



Student Perceptions of Safety, Belonging & Engagement at Wesley College



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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

- Uniting Church School, ECLC – Year 12
- Three metropolitan sites across Melbourne.
- World Class IB school (PYP, MYP, DP)
- Last year we surveyed the wellbeing of our students (i.e., physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, social, and academic engagement).
- These findings led us to further investigate the key themes through a qualitative approach to better understand our students' perceptions of:
 - ❖ What we do well?
 - ❖ What are the barriers?
 - ❖ What could we improve?

Supportive Literature:

Self-Determination Theory - when we feel safe, respected and connected we feel valued as an individual and we meet our key needs for belonging, engagement and autonomy.

Wesley College's Wellbeing Framework ROAR



- RESPECT
- OPPORTUNITY
- ACHIEVEMENT
- RESILIENCE

Developing the strengths, courage and capabilities to roar



Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What makes Wesley College students feel happy, safe, connected and motivated?

METHODS

Participants:

- Students in Years 2, 4, 6, 8, & 10.

Procedure:

- Parental consent was obtained.
- Each campus conducted focus groups of 3-4 participants in each year level using the same guiding questions.
- Students were given a sorting warm up activity prior to each interview to engage their thinking around what they felt was most important to them at school (e.g., 'I feel like I can succeed at school', 'teachers know my name', 'people care about each other at school').
- Each session was recorded via Teams audio recording with transcription.

ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis was undertaken.

Common Themes



AUTONOMY

Year 2

- Difficult to articulate examples.
- Students provided more **teacher led** examples.

Years 4, 6, 8 & 10

- Specific examples of **student directed opportunities** shared.
- **Excited** by these opportunities and express **pride** in doing so.
- **Personal responsibility** in learning success identified.

Year 8

- The importance of **self-evaluations** and **feedback** for growth.
- **Peer** involvement in **unpacking feedback** was valued.
- **Deadlines** help with organisation.

Year 10

- Strong emphasis on the importance of **approaches to learning skills**, particularly growing **independence, collaboration** and **peer support**.

RESULTS (continued)

BELONGING

Year 2

- Responses focused *primarily* on **peer characteristics** and the **physical location cues** to signify that they belong.
- **Physical spaces** and age were also referred to be other year levels.
- **Friendships** were emphasised in all year groups as important to their **sense of belonging**.
- A **shared sense of purpose**.

Years 6, 8 & 10

- Discussed the value of **diversity** and **inclusivity** and the importance of being **known** and **understood**.

Year 10

- Acknowledged the importance of **shared contribution** and **responsibility**.

COMPETENCE

Year 2

- They recognised feelings of being **proud** when doing jobs/work well. Found it difficult to share examples of when the teachers gave praise.

Years 4, 6, 8 & 10

- Identified the **role of peers** in supporting their learning.
- They recognised feeling of being **proud** when doing jobs/work well.
- Appreciated **praise/awards** for their efforts.

Years 6 & 8

- Appreciated being accepted for who they and their **effort** in their work, not just grades.
- Work is **celebrated** (e.g. put on the wall).
- Appreciated **praise/awards** for their efforts.
- Acknowledged the opportunities to **challenge** themselves and the **growth** that occurs from these.

Year 8

- Described the **role the teacher** plays in **building their capacity** and the impact of their **feedback** on their learning.
- **Goal setting** supported their ability to reflect on feedback.
- **Grades** help student gauge their **performance** and dictates their **sense of achievement**. Examples of role modelling shared in the classroom and co-curricular activities.

Year 10

- Strong emphasis on building **autonomy** and **independence** within themselves and not relying on friends.

SAFETY

Years 2, 4, 6 & 8

- General acceptance that school is a **safe** environment. People are **trusted**.
- Responses emphasised **physical safety** (particularly Year 2).
- **Classroom routines** create **predictability** and **safety**.
- Acknowledge the role of their **friends** in helping them feel safe.

Years 6, 8 & 10

- Appreciate the role that **teachers** play in getting to **know you** and **support you** at school.
- Feel safe to **ask for support** from their teachers.
- **Trust** comes through **encouragement** and **kindness**, not emphasising the short comings.

Years 8 & 10

- Acknowledge that **activities**, not just in the classroom help **build relationships**.
- Trust that poor behaviour is **called out** and **etiquette** is upheld within the classroom creating a safe environment to share ideas and work.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

Key Learnings:

- ✓ It's generally accepted that school is a safe place. Friendships are important.
- ✓ *Kindness* and *trust* were commonly used to describe experiences at school.
- ✓ The importance of autonomy is primarily recognised in older students.

Next Steps:

- Look at other campus data and conduct staff interviews.
- Share findings and celebrate with staff and students.
- Comparative analysis with quantitative College Wellbeing survey data.