2014

Wellbeing in schools: research project: improving approaches to wellbeing in schools: what role does recognition play? Executive summary

Anne Graham  
*Southern Cross University*

Robyn Fitzgerald

Mary Ann Powell  
*Southern Cross University*

Nigel Thomas  
*Southern Cross University*

Donnah L. Anderson  
*Southern Cross University*

See next page for additional authors

Publication details  
Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW. ISBN: 9780980382365  
Published version available from:  
https://doi.org/10.4226/47/58eaed4c09218

ePublications@SCU is an electronic repository administered by Southern Cross University Library. Its goal is to capture and preserve the intellectual output of Southern Cross University authors and researchers, and to increase visibility and impact through open access to researchers around the world. For further information please contact epubs@scu.edu.au.
Authors
Anne Graham, Robyn Fitzgerald, Mary Ann Powell, Nigel Thomas, Donnah L. Anderson, Nadine E. White, and Catharine A. Simmons

This report is available at ePublications@SCU: http://epubs.scu.edu.au/ccyp_pubs/196
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
This document comprises the Executive Summary for the Australian Research Council Linkage Project ‘Improving approaches to wellbeing in schools: What role does recognition play?’ (LP 110200656). This Executive Summary may be read in conjunction with Volumes One, Two, Three and Four of the Final Report. The four Volumes of the Final Report are:

Final Report: Volume One
Overview, Methodology, Research Design, Phase 1 Policy Analysis Results.

Final Report: Volume Two
Phase 2 Qualitative Interviews and Focus Groups Results

Final Report: Volume Three
Phase 3 Quantitative Survey Results

Final Report: Volume Four
Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, References and Appendices

Additionally, this Executive Summary is available online.

ADDITIONAL COPIES OF ALL VOLUMES OF THE FINAL REPORT CAN BE ACCESSED AT:

www.ccyp.scu.edu.au
Or contact: Centre for Children and Young People
Southern Cross University / PO Box 157 Lismore NSW 2480 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 (0)2 6620 3605
Fax: +61 (0)2 6620 3243
Email: ccyp@scu.edu.au

ISBN: 978-0-9803823-6-5
Published: August 2014

Suggested Citation:

This work may be reproduced, in whole or part, for study or training purposes, subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgement of the source. It should not be used for commercial purposes.

©2014 Centre for Children and Young People
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Australian Research Council (ARC) supported research project was an ambitious undertaking that would not have been possible without the expertise, interest and generous contributions of a significant number of people.

Firstly, we would like to express our immense gratitude to the thousands of primary and secondary students and hundreds of principals, teachers and other school staff, who shared their views about wellbeing in schools through interviews, focus groups and online surveys. Their insights have not only shed considerable light on how wellbeing is currently understood and practised in schools but also on aspects of school life that might be approached differently in the interests of improving the lives of children and young people. We are especially appreciative of the involvement of senior staff at the three regional education offices that helped to facilitate access to schools in their regions.

Secondly, the research would not have been possible without the vision, funding, expertise and untiring commitment of our three Partner Organisations: the Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Lismore; Interrelate; and Good Grief Ltd. The Partner Investigators on this project, Dr Paul Thornton, Sr Mary Ellen O’Donoghue and Ms Robyn Parker, as well as other colleagues from their organisations, have collaborated closely throughout the entire research process to help ensure rigour, relevance and impact. Their contributions have been invaluable in shaping the research in ways that are inclusive and respectful of the different needs and interests of the schools, the students and other organisations involved.

Thirdly, we wish to thank the members of the project’s Wellbeing Advisory Group (WAG) who have contributed thoughtfully to the research design, development of interview and survey tools, data analysis and the production of various research outputs. We wish to pay particular tribute to the very enthusiastic, constructive and enduring commitment of the student members of the WAG: Lucy Cornwell, Cameron Kable, Lucy Taylor and Ruby Walker.

Finally, we wish to thank Alison Moss for her invaluable contribution during the early phases of the research, and Donna Shipway for her expertise and endurance with the NVivo coding of Phase 2 data. We also wish to thank Elizabeth Adamson and Julia Truscott for their skilful proof-reading, and Carl Welsby at c55 for his creative assistance with designing various research outputs.

This research was supported under the Australian Research Council’s Linkage Project funding scheme (Project LP110200656). The Partner Organisations provided additional financial and in-kind support, as well as working very collaboratively on the intellectual and practical aspects of the research. However, the authors remain responsible for the views expressed and any errors of fact or interpretation.
Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University
Chief Investigators: Professor Anne Graham, Dr Robyn Fitzgerald
Research Team: Dr Mary Ann Powell (Postdoctoral Research Fellow), Dr Donnah Anderson, Dr Catharine Simmons (Research Associates); Nadine White, Alison Moss (Project Officers/Research Assistants)

University of Central Lancashire
Partner Investigator: Professor Nigel Thomas

PARTNER INVESTIGATORS

Catholic Schools Office, Lismore
Partner Investigator: Dr Paul Thornton

Good Grief
Partner Investigator: Sr Mary-Ellen O’Donoghue

Interrelate Family Centres
Partner Investigator: Robyn Parker

Contact for follow up:
Professor Anne Graham, Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW 2480, Ph: +61 (0)2 6620 3605, anne.graham@scu.edu.au
## CONTENTS

1 Introduction and Background 1
   1.1 Project Aim and Objectives 3
   1.2 Methodological Approach 5

2 Key Findings 7
   2.1 Phase 1 Findings: Policy Analysis 7
   2.2 Phase 2 Findings: Student Focus Groups and Teacher Interviews 13
      2.2.1 Phase 2: Student Perspectives 13
      2.2.2 Phase 2: Principal and Teacher Perspectives 19
   2.3 Phase 3 Findings: Online Survey with Primary and Secondary Students and Staff 29

3 Discussion of Findings 41
   3.1 Understanding Wellbeing 43
   3.2 Recognition and Wellbeing 45
   3.3 Implications for Policy and Practice 51

4 Recommendations 57
   Recommendations for Policy 57
   Recommendations for Practice 59
   Recommendations for Research 60

5 References 61
This document is the Executive Summary of a major research report for an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project titled, *Improving Approaches to Wellbeing in Schools: What Role Does Recognition Play?* The project has produced systematic policy and practice-relevant evidence to advance the way children’s ‘wellbeing’ is understood and approached in schools. It is recommended that this Executive Summary be read in conjunction with Volumes 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the major research report.

**The Major Research Report is Comprised of Four Volumes.**

**Volume 1** provides an overview of the research and details the background, significance, research design and methodology for each of the four phases of the study. Volume 1 also includes the findings from Phase 1 of the research, which is an analysis of relevant national, state and system level policy pertaining to wellbeing in schools (*N*=80). **Volume 2** reports the findings from Phase 2 of the research, which is an analysis of qualitative data from in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals (*N*=89) and focus group interviews with primary and secondary students (*N*=606). **Volume 3** reports the findings from Phase 3 of the research, which is an analysis of the quantitative data from online surveys with principals and teachers (*N*=707), primary school students (*N*=3906) and secondary school students (*N*=5362). **Volume 4** provides a synthesised discussion of the findings across all four phases of the research and outlines a number of recommendations arising from these findings. Importantly, Volume 4 also includes a number of resources to assist schools and other project partners in providing professional development for staff in relation to the research findings.

**New Knowledge is Generated about ‘Wellbeing’ in Schools – Drawing on Insights from Students, Teachers, Principals and Policy.**
1.1 PROJECT AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to generate new knowledge about ‘wellbeing’ in schools.

Drawing upon insights from principals, teachers, students and existing policies, together with key ideas offered through recognition theory and Childhood Studies, the research:

1. Develops a detailed understanding of how ‘wellbeing’ in schools is currently understood by students, teachers and educational policy makers;
2. Investigates the potential of recognition theory for advancing understanding and improvements in relation to student wellbeing;
3. Generates new knowledge about how educational policy, programs and practices in schools could more positively impact on student wellbeing.

This study is the largest in Australia to date to invite students’ views about wellbeing in schools and, importantly, to identify similarities and differences between teacher and student views, and how these broadly align with current policy perspectives. Including student perspectives is especially significant given evidence that they are rarely consulted about their wellbeing or other key issues at school (Redmond, Skattebol, & Saunders, 2013). Accessing the views of teachers remains important because teachers are integral to children’s lives (Bingham, 2001) and they often feel poorly equipped to engage in matters concerning student wellbeing, particularly social and emotional wellbeing (Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2010; Koller & Bertel, 2006; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006; Williams, Horvath, Wei, Van Dorn, & Jonson-Reid, 2007). Incorporating an exhaustive review of current system, state and national policy linked with wellbeing in schools adds a further critically important perspective in identifying current and possible future emphases in policy designed to support the wellbeing of children and young people. Hence, this research is underpinned by the assumption that educational policy and practice around wellbeing in schools will be significantly more responsive if they reflect the views and perspectives of principals, teachers and students while taking account of the strengths and limitations of the current policy environment.

INTERDISCIPLINARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD ARE CORE TO THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

1 We acknowledge the key role that parents play in children’s wellbeing in the context of schools but project funding constraints precluded involving them in this research.
RECOGNITION THEORY OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING APPROACHES TO WELLBEING IN SCHOOL.

To help facilitate a deeper understanding of these different stakeholder views, the research integrates two distinctive theoretical interests. The first relates to the way in which children and childhood are theorised and draws on understandings from the field of Childhood Studies. The interdisciplinary approach offered through Childhood Studies (James & James, 2008) is important for this research because it provokes a conceptual shift from seeing children as the passive victims of life experiences to social actors with their own views and strategies for actively coping with challenges in their lives. The emphasis in Childhood Studies on notions of ‘child-centred’ scholarship accords well with research that locates children and young people’s agency as central to their wellbeing, including the way this takes shape in and through their relationships.

The second distinctive element of this research is the use of recognition theory, as this potentially offers an alternative framework for conceptualising how wellbeing is understood and practiced in schools. Grounded in critical theory, the work of recognition scholars is largely interested in self-actualisation, social inequality and social justice. This research draws particularly on the work of Axel Honneth (1995, 2001, 2004) who focused especially on the role and importance of human interaction in the formation of individual and social identity. Honneth proposes three patterns of intersubjective recognition - love, which refers to the emotional concern for the wellbeing and needs of an actual person; rights, which refers to respect for the equal moral accountability of the legal person; and solidarity, which is the evaluation of particular traits, abilities, contributions and achievements against the background of ‘norms’ (Honneth, 1995). For this study, the language of the three dimensions has been adapted in ways that are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of Honneth’s work but also intelligible in school settings (‘cared for’; ‘respected’; ‘valued’).

To date there has been no research undertaken in Australia that empirically tests recognition theory nor that investigates its potential in the context of wellbeing. When combined with key understandings about children and childhood offered through Childhood Studies, the theoretical (as well as applied) contribution of this research is highly significant.
1.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A mixed methods approach was utilised, generating important descriptive and thematically coded qualitative data and both descriptive and inferential quantitative analyses. The views and perspectives of students, principals and teachers, which are central to the research, were sought through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an online survey instrument. An extensive analysis of policy laid firm foundations for identifying current policy emphases related to wellbeing in schools. Key understandings from Childhood Studies and recognition theory guided the analysis of data.

The research was conducted in four phases - with each phase informed by findings from the preceding phases:

**Phase 1 - Policy Analysis:** Analysis of key relevant local (system), state and Commonwealth policy regarding wellbeing (N=80)

**Phase 2 - Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals (N=89); focus group interviews with primary and secondary students (N= 606)

**Phase 3 - Quantitative:** Interactive online survey with primary students (N=3906) and secondary students (N=5362) and staff (N=707 – comprised of principals, teachers and non-teaching staff) across three Catholic school regions

**Phase 4 - Dissemination:** Synthesis of findings and professional development for schools

Interview, focus group and survey data were collected across three Catholic school regions (one each in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria), selected on the basis that the
three regions offered contrasting approaches to the implementation of wellbeing policy and programs in schools. Participation of students and staff was voluntary and anonymous. An expert Wellbeing Advisory Group (WAG), comprised of key stakeholders, which included two primary students and two secondary students, worked collaboratively with researchers throughout each of the above phases.

The policy data collected in Phase 1 was analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) principles. The interview and focus group data collected in Phase 2 were transcribed, coded and inductively analysed for re-occurring themes using the NVivo software program. The students’ drawings and/or lists of school improvements gathered in the Phase 2 focus groups were analysed manually for repeated images or words and cross-checked with related transcribed discussions. The data collected in Phase 3 were cleaned and analysed using IBM-SPSS quantitative analysis software.

---

2 Non-government Catholic school regions were selected for this study given: a) one of the ARC Linkage grant partners comprised one such region; b) there were identified benefits in being able to broadly compare understandings and approaches to wellbeing within one system; and c) there were difficulties securing ethical clearance to conduct the research in government schools (since they were not partnering on the research).
2.1 PHASE 1 FINDINGS: POLICY ANALYSIS

Eighty policies and policy-related documents relevant to wellbeing in schools were accessed using internet searches of national, state and territory government departments; regional and state Catholic education offices; and independent schools by state. While documents within the education sector are of key interest and greatest relevance to this research, policy-related documentation that explicitly or implicitly refers to wellbeing is also found in other sectors including health (in particular mental health), early childhood and child protection. These are included in the analysis for this research, along with a number of joint, cross-sector initiatives involving the wellbeing of children and young people, as they provide a broader context for understanding approaches to wellbeing.

The rapidly changing landscape of education governance in Australia, from primarily state jurisdiction to increasing Commonwealth responsibility, has contributed to a broad and diffuse policy environment. However, there is very little education policy at any level specifically focused on wellbeing. The policy contexts are primarily focused on safety and behaviour and, in Catholic education, on pastoral care. However, although there is very little by way of targeted, specific wellbeing policy at national and state levels, there is considerable reference to wellbeing throughout other policy-related documentation, particularly those of education and health. Specific wellbeing focused documents include those in the areas of learning, health, behaviour, safety, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Within these documents, wellbeing is variously conceptualised as a goal or outcome, an environmental component and/or an existing condition to be protected.

Hence, a key interest of this research is to develop a detailed understanding of how wellbeing in schools is currently understood by students, teachers and educational policy makers. The findings of the Phase 1 policy analysis, outlined below, demonstrate that wellbeing is somewhat awkwardly situated between policy problems (around safety and mental health) and policy possibilities (concerning optimum environments for children), both within education and more broadly.
THE RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN AUSTRALIA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO A DIFFUSE POLICY ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO WELLBEING.
FINDING 1: ‘WELLBEING’ IS NOT CLEARLY DEFINED IN EDUCATION POLICIES AND YET THE TERM IS FREQUENTLY USED IN POLICY LEXICONS.

‘Wellbeing’ is not clearly defined or specifically identified in national or state education policies. The amount, focus and scope of reference to wellbeing in policy-related documents, in both state education and Catholic education, varied considerably across states and territories. Wellbeing was mainly linked to problem-focused discourses of safety/harm and mental health, with less emphasis on universal conceptions that apply to all children across broad contexts. Recent attention to wellbeing was evident in education policy-related documentation, including some wellbeing-focused frameworks, wellbeing webpages and cross-sector initiatives, but these activities are not coordinated or broadly applied.

FINDING 2: THERE IS NO NATIONAL POLICY AND VERY LITTLE STATE POLICY SPECIFICALLY TARGETING THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Wellbeing policy and policy-related documentation is primarily found in the education sector, but there is no specific education wellbeing policy at a national level and few at state/territory or local levels. Only two government education departments (Northern Territory and Tasmania) and one Catholic education office (South Australia) had education policies with a specific wellbeing focus, in the contexts of child protection/safety and student behaviour. More widely within the education sector, at both national and state levels, wellbeing is incorporated into broader frameworks and policy-related documents in the contexts of health (in particular mental health and health promotion), safety, learning and student behaviour. Emphasis is placed on the role of schools in promoting these aspects of wellbeing. Wellbeing strategic frameworks in education, that stand out as ‘lighthouse documents’, were identified in three states: two related to learning in government education (Queensland, South Australia) and one Catholic education wellbeing strategy (CEOM, Victoria). Sectors (other than education) that have developed frameworks relevant to wellbeing at national and/or state levels relatively recently are health, early childhood, and child protection. The state of Victoria stands out as having the broadest range of wellbeing documentation in the sectors of health, state government and Catholic education.
FINDING 3: CATHOLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS INCORPORATE A MORE EXPLICIT EMPHASIS ON PASTORAL CARE THAN WELLBEING.

There is no national Catholic education wellbeing policy. Only one state Catholic education policy has ‘wellbeing’ in the policy name (South Australia). Pastoral care is a relevant focus in much Catholic education policy and policy-related documentation. The Catholic Education Office in Melbourne provides a comprehensive strategic approach to student wellbeing, which stands out in the current education landscape. This incorporates a student wellbeing strategy, wellbeing co-ordinators, support for school communities and a research partnership with the University of Melbourne.

FINDING 4: EDUCATION WEBPAGES SIGNAL AN INTEREST IN WELLBEING, BUT TEND TO ENCOMPASS A RANGE OF LOOSELY RELATED ELEMENTS.

There is a plethora of webpages with a focus on wellbeing. All state education departments and most Catholic education offices have webpages with wellbeing in the title. These webpages provided wellbeing information and resources, without necessarily linking to any documentation, and in some instances, the text on the webpage was the only information available regarding student wellbeing. Generally, though, wellbeing webpages provide links to policies, procedures or information across a range of topics related to student wellbeing. Analyses of these webpages revealed that the term wellbeing is increasingly used as a ‘catch-all’ term, most often incorporating information related to welfare, safety and health (frequently mental health). Wellbeing is usually not well defined (see Finding 1), and webpages cover a wide range of diverse topics, such as headlice, bullying, drug use, counselling, school attendance and exclusion.
FINDING 5: POLICY CENTRES AROUND FOUR DOMAINS FOR IMPLEMENTING APPROACHES TO WELLBEING.

Four domains for implementing approaches to wellbeing were evident in policy: systems and structures, relationships, teaching and learning, and environment. These domains are not exclusive and there are clearly areas of overlap.

- **Systems and structures** - outlining protocols and procedures related to issues such as students’ safety, care and protection, and mental health.
- **Relationships** - in which the three dimensions of recognition theory - cared for, respected and valued were most evident.
- **Teaching and Learning** - which primarily includes pedagogy, curriculum and the provision of information.
- **Environment** - including the school culture and ethos, as well as physical aspects of the school environment.

Some documentation, most notably that which advocated a whole school approach to wellbeing, incorporated reference to all four domains of implementation. This accounted for only 15 documents out of the 80 analysed and included half of the national educational documents. While relationships is likely to be the most effective domain for implementing approaches to student wellbeing, systems and structures are the most identified domain.
The three dimensions of recognition identified in Honneth’s theory of recognition are evident to varying extents in education policy-related documentation that features ‘relationships’ as a domain for implementing approaches to wellbeing. Within the education documentation that emphasised relationships as a domain of implementation for approaches to wellbeing, most signalled at least one of Honneth’s (1995) three aspects of recognition (love, rights and solidarity conceptualised in our study as cared for, respected and valued). All of the national education documents, the vast majority of the Catholic education documents (7 out of 8), and just over half of the state government education documents (11 out of 20) pointed to one or more dimensions of recognition.

- The dimension of *cared for* was the most frequently reflected across all education sectors. This tended to be in terms of: caring, supportive relationships for students (mostly within school communities); support networks; establishing a sense of connectedness and belonging for students within the school context; and developing a caring culture.

- The dimension of *respected* was reflected most in national and Catholic education policy contexts regarding student behaviour, pastoral care, and early childhood. The primary contexts for respect were: respectful relationships, active participation in school activities and processes, and staff having respect for students. There was little reference to participation, student voice or students ‘having a say’.

- The dimension of *valued* was least evident in education policy, primarily reflected in the context of valuing diversity and recognising unique individual attributes. It was marginally more apparent (proportionally) in the Catholic education documents.

In summary, the wellbeing policy environment in Australia, particularly pertaining to schools, can best be described as ad hoc. This is evidenced by the range of documentation that constitutes guidance in relation to student wellbeing, the differences across states (in both government and Catholic education), in the nature of documentation that does exist, and the lack of an over-arching framework. However, there is clearly a major policy interest in notions of student wellbeing, indicated by increasing use of the terminology, the joint cross-sector initiatives and the recent strategic approaches developed in some states and sectors.

Keeping this eclectic policy backdrop in mind, we turn now to the Phase 2 findings to identify how wellbeing is understood by students and teachers.
2.2 PHASE 2 FINDINGS: STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS AND TEACHER INTERVIEWS

2.2.1 PHASE 2: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

The focus group discussions with students followed a semi-structured interview schedule around four key areas: the students’ individual definitions of wellbeing; who in their lives influenced their wellbeing and how; what it feels like to be cared for, respected and valued and when this happens/doesn’t happen in schools (categories linked to recognition theory); and finally, to imagine an ideal school that supported wellbeing. Open-ended questions were used to help facilitate the discussion and invite more in-depth engagement (see Appendix D in Volume Four).
Students generally conceptualised wellbeing across one or more of three domains related to ‘being’ (social and emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing), ‘having’ (mainly equality, voice, confidence, respect, support from significant others, privacy and rights) and ‘doing’ (mainly looking after oneself, acceptance, making good decisions, and acts of generosity or kindness).

Students identified that relationships with self, their school, significant people inside school, and significant people and institutions outside school can help or hinder their wellbeing. Relationships within the school include those with teachers, friends, peers, the principal and school counsellors. Features of these relationships that support student wellbeing were identified as: caring, support and encouragement, talking, fun, being kind, setting good examples, guidance, constancy and protection. Features of relationships in school that hinder student wellbeing include: breach of trust, being yelled at, not being listened to, not being respected, being treated unfairly, receiving poor advice, being judged and criticised unfairly, being bullied and teased, and not being supported.

Students’ relationship with self was seen as helping wellbeing in terms of setting goals, taking care of yourself, being confident, being positive, choosing who you will allow to influence you and making responsible decisions. Students’ relationship with self was understood as hindering wellbeing through giving in to peer pressure, negative self-talk, choosing the wrong friends and changing oneself to fit in. Students also identified significant relationships outside of school with individuals, groups and institutions including: parents and family, coaches, pets, neighbours, community, bus drivers, strangers, social rules, socialisation/environment, religion, government, work/employers and media. Of these, students identified relationships with parents and family as the most important. Parents and family were perceived as helping wellbeing through meeting students’ essential needs (for food, shelter etc.), as well as through their love, encouragement, making students feel special by knowing them well, listening to them, being there for them, teaching them and providing skills. Parents and family were seen to hinder wellbeing by comparing students to their siblings, having too high expectations, being overprotective, and having too much influence on student values.
FINDING 9: STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO ARTICULATE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF BEING CARED FOR AT SCHOOL AND THE BENEFITS THIS HAD FOR THEM.

Students understood that being cared for was about being unconditionally accepted. They also perceived that knowing they are cared for influences them positively even when they are experiencing difficult times, when they are less aware of how cared for they are. When students are cared for they say they feel loved, safe, happy, wanted, valued, respected, good inside, part of something, visible, confident, special, supported and accepted. Feeling cared for provided students with a sense of self-worth and belonging, and gave them purpose and energy for trying to do well at school. Students say they are cared for at school when: teachers ‘know’ them; teachers support them with their school work; schools place a priority on caring for students; schools help students to feel part of a community; and schools provide Catholic values and rules and boundaries.

FINDING 10: STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO ARTICULATE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF BEING RESPECTED AT SCHOOL AND THE BENEFITS THIS HAD FOR THEM.

Students understood that being respected was about being listened to, knowing you can have a say, having your views taken into account, and being treated with equality. Students described how they feel when they are respected as: amazing, safe, equal, worthy, important, loved, satisfied, content, cared for, secure, useful, accepted, acknowledged, happy, special, understood, self-control, a place in the world, confident, higher, valued and having a sense of authority. Being respected was reported by students as an experience that led to them feeling empowered, strong and like they belonged in the school community. Students had differing opinions on whether respect is conditional. For some students, respect was conditional on the behaviour of individuals and only to be given when deserved. A less well-supported view of respect, although one still commonly expressed, was that respect was something that all people deserve, regardless of age, ability, ethnicity and behaviour.
Students understood that being valued was about feeling like you belong and are noticed as having something special to offer - as being able to make a contribution and that other people want you to make that contribution. Students said when they are valued they feel self-confident, good, accepted, smart, included, respected, loved, special, appreciated, worthy, important, “top of the world”, joyful, visible, part of something, kindness, happy, empowered, wanted, and that they “have purpose”. While some struggled to understand the language of being valued, particularly in younger years, students were much more capable of describing being valued as a set of actions: when teachers notice the abilities and gifts of students and support them to offer these to the school community; when teachers put in extra effort for students; when students have opportunities to be listened to and heard; and when schools adopt a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

FINDING 12: STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO ARTICULATE THE EXPERIENCE OF MISRECOGNITION AND HOW THIS OCCURS IN SCHOOL.

Students spoke about, and gave examples of, experiences of misrecognition at school, in which they felt not cared for, not respected or not valued. Students described how feeling ‘not cared for’ was isolating and left them questioning their sense of self-worth. They said they feel worthless, left out, lost, bullied, like they are not fitting in, small, disappointed, unimportant, sad, irritated, confused, distant, alienated, invisible, vulnerable, alone, anxious, depressed, unsafe, not wanted and like they are fending for themselves. Students perceive they are not cared for at school when they are not noticed or acknowledged by teachers and their peers, when students are treated unequally, and when schools exclude students or see them as replaceable. They perceived that not feeling cared for was also directly linked to students not wanting to care for themselves and unable to ask those around them for help. Students identified a lack of self-confidence arising from not being cared for.
Students reported that when they experienced ‘not being respected’ they felt like they had no sense of agency or independence. Students further identified a sense of loneliness and disconnection when respect is lacking or absent. They said they feel unwanted, depressed, like a nobody, weak, angry, guilty, sad, ignored, not important, left out, neglected, guarded, not known, painful, low self-esteem, disheartened, lonely, paranoid, scared, not good enough, hated, annoyed, not liked, insulted and disowned. Further, students say they feel not respected at school when their opinions are not encouraged or valued, teachers don’t speak nicely to students, and teachers don’t make an effort to use diverse methods or creative approaches to teaching and learning. For many students, the most tangible example of not being respected was being “yelled at” by teachers. Students also reported that being inappropriately and/or publicly disciplined was sometimes experienced as disrespect. Additionally, students reported that when others do not respect them, they sometimes don’t respect themselves, or see themselves as worthy of respect.

Students generally described the experience of ‘not being valued’ in stronger terms. Some made explicit links to notions of depression. When students are not valued they say they feel stupid, worthless, unwanted, unaccepted, depressed, disapproved, angry, sad, “don’t exist”, suicidal, embarrassed, excluded, a loner, unappreciated, miserable, hopeless, apathetic, invisible, “not worth having a say”, discarded, not welcome, ice cold, betrayed and unloved. Students perceive they are not valued at school when teachers don’t know their students, speak to them in a degrading way, and focus on the abilities of only those who excel. Students highlighted the impact in terms of not being valued when particular gifts and qualities (they don’t have) are noticed at the expense of others (they might have).

**FINDING 13: STUDENTS’ IDEAL WELLBEING SCHOOL INCLUDED IMPROVEMENTS TO PEDAGOGY, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, RELATIONSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO HAVE A SAY.**

The students’ ‘imaginary schools’ (developed in a focus group activity) had a strong grounding in communal values, such as sharing, respect, cooperation, participation and equality, as well as identifying resources to support the students’ wellbeing needs. Such values and resources were reflected within and across the four major themes that emerged in the data from both primary and secondary students, specifically concerning improvements to pedagogy, school environment, relationships and opportunities to have a say.

Significant attention has been given to the views of students given the substantive focus of the research on student wellbeing in schools, together with the underlying theoretical interests of Childhood Studies and recognition theory. We turn now to considering the findings from the in-depth interviews with teachers and principals.
2.2.2 PHASE 2: PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

Interviews with principals and teachers sought their perspectives on a range of issues including: how they generally describe or define ‘wellbeing’; whether and to what extent policy shaped their understandings and approach; how they perceived ‘wellbeing’ was facilitated and supported in their schools (‘what helps and hinders’); the impact of leadership on wellbeing in schools; the relationship between teacher and student wellbeing; and how the concept of ‘recognition’ was perceived in relation to wellbeing (see Appendix C in Volume 4 for the full interview schedule). These interviews generated extensive, rich data across all three regions, with eleven important, interdependent themes identified, and links between each analysed, such that ‘wellbeing in schools’ is understood to be:

1. **Multidimensional.**
2. Dependent on **relationships.**
3. Embedded in **culture,** which is shaped by Christian values and Catholic identity.
4. Exemplified in **pastoral care.**
5. Partly dependent on **teacher wellbeing.**
6. Impacted by **pedagogy.**
7. Supplemented by **programs.**
8. Supported by **counsellors.**
9. Enhanced by **parent partnership,** and engagement with the wider community.
10. Dependent on **leadership.**
11. Situated in confused **policy environment.**
These eleven themes clustered within and across three main spheres of influence on wellbeing - relational, environmental and personal. Not only was there considerable synergy between the three spheres and the particular themes that constitute these, there was also evident interdependence. Hence, while the ‘relational’, for example, was articulated as a ‘stand alone’ sphere, relationships were also embedded in the environmental and personal spheres. One reason for identifying this layering is to highlight the nuance and complexity involved in understanding wellbeing and hence to foreshadow the likely need for a multi-pronged strategy in improving the way this is approached and supported in schools. This is especially important given there was an evident tension in the data between principal and teacher aspirations regarding wellbeing and the lived everyday reality of school life they encounter.

The following findings from interviews with principals and teachers reflect the eleven themes and the three identified spheres of influence on wellbeing in schools.
FINDING 14: WELLBEING IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL.

Principals and teachers across the three regions tended to describe wellbeing in broad terms, with most identifying different dimensions, including one or two particular aspects they perceived to be more important. The data generally included descriptions of wellbeing linked to the emotional, mental, physical, social and spiritual aspects of children’s lives. Significantly, many of the definitions and descriptions (across all three regions) signaled these different dimensions of wellbeing as related and linked rather than understood or applied in isolation.

FINDING 15: WELLBEING IS DEPENDENT ON RELATIONSHIPS.

The vast majority of themes that emerged from the Phase 2 principal and teacher data tend to cluster around the relational sphere, suggesting that relationships are perceived to be core to student wellbeing in schools. A number of important relationships were highlighted in the data, including those between teachers and students, principals and students, counsellors and students, teachers and principals, counsellors and teaching staff, teachers/schools and parents, and schools with the wider community. These relationships all contribute to and influence student wellbeing. In addition, relationships are perceived to be a central aspect of pastoral care and of effective pedagogical practice, as well as contributing directly to school culture and to both teacher and student wellbeing.
FINDING 16: WELLBEING IS EMBEDDED IN CULTURE, WHICH IS SHAPED BY CHRISTIAN VALUES AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY.

The culture of the school, including its specific mission and heritage as a Catholic school, was a significant touchstone for teachers as they articulated the ways wellbeing was enacted across the school community. The major importance placed on relationships in promoting wellbeing led to a considerable number of teachers and principals also pointing to the critical importance of school culture in fostering these relationships and, in turn, being strengthened by them. The Catholic identity of schools was referred to frequently in the interviews, particularly in respect to how wellbeing was positioned within the overall culture, mission and priorities of the school. The appeal to gospel values as a way of explaining conceptualisations and approaches to wellbeing was also very apparent. Some principals and teachers pointed to the tensions between wellbeing and the ‘Catholic view’ of things, where Catholic views and the reality of a particular situation were at odds. Others subtly questioned whether the rhetoric of ‘because we’re a Catholic school’ was lived out to the extent sometimes claimed in terms of making a distinctive contribution to wellbeing.

FINDING 17: WELLBEING IS EXEMPLIFIED IN PASTORAL CARE.

Understandings and practice concerning ‘wellbeing’ were inextricably bound up with those of ‘pastoral care’. Quite frequent mention was made across all three regions of the important role which initiatives like pastoral programs, pastoral coordinators and ‘home rooms’ play in addressing the pastoral care of students. In this way, ‘pastoral care’ was frequently offered by principals and teachers as a proxy term for ‘wellbeing’.
Principals and teachers in all three regions identified distinct connections between student and teacher wellbeing. The links were bi-directional, with teachers speaking of how their wellbeing was impacted by student wellbeing and conversely how teacher wellbeing affected students. Teachers and principals emphasised the importance of attending to and supporting teachers’ wellbeing in order for them to be effective in their teaching roles and supportive of student wellbeing. Means of supporting teacher wellbeing included: collegial support; support and appreciation from leadership; mentoring; health based activities; social (out of school) activities; and resources such as specific programs and accessible counselling for staff. The vast majority of teachers identified lack of time and resources, overloading and additional role and work requirements as hindering them in relation to their own and students’ wellbeing. Teachers across all regions saw professional development as an important part of being a successful teacher and without which they feel ill-equipped to support student wellbeing.

**FINDING 18: STUDENT WELLBEING IS PARTLY DEPENDENT ON TEACHER WELLBEING.**

Many principals and teachers perceived that the quality of the teaching and learning environment can positively and negatively impact the wellbeing of students. Strong links were made between wellbeing and approaches to pedagogy, with explicit and implicit reference frequently made about the important role of relationships in routine, everyday practices and activities of classrooms and schools. In particular, many principals and teachers commented that attitudes to teaching and to students affect the quality of the learning experience and hence potentially impact on student wellbeing.

**FINDING 19: STUDENT WELLBEING IS IMPACTED BY PEDAGOGY.**
FINDING 20: WELLBEING PROGRAMS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE.

The potentially important role of programs for supporting wellbeing in schools was very evident in the data across the three regions. In some instances, programs featured as part of the discussion about policy but in other instances teachers and principals pointed to particular programs during discussion about how wellbeing was facilitated in schools. Across all regions, teachers and principals spoke about the value of having various types of wellbeing related programs available in their schools, including both targeted (withdrawal) and universal (whole class) interventions. A large number of programs were identified by primary and secondary school principals and teachers across a diverse range of wellbeing related interests including social skills, resilience, emotional intelligence, mental health, restorative justice, meditation, peer support, values education, bullying and transition programs. Teachers made reference to extra-curricular activities, such as sports, as being ways of schools facilitating wellbeing. Primary school teachers also spoke of school initiatives designed to meet a particular, recognised need. Secondary school teachers and principals tended to talk more about initiatives to facilitate wellbeing in terms of content or theme, rather than naming specific programs.

While a significant amount of data refers to programs in schools aimed at helping students and teachers with wellbeing related issues, some referred also to the role, importance and limitations of programs for parents. Teachers in all three regions spoke of being constrained in implementing wellbeing programs by a lack of time and an already overloaded schedule both in terms of teachers’ time and students’ time, and lack of funding and resources.
Across the three regions principals and teachers spoke about having counsellors available for students. Teachers were generally positive about the value of counselling, the counsellor’s role and being able to refer students to a counsellor, particularly when based on the school campus. They also spoke positively about students and parents being aware that there were counsellors available to support students. At times counsellors were spoken of in the context of a wider team of helping professionals on site, for example, medical professionals including nurses. There were mixed responses from teachers in terms of referring children to see the counsellors – some teachers viewed it as ‘passing children on’ and no longer being involved, whereas other teachers described the importance of working closely with counsellors. Counsellors are perceived as having an important role in supporting teachers, providing information and advice regarding issues of concern, and being involved in the facilitation of wellbeing related programs.

Principals and teachers placed significant emphasis on relationships and partnership with parents as a critically important element in supporting wellbeing in schools, through sharing information as well as building understanding and support around their children. The parent-teacher relationship was viewed as being two-way, with a sense that teachers and parents were working with and supporting each other, to support the children. Some teachers suggested that working together and mutual support should also be inclusive of the students. Additionally, for some teachers and principals, this extended to inviting other professionals in to help teachers and parents. Teachers spoke about the importance of involving the community in the school and of the school belonging to the community, with some teachers also emphasising the specific Catholic community which the school was part of. Parents being invited and welcomed into school was one means of building and strengthening relationships, in addition to programs and workshops offered by schools. Teachers and principals spoke of a number of challenges or limitations in developing and strengthening relationships with parents including: some hesitancy around the success of particular initiatives; parents’ attitudes to school; and mismatches between parents’ and teachers’ expectations of teachers and schools.
FINDING 23: WELLBEING IS DEPENDENT ON LEADERSHIP.

Across all three regions principals and teachers identified and emphasised the key role of leadership in relation to student wellbeing. Principals and teachers stressed the importance of ‘leading from the top’ and that such leadership could impact the whole school environment in a positive way. Teachers often referred to the ‘tone’ the principal sets and its effect on the school culture. They viewed a positive school culture as a movement largely dependent on principals creating an encouraging atmosphere for staff that promotes their wellbeing, which is then reflected within the student community. Some teachers expressed a clear preference for having a well-defined and team-based structure, and shared leadership, with their principals taking an inclusive approach with an emphasis on consultation and openness. Teachers and principals across all regions acknowledged the importance of principals and executive teams supporting staff and letting them know they are appreciated; and many principals mentioned the support they receive from their Diocesan Education Offices in relation to student wellbeing.
FINDING 24: WELLBEING IS SITUATED IN A CONFUSED POLICY ENVIRONMENT.

Teachers commented on the diversity of policy and approaches to wellbeing, with a perception conveyed by many that there was not a single policy catering for wellbeing, rather that wellbeing incorporates an amalgam of policies. The lack of clarity around wellbeing policy was accompanied by nebulous conceptualisations of wellbeing (see Finding 1). Additionally, the conflation of wellbeing with pastoral care, and hence the ambiguity between the two, was questioned in policy terms. Teachers and principals emphasised the importance of policy playing a guiding role and being flexible, since there could not be a ‘one size fits all’ approach, with participants emphasizing the need to use initiative and apply common sense in complex situations. Teachers and principals in all regions highlighted links between policy and local school context and culture, underlining the importance of teachers’ involvement in developing relevant and responsive policy and putting this into practice. In terms of challenges, teachers spoke of the time involved in reading and implementing policies and engaging with them in a meaningful way. They indicated how aspects of some policies can’t be taken up because they’re not practical or are vague in their instructions, and how difficulties are experienced when changes are continually made to policy or there are evident and persistent gaps.

In summary, both the student and teacher findings from Phase 2 of the research point to the critically important role of relationships for wellbeing at school. This very strong emphasis on relationships, woven implicitly and explicitly throughout many of the findings reported above, lends weight to the proposition that Honneth’s (1995) recognition theory (with its emphasis on care, respect and valuing of persons) may offer a useful conceptual framework for understanding and improving approaches to wellbeing in schools. With the principal and teacher data, particularly, wellbeing was perceived in ways that had strong resonance with key recognition concepts well before these were introduced into the interview discussion.

Phase 3 of the research involved the development of online surveys for students and staff to further explore conceptualisations of wellbeing and, particularly, to investigate more fully the emerging links between wellbeing, relationships and recognition evident in the Phase 2 findings.

The key findings from Phase 3 follow next.
2.3 PHASE 3 FINDINGS: ONLINE SURVEY WITH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS AND STAFF

The survey content built on the findings from Phases 1 and 2. In each survey, participants responded to items measuring their: views on wellbeing in schools; conceptualisations of wellbeing; views on the importance of relationships for student wellbeing; views on wellbeing policy and programs (staff only); views on the importance of recognition (i.e., being cared for, respected and valued) for student wellbeing; and demographic characteristics.
Primary and secondary students and the majority of staff strongly agreed that student wellbeing is important to teachers. A minority of staff perceived their school did not adequately support teacher wellbeing. Although most primary and secondary students agreed that being at a Catholic school helps their wellbeing, many secondary students did not agree. The majority of staff agreed that the Christian values at a Catholic school help both student wellbeing and their own wellbeing. Just under 16% of all staff, or 18% of primary staff and 11% of secondary staff, said that 100% of their time involved student wellbeing. Teaching and leadership staff reported spending more of their time on student wellbeing matters than non-teaching staff.

Most staff mildly agreed with the statements ‘Existing policy is sufficient to guide and support the way I facilitate student wellbeing’ and ‘It would be helpful to have more guidance with student wellbeing’. Most staff moderately agreed that ‘Additional programs related to student wellbeing are helpful in schools’.
Primary student, secondary student and staff conceptualisations of wellbeing were multidimensional and included physical, affective, social, and environmental aspects of wellbeing. For primary students the term ‘wellbeing’ evoked a range of responses, including being happy, being safe, being loved, being respected, being healthy and helping others. The most popular conceptualisations of wellbeing for secondary students involved being happy, being safe, being healthy and being respected. Staff conceptualisations of wellbeing emphasised the importance of being connected to people, followed by being connected to place, and being mentally or psychologically healthy. Only small percentages of staff selected ‘being spiritually healthy’, ‘being physically healthy’ or ‘being successful at school’ as describing wellbeing.

While gender had no effect on primary students’ conceptualisation of wellbeing, female secondary students were more likely to think of wellbeing as having privacy, being trusted and having a say, while male secondary students were more likely to think of it as being happy. Male staff more often conceptualised wellbeing as being satisfied with life and being spirituality healthy, but less often thought of it as being connected to place.

Age affected the way primary students, secondary students and staff described wellbeing. Younger primary students (aged 8 and 9) were more likely to think of wellbeing as being loved, helping others, and being trusted, while older students (aged 11 and 12) were more likely to think of wellbeing as being happy, being respected and looking after myself. Younger secondary students (aged 11-13 years) thought of wellbeing as being loved, being trusted and helping others, while older secondary students (aged 15) were more likely to think of wellbeing as being respected. Secondary students aged 16-19 years were more likely to think of wellbeing as being healthy. Younger staff were more likely to think of wellbeing as being safe, while older staff were more likely to think of wellbeing as being connected to place.

Students’ Year group (i.e. the year or grade they were in at school) also affected how they described wellbeing. For primary students, wellbeing was more likely to be conceptualised as being trusted and helping others by Year 3 students, as being loved by Year 4 students, as being listened to by Year 5 students, and as being safe, being respected and being happy, by Year 6/7 students. For secondary students, only Year 7 and the senior years (Years 10, 11 and 12) emphasised certain wellbeing concepts. Wellbeing was more likely to be conceptualised as: being loved, helping others and having a say by Year 7 students; being happy by Year 10 and Year 11 students; being healthy by Year 11 students; looking after yourself by Year 11 and Year 12 students; and having a great environment by Year 12 students.
The way in which wellbeing was described was independent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) status for primary students and staff, but ATSI secondary students were more likely to describe wellbeing as having privacy and being loved, while those who were not sure of their ATSI status were more likely to choose being loved and helping others, than expected by chance.

Primary students and secondary students who spoke a language other than English at home described wellbeing as helping others and being trusted. Secondary students who spoke a language other than English at home described wellbeing as having a great environment, being listened to and having a say.

Staff conceptualisation of wellbeing was not dependent on whether staff worked in primary versus secondary schools, nor their years of service or school size.

On average, primary students and staff rated all relationships as important for student wellbeing at school. On average, secondary students rated all relationships as important, except those with non-teaching staff, principals and school counsellors.

For both primary and secondary students their relationships with their parents/carers and close friends were the most important for their wellbeing at school; however, staff rated students’ relationships with teachers as most important, with student relationships with parents/carers and close friends in second and third place, respectively.

Primary students rated their relationships with their teachers as third most important for their wellbeing at school, followed by their relationship with their principal, and non-teaching staff.

For secondary students, their relationships with other students who were not close friends was rated third, followed by their relationships with their home group/pastoral care teacher, their teachers, non-teaching staff, their principal, and counsellors.

Staff rated relationships between students and their home group/pastoral care teacher fourth. Of note, staff rated relationships between adults, that is relationships between teachers and other teachers (5th), parents and teachers (6th) and principals and teachers (8th) as more important to student wellbeing than relationships involving the students themselves, such as relationships between counsellors and students (7th), students and other students who are not close friends (9th), principals and students (10th), and students and non-teaching staff (11th).

**FINDING 28: RELATIONSHIPS WERE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT WELLBEING AT SCHOOL, BUT STUDENTS AND STAFF PLACED DIFFERENT EMPHASES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH RELATIONSHIP.**
FINDING 29: RELATIONSHIPS WERE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR MALE, INDIGENOUS, AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS, AS WELL AS STUDENTS MAKING TRANSITIONS AT SCHOOL.

The importance of relationships for primary and secondary students’ wellbeing differed across several demographic categories.

Relationships with a broader range of people, particularly leadership staff and other non-teaching staff, were of particular importance for primary aged boys’ wellbeing. Similarly, in secondary school, male students rated their relationships with their friends, counsellors and parents as significantly more important for their wellbeing than female students did, while female students rated their relationships with non-teaching staff as more important than male students.

For primary Indigenous students, relationships with all school staff (teachers, principals and non-teaching staff) were particularly important for students’ wellbeing. Secondary students who were not sure of their ATSI status rated relationships with teachers and with other students who were not close friends as less important for their wellbeing than those who were not ATSI.

Student-staff relationships were particularly important for culturally diverse primary school students. Similarly, in secondary schools, pastoral care/home room teachers were particularly important for students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

In general, students in earlier grades in both primary school and secondary school rated relationships as significantly more important for their wellbeing than later grades. The results suggest that students’ relationships with school staff are particularly important when students are making the transition to a new level at school, such as Year 3 or Year 7.
FINDING 30: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS FOR WELLBEING DEPENDED UPON SECONDARY STUDENT AND STAFF CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF WELLBEING AND WAS EMPHASISED MORE BY FEMALE STAFF, PRIMARY STAFF, AND STAFF AT SMALLER SCHOOLS.

While the importance of relationships for primary students’ wellbeing was unrelated to the way they described wellbeing, secondary students who thought of wellbeing as primarily ‘having privacy’ rated almost all relationships (except those with their close friends), as less important for their wellbeing than students who conceptualised wellbeing in other ways.

Students who thought of wellbeing in community or relational ways such as ‘helping others’ or ‘being safe’, thought relationships with non-teaching staff were significantly more important than students who thought of wellbeing in more individualistic ways, such as ‘being happy’, ‘being healthy’ and ‘looking after themselves’.

For staff, when wellbeing was thought of in terms of a student’s academic success, or their physical and mental health, relationships were rated as less important for student wellbeing compared to staff who thought of wellbeing in terms of affect, spirituality and connections with other people and places.

Female staff rated all relationships, except student relationships with other students who were not close friends, and their parents/carers, as more important for student wellbeing than male staff. Primary staff emphasised the importance of relationships for student wellbeing more than secondary staff. There was an inverse association between school size and staff views on the importance of relationships for student wellbeing. Staff from larger secondary schools rated the importance of relationships for student wellbeing lower than staff from smaller secondary schools. Staff from larger schools had worked at the school for less time than staff at smaller schools.
FINDING 31: THERE WAS A POSITIVE LINK BETWEEN RELATIONSHIPS AND RECOGNITION.

There were several results that supported a positive link between relationships and recognition, and both were important for student wellbeing. Students and staff who rated being cared for, respected and valued as important for student wellbeing, also rated relationships as having greater importance for student wellbeing. Thus, students and staff who acknowledged the importance of relationships for student wellbeing also acknowledged the role of recognition in promoting student wellbeing. Students and staff who felt more cared for, respected and valued at school also said relationships were more important for wellbeing.

FINDING 32: RECOGNITION WAS IMPORTANT FOR ALL STUDENTS’ WELLBEING, BUT STAFF WHO CONCEPTUALISED WELLBEING AS ‘BEING SUCCESSFUL AT SCHOOL’ PLACED LESS EMPHASIS ON RECOGNITION.

For primary students, recognition was independent of how wellbeing was conceptualised, and therefore recognition was important for all primary students’ wellbeing. Similar to primary students, results supported the importance of recognition for all secondary students’ wellbeing, but the extent of importance varied for a minority of students, in particular those who described wellbeing as ‘having privacy’ relied less on recognition than others.

Staff who thought of wellbeing as primarily focused on academic or other performance at school also placed less importance on teachers caring for, respecting and valuing students at school compared to staff who thought of wellbeing in affective, safety, psychological and relational ways.
FINDING 33: ACTS OF RECOGNITION AFFECT STUDENT WELLBEING, BUT IMPLICIT ACTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT FOR SUPPORTING WELLBEING THAN EXPLICIT, PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF RECOGNITION.

The majority of primary students, secondary students and staff agreed that teachers speaking kindly to students affects student wellbeing at school ‘very much’. While most primary students and staff said the principal using students’ names affects student wellbeing ‘very much’, this was only the case for approximately half the secondary students surveyed. Feeling included by friends at school was viewed as important for student wellbeing. Most staff were also very aware of the impact of negative actions on student wellbeing.

Primary students who said that implicit forms of recognition given to and received from teachers and peers are important for their wellbeing, also felt more cared for, respected and valued. Outward and public signs of recognition, such as giving awards and writing reports, were not as strongly linked with feeling cared for, valued and respected as more implicit ways of showing recognition, such as the teacher spending time with a student, listening to the student, knowing the student well, and helping with school work.

FINDING 34: ‘HAVING A SAY’ ABOUT PERSONAL NEEDS AND PREFERENCES AS WELL AS PUBLIC ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE ARE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT WELLBEING.

Primary students, secondary students and staff thought that student voice and meaningful participation at school was important for student wellbeing. In particular, students and staff endorsed that students having a say about pedagogy, discipline, welfare and social aspects of school life are important for student wellbeing.

The results captured a discrepancy between staff and student views of the aspects of student voice that matter for secondary students. Secondary students rated ‘who I sit near’ as the most important aspect of having a say, while staff rated this as least important. This suggests that staff may undervalue the importance of secondary students’ friendships at school for their wellbeing. Results also imply that having a say about personal preferences and needs, and not just public or political aspects of school life, is important for student wellbeing.
Most students and staff were conscious of the reciprocal or mutual nature of recognition in promoting wellbeing. The exceptions included primary students who described wellbeing as ‘looking after myself’, secondary students who described wellbeing as ‘having privacy’, and staff for whom wellbeing meant ‘being successful at school’. These participants viewed mutual recognition as less important for promoting wellbeing at school than those who conceptualised wellbeing in other ways.

For primary students, secondary students and staff, greater endorsement of the importance of mutual recognition for wellbeing was related to subjectively feeling more cared for, respected and valued at school. The practice of conditional recognition was also associated with staff feeling less cared for, respected and valued at school.

Staff who acknowledged the importance of caring for, respecting and valuing students felt more cared for, respected and valued by students, their principal, other staff and parents. Staff did not differ in how cared for, respected and valued they felt by gender, ATSI status, or language status. Primary school staff reported feeling significantly more cared for, respected and valued than secondary staff and staff who worked in both primary and secondary schools.
For primary students, boys reported feeling cared for and respected significantly more often at school than girls, while there were no gender differences in feeling valued at school. In contrast, male secondary students reported feeling respected and valued significantly less often at school than female secondary students, and there was no gender effect for how often they felt cared for at school.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous primary students reported feeling significantly more cared for, respected and valued, than primary students who were unsure of their ATSI status, but there were no differences between primary students who identified as Indigenous and those who did not. In contrast, secondary Indigenous students felt cared for, respected and valued at school less often than non-Indigenous students. Students not sure of their ATSI status also felt cared for and respected less often than non-Indigenous students, but they did not differ in terms of how often they felt valued. Indigenous secondary students did not differ from those who were not sure of their ATSI status on feeling cared for, respected and valued.

Primary students who spoke English only reported feeling significantly more cared for at school than students who spoke both English and another language. There were no significant differences in subjective recognition between secondary students based on their language status. Primary students in earlier grades scored significantly higher than later grades in regard to feeling cared for, valued and respected, while in secondary school, Year 7 and Year 12 students reported feeling most cared for, respected and valued.

Secondary students who primarily think of wellbeing as ‘having privacy’, ‘having a say’, or ‘being listened to’ felt less recognised at school than their peers. Secondary students who felt more cared for, respected and valued also rated relationships, mutual recognition with teachers and peers, and being at a Catholic school, as more important for their wellbeing. They also believed their wellbeing was more important to their teacher.
FINDING 37: LEADERSHIP STAFF HAD DIFFERENT VIEWS OF WELLBEING, RELATIONSHIPS AND RECOGNITION COMPARED TO OTHER STAFF.

Analyses were conducted that compared principals’ survey responses to all other staff responses, and also compared assistant principals to all other staff. Principals and other staff, and assistant principals and other staff, did not differ in how they conceptualised wellbeing.

However, compared to other staff, principals had a more favourable view of how well their school supports student and staff wellbeing, the importance of Christian values in helping wellbeing, the centrality of wellbeing in the work of teachers, and the importance of relationships for student wellbeing. Principals were less affected if students did not respect or care for them compared to other staff, but they reported feeling more cared for by students than other staff. They also reported feeling more cared for, respected and valued by parents than all other staff.

Compared to all other staff, assistant principals had a more favourable view of how well their school supports teacher wellbeing, the importance of Christian values in helping their own wellbeing, that policy is sufficient to guide and support them to facilitate student wellbeing, and that it is more important for students to have a say about what they learn in school than other staff. Compared to other staff, assistant principals felt more cared for, respected and valued by the principal of their school, they felt more cared for by parents, and more respected by students. Assistant principals said they practiced conditional recognition less often than other staff.
In summary, these results from Phase 3 of the research provide empirical evidence that student participation and recognition (particularly respect) are positively associated with student wellbeing. In doing so, they provide extensive insight not only into how wellbeing is conceptualised by staff and students but also the key role that a range of relationships play both in relation to wellbeing and in creating the conditions for recognition to occur. These results have implications (discussed in Section 3.3) for policy, staff development, student participation and the pursuit of more student-centred schools.

We turn now to explore the significance of the above findings in light of the research aim and objectives. While some of the key findings are relevant across more than one of the research objectives, we will address each of the three research objectives in turn, drawing attention to the distinctive contribution of this research to advancing the way students’ wellbeing is understood and approached in schools.

Central to this synthesis has been a detailed mapping that compares student, teacher and policy findings (as revealed through Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the research), particularly with respect to wellbeing, relationships, recognition and struggles over recognition. In a study of the scope undertaken here, this mapping (see Appendix K in Volume 4) has played a critically important role in bringing the different stakeholder views into dialogue, in itself a particular and distinctive contribution of the research.
By incorporating three distinct data collection phases, this research has generated a very rich picture of how wellbeing is currently understood by students and teachers (Phases 2 and 3), and by educational policy makers (Phase 1). The extensive data has also provided a firm foundation for exploring the potential of recognition theory for understanding and improving approaches to wellbeing in schools. This section critically discusses key findings across all three phases of the research in light of the overall research aim and objectives.
Research Objective 1: To develop a detailed understanding of how ‘wellbeing’ in schools is currently understood by students, teachers and educational policy makers.

There are a number of similarities in the student and teacher data regarding conceptualisations of wellbeing. Key amongst these, and consistent with other studies (see for example Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2005; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Soutter, 2011; Urbis, 2011), is the perceived multidimensional character of wellbeing, made up of physical, social, emotional, psychological and spiritual interests. In Phase 2, both teachers and students described the interrelated nature of these dimensions, pointing to how wellbeing is bound up with aspirations and interests that are not easy to articulate. In Phases 2 and 3, students’ conceptualisations clustered around notions of: being – happy, loved, trusted, healthy; having – equality, voice, confidence; and doing – self-care, self-acceptance, good decisions, acts of caring. These three clusters are consistent with findings of other recent research (see for example Morgan, 2005, 2010; Soutter, 2011). Notwithstanding this, both students and teachers tended to foreground the social-emotional aspects of wellbeing, reflecting the importance of this dimension (see for example Eckersley, 2005; Hamilton & Redmond, 2010).

Three broad constructions of wellbeing were evident in the policy and policy-related data. The most common two were problem-focused, associating wellbeing with i) safety (most evident in education policy), and ii) mental health (most evident in health sector policy). While such constructions of wellbeing were evident in the student and teacher data they did not feature prominently. The other construction of wellbeing was iii) a more universal interpretation, potentially applicable for all children rather than a particular targeted group or issue. While this latter construction was less apparent in the policy documentation, it more closely reflected the students’ and teachers’ multidimensional conceptualisations of wellbeing, which tended to be framed holistically.

Relationships and wellbeing

The strong emphasis in the findings on relationships provides a significant connection between teacher and student understandings of wellbeing, as evidenced in both Phase 2 and Phase 3. Relationships were explicitly and implicitly identified as integral to wellbeing by students and teachers, with the findings firmly situating student wellbeing within a range of relationships with significant others, including extensive reference to the student-teacher relationship. This emphasis in the data on relationships, particularly student-teacher relationships, is consistent with the literature.
(for example Aldgate, 2010; Fumoto, 2011; Kesner, 2005). Relationships provide the context for conversation and dialogue, identified by theories of recognition as foundational to wellbeing. The emphasis on relationships was reflected to a much lesser degree in the analysis of the Phase 1 policy-related documentation. Relationships was the second most emphasised domain, of the four identified domains for implementing approaches to wellbeing (referred to in only 36 out of 80 documents). The primary domain for implementation was systems and structures (referred to in 56 documents).

**POLICY PLACES LESS EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIPS THAN THAT SUGGESTED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.**

While it is clear both students and teachers understand wellbeing and relationship as inextricably bound together, both Phase 2 and Phase 3 data revealed that students and teachers varied in some respects around this. Students placed a strong and explicit emphasis on actions such as reciprocity and wanting to be treated equally, while teachers were more interested in the relational conditions (as distinct from actions) required for developing trusting relationships.

There were also some important differences between students and teachers in terms of which relationships were considered important for student wellbeing in school settings, apparent in the Phase 2 data and confirmed by the Phase 3 results. While students identified a diverse number of significant people in their lives (family members, community members, role models, bus drivers, mentors and so forth), it was friends, parents and teachers who were ultimately identified as the most significant relationships for students in relation to their wellbeing, with parents considered the most important. In contrast, while teachers identified all relationships as important for student wellbeing, student-teacher relationships were perceived as particularly significant in Phase 2 interviews and the Phase 3 data.

Some other relationships were given greater emphasis by teachers than by students. Teachers pointed out the role of principals in relation to student wellbeing, for example, while students expressed some ambivalence about this. Similarly, teachers spoke of the important role of counsellors, which did not receive as much attention in the student data. A notable difference between students and teachers concerned relationships with parents. Students placed a great deal of importance on relationships between students and parents for student wellbeing, while parent-teacher and parent-school relationships received considerable attention from teachers and also featured widely in the policy-related documentation. These teacher and policy perspectives are reflected in wider literature linking parental partnerships to student wellbeing, which indicates beneficial consequences of parental involvement on a range of academic, social and emotional outcomes for children (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Christenson & Havsy, 2004; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010).
3.2 RECOGNITION AND WELLBEING

Research Objective 2: To investigate the potential of recognition theory for advancing understanding and improvements in relation to student wellbeing.

The central role of relationships for wellbeing, as outlined above, takes on further significance in light of the second research objective. In making the case for why recognition should be distinguished rather than leaving it as an implicit educational concern, Bingham (2001, p. 9) argues “human beings need something from one another when they come to places like schools”. Hence, relationships are central to recognition, with acts of recognition and misrecognition, as well as struggles over recognition, occurring in relational spaces. Further, conversation, identified in the Phase 2 data as a key feature of authentic relationship, provides an important space in which recognition occurs and struggles over recognition take place. In analysing the data, we have closely examined whether and how the three patterns of intersubjective recognition identified by Honneth (1995, 2001, 2004) – love, rights and solidarity (adapted for this research as cared for, respected and valued) – are present, distorted and/or absent in conceptions of wellbeing at school.

RELATIONSHIPS PROVIDE THE CONTEXT FOR ACTS OF RECOGNITION AND MISRECOGNITION.

THE DIMENSIONS OF RECOGNITION WERE STRONGLY ENDORSED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AS IMPORTANT FOR WELLBEING.

There is a high resonance across all three dimensions of recognition, evident in the Phase 2 student and teacher data regarding how wellbeing is understood and facilitated in schools, prior to these dimensions being explicitly raised by the researcher. The extensive data concerning the importance of relationships for wellbeing laid firm foundations for inquiring into what these relationships provide in terms of being cared for, respected and valued, or at least creating the conditions for such experiences of recognition to occur. Students and teachers strongly endorsed the dimensions of recognition (being cared for, respected and valued) as important for student wellbeing. Phase 3 findings show the three aspects were significantly and positively correlated with each other, and that all three aspects were important for wellbeing. The interconnected nature of the dimensions is evident across
Phase 2 and 3 data. Students and teachers were aware of the conditions required for acts of recognition to occur, as evidenced by the aspirations and tacit understandings expressed by teachers around wellbeing and the imaginary schools for wellbeing developed by the students. They were also aware of the impact of misrecognition, with students in particular identifying sites in which struggles over recognition are played out.

The concept of recognition, as explicated by Honneth, was not overt in any of the policy-related education documentation. However, at least one of the three dimensions of recognition, cared for, respected and valued, was implied in all the education documentation that featured relationships as a domain for implementing approaches to wellbeing.

Following is a summary of how the three recognition dimensions of being cared for, respected and valued were viewed by teachers and students across Phases 2 and 3 of the study.

**Cared for**

The dimension of cared for was very evident in the Phase 2 student and teacher data. For students, ‘being loved’ was the most constant theme (after happiness) in the being data on wellbeing. The cared for dimension was the most evident of the three dimensions in the Phase 2 teacher data, with teachers appearing more comfortable and conversant with this dimension than the others. It was also the most evident in the policy-related documentation across all sectors through reference to: caring, supportive relationships for students (mostly within school communities); support networks; establishing a sense of connection and belonging for students within the school context; and developing a caring culture.

Emphasis was placed by both students and teachers in the Phase 2 focus groups and interviews on the importance of care from teachers being genuine, over and above the ‘job description’, a finding which is consistent with those of Gray and Hackling (2009) and Mitchell and Forsyth (2004). Central to being cared for in relationships, for both groups, is the concept of trust.

This aligns with the literature indicating that trust is key to relationships that support wellbeing (see for example Bryk & Schneider, 1996; Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004). Such trust is evidenced in Phases 2 and 3 with students underlining the importance of having sufficient confidence to express themselves, including communicating their needs and asking for these to be met. This is resonant with Honneth’s (1995) assertion about the importance of being able to express needs and desires without fear of retribution or abandonment.
Divergences between student and teacher understandings were also apparent in the data. For example, while both groups endorsed the importance of trust in enabling students to communicate their needs to teachers, there was incongruity in understandings and expectations regarding this. For example, staff rated students having a say about their personal needs/preferences, such as who they sit near, as least important for student wellbeing compared to having a say about more public/political aspects of school life. Another example of divergence was a specific connection between the Catholic ethos, wellbeing and the dimension of being cared for, raised by teachers in the Phase 2 data, and echoed in only one student focus group.

Respected

The dimension of recognition concerning being respected is core for the students, but was discussed less by the teachers in Phase 2. However, both students and staff strongly endorsed being respected as important for students’ wellbeing in the Phase 3 survey. Phase 2 data indicated that, as a general principle, respect is understood by many students as something everyone deserves and which should be exercised equally, although this was not always evident in practice. Respect for others was often expressed and experienced by students in highly conditional terms (such as, ‘I will not give respect to a person who does not respect me’), as well as expressions gesturing to more mutuality (‘I will respect another person regardless of whether they respect me’). Students articulated self-respect and respect for others as central to student wellbeing. While both students and staff expressed understandings about the importance of consistently treating students well, regardless of their individual differences, students also provided many examples that identified conditions for misrecognition evident in inconsistent and poor treatment of students, and consistent with findings from other studies (see for example Hyman & Perone, 1998; Krugman & Krugman, 1984; Olweus, 1996; Theoklitou, Kabitsis, & Kabitsi, 2012). In addition, students and teachers acknowledged that school culture, and the structures within it, provide conditions for students to be respected, or conversely for misrecognition or non-recognition in regard to respect. As Bingham (2001, p.9) argues, “recognition is fraught with peril, power, and limitation as well”.

An important aspect of respect apparent in the data concerns students ‘having a say’. While both students and teachers placed importance on students having a say, expressing themselves and actively participating, tensions were evident in the different emphases that students and staff placed on various aspects of students having a say at school. For example, the most important aspect for secondary students in Phase 3 was ‘who I sit near’, whereas this was the least important aspect from the teachers’ perspective.

Respect also includes students ‘having privacy’, a matter of importance to some students in this study and a key element of the ‘having’ dimension of wellbeing that emerged from the Phase 2 focus groups. Secondary students who defined wellbeing as having privacy in Phase 3 rated several relationships as less important for their wellbeing than other students. The implications of this finding are not immediately clear and indicate an area that warrants further exploration. The importance to some students of having
privacy likely has manifest reasons, ranging from the individual student’s disposition and experiences to broader social movements where there is a sharp distinction between private and public life. What is evident is that this description of wellbeing as ‘having privacy’ presents as a site of struggle over recognition.

The concept of respect was implied in some education policy-related documents, in the contexts of student behaviour, pastoral care, and early childhood. Respect also featured in some policy contexts that emphasise respectful relationships, active participation in school activities and processes, and staff having respect for students. The language of ‘having a say’ or ‘student voice’ is not evident in the policy and policy-related documentation. There was also little by way of reference to participation, although some was found in relation to learner wellbeing, student engagement and retention, and in aspirational national strategy statements for children and young people.

**Valued**

While less evident in the Phase 2 interview data, students and staff strongly endorsed being valued as important for student wellbeing in the Phase 3 surveys. Aspects relevant to being valued were marginally more apparent (proportionally) in the Catholic education documents than in documents from other sectors. However, it is important to note that the idea of being valued in contemporary understandings contrasts somewhat with the conceptualisation of valued in terms of recognition theory. In Honneth’s theory solidarity (conceptualised as being valued in our study) refers to esteem for others’ contributions to shared societal values. The ways in which being valued is reflected in policy documents and in the recognition of students’ contributions in schools, primarily through rewarding exemplary and improving behaviour, differs markedly from Honneth’s conceptualisation.

**OUTWARD SIGNS OF BEING VALUED ARE LESS IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS THAN IMPLICIT WAYS OF CONVEYING RECOGNITION.**

Teachers described structures within the school in which students were acknowledged, encouraged and supported in relation to their own individual differences, abilities and skills. Importantly though, Phase 3 student data showed that outward and public signs of recognition, such as giving awards and writing reports, were not as strongly linked with feeling valued as were more implicit ways of conveying recognition, such as the teacher spending time with a student, listening to the student, knowing the student well, and helping with school work.

Students emphasised the importance of accepting themselves and others ‘for who they are’. An element of being valued, which overlaps with the dimension of respected, is the importance of conversation or dialogue with oneself, expressed by students in terms of ‘looking after yourself’, not being too self-critical and making good decisions. Students also identified the role of significant others in facilitating and strengthening student
wellbeing through valuing their particular gifts, strengths and competencies. In a similar vein, teachers spoke in interviews of valuing students’ contributions, and acknowledged the importance of flexibility and adaptability concerning the uniqueness of individual children and their needs. This resonates with the policy-related documentation in which valuing students was primarily expressed in relation to diversity and recognising unique individual attributes.

The importance of mutual recognition for student wellbeing was apparent in the findings of both Phases 2 and 3. Recognition of staff, for example, was associated in Phase 3 results with their relationships with, and recognition of, students. Links were established between relationships, student wellbeing and mutual recognition, with findings underlining the reciprocal nature of recognition, and showing that the experience of recognition and understanding it were positively associated. Phase 3 results also linked mutual recognition with school cultures in which the school was perceived as supporting student and staff wellbeing, where student wellbeing is viewed as central to the work of teachers, and Christian values in a Catholic school are understood to help student and staff wellbeing.

**Struggles over recognition and misrecognition**

The idea of struggle is integral to the act of recognition, with such struggles moving an individual and a society to the realisation of undistorted relations of recognition. Thus, by looking at struggles over recognition, and the direction in which they point, we can begin to understand what full recognition would look like (Anderson, 1995). Feelings like shame, humiliation, anger and indignation are recognised by Honneth as important for telling us where the implicit rules of recognition have been violated (Thompson, 2006). In Phase 2, students clearly named
Students named experiences of misrecognition. Direct experiences of misrecognition leading to such feelings. They identified a range of actions by teachers that hinder student wellbeing, with the most frequently cited negative experience that of ‘being yelled at’. Most of the student data describing aspects of school life they identified as having a negative impact on their wellbeing coalesced around the second dimension, respect, in the form of disrespect.

Teachers and principals did not directly discuss experiences of misrecognition, while students did. Teachers and principals named or alluded to the conditions in which misrecognition or non-recognition of students was possible, or even likely, in the space between the aspirational (what they believed should happen in relation to supporting and enhancing student wellbeing) and the actual (what actually happens). However, direct discussion of misrecognition and non-recognition of students was largely absent from the teacher data. When it was addressed, it was primarily regarding systemic conditions related to systems and structures or the school environment, or in relation to teachers’ personal issues or personality, and expectations and pressure from parents.

Opportunities for recognition, misrecognition and non-recognition lie in the conversational spaces, talking, listening and hearing, which are fundamental to relationships and a vehicle for recognition. Both students and teachers indicated in Phase 2 focus groups and interviews that conditions for conversation (and recognition via conversation) are not consistent, or even always evident.

Teachers’ own experiences of recognition and misrecognition by colleagues and those in leadership, discussed extensively in the Phase 2 theme of teacher wellbeing, potentially provide a bridge to understanding students’ struggles over recognition and experiences of misrecognition. Students place importance on receiving love and care from significant others: on having needs met, being cared for, being listened to and having someone to talk to. In an almost parallel way, teachers discussed the importance for themselves of collegial support and supportive leadership, and feeling appreciated and valued for the contribution they make at school. Further, these findings provide some insight into the reciprocal nature of recognition, in that recognition is a two way process within an intersubjective context, with one both giving and receiving recognition to/from another.
3.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Research objective 3: To generate new knowledge about how educational policy, programs and practices in schools could more positively impact on student wellbeing.

The findings indicate that teachers and students believe that schools have an important role to play in student wellbeing. Most teachers agreed, for example, that student wellbeing is central to their work, and students strongly agreed that their wellbeing is important to their teachers. This lends further weight to the identification of schools, in policy and practice discussions, as key places for promoting the wellbeing of children and young people (Masters, 2004; Wyn, 2007). Of key importance, therefore, is how educational policy, programs and practices in schools could more positively impact on student wellbeing, using the new knowledge generated through this study. The potential of this knowledge for generating change and improvement will now be discussed. The Recommendations that follow this section provide further concrete direction.

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CENTRALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT CURRENTLY REFLECTED IN WIDER POLICY AND PRACTICE.

The ways in which wellbeing is conceptualised in policy and practice clearly have implications for the way in which it is approached in schools. Wellbeing is perceived as multidimensional and grounded in relationships by teachers, principals, students and in some policy-related documentation. Findings showed that when staff defined wellbeing as multidimensional, including the affective, safety, psychological, social, relational and environmental aspects, there was greater endorsement of the importance of caring for, respecting and valuing students. Such findings signal the need to ensure wellbeing is foregrounded and explicitly considered in all aspects of school life.

RECOGNITION THEORY HOLDS POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING APPROACHES TO WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS.

Importantly, the findings indicate the potential of recognition theory for elucidating core priorities in efforts to better support student wellbeing. This theory grounds wellbeing in relationships and acknowledges that inherent intersubjective tensions and struggles over recognition are essential and necessary drivers of individual identity development and broader social change. While some dimensions of recognition are implied in certain policy related documents,
the explicit use of a recognition lens has not featured in policy to date.

**Implications of the findings for relationships**

Student-teacher relationships are key to student wellbeing. However, in the routine everyday practice of schools, the subliminal nature of relationships means they are often eclipsed by concerns about crowded curriculum, teaching and learning, testing and assessment, behaviour, compliance and accountability. Hence students tend to be attuned to experiences of not being known, and teachers’ views about the importance of relationships often suggest a gap between the aspirational and the actual, sometimes exacerbated by their own ongoing, stressful work experiences. At the policy level, as flagged above, relationships didn’t feature strongly. An emphasis on relationships appears mostly in the largely aspirational national education documentation and the Catholic education documentation, but only sporadically across the State/Territory government education policy efforts related to wellbeing. The sporadic nature of any emphasis on relationships is further highlighted when taking into account that wellbeing-related documentation was not identified in all states and territories, across Catholic or government education. Hence, whilst students and teachers expressed clear understandings about the centrality of relationships, this was not reflected in wider educational policy and practice. The implications of this are potentially significant if policy is to be considered a lever for change.

Notions of being cared for, respected and valued, as conceptualised within recognition theory, provide a framework for examining relationships more closely, including the student-teacher relationship. However, while the findings highlight that recognition and misrecognition play a key role in relation to wellbeing, the links should not be oversimplified. Routinely dispensing care and attention, for example, is not sufficient to meet the requirements for being *cared for*. What is implied theoretically is the need for a positive emotional investment in the wellbeing of the other person. Similarly, the gap between students’ and teachers’ understandings of *respect* has implications. When practice and policy do not reflect the importance students place on being respected, their sense of dignity is compromised, along with their experience of self-respect and capacity to participate in decision-making processes.

The findings also suggest that outward public signs of recognition, such as giving awards and writing reports, were not typically experienced by students as an expression of *being valued*. Such signs were not as strongly linked with feeling cared for, valued and respected as were more tacit ways of showing recognition, such as the teacher spending time with a student, listening to the student, knowing the student well, and helping with school work. These findings imply greater attention to ways of facilitating the experience of genuinely being cared for, respected (with opportunities for having a say and having privacy), and valued (via contributions that are routinely and authentically validated). Pre-service teacher education, teacher professional learning and policy development provide opportunities for drawing attention to and further exploring the implications of greater

**RECOGNITION IMPLIES A POSITIVE EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT IN THE WELLBEING OF ANOTHER.**
attention on relationships as foundational to wellbeing at school.

Further, recognition theory draws attention to the role played by other significant people in the formation of the identity of the student. While student-teacher relationships are centrally important, other relationships (such as with friends, parents, principals, counsellors, other school staff, peers) also play a key role. Importance is placed by students on receiving love and care from significant others, and feeling valued by them. Similarly, experiences of misrecognition in these relationships carry a great deal of weight in terms of ongoing struggles over recognition.

The differences evident in the findings, with regard to students’ and teachers’ views of the importance of relationships with particular people, imply that important opportunities for recognition are being missed or denied. In particular, the demographic differences, which show that particular relationships hold special importance for certain students, ultimately indicate the potential value of all relationships. This implies that respecting and attending to the multiple relationships in children’s lives can have positive benefits for all children, including those who are marginalised. The findings suggest the need for increased awareness in schools of the benefits of supportive relationships and better understanding of some of the sites of struggle over recognition.

Relationships with parents are particularly worth noting here, as they were flagged as being important in two key ways. First, students rated highly the importance of their relationship with parents for their wellbeing at school. This is an area that would benefit from further exploration, from the perspectives of students, parents and teachers. Second, the emphasis placed by teachers and principals on parent partnership and greater parental involvement raises the question of how schools can best facilitate parent partnership and be places of welcome to parents.

Implications of the findings for systems and structures

Given that education structures and systems appear to be the dominant domain for implementing approaches to wellbeing in the education policy-related documentation, the findings have major implications. In short, embedding an emphasis on relationship is essential for successful implementation of structures and systems to support student wellbeing. Certain structures invite opportunities for conversation and the strengthening of relationships. The pastoral care/home room structure, for example, provides opportunities for student-teacher and student-student relationships in a less formal classroom context. As such, these structures can facilitate or impede opportunities for recognition.

The findings indicate that wellbeing-related programs also need to be accommodated within existing systems and structures. Both students and teachers spoke positively about...
such programs and the potential benefits for student wellbeing.

Similarly, teachers emphasised the need for policy that recognises current realities in schools, conveys simply and clearly to teachers what is required, and is tailored to meet students’ needs. Policy that is concise and relevant is more likely to be used given current workload demands. Teachers are well aware of the limitations of policy. Key points they identified include that wellbeing policy should not be too prescriptive, but should be sufficiently detailed to provide useful guidance, flexible enough to adapt to local needs, and readily applicable to practice. They also highlight the importance of policy makers consulting with and drawing on the experience of teachers in developing policy. Currently, policy is perceived as somewhat ‘hit and miss’ in terms of applicability and would benefit greatly from more input from teachers and principals.

**Implications of the findings for teaching and learning**

The findings indicate a dichotomy in how teachers conceptualise their role in relation to wellbeing, with some teachers viewing this in a more instrumentalist way, as educators who focus on student outcomes, and others having a broader, more relational perspective of wellbeing and their role in its facilitation. This has implications for teacher training and professional development, particularly in the current environment.

The recently introduced National Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) point to some important possibilities for a more explicit emphasis on relationships in professional learning at both pre-service and in-service levels. While the Standards are not specifically wellbeing related (and hence did not meet the selection criteria for inclusion in our policy analysis), there are features within all three of the standard domains (Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement) that align with the student and teacher findings concerning relationships. Professional Knowledge, for example, focuses on knowing students in relation to how they learn, while Professional Engagement extends teachers’ role beyond the classroom to professional engagement with colleagues, parents/carers and the community. Thus, the Standards address the issue of relationships, which this study has identified as foundational to wellbeing approaches concerned with the recognition of students.

**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AT BOTH PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE LEVELS NEEDS TO EMPHASISE THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS FOR WELLBEING AT SCHOOL.**

While students did not perceive that they had much influence over pedagogical processes, the imaginary schools data highlighted approaches to pedagogy and school structures that help facilitate relationships. These were: the importance of feeling safe and secure, the capacity to have fun, the desire for understanding, better communication, equality and respect, and more opportunities for students to be heard and involved in school life. Further, the depth and scope of dialogue that took place highlighted the value students placed on conversation, being consulted and having a say in relation to their wellbeing. These findings align particularly with focus areas within the Professional Practice domain of
the National Standards, including: 3.5 Use effective classroom communication; and 4.1 Support student participation, again indicating links between the Standards and relational aspects of teaching and learning for supporting student wellbeing.

THE EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIPS RESONATES WITH A NUMBER OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS.

Implications of the findings for the school environment

The school culture and environment are critically important for student wellbeing, providing a context within which systems and structures, teaching and learning, and relationships are enacted. Acknowledging student diversity within the broader environmental contexts of schools is increasingly recognised in the education policy-related documentation. The findings demonstrate that recognition is important for all students’ wellbeing, but is particularly important for some, primarily ethnic minority students and boys. Further exploration is required to fully interpret these findings, but the implications for policy and practice in schools are clear; there cannot be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy-ordained approach to wellbeing, which will engender improved wellbeing. One of the critically important aspects of recognition theory is that it centres on recognising the individual (who is cared for, respected and valued) in their own right, as well as being a member of a social group. For all students to thrive, the school environment needs to be sensitive to differences in terms of personality, gender, racial and cultural diversity.

A recognition theory lens is potentially useful in this regard as it allows for individual and social recognition, and also for student (and staff) growth through awareness of struggles over recognition and the ways these are routinely manifested in everyday practices in schools. These struggles are a given, in any context, and provide the impetus for identity development and social change. Such a lens provokes attention not only on relationship and the conversations that support these, but also on sites of struggle and awareness of the deleterious effects of persistent misrecognition.

Hence, school culture guides the conditions under which students are cared for, valued and respected, or conversely for non-recognition or misrecognition. A key implication of this research is the importance schools place on developing a culture of inclusion, connection and recognition, incorporating processes and structures that support conversation and also reparation. Underpinning such an approach is respect for the dignity and wellbeing of children and young people, and recognition of their agency, status and voice.

SCHOOLS NEED TO FOSTER WELLBEING FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

Further, the findings point to the importance of schools as places that foster wellbeing for all members of the community, given
some teachers’ concern that when their own wellbeing was compromised their ability to attend to students’ wellbeing was diminished. These teachers candidly point to a lack of resources, time and support as contributing factors. Further, it is clear that recognition of teachers, through collegial support and supportive leadership, is linked with recognition of students. Conversely, less recognition of teachers was linked with their conditional recognition of students. That is, staff who felt less cared for, respected and valued at school, were more likely to practice conditional recognition of students. These findings have significant implications for pre-service teacher training, professional development and for fostering a school climate based on mutual recognition of staff, students and the community.

Summary

Drawing on the findings and discussion above, it is evident that schools and school systems have in place a range of policies, understandings, programs and practices to support wellbeing. However, the new knowledge generated through this research has highlighted several important issues that merit closer attention in the future. These are now framed below in terms of Recommendations from the research.
This project has produced extensive systematic policy and practice-relevant evidence to advance the way wellbeing is understood and approached in schools. The detailed knowledge gained through the research, including the key role that relationships play, enabled deeper investigation of the potential of recognition theory for informing approaches to wellbeing in schools. The new knowledge generated can usefully inform educational policy, programs and practice in schools, as well as future research, as outlined in the following recommendations.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

1. That specific national, state and/or system-level policy guidance is developed in relation to wellbeing in schools and that this incorporates clear definitions, priorities for implementation and links to related policy imperatives. The policy guidance should emphasise a person-centred approach that underlines the central role of relationships in all aspects of school-life and the crucial importance of mutual recognition understood as caring, respecting and valuing each other’s contribution.

2. That wellbeing is positioned as integral to the overall policy framework, structures and processes of schools and school systems. All key operating areas of education - administrative, educational and religious - need to clearly articulate and delineate roles and responsibilities in relation to wellbeing. This may necessitate a review of existing central arrangements, including wellbeing governance, coordination, communication and accountability with schools.

3. Appropriate resourcing should be allocated to coordinate and support the implementation of wellbeing policy and programs. Existing criteria for the funding of wellbeing initiatives, including counselling, should be reviewed to ensure these adequately address the findings of this research and the priorities identified.

4. That the philosophical and conceptual links between pastoral care and wellbeing be clarified given their distinctive character within the Catholic education context. Clarifying these links will be a critically important element in mobilising pastoral care initiatives to ensure these are effective in enhancing student wellbeing.

5. That consideration is given to developing a Charter for Wellbeing in Schools, to be advanced in conjunction with students, teachers, principals, other relevant staff and parents. This should be an aspirational statement that represents broad, collaborative agreement about the value of children and the collective commitment of schools and school systems to supporting them to realise their full potential as human persons of dignity and worth.
6. That targeted intervention programs introduced into schools to specifically support wellbeing are adequately resourced, monitored and evaluated to ensure these deliver intended outcomes. Further consideration should be given to the potential of such programs for extending the knowledge, understandings and skills of teachers and parents, as well as students, around key issues that impact on the wellbeing of children and young people.

7. That teacher wellbeing, including its impact on student wellbeing, is explicitly acknowledged and that current approaches to addressing this (both formal and informal) are reviewed and further developed. Principals and teachers should be closely consulted to ensure a comprehensive, respectful approach to supporting teacher wellbeing is planned, implemented and evaluated.

8. That close consideration be given to the cultures, processes and methods required for affording students more opportunity to ‘have a say’ in matters concerning them at school, including relationships, systems and structures, environment, and teaching and learning. Such opportunities to have a say should be meaningful, routine and available to all students using appropriate verbal, written and visual means. Consulting with students should include feedback and follow-up where relevant, enabling students to learn and develop through their participation, as well as to have their contributions appropriately acknowledged and affirmed.

9. That a flexible program of professional development is made available to schools to help enrich principals’, teachers’, students’ and parents’ understandings and practice around wellbeing. Drawing on recognition theory, childhood studies and the findings of this research, the professional development should include a core focus on the important role of relationships, and of being cared for, valued and respected, in facilitating wellbeing in schools. This professional development should also explicitly highlight the likely negative impact of misrecognition or non-recognition on student and teacher wellbeing.

10. That such professional development for teachers around wellbeing is explicitly aligned with all seven of the recently implemented National Professional Standards for Teachers. Particular emphasis should be placed on the ways in which these standards - knowing students, knowing how to teach, effective teaching and learning, safe and supportive learning environments, providing feedback to students, professional learning and engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community - are intrinsically linked to the recognition of students and hence to their wellbeing. Pre-service teacher education should also ensure that the foundational elements of being a quality teacher are explicitly linked to understandings of children and childhood, particularly in relation to their need to be cared for, valued and respected in all aspects of their education.

11. That professional development for principals around wellbeing is explicitly aligned with the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in relation to leadership requirements: vision and values; knowledge and understanding; personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

12. That the concept of ‘recognition’, with its focus on the importance of being cared for, respected and valued, be further explored within the context of wellbeing in schools, and that a flexible and appropriate measurement tool be developed to assist schools in monitoring the ways in which these dimensions of recognition are routinely practised and experienced.

13. That further research be undertaken to extend understandings of parent and carer roles in supporting the wellbeing of their children at school, with a view to making further recommendations for more effective engagement with parents and for strengthening partnerships between family and school.

The above recommendations reflect the key findings of this research, including the ‘recognition’ interests that have been found to have particular salience in extending the existing knowledge base and potentially improving policy and practice concerning wellbeing in schools. Importantly, these recommendations also support the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), which describes aspirations for all young Australians for the next decade. This commits state and federal ministers to shared educational goals and to ensure that schooling provides an environment in which all children and young people will not only become successful learners, but also confident, creative and contributing individuals.


