

Children's mental health and wellbeing in developing countries

A professional learning course for teachers of all grades

You can't pour from an empty cup (author unknown)



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A decorative graphic consisting of two thick, curved, overlapping lines in teal and orange-red, starting from the bottom left and curving upwards towards the right.

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Catherine Duffett has over twenty years' experience as a teacher in Australia. She has worked in Hobart, Darwin and Alice Springs in both public and private schools from different cultural backgrounds. She has over ten years' experience as a teacher librarian in both primary and high schools and currently works as a primary school teacher librarian. In 2013 she was awarded Tasmanian Teacher Librarian of the Year. Catherine has also taught Science and Maths to high school students. She is a qualified reading educator.

Catherine is passionate about using high impact evidence-based strategies to improve the educational opportunities for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and sharing her knowledge with others.

Catherine works part time on a pro-bono basis as an educational consultant with NGOs in developing countries to improve the educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Her business name, *Mshauri Education* was given to her by her Tanzanian colleagues and *mshauri* is a Swahili word meaning *advisor* or *consultant*.



The program was written in consultation with Yusuf Ali Salah from Somalia. He has worked in community development for over 15 years in both Somalia and the United Kingdom. Yusuf has a diploma in mental health first-aid and volunteers as a community safety advocate in Somali schools.

How to use this course

While this course can be used by educators undertaking solo professional learning, it is recommended that, where possible, educators work collaboratively through it to enable deep discussion and reflection regarding the research described. To facilitate this, the course is divided up into a number of units that provide discussion questions for teachers to reflect on.

The Final Word protocol (Faddis, n.d.) is a good approach for structuring professional learning, as it fosters collaboration and deeper thinking about the text. It works as follows:

1. Teachers are organised into groups of three or four and each teacher in a group is assigned A, B, C or D.
2. The teachers have an opportunity to read the text or a section of it, select a piece of text or quote that resonates with them, and record their selected quote on a sticky note.
3. Teacher A reads aloud their statement or quote to their group and has 3 minutes to explain to their group the reason behind their choice.
4. Teachers B, C & D then have one minute to respond to their teacher A during which time they might express their own perspective, clarify Teacher A's comment or even question Teacher A's assumptions.
5. Teacher A summarises what has been said and also makes a comment about whether they have changed their own thoughts about the topic.
6. Teacher B discusses their selected quote or section that they found pertinent,

including whether the discussion of teacher A's quote has affected their own views on their own sticky note and the whole process is repeated with teachers A, C and D responding to Teacher B's ideas.

7. Finally, Teachers C and D have their turns at sharing the section of the text that resonates with them.

Copyright and Artificial Intelligence

The seven high-impact strategies described in this program are based on *High Impact Wellbeing Strategies*, published in 2022 by Allen, K., Grove, C., Berger et al. The resource is available at:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/High-Impact-Wellbeing-Strategies-Resource2023.pdf> (Accessed 16 March 2026).

This document was published under a Creative Commons licence, and elements of it have been included in this program with minor modifications.

Artificial intelligence tools were used to assist with proofreading and the development of discussion questions.

Mental health and wellbeing in Children and Young People: An Overview

Introduction

Wellbeing is crucial in enabling students to learn effectively, form positive relationships with others, and ultimately reach their full potential and make a positive contribution to society as adults (Unicef Australia, 2026). In their day-to-day interactions with students, teachers can have a significant impact on students' wellbeing. This program provides an evidence-informed approach to supporting students' wellbeing, providing 7 high-impact strategies that teachers can adopt to positively influence their students' wellbeing. It is acknowledged that teachers working in developing countries and teaching very large classes are likely to find some of the strategies difficult to implement. However, it is hoped that teachers in these contexts will adopt the strategies that are feasible helping to make school an enjoyable place to be where students are able to learn because they feel valued and supported.

What is mental health and wellbeing?

The World Health Organization (2026) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community. Good mental health is essential for overall wellbeing.



Figure 1: Wellbeing as defined by ARACY (2024).

According to Unicef, wellbeing can be thought of as a child or young person having everything they need to thrive and reach their full potential. It encompasses all areas of a child's life, which are linked and interdependent.

While mental health and wellbeing are closely connected, wellbeing is broader and refers to how well we feel in terms of our mental, physical, and emotional health. These definitions indicate that wellbeing is a broader concept than mental health, but both influence each other; good mental health contributes to a sense of wellbeing (Trevail, 2025).

Figure 1 illustrates that wellbeing can be categorised into six interrelated areas including: identity and culture, feeling valued, having access to essential material needs such as food and housing, participating in decisions that affect them,

effective teaching and learning, and having good health (ARACY, 2024). Teachers can have a positive impact on students in some of these domains as follows:

Learning

Being in full-time education with a positive learning atmosphere that prevents violence and promotes mental health (WHO and Unicef, 2024). The relationship between wellbeing and academic achievement is likely to be reciprocal. Wellbeing is correlated with higher academic achievement, but improving teaching and learning also leads to improved wellbeing (Student Wellbeing Data and Measurement in Australia, 2026).

Valued and safe

Through their interactions with students, teachers can create a school environment where students feel valued and safe. Teachers can foster positive relationships among students within the classroom through the learning experiences they create.

Identity and culture

Teachers can create a school environment where students' religion and culture are respected and valued. Teachers can achieve this by fostering positive peer relationships.

Wellbeing of children in developing countries

The wellbeing of children in developing countries is a significant concern, as many of their basic needs, as described in Figure 1, aren't being met. Too many children are living in poverty, affecting their physical health. The safety of children in such countries isn't always guaranteed due to armed conflict,

violence, and natural disasters (Patel et al., 2007). Living on the street, and enduring harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016), come with their own dangers, impacting on the wellbeing of those experiencing such scenarios.

Orphans are particularly vulnerable as they are at a significantly higher risk of missing out on schooling, being exposed to HIV, experiencing greater food insecurity, and suffering from anxiety and depression (Holborn and Eddy, 2011). Students may experience violence at home or at school. A survey conducted by the ACPF (2020) indicated that in the 12 months preceding the survey, 60% of boys and girls reported experiencing physical punishment from either a family member or teacher.

Wellbeing of girls in developing countries

The wellbeing of girls is of a particular concern. Figure 2 provides some alarming statistics demonstrating the level of adversity girls face, providing a snapshot into the nature of adversity that girls can experience. The wellbeing of children with disabilities is also significantly lower. African girls with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than able-bodied girls (ACPF, 2020).

Given these alarming statistics, it is not surprising that girls are at a much higher risk of developing mental health problems than boys. Unfortunately, in Africa, suicide among girls is increasing. Approximately 20% of adolescent girls in Mauritania, 27% in Seychelles, and 18% in Ghana have attempted suicide (ACPF, 2020).



The plight of African girls: A snapshot



Figure 2: Factors impacting on the wellbeing of African girls

Schools and wellbeing

For some students, schools are also unsafe places. In Kenya, 40% of students surveyed indicated that they have been sexually harassed by another student, and this was higher for students attending schools in the poorest communities. One in eight girls in Senegal and Zambia reported having been sexually harassed

by a teacher or staff member at their school in the four weeks leading up to the survey being conducted (ACPF, 2020).

With so many students in developing countries facing significant adversity, it is paramount that schools are safe places where teachers actively work to nurture students' wellbeing. For some students, school is the only refuge from the adversity they face in their personal lives. If schools make student wellbeing a priority, this can open the way for improved learning.

Teachers are instrumental in nurturing students' wellbeing

While these statistics create a bleak picture of the state of children's wellbeing in developing countries, through their interactions with students, teachers can create a school culture where students feel valued and safe. Schools can therefore become a place where students find respite from the adversity they experience in their personal lives.

This program provides seven evidence-informed, high-impact strategies that teachers can implement to assist them in creating an environment that nurtures students' wellbeing.

These seven strategies have been documented by the Australian Education Research Organisation under a Creative Commons Licence. They have been slightly modified to better suit the needs of teachers in under-resourced schools in developing countries who are grappling with large class sizes.

Discuss and Reflect

1. Why is student wellbeing important for learning? Reflect on your own classroom experience. How have you seen students' wellbeing affect their ability to learn, participate, or interact with others?

2. What are some practical things teachers can do to help students feel valued and safe in the classroom, even when resources are limited?

3. In what ways can teachers help make school a positive and supportive place for students who may be experiencing difficulties in their personal lives?

2

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 1: Build relationships with students

Effective teachers prioritise building relationships with students. These relationships play an important role in advancing student wellbeing and are a foundation for effective teaching and learning. They support teachers to use other high impact wellbeing strategies

Strategy overview

What is the strategy?

Teachers build relationships through authentic efforts to get to know their students and their needs. Positive relationships are built through ongoing interactions, active listening and respect. When teachers show empathy, encouragement, and genuine care, they help build a student's positive self-image and confidence. A positive teacher-student relationship occurs when students feel seen, understood, encouraged and respected.

How effective is the strategy?

Positive teacher-student relationships have a significant effect on student wellbeing. When teachers are seen as trusted adults, student attendance, learning and wellbeing outcomes improve. Building teacher-student relationships affects peer relationships, learning and school experience.

Considerations

Building positive teacher-student relationships takes time and commitment. When building these relationships, teachers need to consider the developmental stage of students, their learning and wellbeing needs, and the dynamics of the classroom. Students experience higher levels of

wellbeing with teachers who help students feel safe, take the time to help them learn, and encourage questions. When a relationship is challenged, it is important that teachers lead a process of resolution with the student to restore trust and respect.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Models the skills and attitudes of a respectful relationship (e.g., greeting students and using their names).
- Listens supportively and actively to students.
- Uses humour (but not sarcasm) to build connections with students.
- Responds to students in an empathic and culturally sensitive way.
- Maintains healthy professional boundaries (e.g., is not friends with students on social media).
- Considers their body language when interacting with students (e.g., conveys warmth and acceptance with eye contact, smiles and/or appearing relaxed).
- Considers how they move around the classroom and how they approach students (e.g., positions themselves beside a student rather than in front and does not stand over them).
- Uses tools like entry/exit routines to check-in with students to determine how

students are feeling, their readiness to learn and if additional supports are required in that lesson.

- Has conversations to repair negative interactions and is prepared to apologise as part of this process.
- Models respectful relationships through interactions with parents/carers.

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Puts down, belittles, or singles out students in a way that deliberately causes shame or embarrassment.
- Emotionally escalates with the student rather than managing their response to help the student regulate.
- Demands respect.
- Does not show students how to do something or does not provide clarification when providing feedback.
- Focuses on setting consequences without restoring the relationship.
- Is oblivious to, or ignores, student cues and does not consider or adjust their response accordingly.
- Oversteps or violates ethical or personal boundaries.
- Only tries to build relationships with some students

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Has at least one teacher they view as a trusted adult.
- Seeks out the teacher for informal chats.
- Is quickly and easily redirected back to work when off-task.
- Views their teacher as kind, clear, respectful and patient.
- Accepts both positive and corrective feedback from the teacher.
- Believes they are treated fairly and consistently.
- Regularly attends school.

- Can approach their teachers with problems or ask for help

The importance of lesson planning in building relationships

A well-planned and well-executed lesson demonstrates to students that you care about their learning. Such lessons begin immediately and engaged students in meaningful work (Lemov, 2021).

Discuss and Reflect

1. What strategies can you implement in your classroom to develop a rapport with your students?
2. Consider a student who may not yet feel comfortable approaching you for help or conversation. What small, intentional actions could you take over the next few weeks to strengthen that relationship?
2. How does effective lesson planning contribute to stronger relationships with students?
3. In what ways can clear structure, engaging learning activities, and smooth lesson starts help students feel supported and respected in the classroom?

3

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 2: Facilitate peer relationships

Effective teachers understand the importance of connection between students and provide opportunities to build this connection. Teachers can foster positive relationships by promoting acceptance and respect in their classrooms and provide opportunities for collaborative learning.

Strategy overview

What is the strategy?

Teachers play an important role in encouraging positive interactions and relationships between students. Teachers can encourage students to accept their peers and celebrate diversity. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to develop meaningful connections with their peers. When teachers voice favourable opinions of students and interact with them warmly, they are able to foster students' social interactions with their peers and help students learn to resolve peer conflicts in a healthy way.

How effective is the strategy?

Positive peer relationships contribute to student wellbeing in the school environment. They help increase an overall sense of happiness, mental health and belonging. They support problem-solving and the development of social skills. Positive peer relationships are connected to strong school engagement. Better outcomes are achieved when students feel cared for, understood, and validated by their peers. When teachers facilitate growth of positive peer relationships, students find school and learning a more enjoyable process. This is associated with a significant positive effect on academic engagement. Peers are an important source of social support to

help students deal with stress and challenges.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Creates a cooperative rather than competitive classroom environment, focusing on student strengths and skills.
- Provides a safe space for students to connect with each other.
- Uses games and activities to build contact and connection between students and provides students with opportunities to explore new friendships.
- Understands the relationship patterns and dynamics of the class and how these affect their peer interactions.
- Uses cooperative learning opportunities in lessons and is thoughtful and considered when grouping students.
- Builds group interdependence to foster collaboration and build relationships.
- Helps students to develop conflict resolution skills and work through different perspectives.

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Provides an environment that reduces rather than stimulates interactions between students.
- Doesn't understand the dynamic of connections among students.
- Focuses on academic achievement only.

- Ignores potential student conflicts in the classroom.
- Dismisses student concerns regarding bullying and inappropriate language and behaviour or does not raise serious incidents with leadership.

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Participates more actively in the classroom.
- Collaborates positively with peers and finds lessons fun.
- Confidently connects with other students at the school.
- Builds skills to resolve conflicts and understand difference.
- Feels a sense of self-worth when interacting with peers.
- Feels accepted by their peers.

Turn and Talk

Turn and Talk is a brief discussion (of about one minute) between pairs of students about a question the teacher has asked. This effective technique engages all students in the learning and enables those students who might be reluctant to engage in whole class discussions to articulate their thoughts with a partner. During the discussion, the teacher listens in on the conversations and can select particularly insightful comments to begin a whole class discussion (Lemov, 2021).

- c. How have the positive connections you have established with your students helped to create a safe and supportive learning environment?
- d. After implementing the pedagogical changes you identified, what evidence did you observe that indicated that these strategies were effective for your students?

Reflecting on the current unit:

2. How can you intentionally create opportunities for students to build positive peer relationships? Consider strategies such as cooperative learning, structured discussions like *Turn and Talk*, group work, and classroom routines.

3. Think about a student (or small group of students) in your class who may be struggling with friendships, peer conflict, or a sense of belonging. What intentional strategies could you implement to better support this student's peer connections and wellbeing? Consider actions such as purposeful grouping, cooperative learning activities, teaching conflict resolution skills, providing structured opportunities for interaction (e.g., Turn and Talk), or checking in with the student. What would a short plan for supporting this student look like over the next few weeks?

Discuss and Reflect

Reflecting on the previous unit:

1. Reflecting on the previous unit and how you have implemented the strategy in your classroom, consider:
 - a. What aspects worked well?
 - b. What aspects do you need to prioritise moving forward?

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High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 3: Establish and maintain clear classroom expectations

Effective teachers establish, clearly communicate and maintain clear classroom expectations. They know that creating expectations and rules is an ongoing, shared process with students.

Strategy overview

What is the strategy?

Teachers clearly and consistently communicate and reinforce classroom expectations and consequences to students that are consistent with the school wide approach. They help to create a sense of order and predictability in a classroom. Teachers model, expect and reinforce respectful behaviour. Consistently reinforcing expectations does not mean that teachers need to treat every student in exactly the same way. Consistent classroom expectations can be implemented in a way that is sensitive to student needs, abilities and strengths.

How effective is the strategy?

Research demonstrates that clear expectations are important for student wellbeing and helping students feel safe at school. Safe environments that encourage positive and predictable classroom interactions and routines contribute to student wellbeing. They can also maximise instructional time. Setting clear expectations positively affects student behavioural and social-emotional outcomes. It also has significant positive effects on social competence and motivation and engagement.

Classroom expectations may change depending on the developmental stage

of students, their learning and wellbeing needs and the dynamics of the classroom. Where appropriate, teachers should include students in the process of creating clear expectations in the classroom. Teachers can use examples of how students can meet or not meet expectations to clarify the expected behaviour. The physical classroom space should be organised, with few distractions. Teachers may use visual prompts and tools (e.g., scripts, models, scaffolds) as needed.

Classroom Routines

A routine is a procedure for executing a task that becomes automatic (Lemov, 2021). Routines help maximise learning time, but their predictability enables students to feel safe, respected and supported (AERO, 2025). Lemov (2021) recognises three broad categories:

Academic routines:

These assist students with completing learning tasks. The *turn and talk* routine described in Unit 3 is an example of an academic routine.

Procedural routines:

These help students make mundane tasks such as managing materials and moving around the school, more efficient.

Cultural routines

Such routines help students express shared values, norms and aspirations. For example, students can be taught how to explicitly praise another for effort or quality thinking.

Students need multiple opportunities to practise classroom routines before they can consistently meet expectations (AERO, 2025).

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Explicitly teaches students how to meet expectations, provides opportunities to practice and consistently reinforces expectations.
- Focuses on what to do, rather than what not to do.
- Responds positively when expectations are met.
- Recognises that not all students can regulate their emotions to the same degree.
- Identifies warning signs and actively supports students to identify their own triggers and apply strategies to manage emotions. (e.g., 'I can see you are frustrated as you're speaking more loudly than usual, and your fists are clenching up. Would you like a drink of water to help you feel calmer?').
- Does not assume a student has deliberately not met expectations.
- Uses proportionate and non-punitive responses, focusing on educating the student on the desired behaviour when expectations are not met.

Establishing a learning environment where mistakes are part of the learning process helps to create a safe environment for students (AERO, 2025).

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Does not consistently reinforce classroom expectations or is unpredictable in expectations.

- Allows their mood to influence the classroom climate.
- Is punitive, harsh or controlling when reinforcing expectations.
- Usually phrases reminders about behaviours in negative language.
- Ignores the whole student and their circumstances, focusing only on the negative behaviour.
- Is unjust or targets particular students or has biased expectations for students based on their characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, culture, learning needs or socioeconomic status.
- Selects an inappropriate time and place to talk to a student about their behaviour.

Assume The Best strategy

While, a detailed discussion of classroom management techniques, is beyond the scope of this program, the *Assume the Best strategy* is worth considering as it is easily implemented and highly effective. When things go wrong, it is common to attribute the mistake to a person's actions or personality. For example, a statement such as *Stop disrupting the class* or *You haven't taken on board my feedback* convey an assumption that students are deliberately not following instructions, where they could have genuinely been distracted or misunderstood the instructions. Unless the evidence is clear that a student is deliberately being obtuse, it is best to assume that students have tried to carry out your instructions. A simple way of modifying what we say to students is to use the word *forgot*. For example, a teacher could say *I can see that some students have forgotten to stop talking while I am speaking to the class. This assists in building relationships founded on trust and conveys the message that you assume you want your students to do well and believe then can* (Lemov, 2021).

Discuss and reflect

Reflecting on the previous unit:

1a. What strategies did you implement from the previous unit to strengthen relationships with your students?

1b. How have these strategies influenced student behaviour, engagement, or willingness to meet classroom expectations?

Reflecting on the current unit:

2. Which classroom routines (academic, procedural, or cultural) are most important in your classroom?

3. Share examples of routines or expectations that have worked well in your

classroom.

4. How can teachers maintain consistent expectations while still responding to individual student needs, strengths, and emotional regulation abilities?

5. Think about a routine or expectation in your classroom that students sometimes struggle to follow. What strategies could you use to explicitly teach, model, and practise this routine so students can meet the expectation more consistently?

5

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 4: Support inclusion and belonging

Effective teachers communicate and act in ways that foster social inclusion and belonging. They acknowledge and value each student's cultural differences and understand their classrooms are culturally diverse environment

Strategy Overview

What is the strategy?

Teachers promote acceptance and inclusion, celebrate the diversity of students and their families, and support all students to learn and thrive in their classrooms. They are aware of, and reflect on, their own cultures and biases. They do not attempt to minimise or dismiss inequalities and inequities. Teachers can model and reinforce social inclusion by encouraging and welcoming all students in the school and providing the same educational opportunities to all.

How effective is the strategy?

There is a positive and significant association between social inclusion and belonging and decreased mental health concerns and increased wellbeing. Students are more likely to experience positive outcomes at school when they feel they belong and are included. Benefits of belonging and inclusion can last into adulthood, impacting pathways to higher education and employment. Positive student-teacher relationships are pivotal to students' sense of belonging at school. When students feel a sense of belonging at school, they are more likely to be academically motivated, have higher self-esteem and have good relationships with peers, parents/carers/kin, and teachers. Students who feel a sense of belonging at school show personal growth in the

face of uncertainty or adversity. Other important factors that promote belonging are how motivated a student is at school and how capable they are at managing stress and coping with challenges.

Considerations

Students feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in the classroom when they feel safe and valued, accepted and respected by their teachers and peers, and can participate fully in their learning and school community. Belonging and social inclusion is largely determined by the relationships students form at school and home, with teacher-students relationships playing a pivotal role. Teachers can promote social inclusion and belonging through everyday classroom teaching. Social inclusion and belonging are important for all young people, especially those who experience disadvantage or marginalisation.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Creates an inclusive and culturally safe classroom and models respect.
- Learns from students about their lived experience and promotes an understanding of multiple and diverse perspectives.
- Responds swiftly and effectively to language and behaviour that is discriminatory, offensive or demeaning to others.

- Is aware that students may listen or respond differently in the classroom based on their background and lived experience (e.g., a student who does not make eye contact may be acting in a way that is culturally appropriate for them).
- Provides opportunities for students to develop, understand and express their identity.
- Is aware of their worldview and perceptions and how these might impact the classroom environment and strives to build their cultural competency (e.g., through professional learning).
- Seeks support if feeling ill-equipped to manage student needs or circumstances (e.g., engaging language services to support communication if required).

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Does not create a safe classroom. For example, downplays the significance of discriminatory language and behaviour.
- Dismisses student reports or concerns regarding bullying *and inappropriate language and behaviour or does not raise serious incidents with leadership.*
- Expects students to speak on behalf of their respective cultural, religious or ethnic community.
- Lacks sensitivity to students' diverse learning needs, individual needs, personal characteristics, culture, religion or interests.
- Provides minimal time for students to communicate with one another

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Feels safe and valued, and knows that their culture, ethnicity, religion and identity are respected.

- Feels proud and more confident of who they are and where they come from.
- Works collaboratively with all peers.
- Knows that their teacher expects the best of them and that differences are a strength.
- Is confident the teacher will understand and respond to their individual needs.
- Respects diverse perspectives and backgrounds.

Reflect and Discuss

Reflecting on the previous unit:

1. Revisit Unit 4 and the strategies for establishing and maintaining clear expectations. After implementing the pedagogical changes you identified, what evidence did you observe that indicated that these strategies were effective for your students? (Refer to the section - *This strategy is demonstrated with the student*).

Reflecting on this unit:

2. Using the strategies described in this unit, describe some changes you plan to make to your teaching practice to improve students' sense of belonging?

3. How can teachers ensure that all students feel valued and heard, especially those who may be quieter or from marginalised groups?

4. What systems or practices can schools put in place to ensure serious incidents of discrimination or bullying are addressed effectively?

6

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 5: Foster student self-efficacy

Effective teachers hold high expectations for all students and help develop a sense of self-efficacy in students. They know that the way students view their abilities, achievements and self in the classroom influences their wellbeing as well as their learning.

Strategy overview

What is the strategy?

Self-efficacy involves students having positive beliefs about their capabilities. Teachers can foster self-efficacy by encouraging students to persist in trying their best and providing feedback. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to experience success and celebrate achievements and growth of all students. Self-efficacy is fostered by teachers who care about their students and are willing to help. Holding high expectations of progress for all students helps them to build student self-efficacy.

How effective is the strategy?

Research demonstrates that self-efficacy is related to how well a student feels they can learn, which in turn are both associated with student wellbeing. This strategy improves student wellbeing on its own and through improving student self-esteem, which is one of the strongest indicators of wellbeing. Self-efficacy is positively related to academic achievement and motivation, engagement in school and learning, and positive attitudes towards teachers. Beliefs and feelings about academic abilities can influence student learning and achievement, student satisfaction with teachers, and social inclusion. Self-efficacy can help strengthen students' self-confidence and willingness to try new tasks and experiences.

Considerations

A strengths-based approach can help teachers foster self-efficacy. Communicating to students that learning is dynamic and complex can positively influence their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is most effectively built in an environment that is warm and supportive, where the teacher listens to and values student input.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Praises and encourages student effort in an authentic way that is connected to an outcome, effort or learning progress.
- Builds student understanding that abilities and intelligence are not fixed but can be developed.
- Considers each student's progress compared to their abilities, instead of compared to peers.
- Helps students set achievable goals and then supports them to progressively work towards more challenging and advanced aspirations.
- Supports students when they are unsuccessful or do not achieve their goals.

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Provides support to students that does not meet their needs.
- Provides praise that is vague, describes the teacher's feelings, is

manipulative or focuses on the student as a person.

- Does not recognise their own bias or is biased in their support of students.
- Supports students' self-limiting beliefs in their capabilities.
- Adopts a deficit model and focuses on student weaknesses.

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Says their teacher provides adequate teaching and learning tasks.
- Takes initiative with their own learning.
- Is confident or is developing confidence in their academic abilities.
- demonstrates strategies for achieving goals and proactively managing their own learning.
- Feels supported during setbacks and understands how to improve.

Reflect and Discuss

Reflecting on the previous unit:

1. Revisit Unit 5 and the strategies for promoting inclusion and belonging. After implementing the pedagogical changes you identified, what evidence did you observe that these strategies were effective for your students?.

Reflecting on this unit:

2. What strategies do you currently use to encourage self-efficacy among your students?

3. Reflect on your current students and their perception of their own self-efficacy. Which students require more support in seeing themselves as capable learners? How will you help build their self-efficacy?

7

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 6: Engage students

Effective teachers engage students and encourage high attendance. They provide meaningful experiences and tailor tasks to student interest and capability

What is the strategy?

Student engagement consists of cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement in school. Cognitive engagement refers to the amount of effort students are willing to invest in their learning. Behavioural engagement refers to student participation in academic and extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement refers to the extent to which students enjoy their learning and feel supported by their teachers. Teachers can engage students by providing stimulating and thought-provoking learning tasks, having a good understanding of their students' needs and interests, encouraging the desire to learn, and explaining the relevance of topics and skills to students.

How effective is the strategy?

Students who are more emotionally engaged in school are more likely to experience higher levels of wellbeing. Student engagement is also positively related to their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and good teacher-student relationships. Self-efficacy also plays an important role in student motivation and interest, which in turn is related to student wellbeing. Increasing student voice and active participation is positively related to student attention, effort, interest, learning and enjoyment at school. Research suggests that student engagement is related to academic achievement, attained knowledge, and effective learning. Increased

engagement also contributes to better emotional functioning and is related to increased attendance.

Considerations

Classroom interactions can impact student engagement. Teachers should ensure there are opportunities for students to engage in collaborative learning tasks as this can promote student engagement as well as development of peer relationships. Whole class discussion and reflection should be incorporated. Student voice also supports student engagement by actively involving students in their learning. As engagement can be impacted by student's emotional regulation and response to external factors it is important to cultivate a safe and inclusive environment that is conducive to learning.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

Plans group tasks that support all students to engage meaningfully and effectively.

- Considers the sequence of activities within a lesson and across a unit of work, planning tasks that are challenging, but support all students to experience success.
- Provides a variety of meaningful and challenging ways for students to complete classwork and assessments.
- Uses simulations to engage students in concepts.

- Encourages students to plan their approach to tasks (e.g., guides students to identify the steps required to complete a task).

Where possible, provides students with a range of options and choices in tasks.

- Recognises the value of student contributions in shaping teaching and learning, including by using student feedback and suggestions to shape classwork and the classroom environment.
- Uses strategies to help students regulate emotions before beginning a lesson or when the energy level of a class shifts.
- Actively supervises students and effectively manages distractions and disruptions in the class.

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Is inflexible about content or ways that students demonstrate their learning.
- Sets work that is unsuitable for the student's need.
- Ignores other contextual factors that might make engagement difficult (e.g., individual student circumstances, events prior to a lesson such as conflict with peers or the general classroom environment).
- Is disorganized and/or ignores off-task behaviours that distract other students.
- Has a strained relationship with students which impacts a student's motivation to engage with tasks and activities.
- Does not offer choices to students in their learning or opportunities to collaborate with their peers.
- Ignores the importance of student voice and feedback in promoting engagement.

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Is emotionally regulated and willing to learn.
- Understands tasks and expectations and knows how to get started.
- Feels comfortable and safe in the classroom.
- Is actively asking and responding to questions.
- Is free from distractions.
- Finds learning activities interesting and meaningful.
- Is in a mindset that is open to challenges and willing to learn.
- Understands what they are learning and how they can be successful.
- Feels a sense of autonomy and purpose at school.

Reflect and Discuss

Reflecting on the previous unit

1. How did you help students understand that abilities and intelligence are not fixed but can be developed over time?
2. How did you support students when they didn't achieve their goals or they experienced setbacks?

Reflecting on the current unit:

3. When students have been given an opportunity to discuss the content with their peers, how did these discussion opportunities impact student engagement, participation, and students' willingness to share ideas or seek support?
3. What is one specific change you will make in your classroom to link student engagement with promoting coping strategies for wellbeing?

8

High Impact Wellbeing Strategy 7: Promote coping strategies and facilitate referrals

Effective teachers can promote coping strategies, including self-regulation and help seeking. They notice changes in a student, inquire sensitively and facilitate referrals to their school's wellbeing team if needed

Strategy overview

What is the strategy?

Teachers can help students to identify and use positive coping strategies, including self-regulation or self-calming strategies, planning and problem-solving strategies, seeking social support, utilising relaxing diversions, engaging in physical activity, establishing good sleep and study habits, utilising positive self-talk and engaging in help-seeking.

Teachers notice changes in a student's demeanor or behaviour that may indicate additional support is required and inquire sensitively. They seek advice and guidance from the wellbeing team and school leaders and when needed follow school processes for referring students. They recognise that for some students a teacher may be the most trusted adult in their life.

How effective is the strategy?

Positive coping strategies, including help seeking, are important for fostering positive student wellbeing and enhancing positive mental health. Well-designed and well-implemented support to encourage effective coping strategies can have long-term benefits for students. Use of effective coping strategies also has significant positive effects on academic performance and school belonging. It has a positive effect on help seeking behaviour and attitudes towards mental health. It can help to reduce loneliness and improve physical health.

Considerations

Students are more likely to tell a teacher about concerns they have and listen to their advice if they have a positive relationship with the teacher. They are also more likely to approach the teacher and seek help if the teacher speaks about the practical strategies people can use to cope with stress and challenge, encourages help-seeking, and talks about mental health in a destigmatising way. It is important teachers recognise the limits to their role in this area. While they play an important role in advancing student wellbeing, they are not mental health experts. If they are concerned about a student and don't feel equipped to initiate a conversation, they must refer the student to the school wellbeing team and/or school leadership, as per their school processes. If a teacher is concerned about a student's safety, they must follow the school's Emergency Management Plan. Teachers should also be mindful of their own mental health, practice self-care and seek support if needed.

How do I implement the strategy?

This strategy is demonstrated when the teacher:

- Discusses use of positive coping strategies students can use as needed.
- Promotes help seeking by talking positively about professional mental health and wellbeing support and how

mental health and wellbeing concerns can be treated.

- Notices changes in demeanor or behaviour, raises concerns promptly with the wellbeing team and collaborates with the team and other professionals as needed.
- Encourages students to support each other in a safe and age-appropriate way and seek help for peers if concerned.
- Considers individual student mental health and wellbeing and makes reasonable classroom adjustments.
- Has good mental health literacy but is prepared to seek advice and recognises that they are not expected to be a mental health expert.

This strategy is not demonstrated when the teacher:

- Promises to keep information secret and does not explain conditional confidentiality to a student who is seeking help.
- Ignores or fails to act on signs of declining student mental health and wellbeing and/or does not make appropriate referrals to school supports.
- Attempts to provide support that is beyond their capabilities or qualifications.
- Attempts to force support or conversations about health when a student does not want to engage.
- Uses negative or stigmatising language to discuss ill health, such as “bonkers” or “crazy”.

This strategy is demonstrated when the student:

- Recognises that their teacher notices and cares about their wellbeing.
- Seeks help from a teacher or other school staff.
- Has a good understanding of positive coping strategies
- Is comfortable to talk about mental health at school.
- Understands their own triggers and emotional responses.
- Develops knowledge and positive attitudes towards mental health and help seeking.
- Can identify sources of help in their school.

Reflect and discuss

Reflecting on the previous unit:

1. What engagement strategies were most effective in creating an environment where students feel comfortable discussing challenges or asking for help?

Reflecting on the current unit:

1. Reflect on a time when you noticed a student experiencing stress or difficulty. How did you respond, and how did your approach help promote coping strategies or support the student’s wellbeing?
2. How can teachers tell if students feel safe and supported enough to seek help?
3. Which students might require additional support to develop coping skills, and how can teachers respond effectively?

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