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From resilience to wellbeing: Identity-building as an alternative framework for schools' role in promoting children's mental health

Ceri Brown[1]★ and Marnee Shay[2]
[1]*University of Bath, UK,* [2]*The University of Queensland, Australia*

This paper explores schools' new role in promoting children's mental health, as a key focus for policy makers across the global north. An education policy analysis is conducted for England and Australia, two nations advocating a 'bottom-up' approach to mental health promotion, granting flexibility to schools and municipal authorities. Here it is argued that a common policy lexicon is evident where key concepts—wellbeing, resilience, character—are constructed on taken-for-granted assumptions. These are argued to be limited by an emphasis upon the individual constituents of mental health, which is contrasted against a broader conception of wellbeing, evident in recent non-governmental international policy. Empirical data is then presented from two separate studies in England and Australia, where young peoples' perspectives are used to arbitrate the efficacy of the policy construction of wellbeing, in canvassing a relational and social identity approach as a viable alternative. Both studies privilege the voices of young people on wellbeing and identity, with findings from England highlighting that the dominant schooling narrative of resilience perceived by students, misses the ontological and social dimensions of their wellbeing. Research with Indigenous young people in Australia is then evaluated for the affordances generated by identity building and affirming programmes in schools. Notwithstanding cultural differences, common aspects were evident across both datasets, revealing the centrality to young people of self-authenticity, relatedness, and connectedness to nature, as key to their wellbeing. The paper concludes in advancing a set of principles to underpin a relational and social identity approach to schools' wellbeing promotion strategy.

Keywords wellbeing, mental-health, identity, schooling.

Introduction

The creeping spectre of youth mental ill-health has cast a shadow across much of the developed world over the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Within Anglo speaking nations the scale of this phenomena has reached a reportedly 'crisis' status, both in terms of the number of young people experiencing mental health problems and with respect to the capability of public health services and schools to respond to current need. This looming crisis has justified the extended reach of state intervention

★Corresponding author. Department of Education, University of Bath, Bath BA1 7AY, UK. Email: C.L.Brown@bath.ac.uk

through early years, schooling and college education, with the associated responsibilities of preventative and ameliorative action targeting young people's mental health. Across the developed world we have witnessed a gradual shift in education policy away from a 'pathogenic' approach to mental health issues, and towards a 'salutogenic' one (Weare, 2010). While the former approach aimed to identify and correct mental health problems, the latter reflects a universal whole-school approach, concerned with prescribing positive mental health for the total student body.

Nations have varied, however, in the ways in which schools are required to formulate mental health promotion strategies. While the United States has advocated prescriptive and manual based approaches—for example, the influential PENN resilience programme[1]—in Australia and the UK, two nations on the front line of mental health promotion, a more bottom-up approach aspires to encourage user ownership and flexibility at the local and school level (Rieke *et al.*, 2017). An advantage of the bottom-up approach is that schools and educational authorities have the opportunity to develop a mental health strategy in consultation with local stakeholders. On the other hand, a drawback to this approach has been 'much conceptual confusion… at the level of everyday policy and practice' (Ecclestone, 2012). As a consequence, schools' role in children's mental health has been approached through a suite of policy guidance documents, rooted in a discourse of poorly defined and weakly integrated key terms: character, resilience and wellbeing. In drawing upon a policy analysis and empirical evidence in England and Australia, we propose an alternative framework for schools' mental health promotion strategy, based on identity-building and affirming as a pathway not only towards the mental health and wellbeing of children, but of their families, communities, and for civic society at large.

The education policy approach to mental health promotion

In English policy, the issue of youth mental health has been high on the national agenda since the mid-2010s following the government appointment of a Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce in 2015 with a remit to review the promotion of good mental health and current specialist provision. In 2017 the former prime minister, Theresa May, announced a major reform in children's mental health services, in outlining a new role for schools as key stakeholders in mental health promotion. This accompanied a raft of policies detailing schools' responsibilities in relation to emotional health (PHE, 2015), behaviour (DfE, 2016a), therapeutic intervention (DfE, 2016b), peer support (DfE, 2017a) and, curriculum reform (DfE, 2017b, 2019a). The road map for these changes was provided in the joint ministerial document 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Services' (DoHSC/DfE 2017, 2018), which specified three key responsibilities for schools: a designated mental health and wellbeing lead in every school; the appointment of mental health support teams to link schools and specialist national health services, in order to support the needs of children with mild to moderate mental health needs; and the policy commitment to teach children about mental wellbeing, in foreshadowing the now formalised curriculum subject areas of Relationships Education in primary schooling and Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schooling (DfE, 2017b), and more recently Health Education (DfE, 2019a). This

document marks a distinct policy shift away from earlier top-down approaches to address wellbeing in England (e.g. SEAL DCSF, 2007) in putting the onus upon schools to develop their own 'whole-school' mental health policy (DoHSC/DfE, 2018, pp. 10, 17, 21).

Similarly, in Australia, youth mental health has been increasingly present as an objective, in a tranche of health and education policy imperatives. Although still predominantly positioned within the health domain at a Commonwealth level, the 2015 'Healthy, Safe and Thriving' framework developed by the Council of Australian Governments Health Council (COAG) was a review of the '1992 Health Goals and Targets for Australian Children and Youth' and outlined a series of policy targets aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia (COAG, 2015). It recognised that over the subsequent two decades following the original policy, research has increasingly made clearer connections between 'physical health, social and emotional wellbeing, environment and experience' (COAG, 2015, p. 81) in gauging the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Prevention and early intervention, as well as a strengths-based approach, are outlined as being key foci within the policy recommendations.

Recently, the Australian Government released the 'National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020–2030' (Australian Government, 2019a). The document is framed as being the blueprint for a national approach to the health and wellbeing of young people in Australia, and builds on the COAG Healthy, Safe and Thriving framework. The approach has five key priority areas outlined: improving health equity across populations; empowering parents and caregivers to maximise health development; tackling mental health and risky behaviours; addressing chronic conditions and preventative health, and strengthening the workforce (Australian Government, 2019a). Education and the role of schools are mentioned frequently within the action plan. For example, in their perceived responsibility to increase 'resilience, engagement and coping strategies' in the middle years (8–14 years) (Australian Government, 2019a, 20). The identification of health education as being critical to children's mental health is arguably, however, a panacea. Indeed, the increasingly worrying statistics on mental health has prompted the government to identify the mental health of children and young people as being an area of 'significant concern' (Australian Government, 2019a).

The translation of broader policy foci on youth mental health and wellbeing into education policy is difficult to map. Australia has undergone a number of large-scale reviews of the national education systems, most notably the work of 'Gonski' who identified serious systemic issues preventing education equality from becoming a reality for Indigenous children and other marginalised young people. In 2018 the Australian Government released the 'Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools', providing a series of recommendations to assist the government in identifying priorities and interventions aimed at enabling support to help all students 'reach their full potential' (Australian Government, 2018a, 2018b, p. x). What is troubling, however, is that while the term 'wellbeing' is mentioned as an aspiration throughout the document, mental health does not feature, nor is there specific recommendations for schools to work in unison with national health policies aimed at addressing health and wellbeing for all young people.

Education policies that specifically address health and wellbeing in an Australian context are currently addressed at a state level. There is a raft of state-based education policies addressing health and wellbeing in schools. For example, the Victorian Government has a policy 'Student Wellbeing and Learning' (Victorian State Government, 2018), aimed at ensuring student wellbeing of learners within the school community. The key mandate within this policy is that schools must incorporate a comprehensive range of opportunities, through both the curriculum and practices, to enhance the wellbeing and learning of students in all Victorian schools. While the Victorian State Government provided little in the way of guidance in operationalising this mandate, the Queensland Government delivered more concrete policy guidance by way of the 'Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework' (Department of Education Queensland, 2018). This document outlined the success measures for learners' wellbeing as follows: 'schools can monitor their school culture and student wellbeing and engagement through: attendance rates; student retention data; learning days lost due to disciplinary absences and school opinion survey responses' (Department of Education Queensland, 2018). In this context 'wellbeing' is decoded in terms of compliant behaviours, or the student's acquiescence to the policy requirement to be in school and conform with behavioural structures. It is arguable whether such measures can duly capture the complex link between the student's state of being and the learning they engage in. The policy also claims that the Department of Education, Queensland, is still in the process of developing a standardised measure of wellbeing, which is at odds with the literature that recognises the subjective element to measuring a person's wellbeing, particularly the need to account for issues of race and culture that can impact upon the accuracy of such a tool (Legette, 2018).

While England has formalised a mental health curriculum focus (DfE, 2018), in November 2018, the Australian Government committed approximately AU$100 million to a school-based youth mental health program to 'help students manage their mental health' (Australian Government, 2019b). The school-based programme called 'Be You' has five key elements: leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support (Beyond Blue, 2020). The programmes are similar in nature and demonstrate a cultural alignment in the ways in which medical approaches to conceptualising the mental health and wellbeing of young people are prevailing in policy development in the UK and Australia.

In reviewing the overall cadre of policy approaches to schools' role in mental health promotion it is apparent that a particular discourse has emerged across both nations, founded upon a framework of key terms that pepper policy documentation and political discourse, yet continue to evade clear definition. These specifically refer to the concepts wellbeing, resilience and character.

The rising rainbow beacon of 'wellbeing' in mental health policy

It is apposite to first consider wellbeing given its close alignment with mental health in international discourses. Indeed, the global reach of public and policy narratives of mental health crises have prompted state governments as well as third sector organisations to turn to non-government authorities, in search of core terms. One of the most frequently cited definitions of 'mental health' in the early twenty-first century is

provided by the World Health Organisation,[2] which it claims to be 'consistent with its wide and varied interpretation across cultures' (WHO, 2013a, 2013b, 10):

> [A] state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. (2001, 1)

In a somewhat circular fashion 'mental' wellbeing is defined using the exact same descriptor (WHO, 2013a, 2013b, 6). This conflation of mental health with wellbeing is adopted in both English and Australian policy, with one important substitution of 'potential' in place of 'abilities' (DfE, 2016b, 8) where the emphasis is shifted towards outcomes. The UK and Australian policy environment simply sidesteps the requirement to clearly define the term wellbeing at all, indeed the concept is treated as self-evident in every key document, even those with wellbeing specified as a core focus in the title (DoH/NHS, 2015; PHE, 2015; Australian Government, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a). Nowhere is a conceptual clarity more important than with respect to its curriculum focus, and here it is interesting to note a distinctive shift away from a policy commitment to teaching children about *mental health* (PHE, 2015, 4, 11; DoHSC/DfE, 2017, 26, 28, DfE, 2018, 5) to a formal curriculum focus upon teaching *wellbeing* (Australian Government, 2019b; DfE, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). This may be due to the well-rehearsed and various disciplinary claims on mental health, in pointing to neurological (medicine) behavioural (psychology) or ecological (social work) aetiologies, which do not make for an easy alliance and are frequently in tension.

Wellbeing is, in contrast less divisive or contentious as a policy objective. The pathways to wellbeing do not carry the burden of a dichotomous other as do mental health/mental ill-health, with the implication that the solutions they promise do not necessarily shadow its cause(s). Furthermore, there are far less quantitative measurement tools imposed on those tasked with enacting 'wellbeing' policy imperatives, further adding to its appeal as a policy objective. As a holistic marker of human functioning, the many faces of wellbeing sit in more harmonious alliance. While 'mental' wellbeing is the most frequently cited descriptor within the English Green paper (DoHSC/DfE, 2017, 5, 6, 19, 27, 28, 42) it is dove-tailed interchangeably with 'emotional' wellbeing (DoHSC/DfE, 2017, 7, 14). In stating the claim for statutory 'relationships' and 'sex and relationships' education, English policy has also made the case for 'economic' wellbeing (DfE, 2017b, 3). Although notably this is used with reference to children's 'financial *capability*' (ibid., our emphasis) as opposed to as a *resource*, with the inference that children's financial management is more important than their capital. The curriculum justification for Wellbeing Education, however, is perhaps the most explicit in the forcible alignment of divergent health agendas by the now-former English Education Secretary, in promising 'a focus on promoting the positive link between physical and mental health' (Hinds, DfE, 2019a). This link is later explicated:

> Mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life and why simple self-care—like getting enough sleep and spending time outdoors and with friends—is important. This will go hand-in-hand with content on nutrition, the importance of staying active, and recognising the early signs of physical illness—ensuring pupils understand how mental and physical health are linked. (ibid.)

In these terms wellbeing in its various iterations is presented as a panacea, where physical health strategies are wielded as a solution to children's mental health needs. Indeed, the political discourse of wellbeing can be seen to operate as a kind of guiding beacon, in shining a light through the troubled waters of a range of childhood social issues: obesity (Cabinet Office/DoHSC, 2016), cyber-bullying (DfE, 2013; Lawrence *et al.*, 2015), and childhood sexualisation (DfE, 2011). As a beacon of hope within a current 'risk society' (Beck, 2000), wellbeing can be seen in this light as a counterpoint object to mental ill-health and pathway goal for social, political, economic and educative action. The appeal of wellbeing is in its ideological resonance across policy, media and popular culture. Like a rainbow, however, the concept invokes benevolent, optimistic and aspirational associations, a universal symbol for hope and light in darkness. Yet its subjective ephemerality as a value-position is both wellbeing's strength and flaw: it can mean (almost) anything to anybody, or in Wright and McLeod's terms signals 'both everything and nothing' (2012, p. 1). This is why, they argue, the concept fails in its operationalisation. Like a rainbow it cannot be touched, contained or even comprehended up close, a 'cultural mirage' (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008) that falters in any state other than as a symbol.

In speculating as to why political discourse and policy has exercised the concept of wellbeing in this way, it could be argued that this fits with a broader policy logic of reframing issues of social and structural inheritance as merely shortfalls in individual conduct and behaviour (see Brown & Carr, 2019). As Wyn (2009) outlines, 'wellbeing has become a social concern and a personal quest, a public preoccupation and a private responsibility' (p. 47). This is evident within the social and political discourses that underpin policy in England and Australia; under the veneer of freedom schools are granted autonomy to decide on what encompasses wellbeing, but the accountability for ensuring youth mental health is shifted away from social structures and institutions and on to young people themselves.

The pathway to wellbeing in educational policy on mental health promotion

If children's mental health/wellbeing is the goal of educational and health policy on schools' mental health promotion strategy, then the development or building of children's 'character' and 'resilience' are the tools and pathway through which schools are advised to support children to achieve it.

Character

'Character education' as an aspiration for schooling has a somewhat chequered history as an object of the colonialist aspiration to cleanse children of 'original sin'. It has nevertheless enjoyed a number of revivals through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in English-speaking countries, particularly in the United States. In an increasingly ethnically diverse and diasporic world, there is little recognition of the Eurocentric foundations on which the notion of character was built. Today there are numerous programmes worldwide devoted to building children's character, despite the fact that there is no universally defined and empirically measurable agreement of what 'character' is and the values underpinning it (Hunter, 2000). Notwithstanding

its non-amenability to the audit culture characterising neoliberal education policy-making, the rhetoric of 'character-building' continues to have political sway given the right-wing neo-conservatism moralism that has risen to prominence following the global economic crash of 2008. One example is the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, a social reform think-tank based at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. The centre is motivated by an Aristotelian injunction to assert the 'virtue' into character education (see Kristjánsson, 2015) as distinct from the view that character is an 'amoral' and performative set of skills, as rendered in parallel efforts to champion school's role in building 'character' (see Tough, 2013).

In recent history the pursuit of character has been championed in Conservative English education policy by former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, and was decoded to teachers in terms of the 'drive, grit and optimism' (DfE, 2015, 29) for which schools were required to instil in children 'the development of character and [achievement of] mental wellbeing' (Morgan, 2016). Following strong professional criticism,[3] her landmark National Character Awards scheme was later scrapped by the DfE only to be revived by the superseding Education Secretary for England, Damien Hinds; who promised to reintroduce them in a recent speech (DfE, 2019b). In defending this decision Hinds elucidates five key components of what he means by 'character':

> First you have to believe you can achieve. [Second] You have to be able to stick with the task in hand, and [thirdly] see a link between effort today and payback sometime in the future, even if it's uncertain or rather a long way off.... Fourthly, you need to develop the ability to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us... [and fifth] to use strength of character to be good in the world...So character must be grounded in virtues. (ibid.)

This aspiration has now become formalised in the Character Education Framework (DfE, 2019d) launched under the current Secretary for State for Education, Gavin Williamson, tasking schools with the responsibility to 'promote' such virtues including: 'consideration', 'respect' (p. 5), 'courage', 'honesty' and 'integrity' (p. 7). This framework has been hailed a success by the Jubilee Centre (cited in the policy), especially given that the six outlined benchmarks prompting schools to reflect on their character education provision, lay the groundwork for school-based programmes, such as the recent school leadership programme launched by the Jubilee Centre (Taylor, 2019).

The concept of 'character' has, however, been critiqued for its deficit model assumption that understands the morality of children to be deficient (Burman, 2018), especially when used as a myopic lens in obscuring the effects of structural disadvantage. Such a critique can also be levered at the most recent Character Education Policy (DfE, 2019d) in relation to schools' requirement to support 'making children civic minded and ready to contribute to society.' (pp. 5-6). Here it was acknowledged that, 'household income is by far the most important factor driving gaps in participation, with children from the poorest households much less likely to [participate]' and therefore 'less likely to have formed 'a habit of service' (p. 9).

Character-building and character-education does not feature in Australian education wellbeing policy. However, given Australia's colonial foundations, much of the

discourse about character indirectly permeates social, cultural and institutional structures, including schools. For example, on an Australian Government website that provides an overview to a global audience about 'Our People', under the heading 'Becoming Australians', the Australian Government outlines that 'non-white immigrants were often seen as a threat to working conditions in Australia and to Australia's "British" character' (Australian Government, 2020a, 2020b).

   As an ideological heuristic the concept of 'character' has strong alignment with moralistic and religious objectives and especially when used alongside youth moral panic agendas (e.g. terrorism, knife crime, drugs trafficking) it can be particularly effective in co-opting public and media assent. Character has, however, been accused of lacking theoretical grounding, (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006, pp. 499–500) which may well be justified when approached from a positive psychological perspective that has dominated the educational market of wellbeing interventions, and is in stark contrast to the careful scholarship and empirical work carried out within the philosophical tradition (see Kristjánsson, 2015; Cigman, 2018). Cigman (2012), for example, admonishes the former approach for its superficial reading of Aristotelian principles. She argues that the polarisation of emotional states and the blind exultation of positive emotions evident within the tradition, overlooks the core functions of emotions within the psyche; for example, a misguided optimism can shadow ignorance, and a universal denigration of negative emotions overlooks their fundamental utility to our humanity as 'modes of attention enabling us to notice what is morally salient, important, or urgent in ourselves and our surroundings. They help us track the morally relevant "news"' (Nancy Sherman in Cigman, 2018, p. 88). By ignoring this Cigman (2012) argues that positive psychology 'promotes an ideal without cautioning us…against turning our backs on the negative realities of our own and others' lives' (p. 453). Such critiques may go some way to explain the English government's acknowledgement of the need 'for greater clarity about the core attributes that underpin mental health' to be informed by empirical 'insights and evidence' (DoH/NHS, 2015, 35). To this end a narrative of 'resilience' has grown in policy discourses in plugging the gaps that 'character' is assumed to leave behind in terms of empirical evidence and scientific credibility that are misguidedly assumed to assure children's wellbeing.

Resilience

The rise of 'resilience' in education policy reflects a broader shift in the disciplinary foundations that are drawn upon, away from theology and philosophy towards psychology as a hard science. While academically the concepts have little synergy, in policy discourse 'character' and 'resilience' are keen bedfellows and are frequently aligned, often within the same sentence (DfE, 2019a) as 'key to promoting children's mental health' (DfE, 2016a, 2016b, 8). While 'character' is freely wielded in press statements and political speeches, resilience is the term more likely to find its way into policy guidance (PHE/DfE, 2015, 4; DfE, 2016a, 2016b, 4; PHE, DfE, 2017a, 2017b, 25) and has been identified as a key component informing the new 'personal development' judgement by the English national inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019). The alignment of 'character' and 'resilience' has been mobilised in English

politics through the *Character and Resilience Manifesto* (Paterson *et al.*, 2014) by the all party parliamentary group (APPG) on Social Mobility. Described as 'soft skills' (p. 11) the terms are synthesised and deconstructed in terms of four key individual 'capabilities': application, self-direction, self-control, and empathy' (ibid.). While the emphasis here is competency-based as opposed to the values-based educational policy framing, achievement is nevertheless reduced to agentic factors, in explaining 'Why do some talented children grow up to fulfil their ambitions and become leaders in any number of fields, while others never realise their full potential?' (p. 4).

In Australian wellbeing policies for children and youth, colonial discourses underpinning the term 'character' have been operationalised through the term 'resilience', which features seven times in the National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020–2030. In the psychological literature, also, there are studies that have attempted to gauge the role of character in the prediction of resilience, emphasising individual responsibility in relation to a range of success markers (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). The 'Australian Student Wellbeing Framework' developed by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment, is introduced on their website as 'Student Resilience and Wellbeing' (Australian Government, 2020a, 2020b), further demonstrating how the term gets adopted as central to guiding wellbeing policy implementation. Furthermore, in the Australian schools' mental health program 'Be You' (Australian Government, 2019b), the focus is on building 'resilience' and healthy 'coping' skills of young people. As a key component of the National Action Plan for Child and Youth Mental health in Australia, resilience, and resilience building are constructed as having the omnipotent ability to address issues of youth mental health, while concurrently pointing to the deep inequalities that are existent amongst young people with regards to socio-economic status, race, gender, dis/ability, sexualities and physical health, demonstrating the problematics of employing this term as a policy objective.

As with other concepts central to policy rhetoric on mental health, the term 'resilience' is not defined in Australian policies and in English policy there is only one attempt to define it across the suite of policies wielding the term. Even this refers only to its indicative features, taken from one research study published over 30 years previously:

> Resilience seems to involve several related elements. Firstly, a sense of self-esteem and confidence; secondly a belief in one's own self-efficacy and ability to deal with change and adaptation; and thirdly, a repertoire of social problem-solving approaches. (DfE, 2016, 8)

Each of these constituents can been attributed as an individual property, reflecting an alignment closer to that of the material, as opposed to the social, sciences. Originating from the material sciences, 'resilience' is defined as 'the capability of a substance to return to its original state at some later time after the removal of a deforming stress' (Hoffman, 1948). The quality of resilience is seen to be an intrinsic and absolute property of the material, a measure of elasticity by which to calculate energy load, both in the short term (impact) and longer term (stamina). From the late twentieth century onwards, the concept has been adapted for use across multiple disciplines in both the natural as well as social sciences, in calculating the (in)vulnerability of the research object to withstand pressure from the external environment

(Thoren, 2014). The point of distinction from non-human resilience science is that the social science account treats resilience as a malleable, crafted resource:

> [Resilience] is not a discrete quality that children either possess or do not possess [but rather] depends on the interaction and accumulation of individual and environmental factors. (Howard *et al.*, 1999)

The refutation of resilience as an innate and immoveable property has been seen to signal its potency as an object of a governmentality approach to public policy, in shaping the normative behaviours constitutive of the social order. Conceptualised in this way resilience is thus mobilised from an essentialist understanding as a rare or special quality, and (re)constructed as a capital that can be fostered in any child, through 'the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains and bodies of children in their families and relationships and in their communities' (Masten, 2001, 235).

An ecological model constituting factors of resilience, and similarly 'character' and wellbeing, is—as we have illustrated earlier—notable in its absence in policy constructions in deference to individual attributes, such as 'the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, behaviours and interactions with others' (WHO, 2013a, 2013b, 7). Failure to contextualise, define and theorise resilience for those tasked with implementing policy, ensures that the deep-rooted social, health, educational and economic inequalities are then manifested in policies that claim to be addressing the issue. It has been argued that the construction of mental health as an individual one risks shifting the focus of causal mechanisms away from the state and structural forces, and on to the individual learner (Burman, 2018; Brown & Carr, 2019). While the social constituents of resilience are neglected there is something of an irony in that the responsibility to instil this in children has been placed firmly upon the shoulders of schools and communities. In so doing, 'the social world (or at least the one in which it is possible to act) is shrunken to the arena of relationships with the family, the school setting, and the neighbourhood' (Henderson & Denny, 2015, p. 8).

The non-governmental organisation policy turn to the social constituents of wellbeing

Notwithstanding the differences in national policy approaches in England and Australia, there is growing recognition for the external barriers to wellbeing, evident within international policy guidance. For example, the WHO (2012) report, *Social Determinants of Health and Well-being among Young People,* focused upon the circumstances in which young people live, such as 'access to health care, schools and leisure opportunities, [as well as children's] homes, communities' towns and cities' (p. xvii) as well as the population level indicators, such as 'social status, gender, age and ethnicity' (ibid.). Such acknowledgement for the limits to individual effort *alone* in the pursuit of wellbeing, have led to a broader definition in recent iterations of the WHO, with the appendage to the above account that:

> With respect to children, an emphasis is placed on the developmental aspects, for instance, having a positive sense of identity, the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, as well as to

build social relationships, and the aptitude to learn and to acquire an education, ultimately enabling their full active participation in society. (WHO, 2013b, p. 6)

Implicit within this definition is a diagnosis of (poor) wellbeing as the fragmentation of the child from her/his community, both in terms of a sense of identification with, and well as participation within it. This is an indicative example of the types of policy concern that have been explained by policy critics as evidence for the fundamental decline of the social as a consequence of a globalised capitalist modernity, and the revised state contact that decentres the autonomy of localised forms of participation and governance (Donati & Archer, 2015; White, 2017). This fragmentation of the self from society is apparent within the framing of wellbeing discourses as a fundamentally individual concern. According to White (2017) this is evident within the three distinct approaches to wellbeing in policy—comprehensive wellbeing (CWB), subjective wellbeing (SWB) and personal wellbeing (PWB):

> The first, 'comprehensive', approach, directs attention to a broad range of 'quality of life' factors, questioning the primacy often given to income or economic growth. The second, subjective wellbeing (SWB), uses measures of individual happiness or satisfaction to evaluate a policy or political project. The third, 'personal wellbeing', aims to get individuals to take action to promote their own health and happiness. (p. 124)

While each of these perspectives acknowledges the importance of relationships, White (2017) identifies that this is only insofar as they relate to individual goods—in being viewed as either a mediator of (SWB), a channel through which to achieve (CWB), or a component of (PWB) individual wellbeing (p. 128). By way of an alternative, White (2017) proposes a relational wellbeing approach (RWB) driven by fundamentally relational ontology. From such a perspective wellbeing is seen as a 'relational good', meaning the outcomes that benefit the relationship itself, as opposed to particular parties within it. There are a number of core propositions to RWB that when extrapolated to the wellbeing of school children, can be seen to firmly emplace children within—as opposed to dislocate children from—their local context. First, the impact of social structure is acknowledged, which points to the role of the state (or other powerful actors) in providing the underlying framework in order to promote purposeful social interaction that leads to relational goods. This marks a key point of departure from the more individualistic approaches (e.g. the WHO, 2013a, 2013b example above) which emphasise capability building in the *child* as the route to wellbeing. Secondly, the local community are foregrounded as a key beneficiary of, and therefore conduit for, the mobilisation of relational goods. This leads to the third proposition, that of varying interest, opinion and hence the importance of socially democratic engagement and dialogue in the interests of common ground and mutual interest. Fourthly, 'policies need to re-build social relationships and deepen social recognition' (p. 132). In this sense a relational connectedness between communities is conceptualised as a form of wellbeing in its own right, as opposed to a social capital channel for accruing individual wellbeing. Finally, this approach is tethered to a view of wellbeing as an ethical-political project of social justice and inclusion, where identification and belonging is part and parcel of appreciating the dynamics of power distribution and inequality that shape local through to global affairs.

Key parallels and points of departure in wellbeing policy

In summary, this policy review has highlighted a marked shift in schools' role in children's mental health, from a pathogenic to a 'salutogenic approach' (Weare, 2010). This is reflected in a linguistic and conceptual turn towards promoting children's wellbeing (see Figure 1). In both England and Australia, wellbeing is understood loosely and in narrow terms as a primarily health and behavioural issue. In England the emphasis is upon the link to physical health, such as staying active, getting enough sleep and good nutrition (Hinds, DfE, 2019a). In Australia it is on avoiding risky behaviours and is more squarely orientated towards compliant behaviours in terms of school, attendance and achievement in learning objectives (Department of Education Queensland, 2018). This is reflected in the joint health and educational ministerial approach in England (DoHSC/DfE, 2017) and separate policy approach in Australia (Australian Government, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b). The English policy conception of wellbeing also emphasises compliance, but it is here understood as the individual child's control and regulation of their emotions. In both Australia and England, schools' role in promoting child wellbeing is operationalised through a curricula and educational programme focus on building children's resilience, as well as 'character' in England. Both nations have developed a dedicated health curriculum in which to achieve these objectives, as well as relationships and sex education in England. In so doing there is a subtle shift in the conceptualisation of wellbeing away from being a primarily health-related issue, to that of an educational problem. This is reflected in the construction of resilience as an individual competency in terms of coping skills, and perseverance in learning and engagement in school. In England this is complemented with a moralistic perspective on building 'virtues'. This is in contrast with the construction of wellbeing advanced in the policies of international non-governmental organisations (WHO, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; UN, 2019) who acknowledge the economic, social and identity constituents of wellbeing.

We argue in this paper that the inclusion of 'a positive sense of identity' within the conceptual framework of international organisations is a significant step forward in acknowledging an alternative pathway by which society in general, and schooling in particular, can approach mental health promotion. However, as we have illustrated, national education policy agendas have yet to embrace this turn, in formulating educational strategy that remains rooted to an individualistic and performative rhetoric of mental health and wellbeing. Underpinning the conflation is a deeper question as to what the purpose of education ought to be. Within the philosophical tradition is the view that schools have a responsibility to a whole-child focus, with respect to a generalised flourishing of children's lives. While there is deep division as to whether this is best achieved through sculpting children's virtues (e.g. Kristjánsson, 2015) or through harnessing their political imagination (Bottici & Challand, 2012; Suissa, 2015) both perspectives see the development of children's values as central to the schools' role, the former being morals-based and the latter ethics-based. In arguing that schooling should take an ethics-based approach to supporting children's flourishing, Cigman (2012) makes a useful delineation between what she calls the 'enhancement agenda' of positive psychology, which she argues bifurcates between knowledge and wellbeing, and on the other hand, what she terms 'knowledge advocates' (p. 458)
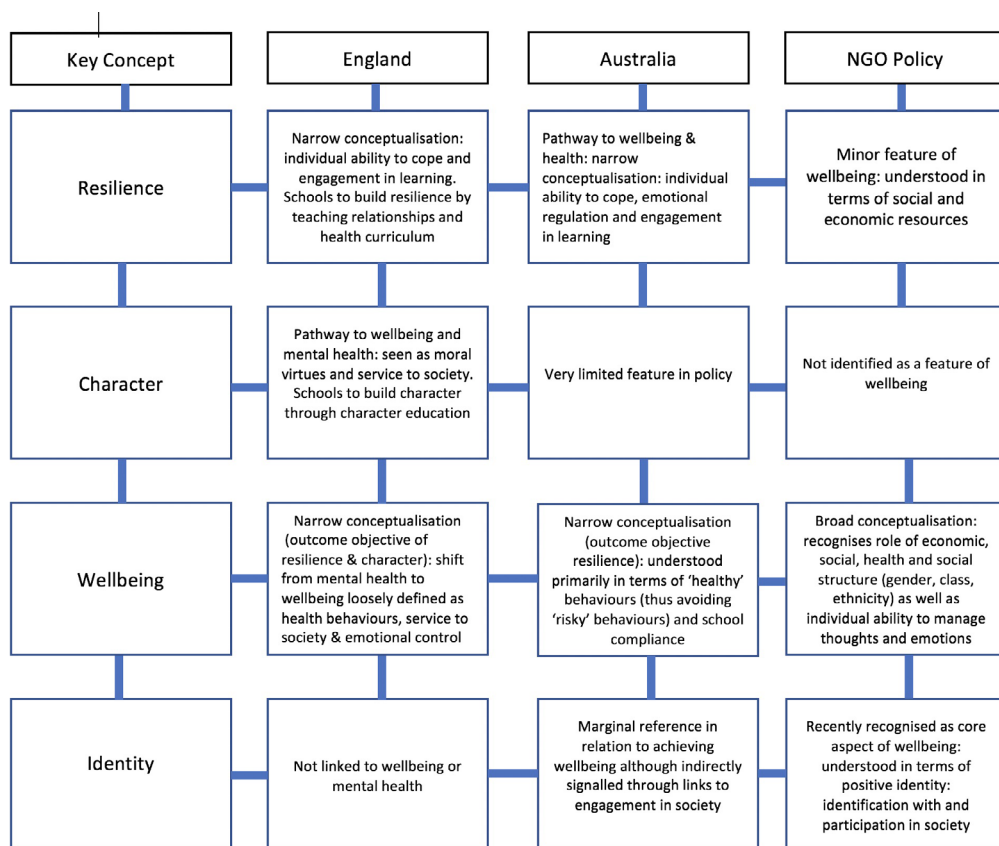
Key Concept	England	Australia	NGO Policy
Resilience	Narrow conceptualisation: individual ability to cope and engagement in learning. Schools to build resilience by teaching relationships and health curriculum	Pathway to wellbeing & health: narrow conceptualisation: individual ability to cope, emotional regulation and engagement in learning	Minor feature of wellbeing: understood in terms of social and economic resources
Character	Pathway to wellbeing and mental health: seen as moral virtues and service to society. Schools to build character through character education	Very limited feature in policy	Not identified as a feature of wellbeing
Wellbeing	Narrow conceptualisation (outcome objective of resilience & character): shift from mental health to wellbeing loosely defined as health behaviours, service to society & emotional control	Narrow conceptualisation (outcome objective resilience): understood primarily in terms of 'healthy' behaviours (thus avoiding 'risky' behaviours) and school compliance	Broad conceptualisation: recognises role of economic, social, health and social structure (gender, class, ethnicity) as well as individual ability to manage thoughts and emotions
Identity	Not linked to wellbeing or mental health	Marginal reference in relation to achieving wellbeing although indirectly signalled through links to engagement in society	Recently recognised as core aspect of wellbeing: understood in terms of positive identity: identification with and participation in society

Figure 1.   Educational policy on schools' role in mental health promotion: key concepts

who understand knowledge and wellbeing as being inextricably tied. In building a compelling case for the legitimacy of intrinsically valuable knowledge (evident in the latter assumption), Cigman gives the example of 'mastery' in learning, which incites wellbeing both through the *process* of 'gradual acquisition of knowledge and skill' (p. 461) that invokes for example 'patience, self-discipline and resilience' (ibid.) but also in its *outcomes*, such as the 'pleasurably and satisfying' (ibid.) rewards, including 'self-respect' (ibid.) and a sense of fulfilment. Following White (2017) and Cigman (2012) we revoke an 'enhancement' perspective that reveres wellbeing promotion as the discrete and primary role of schooling, and align with an ethics-based perspective of education, that sees children's flourishing to be concordant with broader disciplinary learning, a sense of fulfilment in life and participation within society. However, given the broad scope of the objectives to which wellbeing serves and the contextual foundations upon which it is pursued, we warn against a prescriptive account of wellbeing in favour of one that is open to interpretation by the communities that schools serve. In so doing we argue that the foundation for any bottom-up approach to wellbeing promotion starts in researching the conceptualisations held by school students themselves.

In the following, we will consider the empirical evidence for schools' current 'resilience' orientated mental health promotion strategy and its impact on school children's perspectives on their own wellbeing. We will provide examples using empirical data from two separate studies in England and Australia to build an evidence-based argument for a shift to the affirming of social identities through RWB, as an alternative to character and resilience in policy and practice, in improving mental health of children and young people in school settings. This evidence demonstrates that as the key stakeholders in schools' mental health and wellbeing strategy, school children's own narratives of wellbeing fit far better with a RWB conception (White, 2017) then they do with the 'resilience' narrative of that they perceive schools to project.

The empirical case for reconsidering 'resilience' as a route to wellbeing

This section draws upon findings from a small study in south-west England. The study aimed to elicit how good mental health was perceived by students aged 12–14 across seven secondary education schools identified for intensive mental health promotion activities in one local authority. The schools were situated within small towns dispersed evenly across a largely rural county and serving mixed populations including a significant number from areas of socio-economic deprivation. In the first phase the researchers delivered a short presentation to students across the year groups eight (aged 12–13) and nine (aged 13–14) in each school. The presentation served two key purposes. First, to invite students to take and share with the project team images representing good mental health (and key mental health terms, i.e. resilience, character, and wellbeing). Students were advised that these images would then be hosted on the publicly available online image sharing social media platform Instagram, on a dedicated project page. Students were given the option to send images either by emailing them directly to the first author (Brown) or through using the file-sharing application WhatsApp to the designated project mobile phone. The advantage of using this platform was that it was anonymous, secure, and once researchers had confirmed with participants (via a response message) that they were happy for their images to be shared, the sending mobile phone number could be immediately deleted. Students were reassured that Brown had exclusive administrative rights over the mobile/web platform and could therefore vet (and if necessary edit) the images that were received. They were advised that any photographed images that contained people would be digitally edited in order to make identification impossible. Secondly, students were invited to participate in a focus-group hosted at the school, whereby the researchers would use the images generated through the mobile/web platform in order to stimulate guided group discussions as to what good mental health (and the associated policy terms) meant to young people. Participation in the first phase of the study was not a requisite for participation in the second and vice versa.

Our gatekeeper at each school was the mental health lead who was our contact in co-ordinating the focus groups. These staff members disseminated and collected signed informed- information/consent forms with students and parents, as a condition of participation. Both researchers then returned to each school some weeks later in order to carry out a focus-group session. In guiding the discussion 36 images generated by the study were printed and displayed around the table. Students were invited

to select any image in order to expand on their accounts of how they understood key mental health terms. Following a general discussion of what the young people understood of mental health, students were prompted to consider specific mental health terms. While students were less familiar with the terms 'thriving' and 'character', there were only two children who had no conceptualisation of 'resilience' and only three who had not heard of 'wellbeing'. With the help of school staff, we were able to include all young people in the study who volunteered to participate, within group sizes determined by teachers as those optimal to stimulate engagement. In total, eight focus groups were carried out with 65 young people, consisting of mixed sex groupings of between 3 and 10 students. Data was analysed using a 'code and retrieve' approach to identify common themes, collect examples of data excerpts in order to identify patterns within the data (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). The first two transcripts were coded independently by two researchers [including Brown] differences in coding were then discussed and a consensus on the coding frame was agreed upon. Textual excerpts were then placed into separate word documents according to identified codes.

While the study findings on 'resilience' have been reported elsewhere, here the focus is to discuss two of the key policy concepts discussed—wellbeing and resilience —and how they relate to each other in students' perspectives.

Young peoples' understandings of wellbeing

There were a number of dimensions to wellbeing that young people perceived to achieve varying levels of attention according to the school's mental health strategy. While there were no discernible patterns in children's responses (e.g. by age or gender) it was notable that five aspects were raised across seven of the eight focus groups, and within each of the schools. These were; physical, mental, emotional, social, and self-authenticity (see Figure 2).

Physical wellbeing (physical activity and food choices)

'Physical wellbeing is about your body and like if you're fit' (Sky FG3). This was seen to be promoted by the school as important for children's future wellbeing: 'you've got to be healthy and active when you grow up and you leave school . . . to be active and healthy in life later' (Pink FG2). While other children noted a benefit in the present moment of physical activity: 'You just get caught up in it [football] and it can make you feel happy even when you don't realise it' (Chillies, FG1). Physical wellbeing was also defined by children in terms of food choices: 'eat healthy' (Orange FG3) and 'Healthy wellbeing' (Red, FG3). This narrative squarely fits with the 'health' and wellbeing agenda advocated by Hinds in which pro-healthy behaviours are seen to benefit mental health.

Mental wellbeing (calm mind and balanced thought-processes)

Mental wellbeing was understood in terms of stability or harmony in thoughts or experiences, and was defined in terms of achieving a sense of 'calm' and 'balance';
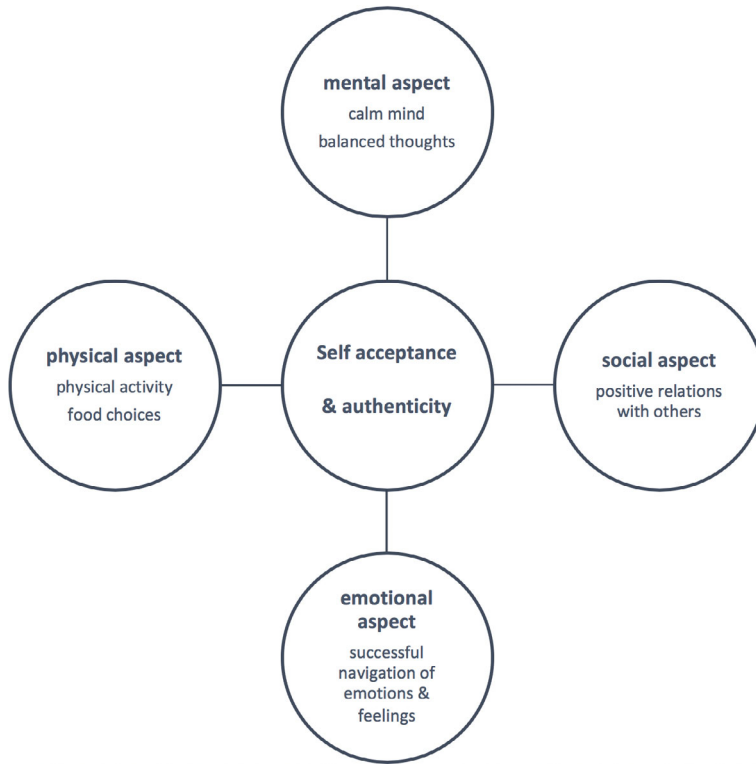
Figure 2.   Model outlining English school students' views on the constituents to wellbeing

> I think that's all about being calm, but [mental] wellbeing is about having a good balance between what's going well and what's not going so well. (Harriet FG5)

> [Mental] Wellbeing might be about trying to keep your mind clear ... kind of like maybe going to your calm place or somewhere that makes you feel calm and just kind of letting it all out and trying to think through each problem and how you can resolve it. (Green FG2)

One child in care understood mental wellbeing as a judgement made by professionals as to what extent they could disclose painful truths:

> Well, mental wellbeing is like how good or how you think your mental wellbeing is, like if it's like at breaking point or if it's like on the mend. I think it sort of means how everyone really thinks what your mental state is,... how stable, and how do they talk to you like, say for example your Dad can't see you this weekend, how would we say that in a way which...you might understand ... We might say he's going on holiday or something like that, because we'd find that easier to accept than just, he isn't going to be there. (James Bond FG4)

These accounts chime with a SWB and PWB emphasis upon how challenges in life are perceived as more centrally constitutive of wellbeing than the presence or absence of those challenges themselves. While for Green and Harriet this conceptualisation afforded a sense of agency in enabling them to (try to) achieve a sense of wellbeing even during times of adversity, the account by James Bond highlights that perceived

strength in one dimension of wellbeing (mental) may ultimately have painful conse-quences and therefore lead to a negative impact on the emotional dimension to well-being.

Emotional wellbeing (successful navigation of emotions and feelings)

The emotional dimension was most frequently raised in terms of positive feelings and emotions: 'I think of wellbeing as kind of you're happy' (Mango Chutney FG6) and 'when you feel good' (Purple FG6). However, it was also seen to apply to moderate emotional states—'not feeling down, being okay' (Max FG2), as well as the ability to navigate negative feelings and experiences—'knowing how to cope with situations' (FG2) and having recourse to emotional support—'So people who are experiencing the same emotions and can help you through' (Violet FG1). Again, this component of wellbeing was aligned with an individual emphasis as explained through PWB and SWB, although as a facilitator for wellbeing the role of social support that Violet advances chimes with a CRB approach.

Social wellbeing (positive relations with others)

On the concept of social wellbeing, however, the individual wellbeing approaches (CRB, SWB, PWB) fell somewhat short of the understanding held by students, which was principally in terms of positive relationships with others such as a 'group of like-minded people' (Violet FG1) or efforts to 'help others' (Red FG1):

> Social wellbeing in my opinion is how you feel with others and so your relations with other people but not just friends as in your family. And like what you think you're going to do in the future I also think is social wellbeing, because it's sort of how you interact with other people. (Sky FG3)

While students' relationships, particularly with friends, peers and family, were seen to be a key resource in generating social wellbeing, they contrasted this with the con-ception of social wellbeing advanced in school, which was more often framed in terms of negative interactions with others and having 'a safe place to go' (Gafonda FG5):

> When social wellbeing gets brought up [in school] it's usually linked to bullying or some-thing, or having zero tolerance towards it all, and how you should be supportive to other people. But it's not. . .about 'This is how you should deal with things' that maybe aren't connected to bullying and stuff'. (Pink FG3)

Here it is notable that while the school narrative echoed a PWB approach in encouraging students to take individual action to tackle bullying, children adhered more to an RWB principal in seeing their wellbeing as defined through their relation-ships with and help towards others in the social group.

Attention to wellbeing in schools' mental health promotion strategies

A consistent finding across seven of the focus groups was that students believed that the social and emotional dimensions of wellbeing were overlooked by schools. This

was seen to be due to schools' disproportionate interest in physical wellbeing, in line with the recent national policy direction:

> I think there isn't much focus on emotional [wellbeing]. There's a sort of focus on social wellbeing but not much…I don't think. There is quite a bit on physical. (Sky, FG3)

Furthermore, students asserted that wellbeing in its different forms was articulated in somewhat simplistic ways and in using didactic schooling methods:

> Sometimes like the only time wellbeing pops up in school is like during assemblies, then in lessons. But anywhere else, nothing. (Unidentified FG5)

> With social wellbeing they just talk about not to bully people and stuff and physical is like eat healthy and all that, and emotional wellbeing is just like be supportive if someone's upset and that's all they ever really say. (Orange FG3)

> There's a lot said about how to support peoples, other peoples' wellbeing but a lot less is said about how to help yourself when it comes to mental wellbeing. (Red FG3)

In delineating their own understanding of wellbeing from those promoted in school, there was one further element of wellbeing that students raised as being important to them, which referred to their individual identity, integrity and sense of self.

Self-acceptance and authenticity

The importance of self-acceptance and authenticity emerged as a common narrative across a number of students' accounts of wellbeing. This had both a cognitive element—'thinking for yourself and who you are rather than worrying about the rest of the world' (Red FG1)—and an emotional dimension: 'just feeling good about yourself' (Sally FG2); 'where you can feel free to be yourself and kind of just explore your own emotions further' (Violet FG1). There was also a contextual element to the opportunity to achieve this aspect of wellbeing, in that it was tightly bound to particular spaces or places where this was possible. Indeed, one third of the images received on the mobile platform included images depicting the natural environment: flowers, plants, trees, sky and water. While it is important to acknowledge that the natural environment was within close proximity of the schools involved (an opportunity not available for many children attending urban schools), it is nevertheless notable that the connection between nature and wellbeing emerged in four of the focus groups and was valued for its sensory stimulation and the opportunity it afforded for each of the other aspects of wellbeing:

> I think nature's a big part of it, because when you get like the fresh air and you get to hear the sound of like the running water in the trees, it kind of makes you feel sort of calm because it's just an open space and it's your space, and there's no-one else, it's not loud, its quiet, so it gives you time to reflect on your different thoughts. (Harriett FG5)

Outside of the natural environment students also cited other spaces as conduits for the achievement of a positive sense of self:

It could be your bedroom, a park, your garden, anywhere that makes you feel comfortable and makes you feel like you. (Green FG2)

Wellbeing, yes I agree with Green, in that the thought of happy places because I probably have about 3 or 4 of them and it is places where I feel at peace with myself. (Blue FG2)

While these accounts support White's (2017) direction towards otherwise overlooked emphasis upon the spatial environment, it is also interesting that young people's accounts of authenticity are seen to be strongest when outside of the socialising settings of the school, or urban environment and hence the importance of a wellbeing agenda that seeks to build an inclusive school and community identity that can support children's need for self-authenticity. These findings indicate that while wellbeing was a term heard in school, students perceived schools' interest with it to be narrowly focused upon the physical and behavioural dimensions, reflecting the dominant policy construction. Notwithstanding this framing it was evidently a concept that resonated positively for students and particularly with respect to those aspects overlooked by schooling (social, emotional and existential). Here students identified various resources, faculties, relationships and contexts by which they were able to achieve wellbeing in these terms. In so doing this discussion has highlighted the construction of wellbeing as simultaneously individual, social, material and spatial. This supports White's (2017) claims that discourse has moved beyond the simple subject-object binary advocated by SWB, CRB and PWB, in revealing the 'subjective, material and relational dimensions of wellbeing…as co-constitutive' (p. 133). Having considered the various ways in which wellbeing is deciphered for children in relation to their mental health, we will now consider to what extent such objectives align with the concept of 'resilience' for the students in this study.

The narrative of resilience promoted in school

While the vast majority of focus-group participants opened a discussion of wellbeing in drawing upon their own understandings of the term, 'resilience' was a term with which students were far more familiar as part of the daily discourse of schooling. This was evident from students' reports that resilience featured in the school motto (one school), or as a key schooling principle (four schools). Indeed, it was a word visible to the researchers on the 'rules' and 'values' posters attached to notice boards on the reception of three schools, in the classroom of one other, and even on the exercise books in one further school. Resilience was also a core theme running through students' PSHE curriculum. Indeed, two of the presentations we delivered were scheduled by school staff as part of the 'resilience week' or topical theme reflecting its core centrality to schools' mental health strategy.

There was a notable consistency in the ways in which students deciphered resilience across each of the schools included in the study. This construction was narrowly aligned with students' performance and attitude in school work: a mind-set fostered by individual effort; 'better yourself', 'try harder', 'don't give up'. The term given to this construction of resilience was 'push on through' (Brown & Dixon, 2020) in ode to children's own accounts of school's framing of the concept:

> They said in the school quite a lot recently, like, try to be resilient. Like, even if you're struggling with, like, work or anything then you have to try and be positive and, like, get through it. (Chillies FG1)

> So I think they use it a bit if you get knocked down it's about getting back up again, so if something's happened to you….you need to keep working so that you can get back to where you were and then you have the ability to push through and be even better. (Purple, FG2)

In reflecting upon the impact of the push-on-through narrative, participants were adamant that when defined in these terms, resilience as an aspiration for children's mental health was unhelpful if not damaging to their mental health, and indeed some distance from the dimensions of wellbeing canvassed earlier:

> Teachers should, like, explore other ways because we have, like, the basic ways of just try-ing to push-on-through it, but just sometimes that's not enough and you need to address the issue or just trying to work with those feelings instead of working against them. (Violet FG1)

> It [when teachers talk about resilience] kind of gives you anxiety and sometimes stress from the amount that they're putting on you, so it's like for your exams they like tell you to revise and keep revising and then if you fail then they just tell you to kind of get back up and work more and revise more. (Purple FG2)

What is notable in students' accounts of schools' framing of resilience is that it fails to signpost the multiple resources and mechanisms by which children may seek to strengthen their wellbeing or support their mental health. In contrast, and indeed in aligning with national policy narratives, good mental health is constructed in broadly individualistic terms and reduced to children's educational achievements and perfor-mance in standardised performance indicators (Brown & Carr, 2019) and their men-tal capacity and aptitude to pursue these ends. While the deleterious effects of a neoliberal agenda of standardised performance indicators upon children's learner identities has been well rehearsed elsewhere (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Booher-Jennings, 2007; Silfer *et al.*, 2016) we argue that this reinforces the observation that children's wellbeing cannot be served in ways that obscure or deflect the importance of chil-dren's sense of belonging and connection with others (White, 2017). This is in line with research conducted within Ireland and Australia, which has highlighted chil-dren's relationships with friends, family and other members of the community as being one of, if not *the* most formative aspect in their conceptualisations of their well-being (Sixsmith *et al.*, 2007; Bourke & Geldens, 2007).

At this juncture we advance an alternate pathway by which children's mental health can be promoted by schools, one that is harmonious with children's own testimonials of wellbeing. In the following section we will review the empirical evidence in the case of Australia, which explores the means and impact by which schools promote 'a posi-tive sense of identity'. In so doing we argue for the affordances offered when identity building and affirming is pursued as a core objective for schools' role in children's mental health.

Our stories, our way—Indigenous youth in Australia on identity, wellbeing and schooling

In a three-year funded empirical study by Shay, the concepts of identity, wellbeing and schooling were investigated for Indigenous young people aged 12–18 in Australia. The sample included six sites from urban, regional and remote communities in the states of Queensland and Western Australia. Indigenous young people as a group experience high levels of social, health and educational disadvantage in Australia (Australian Government, 2020a, 2020b). Steeply rooted in Australia's colonial histories, Indigenous people continue to face systemic barriers resulting in inequalities that are deeply interconnected with historical race-based policies, ongoing institutionalised racism and a lack of policy approaches that enable self-determination and decision making by Indigenous peoples (Shay, 2016).

While access to education and policy goals to improve health and educational outcomes for Indigenous people have vastly improved over the past decade, there remains a distinct lack of scholarship on both Indigenous young people's voices on the central issue of identity and on understanding of how Indigenous young people represent their identities in school settings. The interdisciplinary approach taken in this study was a unique way of understanding the interconnectivity between all of these dimensions in relation to wellbeing. In the face of a history that includes the systematic removal of Indigenous children based on blood quantum (otherwise known as the 'stolen generations') and ongoing political and social authority non-Indigenous people afford themselves in defining who Indigenous peoples are in contemporary Australia (Shay & Wickes, 2017), the research aimed to ask Indigenous young people for their understanding, experiences and perspectives across a ranges of areas where there were glaring gaps in the literature. For example, while there were some existing studies on identity and schooling (Purdie *et al.*, 2000; Kickett-Tucker, 2009), there were no existing studies that did not have a preconceived framework conceptually of how identity was to be positioned by participants.

This (Indigenous-led) research team utilised a range of creative and culturally relevant methods and was underpinned by Indigenist theory by Rigney (2001) that is principally concerned with resistance as the emancipatory imperative: privileging of Indigenous voices and political integrity. Using a variety of creative research methods including drawing, painting, photographs and yarning, data was co-developed with young people (Stuart & Shay, 2018; Shay, 2019). Employing the collaborative yarning methodology (Shay, 2019), young people were invited to share their experiences and perspectives in individual and group settings, and undertake co-analysis with the research team. There was funding to employ local Indigenous peoples in each of the communities to become researchers alongside the research team, ensuring cultural differences were incorporated and that local Indigenous knowledges were available to young people as they explored the concept of identity and its meaning to them. Identity-building workshops were conducted in school. The workshops were grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that centred connectedness and culture in how the workshops were facilitated. This included having discussions about how we are connected as Indigenous peoples and the significance of connection to Country (land), community and kin. This enabled young people with the time, space and

resources to reflect on what identity meant to them, what it means in different contexts and how they represent their identities.

There were various data generated in investigating this issue, all of the data coming directly from Indigenous young people. In total, there were 105 Indigenous young people who participated in the study and six schools. The schools were also partners' in the study and facilitated the research through identifying young people who might have been interested in participating, as well as in providing the physical space and time to facilitate identity workshops. The research team had existing relationships with schools and communities, which enhanced the ability of the research team to undertake the project collaboratively. These existing relationships were connected to the research team's previous roles as teachers or researchers in those communities. To achieve informed consent, the research team worked closely with local Indigenous researchers to share information and gain the agreement to run the project from Elders, parents and community members. This approach reflected the cultural context of Indigenous young people, as Indigenous worldviews are holistic and relational (spoken about in Western literature as social identities) and therefore children's wellbeing is seen to be the responsibility of the whole community, not simply that of parents.

The research team also facilitated sessions prior to commencing the project where young people met with the research team to hear about the project, what was involved and to understand what participation would look like in practice. As the methods were not the standard interview or survey approaches to qualitative research, young people expressed interest in larger numbers than the team anticipated. Of note, all data is qualitative, principally using a method called collaborative yarning (Shay, 2019) where participants would yarn (or talk) through research questions in a nonlinear way and data was collected via story-boards (textual notes from the yarning). These notes were available for young people to see visually and analyse as they were being captured, enabling co-analysis for rigour. Co-analysis was undertaken with young people and with the local Indigenous researchers, to enhance rigour to ensure that local nuances in relation to language and culture were under consideration (Shay, 2019). A qualitative thematic analysis was then undertaken using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. For data to be identified as a theme, codes were required to emerge as a pattern and be present across more than one data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once themes emerged after the data was analysed inductively, these themes were then taken back to local researchers for verification.

The study aimed to answer three research questions: how are cultural identities represented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in diverse school settings?; how do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people describe the implications of this representation for their physical/social/emotional/spiritual wellbeing?; and what perspectives do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people express about successful ways to support the development of resilience in the sense of strong cultural identities within their communities? The data discussed in this section focuses on the first question, how are cultural identities represented by Indigenous young people?

Four key themes emerged from the analysis of data from two workshops, including identity yarning and a drawing activity called 'me maps' (see Figure 3). The theme

included: where you are from (country, connections, family); culture (language, respect for Elders, history, community, dance, art, stories and hunting); physicality (blackness, skin colour, nose) and role models (Jess Mauboy, football players, local people). Underpinning the themes were values that were represented across all four themes. The identified values included respect, succeeding, handshakes and pride.

This data aimed to draw from the voices of young people on how they represent their identities as Indigenous young people. 'Culture' was the broadest theme to emerge; the Indigenous young people discussed many aspects of culture, unique to Indigenous Australian cultures, that reflected how they represent their identities. The theme 'where you are from' described how young people are connected to place, kin (family), community and country. In Indigenous cultures, foundational to identity is where a person belongs; often Indigenous people will introduce themselves in terms of which community they are from—not what they do. This way of relating to identity and to other Indigenous young people came through in the data as highly relevant for Indigenous young people today. The 'physicality' theme referred to the emphases Indigenous young people placed on physical traits in relation to identity. With the issue of race and racism surfacing across every data set, the emergence of physicality (skin colour, nose shape, for example) demonstrated that the Indigenous young people also absorbed racialised ideas and norms about their perception of the physical traits that one should possess in order to identify as being Indigenous. The 'role models' theme emerged as young people identified that Indigenous people who have
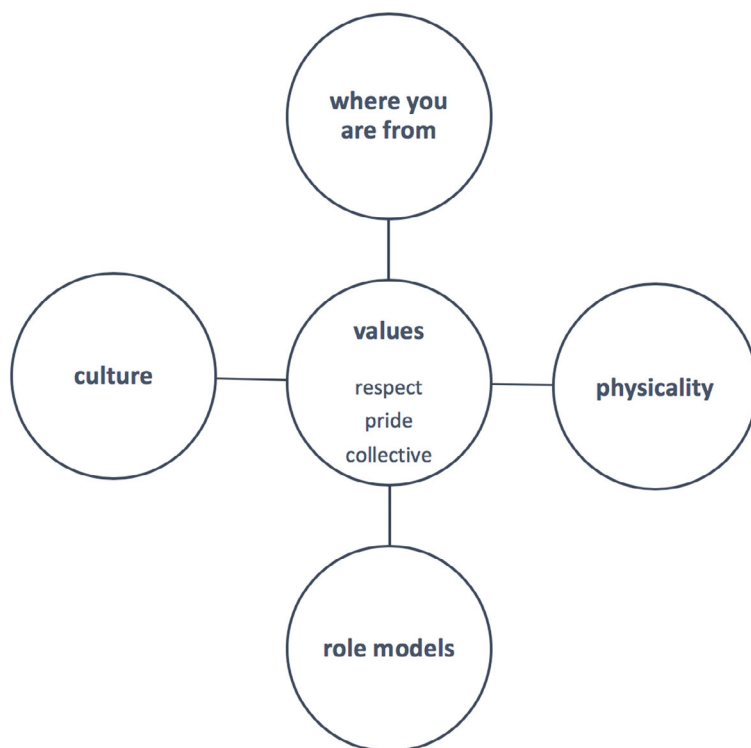

Figure 3.   Indigenous young peoples' representations of identity

achieved in their fields (sport and music were the dominant fields) had a positive impact on their identities as young Indigenous people.

Underpinning all of these themes were values that Indigenous young people described as being representative of their identities as young Indigenous people. These values included key attributes such as being proud, successful and respectful, reported as a cultural norm for many Indigenous young people. The significance of these findings is that in broader social discourses in Australia, these findings would be perceived as being at odds with how Indigenous young people are portrayed in the media, for example as being in trouble, or troubled (Shay *et al.*, 2019). These key values uniting the thematic threads to identity building, highlighted the centrality young people attributed to upholding a self-affirming identity for ontological wellbeing.

The research team was concerned primarily with privileging the voices of Indigenous young people. In a social and political climate that routinely excludes the voices of young people more broadly, the voices of Indigenous young people in Australia are rarely heard. Moreover, even when the voices of Indigenous young people are present, the researchers asked the critical question, are we really listening? (Shay *et al.*, 2019). Indigenous young people expressed their insights frankly and concisely in relation to identity, which was often conflated with issues such as racism. It appeared that while the research team aimed not to impose a particular conceptual lens around identity, young people appeared to describe their identities through both cultural and race-based constructs. One young person said: 'no matter what happens we should all be proud of whatever culture we are, no matter what culture/skin colour. We are all people, our skin colour shouldn't matter', whilst another simply stated: 'I've been told messed up shit about being black'. Others shared their bigger picture aspirations for themselves, and indeed society more broadly, if they were given platforms to be heard and for their identities to be incorporated into their future aspirations: 'well if people just listen to us for once... we can make our own shop, with all the art stuff or Aboriginal kids have grown up in dance and stuff. But the government just [needs to] listen to us. We reckon we'll make a future. We'll go all the way.'

Schools' role in building young people's social identity as a form of relational wellbeing

There are a number of important factors to note in these findings in relation to the empirical argument for focusing on identity building as a curriculum and social approach to wellbeing promotion in schools. First is the opportunity to celebrate the cultural emphasis upon collective values and achievements, where community is viewed as both a shared responsibility and resource. The assimilation policy, which saw thousands of Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families on the basis of skin colour (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2000), continues to have an impact on the identities of many Indigenous peoples. However, despite disastrous policies (such as assimilation) that have impacted on generations of Indigenous people in relation to their identities and connections, there was clear evidence in the data that Indigenous young people have maintained elements of a culture that scientists support is over 65,000 years old and the oldest living culture in the world (Australian Government, 2018a, 2018b).

Secondly, is the ontological value of 'knowing oneself' that serves as an anchor for navigating through life's challenges and a compass to retain a sense of value, even where that is not reflected, and at times at odds with representations constructed by dominant society. In eliciting contemporary representations of social identity and maintenance of values such as pride, respect and succeeding, the Australian data provides evidence of the power of knowing who you are, where you come from, where you belong, and how you are connected. This served as a powerful counter narrative to political and social discourse representing Indigenous young people through policies in Australia such as 'close the gap' that continue to represent Indigenous students as unwell and educationally not on par with their non-Indigenous peers (Fogarty *et al.*, 2018). An emphasis upon relatedness and social connection is in direct contrast with the individualistic focus upon 'character' and 'resilience' decried by the students in England. As a valued aspect of social identity-building for the Indigenous young people in Australia, the dual themes of belonging and heritage aligned with the key constituents of young people's view of wellbeing in England: 'self-acceptance and authenticity' and 'social wellbeing'.

The third claim for identity-building as a pathway to wellbeing is the opportunity to strengthen a schooling identity as part of the local community, and region. Notable from students' accounts in England was that students felt unable to 'be yourself' (Violet, FG1 England) in school and they pointed to places and spaces that were valued as a context in which they felt they could be true to themselves. The affordances of place and space identity as a form of relational wellbeing (White, 2017) are inherently part of Indigenous worldviews and ontologies (Martin, 2012). Therefore, the significance of situating the identity workshops in school was highly symbolic in demarking the school as part of, as opposed to separate from, the Indigenous communities they served. While the young people were the focal stakeholders of the project, it was notable that community members, parents, and Elders who provided support in various ways for the young people to participate in the project, were adamant that identity-building workshops should be a regular part of schooling and not a one-off and tokenistic event, in voicing concern that the positive outcomes achieved on the project wouldn't continue if schools did not commit to it. One local Indigenous researcher explained:

> I found some of the challenges [delivering the project] were not particularly from our Aboriginal community, basically from the school. I think they were confronted that the kids would ask these sort of questions [about identity] and asking why haven't we got Aboriginal studies at school, why we don't do much in community, that sort of stuff. I think that was a challenge and they [the school] didn't want to answer those—teachers didn't want to answer, the school staff. . .

While the data from both community members and school staff were emphatic about the benefits of focusing on identity to enhance wellbeing and learning, it was evident that a challenge will be providing schools with the resources and skillsets to effectively deliver these types of programs. As well as the local researcher from the vignette above, other local researchers and school staff also expressed concern that although the school may have observed the benefits of the project, once the project finished, other things were likely to become a priority above concentrating on identity

as an approach to increasing engagement, wellbeing and learning in the school setting.

Lastly, is the educational case for schools' role in promoting identity as a constituent of relational wellbeing. Indigenous people remain the most 'socio-economically disadvantaged population cohort' in Australia (Gillan *et al.*, 2017, p. 1), despite Indigenous people making up just 3% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The Australian data demonstrated that as a consequence of eliciting and affirming young people's social identities in school, their engagement, motivation, attendance and aptitude to learning was noted by teachers and school leaders to have increased. Local Indigenous researchers and school staff on the project observed notable differences in Indigenous young people's positive interaction with their peers, and in their communities and schools having participated in the project, which they attributed to students' thinking more deeply about their identities. One Deputy Principal stated:

> The benefits I've seen for students participating in the Our Stories, Our Way project, the biggest thing for me on reflection would be pride that they've created something that they're proud of, that represents them and where they come from, that they have confidence to try new things and better things, bigger things so they take the skills they've got now further. For the ones who are really heavily involved [names withheld] their engagement has increased, their attendance has increased, their relationships with staff have improved, they're just buying in more than where they were at the start of the year. They're happier. So that's definitely a benefit. (Deputy Principal, Urban School)

Local Indigenous researchers also discussed the benefits to young people's aspirations of including identity building and affirming activities into schools, with one local researcher stating the project had a 'big impact on our students. They aim high and want more.' Another noticed that 'more young people came out and identified as Indigenous', whilst further adding that a 'strengths based' focus on identity in their school saw a 'sense of self-worth among students. Sense of pride and belonging. Friendships that may not have otherwise connected.'

Although the data presented in the Australian study is representative of a minority group in one part of the world, Indigenous young people, like all young people, are citizens of the world in an increasingly globally connected and technology driven era. What young people described clearly across the data from Australia and England was the need to feel authentic in their self-identities but to also be part of a collective, which was a consistent finding despite the differences across cultures. While for the young people in England their friendships and peer relations were foremost in their social wellbeing, for Indigenous young people in Australia, identity and wellbeing was interconnected with a sense of where you are from and how you are connected (to family, country/land and community). The importance of the natural environment (referred to as country in Aboriginal cultures) was also reflected in the study in England where one third of the images taken by young people—when they were asked to consider what contributes to wellbeing—were images of nature. In a world that is increasingly global and culturally diverse, this data provides important insights from a group of young people who clearly expressed that connectivity (and human and non-human) and relationality remains a fundamental element to their identities as First

Nations young people. In highlighting that while their challenges may be unique to socio-political histories and cultural heritage, there are nonetheless common elements in young peoples' quest for wellbeing and identity that schools can build upon in developing their wellbeing strategy. In the model in Figure 4 we depict the common elements of wellbeing that draw together the findings from England and Australia. Key to the model is the concept of identity as fundamental in uniting the individual and social aspects of wellbeing.

Conclusion: identity building as a pathway to wellbeing in schools' mental health promotion strategy

In this paper we have identified the international policy drive towards the role of schooling in promoting children's mental health. In England and Australia this has translated into policy objectives aimed at promoting children and young people's wellbeing. We have speculated that the substitution of 'mental health' with 'wellbeing' is significant in two key respects. First, it defends a universal focus upon every child, not just those identified with mental health problems, therefore reframing children's social and emotional wellbeing as an educational as opposed to a health issue (Brown & Dixon, 2020). Secondly, as a populist and polemic policy aspiration, few could dispute that schools should be concerned with children's wellbeing, thus co-opting popular and professional assent. While acknowledging the current opaqueness of wellbeing in meaning 'both everything and nothing' (Wright & McLeod, 2015, p. 1), we believe the current looseness in definitional terms provides an opportunity for
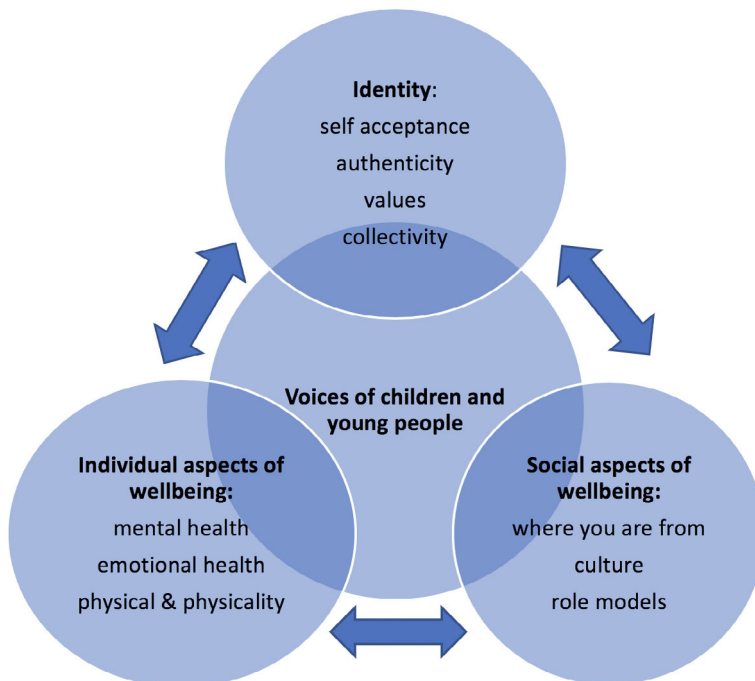

Figure 4.   Model indicating the relationship between identity and wellbeing for young people

the educational community to debate and formulate how best to construe and operationalise this ambition. Both England and Australia have adopted a bottom-up approach in placing the autonomy on schools and municipal authorities in developing wellbeing strategy, there has nevertheless been a demonstrable steer towards 'resilience' and 'character' building as a pathway by which schools' should pursue children's wellbeing.

In conducting a policy analysis of mental health discourse in England and Australia and in consulting the empirical accounts of English schoolchildren, we have argued that resilience narratives have been constructed in individualistic terms that miss the social, emotional and ontological dimensions that students themselves identify as essential to their wellbeing. We have argued for an alternative pathway to the moralistic and atomised focus on resilience and character, one that recognises the collective, relational, and place-based foundation upon which children's wellbeing is built (White, 2017). The advent of COVID-19 has shone a light upon the essential welfare function that schools provide, where the impact of social isolation and distancing measures associated with school closure have forced governments to confront the central role of schooling in children's social and emotional wellbeing. This points to a second-order change that is needed whereby children's health, welfare and education is more squarely integrated and one that cannot be addressed through separate policy agendas. In canvassing a viable alternative, we have presented the case for social identity building as a wellbeing promotion strategy, in using empirical data from a project with Indigenous young people in Australia, whereby schools were involved in hosting and delivering strengths based identity-building workshops, which succeeded in both celebrating and including the Indigenous communities they served, as well as strengthening students' connection to school and learning. This represents but one way in which schools might engage in identity-building activities for young people as a strategy to promote wellbeing. The qualitative studies that we have presented do not profess any level of generalisability, in that despite the parallels we elicited between two cultural contexts, the findings may be quite different for young people who, for example, live in densely urban areas. This does not detract, however, from the central thesis of our claim that wellbeing approaches can start from a place of identity building—in acknowledging that the constituents of both identity and wellbeing may differ according to the communities they serve.

The role of schooling in building children's identities has a long history that can be traced back to Dewey, who saw it as fundamental to children's learning and socialisation as productive citizens (Abdi, 2001). As a cross-disciplinary concept, identity encompasses the many facets including age-related, situational-related, group-related and society-related determinants that have been long argued to contribute to a wellness agenda (Cowen, 1991). When taken from a relational perspective there are also parallels to be drawn with recent moves within the character education tradition to employ schools in the role of purpose development (Hatchimonji *et al.*, 2019) where 'purpose' as a character strength is rendered through the psychological concept as 'a stable and generalizable intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and contributes to the world beyond the self' (Damon *et al.*, 2003, p. 121). Young people's concerted action to connect with and participate in society chimes within a RWB approach to identity notwithstanding that when theorised in

sociological literature identity is construed in less individualistic terms as fluid entities that are not fixed, nor are they complete—in emphasising the social over individual and the interactions with social classifications imposed such as gender, class and race (Stokes *et al.*, 2015). We argue that schools' role in building and affirming young peoples' social identities should be a long-term project, not a one-off event, and involve multiple stakeholders including young people, parents and the communities. We have provided evidence from the Australian data of the benefits to the young people, schools and their communities when such an approach is applied. For the young people engaged in identity-building activities in schools, the collaborative emphasis on identity correlated with collective gains for schools and communities, in leading to strengthened relationships and engagement for all stakeholders. While conceptual lenses differ across the literature there is increasing evidence to suggest that young people who self-report a strong sense of their identities and self-perceptions are more likely to experience mental health and wellbeing (Reese *et al.*, 2017; Legette, 2018).

While there is a way to go in fleshing out what schools' role identity-building might look like, we argue it is a profitable line of enquiry if underpinned by the principles of a relational wellbeing approach (White, 2017), which correlates with Indigenous worldviews that are grounded in relationality, connection to country and community (Martin, 2012). This follows the construct of social-identity as a form of relational wellbeing, where social identity is understood to be 'relational good', and all those involved in the relationship (learners, teachers, parents, community) are seen as stakeholders.

In following a RWB ontology, we adapt White's (2017) framework to elicit the following key principles to guide schools' wellbeing strategy:

- A stalwart recognition that societal structures provide the underlying frameworks upon which wellbeing and identity are constructed, and as such the responsibility for both must not be redirected from the collective to the individual.
- The local community are foregrounded as a key beneficiary of, and therefore conduit for, the mobilisation of relational goods (understood as the resources and opportunities for identity building).
- An understanding that socially democratic engagement and dialogue underpin the pursuit of common ground and mutual interest in children's wellbeing. This includes recognition for how existing social and cultural identity forms reflect power inequalities at the level of both community and society. Accordingly, the aspiration to identify commonalities across social and cultural identity forms should be balanced against a celebration of cultural diversity, especially for those that have been historically subordinated.
- A recognition that schooling strategy must be situated within a policy emphasis on building social relationships and deepening social recognition between schools and the community.
- The positive social and learner identities of students, teachers and communities are seen both as an essential component of learning and wellbeing, as well as being a valued end in their own right.
- Social identity is conceptualised from a strengths-based approach, which 'creates conditions that enable people to identify, value and mobilise their strengths and

capacities in the process of change' (McCashen, 2005, p. 9). This recognises the impact of *power with* rather than *power over* as a vehicle for addressing systemic issues often located in institutionalised settings such as schools.

- Finally, where identity building is conceived of as an ethical-political project of social justice and inclusion, where identification and belonging is construed across the local, national and international levels.

While by no means foregrounded in recent guidance, identity has nonetheless been signalled as a constituent of wellbeing in Australian educational policy (for example, COAG, 2015, p. 23; Australian Government, 2019a, pp. 14, 17). We recognise the need for further research to inform the development of evidence-based identity affirming and development programmes, in order to support schools to embed such an approach. However, we argue that the data presented in this paper shows promise for the wellbeing gains afforded through a shift from the current policy mental health narrative of 'push on through' (Brown & Dixon, 2020) to the more empowering schooling aspiration, 'know yourself'. Recent global events such as Brexit, the devastating Australian wildfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have served to simultaneously dislocate children from their schooling, cultural and social communities, while underscoring the importance of schools as key actors in children's as well as communities' welfare. We believe there has never been a more apposite moment to pursue schools' role in identity-building as an educational, civic and ethical project in pursuit of children's wellbeing.

Data Availability Statement

Contact authors for a summary of the data reported in the paper.

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1 As the flagship programme produced by the Positive Psychology Centre, University of Pennsylvania, the PENN resilience programme and PERMA Workshops are training programmes orientated to build resilience wellbeing and optimism. They have since been adapted for use within primary and secondary schooling and were included as 2 of only 22 programmes reviewed for their effectiveness in supporting children's social and emotional learning by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), UK.

2 The World Health Organisation definition of mental health is the first hit raised by the search engine Google. It is included in a suite of English policy documents and the Wikipedia (UK https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_health). It is also cited by some of the major third sector stakeholders in mental health including MIND (https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/what-is-mental-health-and-mental-wellbeing/#.XO0qo4rTVhE) and Medical News Today (https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/154543.php).

3 The promotion of 'character' in schools was listed as number two in '8 Teaching Ideas to Bin in 2016', by the popular schools blog @TeacherToolkit: https://www.teachertoolkit.co.uk/2015/12/30/teaching-ideas-2016/.

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