

# Wellbeing NOTEBOOK

## Wellbeing: New idea or old wisdom?

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In a series of introductory classes on wellbeing in schools this year, my primary pre-service students and I looked at wellbeing from four different perspectives. Instead of taking notes in the usual way, I provided each of my students with sticky notes of different sizes and colours and a base sheet with the heading Wellbeing at the top. Their task was to listen and search for key words, organise their thoughts on wellbeing as we explored different perspectives and come up with a visual synthesis of how education may best support the wellbeing of students. They were to include a personal definition of wellbeing. (See figures 1 and 2).

We began with popular perceptions of wellbeing derived from a google image search and spent some time analysing the visuals and key words that surfaced. Having established the key ideas contributing to wellbeing from a popular twenty-first century cultural perspective, and identifying mind, body and soul/spirit as the most often used words associated with wellbeing, we moved back a couple of decades to Martin Seligman, whose ideas have gained resonance with today's culture and are widely practised today.

Seligman has been called the guru of positive psychology. He is an expert on topics ranging from resilience and optimism to learned helplessness, pessimism and depression. After years of seeing the minimal impact of traditional psychology on people's happiness, Seligman (2011) began taking a different route which has resulted in the popular positive psychology movement today. His premise is that there is a strong connection between the body, the brain and the emotions and therefore all should be considered in the learning process. His books include intriguing titles such as 'Flourish',

'Authentic Happiness', and 'The Optimistic Child'. Seligman was a good starting place for my students to explore more academic notions of wellbeing. We evaluated Seligman's (2011) PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement) model and began to extend and cluster key ideas and words.

I then challenged my students with the question, "Is wellbeing a new idea, or is it old wisdom" To further explore this thought, my students and I spend some time reflecting on what Ellen White, a co-founder of Avondale College of Higher Education had to say in relation to wellbeing and education. White did most of her writing in the late nineteenth century when the term wellbeing did not exist, and the prevailing view of education involved concepts of fixed intelligence, with a liberal arts and science-based curriculum. In contrast, White advocated for education that was "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual power" (White, 1903, p.17). This education, White (1903) maintained,

“His premise is that there is a strong connection between the body, the brain and the emotions and therefore all should be considered in the learning process.”

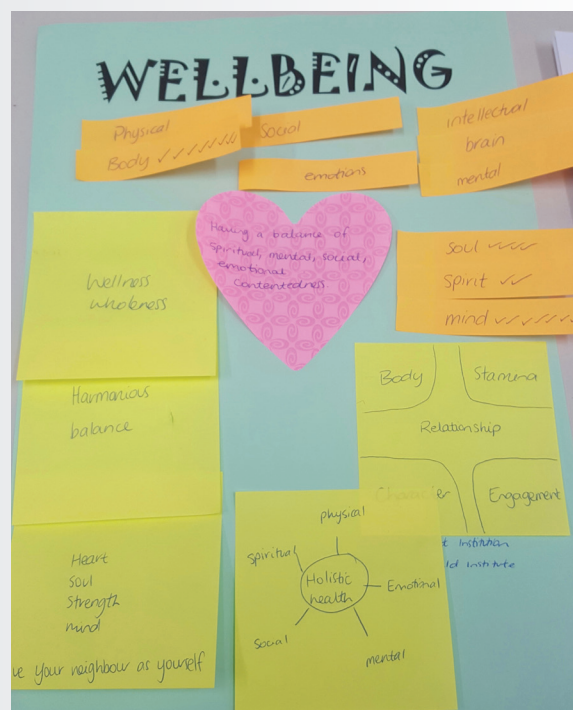


Figure 1: Musings as tagged mind-maps of wellbeing

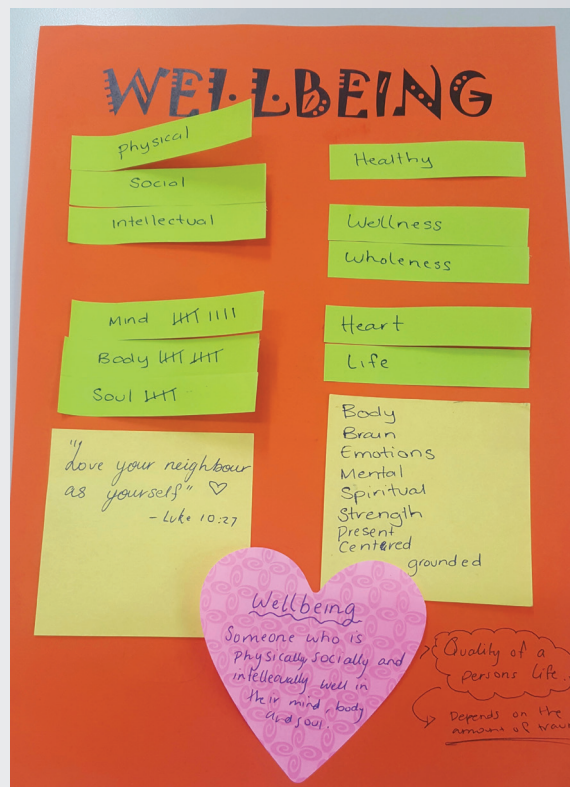
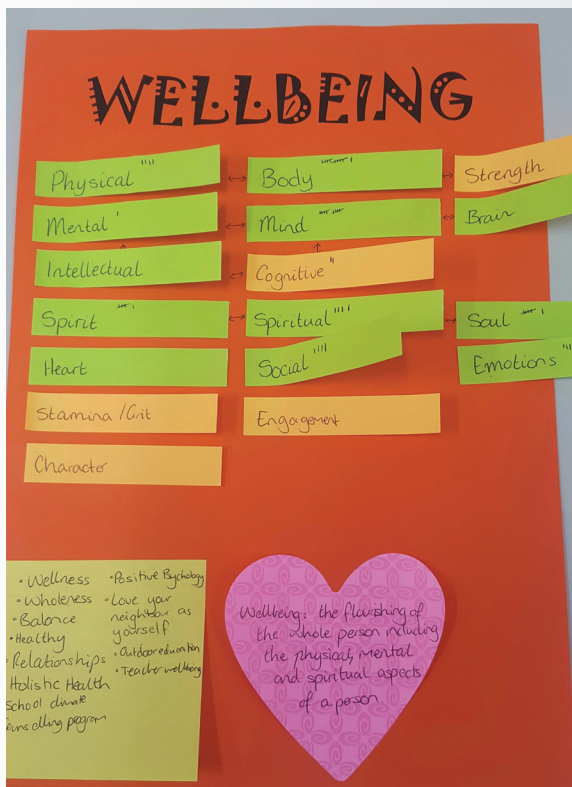


Figure 2: Musings as tagged mind-maps of wellbeing

“As students extrapolated the common elements of wellbeing; a holistic education that fosters opportunities for service emerged as a common theme.”

was to prepare students to serve others, an idea also promoted by Seligman to bring meaning to life, although White introduced a spiritual element, not so overt in Seligman's model.

Stepping back even further in time, we lastly reflected on Jesus, the Master Teacher: the one who healed hearts, soothed souls and restored ravaged minds and bodies back to full health. When asked the ultimate wellbeing question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27). As students extrapolated the common elements of wellbeing; a holistic education that fosters opportunities for service emerged as a common theme. We discovered that what is sometimes presented as a new educational idea may in fact be old wisdom, and something for Christian educators to acknowledge and embrace, as they heal, soothe and restore young lives as Jesus did.

There are many other facets of wellbeing that were not explored in this class session. Many of you who read this are exploring and implementing wellbeing ideas in your schools. We hope that this Wellbeing Notebook page becomes a place where you can share your reflections and ideas with other Christian educators. (To share your ideas contact Beverley Christian using the email address above.) [TEACH](#)

#### References

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. New York, NY: Free Press.  
White, E. G. (1903). *Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.