Assessment as a pedagogical tool: Wellbeing in the wake of the pandemic

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Introduction

Many educationalists support a holistic approach to understanding and supporting students. Appreciating each student as a whole person can really help to understand how well they are doing in school, and why. Wellbeing is one of several different areas of insight that every teacher can gain, to build a student profile.

Put simply, wellbeing is a combination of both feeling well and functioning well. As it is a transient psychological state, it is worth monitoring over time.

Since wellbeing is included in many curricula internationally, including England’s national curriculum, we developed an online assessment, the ‘Cambridge Wellbeing Check’, for schools to use with their students.

It was first developed as a research instrument by researchers in the Faculty of Education within the University of Cambridge, and it was used with 5170 students across 40 English primary and secondary schools (McLellan and Steward, 2015). We converted the instrument into a pedagogical tool for classroom use. Our idea was that it could be used together with lesson plans to:

• educate students about what wellbeing is
• create a classroom culture that is emotionally literate, sensitive, and aware of others’ emotions
• provide students with a sense of interpersonal connectedness and intrapersonal understanding
• involve students in the co-development of a whole-school wellbeing policy.

Methodology

We extended the original instrument into a 22-item digital assessment with improved coverage of hedonic (feelings) and eudaimonic (functioning) wellbeing. Users self-report the frequency with which they experience a range of feelings in school using a 5-point Likert scale. These feelings are associated with the four areas of wellbeing: competence, interpersonal, life satisfaction and negative emotions.

We created four linked, age-appropriate lesson plans to teach children about wellbeing, for lower and upper primary and for lower and upper secondary students. In each plan, teachers taught Part 1, administered the assessment, then taught Part 2.

We trialled the pedagogical process with 1800 children aged 7-18 across 22 schools in multiple countries, obtaining feedback through a teacher questionnaire and interviews.

Example item and example report:

Results

Exploratory factor analysis of the response data indicated broadly similar loadings of items to wellbeing areas as in the original study.

Conclusion

Our assessment has multiple complementary purposes, and overall, understanding and tracking wellbeing can contribute to a positive school ethos. Through using the assessment, students understand more about what wellbeing is, and potentially become more confident to express their feelings. The assessment is also formative, providing teachers with information about their students. This could help with tracking wellbeing, and in identifying individuals needing more support. It could also help with evaluating interventions to improve wellbeing.

Reference


For further information see: https://www.cem.org/wellbeing