CHAPTER 14

Mental Health: Social and Emotional Dimensions

This chapter explores social and emotional dimensions of wellbeing (mental health) and their development through Health and Physical Education (HPE). Hence, it sits within Whole child development; and Community partnerships (strengths-based) elements of quality physical education (cf. Figure 1.2). Reiterating, Robbins et al. identify seven dimensions of wellness: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental, and occupational. Additionally, they reinforce "there is a strong interconnection amongst these dimensions", and a strong link between spirituality and one's self-esteem (relating to one's social and emotional development) (2011, p. 9). Hence, as established in the literature in the previous chapter (Ch. 13), the social and emotional dimensions of wellbeing (also referred to as mental health) are very closely related to the spiritual dimension. Another common thread is the feeling of 'belonging', a recurring theme throughout this book which relates to 'connectedness' (NSW Department for Education and Communities, 2015). The concepts of relationships, self, community and culture are consistently presented across the dimensions of wellbeing; therefore the findings in the previous chapter are also relevant within the focus for this chapter—social and emotional dimensions (also referred to as mental health).

Research and literature have over a long period of time found there are social and emotional benefits that result from participating regularly

T. Lynch, *Physical Education and Wellbeing*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-72874-7_14

in physical activities, for example physical activity has been consistently shown to lessen symptoms of clinical depression (Calfas & Taylor, 1994; Chekroud et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 1985). The largest study of this kind was conducted in the US involving 1.2 million participants. The findings suggest that "regular physical activity lasting 45 minutes three to five times a week can reduce poor mental health" (BBC News, 2018). Hence, "Poor mental health is a major risk factor for poor physical health and vice versa" (Australian Health Policy Collaboration, 2018). Other mental health benefits include better stress management (American Heart Association, 2019; British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2018; Chiras, 1991; Robbins et al., 2011), having fun, relationships, self-esteem and self-efficacy, enhancement and building of personal and social skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork and cooperation (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2018; Shilton, 1997).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) supports having wellbeing as the platform for maths, reading and writing recovery curriculum adopted by the UK maintained case study school and the British School Overseas (BSO) case study school: physical needs, safety, belonging and love, feeling good about yourself, desire to learn, artistic and creative, and reaching your potential. Similar to spirituality, connections can be made with universal competencies [Learning Values] (attitudes, values and skills) (OECD, 2021). Lynch (2022) argues Learning Values/competencies need to be enacted across three key curriculum pillars: Community (belonging and partnerships), Metacognition (thinking about learning) and Values (global citizenship) (Fig. 10.1; cf. p. 155). Mental health (social and emotional dimensions) is underpinned by Community (belonging and partnerships - collaboration and cooperation, respect, responsibility and trust) and Values (global citizenship—reflection, respect, empathy and persistence).

Research findings suggest such Learning Values/competencies impact on wellbeing; specifically, Respect (cf. p. 146); the valuing of self and others, and all living things. Movements such as Moral Education, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) (cf. p. 205) and Character Education advocate for children being supported to respect themselves and other children, especially from different backgrounds and cultures (OECD, 2021, p. 58). Also, taking Responsibility is an important factor in developing a global interconnectedness, often referred to in schools as global citizenship. (OECD, 2021, p. 64). Furthermore, Empathy involves

cognitive skills as well as social and emotional skills (OECD, 2020); Self-regulation and Persistence (resilience) are both associated with increased self-esteem and a decrease in depression and anxiety (cf. p. 148). Learner self-regard measures a learner's overall view of self-efficacy for academic achievement - it is the child's deep confidence and feelings that they can achieve success. Zimmerman (2000, p. 83) defines beliefs about self-efficacy as "personal judgements of one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action to attain designated goals".

In educational contexts and as detailed in Chapter 10 (OECD, 2021); "It is widely recognised that a child's emotional health and wellbeing influences their cognitive development and learning, as well as their physical and social health, and their mental wellbeing in adulthood" (Public Health England, 2015, p. 4). Physical activity creates a friendly school climate where students are less aggressive and experience fewer discipline problems (Public Health England, 2014; Queensland Government, 2003); reducing the likelihood of students being involved in anti-social behaviour (Clea et al., 2002; Kerr, 1996; Public Health England, 2014; Stead & Neville, 2010; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008) and decrease the levels of vandalism, mischief, petty crime and negative behavior (Norrie & Mustard, 1999).

This directly relates to students' sense of belonging within school; how much students feel respected, accepted and supported by the school community (Pedler, 2018). "Sense of belonging has been shown to be an important schooling outcome in its own right, and for some students, is indicative of educational success and long-term health and well-being" (ACER, 2018, p. 12; OECD, 2004, 2021). Research evidences that students from Australian metropolitan schools have significantly greater sense of belonging than students from provincial schools and remote schools (p. iii https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=ozpisa

A longitudinal study conducted in Finland found that teachers play a pertinent role in nurturing students' sense of belonging. More so, if a student considers their teacher to be caring and accepting (Learning Values role model), they're more likely to adopt the teacher's academic and social value. Approaches to teaching that foster belonging include:

- prioritising high-quality teacher-student relationships
- creating a supportive and caring learning environment
- offering emotional support to students

- being sensitive to students' needs and emotions
- showing interest in students
- trying to understand students' point of view
- respectful and fair treatment
- fostering positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates to establish a sense of community
- positive classroom management (Ulmanen et al., 2016).

Other significant approaches include giving students a voice, working with community partners to meet students' needs, student participation in extracurricular activities, and developing a culture of high standards and behaviours across the whole school (NSW Department for Education and Communities, 2015). Hence, "prioritising belonging within school culture is essential. If done effectively, educators can support students' emotional and social development and enhance their motivation, effort and achievement" (Pedler, 2018).

Numerous researchers and educators around the world advise that SEL, which is embedded in the HPE curriculum and wellbeing (directly related to Learning Values), should be addressed as an essential aspect of children's formal education from the beginning of school, as it provides a strong foundation for healthy development.

> SEL is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. Research has shown that SEL is fundamental to children's social and emotional development - their health, ethical development, citizenship, academic learning, and motivation to achieve. Social and emotional education is a unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based programming that focuses on positive youth development, health promotion, prevention of problem behaviors, and student engagement in learning. (Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, 2005, p. 73)

HPE's aim is to enable students to "access, evaluate and synthesise information to take positive action to protect, enhance and advocate for their own and others' health, wellbeing, safety and physical activity participation across their lifespan" (ACARA, 2019). Hence, research suggests that schools play a central role in fostering children's social and emotional competence (Bahman & Maffini, 2008; Daunic et al., 2013; Durlak et al.,

2011; Roffey, 2011) and therefore, children's sense of belonging within the physical dimension plays a key role (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014; Public Health England, 2014). In addition, an integrated approach to learning is advocated (Australian Health Policy Collaboration, 2018; Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, 2005).

This chapter investigates the social and emotional dimensions of well-being and how they are enhanced through H/PE in schools. This is done using a specific focus on children's sense of belonging through health promotion and student engagement, specifically:

1. a supportive and caring learning environment;
2. teachers being sensitive to students needs and emotions;
3. fostering positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates to establish a sense of community;

Findings & Discussion

As established using the data in Chapter 13 (spiritual dimension), when the physical activity strand was of quality implementation (QPE): the HPE teacher was knowledgeable; acted as director and facilitator; peer-relations were empathetic, accepting and encouraging which enabled the children to truly belong and feel appreciated within the community of the school. This was supported by the 376 school principal participants' perceptions of how QPE in Government primary [elementary] schools is implemented. Specifically relevant to 'sense of belonging'; 215 of the total 637 mentions (representing 33.75%) related to fostering positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates to establish a sense of community. Again, 142 mentions (22.3% of total mentions) were in relation to teachers being sensitive to students needs and emotions; 43 mentions (representing 6.75%) were in relation to a supportive and caring learning environment and working with community partners; 60 mentions (representing 9.4%) were in relation to student engagement; and 177 mentions (representing 27.8%) were in relation to health promotion. Hence, this was consistent with the literature; concepts of relationships, self, community and culture, underpinned by 'belonging'.

This data is supported by research and literature relating to children's social and emotional development; "Sense of belonging has been shown to be an important schooling outcome in its own right, and for some

students, it is indicative of educational success and long-term health and well-being" (OECD, 2004). Students' sense of belonging within school is described as the degree students feel respected, accepted and supported by teachers and peers (Pedler, 2018).

Within small schools (less than 100 children) many Principals stated that it was not possible or financially viable to have HPE specialists due to their rural, regional or remote location and/or their size (funding available). This corresponds with the research evidence that students from Australian metropolitan schools [who often have HPE specialists and regular lessons] have significantly greater sense of belonging than students from provincial schools and remote schools (ACER, 2018, p. iii). The ITE lecturer prioritised a sense of belonging in PE when she defined physical literacy as a concept; "regardless of what your endowment… we want individuals to have motivation, confidence, competence, and knowledge and understanding". This was also evident across the three case study schools but more so in case study two school.

Case Study Two school had a knowledgeable and qualified HPE specialist teacher who was also a qualified, caring and accepting classroom teacher. This was identified by lecturers as a strength of the UK 'outstanding' Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme—that the graduating teachers offered something special to the community. They described the unique course as filling a gap, offering something to the school community and culture that is needed; "they're not going to be PE teachers, they are primary school teachers with a specialism in Physical Education". Someone with the subject and pedagogy knowledge knows the children and can give feedback to teachers and parents. This was also noted as an important feature of the Singapore education system (cf. Chapter 9). Furthermore, data indicated that 83.2% of principals believed a course that qualifies teachers to be generalist classroom teachers and HPE specialists would be or would probably be valuable—only 2.4% of principals indicated that it would not be valuable. There were 637 mentions (made by the 376 principal participants) of key attributes of a good HPE teacher which directly related to children's social and emotional development. In particular, being a good classroom teacher was advocated 73 times (11.5%).

Interestingly, the ITE lecturer raised the pertinent issue of teacher's social and emotional wellbeing. The lecturer shared that many Headteachers would "go for someone who was secondary trained [PE] and hope they could adjust". She believed that not everyone is able to do this

and "find it really really hard". She shared that the key for her was being a parent and having her own children to learn from. However, she believes that the primary school "is where the real work is being done" and that the priority should be "the other way around, you start as a primary specialist and build up". This was supported by Andrew (pseudonym), a secondary trained PE teacher who teaches PE in the primary school. He recommended teachers of PE in primary school go down the primary route; "if you are interested in working with primary school children, I would go down the primary teaching degree route", however Andrew, David (pseudonym) and Angela (pseudonym) acknowledged that such courses were rare. Angela has heard of primary teachers with specialist PE and thought that such a course "would be brilliant" but added "there is very few in the UK".

Preparation for PE in the primary school within the UK was highlighted as a major flaw. Andrew explained that he felt "Nowhere near enough [prepared], purely trial by error and no-one helped other than your PE department, to get ideas off". Andrew shared that his knowledge was limited for primary PE; "At that point I had zero. I didn't know how to talk to the children and I didn't know what level they should be at or what they could do and what they couldn't do". Andrew suggested that this is common practice in international schools and his interest and strength now in teaching primary PE has also come from having his own children. Angela shared that in terms of being prepared to teach primary PE, she relied on her experiences as a sports coach, as in her GTP "in terms of primary—there was nothing. It was a secondary PE course" and she chose secondary over primary "because that is all I could train in". She shared that for this reason she lacked confidence and preferred to teach from Year 5:

> Sometimes when they are younger than Year 5 it is more difficult to get your ideas across, than when they get older. Because I don't have a PE degree, I can struggle with the more academic side of things, because I didn't learn that, I came from a coaching background rather than a PE teaching background.

The data generated suggested that a Whole School Curriculum Program (WSCP) for HPE increases the likelihood of quality experiences for the children in schools by increasing the rate of developmentally appropriate activities. In case study two school, QPE was directly

connected to the implementation of a WSCP for PE and a whole school PE behaviour management policy. Having developmentally appropriate curriculum through the WSCP was supported by the ITE lecturer who spoke about the importance of children learning fundamental movement skills early, "giving them the competence, if they've got the competence then they become more confident, they become more motivated and the whole thing begins to spiral". The behaviour management policy in case study two school comprised of four rules which represented approaches to teaching that foster belonging (Ulmanen et al., 2016):

A. Every student must wear a hat for HPE physical activity lessons - sunscreen was encouraged (safety—a supportive and caring learning environment)
B. When the whistle is blown it signals for all children to 'stop, look and listen' (mutual respect)
C. Only touch the sports equipment when instructed to do so (mutual respect)
D. Be kind to others (teachers being sensitive to students needs and emotions)

In case study two school, mention was given to the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework as promoted by global policy and the three focus areas within the framework: the school environment; the curriculum; and community partnerships (cf. p. 101). The HPS framework was also evident in the UK ITE programme—an ITE strength identified was intricate connections with schools in the local community. Within the course there were a number of partners who contributed to the learning environment including local and international primary schools, and community groups. Working with community partners enhanced the ITE students' and the primary children's learning. As the lecturer explained; "We are quite unique I think in that within the faculty we work with children in eight of our nine modules. I know other subjects never work with children at all, so our PE students often say to us 'we're really lucky because we get lots of opportunities to work with children'". Also, relationships among the ITE students were also described as a strength, "the fact that the lecturers know the students, they are not just faces" and "offer a motherly or fatherly overview of their progress". Furthermore, the ITE programme was similar to case study two school

where relations with local schools enabled access to facilities. The PE subject leader explained, "what we're really short of is our outdoor space, so in a way that's why our relationship with our partner schools is so important".

In the US questionnaire data, the Associate Professor advocated HPE leadership in school communities as evident in case study two school. He described the HPE teacher as being "positioned to be the school leader/community leader in 'healthy, active living' and not only be the lead teacher for this coordinated curricular effort, but also as an 'adviser', 'collaborator', and 'advocate/promoter' of everything that contributes the lifestyle development".

As previously mentioned the curriculum in case study two school was developmentally appropriate and enabled a range of skills and strategies to be developed through meaningful experiences. Hence, the curriculum was well-designed and implemented which both teachers and students believed to be important, beneficial and enjoyable—developing a culture of high standards and behaviours across the whole school (NSW Department for Education and Communities, 2015). HPE communication was a strength of the school; teachers knew and could share what aspects of the HPE curriculum they were responsible for and this was led passionately by the HPE specialist teacher. The students were given a voice, organising and coordinating school lunchtime netball and touch football events and sharing their insights for the purpose of this research (NSW Department for Education and Communities, 2015). The school environment included sufficient equipment and inadequate space was overcome by genuine, long-term community partnerships. These factors contributed to all the approaches to teaching that foster belonging identified by Ulmanen, Soini, Pietarinen and Pyhältö (2016).

Social and emotional benefits were identified by the children in the case study schools. Specifically social benefits were discussed by one boy who stated he preferred team sports to individual: "It's better than individual, because like, if you like, if you make a mistake or something, there are people to help you out and stuff". Another girl mentioned that within cooperative teamwork she enjoyed experiencing "good team spirit". She shared that she enjoyed working together and that it was fun to know that you could enjoy working with other people in the group. All student participants agreed that they do look out, backup and support their team mates. "It is fun to know that you are having fun with other people in the group".

The social and emotional benefits were also acknowledged in the US questionnaires by both the Associate Professor from Missouri, who championed for continued efforts towards the holistic HPE ideal through the implementation of the Health Promoting Schools model (HPS), and Barry. Barry stated that "mental/emotional Health and Social Health are significant elements to the potential success that each of us will experience in life" In the case study schools one child described the emotional benefits when he suggested "you feel better, about yourself and you have more self-esteem". Another shared that after PE lessons "we are not stressed", which relates directly to the research regarding better stress management (American Heart Association, 2019; British Universities and Colleges Sport, 2018; Chiras, 1991; Robbins et al., 2011; Shilton, 1997).

Children in all case study schools enjoyed moving, enjoyed PE and it was valued by the school communities. Both the children and the teachers shared that children were motivated, interested in movement regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, and enjoyed giving their best effort which the literature states is related to students' sense of belonging (Pedler, 2018). Furthermore, teachers referred to lifelong and holistic benefits. One girl in case study two school spoke of enjoying her new school more (heightened wellbeing) solely because of the regular PE lessons. The secondary trained PE teachers also shared that in their experiences most children in primary thoroughly enjoy PE and learning through the physical.

In case study two school the students spoke about PE lessons reducing stress and improving work in other areas. Upper years' students shared "you feel relaxed when you come back [from PE] and you can work easier". In case study three school the students also agreed that moving during PE helps them with their school work, "cause you get a rest from it [working in the classroom], because we do heaps and it is nice to have a break". One girl added that it improves their school work as "we are more relaxed" and another boy added "when we come back, we concentrate better". There was an increase in verbal articulation of links in schools that had a HPE specialist or a designated teacher and lessons were conducted regularly. Furthermore, observations suggested that QPE promoted student interest.

In case study two school the teachers felt that they promoted inclusion by beginning in the early years and making the physical activities enjoyable for all. This was achieved by covering a diverse range of sports and skills, and by using minor games to maximize student participation

and increase opportunities for students to experience success. As well, efforts were made to ensure struggling students were not on show in front of others, a situation that could possibly result in students feeling uncomfortable.

Case study two school and more specifically their HPE specialist manifested a deep understanding of inclusiveness, by "assigning open-ended tasks that allow kids to progress as far as they can individually and modifying traditional team sports so that teams are much smaller and everyone gets more opportunities to practise skills" (Boss, 2000, p. 4). Hence, case study two school evidenced: a supportive and caring learning environment; where teachers were sensitive to students' needs and emotions; and fostered positive peer relationships and mutual respect among classmates by using a whole school approach. This involved whole school rules for PE and the Health Promoting School Model. By so doing, the teacher participants in case study two school displayed an understanding of the socio-cultural approach to HPE—teaching underpinned by social justice principles of equity, diversity and supportive environments.

In the UK maintained case study school, QPE was one strategy employed during the curriculum recovery to increase children's wellbeing. The case study school explicitly focused on the 'how' of learning (implementation) to exploit learning opportunities, where the curriculum across all learning areas was interwoven by learning value threads: creativity, energy, resilience, curiosity, courage, exploration, reflection and communication. The learning value threads are underpinned by the nine universal competencies [Learning Values], (attitudes, values and skills): *Reflection, Collaboration and cooperation, Learning to learn, Respect, Responsibility, Empathy, Self-regulation, Persistence and Trust* (OECD, 2021, p. 48); specifically, Respect, Responsibility, Empathy, Self-regulation and Persistence (resilience). Teachers chose pedagogy with a deliberate aim to nurture children's emotional literacy and develop consciously their deep thinking, where they improve their skills and knowledge through solving problems, explaining concepts, investigating, designing, creating, understanding, evaluating, analysing, communicating and applying. It is important to note that within this case study school it was shared that previously the school focused mostly on the Values pillar and Community pillar (Fig. 10.1, p. 158). One academic year they were told by the Headteacher to forget about the Values pillar and only focus on the Metacognition pillar. Consequently, the children's behaviour deteriorated,

as too did their social and emotional health (mental health). Subsequently, the mental health of staff members began to deteriorate.

On this occasion a balance of Learning Values/competencies was implemented using a whole school approach. The Boxall Profile (BP), the most popular tool used by schools in the UK to measure the social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) and well-being of children (Marshall et al., 2017), was completed by teachers for every child late in term 1 (November 2020) and revisited in term 2. Findings indicated that the children's wellbeing had improved significantly as a result of the wellbeing initiative and balance of Learning Values/ competencies. The children flagged as having wellbeing needs in KS2 (and across the whole school) were already being monitored by the Special Educational Needs (SEN) support team before remote learning. There were no new wellbeing cases of concern—an ideal outcome. Through discussions, observations and interviews (assessing and monitoring), the teacher's wellbeing improved as did the children's.

In the British School Overseas case study school located in Africa, it was identified that the essential ingredient for improving the learner's self-regard [deep confidence] could be achieved through deep implementation of Learning Values derived from the IB Learner Profile (refer to cf. p. 156). A whole school approach involved not only the PE curriculum but across all learning areas. Self-regard was indicated as a focus on the PASS survey analysis from the last four years. Self-regard measures the children's overall view of their self-efficacy for academic achievement; their deep confidence and belief that they can achieve. Self-regard is embedded within the Learning Values [nine universal competencies].

In the primary and secondary school case study, British curriculum school, located in the Middle East there was a concern that too many wellbeing and learning value programmes were being advocated within the school; subsequently all were surface level rather than deeply implemented. For example, Positive Psychology accentuated approximately 30 Values; High Performance Learning (HPL) consisting of 20 Advanced Cognitive Performance Characteristics (ACPCs) and 10 Values Attitudes and Attributes (VAAs), then the HPL programme also espoused the Seven Pillars of Pedagogy. Furthermore, the terms and language was also too complicated for the mostly English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. It was recommended that an eclectic, contextually designed programme be specifically designed for their context, specifically relevant and developmentally appropriate for the students' ability. This would

enable all community members to understand and take ownership of their learning, especially the process of learning. The school needed to enact deep implementation of Cognitive Characteristics and Values by personalising and making meaningful for the school. The chosen values were representative of their vision and mission—the how of learning and building their ability to progress. An example would be for the students to identify people who are role models within their culture (or design their own character and term) which relates to HPL and they could change to be developmentally appropriate for each sector of the school. Another recommendation is that the Learning Values are simplified and reduced in number. It is recommended that there are no more than six to eight Learning Values/ Attributes, they are studied explicitly in greater depth for the older students and tailored to suit the needs of the children in the early years, for example characters and puppets.

The school needs to use a whole school approach; identify various strategies for deep implementation of the HPL programme eg. consistently use references in books, stickers, feedback given, everyday language embedded within school culture, signage, Assembly presentations, inform teachers of their liberty to address values and thinking skills in context, as needed. Also, a reward (House point) system could be used when students display HPL (behaviours and characteristics)—for formal learning and informal learning. Also, incorporate into their various school policies, especially for feedback and assessment.

Reflection

This chapter explores social and emotional dimensions of wellbeing (mental health) and their development through Health and Physical Education (HPE). Thinking about your context. How are community members made to feel valued and that they belong? How do members model Learning Values? How does your context offer support and care? How is respect optimised? How is the physical dimension used to reduce stress and improve mental health?

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