BOOK REVIEWS

Phillip T. Slee, Grace Skrzypiec and Carmel Cefai (Eds.) (2018): *Child and Adolescent Wellbeing and Violence Prevention in Schools.* **London and New York: Routledge**. ISBN 978-1-138-10478-5

Can positive school approaches that foster student wellbeing effectively address destructive perceptions of self and others and reduce negative behaviour and violence in school? This was the focus of the first international conference of the Centre for Student Wellbeing and Prevention of Violence in 2016, which was held in Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. The book under review grew out of the papers presented at this conference.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in the application of wellbeing approaches to such diverse areas as public policy (Diener et al., 2009) and economics (Diener, Kahneman, and Helliwell, 2010), with Bhutan pioneering the concept of Gross National Happiness in lieu of the GDP (Saikai, Chalmers and Dasvarma (2018). Positive psychology perspectives are also permeating counselling (Fulmer, 2015), psychotherapy (Peteet, 2018) and education (Shankland and Rosset, 2017). Indeed, Shankland and Rosset consider that: "Teachers and researchers in positive psychology are natural allies. At its core, education is about nurturing strengths, growth and learning. Furthermore, psychological and social well-being are key concerns for teachers and other educators and for people working in the field of positive psychology" (2017 p 385).

Well-being is popularly described as the capacity to respond effectively to adversity, drawing on internal resources such as self-regulation, optimism and mental agility, as well as external ones such as strong relationships, that enable us to deal with problems and setbacks in a way that still enables us to meet developmental milestones. Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders (2012) define it as: "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (p.230). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines

mental health as: "as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community"(WHO, 2014).

The connection between mental health and well-being is a core concept in positive psychology, on which well-being strategies are based. Positive psychology is considered the 'fourth wave' of psychology (Peteet, op.cit; Positive psychology programme, 2018), following the Disease, Behaviourism, and Humanistic psychology models. The Disease model focused on the pathology and curing mental illness, whilst behaviourism was premised on the negation of free will and focused on behaviour modification. Humanistic psychology grew out of dissatisfaction with these two approaches, and focuses on people's ability to make meaning and choices and strive for self-actualisation. Positive psychology is grounded in humanistic psychology's belief in the power of individuals to change their own lives, and focuses on the achievement of authentic happiness and the good life.

As an educator with over thirty years of experience at most sectors and levels of Maltese educational provision, and of course as a student myself in the 1970s and '80s, I have lived through a range of school approaches to addressing unacceptable student behaviour. Thankfully, Maltese schools have moved on from the use of corporal punishment justified by operant conditioning perspectives (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015), although this is not always true internationally (Russo, Oosthuizen and Wolhuter, 2015). However the Manage and Discipline model of classroom behaviour management (Armstrong 2018) is still very much alive, not only in Malta (Wubbels, 2011).

Disease Model-based approaches to the labelling of and responses to students' unacceptable behaviour are also prevalent. We still pathologize vulnerable families as environments-in-deficit. The medicalisation of deviance (Conrad and Schneider, 1992) in student behaviour (Lavin, 2016) in terms of learning and/or psychosocial 'deficiencies', such as dyslexia, discalcula, ADD/ADHD and SEBD, has reached chronic proportions, certainly in the Maltese context. Internationally, the implications of over-diagnosis of ADHD, for example, is increasingly cause for concern (Fresson et al., 2018).

This is not to dispute that families (not only those with visible vulnerabilities) can present particular challenges for the nurturing of resilience in children, or that the medico-educational categorisations mentioned are real and can be extremely helpful. But in non-inclusive educational contexts they can serve to justify segregation and inequitable educational provision under the guise of 'additional support', the benefit of which can be debatable (Blatchford et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 1010).

On the other hand, the well-being perspective and the positive psychology that underpins it are intrinsically linked to the concept of positive school climate. As Blaya (2018) rightly points out in the concluding chapter of this publication, they are "rooted in the school identity, in the sense that they are both related to school engagement, achievement, social skills and social relations that enable positive individual developments for all" (p.225). Research has shown that a positive and inclusive school climate (Thapa et al., 2013) and classroom climate (McBer, 2000) facilitate enhanced student connectedness, belonging and achievement.

The importance of 'Child and Adolescent Wellbeing and Violence Prevention in Schools' is in that it situates a range of concrete Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies to address unacceptable student behaviour in such a holistic well-being perspective. It presents specific strategies to address bullying, cyberbullying and student violence along with programmes for whole-school, including curricular, approaches such as RESCUR Surfing the Waves (Cefai, 2018) that build resilience and well-being and promote violence prevention. It thus circumvents the stigmatising, pathologizing and deficit perspectives and concomitant strategies mentioned previously.

This publication includes 22 different contributions by 45 researchers and educators. It presents a healthy mix of analyses, trends and current issues in the field, as well as practical information and research on classroom, school or community applications. It has five thematic sections: culture and well-being, which has a particular focus on indigenous/first nation issues; young females and bullying; interventions to promote wellbeing; and interventions to promote violence prevention. Apart from issues of culture, mental health in the context of gender, young children and youth voice is particularly addressed.

The publication opens with an overview of the field that highlights the vital role that the school can play in children's mental health, and closes with a synthesis that situates these themes in wider perspectives such as the fostering of a positive school climate and the need to address the particular realities of identified vulnerable groups that are more prone to school-based violence in different forms.

A publication of this scope will always be open to critique that more could have been covered. Given the nature of the conference that fed the publication, it is understandable that more than two thirds of the contributions are by authors working in antipodean, mostly Australian, universities and other entities. Nonetheless, the range of chapters tends to be anglo-centric; the presence of the Asian context in this publication is quite limited, with one Indian University being represented, although two other chapters also discuss programmes in India. The section on culture and wellbeing can thus serve as an important point of departure for a truly international perspective of ethnicity, different minority contexts and wellbeing. Another area of future growth, which was not focused on in this publication, is the nexus of wellbeing with social class, including its intersection with gender.

Nevertheless, this is certainly a timely and important contribution to research-based knowledge of whole-school approaches to SEL, classroom management and violence prevention in schools in vulnerable sectors, especially with respect to indigenous and gender contexts. It is a very useful point of reference for researchers, policy makers and practitioners, and provides a secure stepping stone for further research and reflective practice in the field.

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