The great divide impacting wellbeing in education

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We all agree that education is a complex structure seeking to improve the outcomes of its students through imparting knowledge or skills. The question lies in why we impart this knowledge and what the core purpose behind our interactions are driven by and whether they are portrayed in the context of real world application and relevance.

Increasingly wellbeing is coming to the front of many educational discussions. Why are student stress levels increasing? Why are more students disengaged or school avoiding? How do we better motivate compliant disengaged students within our schools?

Whilst wellbeing in schools has evolved particularly in the last few years for many, it is founded in the roots of welfare, which is quite a different need, or pastoral care, which again can have an alternate goal for students. The 2017 Gallup Students poll in April revealed that 55% of Australian students are engaged in their education, passionately connected to the offer of learning and developing themselves within the school system. Conversely 17% of students were actively disengaged, feeling negatively about their schooling and being actively involved in being disruptive within their schools. These results reiterate the finding around a high level of disconnect at school as much as seeking to explain the volume of school absenteeism and truancy. Additionally, it offers us insight into why students may be acting out in this way and why this is becoming more deeply rooted within our schools at younger years.

Consistently for the last four years Gallup Student Polls have revealed that student Hopefulness is stagnant at 48%. This explains students feeling a lack of motivation or desire in their schooling. Hope is forward thinking and around the "light at the end of the tunnel" or the "why" factor in the daily activities they are engaged in.

Partnering with Department, Catholic and Independent schools broadly across NSW we notice evidence of a deep chasm when it comes to wellbeing. It comes in the form of future vision and aspiration. Traditionally referenced as careers education, this focus on transition and purpose beyond curriculum seems to be lacking in many schools. In saying this it is important to note that in work across these schools we are fortunate to interact with passionate educators with a true sense of desire to make a difference to their students' lives. The challenge lies in volume and segmented perceptions.

In corporate there have been massive inroads towards integration of departments, cross-functionality and interface on project management. This is also becoming more visible within our tertiary institutions with increases in cross faculty degrees and experiences to build student learning towards tangible life skills.

Few schools have taken on a holis-

tic approach to wellbeing by embedding careers or transition as a core focus from kindergarten to Year 12, or Year 7 to Year 12 for high schools. This isolated or piecemeal focus on negative issues around school interaction, avoidance and behaviours is missing the root of the issue, which is inadvertently creating challenges with such students and as a result schools in connecting with their students in a meaningful way.

"If we want Australian youth to thrive, we must help them see the bigger picture and encourage them to invest in career pathways that give them passion and purpose." (2017 *Skillsroad Youth Census* p. 30)

Some of the key recommendations from the 2017 *Skillsroad Youth Census* suggest that schools must begin authentic career conversations earlier that invite students to develop knowledge of current career trends and seek opportunities that will enable greater skills in adaptability for the unknown careers of the future.

Bridging this chasm with meaningful self-awareness, real world connection, understanding of own personal motivation assists all aspects of the school community in a tangible and purposeful manner.

Some of the core issues we hear from schools impacting the attainment of success for students and families in assimilating these areas include:

"A dense curriculum"

With an increasingly heightened focus on academic outcomes, schools are measured not by the growth of the individual students rather by the "average" academic results aligned to their student's base. This has become evident in schools' approaches to NAPLAN and ATAR as much as the publicity of ATAR results in isolation. Schools could equally value the job attainment and transition for those without ATAR aspirations. Including transition connections within subjects, real life examples and breadth of student post school success we are recalibrating the success of the school and students.

"No money for resources"

Educators are exceptional in their area of experience. Our passion for teaching others or for a particular content area tends to drive us toward the profession. As the world beyond school becomes increasingly complex for staff and students alike, there is more need for experts in their field to support school with resources, strategies and tools to positively change the outcome for students. These impacts around mental health, self-drive and ambition are critical for school success yet are not directly correlated to curriculum content and cannot always be accepted by students from in-school staff. There are extensive programs online, from Government initiatives and private providers that can assist schools in personalising a directional plan for their student and family demographic.

"Lack of vocational pathways"

Many schools subject offerings are narrowed to perceived "best" options when it comes to HSC scaling and university pathways. For students with a thirst for learning and enjoyment for the structure of school learning, this is a positive pathway. However, for many students the practical or direct work-related areas are where they thrive. Working extensively with students facing challenges to their mental health and/or feeling disengaged with their schooling, the lack of autonomy, personal application and freedom to create stifles them.

"How do we use student testing"

Associated to the funding debate, many schools do not have the funds to run comprehensive testing for whole year groups or specific students. A number of students however prioritise undertaking extensive academic testing prior to or as they commence Year 7. This is followed with various assessments as they come to elect senior subjects. Applying this assessment isolated to literacy, numeracy and faculty-based learning areas however removes an opportunity for students to enter their senior years with the potential to increase their emotional intelligence and motivational drivers. We should seek to utilise positive and broad assessment tools building the students self-awareness and behavioural preferences around positive frameworks such as motivations or strengths. This has been shown to result in encouragement of growth mindset and improved understanding of potential responses to negativity and challenge, such as anxiety, stress, depression, social interactions.

"Bringing the workplace into school"

As staff cannot easily take time off class to visit a workplace and industry cannot always bring their workplace into the school, we are left with a variety of messages, access and interactions with employers. Undisputedly, education is to support students in becoming positive members of a global society, as such understanding of employer expectations, experiences and styles is essential. Social media offers much to support schools in this endeavour as to many businesses now. Creating connections between educators and industry is our first step.

"Red tape and regulations"

New regulations and systems have seen many schools reduce their involvement in work experience or workplace activities. Unless it can connect to a current trend, such as STEM, or an in-school program, such as Cross Roads, schools feel their hands are tied. Support for schools to re-engineer their approach to wellbeing to incorporate transition assistance in resolving these issues. There are opportunities throughout the curriculum and some schools have designed amazing programs to genuinely change their community.

The process of culture change is a slow one that includes much discussion with experts, educators, parents and families and the students themselves. Customising in-school programs to include reflection and review as a natural element of growth and allowing for change are all critical spheres building meaningful and responsive wellbeing structures. Live, engaging and purposeful transition functions from early on in the education process, Year 7 at a minimum, primary where possible. Breaking down silos within schools and considering deep methods of understanding staff and students at a personal level allow all to flourish.

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