

Andrew Fuller

Clinical Psychologist
Author and Speaker

www.andrewfuller.com.au
www.mylearningstrengths.com



Metacognition & The Science of Wellbeing

Andrew Fuller

The other strand of the DNA of schools is wellbeing. Increasing wellbeing requires knowing that what you do makes a difference (*self-efficacy*) & knowing what works best for you (*metacognition*).

Our wellbeing can be thought of as a spiral.



We all have times when we don't attend to our wellbeing as much as we probably should. At those times we need to consider & then implement strategies to raise ourselves up the wellbeing spiral.

This does not require another program that schools should deliver. The last thing schools need is yet another ineffectual wellbeing program. Many of them are not aligned with the current challenges that young people face after the pandemic years- some don't even cover them. Others are overly reliant on teacher instruction & do not involve students or empower student voice.

Instead, we can take a scientific approach to increasing wellbeing. This involves students &

staff being investigators & researchers into increasing their own levels of wellbeing.

This creates a community where everyone has the intention of increasing wellbeing. While there are common themes, we are entering an age of personalised tailoring of mental health & wellbeing processes.

When we feel bad, it is a signal to do something differently. There are many ways of improving wellbeing- the challenge is to find the methods that work for each person.

Asking ourselves & one another what we should do differently, creates thoughtful metacognition & ultimately tailors wellbeing to suit the individual needs of each person.

Metacognition improves wellbeing & mental health. For example, if I know that I am a person who is prone to over-thinking issues, I can become aware of this tendency when I do it & remind myself to reset rather than ruminate. For example, "*Ah there I go again over- thinking things. Try to keep it simple. Now move into action*".

We all need to know how to increase our own wellbeing & what to do on those days when we struggle (& *we all have those days*). This sets us up for success & resilience for the rest of our lives.

The last year has brought about a whole array of fascinating, new research that we can bring to this quest. Increasing wellbeing is not a spectator sport.

The Current Challenges for Wellbeing

The landscape of wellbeing has shifted dramatically over the past few years, leaving many of our current interventions out-dated & ineffectual.

I asked the team at Skodel to survey 2,000 teachers & 50,000 students to find out the big challenges students are currently facing in relation to wellbeing.

The top 6 are presented below & should be considered as a high priority as the basis for investigations & interventions in increasing wellbeing.

Sleep deprivation

Sleep patterns generally have improved (*a bit*) but nourishing restful sleep has not.

Over two thirds of students have disrupted sleep patterns, attributing their tiredness to stress, digital distractions, & erratic daily routines.

A school community that values sleep, lives better & learns better. We need to have our students & their parents fully aware of the architecture of sleep, how this relates to learning & health & how to regain restful sleep patterns.

Having students complete a sleep diary or use sleep trackers, helps students & families who are outliers become aware that not everyone is up at 2 a.m. playing Fortnite.

We can also have staff & students investigate their '*down times*' when they will learn least & using ultradian tracking, their '*peak times*' when they will maximise their productivity & learning.

Concentration & distractibility

Never in the history of education have we had students with shorter concentration spans.

Over 80% of students find it harder to focus on tasks for extended periods. Concentration spans have decreased by 27% over the past 20 years.

Anyone who has ever learned to play sport or a musical instrument knows concentration is skill we can get better at.

Increasingly people are not concentrating, they are anticipating. The anticipatory mindset is always scanning for what's next. You may have seen this- people taking photos or videos of an event sacrificing their own experiences, preferring to possibly view it or show it to others later.

Concentration is a skill that can be developed using the process of **AIER**:

Awareness- what am I doing?

Intention- what is my goal?

Evaluation- what should I be doing?

Reset

Anxiety

Since the pandemic years, anxiety levels have skyrocketed, creating levels of distress & avoidance we simply haven't seen before.

While anxiety expressed as worries still occurs, what predominates more frequently is immobilisation & avoidance. This threatens the 'have-a-go' mindset that broadens success.

Helping teachers & students understand & develop strategies for the three main levels of anxiety is essential. Briefly these are-

Freeze & fatigue- rest then move, reset & step-in rather than zone-out or avoid.

Fight & flight- exercise, dance, sing, hum, move.

Synch and Link-talk, problem solve, link & act with others in community.

Friendships & social network

Loneliness & isolation are perilous for wellbeing.

While all of us have different levels of optimal social contact, we all need some people in our life. This is our tribe.

A powerful way of resolving anxiety is to link & synch with people who you trust. This requires stepping into life rather than avoiding it.

What makes this possible is not a wellbeing program but a culture that connects, protects & respects (**CPR**) people.

Online Life

Unsurprisingly, sleep deprivation correlates with increased device usage & screentime. 90% of high school students spend over 7 hours on screens daily, with 40% admitting feelings of addiction. 85% of young people feel that their social relationships are 'significantly more online based' than pre-pandemic times. This calls for the need to ensure student safety online as well as investigating how to be a wise user of technology.

Motivation

Too many students have slumped back into school feeling listless & less motivated. School attendance rates have dropped. Levels of motivation to learn have declined with 68% of students finding it hard to feel motivated.

Elsewhere I have written about ways teachers can increase dopamine by modulating challenges in classrooms to build motivation.

Recent research into the mid anterior cingulate cortex, the development of dopamine-wise classrooms and the use of learning strengths has shifted our understanding of motivation.

Biohacking for Gains

While there is merit in approaches that focus on feelings & wellbeing, emotional literacy &

self-awareness take time to develop. Our quickest gains in wellbeing are in the 6 areas raised in this paper.

How to make this happen

Regardless of how vulnerable our group of young people are, we should not convert most schools into quasi-mental health clinics. To do so, would be to divert the wonderful skills of educators away from creating two of the most powerful factors in the wellbeing of young people- a sense of belonging at school & the understanding that you are smart & can get smarter.

More information

inyahead@aussiebb.com.au

Andrew's websites

www.andrewfuller.com.au

www.mylearningstrengths.com has helped over 100,000 young people in the past year discover their learning strengths.

Books for Parents

Tricky Behaviours

Tricky Teens

The A to Z of Feelings

Unlocking Your Child's Genius

Books for Teachers

Guerrilla Tactics for Teachers

Neurodevelopmental Differentiation- Optimising Brain Systems to Maximise Learning

