Article 5

The Art of Wellbeing through Drama/Theatre Education

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Abstract

Wellbeing has been a trending topic in education over the past 20 years, but it is a broad term that encompasses a range of related concepts that are often used synonymously. This article will attempt to clarify the meaning of wellbeing by examining its context and evolution into educational theory, from its philosophical origins to its current place in modern psychology. It will then address how wellbeing can be integrated into the life of an international school by identifying its intrinsic links to a well-taught drama/theatre curriculum. Through existing educational and psychological research along with qualitative data analysis from past-students and colleagues, the findings show that drama/theatre is perceived to improve student wellbeing. The results also give prominence to the lack of tangible evidence that schools have to measure the effectiveness of their current wellbeing provisions. To conclude, the discussion will suggest ways that wellbeing can be more explicitly embedded into the culture of an international school to support adolescents in their transition to adulthood.

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Introduction

Wellbeing has been a trending topic over the last twenty-five years, but it's a broad term that encompasses a range of related concepts such as: happiness, wellness, mindfulness, thriving, flourishing, flow, growth mindset, emotional intelligence and positive psychology, to name a few. It has also become synonymous with mental health yet the lack of an agreed definition can confuse people and even stigmatise the concept. The advances in scientific research and psychology over the past twenty years have impacted education systems around the world to promote the health, happiness, academic attainment and social-emotional development of children and adolescents. This discussion explores the concept of adolescent wellbeing, of students between 16-18 years, from a social, emotional and psychological perspective, rather than its medicalised association with mental health. It will analyse wellbeing's philosophical origins and its evolution into a branch of educational psychology. Secondly, it will examine the relationship between drama/theatre, and aspects of wellbeing education through a range of literature including anecdotal data from teachers and past students. By deconstructing the concept of wellbeing and examining its related concepts, the study aims to identify links to the drama/theatre curriculum and hidden curriculum, to advocate for the benefits that the subject can bring to an international school community. These concepts will be explored through an international school perspective that follows the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), a curriculum for 16-19 year olds which runs in over 150 countries (Organization, n.d.) and is recognised by leading universities across the world (International Baccalaureate®, n.d.). The term drama/theatre will be used concurrently to address the overlap between Secondary drama courses and the IBDP Theatre course.

The Origins of Wellbeing

The concept of Wellbeing can be traced back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* where he referred to the notion of *Eudaimonia,* a Greek term that is often translated to signify 'happiness' (Aristotle et al. 2014: 17). For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* was the ultimate goal in life or the *summum bonum* as it was called in Latin. It was not achieved through *fortuna*, or chance, but through a conscious effort to live a successful life (Höffe 2010: 4). Scholars, such as Jonathan Barnes and Anthony Kenny (2014: 17) believe that the translation of *eudaimonia* into modern English does not imply happiness by today's definition since it does not only apply to one's state of mind, rather to the way a person lives a successful or virtuous life. As they iterate in their book *Aristotle's Ethics: The Complete Writings:*

> It would indeed be a mistake to replace 'happiness' by 'success' as a translation of the Greek word, since the success which 'eudaimonia' denotes is a very specific project, that of living a good life.

This idea is echoed by Otfried Höffe in his critical study of *Aristotle's 'Nicomachean ethics'*, where John L. Ackrill suggests there is some consensus that the word *eudaimonia* implies 'that which is "the highest of all practicable goods"' (279), and that all take the expressions 'living well' and 'doing well' to be equivalent to it' (Höffe 2010:35). Whilst scholars have attempted to distinguish Aristotle's concept of 'being well' and 'living well' from today's notion of happiness, the terms of wellbeing and happiness are still often used synonymously which can lead to misconceptions. This is partly due to the fact that since Aristotle, the concept of wellbeing has continued to be debated amongst philosophers, psychologists, medics and economists who have expressed their own ideologies on the meaning of happiness and living well (Watson, Emery and Bayliss 2012:19). Modern psychologists, such as Dr Ilona Boniwell, argue that existing approaches to happiness which are depicted in contemporary literature ignore the contributions from humanistic and existential thinkers, such as Maslow, Rogers, Jung and Allport as they fail to consider the complexity of ancient philosophical notions of happiness. In her blog, PositivePsychology.org.uk, Boniwell argues that there are two conceptions to happiness: Hedonic and Eudaimonic. Hedonic happiness refers to pleasurable, ephemeral moments of enjoyment and having a good time, whereas Eudaimonic happiness refers to striving to achieve a goal, or surmount a challenge either for oneself or beyond one's own needs.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new branch of psychology emerged which examined the scientific and psychological study of human strengths and happiness (Carr 2013:xiii) The founder of modern Positive Psychology, Martin Seligman stated that its aim was not only to study pathologies and weaknesses but to nurture what is best. He asserted that:

> Psychology is not just a branch of medicine concerned with illness or health; it is much larger. It is about work, education, insight, love, growth, and play (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000: 7).

In the introduction to his book, *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman outlined the three pillars to positive psychology as: the study of positive emotion, positive traits and abilities and the study of positive institutions (Seligman 2002: 10). Seligman's theories draw on the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who conceived the concept of Flow, to explain the mental state that a person enters when they want to pursue something they are doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 6). Additionally, Seligman's study of positive emotions shares some links to Emotional Intelligence, or EI in its abbreviated form, a term that Daniel Goleman (1995: xi) popularised in the 1990s while referring to skills and competencies in the domains of: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Alan Carr, the author of *Positive Psychology: The science of happiness and human strengths,* highlighted in the introduction to his book that positive psychology theory had evolved since 2010 in response to further research and advances in the related fields including: 'positive psychotherapy, character strengths and virtues, and emotional intelligence' (Carr, 2013: xiv). However, prior to the emergence of publications post-2010, the books by Csikszentmihalyi, Goleman and Seligman were the recommended

texts for educators according to Ian Morris. Morris authored the handbook entitled *Teaching Happiness and Well-Being in Schools: Learning to Ride Elephants* (2009); and is recognised as the Head of Wellbeing at Wellington College, which was the first school in the UK to introduce a wellbeing programme (Watson, Emery and Bayliss 2012: 65).

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, wellbeing education has become a prominent government agenda across many countries (David et al. 2013: 580). According to the *Oxford Handbook of Happiness,* there were two reasons that provoked this response. Firstly, governments wanted to confront the rising percentages of child and adolescent depression and anxiety which were recorded in the UK, USA and Australia. Secondly, they sought to address the findings of the 2007 *Unicef* survey of subjective wellbeing; where children's opinions were ranked in terms of their health, liking for school and perceived wellbeing. The report concluded that France, the USA and UK were listed in the bottom third of the twenty-one industrialised countries that took part (David et al. 2013: 580). Whilst the need for reform was recognised to prevent physical and mental health disorders, research of the time also identified benefits to promoting happiness and wellbeing. Boniwell cited Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener's article, entitled *The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success?* (2005) to assert that:

> Happy people are successful across multiple life domains, including marriage, relationships, health, longevity, income, and work performance. They are more creative, able to multitask and endure boring tasks, more trusting, helpful, and sociable (David et al. 2013: 580).

Significant breakthroughs in wellbeing education were attributed to Wellington College in the UK for creating a wellbeing syllabus (David et al. 2013: 30) and Geelong Grammar School, (GGS) in Australia which is cited by several authors (Morris 2009; Seligman et al. 2009; Watson, Emery and Bayliss 2012) as the first school to pilot a whole-school wellbeing initiative. Although both schools are considered pioneers in introducing wellbeing education, their approaches to wellbeing are different (David et al. 2013: 35). In 2006, Wellington College introduced a 2-year wellbeing programme consisting of fortnightly lessons for students aged between 14-16 with the aim of providing 'skills for living well that are useful, easily understood, and can be applied on a daily basis' (ibid. 582). According to Morris, the course covers a range of knowledge on the causes of human flourishing from physical health, positive relationships, character strengths, sustainability, to understanding meaning and purpose (ibid. 702). In 2008, Seligman formed part of a team that visited GGS to train the faculty members on the skills of positive psychology which included: 'resilience, character strengths, gratitude, positive communication, optimism' (Seligman et al. 2009: 304). Since then the school has devised a curriculum that offers 20–25 80-minute lessons which are delivered from the 9th grade (14-15 years) upwards. Seligman comments that the sessions are predominantly discussion-based which are followed up with practical activities and a journal reflection. The aim is to encourage students to apply the concepts and skills they learn in school to a personalised, real-life situation as a

homework task (ibid. 301). These two examples show that the provision of wellbeing may differ depending on the school and whilst both methodologies focus on relationships and character strengths as components of wellbeing, there are variations in the other skills that they focus on. This highlights how multifaceted the concept of wellbeing education has become and how differently it is interpreted by academic institutions.

As aspects of positive psychology were integrated into school wellbeing programmes, Seligman launched a new concept in 2009 through a journal he wrote asking educators to 'imagine "'Positive Education"'' (ibid. 294). The term emerged from positive psychology although its origins have been attributed to John Dewey's concepts of schooling (Trask-Kerr et al. 2019: 786). In the article, *A Deweyan positive education: psychology with philosophy,* Trask-Kerr et al. assert that:

> Positive psychology's goals for education share many of Dewey's ideas about community-mindedness and the role of education in nurturing citizenship (ibid. 787)

although the difference between the two theories is that Dewey ideas were rooted in philosophy, where Seligman's ideas were underpinned by science. In the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Matthew A. White (2021) reviews the last decade of positive education remarking that its rapid growth can be evidenced by the founding of the International Positive Psychology Association's Education Division (IPPA) in 2020 and their numerous global conferences, festivals and online training platforms (White 2021: 74).

Whilst the direction a school chooses to follow may depend on the institution, it has become evident over the past ten years that an increasing emphasis has been placed on the importance of wellbeing programmes. White cites Seligman et al. (2009) to recount that positive education was initially challenged by more dominant schooling priorities, stating that:

> In the first five years of early research, this tension manifest as considerable competition between education for wellbeing and academic accomplishments and growth (White 2021: 77).

However, as evidence has begun to emerge, academics have highlighted the correlation between student wellbeing and academic achievement. In 2014, a British Medical Journal which argued for the reasons to promote health and wellbeing in UK schools stated:

> Students' broader development and wellbeing receive more attention in several countries with better academic attainment than in England. Schools in Finland, Sweden, Australia, and Singapore vary in whether provision occurs in specific lessons or is integrated into subject learning, but they all place greater emphasis than schools in England do on students' overall development, and social and emotional learning (Bonell et al. 2014: 1).

This comment shows that the promotion of wellbeing has been acknowledged as a global incentive which recognises the benefits to students. It highlights that there is no prescribed approach as to whether schools should be offering wellbeing through a 'taught' or 'caught' curriculum. As White asserts, a taught curriculum refers to taught lessons which follow a scope and sequence, whereas a caught curriculum lies within its culture (White 2021: 77).

Having explored the context behind wellbeing and some of the components which have emerged within education over the last 20 years, there is evidence to support its growing recognition and importance in students' welfare and academic success. The research also suggests that the provision of wellbeing is broad and varied since there is no prescribed methodology that institutions must follow. This grants schools the choice to create their own taught curriculum or foster their own ideologies of wellbeing throughout their wider curricula and culture. In turn, it raises the question as to whether or not schools should focus on wellbeing through a dedicated curriculum or if it should be integrated more explicitly throughout individual subjects and extra-curricular activities. If schools were to audit the subjects and non-curricular opportunities that they offer students in terms of developing their wellbeing, would they place a greater emphasis on subjects such as drama/theatre? The next section of this discussion details an independent study that was carried out with colleagues and past students to examine the links that can be made to wellbeing through high school drama/theatre education with a specific focus on how the subject can support the social and emotional development of adolescents between the ages of 16-18.

Independent Study Findings

Research for this discussion area was undertaken by an independent study through informal interviews with twenty colleagues from two international schools. The purpose was to elicit their views about wellbeing, the value of drama/theatre education in relation to wellbeing and the provisions for wellbeing education that were currently offered in their schools. The volunteers were teachers and leaders who worked across various subjects in the Secondary age range who engaged in 10-20 minute conversations. The aim was to gather qualitative feedback from a varied range of subject teachers that would allow for personalised responses on the topic rather than merely generating direct quantitative feedback. Colleagues were asked a selection of closed and open questions to gather perceptive data about their experiences and ideologies of wellbeing education; their views on curricular and extracurricular drama/theatre's ability to promote wellbeing; and their responses to how students had been affected by socially-distanced learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. In an attempt to mitigate bias, conversations were tailored to each individual teacher allowing them to draw upon their own ideologies of wellbeing and to draw on their past and present experiences, as teachers and parents, of how the schools they had worked in had recognised drama/theatre. Where participants had knowledge and experience of the IB curriculum, wider discussions into the

Approaches to Learning (ATLs) and *Learner Profile (LP)* attributes were discussed to elicit how these skills were integrated into teaching social and emotional wellbeing. Permission was granted by all the volunteers to record their conversations for transcription purposes and was once again requested in order to include quotes which were deemed pertinent to this discussion. All volunteers remain anonymous although they have allowed their subject or role to be referenced in order to provide context to the discussion. In some cases, paralinguistic expressions have been removed from their quotes for the purpose of clarity and simplicity. An informal survey was also conducted via a social media group chat with four previous IB Theatre students from the graduating class of 2019. The students were briefed on the topic and asked for permission to utilise their responses to the question, 'Why did you take IB Theatre?'

Overall, the findings of the qualitative research supported the hypothesis that limited measurable data has been available for teachers to formulate their own ideas on what a successful wellbeing incentive might look like. Whilst school leaders were able to discuss wellbeing within the context of the school and its prospective links to drama/theatre, particularly to extra-curricular productions; subject teachers tended to speak more generally about their perceptions. In three instances the expressions: wellbeing, wellness and mindfulness were used synonymously whilst another three colleagues openly admitted to not knowing what the wellbeing provision at the school entailed, or how to define what 'wellbeing' actually meant. This underlines the lack of clarity that teachers face regarding concepts and the potential role they might be able to play in promoting wellbeing in their current school, aside from delivering their subject curriculum.

The responses from the students aligned more to a desire or priority for wellbeing, rather than for academic achievement. They cited the following reasons for their choice:

- Enjoyment of explorations
- Freedom of expression
- Collaborative work
- Creativity - free from restrictions and boundaries
- Autonomy over what to study individually/collaboratively
- Self expression
- Step outside of comfort zone
- Non-verbal self-expression
- Coping mechanism

Student comments provided useful feedback on their experiences of drama/theatre from an holistic perspective of school - the added value of enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from doing something they enjoyed and found useful. Furthermore, their remarks underlined the importance of gathering qualitative data surrounding wellbeing to ascertain how effectively the students perceive they are being cared for throughout their studies. This highlights the need for schools to focus

their initiatives beyond academic growth, but also on the social-emotional development of students.

Wellbeing through Drama/Theatre

A well-taught drama/theatre curriculum can contribute to the wellbeing ethos of a school and the academic, creative, social-emotional development of its students. As an art form it has constantly evolved and therefore, passionate educators have the capacity to deliver a curriculum that teaches the conventions of the subject, remains relevant to current affairs, prompts creative endeavours and accesses the skills and virtues that lead to a 'good life'. As one leader and teacher of science remarked:

> Education is about being a well-rounded, critical thinker, who wants to learn all their life and engage with other people, who has compassion and empathy, who understands, manages and regulates themselves; so I think that Theatre plays a crucial role in all of this (Interview E 2021: 00.06.59-00.07.21).

Arguably, all teachers have the capacity to implement wellbeing into their subjects; as a Maths teacher claimed, 'it should be something that should be part of all of our jobs' (Interview C, 2021, 00.05.21-00.05.25). Although, for that to occur, perhaps schools need to audit their curricula to assess where the opportunities to promote wellbeing lie. With this in mind, the following discussion will examine the inherent links that drama/theatre shares with positive education.

In the *Oxford Handbook to Happiness,* Morris believes that schools should 'educate for happiness' by teaching students how to be happy and learn how to make themselves happier. He argues that:

> There is considerable current, reliable, and meaningful research into the ingredients of a happy life and young people should be given the opportunity to engage critically with that research (David et al. 2013: 701).

He argues for a 'tandem approach' to educating students both in terms of a curriculum that generates happiness and challenges them, but that also allows them to reflect on what it is about their education that makes them happy in order to further their goals. Morris states that:

> Every opportunity must be given to young people to learn how to bring about their own flourishing (ibid. 701).

Whilst there is a considerable amount of literature to educate individuals on how to engender happiness, being able to practically apply the theory can be more difficult.

Drama/theatre lessons can provide a range of activities that allow students to engage with one another through a variety of topics. By their nature, they allow students to communicate ideas, thoughts, questions and feelings to one another

when they are devising, critiquing or establishing a subtext. Jonathan Neelands (2012: 1) describes drama as 'the most social of all art forms because it requires students to act and interact'. Through these interactions students can explore and reflect on fictional and real-life circumstances as a way of developing their critical or divergent thinking skills. As Neelands (2000: 7-8) states:

> We recognise that these students do not come to us as 'human beings' but rather as 'human becomings' - we believe that what we do is planned to help them in this journey of becoming. We try, by all manner of means, deriving from art and deriving from other sources, to put living reality into the hands of living people. The curriculum is the necessary map, it is not the journey itself.

The classroom environment is conducive to wellbeing as it creates a space for students to interact with their peers more freely to address real life issues and situations. A colleague who teaches Science (Interview D 2021: 00.08.08-00.08.27) compared their subject to highlight that students were more comfortable interacting and communicating with one another in a drama/theatre lesson:

> Sometimes there are students who won't feel comfortable doing something, but if you're doing it in the context of an activity and it's in drama, where they are generally more relaxed, they're more able to voice their opinions...because you have the scope to have the wellbeing built into the lessons, not as easily in a science lesson, for example.

Similarly, an EAL teacher (Interview I 2022: 00.03.34-00.03.59) believed that students were less inhibited to communicate with one another by saying:

> Within a drama class, any way in which students can express their message is valid, there's no right way or wrong way. Therefore, they have that freedom to do things or say things that they normally wouldn't have within the constraints of, say, a Maths classroom.

The colleague went on to highlight the inclusive aspect of drama/theatre, in that the means of communication can be verbal and non-verbal, thus enabling English language learners a mode of self expression and sense of equality. She advocated that:

> Because there's that element of fluidity, of creativity, of rewriting a story, or indeed writing a story that hasn't been written before. Students really can, no matter what their ability on paper, in a drama classroom they can start from zero on a par with everybody else and be expressive in whatever form that expression takes (Interview I 2002: 00.04.07-00.04.31).

Students gain confidence and the ability to express themselves when there is an emphasis on developing trust and cohesion. When an environment is created where students feel free to express themselves without fear of judgement they can develop

a greater bond with each other. As Alan Carr (2013: 253) states 'trust develops when the person we are in the relationship with is predictable and dependable', therefore, it is fundamental to build a predictable and dependable atmosphere amongst the students so that they know they are contributing to each other's feeling of comfort. This point is furthered by the past-student surveys, where Student 2 (2021) alluded to the fact that IB Theatre afforded the opportunity to 'let go a little bit and work collaboratively' whereas Student 3 (2021) said that:

> *Theatre was free from restrictions and boundaries which made the collaborative process with my classmates all the more inclusive.*

Neelands (2012: 12) asserts that it is up to the teacher to establish classroom norms as their role is:

> To encourage and protect, through contracting, all pupils so that they can find the confidence and self-esteem needed to take action in the drama classroom.

When students feel valued and accepted for who they are and what they have to offer, they are more likely to contribute to the work.

Since the quotes from the past students connected their feelings of comfort, freedom and inclusion with the social aspect of collaboration, it suggests that they formed positive relationships with one another that gave them a sense of security. To achieve this they needed to develop their social intelligences such as the ability to trust and empathise with one another. As Carr (2013: 253) claims:

> Trust also depends upon skills such as empathy and compassion, being a good listener, appreciation of others' strengths and acknowledgement of their shortcomings, knowing when to disclose personal information, knowing how much touch is appropriate and above all seeing every other person as absolutely valuable, not as a means to an end.

In the IB Theatre course, the *Collaborative Theatre Project* (CTP), which is one of the four assessments, requires students to audit their skills, interests and experiences so that they can form ensembles with like-minded peers. The exercise is useful in letting students identify and compare aspects of their personalities, such as their strengths and weaknesses. This has often enabled pupils with contrasting as well as complimentary traits to come together in appreciation of their diversity. Moreover, it is an appropriate introductory activity for the course since it allows them to present themselves 'publicly' to others.

The distinction between students' private and public lives is highlighted by Neelands (2012, p.40) who remarks that they are mindful that they have different personas in school and at home. He believes that the drama/theatre setting is conducive for them to establish where those boundaries lie:

> Drama can draw pupils' attention to the need to establish, among themselves, a set of rules for public behaviour in school that respects the privacy and rights of others: a highway code that allows all to safely negotiate.

The personal audit activity exemplifies how students can reflect on themselves and the group to acknowledge the need to cooperate. The activity connects directly to the IB ATLs which are a set of ten skills that can be explicitly taught alongside the curriculum to provide strategies to help students become 'stronger, more self-regulated learners' (Approaches to teaching and learning (ATL) skills, n.d.). Ensemble work lends itself to the teaching of Social Skills which include: encouraging others to contribute, giving and receiving meaningful feedback and building consensus in the group (Approaches to teaching and learning (ATL) skills, n.d.). In drama/theatre, students are often required to work collaboratively and therefore they have the opportunity to practice their negotiating skills. As Neelands (ibid. 40) explains:

> They are faced with problems, dilemmas or conflicts of interest in the drama that require them to act collectively rather than in their own private interest.

If the students are explicitly taught the importance and ability to negotiate and resolve problems in the classroom, they will be able to apply these skills in their future endeavours. As Goleman (1995: 142) states:

> The skills that help people harmonise should become increasingly valued as a workplace asset in the years to come.

Drama/theatre enables students to develop their social and emotional intelligences as it provides opportunities to experiment with modes of personal and cultural expression as they contemplate moral and ethical values. This was recognised by a History teacher (Interview J 2022: 00.07.35-00.07.52) who remarked that:

> Because you place yourself into somebody else's shoes and into a different character, it gives you an opportunity to empathise with other people's situations and perhaps also with your own situation with something you have to deal with.

As students explore different perspectives through scenarios, subtexts and characters, they learn the value of empathy. Goleman (2009: 110-11) believes that empathy requires the ability to read the emotions of others which are not always expressed verbally and to understand the issues that lie behind those feelings. The History teacher echoed Goleman's views in pointing out that:

> Because they're watching and observing it gives them an awareness of other students' feelings, emotions… so it can make them very emotionally intelligent (ibid.: 00.05.48-00.06.00).

Another colleague remarked that, compared to Science, there was more scope to talk about issues and people's feelings:

> Sometimes we can talk about ethics in Science, but we don't get to do that as much. They do feel more comfortable in drama lessons to be able to voice their opinions and I think they get more of an opportunity to do that (Interview D 2021: 00.08.35-00.08.47).

Drama/theatre enables students to inquire into topics which interest them, engaging their critical and creative thinking as they grapple with ways to understand and communicate those ideas. In the article, *Imagined Worlds in Theatre and Drama,* Cecily O'Neill (1985: 159) stated that audiences and performers combine their imaginations with their life experiences when they are formulating meanings in theatre:

> We try to piece together what we perceive to be the underlying logic of the action. We supplement the hypothetical world we are witnessing on stage or creating in the classroom with our own knowledge and experience of the real world.

This idea is supported by an English teacher who compares their subject to argue that there is more scope for personal expression in drama/theatre, which creates a stronger teacher-pupil relationship:

> Within the DP English classroom, there's so little chance for personal expression. So it's all critical thinking. They express an opinion but we never ask them to link it to their own life experience. Whereas in drama, kids are asked to be creative and within that creativity they share emotion and they share opinion...because of that you get to know them better and you get a different type of bond (Interview H 2021: 00.03.31-00.04.34).

In the IB Theatre course, since students have the chance to devise their own work, their performances can provide insight into the issues that are affecting them. The English teacher exemplified this by remarking on a recent solo theatre assessment that a student had devised and performed:

> She did a piece about sexual harassment and women being abused and it was fascinating because it made me want to speak to her about the topic. It was an avenue. It was a way of getting to talk to the kids about it in general and from a pastoral point of view, this is something you've been affected by, can we get you some support? (ibid.: 00.03.57-00.04.43).

This comment highlights the empathy that the teacher has towards the student for wanting to explore the subject matter and it acknowledges the empathetic attitude of the student for tackling these issues through theatre. It also demonstrates a situation where a teacher may follow up with the student or seek further pastoral intervention from a school counsellor if it were deemed necessary.

Drama/theatre provides a medium to explore and communicate relevant themes that students care about. Student 4 (2021) reflected on their reasons for studying IB Theatre, writing:

> *I think I was persuaded most by the fact that I was, in some ways, in control of the knowledge I wanted to learn. There wasn't a strict syllabus that dictated the creative process in class which meant we had the chance to explore whatever we wanted as individuals but also as teammates.*

Giving students the autonomy to explore topics that interest them is more motivational and fulfilling for them. A principal who was interviewed, posed the question:

> Can you teach somebody to flourish; if we believe that flourishing is the concept of wellbeing rather than happiness, or is it a product of the activities you engage in? (Interview A 2021: 00.02.29-00.02.40).

From the qualitative data that has been shared thus far, there is reason to believe that students can flourish; personally, socially, emotionally and academically from the study of drama/theatre if the teacher is aware of their capacity to integrate wellbeing into their lessons.

While it is important to acknowledge that drama/theatre activities can contribute to wellbeing education, it is worth considering that it is not the subject but the way that it is taught that characterises this. As Neelands (2009: 11) stated in the article, *The Art of Togetherness:*

> Drama of course, by itself does nothing. It is only what teachers do with drama that makes the difference.

Therefore, the onus is perhaps on each individual teacher to create a culture of wellbeing within their lessons for it to become pervasive across other areas of the school.

Perceptions of drama/theatre as a source of wellbeing

If drama/theatre is valued and nurtured by a school, rather than pushed out to promote the core subjects, it can have a positive impact on students' holistic development. The opportunity should not be limited to extracurricular performances which are more product-driven and condensed into a short timeframe. According to the data collected from colleagues, productions were regarded highly for their contribution to the life of a school. One school leader spoke of the lasting impact that a show can have on students:

What makes a child's experience through school special isn't a lesson...what they take away from it is things like the sports, the drama, the productions they've been in whether it's the technical side or being in front of the audience (Interview B 2021: 00.07.57-00.08.30).

Traditionally, the arts have been subjected to a hierarchy where they have been regarded as the least important subjects, according to Ken Robinson (2009: 12). Even today, this can be evidenced in the IBDP curriculum which separates the subject areas into six categories:

- Language and Literature
- Language Acquisition
- Individuals and Societies
- Sciences
- Mathematics
- The Arts

Students must take a subject within each category but there is an option to drop the arts choice in favour of another subject. As the website states:

Students may opt to study an additional sciences, individuals and societies, or languages course, instead of a course in the arts (International Baccalaureate®: 2019).

Research was conducted into the factors which affect uptake in the IB Arts in a report by Kenneth Elpus of the University of Maryland which used administrative data, surveys from IB Coordinators and exam registrations between 2010-2017. The report highlighted that some schools did not have the provision to offer Arts subjects whilst others cited the geographic region and legal status of the school, as well as the gender, nationality, race/ethnicity and English language abilities of the students to be amongst other contributing factors (Elpus, n.d.). According to the report, when IB Coordinators were asked how the value of the arts was perceived by the stakeholders, such as teachers, Principals/school boards, parents, and students they stated that 'in general... the arts were mostly held in high regard' (Elpus, n.d.: 28). In concluding comments however, the report remarked that:

The arts subjects are viewed by many IB stakeholders as less rigorous, less important, and less applicable than the other subjects comprising the DP model (Elpus n.d.: 36).

It is worth noting that the report acknowledged the need to qualitatively measure the student decision-making process in the future to gather data on the reasons why students opt in or out of studying the arts. Nevertheless, it highlights the ongoing struggle the Arts have for recognition amongst other subjects which is why the advocacy for its visible benefits to wellbeing are relevant.

The aforementioned report highlights that there is a lack of qualitative data when assessing the student rationale behind their IB subject choices. Similarly, some academics (Gray 2011; Watson, Emery and Bayliss 2012; and White 2021) have commented that there is not yet enough data to measure the success of wellbeing initiatives in schools. This emphasises two critical points: firstly, that there is no way to measure wellbeing unless it is clearly defined; and secondly, there is no common agreement over what wellbeing is to ascertain which concepts ought to be measured. When the question was posed on how wellbeing incentives were being measured to gauge their success, a colleague admitted that:

> People want it to be measurable and they want there to be some kind of tangible evidence that can solidify that and support it and say that there's a definite link. I don't know how that can be approached (Interview G 2021: 00.04.45-00.05.06).

This comment emphasises the issue that schools face in having to accumulate and quantify data.

A school leader responded to the question on how the school was measuring its wellbeing provision by saying that sometimes questionnaires or focus group discussions might be used but they are not always, they stated that sometimes the feedback was 'very much anecdotal' (Interview B 2021). This may present an opportunity to survey the student body more widely in order to gather more accurate and tangible data.

In drama/theatre, as with wellbeing, there is a reliance on anecdotal and perceptive data to continually validate its importance within a school. As a school leader iterated:

> Above all other subjects, Drama has to rely on personalities and characters within that department to drive its profile forward. Science has to happen, Maths has to happen, and English has to happen. You don't have to work hard from a profile perspective, whereas Drama and the importance of Drama… you have to sell it (Interview B 2021: 00.18.50-00.19.24).

This school leader shows an awareness of how important positive perceptions of drama/theatre are amongst stakeholders. Fleming (2006: 58) echoes this comment by stating that successful drama/theatre education is about creating a culture in the school, not just designing a syllabus. He asserts that there are 'a priori arguments to suggest that a strong arts program in a school is likely to have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and in turn on their general performance' (ibid. 58). That said, it has always been difficult to measure the success of arts programmes given their subjective nature.

The extent to which students benefit from a drama/theatre education in terms of academic attainment or wellbeing depends on how the curriculum is taught. To reiterate Neelands' (2009: 11) assertion that 'it is only what teachers do with drama

that makes the difference', this same principle ought to be applicable to any subject. Teachers should identify opportunities to embed wellbeing as part of their lessons, but this can only be achieved effectively once the school clarifies its definition and makes wellbeing a school-wide priority. A sixth form teacher supports this notion by saying that:

> I'm not necessarily sure that wellbeing needs to be taught, it needs to be immersed and be part of what we do (Interview F 2021: 00.08.10-00.08.18).

A Maths teacher shared this sentiment by stating that:

> Wellbeing should be more than just a lesson on wellbeing, it needs to be something that is pervasive throughout the curriculum (Interview C 2021: 00.05.06-00.05.14).

Morris (2009: 14) takes this idea a step further in saying:

> Everywhere that every member of a school community turns, in every interaction, every system and every structure, they should see wellbeing reflected back at them.

Conclusion

This study has sought to demystify the term wellbeing and its related concepts by attempting to define its history and evolution into modern psychology and educational theory. Over the past twenty years, it is evident that researchers have gained a deeper understanding of how to live well, as there is a wealth of contemporary literature on the topic. While policy-makers and educational institutions believe they understand the value of wellbeing education, there is some discrepancy amongst colleagues as to what it is, how it is taught effectively and if it is evaluated. Informal discussions with colleagues showed that there was a lack of tangible data available to measure the current success of wellbeing initiatives and that schools have tended to allude to perceptive and subjective opinion.

Through research and qualitative data analysis, this study has shown that drama/theatre has several intrinsic links to the social-emotional wellbeing of adolescents. Colleagues have observed that students can practice empathy, self-expression, develop stronger relationships and understand the value of collaboration; however, these skills are naturally embedded in the subject where students also develop critical and creative thinking and communication skills. When teachers explicitly define and focus on the 'soft-skills' that can be explored in drama/theatre, along with the syllabus requirements; the benefits of learning the subject will become more visible to stakeholders. Although exam grades provide data on academic achievement, the levels of student satisfaction and contentment are often only gauged perceptively, if they are even measured at all. This highlights

the ongoing struggle that arts teachers face in attempting to validate their subject to stakeholders.

Research confirms that drama/theatre teachers still have to justify the value of their subject, therefore, they need to identify and champion the benefits to wellbeing that can be taught through the syllabus and the additional benefits that can be exploited through the 'caught' curriculum. In order to capitalise on the unplanned curriculum, teachers must define the culture of their classroom through establishing norms, expectations, traditions and customs that students respect and follow. Moreover, if teachers recognise when 'teachable moments' appear through a diversion from the taught syllabus, such as an ethical discussion, or research task, they could embrace the opportunity to embed wellbeing into their instruction. Ultimately, the success of a school's wellbeing provision depends on the culture that it creates as a community. A whole-school wellbeing initiative that considers what wellbeing means and the roles that all staff will play making it part of daily life is fundamental, but it needs to be agreed on amongst all stakeholders. Wellbeing must be clearly defined and every member of the school has to be in accordance with its values. One suggestion may be to implement staff training across all the sectors of the school and designate time for teachers to examine the possibilities for integrating skills into their lessons. Another idea may be to enlist the feedback of the parents and student-body on the topic because schools can only make a meaningful plan for student wellbeing if it aligns with their needs and expectations of happiness.

The academic research to date provides limited qualitative data demonstrating that there is limited evidence regarding what students actually think about wellbeing or whether it has any benefit to their school experience. Since the social-emotional needs and desires will vary between different student age and gender demographics, the question of whether or not it should be prioritised must surely lie with the students. Perhaps schools ought to individualise their approaches to wellbeing by engaging and empowering the student-body to take an active part in their social-emotional development.

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Interviews

The following selection of interviews have been transcribed and referenced as follows:

Interview A Voice-memo recording, 8th June, 2021
Interview B Voice-memo recording, 9th June, 2021
Interview C Voice-memo recording, 9th June, 2021
Interview D Voice-memo recording, 9th June, 2021
Interview E Voice-memo recording, 9th June, 2021
Interview F Voice-memo recording, 10th June, 2021
Interview G Voice-memo recording, 11th June, 2021
Interview H Googlemeet recording, 26th June, 2021
Interview I, Voice-memo recording, 14th January, 2022
Interview J, Voice-memo recording, 19th January, 2022.

Surveys

The survey responses are referenced as follows:

Student 1 Written message through social media, 6th August, 2021
Student 2 Written message through social media, 6th August, 2021
Student 3 Written message through social media, 6th August, 2021
Student 4 Written message through social media, 6th August, 2021

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