention to detail, it is clear that this area is of far more importance than in previous Welsh education plans. The commitment of the government to well-being is also evidenced in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which includes seven priorities to improve the lives of people living in Wales.

To conclude, it is clear that schools need to be united in their approach to the well-being of their staff in order to promote the well-being of their pupils. Head teachers and senior management need to make sure that both children and staff feel valued, respected and listened to. That regular opportunity is provided for pupils and teachers that are not measuring, testing or evaluating, but just talking, listening and making meaningful connections. It seems apparent that teaching professionals do need training in mental well-being and emotional intelligence at least if they are to be able to equip young people with the necessary skills and to be able to teach this higher level of health and well-being educationally. In fact, (Young Minds, 2017) recommends that this be embedded in teacher training or at very least considered as personal development and delivered within INSET days. Everyone within the school community needs to have their emotional needs met for everyone to work cohesively and coherently, all having the same sense of regard for their own and each other's well-being.

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