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The Entanglement of Wellbeing in Developing Schools: An Actor Network Analysis

Thesis presented by:

David Cashman
101390180
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0612-3314

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Education

University College Cork
School of Education

Head of Department: **Professor Nicola Ingram**

Supervisors: **Dr Wesley O'Brien and**
Professor Fiona Chambers

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AUTHOR DECLARATION:

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

Signed:



David Michael Cashman (Candidate)

Student ID: 101390180

Date: 23rd April 2025

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List of Acronyms

CACSSS	College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences
SWB	Subjective Wellbeing
TPSR	Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility
SHANARRI	Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PERMA	Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment
PERMAH	Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, Health
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
ESS	European Social Survey
MHC-SF	Mental Health Continuum Short Form
CSPPA	Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study
WHO	World Health Organisation
MVPA	Moderate- to Vigorous-Intensity Physical Activity
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals Network
CTE	Collective Teacher Efficacy
NPF	National Principals Forum
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
CET	Cognitive Evaluation Theory
OIT	Organismic Integration Theory
BPNT	Basic Psychological Needs Theory
MWS	My World Survey
GIRFEC	Getting It Right For Every Child
ANT	Actor Network Theory (Latour, 1987, 2005)

SREC	Social Research Ethics Committee
NVIVO	A qualitative data analysis software
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
CRC	Convention of Rights for the Child
EU	European Union
OLCA	Office of Corporate and Legal Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Science (from 01/10/1997); Department of Education and Skills (from 02/05/2010); Department of Education (from 22/10/2020)
DoH	Department of Health
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Disorder/Difficulties
EE	Entertainment Education
FMS	Fundamental Movement Skills
MHL	Mental Health Literacy
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OW	Objective Wellbeing
OPP	Obligatory Passage Point
PA	Physical Activity
PE	Physical Education
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RQ	Research Question
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SACD	Social and Character Development
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning/Socio-Emotional Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SERCCH	Socio-economic factors, Emotional intelligence, Relationships, Communication, Contentment and Happiness
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SNA	Special Needs Assistant

SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
USA	United States of America

Glossary of Terms

Actant
An actant is a human or non-human involved in an activity under study

Actor
Any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translate their will into the language of its own. Common examples of actors include humans, texts, graphical representations, and technical artifacts. Actors, all of which have interests, try to convince other actors to create an alignment of the other actors' interests with their own interests (Callon and Latour, 1981, p.286).

Actor Network
Heterogeneous network of aligned interests, including people, organisations and standards (Walsham and Sahay, 1999, p.42).

DEIS
The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme aims to reduce educational disadvantage. It is a Department of Education policy. Under the DEIS programme, schools with the highest number of students at risk of educational disadvantage get extra resources.

Emotional regulation
The ability to control emotions and express them appropriately. This involves the ability to dampen or heighten an emotion to fit the context.

Enrolment
The third moment of translation, wherein other actors in the network accept (or get aligned to) interests defined for them by the focal actor (Callon, 1986)

Eudaimonic wellbeing
Living life according to one’s values, reaching one’s potential and flourishing.

Hedonic wellbeing
Experiencing pleasure and feeling good (usually in the short term)

Interessement
The second moment of translation which involves a process of convincing other actors to accept definition of the focal actor (Callon, 1986).

Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)

Broadly referring to a situation that has to occur in order for all the actors to satisfy the interests that have been attributed to them by the focal actor. The focal actor defines the OPP through which the other actors must pass through

Problematisation
The first moment of translation during which a focal actor defines identities and interests of other actors that are consistent with its own interests, and establishes itself as an obligatory passage point (OPP), thus 'rendering itself indispensable' (Callon, 1986).

Pupil agency
The child is invited to co-construct knowledge in the educational setting, where it is possible for them to own and guide their own train of thought and make choices.

Resilience
The ability to recover from setbacks in life, deal with adversity and develop coping mechanisms

Teacher agency
Teachers as reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to learning needs in a variety of contexts

Translation
The process of the alignment of the interests of a diverse set of actors with the interests of the focal actor. The creation of an actor-network. This process consists of three major stages: problematization, interessement, and enrolment. Numerous actors within an organisation may be involved in a different process of translation, each with its own unique characteristics and outcomes. For purposes of clarity, it is useful to focus on a single actor, from whose vantage point we wish to see the process of translation (Callon, 1986; Walsham, 1999)

Abstract

Background/Context

The concept of wellbeing in education is riddled with complexities. Wellbeing, therefore, exemplifies a *live controversy* as it continues to evolve and generate debate among diverse stakeholders. The debate involves multiple actors, both human (e.g., educators, policymakers, psychologists, parents, and students) and non-human (e.g., educational policies, assessment frameworks, and wellbeing interventions). Added to this, wellbeing itself doesn't have a consistent spelling - often written as 'wellbeing' or 'well-being' or 'well being' or even 'Wellbeing' in academic and policy documents. Such a spelling inconsistency for wellbeing indicates both a conceptual fluidity, yet also a lack of stability. Coupled with this, there is the absence of a standard definition for wellbeing, which this has led to diverse interpretations across various disciplines (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2015). An example of wellbeing which is commonly operationalised in education is positive education. Seligman (2011) outlined five pathways through which wellbeing can be achieved through positive education. The work of Seligman (2011) culminated in the PERMA model (Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement), which has formed the basis of multiple empirical wellbeing models in schools (Adler et al, 2016; Norrish et al 2015; Kern et al, 2021). In addressing this, the present doctoral study will focus on designing a broader positive education framework which embraces a holistic model of wellbeing – consisting of relationships, emotional, social, physical, and cognitive domains. This study will strive to create a more inclusive and responsive wellbeing framework within the context of education system.

Research Aim/Objectives/Purpose

The study aims to design and develop a systems-informed model of positive education, known as the "Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing" (KCW), which promotes holistic wellbeing for primary school students in Ireland. Using Venturini's (2015) 'Cartography of Controversies', this Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing seeks to capture the interconnected nature of wellbeing, by being flexible and agile to the diverse needs of students and school communities.

Methods and Data Sources

A transmethodology approach guided the development of this KCW (Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021). The research design involved a narrative literature review, stakeholder consultations, and qualitative data collection techniques. Stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, and students, contributed their voice through focus groups, interviews and a Photovoice methodology, which provided critical insights in shaping this model. This methodological process allowed for iterative refinement, aligning with Venturini's (2010) four out the five observational lenses; *from statements to literature, from literature to actors, from actors to networks and from networks to cosmoses.* Venturini's (2010) cartography of controversies offers a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to advancing wellbeing within educational settings.

Key Findings/Conclusions

The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing establishes an interconnected wellbeing cycle. "Relationships and care" is a core entry point. This leads to social-emotional, physical, and cognitive domains which cumulatively foster student flourishing. The iterative, stakeholder-informed design process was pivotal in establishing the feasibility and acceptability of this Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing in diverse school settings. This resulted in it being deemed a comprehensive approach to wellbeing. The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing framework proved instrumental in ensuring the study design was both theory-driven and evidence-based. Moreover, this considered study design was attuned to systemic influences of wellbeing surfacing its multifaceted and interconnected nature.

Significance or Potential Contribution of the Research

This study presents a new, adaptive model of wellbeing for schools called the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing. This model attempts to address gaps in traditional positive education frameworks. By offering a comprehensive and evidence-based approach, the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing model 's application in various educational contexts holds potential to enhance wellbeing practices, and make a significant contribution to the implementation of positive education theory overall. Indeed, the current Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing model proposed holds the potential to equip educators to

foster inclusive and nurturing environments that support students' long-term personal and academic growth (Diener et al., 1999; Seligman et al., 2009).

Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 1.1 of this thesis outlines where and to whom this dissemination occurred, across publications, conferences, workshops, keynote addresses, and publications. Sharing the work at each stage allowed me to test ideas in real time, learn from others' experiences, and continually improve the study's relevance to practice. Dissemination became a powerful strategy for creating a two-way exchange between research and the real world. It gave the work a life beyond academia, and it reminded me constantly of why I began this journey: to make a genuine difference to wellbeing in schools.

This chapter then sets out to develop the background of the study by first describing the research assemblage of a primary school. Accordingly, my personal and professional motivation for doing this research is presented, along with the philosophical underpinning that informs this work. To make sense of the research context and stakeholders, the study employs a guiding theoretical framework called Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005). I share the essence of ANT and how it is used in context of this research. Finally, I describe the structure of the thesis, the contribution of the study, and the research questions that guide this study. To begin, the next section outlines a comprehensive list of publications, conference presentations and awards.

1.1 Publications and Conference Presentations

Publications

Cashman, D., O'Brien, W. & Chambers, F.C. (2025), "An analysis of primary school student's holistic wellbeing using PhotoVoice", *Health Education*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-05-2024-0062

Oral Presentations

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2025). The design of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing using Venturini's Cartography of Controversies. The Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Research Conference 2025, Athlone, Ireland, April 12th 2025.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2024). Empowering Young Voices: Integrating Photovoice in Positive Education Research to Explore Wellbeing in Irish Primary Schools. The Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Research Conference 2025, Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland, April 6th 2024.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2024). An Actor Network Analysis of Teachers Experience of Wellbeing in the Context of a Developing School. The Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Research Conference 2024, Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland, April 6th 2024.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2023). Developing School Teachers' Experiences of Wellbeing: An Actor Network Analysis. European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Glasgow, Scotland, August 24th, 2023.

Cashman, D. (2023). Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education. The Educate Together Principals Conference Principals Conference, Galway, Ireland. March 3rd, 2023.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2023). Developing School Teachers' Experiences of Wellbeing: An Actor Network Analysis. College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS) Postgraduate Research Conference, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, February 6th, 2023.

Cashman, D. (2022). Implementing Trauma Aware Practices in Educate Together Schools. The Trauma Informed Practice Conference Ireland, Dublin, Ireland, November 17th, 2022.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2022). Developing School Principals' Experience of Wellbeing: An Actor Network Analysis European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Yerevan, Armenia. (Online), August 29th, 2022.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2022). New School Principals' Perspective of Wellbeing. The Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Conference 2022, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, Ireland.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2022). Reconceptualising Wellbeing: A Framework for New Schools. The Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Conference 2022, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, Ireland, April 7th, 2022.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2022). Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools. College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS) Postgraduate Research Conference, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, January 26th, 2022.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2021). Reconceptualising Wellbeing to develop an Ecological Framework for organisation for a new Irish Primary School. European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Geneva, Switzerland. (Online), September 3rd, 2021.

Cashman, D, O'Brien, W & Chambers, F.C. (2021). Reconceptualising Wellbeing to develop an Ecological Framework of organisation of a new Irish Primary School. College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS) Postgraduate Research Conference, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, January 23rd, 2021.

Keynote Speeches

Cashman, D. (2025). *Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education.* YouHQ Live, Kent, UK, February 5th, 2025.

Cashman, D. (2024). *Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education.* YouHQ Live, Dubai, UAE, November 25th, 2024

Workshops

Cashman, D. (2025). *Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education.* YouHQ Live, Kent, UK, February 5th, 2025.

Cashman, D. (2023). *Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education.* The Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) Principals Conference, Portlaoise, Laois, Ireland, March 9th, 2023.

Cashman, D. (2022). *Embedding a Systems Informed Model of Positive Education.* Early Childhood Studies 3rd Year Cohort, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland, October 26th, 2022.

Awards

Bank of Ireland and UCC Ignite Business of the Year 2025

UCC Research and Innovation Awards 2024, *New Spin Out of the Year*.

College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences (CACSSS) Employment Based PhD Scholarship awardee (October 2019 – October 2024). 44,000 Euro

The Teaching Council 'Researcher in Residence' Award, 2023. 2000 Euro

1.2 The Research Assemblage of a Primary School: A Narrative Description

I sat in my office one Friday afternoon following what many principals would call "a day". As I reflected on the day, I thought about every decision I made and the individual conversations I had in the previous six hours. I arrived at school and between 7.45 and 8.15 had twenty individual conversations with teachers and Special Needs Assistants ranging from general chit chat to them needing time off, to

stress or the worry some had about a particular child. At 8.15am, the school gates opened for the kids. I had made it custom and practice to greet every child and their parents at the gate. One hundred and forty-one greetings to kids and the same with parents. By 8.45am, I had had over three hundred interactions with three different stakeholder groups. Over the course of the rest of the day, I spoke to four principals, one psychologist, one Special Educational Needs Organiser, a builder, a neighbour of the school who was complaining about parents parking outside his house…This list goes on. However, this reflection was different as I had just started this PhD research. I began to link theory and practice and in particular Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which emerged in the 1970s as a new perspective on child development. This theory emphasises the role of the environment and society on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1976, 1977). He explored how development occurs within a multitude of different, but nested and related systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theory enables a focus on individual experiences, while simultaneously taking into consideration the socio-cultural context of these experiences. In doing so I began to realise that the ecosystem of a school is complex. As a result of this epiphany, I wrote the following narrative reflection on what the research assemblage of a school looks like and the interconnected nature of a school:

'In a primary school environment, wellbeing is an interconnected web shaped by relationships, physical surroundings, policies, and practices. The school operates like a living ecosystem, energised by its students, staff, and the various tangible and intangible components that define its climate. Students, who are the core of this ecosystem, move through hallways filled with colour, texture, sound, and movement, with their experiences moulded by interactions with others and their environment.

Chris Flink of Stanford Design School noted how 'Space is the body language of an organisation' (Doorley & Wittholft, 2012). In schools, this is illustrated by classrooms, corridors, and playgrounds which serve as the arenas where wellbeing plays out, influenced by the interplay of educational tools, curricular activities, and the social dynamics of the school community. A student's wellbeing transcends their physical presence, encompassing academic performance, social bonds, emotional

health, and engagement with the learning environment. Although often unseen, their experiences are inextricably connected to curricula and resources designed to foster growth and development.

Records of student wellbeing including curricular plans, individual education plans, student voice records and assessment portfolios are dispersed across different formats, including management information systems, paper files, teacher notes, and school policies. These records, developed by educators, parents, and occasionally students themselves, form a mosaic of the wellbeing narrative within the school. The secretary's office and administrative (and often social) heart of the school, where parents and community members often make their first point of contact. The playground becomes a vivid reflection of the school's wellbeing narrative, where laughter, social negotiations, and moments of solitude or connection reveal the emotional and physical dimensions of wellbeing. The quality of these interactions, the presence of adults and other children, and the design of the environment all contribute to the broader wellbeing tapestry.

Staff members play pivotal roles in this network, with their daily actions and responsibilities significantly influencing the wellbeing of students. From the compassionate guidance of teachers to the strategic leadership of administrators and the supportive roles of ancillary staff, each interaction leaves an imprint on the school's wellbeing ecosystem. This network is constantly evolving, adapting to changes in educational policies, societal shifts, and the diverse needs of the student population. Wellbeing initiatives, whether curriculum updates, upgrades to the building or physical environment, or new resources, integrate into the rhythms of school life. Decisions made in staff meetings, translated into policies, and enacted in classrooms and playgrounds create ripples that shape experiences and interactions.

At its core, the school is a convergence of human and non-human elements, all contributing to the creation and experience of wellbeing. These elements align around the shared mission of education, working toward the goal of holistic development. The challenge lies in balancing these diverse components, ensuring that every student's journey is supported by a resilient framework of wellbeing that

evolves and thrives within the vibrant school ecosystem.' (Principal's Diary, January 2020).

My narrative was inspired by a reflection into the dynamic world of primary school wellbeing. By its nature, this narrative doesn't push solutions. It simply describes a living portrait of the educational landscape in one primary school. Inspired by this, the thesis aims to appreciate, explore, and elucidate the complex web of relationships and associations within a school setting. It highlights how various actors, both human and non-human, entangle and interact to shape the everyday experiences of students and staff, bringing into focus the often overlooked and mundane realities of school life. This idea of entanglement shows how human and non-human actors in schools are tightly interdependent, relying on each other to shape the ordinary flow of everyday life. By focusing on these small, often unnoticed relationships, it highlights how the mundane realities of school life are constantly produced through mutual support and influence. This narrative encourages a shift in perspective by presenting material and human actors in a school setting on an equal footing. It draws attention practices within the spaces that become ingrained in the fabric of the school community. Many of these aspects of the educational experience that might otherwise remain unnoticed. As a result, this thesis posits that to fully understand and appreciate the intricacies of the educational domain, particularly in terms of wellbeing, it is imperative to adopt an approach that fosters the emergence of new and insightful descriptions of a more nuanced exploration of how learning, knowledge and wellbeing are shaped.

1.3 Author's Profile

1.3.1 My early school years and education through sport

I began my own schooling in Beaumont Boys National School at the age of four. When I reflect on my schooling, I remember receiving a well-rounded and child centred education that really instilled a love of learning within me. I received a great grounding in academics while also learning much drama, sport and lots of history. For example, I still remember learning about Beaumont House, an old manor house

that had been near the site of our school 100 years earlier. What I remember however, is receiving maps to trace the co-ordinates of Beaumont House and outline where the footprint of where the house may have been. This is in essence what we now call active learning. I remember our teacher Mr Murphy reading 'The Van' by Roddy Doyle and in doing so editing it to make it age appropriate for a 5th Class audience. Furthermore, I remember him translating it into a drama as Gaeilge for us to perform at the end of the year. Again, these are now all central components of the new language curriculum. My alternative education came from sport and hurling. I grew up while my two uncles were playing with Cork and much of my education came on the side of a hurling pitch! I played hurling and football from the age of five and still play today. From the time I was thirteen, I was also heavily involved in coaching kids in hurling. I turned up at nine o clock every Saturday to coach the five- and six-year-olds in my club, Blackrock. As I got older, I became involved in more teams. Even when I was playing senior hurling myself, I always found time to coach where I enjoyed seeing the kids grow and learn.

1.3.2 Second and third level years and learning about myself

I progressed to Colaiste Chriost Ri for my secondary school education. A school famous for sport, it was a perfect fit. I played hurling and football for 'Chriost Ri' over my six years while also receiving a great education. One teacher who stood out was Mr Scully, who I was lucky to have as my English teacher for five years. He was kind, humorous and enabled me think critically. I remember learning about existentialism, Kierkegaard and Kant in transition year which stoked my interest in philosophy and the human condition. More importantly, he instilled a sense of self confidence in me as a learner. I still remember how his feedback on an essay made me feel I could achieve anything and when I became a teacher, it was him who I wanted to emulate.

When doing my Leaving Certificate (the final exam of the Irish secondary school system in Ireland which is used to gain access a university place), I remember the

narrative of the Celtic Tiger dominating public discourse. In every essay in English or Gaeilge, there was some reference to it. As a result, I went straight to UCC to do a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Geography, programmed to follow a career path in business. I followed that up with a Post Graduate Diploma in Business Economics. However, I soon realised that Economics or Business was not something I was passionate about. I did however love learning and being in the university environment. I had made great friends and started to learn about myself, and what I wanted to do. I reflected on my love for helping kids through coaching, so I approached my local school to do some sub teaching. Within a week, I knew that teaching is what I was passionate about and straight away I went about the application process to return to study a Post Graduate Diploma in Primary School Teaching. I began a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from Hibernia College, Dublin, Ireland in 2007. As a result of my early educational experiences, I was passionate about history, sociology, and the philosophy of education, with my academic interest subsequently focusing on how values, policies, and social structures intersect to impact teaching and learning. Inspired by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), I saw how education had the power to enable learners to think about their world critically, thereby bringing meaningful change.

1.3.3 My early teaching experiences

In 2009, I got my first permanent job in Sundays Well Boys National School (BNS). I soon discovered I could establish a calm classroom atmosphere built on trust and collaboration but also by creating engaging, active lessons. Keen to eventually become a school leader, I commenced a Postgraduate in Educational Leadership at Maynooth University, Ireland, in 2014. In my thesis, I evaluated the use of restorative practices for conflict resolution as part of an action research project. In hindsight, this is where I initially became interested in relational approaches in schools. My postgraduate study and ambition to mitigate educational disadvantage played instrumental roles in my initial promotion to the position of Deputy Principal and eventually Principal at Sundays Well BNS in 2015. During my tenure as principal, our school received DEIS Band 1 status, which showed commitment towards achieving equity for every child in our immediate community. I worked

closely with Young Knocknaheeny (now Let's Grow Together CLG) Area-Based Childhood Programme[1] to build the capacity of the staff in our school. One of Young Knocknaheeny's intervention themes was pro-social and emotional behaviour and wellbeing. Indeed, I would say that I probably would not be writing this thesis today had I not initially gotten the exposure, training and learning from Young Knocknaheeny. Specifically, the first training I enrolled in was the Incredible Years (IY) suite of programmes. The Incredible Years (IY) Parent, Teacher and Child Training Series (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001) includes a suite of interrelated evidence-based programmes aimed at promoting positive socio-emotional and behavioural development in children aged 0-12 years. The Teacher Classroom Management programme aims to provide teachers with tools to strengthen and improve classroom management and promote pro-social and emotional regulation (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 1999).

1.3.4 My experience as a Founding Principal

In 2019, I took up the post of the founding Principal of South Lee Educate Together National School, one of 42 new schools announced by the Department of Education and Skills. It was a chance to make a difference right from the beginning of a school's journey, and it allowed me to gain agency in shaping school culture. Based on the equality-based, democratic, child-centred, and inclusive educational approach of our patron, Educate Together, I worked to establish a school culture that prioritised wellbeing, learning, and community. Rejecting traditional, siloed models of education, I sought to create a reflective, research-informed environment where evidence-based practices could thrive. This was heavily influenced by training provided by Cork City Council as part of an initiative to situate Cork as a 'trauma aware city' for front line workers including principals, hospital staff, civil servants and Gardai. The training by Dr Karen Treisman outlined the impact of childhood trauma, abuse, neglect and adverse childhood experiences. This training taught me about children's stress responses and how this stress impacts their bodies, brains, behaviours, emotions, sensory worlds, and relationships. As a result, I wanted our

[1] Young Knocknaheeny (now Let's Grow Together CLG) is a national prevention and early intervention initiative aimed at improving outcomes for children and families living in disadvantaged areas across Ireland.

school to be built on trauma-aware principles, cultural sensitivity, and relational approaches so that every student felt valued in their educational journey.

Creating a *start-up school* however came with its unique contextual challenges. Among these were system and resource-based problems encompassing limited finances and a lack of teaching and human resources and appropriate accommodation. This is mainly due to the Department of Education not recognising the contextual nuances of a developing school. There were also enormous pressures that went with constructing infrastructure and school buildings while concurrently establishing community links and providing quality education, which significantly impacted my wellbeing and the wellbeing of the teachers in my school. By experiencing these issues and during professional conversations with other principals, I realised that my experience was not unusual and that the wellbeing of many principals in a start-up school was being diminished due to contextual factors. Many were out sick on stress leave, burning out and returning to teaching roles. The majority had planned an exit strategy to leave the job within five years. As a result, my curious mind wanted to uncover what exactly were the real factors or 'things' that were inhibiting my friends and colleagues' wellbeing.

I was awarded a College of Art, Celtic Studies, and Social Sciences (CACSSS) Employment-Based PhD Scholarship through University College Cork, in conjunction with the Board of Management of South Lee Educate Together. The scholarship helped me to convert my curiosity and lived experience into a formal research project where I could really interrogate the issues. My doctoral research aims to develop a systems-informed framework for school wellbeing by incorporating theoretical insights, practical applications, and experiences of principals, teachers, and students. This academic research journey has helped me to track and rigorously investigate my challenges as a principal of a start-up school and widen that to examining the collective experiences of other school leaders and teachers in established and newly established schools. It represents my commitment to developing an approach that fosters the wellbeing of all school community members, creating environments where students, teachers, and families can thrive and flourish.

1.4 Research Focus and Professional Motivation

Embarking on this doctoral study helped me to realise a professional and personal goal to profoundly influence how wellbeing was being conceptualised and enacted at a systemic level in schools. This thesis, *'The Entanglement of Wellbeing in Developing Schools: An Actor-Network Analysis* charts my journey in attempting to reach this goal through research informed practice.

The way in which I conduct my doctoral work leaned into my role as a pracademic, a term coined by Volpe and Chandler (2001) referring to people occupying the intersection between research and practice during professional life. This allows me to occupy ‘a third space’ to oscillate between both realms, situating theoretical ideas into practice (Bhabha, 2001). I am particularly struck by the description of pracademics as "dual citizens" (Posner, 2009), which appears apt in the context of my professional experience. According to Wasserman and Kram (2009), pracademics occupy a space along the continuum of practice and scholarship, which is very close to my career to date. Similarly, my role as a school principal and my involvement in research as a PhD scholar greatly aligns with the concept of praxis. Praxis represents a dynamic, reflective process where theory and practice inform and transform one another.

The motivation for this doctoral research emerged through a combination of professional experiences and conversations. In my professional practice, I observed that wellbeing was not an individual or isolated phenomenon but deeply relational. The wellbeing of principals impacted the wellbeing of teachers, and the wellbeing of teachers impacted that of the students. I also noted that the wellbeing of all three stakeholders very low. Both principals and teachers were suffering from burnout and occupational stress leading to an increase in illness and stress related absences (Rahimi and Arnold, 2022; Dempsey and Nohilly, 2021). Rahimi and Arnold’s (2022) study revealed that over 43% of respondents experienced high or severe levels of burnout. Recent research has shown that (85%) of teachers reported experiencing moderate to high levels of Work-Related Burnout with 42% of teachers noting they are likely to leave the profession (DCU, 2025). In relation to students, Cannon et al.'s (2013) study estimated that a third of adolescents develop a mental

disorder by the age of 13 years. One in eight adolescents, as reported by Cannon et al. (2013), experience anxiety and one in seven experience depression by the age of 13. Despite this interdependence, approaches to wellbeing within schools often focused on individual social and emotional wellbeing, physical wellbeing or resilience. As a principal I saw this play out every day. I got phone calls from principals who were on leave with stress. Teachers who were calling in sick due to stress. Children needed to be coaxed in past the school gates. For me, this raised important question. If wellbeing is so deeply interconnected and impacting all of the stakeholders in a school, why is it often treated as an individual concern ?

At the same time, policy documents and national statements were giving more attention to wellbeing (see **Section 2.2**). However, the gap between what was written and what was happening on the ground was hard to ignore. Schools often mentioned wellbeing in their ethos or mission statements, but few including my own had a clear, shared understanding of what it meant for their school community. This gap made me think more critically about wellbeing practices in schools. More importantly, it ignited my curiosity regarding the drivers of wellbeing practices in schools.

Looking for better ways to understand what I was observing, I turned to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Bronfenbrenner emphasises how individuals are shaped by multiple, interconnected systems, from family and school to wider societal forces, helped me make sense of the relational nature of wellbeing I had been observing. Similarly, trauma-informed approaches offered an approach that emphasised relational safety and emotional wellbeing (Dorado et al., 2016). Slowly, through reflection and experience, it became clear to me that if we want to truly support wellbeing in schools, perhaps it was time to move beyond individual programmes or quick fixes. Similarly, perhaps it was time to understand wellbeing contextually as something created by the whole community. This thesis is my contribution to explore how wellbeing is conceptualised, practiced, and lived within the complex networks of school life.

Accordingly, this study utilises Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005) as its

guiding theoretical framework to help to make sense of the complexity of such school networks (teachers principals, students, parents, classrooms, books, exams, policies, the Department of Education, The National Council for Special Education…). Through ANT's four moments of translation: problematisation, interessement, enrolment, and mobilisation (Callon, 1996), this research investigates how wellbeing policies, practices, and relationships interact, entangle, and shape the lived experiences and outcomes for students, teachers, and school leaders.

1.4.1 Research Aims

This study seeks to:

1. To explore how wellbeing is currently understood, enacted, and experienced within Irish primary schools from the perspectives of key stakeholders.
2. To develop a systems-informed, relational, and ecologically grounded conceptualisation of wellbeing that reflects the lived realities of school communities.
3. To design and refine a practical, evidence-informed framework that can support the development, implementation, and evaluation of wellbeing strategies in schools.

In reaching these research aims; I have adopted a particular philosophical stance which will be interrogated in the next section.

1.5 The Researcher's Philosophical Stance

The paradigmatic approach to this research can be defined as posthumanist pragmatism. I will first define the posthumanist pragmatist approach and then explain the ontological, epistemological, and ethical assumptions guiding this stance before finally discussing the methodology. Posthumanism is a heterogeneous terrain of ideas, concepts, theories, frameworks and practices (Taylor, 2016). Barad (2007) and Bennett (2010) propose that human–non-human relations exist through ecologies of co-emergence in which we all are embedded and entangled. Within posthumanism, the human is only one of many 'things' that have agency. All these human and non-human things contribute to whatever is educative about any

experience. In other words, posthumanism gives matter and materiality equal regard in knowledge-making practices.

Furthermore, Braidotti (2013) suggests that materialism offers not only a conceptual frame and a political stance but also a means to focus on 'the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power' (Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012, p.21). These relations between objects, materiality, and arrangements of power are central to wellbeing within the primary school system. Accordingly, posthumanism may provide new ontological, epistemological, and ethical starting points for considering wellbeing in schools. The decision to take a posthumanist pragmatist perspective comes from an attempt to account for the intricate human and non-human actor relationships within an educational system, especially in regard to wellbeing experiences. Such understanding on wellbeing in primary education requires a multidisciplinary approach, which, of necessity, puts together both a theoretical framework and practical orientation.

The pragmatist paradigm involves using the method that appears best suited to the research problem and is often deemed a suitable approach for mixed methodological research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism presents a nuanced research paradigm that eschews traditional metaphysical debates on truth and reality in favour of a focus on practical, empirical inquiry into multiple, socially constructed realities (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This paradigm asserts that objective reality exists independently, is comprehensible only through human experience, and is fundamentally intertwined with the social environment (Goles, 2000; Morgan, 2014). A cornerstone of pragmatism is its perspective on knowledge and reality as outcomes of social habits and beliefs, which promotes a view that acknowledges multiple realities shaped by societal constructs, with some constructions aligning more closely with individual experiences than others (Morgan, 2014; Yefimov, 2003).

The relevance of pragmatism to qualitative research lies in several key aspects. Firstly, its methodological flexibility supports a pluralistic approach to research design, enabling the incorporation of various methods to comprehensively address

research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2014). Secondly, pragmatism's orientation towards actionable knowledge resonates with the qualitative research objective of generating insights that can inform and transform human and social realities (Biesta, 2010; Hothersall, 2018). Furthermore, by acknowledging the existence of multiple realities, pragmatism validates the qualitative emphasis on exploring diverse human experiences and perspectives (Morgan, 2014). Lastly, the paradigm encourages reflective inquiry, urging researchers to critically evaluate their assumptions, methodologies, and findings throughout the research process (Biesta, 2010; Morgan, 2014).

Pragmatism's contributions to the epistemological and methodological landscape of qualitative research are underscored by its foundational principles, drawing significantly from the works of John Dewey and other scholars (Biesta, 2010; Dewey, 1938; Goldkuhl, 2017; Morgan, 2014). Dewey's conceptualisation of inquiry as a mechanism for navigating uncertainty and fostering change through reflective and intelligent action provides a philosophical backbone to pragmatism, emphasising its utility in addressing real-world problems through research (Biesta, 2010; Ormerod, 2006).

In sum, pragmatism offers a robust framework for qualitative research, championing adaptability, practicality, and a profound engagement with the complexities of human and social phenomena. Its emphasis on empirical inquiry, grounded in human experience and social context, makes it a valuable paradigm for researchers aiming to produce meaningful, actionable knowledge (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Having outlined the paradigmatic foundations of this study, it is now important to situate the research within its broader educational context. The following, examines how wellbeing has been conceptualised and integrated into Irish primary schools through a series of key policy developments and curriculum reforms, providing the necessary backdrop for understanding the study's focus.

1.6 Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Its Role in This Study

1.6.1 What is ANT?

ANT, also known as the sociology of translation, is an approach to studying how networks integrating human and non-human actors are created, consolidated, maintained, and disrupted. Initially developed by Callon (1986) and Latour (2005) alongside Law (1992), ANT focused on the removal of human agency and included material factors which pushed the boundaries of sociological studies. Instead of assuming the existence of a predetermined 'social' domain, ANT regards' social' as something that emerges from the dynamic interplay of diverse entities, including people, technologies, policies, and institutions (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005).

ANT emphasises a relational focus, whereby both human and non-human actors derive their identities, functions, and power from their interactions within a network. Within ANT, non-human actors are given agency. In particular, non-human actors perform and are performed by the networks in which they are situated (Law, 1992). This is called the principle of generalised symmetry (Callon, 1986). This principle investigates the relations between human and non-human actors without positing dominance or superiority of one over the other. By studying how networks are created, preserved, or disrupted, researchers can understand the dynamics of systems and their subsystems, which is an advantage offered by ANT (Latour, 2005).

1.6.2 Theoretical Foundations of ANT

ANT's theoretical foundations discard dualism like human/non-human, nature/society, and subject/object, which have dominated sociological thought. Such restrictions are bound to a specific ontology, with actors and elements attempting to define one another in different ways (Latour, 2005; Law, 2008). Following poststructuralist thought and process metaphysics, ANT considers 'social' to be performed rather than structured, bringing forth the essence of an evolving process (Law, 2008). This is explained further by Latour (2005) who proposes a sociology of associations that trails actors as they negotiate and translate their interests to network them together. Similarly, Callon (1986) also views translation as the key process through which a network is formed, emphasising the interplay of relationships.

Meanwhile, Law (2008) describes ANT as a material-semiotic method or a method that maps the relational ties between material and conceptual entities.

By analysing using ANT, one uncovers social performativities whereby things can act, not just humans. This helps to make sense of the world or reality (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Such an approach enables an understanding of how networks emerge, get stabilised, or are disrupted using ANT's flexible and dynamic theory.

1.6.3 Key ANT Concepts

ANT is built on several key concepts that inform its analytical and methodological approach:

- **Actors/Actants**: Both human and non-human entities that possess the capacity to influence and shape networks. Actants can include individuals, policies, technologies, institutions, and spaces (Latour, 2005). In the context of this research, think of anything that can influence a situation—like a teacher, a timetable, a school rule, or a classroom layout. They all "do" something that shapes how things work.
- **Networks**: Relational assemblages formed through associations between actors. Networks are inherently dynamic and require constant negotiation and maintenance (Law, 1992). In school, a network is the web of relationships between people, spaces, routines, tools, and policies that all work together to support student well-being. These connections are always shifting and need regular effort to keep them working.
- **Translation**: The process through which actors define roles, align interests, and stabilise relationships to create durable networks (Callon, 1986). In the context of school wellbeing, the translation process happens where all staff in a school come together, agree on roles, and start working in sync to support student well-being.
- **Generalised Symmetry**: The principle that human and non-human actors must be analysed using the same conceptual tools, treating both as capable of agency (Callon, 1986). For example, a school policy can have just as much

impact on students' experience as a teacher can. As a result, we should treat both as important players.

- **Punctualisation**: A network that achieves temporary stability and is "black-boxed," allowing it to function as a singular actor within larger networks (Law, 1992). Punctualisation can happen in relation to school wellbeing when all the parts of a school's well-being system work so well together, it feels like one smooth, solid structure. This is the case even though it's made of many people, tools, and routines behind the scenes.

These concepts describe some of the 'methodological toolkit' for tracing how networks are assembled, stabilised, and sometimes contested or disrupted. The following section describes the translation process which describes how networks are assembled, stabilised, or disrupted through what Calon (1986) describes as the four moments of translation.

1.6.4 Translation: The Core Process in ANT

Translation is a central concept in ANT, describing how actors align their interests, negotiate roles, and stabilise relationships to form networks. Callon (1986) identifies four moments of translation which I have adapted to this research in simple language:

1. **Problematisation:** I as a "focal actor" spotted a problem of wellbeing in schools. Based on my pracademic experience as a school principal and a PhD Scholar, I said "This is the issue, and the only way to solve it is to set this research up as essential to fixing the problem.
2. **Interessement**: Through this research and the development of Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing, I try to convince others to join this way of thinking.
3. **Enrollment**: Schools start to agree on who does what and adopt the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing. People take on roles that fit into the bigger plan, and they start working together in a more organised, stable way
4. **Mobilisation**: Once roles and relationships are in place, the school moves forward. A few trusted people speak on behalf of others, making sure everyone's still on the same page and working towards the shared goal.

These phases are dynamic and fragile, as networks can fail at any point due to resistance, competing interests, or redefined roles. By following the translation processes, ANT reveals the negotiated and contingent nature of network formation (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005). **Table 1.1** illustrates how this thesis progresses through each of ANT's moments of translation, creating a cohesive approach to the design of an ecological wellbeing model.

Table 1.1: Schematic of this thesis using Four moments of translation (Callon, 1986) (Source: Created by author)

Moment of Translation (ANT) (Callon, 1986)	**Purpose**	**Chapters**
Problematisation	Examine the system's context, refine program theory, and engage stakeholders to define the research problem and identify uncertainties.	Chapter 2 (Literature Review) Chapter 3 (Methodology)
Interessement	Align and engage stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, students) to explore the enablers/barriers and develop a theoretical framework.	Chapter 4 (Principals), Chapter 5 (Teachers), Chapter 6 (Students).
Enrolment	Map and visualise an ecological model of wellbeing using Venturini's Cartography of Controversies.	Chapter 7 (Development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing)
Mobilisation	Facilitate broader adoption of the intervention and explore its scalability and sustainability in practice.	Future Research: This is beyond the scope of this PhD thesis and will warrant further study.

Evaluation	Assess the intervention's long-term impact, effectiveness, and sustainability across diverse contexts.	Future Research

While ANT provides a relational and performative lens for tracing how wellbeing is enacted through networks of human and non-human actors, it does not operate in isolation from broader systemic influences. To deepen this understanding, the following two sections explores systems theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, both of which offer valuable insights into the nested, dynamic environments in which wellbeing is co-constructed.

1.6.5 ANT in Education

The use of ANT in educational research has emerged as a growing focus area as researchers work to unpack the socio-material complexities that influence educational policies, practices, and settings (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). With ANT, researchers focus on the multiple actors such as teachers, students, curricula, technologies, and policies and their interactions toward co-producing educational outcomes. For instance, Hamilton (2013) used Callon's (1986) four moments of translation to trace the processes that led to the consolidation of certain literacy policies. Meanwhile, Decuypere and Simons (2014) used ANT to depict academic practices in higher education. Such literature illustrates the relations and performances involved in educational phenomena, highlighting the non-human elements such as policies, technologies, and institutional infrastructures.

ANT provides a framework for understanding school wellbeing through the interactions of different actors—teachers, students, policies, and community programs. Following these interactions, ANT explains how wellbeing initiatives are negotiated, implemented, and challenged within educational frameworks.

1.6.6 ANT and Venturini's Cartography of Controversies

Venturini's (2010, 2012) 'cartography of controversies' is an applied version of actor-network theory (ANT), which combines theory, method and findings to explore, map and visualise social phenomena that are subject to constant transformation or controversy. The 'cartography of controversies' originated in the field of science and technology studies. More recently, the scope of its application has widened to include fields such as religion (Sumiala and Harju, 2019), education (Khalid and Sorensen, 2015) and physical literacy (Young et al, 2021). In **chapter 2** and **chapter 7**, we apply the 'cartography of controversies' to wellbeing in education because it assists in the visualisation and design element of this thesis by providing a structured approach to mapping controversies.

1.6.7 How ANT Influenced This Study

This study draws on ANT as a theoretical and methodological framework based on my experience as a principal of a start-up school and the issues shared by small school principals across Ireland. In addition, numerous existing wellbeing programs ignored the complex, relational, and systemic nature of wellbeing (Nolhilly and Tynan, 2022). ANT enables a systems-level analysis of the actors and processes involved in promoting wellbeing, providing a sound approach to addressing these issues. This research focuses on how wellbeing is negotiated, enacted, and co-constructed in developing schools by tracing the relationships between teachers, students, policies, community initiatives, and networks. In addition, the four moments of translation described by Callon (1986) (See **Table 1.1**) played a central role in this study to illustrate the enablers and the inhibitors of wellbeing and how actors align interests, mobilise resources, and stabilise practices.

Ultimately, ANT assists in the development of a contextually relevant ecological framework for wellbeing that still acknowledges the interrelation of actors. This study follows actors and their negotiations to contribute to understanding how wellbeing can be integrated within school communities and how these communities can become all-inclusive, trauma-sensitive, and sustainable.

1.7 Systems Theory and living Systems Theory

This thesis is also influenced by systems theory, and particularly Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). General systems theory was formulated in the 1940s by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, who set out to replace the mechanistic foundations of science with a holistic vision (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). Von Bertalanffy (1969) believed that biological phenomena required a new way of thinking. His goal was to construct a "general science of wholeness" as a formal mathematical discipline (p.288).

Von Bertalanffy's concept of a living 'open system' was a key distinction between biological and physical phenomena. Capra (2002) argues, that human organisations are also complex, living systems. Furthermore, he maintains that principles of organisation of ecosystems are identical to the principles of organization of all living systems (Capra, 2002). Consequently, Capra (2002) argues that we need to redesign our technologies and social institutions in order to create a link between human design and the ecologically sustainable systems of nature. This is reinforced by White and Murray (2015), who describe education at a systems level, as caught between an industrial and 21st century model (p.14). They further argue that the system of education we have, essentially perpetuates an outmoded, industrialised view of the world (White and Murray (2015).

Hargreaves (2010) argues that for school reforms to be sustainable, they must be premised on the development of self-improving school systems where schools, instead of relying on centralised provision, are primarily accountable for their own improvement. Fullan (2004) argues that for systemic change to occur, systems thinkers are needed. These systems thinkers are:

> *'Leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking to other parts of the system'* (Fullan, 2004, p.8).

System thinking suggests that the defining characteristic of a system ''cannot be understood as a function of its isolated components and that the system doesn't

depend on what each part is doing but on how each part is interacting with the rest'' (Kofman and Senge 1995).

1.7.1 Ecological Model of Human Development

Originally used to describe the study of habitats in which organisms live, the term 'ecology' has now been widely used as a metaphor to elucidate the mutually constituting influences underpinning the sustainability, management and development of social ecosystems (Olsson et al. 2004). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emerged in the 1970s as a new perspective on child development. This theory emphasises the role of the environment and society on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1976, 1977). Based upon Lewin's theory of psychological fields, Bronfenbrenner professes that the ecological system in which we exist is composed of five socially arranged subsystems that influence and support personal growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). He explored how development occurs within a multitude of different, but nested and related systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theory enables a focus on individual experiences, while simultaneously taking into consideration the socio-cultural context of these experiences.

The five layers or subsystems, as outlined by Bronfenbrenner are described as follows (see **Figure 1.1**):

- the **microsystem**: direct influencers or immediate environment such as family, school, neighbourhood, and childcare.
- the **mesosystem** refers to how the different parts of your environment work together to support you and the interaction between any two microsystems.
- the **exosystem**: larger, indirect social system including parental workplace and community-based resources.
- the **macrosystem**: includes societal values, customs, and laws.
- the **chronosystem:** the relationship between time and timing of external life events and internal processes related to physical maturation.

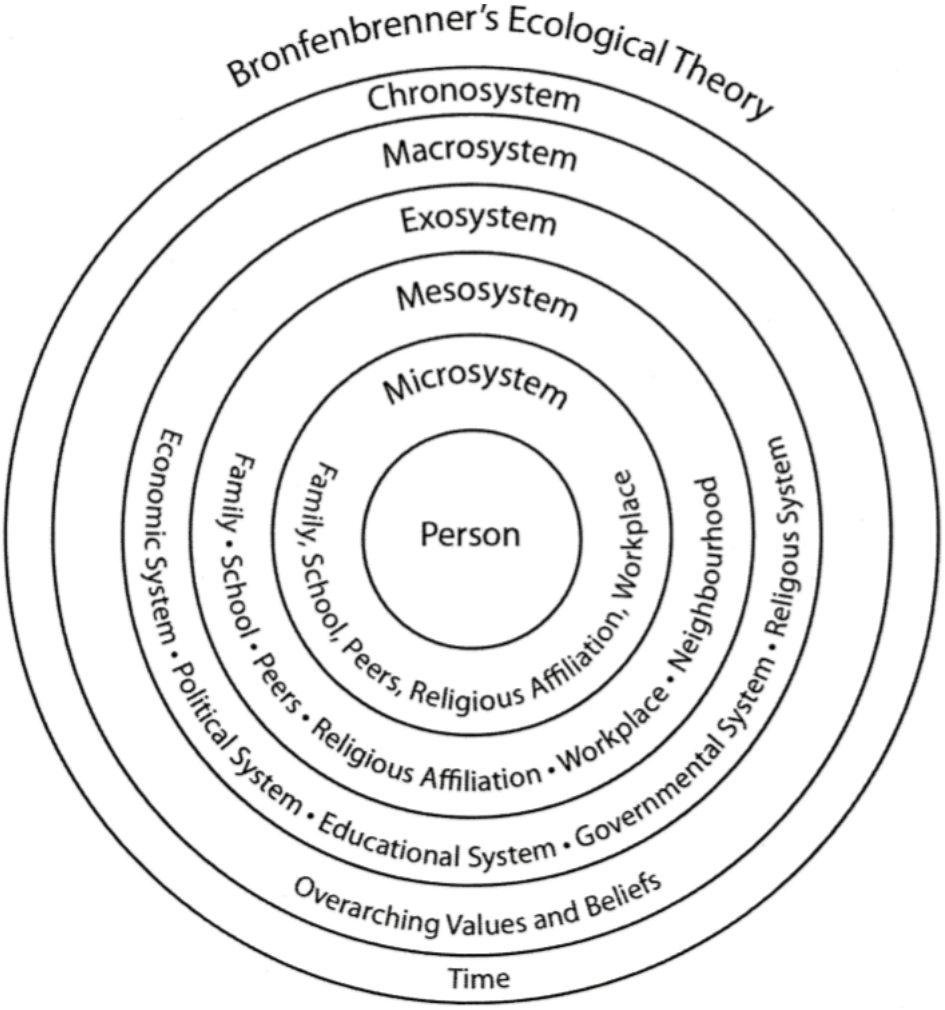


Figure 1.1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development (Source: Berger, 2007)

Bringing together the conceptual insights from ANT, systems theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model creates a robust foundation for understanding wellbeing as a dynamic, networked, and multi-layered construct. The following section outlines how these theoretical perspectives have been woven into the structure of the thesis, guiding the progression from problem identification to model development and future application.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured around Callon's (1986) four moments of translation in ANT, providing a cohesive framework for analysing the dynamics of wellbeing in Irish primary education (See **Figure 1.1**). Each chapter builds upon the preceding one to trace the development, implementation, and evaluation of wellbeing policies and practices.

Chapter 1 provides an overall introduction to the thesis, describing the background and rationale for conducting the research along with research aims and questions. In addition, the significance of using ANT for the proposed research is discussed as well as the outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2 (Problematisation: Theoretical and Policy Contexts): This chapter reviews the historical, theoretical, and policy foundations of wellbeing in Irish education. It explores the evolution of wellbeing frameworks, including the *SPHE Curriculum* (1999), *Aistear* (2009), and the *Wellbeing Policy Statement* (2018), situating the study within broader systemic and ecological perspectives. The chapter identifies gaps in the literature and positions wellbeing as a complex, multidimensional construct requiring further exploration.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodological approach and provides a rationale for the research design employed to answer the research questions. Ontological, epistemological, and methodological concerns are addressed. Then, the methodologies are discussed and justified in detail to support and provide a roadmap for developing the findings (and publications). Reflexivity, ethical considerations and insider status are discussed.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present the findings in the form of publications – each chapter is presented in the same manner, beginning with a brief introduction to the study and a description of the journal chosen for the publication. Following this, the manuscript is presented.

Chapter 4 (publication one: under review) is titled 'An Actor-Network Investigation into the Wellbeing of Developing School Principals'. This paper involved three focus groups and three semi-structured interviews with 12 school principals in Ireland. The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed using ANT. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), outlined by Braun and Clarke (2023), was employed to code the data and refine themes. The study found that school structures and cultures significantly impact the wellbeing of the school community. Positive relationships and supportive school cultures were deemed more effective for wellbeing than

commercial programs. Challenges such as special education allocation and inadequate school buildings were highlighted. The lack of guidance for new school principals was a recurring concern.

Chapter 5 (publication two, under review) is titled 'An Actor-Network Analysis of Teachers' Experience of Wellbeing in the Context of a Developing School'. This study uses ANT to investigate teachers' experiences, enablers, and inhibitors of wellbeing within the context of new or developing Irish primary schools. In addition, the study aimed to understand how practices, assemblages, and interconnected relationships between human and non-human elements impact teachers' wellbeing. The study highlights four wellbeing enablers for teachers: leadership, relationships/school culture, mentoring, and job satisfaction, with the first two being crucial. However, these enablers can become inhibitors if perceived as tokenistic or if support and resources fail to address the complexity of teaching roles. Inadequate facilities and lack of support undermine teachers' sense of value, especially without special education resources.

Chapter 6 (publication three, published in the Emerald Journal of Health Education) is titled 'An Analysis of Primary School Student's Holistic Wellbeing Using Photovoice'. This study utilised visual participatory research methods, including PhotoVoice and one-on-one interviews, to assess children's (n=16) wellbeing, guided by Von Unger's comprehensive seven-step framework (Von Unger, 2012). Data analysis was anchored within grounded theory, beginning with data collection, initial coding, focused coding, and culminating in identifying themes and subthemes. Data were interpreted using the mosaic approach by integrating visual and verbal data. This analysis uncovered three main themes that affect student wellbeing: Relationships, Space and Physical Environment, and Learning and Curriculum, each with detailed subthemes. For instance, student-teacher relationships, peer relationships, safety, learning spaces, the creative curriculum including arts and music, and the experiential richness of outdoor learning are crucial to students' educational growth and wellbeing.

Chapter 7 (publication four) refines and applies the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) as a systems-informed model for school wellbeing. It integrates perspectives from school leaders, teachers, and students to map the dynamic interplay of actors, policies, and practices shaping wellbeing in education.

Using Venturini's *cartography of controversies* (Venturini, 2009; Venturini, 2012), the KCW is developed through four key observational lenses:

1. From Statements to Literature
2. From Literature to Actors
3. From Actors to Networks
4. From Networks to Cosmoses

These lenses provide a structured yet flexible approach for visualising, mapping and implementing wellbeing approaches at a whole-school level.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. First, a synopsis of the thesis aims, and research questions are presented. An integrated discussion of the findings is then provided to unite the entire thesis and answer the research questions. Implications and contributions to theoretical, practical, and methodological knowledge are then explored. The way I navigated the limitations and critiques of ANT is then outlined. Next, the research limitations and proposed recommendations for future research are identified. Finally, the chapter summarises the unique contributions to knowledge offered by this thesis and presents conclusions.

1.9 Research Questions

The complexities of wellbeing within the Irish primary school system present a significant challenge in terms of both conceptual clarity and practical application. Despite its increasing prominence in educational discourse and policy, wellbeing remains inconsistently understood, operationalised, and evaluated across schools. This study addresses these challenges by examining wellbeing through a systems-informed perspective and reconceptualising it within a multi-faceted

ecological framework that aligns with the unique cultural and relational dynamics of Irish primary education.

Guided by a critical exploration of ANT, the study interrogates how wellbeing is shaped by interactions among policies, stakeholders, and institutional practices. Through this lens, the research aims to bridge gaps between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities, culminating in designing and evaluating a contextually relevant conceptual framework for wellbeing. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. **How is wellbeing conceptualised, understood, and operationalised within the Irish primary school system?**

   This question critically explores the current landscape of wellbeing in Irish primary schools, including its definitions, policies, and practices. It seeks to uncover how various stakeholders (students, educators, school leaders, and policymakers) perceive and enact wellbeing. Additionally, it examines the systemic enablers and barriers that influence its effective implementation, with particular attention to how schools navigate the relational and contextual dimensions of wellbeing in their everyday practices.

2. **What is a reconceptualised definition of wellbeing that reflects its multi-faceted and relational nature within the Irish primary school context?**

   Recognising the inadequacies of existing interpretations, this question seeks to articulate a definition of wellbeing that is both comprehensive and adaptable. It aims to integrate ecological, cultural, and relational dimensions into a cohesive conceptualisation, ensuring relevance to the diverse realities of Irish primary schools. The reconceptualised definition aspires to serve as a shared foundation for educators, policymakers, and practitioners, promoting a unified and context-sensitive understanding of wellbeing.

3. **How can a systems-informed, ecological conceptual framework for wellbeing be designed, implemented, and evaluated in Irish primary schools?**

   This question addresses the practical application of the research, focusing on designing and testing a framework tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of Irish primary schools. The framework aims to embed trauma-aware, culturally sensitive, and relational principles into school culture, ensuring its adaptability and sustainability. This question further investigates the framework's capacity to foster positive outcomes for students, enhance staff wellbeing, and support systemic change. Its evaluation considers the perspectives of all stakeholders and assesses its impact on policy, practice, and school community dynamics.

These research questions underpin the study's ambition to advance the theoretical, practical, and systemic understanding of wellbeing in Irish primary schools. By interrogating the relational entanglements of wellbeing and addressing the critical gaps in policy and practice, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to educational research and the development of resilient, inclusive school communities.

1.10 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing literature on wellbeing in education by offering a dynamic, relational perspective that integrates systems, ecological, and contextual frameworks. ANT provides a novel lens for tracing the interactions between policies, stakeholders, and practices, while the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing offers a practical model for improving wellbeing outcomes. By bridging theory and practice, the thesis addresses critical gaps in the understanding and implementation of wellbeing in developing schools, laying the groundwork for sustainable change.

The first chapter has outlined the reasoning, context and policy documents that provide direction to this doctoral study. Informed by the experiences of a pracademic researcher, this chapter has illustrated the lived experiences and research underpinnings that motivate the need to urgently rethink wellbeing in the context of

Irish primary education as a relational and systemic construct within an array of human and non-human actors. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and ecological systems thinking, the study positions wellbeing as something that is always being shaped through people, policies, places, and practices.

This chapter has provided the research questions and explained how they relate to the study's objectives. It has also provided the outline of the thesis, which is designed around ANT's four moments of translation. Collectively, these components form the lens through which one can examine how wellbeing is negotiated, enacted, and disrupted in the context of developing schools.

In order to provide a theoretical foundation for this research, the following chapter offers a critique of the existing literature. In Chapter 2, I provide several approaches to wellbeing and the philosophical ideas that inform them, as well as the educational paradigms through which wellbeing has been understood, developed, and, unfortunately, limited. This review sets the stage for identifying the gaps, tensions, and controversies that inform the need for a more holistic, ecological, and relational model of school wellbeing.

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Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A controversy represents a complex phenomenon, requiring careful observation and analysis based on a comprehensive understanding of its defining characteristics. Venturini (2009, p. 261) defines controversies as "situations where actors disagree (or better, agree on their disagreement)"'. Controversies begin when actors discover that they cannot ignore each other, and controversies end when actors manage to work out a solid compromise to live together (Venturini, 2009). A controversial issue, therefore, exists along a spectrum between these two extremes.

According to Venturini (2009), social controversies share five key characteristics. First, controversies involve human and non-human actors, such as policies, scientific theories, or physical objects. Second, controversies are highly dynamic, with actors coalescing with heterogeneous networks that can function as a single actor. Third, controversies are non-generalisable and highly context dependent. The complexity often arises due to the inability of actors to agree on the questions themselves and not due to disagreements on the answers or solutions. Fourth, controversies involve challenging existing paradigms and are thus highly debated. Finally, controversies are conflicts or power struggles between actors to transform or preserve social values and opinions.

Venturini (2009) employs the properties of magma as a metaphor to illustrate the hybrid nature of social controversies, comprising both solid and fluid elements. A controversy is deemed significant if it is neither (1) cold (i.e., lacks engagement), (2) past (i.e., no longer relevant), (3) boundless (i.e., too diffuse to be analysed), nor (4) underground (i.e., hidden from the public debate). Thus, the concept of wellbeing in education exemplifies a *live controversy* as it continues to evolve and generate debate among diverse stakeholders. The discussion involves multiple actors, both human (e.g., educators, policymakers, psychologists, parents, and students) and non-human (e.g., educational policies, assessment frameworks, and wellbeing interventions). The fact that the word is spelled differently ‘wellbeing’, ‘well-being’, ‘well being’ or even Wellbeing in curriculum and policy documents shows its

conceptual fluidity and lack of stability. Similarly, the absence of a standard definition for wellbeing has led to diverse interpretations across various disciplines (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2015).

Over time, school wellbeing has moved along the way from an individual concern to a construct that also includes systemic, relational and cultural aspects (Kern, 2021: Allison, Waters and Kern, 2024: Cárdenas et al., 2022). School wellbeing encompasses the physical, psychological, and socio-emotional experiences of students, educators, leaders, and families in a school community. It also considers factors such as policies, leadership, sustainability and how schools work with their communities as important elements in creating an enabling environment within a school setting (Cárdenas et al., 2022). These aspects are sometimes viewed as secondary to the academic outcomes of students, yet are deeply connected to a school's ability to promote holistic development, engagement, and a sense of belonging (Nathan, 2017; Fullan, 2021)

Research on wellbeing frequently contends with this conceptual ambiguity of its meaning in school contexts. This often involves navigating the philosophical tension between hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure) and eudaimonia (characterised as a life of flourishing (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Spratt, 2016). Schools serve a dual function as they must ensure comfort and safety while fostering environments where communities thrive (Alonso-Tapia & Nieto, 2019; Steinmayr & Bergold, 2018). Farrell et al. (2024) argued that wellbeing is now conceptualised through three interconnected dimensions: happiness or positive emotions, health and safety and wellbeing as an active pursuit or something you do. 1. Happiness or positive emotions dimension emphasises emotional fulfilment and tranquility. 2. Wellbeing as health and safety addressing essentials such as nutrition, sleep and physical security, particularly for disadvantaged groups. 3. Wellbeing as an 'thing you do', including mindfulness, yoga and wellness programmes. In line with this, educational initiatives often focus on enhancing school wellbeing by principles that address physical health, mental health and social-emotional development (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2021; Waters and Loton, 2021: Kern, 2021).

The discourse surrounding school wellbeing is also significantly enhanced by theoretical models that offer structured frameworks for embedding wellbeing into educational practices. For example, Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1976, 1977, 1994) bioecological model explains that school wellbeing occurs in systems that connect individuals, families, and communities. Complementary frameworks, such as Scotland's Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included (SHANARRI) wellbeing indicators, Seligman's (2012) Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) model and the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model (Hellison, 1985, 2010), highlight wellbeing dimensions such as safety, respect, meaning and responsibility. These frameworks are informed by significant psychological research. Contributions from Maslow (1954), Dweck (1999, 2007, 2012), Ryan and Deci (1985, 2000, 2017), Bowlby (1973) and Bandura (1977, 1993) highlight the multidimensional nature of school wellbeing (Danker et al., 2019; Svane et al., 2019). Similarly, Waters and Loton (2019) developed the SEARCH framework that encompassed 1) strengths, 2) emotional management, 3) attention and awareness, 4) relationships, 5) coping and 6) habits and goals. This was a result of a two-stage approach that included a bibliometric review and action research (Waters and Loton, 2019). Accordingly, this has further added to the conceptual ambiguity surrounding wellbeing discourse.

Farrell et al. (2024) cautioned against viewing wellbeing as a 'product' that can be distributed through activities or tools. This is in line with what Sahlberg (2011) refers to as one of the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) and the productization of education. Furthermore, they felt that the responsibility for wellbeing should not rely on individuals or schools without addressing broader economic and social determinants (Farrell et al., 2024). Thus, dealing with school wellbeing requires a flexible, evidence-based approach that recognises its evolving definitions (Waters 2011; White and Murray 2015). Adopting this perspective allows schools to establish settings that support academic excellence and the flourishing of all stakeholders. This approach positions wellbeing at the core of education. It integrates schools into a larger ecosystem focused on comprehensive, equitable and sustainable development in modern societies.

This understanding of school wellbeing as a live and evolving controversy revisits the literature on wellbeing in the education system as a key discourse. This literature review analyses various theoretical perspectives that frame the debate within its philosophical foundations, such as hedonic wellbeing (Waterman, 2008) , eudaimonic wellbeing (Irwin, 2012) , the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1992, 1996, 1999) , and Self-Determination Theory (Deci. And Ryan, 2001). It also examines care, relationships, social-emotional learning, and their contributions to fostering holistic growth in students, as they encourage supportive school climates. The review addresses physical health, sustainability, and systemic approaches to wellbeing, which showcases the multifaceted and interrelated aspects of wellbeing in education. This multidisciplinary approach, informed by different theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, captures the flow of debates, controversies, and divergences concerning how wellbeing is understood, enacted, and contested in educational institutions.

To address these complexities, Sartori's Ladder of Abstraction guides the analysis an effort to conceptualise what is an ambiguous concept while sustaining coherence at varying layers of abstraction. Moreover, Venturini's Cartography of Controversy (2010) facilitates the mapping and visualisation of each of the perspectives, including tensions within the discourse. This helps to identify underlying commonalities and provides a systematic approach to developing an integrated conceptual model of school wellbeing.

2.2 Setting the Scene: Wellbeing in Irish Primary Education

There is an assemblage of policy documents which are critical to guiding the Irish primary education system's priorities, activities, and relationships in general and in relation to children's wellbeing. These are: The Primary School Curriculum (1999), The Aistear Framework (Department of Education, 2009), Wellbeing Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (Department of Health and Department or Education, 2015), Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education, 2019), and Primary Curriculum Framework (2023) policies.

Cumulatively, they are a powerful interconnected policy web governing wellbeing in schools. To unpack the potency of this web of policies, the next section looks at influence of these policies on the pedagogical integration of wellbeing in Irish primary education. It focuses on curriculum development, policymaking, and educational reforms.

2.2.1 The 1999 Primary School Curriculum and SPHE

The introduction of the Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) marked a significant turning point in the status and focus of wellbeing in Irish schools. This overarching curriculum added the subject area Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to the school curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b). Three of the SPHE curriculum strands are concerned with educating children about 'myself', 'myself and others' and 'myself and the wider world', and as a result, wellbeing became a pivotal aspect of the SPHE curriculum. Despite this, the 'how' of implementation is a notable and significant gap. SPHE ended up being taught through single-issue programmes like Walk Tall and Stay Safe rather than adopting a holistic school approach which was what the Primary School Curriculum (1999) had intended. Indeed, as Nohilly and Tynan (2022) argue *'while loosely based on curriculum, the subject area of SPHE is completely overwhelmed by the number of programmes and resources that are available to schools to support its implementation which leads further away from the objectives of the curriculum' (Nohilly and Tynan, 2022, p 50).* As a result, the wellbeing modules incorporated in SPHE have been criticised for neglecting school systems. As often happens, teachers had to make curriculum objectives work in their contexts, which in many cases was not accompanied by adequate resources or professional development, leading to disparities between schools. In addition, personal development was included in the curriculum, but this was usually without regard to any of the structural determinants of wellbeing, like school culture or relationships within and outside the school.

The introduction of the Aistear Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) marked another strategic effort towards early years teaching,

adding wellbeing as a core theme. Aistear defined wellbeing by encompassing physical and psychological aspects, focusing on emotional strength and positive social interactions. Its designated theme of "Identity and Belonging" emphasised the importance of community and self-recognition in shaping children's experiences. This aligns with Sen's Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999), which defines wellbeing as achieving meaningful outcomes through having agency and inclusion. Aistear enhanced continuity from early years to primary education, fostering the integrated focus on wellbeing. Aistear's focus on identity and emotion provided developmentally appropriate continuity between preschool and primary school so that the principles of wellbeing were integrated from the earliest phases of formal education (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009).

2.2.2 Wellbeing Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015)

The introduction of the Wellbeing Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (Department of Education, 2015) marked another important turning point for Irish policy by adopting a whole-school approach to wellbeing, aligning it with international frameworks such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) school-based mental health promotion. These guidelines took a more preventative and relational stance by making wellbeing a core element of school culture and operations, strengthening the approach to wellbeing in schools. These guidelines included the introduction of proactive approaches to wellbeing during professional development for teachers, school self-evaluation, and classroom-based teaching. The policy was supported by funded programs such as The Incredible Years and Zippy's Friends, which made the policy accessible (through training provided by the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)) by providing educators with materials to assist students in social and emotional learning.

These guidelines also emphasise teachers' wellbeing as integral to students' wellbeing. The policy recognised that the teachers' emotional and professional wellbeing within the system must be addressed. By integrating teacher wellbeing, the guidelines enabled a broader scope of mental health promotion by addressing mental health at the overall school level.

2.2.3 The Wellbeing Policy Statement as a Central Actor

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2023) (Department of Education, 2019) consolidated earlier works by establishing wellbeing as an area of focus of the Irish education system. The policy outlined four interrelated domains within which wellbeing ought to be fostered:

- Culture and environment
- Curriculum
- Policy and planning
- Relations and partnerships

The policy further became embedded in school development through the Self Evaluation (SSE), where schools were required to reflect on their wellbeing practices and make improvements towards them. In this way, the wellbeing policy was operationalised, and schoolteachers, together with school leaders, developed strategies for lesson planning and school improvement at staff meetings.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement (Department of Education, 2019) also emphasises the need to develop partnerships between the school and the broader community. This policy approach developed the role of schools beyond teaching institutions, redefining them as the main facilitators of wellbeing in society. This relationship enabled wellbeing to be part of education and integrated into other social and educational systems and frameworks.

2.2.4 The Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)

The Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education, 2023) marks the most notable shift in Irish educational policy as it incorporates wellbeing as an equal

alongside subjects like Language and Mathematics. The framework portrays a profound understanding of the foundational nature of wellbeing in learning by dedicating three hours per week to wellbeing instruction at the upper primary level. The competency "Being Well" focuses on children's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, aligning with the Wellbeing Policy Statement principles.

The framework forges stronger links with earlier policies like SPHE, Aistear, and the Wellbeing Policy Statement, providing better cohesion regarding wellbeing across different educational levels. For instance, the "Being Well" competency builds upon learning outcomes associated with the SPHE strands "Myself" and "Others" and incorporates concepts from Aistear's themes of Identity and Belonging.

Further, the framework supports wellbeing as a transversal priority area in alignment with best practices, which promotes social and emotional learning integration across subjects. The framework cultivates wellbeing as a school culture by establishing collective responsibility among teachers and integrating wellbeing throughout the curriculum.

2.2.5 Behaviour Guidelines, wellbeing, and regulation

The Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations Guidelines (National Council for Special Education, 2024) extend the reach of the wellbeing assemblage by reframing behaviour management as a relational process rooted in co-regulation and emotional safety. These guidelines articulate that "all behaviour is communication" and emphasise the importance of effectively addressing underlying emotional and sensory needs to support students (p. 7). By positioning wellbeing as foundational to behaviour for learning, the guidelines create an intertextual link between curriculum, assessment, and classroom management policies.

The guidelines serve as a critical resource during teacher planning meetings, where assessment frameworks intersect with behaviour policies, promoting alignment with the Primary Curriculum Framework's focus on resilience and emotional regulation. As noted, enabling environments that prioritise co-regulation help students "achieve

and maintain a calm and alert state" (National Council for Special Education, 2024, p. 27). This approach underscores the centrality of wellbeing within school literacy practices, reinforcing its stability across all educational levels.

Leadership also plays a pivotal role in implementing these principles (Government of Ireland, 2023). The guidelines highlight the importance of school leaders modelling relational approaches to behaviour management, fostering a culture of empathy and co-regulation: "*The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high-quality student care, learning, and teaching*" (Government of Ireland, 2023, p. 51). By embedding these practices, leaders ensure the guidelines' principles are understood and actively applied, further stabilising the wellbeing framework.

2.2.6 The Influence of Global Policy on Wellbeing in Primary Education

The increasing focus on wellbeing in Irish primary education is in tandem with the global agenda of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the WHO (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs, adopted in 2015, serve as a blueprint for sustainable development in different sectors, including health and education. Goals Three and Four emphasise the centrality of wellbeing in achieving equitable and sustainable outcomes:

- Goal Three seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all, irrespective of age, focusing on prevention, treatment, and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

- Goal Four focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

These goals demonstrate a global commitment to integrating wellbeing in education and broader social policy and practice, underscoring that healthy, well-supported learner are crucial for achieving quality education and sustainable development. WHO supports this view by calling for an overall comprehensive, cross-sectoral

approach to wellbeing that includes health promotion at the school level within policies, curricula, and practices.

While responding to global policy, the Irish education system has undergone several changes to incorporate wellbeing into the curricula and policies of the education system. This transformation clearly prioritises wellbeing in education through the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Frameworks for Practice (2018-2023) and the Primary Curriculum Framework (2023). This shift in focus alongside the SDGs marks a turning point towards wellbeing as a fundamental constituent of education in Ireland. These changes represent a movement within educational policy that is increasingly focused on the comprehensive development of the learner and integrating international obligations toward health, equity, and lifelong learning.

The wellbeing reforms in Irish education are part of a more comprehensive approach aligned with the collective objectives of the SDGs. Through fostering positive wellbeing practices at the policy level, nurturing inclusive educational settings, and teaching emotional regulation and resilience, the Irish education system is actively working toward equitable, sustainable, and inclusive societies on a global scale.

2.2.7 The Impact of COVID-19 on Wellbeing in Education

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted wellbeing in education during its initial phase, when schools were closed, and remote learning programs were introduced, as well as in the period that followed. While the pandemic added complications to the already problematic educational system, it also created new pressures and transformed the understanding and focus of wellbeing within the school setting.

The isolation and anxiety associated with the pandemic, as well as the abrupt transition to remote learning, resulted in negative mental health impacts for students, teachers, and families. Students, especially those from marginalised and at-risk groups, reported facing more significant anxiety, overwhelming loneliness, and

depression when compared to pre-pandemic levels because of the lack of social interaction and routine structure provided by school (Banati et al., 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2021). There were also academic disruptions, such as decreased motivation to learn, learning ineffectiveness, and difficulties in managing the balance between school and home activities (Garbe et al., 2020). With no training or resources provided, teachers strained to meet the demands of online teaching, subsequently compounding their burnout and exhaustion (Kim & Asbury, 2020). School lockdowns also exacerbated educational inequities, and the learning opportunities gap for students with special needs due to the lack of tailored educational resources and structured support (Bobo et al., 2020).

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an emphasis on fostering resilience and enhancing mental health as part of the pandemic recovery plan, which is essential for students and staff (Arslan & Burke, 2021). Furthermore, positive education focuses on recovery and growth. This approach combines academics with developing wellbeing skills such as resilience, self-regulation, and self-awareness. Students' psychosocial wellbeing is enhanced through evidence-based programs such as the Penn Resiliency Program (Proctor et al., 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Furthermore, positive pedagogy as an approach has been effective in enhancing teachers' and students' wellbeing. Such an approach focuses on teaching and learning in a flexible and creative way while fostering personal and social bonds to boost the attainment level of both the students and teachers (Burke & Dempsey, 2021; Waters et al., 2017).

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of having robust and flexible education frameworks that prioritise wellbeing (Burke and Dempsey, 2021). Schools have started dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 in conjunction with using strategies grounded on positive education and pedagogy to build wellbeing infrastructures that will be sustained in future educational environments.

Table 2.1: Concept-Centric Matrix of Wellbeing Policies (Source: Created by author)

Policy Document	Core Wellbeing Components	Key Approach	Implementation Focus

SPHE (1999)	Personal development, emotional regulation, social skills	Curriculum-based	Discrete subject with limited whole-school integration
Aistear (2009)	Emotional resilience, identity, belonging, creativity	Holistic developmental	Cross-curricular theme in early childhood education
Wellbeing Guidelines (2015)	Mental health promotion, resilience, relational wellbeing	Whole-school framework	Universal, targeted, and individual support tiers
Wellbeing Policy Statement (2018)	Culture, relationships, belonging, emotional safety	Multi-component whole-school framework	SSE-driven strategy embedded in school planning
Primary Curriculum Framework (2023)	Self-awareness, resilience, social connectedness	Curriculum restructuring	Standalone competency integrated across all subjects
Understanding Crisis Situations and Behaviour of Concern Guidelines (2024)	Emotional regulation, co-regulation, relational behaviour	Relational approach to behaviour management	Interlinked with curriculum and wellbeing priorities
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015)	Physical and mental health, quality education, equity, lifelong learning	Global policy framework	Embedding wellbeing across sectors, linking education and health

This collection of wellbeing policies illustrates how policy documents are core actors of Irish primary education (**Table 2.1**). By emphasising wellbeing as a core aspect within the actor-network framework, these policies have altered the focus of schools, balancing the teacher and student relationships and their practices.

In addition, tracing policy documents through their assemblage reveals how these policies attempt to stabilise the network of Irish primary education. In isolating individual policies, one overlooks their interrelations with other policies, which is why these policies ensure that wellbeing remains prioritised irrespective of the operational level. The interplay between policy documents and the theoretical underpinning of wellbeing that is analysed in the following section our literature review. This promises to enrich the understanding of how educational policies the practice of wellbeing in schools.

2.3 Structure of the theoretical underpinnings of wellbeing

This review systematically examines wellbeing in education using a framework adapted from Spratt (2016). The wellbeing analysis in education offered in Spratt's (2016) framework is particularly useful for the current review because it combines both critical and discursive analysis. Unlike earlier models which focus on psychological or health considerations (Seligman, 2009; Sen, 2009; WHO, 1998), Spratt is situated within education and examines wellbeing from its philosophical, practical, and policy aspects.

As a result, this review is structured around five interrelated discourses: flourishing, social and emotional wellbeing, physical health, care and relationships and sustainability (**see Figure 2.1**). These five themes are analysed for their relevance and influence on educational practices. This review seeks to advance the understanding of wellbeing in Irish schools while proposing strategies to cultivate inclusive and sustainable environments. It brings together philosophical, research-based and practical insights to show how important wellbeing is for the future of education.

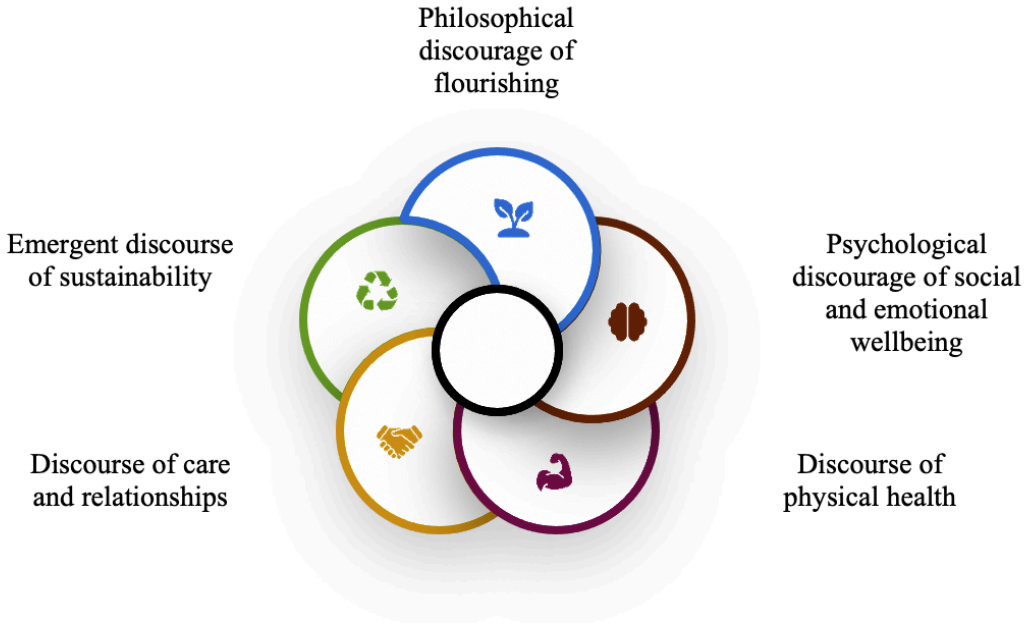


Figure 2.1: The 5 overlapping discursive themes used in this review (Source: adapted from Spratt, 2016)

A key advantage of Spratt's (2016) framework is its direct engagement with education policy. Many wellbeing models describe wellbeing components in isolation, but Spratt critically examines how wellbeing is operationalised within education systems (Spratt, 2016). This shows the political and ideological factors which influence perceptions of wellbeing within schools. This is consistent with the current review on Irish primary education, where the policies for wellbeing intertwine with social, economic, and institutional frameworks. With these considerations, the framework shifts from singular strategies of wellbeing to examine the overarching school and national policy contexts in which wellbeing is integrated. Considering the growing concern for wellbeing in educational contexts, Spratt's framework offers a timely perspective. It enables educators, policymakers, and researchers think critically about how wellbeing is performed or constructed in schools. Other models have been useful, but none provide the policy critique and discourse analysis that Spratt incorporates. This allows us to discern wellbeing, considering primary education in Ireland, not as a concept, but as a system of policies shaping student experiences and educational results.

The next section of this thesis is divided into four main sections (see **Figure 2.2**), each building on the previous to provide a full comprehensive analysis of school wellbeing. The thesis follows a logical progression from the theoretical framework, to applied wellbeing models leading to visualisation and mapping of the discourse.

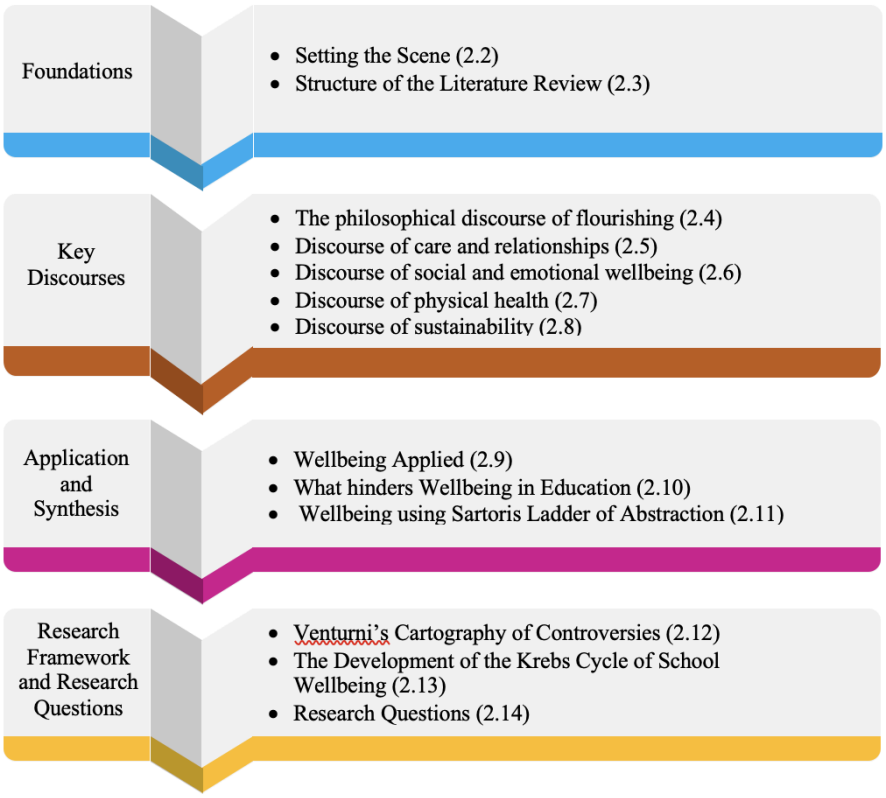


Figure 2.2: Structure of Literature Review (Source: Created by author)

It begins by laying out the key necessary components that need to be defined to understand school wellbeing. Chapter 2.3 presents Theoretical Perspectives that underpin this research, synthesising the literature with the most relevant theoretical frameworks.

The second section explores the major discourses that shape our understanding of wellbeing in educational settings. This includes an examination of the philosophical discourse of flourishing (2.4) and key perspectives on care and relationships (2.5), social and emotional wellbeing (2.6), physical health (2.7), and sustainability (2.8).

This set of discourses are instrumental in developing a multi-dimensional understanding of wellbeing in education.

Building on the critical discourses, section 2.9 looks at how Wellbeing is applied in Education settings showing how the various perspectives are implemented into action. Finally, section 2.11 engages in critical discussion, Uncoupling the Core Meaning of School Wellbeing Using Sartori's Ladder of Abstraction, which is useful in constructing school wellbeing refining and clarifying pedagogy understanding in abstraction.

The concluding section of the thesis provides the research framework along with the primary research questions to be addressed. This also includes applying Venturini's Cartography of Controversy as a methodological tool to map the discourse on school wellbeing. Subsequently, section **2.13** presents The Development of the Krebs Cycle of School Wellbeing.

2.4 Philosophical Perspectives on Flourishing in Education

In the philosophy of education, human flourishing or wellbeing is often upheld as an ideal or overarching objective of education, with some scholars considering it the ultimate goal. Before engaging in that debate, it is essential to understand how wellbeing is rooted in two philosophical concepts: hedonism and eudaimonism (Samman, 2007). These concepts date back to the Greek philosophers Aristippus of Cyrene (435–356 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), respectively.

The hedonic approach concentrates on happiness and describes wellbeing as the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In contrast, the eudaimonic approach concentrates on self-realisation and meaning and describes wellbeing in terms of the extent to which an individual is functioning at their fullest potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Accordingly, current conceptualisations of wellbeing often incorporate aspects of both hedonic and eudaimonic frameworks, operating in tandem (Huppert & So, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Taylor (2015) defined wellbeing within the following broad philosophical perspectives:

- hedonistic (mental-state), which posits that wellbeing consists of affective states such as life-satisfaction or happiness.
- desire-satisfaction, which views wellbeing through the lens of fulfilling one's real, filtered or ideal preferences and/or desires.
- objective, which ties wellbeing to human excellences and/or capacity-building; and
- capabilities, which combines neo-Aristotelian theories and objective list theories to produce lists of capacities needed for the ability to lead a satisfactory life.

These philosophical perspectives offer a broad yet strong base for understanding and potentially defining wellbeing as a multifaceted concept applied in everyday life, particularly in its multi-component use in education (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Norrish et al., 2013; Peill, 2022; Roffey, 2012; Scottish Government, 2004; Seligman et al., 2009; Waters & Loton, 2019). Similarly, in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 study (Borgonovi & Pál, 2016), the Framework for the Analysis of Student Wellbeing uses five domains to examine indicators of student wellbeing and how these relate to the school environment in a similar way to Taylor's (2015) broad perspectives of wellbeing. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) domains of wellbeing include psychological, social and physical functioning, material, cognitive and capabilities that students require to live fulfilling and happy lives. O'Brien and O'Shea (2017) further demonstrated the multidimensional nature of wellbeing, drawing on insights from psychology, philosophy and sociology.

Classical debates underpinning modern conceptualisations of wellbeing still revolve around eudaimonia and hedonism. These debates have led to the evolution of contemporary models like the Capabilities Approach (Sen et al, 1999) which focuses on the provision of necessary opportunities and freedoms for wellbeing, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000) which claims the essentials of one's wellbeing to be autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Seligman's PERMA model (2012) is indicative of a strengths-based approach resulting from a mixture of hedonic and eudaimonic thinking. These models guide and shape the policies and practices targeting holistic personal and communal flourishing and growth tailored to the needs of students in schools. The following sections will elaborate on the various conceptualisations of wellbeing beginning with the notion of 'eudaimonia' and its significance in education.

2.4.1 Eudaimonia

According to Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./1998) in his influential work Nicomachean Ethics, eudaimonia is the scientific articulation of happiness. It is not a fleeting individual's emotional state; rather, it is a stable state of wellbeing (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1998; Irwin, 2012). Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./1998) held that eudaimonia is the culmination of human existence, achievable by the practice of virtues, a pursuit not arbitrary but pursued through conscious moral discipline (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1998). This classical concept has been refined to a great extent by modern philosophers such as MacIntyre (1984), who considered eudaimonia as 'being and doing well', which represents the fullness of life. This underlines that a good life requires its core to be constituted of virtues in action. Similarly research has also associated eudaimonia with to the process of becoming self-actualised, developing a sense of purpose and competence through identifying and exercising one's unique talents (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2013). Deci and Ryan (2006) extended this to suggest that wellbeing transcends being an outcome; it is the ongoing journey of aligning with one's daimon or intrinsic nature, encapsulating a life lived virtuously. Ryan and Deci (2001) posited the 'good life' as one of optimal functioning and experience, a continuous quest for self-realisation.

Within the sphere of modern education, eudaimonic wellbeing implies a vast array of personal and social capabilities, from finding meaning to fostering enduring growth and positive societal contributions (Ryff, 2018). These elements are critical to optimal psychosocial functioning and paramount in educational domains where developing the whole person is central. Indeed, Clarke et al (2023) contends that for adolescents', eudaimonia at school was significantly associated with academic

attainment. Consequently, educational wellbeing initiatives should prioritise the cultivation of eudaimonic qualities, empowering students and teachers to achieve their fullest potential while making meaningful contributions to their communities (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Nevertheless, the application of the concept of eudaimonia within educational frameworks is accompanied by notable complexities (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The concept focuses on living a genuine life and achieving virtue, but these goals can differ significantly for each individual (Huta and Waterman, 2014). This questions the feasibility of a uniform approach to wellbeing in diverse schools (Biesta, 2010). Emphasising virtues and optimal functioning has its risks. It may fail to account for the complex nature of contemporary life and the many factors affecting wellbeing. Factors such as socioeconomic variances and cultural diversities profoundly affect one's capacity for eudaimonia, potentially excluding those hindered by obstacles that limit their self-actualisation and virtue development (Nussbaum, 2000b). As a result, the eudaimonic model risks can appear too rigid and may interpret that individuals who do not possess certain virtues are somehow deficient. This constricts one's view of wellbeing, which in turn can marginalise diverse human experiences or indeed diversity (Ryff and Singer 2008).

Thus, engaging with the notion of eudaimonia in the context of school wellbeing calls for modifying it to contemporary approaches. Education needs to go beyond delivering knowledge and foster all human capabilities and experiences so that students can flourish in every aspect of life. The focus should be on creating an school culture or environment that fosters intellectual, moral and holistic growth, ensuring students become well-rounded and ready to succeed in life and society (Kristjánsson, 2007; Nussbaum, 2011).

While eudaimonic wellbeing emphasises the cultivation of moralistic, intellectual and holistic virtues, another significant strand of thinking about wellbeing emerges from the hedonic tradition. This strand of thinking stresses the importance of pleasure, happiness, and life satisfaction in the overall wellbeing of a person.

2.4.2 Hedonic and Subjective Wellbeing

Hedonic wellbeing is closely tied to seeking happiness and avoiding discomfort. It emphasises emotional experiences such as joy and contentment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Diener et al. (2018) defined hedonic wellbeing as a state marked by satisfaction with life, positive emotions and a noticeable lack of negative feelings. This renders hedonic wellbeing an essential aspect of subjective wellbeing (SWB). The construct of subjective wellbeing, established by Diener and Emmons (1984), is measured by tracking positive emotions, reducing negative emotions and assessing one's satisfaction with life. Ryff and Singer (2008) tied hedonic wellbeing to subjective experiences, stressing its connection to feelings of contentment and positive affect or the extent an individual experiences a positive mood. Therefore, the hedonic perspective focuses on how individuals evaluate their emotional experiences and how satisfied they feel with life. Ryff et al (2021) further contend a threefold structure of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect remains core in defining what constitutes hedonic wellbeing.

However, hedonic wellbeing has faced criticism because it oversimplifies the complex nature of wellbeing into a dual system of happy and negative emotions (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This approach may systematically overlook more important human goals and endeavours that transcend fleeting feelings, according to Ryff and Singer (2008). The hedonic perspective concentrates on the pursuit of pleasure and avoiding pain; it may neglect ethical and moral aspects of enjoyment, which are critical to the social and developmental fabric of human life (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2012).

In educational contexts, dependence solely on hedonic metrics may overlook important elements such as the development of character, resilience and virtues which are critical to a student's overall growth (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). While hedonic wellbeing highlights the affective aspects of a rewarding life, it is imperative to augment this perspective with eudaimonic insights (Ryff et al, 2021). Such integration could provide an enabling approach within educational systems for a comprehensive vision of wellbeing, promoting human flourishing across different dimensions (Forgeard et al., 2011; Waterman, 2008).

The subjective and hedonic approaches towards wellbeing centre on an individual's sense of happiness and satisfaction and may lack the more broad and structural reasons that contribute to human flourishing. No system measuring wellbeing is complete without metrics that are not purely based on subjective feelings. The concept of objective wellbeing (OWB) adds value by highlighting the measurable domains such as economic productivity, health, and education which form the life quality of a person. This concept is based on welfare economics and seeks to measure wellbeing in its individual and societal dimensions.

2.4.3 Objective Wellbeing

Even though hedonic wellbeing encompasses the emotional and affective dimensions of wellbeing, it does not exist in isolation. Equally, subjective wellbeing is self-reported and lacks quantifiable nature. This poses a challenge in establishing universal standards that define 'good life' across different cultures (Diener et al., 2018; Ryff et al., 2021). These limitations have prompted scholars to rethink the approach towards wellbeing and have evolved into what we know as objective wellbeing.

Objective Wellbeing shifts the attention from a person's emotions and feelings to measurable, quantifiable indicators. It offers a structural and societal perspective by including economic, health, education, and social factors that affect the overall quality of life (Sen, 1973, 1976; OECD, 2015b). Unlike subjective wellbeing, which relies on personal evaluations, objective wellbeing is based on empirical data and external criteria, thus making the assessment of human welfare more systematic. The adoption of both views leads to a comprehensive understanding of wellbeing, incorporating individual experiences together with the conditions that enable humans to flourish. The idea of objective wellbeing derives from Sen's (1973, 1976) studies in welfare economics. His work concentrated on assessing poverty and inequality. With this foundation, the OECD (2015) constructed a detailed framework for comprehensively conceptualising objective wellbeing.

This divides objective wellbeing into two primary dimensions: material conditions and quality of life. This framework emphasises tangible and measurable factors that are critical to human flourishing (Clark et al., 2008; Diener & Suh, 1997; Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b). Material conditions are assessed through indicators such as income and wealth, employment and earnings and housing. Quality of life incorporates health status, education and skills, work-life balance, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, social connections and SWB, with the SWB further divided into three subdimensions (evaluative, affective and eudaimonic; OECD, 2015b, p. 22). All these factors are the foundation of a life considered 'going well' (OECD, 2015b).

Ryff (1989) found the key dimensions of objective wellbeing to include a sense of purpose in life and personal growth. Nussbaum's (2011) capability approach emphasises increasing freedoms and opportunities for a meaningful life. In turn, Sen viewed objective wellbeing, as integral to justice and underlined its central role in creating freedoms and enabling both individual and collective flourishing. Together, these perspectives underline the multidimensional nature of objective wellbeing. and its importance in promoting a fair and just society. Accordingly, Curren et al. (2024) argue that objective wellbeing. significantly contributes to promoting equity and fostering human flourishing. They indicated that objective wellbeing is grounded in universal human needs and societal standards. It emphasises the structural conditions necessary for individuals to thrive, including physical health, education, financial security and quality social relationships. As a result, Curren et al. (2024) emphasise that schools have the critical responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of their students is secured both in the short term and over the long term through ordered, sustainable environments.

2.4.4 Capabilities Approach

The Capability Approach, introduced by Sen (1992, 1996, 1999), provides a more transformative conceptual framework for evaluating wellbeing. According to Sen (1992, 1996), wellbeing essentially concerns the freedoms that individuals have to live the lives they value. From this perspective, the focus shifts from conventional measures based on income, wealth, or happiness to real freedoms and what

individuals can achieve in life. As Robeyns (2005, 2017) indicated, this approach, therefore, provides a broad normative framework through which wellbeing and society can be evaluated.

The Capability Approach is based on four main elements:

1. functionings
2. capabilities,
3. agency
4. freedom.

Sen (1999) defined **functionings** as the 'doings and beings' that an individual achieves. Primary functionings include basic necessities such as nourishment and shelter. More complex functionings encompass emotional states such as happiness, self-respect and tranquillity (Sen, 1992).

Capabilities are the freedom to choose from among functionings. They reflect the ability to live the life one values (Sen, 1999). Bartolomei et al. (2024) reinforced this distinction, noting that capabilities capture not only what individuals accomplish but also what possibilities are available to them. Building on Sen's (1999, 2001) work, Nussbaum (2000a, 2000b, 2011) proposed a list of ten essential capabilities, such as bodily health, senses (thought and imagination), control over one's environment and practical reasoning. This prompts the integration of the Capability Approach into policymaking to support justice and equality as ensuring these capabilities helps uphold human dignity and enables individuals to flourish (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2011). Robeyns (2017) further observed that these capabilities are guiding principles for fixing wellbeing gaps, especially for marginalised groups.

Agency, according to Sen (2001), is described as the ability to act for and produce change aligned with their personal values rather than just maximising personal utility. Unlike the traditional notion of 'agency' in economics or game theory where agents act on another's behalf, Sen's (2001) concept of agency emphasises personal freedom and empowerment. This approach presents a more detailed view of

wellbeing by showing that choices are not always directed towards immediate happiness but rather express deeper values. Robeyns (2005, 2017) draws attention to the way social structures, as explained earlier, influence an individual's agency by either augmenting or limiting one's options.

In Sen's Capability Approach, **freedom** is both a facilitator and an outcome, making it possible for persons to exercise agency and attain wellbeing in accordance with their values (2001). As Bartolomei et al. (2024) explored, resolving the issue of freedom attempts to remedy inequity not simply in its outcome but also the processes that sustain such an outcome. Consider, for instance, two people who may have achieved the same outcome in terms of functioning, such as receiving an education. However, their potential achievements, and resources at their disposal, may vary due to the societal constructs and institutional support provided to them. The Capability Approach is utilized in areas such as education, health and sustainability (Bartolomei et al., 2024). In addition, the integration of Sen's approaches (1999, 2001) with Nussbaum's (2000a, 2000b, 2011) universal capabilities aids policymakers in addressing systemic injustices and fostering equity (Clark, 2019; Robeyns, 2017). Clark (2019) illustrated the efficacy of this approach in tackling educational inequality through an opportunities-beyond-outcomes framework.

The Capability Approach emphasises freedom, agency, and the ability to attain wellbeing. However, it appears that the Capabilities approach lacks the attention to the underlying psychological drivers that encourage the pursuit and maintenance of wellbeing. In this sense, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a different perspective. Developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), SDT uniquely emphasises the intrinsic motivators alongside fundamental psychological needs critical to human flourishing. SDT highlights the influence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness toward wellbeing, thereby helping explain agency in diverse circumstances, including educational ones.

2.4.5 Self-Determination Theory

SDT, which was developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), explains human motivation, growth and wellbeing. The theory investigates the ways in which environmental and social conditions either support or obstruct individuals' natural growth tendencies and psychological integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The core of the theory revolves around three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2017, 2021). Autonomy describes the experience of having volition and self-determination, where individuals perceive themselves as the origin of their actions. It is not the same as being independent but rather being able to act based on personal values and interests (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2017, 2021.

Competence reflects the fundamental human need to perceive oneself as effective and capable in engaging with the environment. Feeling mastery is very important for dealing with challenges and achieving meaningful results. Relatedness refers to having meaningful relationships where individuals feel they belong and care for each other. (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2017, 2021 Satisfying these three needs enhances wellbeing, motivation, vitality and resilience (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Howard et al., 2021).

SDT describes motivation as a spectrum ranging from controlled to autonomous regulation, focusing on two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation, driven by the joy of the activity itself, is characterised by curiosity, creativity and a sense of enjoyment (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Further research has shown that intrinsic motivation has also played a role in student achievement (Taylor et al, 2014). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or potential consequences. However, SDT recognises that extrinsic motivation can evolve to be more autonomous (Ryan and Deci, 2017). This happens through internalisation, where external values and rules are integrated into a person's self-concept (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT incorporates several sub-theories including Cognitive Evaluation Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), Organismic Integration Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)., Basic Psychological Needs Theory (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020) and Goal Contents Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Cognitive Evaluation Theory focuses on how external rewards and feedback influence intrinsic motivation and asserts that

environments promoting autonomy enhance motivation, while controlling environments reduce it (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Organismic Integration Theory focuses on motivation. It describes how external motivation shifts into internal motivation as actions move from external control to becoming fully self-endorsed (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Basic Psychological Needs Theory explains that autonomy, competence and relatedness are important for wellbeing (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Goal Contents Theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals, such as personal growth, are strongly linked to long-term wellbeing, while extrinsic goals, such as fame, are less effective (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

SDT has significant educational implications (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004; Su & Reeve, 2011; Cheon, Reeve, Lee, & Lee, 2018; Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016). It explains that the creation of autonomy-supportive environments allows students to find their interests and build intrinsic motivation. Some of the key approaches include the provision of constructive feedback to support competence and the building of classroom relationships to provide relatedness, which cumulatively enhance student engagement and wellbeing (Deci et al., 1991. Studies explain that the satisfaction of the psychological needs of students leads to better academic achievement, emotional wellbeing and higher retention rates (Howard et al., 2021). However, SDT has also been critiqued for assuming universal applicability. In collectivist cultures, which prioritise interdependence and harmony, autonomy may not hold as significant a role (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Furthermore, applying SDT constructs in dynamic environments such as schools and workplaces presents practical challenges such as oversimplifying the complexity of human motivation by focusing on three primary psychological needs (

SDT aligns closely with positive psychology, particularly in its focus on creating supportive environments that promote thriving. Seligman's (2012) PERMA model complements SDT by emphasising positive relationships, engagement and meaningful living as core pathways to wellbeing. These frameworks provide useful insights for creating interventions and policies that can help improve both individual and collective wellbeing.

2.4.6 Positive Psychology and Wellbeing

The term ‘positive psychology’ was coined by Maslow (1954) to describe the growing focus on understanding what contributes to a good, happy and compassionate individual, as well as the innate human tendency to strive for excellence, self-actualisation and peak experiences. According to Lomas et al. (2014), positive psychology is ‘the science and practice of improving wellbeing’. The positive psychology view of wellbeing is often known as ‘flourishing’. Agenor et al. (2017) argued that ‘the science of flourishing is still in its infancy’ (Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016, p. 1355). Although it is conceded that hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing together foster flourishing, different models of the concept provide different views on the constituting attributes of flourishing (Agenor et al., 2017; Ruini et al, 2023). Hone et al. (2014) originally identified four prominent conceptualisations and operational definitions of flourishing within the psychological literature: Keyes (2002), Huppert and So (2013), Diener et al. (2010) and Seligman (2012). These models were subsequently synthesised by Agenor et al. (2017) to capture their unique contributions to the study of flourishing. Each of these frameworks offers distinct theoretical underpinnings and measurement instruments to operationalise flourishing.

However, with the integration of more recent advancements in the literature, such as Kern’s (2022) Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment and Health (PERMAH) model, Waters and Loton’s (2021) Strengths, Emotional Management, Attention and Awareness, Relationships, Coping and Habits and Goals (SEARCH) framework and Noble and McGrath’s (2015) Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement and Resilience (PROSPER) framework, the conceptual landscape of flourishing has expanded significantly (see **Table 2.2**). These newer models extend the foundational elements identified by Hone et al. (2014) to incorporate additional dimensions such as physical health, coping mechanisms and systemic approaches to resilience and goal setting, reflecting a broader and more dynamic understanding of wellbeing in contemporary contexts. This updated synthesis highlights the evolution of flourishing as a multi-faceted construct, enriched by ongoing research and its application in diverse domains, particularly education.

Keyes (2002) identified positive versions of symptoms outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) to identify the components of subjective wellbeing. The main elements of Keyes's (2002) model are psychological (eudaimonic), emotional (hedonic) and social elements. Keyes (2002) classified adults free of mental disorders as follows: flourishing, moderately mentally healthy and languishing. Keyes (2002) used the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF) as a measurement instrument. It uses an episodic frequency scale (e.g. In the last month, how frequently did you feel…) to assess six items of psychological wellbeing, three items of emotional wellbeing and five items of social wellbeing (Keyes, 2005, 2006; Lamers et al., 2011). To be diagnosed with flourishing mental health, a person must show at least one of the three items of emotional wellbeing and six of the eleven items of psychological and social wellbeing, experienced 'every day' or 'almost every day' over the past month (Young et al., 2020, p. 5). While the MHC-SF has shown consistency and reliability in studies involving adolescents (Keyes et al., 2008; Lamers et al., 2011; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010; Young et al., 2020), it has not been used as an instrument in an educational setting.

Building on Keyes's (2002, 2005, 2006) work, Huppert and So (2013) identified ten elements of wellbeing (engagement, competence, meaning, emotional stability, positive emotion, optimism, resilience, positive relationships, vitality and self-esteem) by identifying the opposite features of mental illness. They did this by employing a diagnostic approach that reversed the defining characteristics of common mental disorders. This was based on the rationale that mental health was not just the absence of mental illness but also on the presence of positive traits. The measurement of these ten positive features is based on episodic frequency and is assessed through the European Social Survey (2014).
Huppert and So (2013) further categorised these ten elements of wellbeing into three distinct groupings:

- Positive characteristics: vitality, emotional stability, resilience, optimism and self-esteem.

- Positive functioning: competence, engagement, positive relationships and meaning.
- Positive appraisal: positive emotion and life satisfaction.

Based on their framework, Huppert and So maintained that flourishing requires three key elements. First, the presence of a positive emotion is essential. Second, individuals must exhibit four out of the five positive characteristics. Finally, they need to demonstrate three out of the four positive functioning features. This framework establishes a continuum from illbeing to wellbeing where a mental disorder is viewed at the opposite end of the continuum to wellbeing.

Within positive psychology, Seligman (2012) and the PERMA model has and fundamentally reshaped how the entire field approaches the topic of wellbeing. Seligman's work established a profound and measurable multi-dimensional approach to flourishing by asserting that wellbeing is more than the absence of illness; it is the presence of vital psychological, mental, resources which truly enable life to be lived fully. His work initiated the era of positive psychology by redirecting the focus from human pathologies to human potentials and thriving. The following section aims to explain Seligman's Flourish more deeply and how it functions as both a theory and practice of wellbeing advancement.

In his book *Flourish*, Seligman (2012) argued that 'the topic of positive psychology is wellbeing, that the gold standard for measuring wellbeing is flourishing and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing' (Seligman, 2012, p. 13). Seligman (2012) maintained that wellbeing is a construct that can be operationalised through a highly specific set of measures which define it. Accordingly, Seligman's (2012) PERMA model identifies the following specific set of measures as five components of wellbeing: positive emotions, positive relationships, engagement, meaning and accomplishments. Seligman (2012) further asserted that each element of wellbeing must meet three criteria to qualify as a distinct component. First, it must contribute to wellbeing. Second, it must be pursued by many people for its own sake. Third, it must be independently defined and measured to ensure exclusivity. According to Lomas et al. (2021), there have been three waves of positive

psychology. The first wave of positive psychology concentrated on cultivating happiness and subjective wellbeing, the second wave assimilated the idea that negative experiences are essential for personal growth, and the third wave broadened focus to include sociocultural and ecological factors that impact wellbeing, adopting a more holistic and systemic approach. In essence, this development integrates context, individual differences, and more complex systemic structures into the understanding of wellbeing and flourishing (Wong, 2011). Accordingly, the PERMA model has been applied in many positive psychology and Positive Education (PosEd) interventions as it focuses both the achievement of academic goals and also the development of psychological wellbeing. The PERMA model was subsequently reiterated by Kern (2022) who added health, to create the PERMAH framework. This appreciated the importance of health in overall wellbeing and enhanced the PERMA model in light of the emerging understanding of the relationship between physical and psychological factors in education.

Central to both PERMA and PERMAH models is the VIA (Values in Action) Character Strengths Inventory. This outlines 24 strengths categorised into six core virtues: courage, wisdom, humanity, temperance, justice and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These character strengths are central to many PosEd interventions aiming to cultivate resilience, empathy and purpose among students. Nonetheless, numerous perspectives on eudaimonia and flourishing have been proposed. Huta and Waterman (2014), for instance, compared eleven operational definitions of eudaimonia in contemporary psychological literature, highlighting the diversity in how flourishing is conceptualised. Among these, Seligman's (2012) PERMA framework is particularly notable for its adaptability and focus on measurable constructs, which has made it a cornerstone of positive psychology interventions, particularly in education.

In addition to the two prominent frameworks, PERMA and PERMAH, recent research has focused on the application of positive education from a systems perspective. Waters and Loton (2021) identified six key aspects: strength, emotional regulation, attention, relationships, coping/habits and goals. This model focuses on practical skills and habits that support academic achievements along with

psychosocial resilience; this focus makes these frameworks suitable for whole-school wellbeing. Noble and McGrath's (2015) model, known as the PROSPER framework integrates character development, resilience building and academic outcomes. Both models incorporate systemic interventions to infuse wellbeing into the school culture in ways that create school environments where students would not only succeed academically but emotionally as well.

PosEd refers to the application of positive psychology principles in education. According to Seligman (2012), PosEd involves 'education for both traditional skills and skills of wellbeing' (Curren et al., 2024, p. 132). This approach integrates academic excellence with evidence-based strategies designed to enhance psychological wellbeing. Frameworks such as PERMAH, SEARCH and PROSPER provide structured pathways for schools to create environments that foster holistic development and flourishing. Collectively, these models mark a shift toward more conceptually grounded and empirically validated approaches to promoting wellbeing within educational systems.

Positive psychology and Positive Education offers a foundational framework of wellbeing and flourishing, different theoretical models approach these constructs in fundamentally different ways. Each perspective captures varying but overlapping dimensions of human flourishing, such as Keyes's (2002) model that combines the psychological, emotional, and social aspects of wellbeing and Seligman's (2012) PERMA framework. Noble & McGrath's (2015) PROSPER model, Waters & Loton's (2021) SEARCH, and Kern's (2022) PERMAH have built on previous ones by adding elements like physical health, coping mechanisms, and systemic approaches. This shift illustrates the increasing understanding that wellbeing is complex and multidimensional, sufficient to require an integrative approach, especially in education. Exploring the various components of these models, including their opposing constructs, helps to capture the essence of flourishing and distinguish it from illbeing. These differences outline a more effective approach to designing educational interventions and frameworks and addressing strengths and vulnerabilities with precision.

2.4.7 Wellbeing Components Across Models

To provide a comparative analysis of these diverse perspective, **Table 2.2** analyses the varied conceptualisations of wellbeing across various theoretical models. An analysis of the total number of components within each framework reveals differences in their number, inclusion frequency and implications for how wellbeing is defined and measured. The findings of this analysis point to how complex and ambiguous the concept of flourishing is. For example, Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT identifies three core psychological needs, while Huppert and So's (2013) framework outlines ten unique wellbeing elements. For intermediate models, Diener et al.'s (2010) Flourishing Scale identifies eight components, while Seligman's (2012) PERMA model includes five. Recent frameworks such as PROSPER (Noble & McGrath, 2015), SEARCH (Waters & Loton, 2021) and PERMAH (Kern, 2022) include six or seven components. This variation reflects the differing theoretical priorities of each framework, with some focusing on foundational psychological constructs and others integrating broader contextual factors.

Table 2.2: Conceptualisations of flourishing (Source: Created by author)

Component	Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)	Keyes (2002)	Diener et al. (2010)	Huppert and So (2013)	Seligman (2012)	PROSPER (Noble & McGrath, 2015)	SEARCH (Waters & Loton, 2021)	PERMAH (Kern, 2022)
Positive Relationships	Relatedness	Social relationships	Positive relationships	Positive relationships	Positive relationships	Relationships	Relationships	Positive relationships
Positive Affect	-	Happiness	-	Positive emotion	Positive emotion	Positivity	Positive emotion	Positive emotion
Engagement	-	-	Engagement	Engagement	Engagement	Engagement	Attention and awareness	Engagement
Meaning	-	Purpose in life	Purpose and meaning	Meaning	Meaning and purpose	Purpose	-	Meaning
Self-Acceptance	-	Self-acceptance	Self-acceptance and self-esteem	Self-esteem	-	-	-	-
Optimism	-	-	Optimism	Optimism	-	Positivity	-	-
Competence	Competence	-	Competence	Competence	Accomplishment	Outcomes	Strengths	Competence

Vitality	-	-	-	Vitality	-	Resilience	-	Health
Resilience	-	-	-	Resilience	-	Resilience	Coping	Resilience
Social Contribution	-	Social contribution	Social contribution	-	-	-	-	-
Social Integration	-	Social integration	-	-	-	-	-	-
Autonomy	Autonomy	-	Autonomy	-	-	-	Habits and goals	-
Life Satisfaction	-	-	-	Life satisfaction	-	Positivity	-	-
Environmental Mastery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Accomplishments	-	-	-	-	Accomplishment	Outcomes	-	Accomplishment
Health	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Physical health

The frequency of individual components differs across the models, as indicated in **Table 2.3**. Certain elements, such as positive relationships, appear in nearly all frameworks, underscoring their centrality to the concept of flourishing. Similarly, components such as engagement and meaning/purpose are widely recognised, appearing in six of the eight models. These frequent inclusions suggest a broad consensus on the importance of these dimensions in fostering wellbeing. However, other components, such as health/physical health and autonomy, are far less consistently represented, with physical health appearing only in Kern's (2022) PERMAH framework and autonomy explicitly included in Ryan and Deci's (2001) SDT and Diener et al.'s (2010) model. This disparity indicates a lack of alignment in how different frameworks conceptualise the essential elements of flourishing.

Furthermore, inconsistencies across theoretical frameworks contribute to ambiguity in its definition. These frameworks are grounded in varying theoretical approaches, such as Huppert and So's (2013) diagnostic model, SDT's (Ryan & Deci, 2001) focus on psychological needs and Seligman's (2012) constructs of flourishing. While all models emphasise engagement and relationships, they differ in prioritising elements such as physical health, optimism and resilience. This selective focus often results in fragmented or partial conceptualisations of wellbeing. Exclusions or marginalisation of certain aspects further blur clarity. For instance, Kern's (2022) PERMAH model incorporates physical health, unlike earlier frameworks such as Keyes's (2002) model, SDT, or Huppert and So's (2013) diagnostic model. Similarly, autonomy, central to SDT, receives less attention in other models, leading to narrower conceptions of wellbeing, particularly in education or public health contexts.

Challenges also arise in measurement and implementation due to discrepancies in how these frameworks are operationalised in real-world settings. Differing definitions of wellbeing components have led to a range of diverse measurement tools, such as Keyes's (2002) MHC-SF and Seligman's (2012) PERMA Profiler, which assess distinct constructs. These measures often yield inconsistent results when applied to the same populations depending on the specific interest of the study

(Ploke, Batinic and Stieger, 2024). Moreover, such disparities in wellbeing conceptualisation discourage the incorporation of models into practice or policy. Some models, for example, prioritise psychological variables and downplay physical health or systemic factors, creating gaps in application.

Table 2.3: Components and Frequency Across Wellbeing Frameworks (Source: Created by author)

Component	Frequency Across Models
Positive Relationships	7
Engagement	6
Meaning/Purpose	6
Positive Affect	4
Competence	5
Resilience	3
Autonomy	2
Optimism	2
Accomplishments	2
Health/Physical Health	1
Vitality	1
Self-Acceptance	1
Social Contribution	1
Social Integration	1
Life Satisfaction	1
Environmental Mastery	0

Therefore, developing wellbeing frameworks remains an ongoing process aimed at mitigating such ambiguities. The PROSPER (Noble & McGrath, 2015) and SEARCH (Waters & Loton, 2021) models include constructs such as emotional regulation, habit formation and coping strategies, extending the conceptualisation of wellbeing as a practice rather than merely a rigid system. PERMAH extends the guiding principles of PERMA by adding an ‘H’ for health (Kern, 2022). This addition reflects emerging research emphasising the interdependence of physical and mental wellbeing. Contemporary assessment tools are thus becoming more holistic because they consider a wide range of issues connected to context.

The debate on wellbeing is continuously evolving as it captures the dynamic interplay between subjective perceptions, objective realities, and human agency needed to construct a good life. The debate on eudaimonia captures the role of underscored purpose, virtue and personal growth while the hedonic view captures

the role of pleasurable emotions in reinforcing one's happiness. In contrast, objective wellbeing considers structural and societal contexts, placing significance on economic, social, and environmental frameworks as integral to human flourishing. All these viewpoints are integrated in The Capabilities Approach and Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2001) which underscore autonomy, competence, and agency as essential dimensions of wellbeing. In addition, the rise of positive psychology has developed guiding frameworks such as PERMA (Seligman, 2012), SEARCH (Waters and Loton, 2019), and PROSPER (Noble and McGrath, 2015), which structure proactive and reactive interventions to support flourishing at individual and collective levels.

However, these frameworks have a practical relevance within educational settings only if one aspect is prioritised: relationships. The role of human relationships in the strengthening of resilience, sense of belonging, and overall development sustains all wellbeing models. In education, caring relationships among students, teachers, and peers serve as a nurturant factor for psychological safety, wellbeing, engagement, and growth. It is therefore important to analyse the influence of care and relationships in education. How do teacher student relationships influence emotional and academic growth? How can schools create a culture of care to support all students? How do students enhance peer belongingness? The focus of the next chapter aims to answer these questions informed by attachment theory, trauma-informed approaches, and the neuroscience of learning to explain why relationships matter in education.

2.5 Care and Relationships

The discourse on care in education emphasises the provision of care for children within the context of their relationships at school. Research demonstrates that teachers who cultivate caring relationships with their students positively impact students' emotional, social and academic development (Battistich et al., 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; O'Connor et al., 2010). This perspective aligns with Noddings's (1994) foundational work, which underscores the importance of caring and relationships as central goals of education. Noddings

(1994, 2012) argued that caring is a natural, affective response between humans and asserts that caring relationships between teachers and students form the basis for all educational interactions.

The Children's School Lives Study (Sloan et al., 2024) shows that relationships are very important for improving the feeling of belonging and wellbeing in schools. Despite most children reporting a general sense of care in their lives, the study identified a notable decline in this perception from 2nd to 6th class, particularly for girls. Care and support in schools evolve as children grow older. The results showed that school belonging declined from 5th to 6th class[2], with this decline being more pronounced for girls than boys. These findings underline the powerful role of teacher-student and peer relationships in shaping children's experiences at school.

According to Noddings (2012), teachers and students engage as whole persons, moving beyond hierarchical systems and a narrow focus on standardised testing. This argument is supported by Sloan et al. (2024), as they reflected upon the emotional significance of peer relationships and teacher support in shaping children's experiences at school. For example, children treasured friendships and peers alike, not only because they added fun to their lives but also because they provided happiness and a sense of emotional support. Yet, the Children's School Lives Study also highlights some of the challenges that threaten to undermine such important and caring relationships. Older children faced significant stressors, including bullying and changing friendship dynamics, which can undermine these essential connections (Sloan et al., 2024). Bullying was infrequent across most of the study. However, it increased from the 4th to 6th class, with girls being affected more by the end of primary school (Sloan et al., 2024). These findings align with Noddings's (2012) argument that care in education needs to move past institutional assumptions and focus on the unique needs and experiences of students. This is in line the fourth stage of Trontos (2015) ethics of care. Tronto contended that care consisted of four interdependent stages, each corresponding to a particular moral

[2] The Irish primary school system serves children aged 4 to 12 years and is structured into eight consecutive years: two years of infant classes (Junior Infants and Senior Infants), followed by six years of primary education (First to Sixth Class)

principle.. The first stage, caring about, focuses on the need for care. The second stage, taking care of, considers the need to address the concern. The third stage, caregiving, involves the actual hands on provision of care. Finally, the fourth stage is care receiving, or ensuring that the care provided meets their actual needs (Tronto, 2015). The recipient of care must ensure that there is something provided that responds to their needs.

Spratt (2016) extended Noddings's (2012) discourse by cautioning against a one-sided interpretation of the carer–cared-for relationship, where teachers may unconsciously assume that adhering strictly to curriculum goals equates to care. This aligns with Freire's (1970) critique of the banking model of education, where students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active learners. Sloan et al. (2024) reinforced the importance of listening to children's voices, as their experiences of relationships, both positive and negative, significantly shape their wellbeing and sense of belonging.

In light of these findings, Noddings (2012) called for an education system rooted in trust, where teachers consider moral, social, emotional and aesthetic dimensions within the curriculum. Similarly, the *Children's School Lives Study* highlights the need for a relational approach in schools that prioritises care, fosters a sense of belonging and addresses challenges such as bullying and declining perceptions of support, particularly for older children and girls. Together, these perspectives advocate for a holistic, student-centred approach to care in education, one that responds to the nuanced and evolving needs of all learners.

Accordingly, the analysis of care within educational spaces has led to relationships and care forming a central component of wellbeing initiatives. Understanding Attachment Theory **(2.5.1)** highlights the significance of safe relationships in early development. This is further expanded by Trauma-Informed Education **(2.5.2)** with regard to the adverse childhood experiences and their impact on learning. The Science of Safety and Polyvagal Theory **(2.5.3)** investigates further the physiological aspects of student self-regulation and engagement.

Furthermore the Neuroscience of Learning **(2.5.4)** deepen the understanding of the interplay between emotional state and thinking. Initiatives such as the HEARTS Model **(2.5.5)** provide emerging frameworks for fostering care in school culture, while Teacher Relationships and Collective Efficacy **(2.5.6)** mark the stance on care to focus on the role of teachers as critical learners supporting peers and building an environment conducive for learning for all.

2.5.1 Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1973) Attachment Theory is an example of how to create a sense of trust and safety in a school in terms of the development of authentic relationships bound by genuine care. Attachment theory is essentially a psychological framework that was established to stress the importance of building a strong connection between the infant and the main caregiver and how attachment unconsciously and instinctively regulates the mother-infant dyad.[3] Attachment has also been defined as a long-term relationship with another person (caregiver, parent, teacher or friend) that is characterised by comfort, soothing, pleasure or safety (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). This is further emphasised by Baim et al. (2011) who summarise attachment theory as the presence of nurturing interactions that allow a child to develop self-regulation capacities. Based on these interpretations of attachment theory, it can be argued that attachment theory has the adaptability to lay the foundations for fostering caring relationships in schools (Ainsworth, 1989; Schwartz, 2015; Solomon et al., 2017). Attachment-based relationships are built on foundations of safety and compassion (Ainsworth, 1989; Schwartz, 2015; Solomon et al., 2017) According to Bowlby (1973), a child who feels wanted and loved is more likely to grow up confident, with a belief in their own lovability. Consequently, caring relationships between teachers/school staff and students can have a positive impact on the development of the child (Xerri et al., 2018; Xie & Zhang, 2020) As a result, the school environment presents many opportunities to develop healthy relationships and authentic care. Indeed, if educators develop attachment-like relationships with

[3] The mother-baby dyad refers to the mother-offspring biological, psychological and social relationship. 'Infant social, emotional and neurological development is shaped by the bond established between mother and child' (Tsang et al., 2019, p. 497).

their students, especially those who are challenging or vulnerable, this will improve their chances of learning and achieving (Parker et al., 2016).

An example of how teachers and schools can use attachment theory to provide care and develop relationships in schools is through the concept of the 'One Good Adult' (Dooley et al., 2019). More specifically, this concept refers to the presence of 'one good adult' in school who provides non-parental social support to a child (Sterrett et al., 2017). At least one caring adult in a child's life can mitigate the effects of stress and contribute to healthy psychological functioning (Bogard, 2005). The findings of the *My World Survey* 1 (MWS-1) corroborate that having a 'One Good Adult' strongly supports children's mental health (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). A caring adult enhances a child's self-confidence, coping skills, sense of belonging and connectedness, life optimism and overall life satisfaction. The MWS-2 (Dooley et al., 2019) reinforced the importance of adult support in fostering resilience among young people. It showed that low levels of such support are associated with increased anxiety and depression in young people (Dooley et al., 2019).

The fundamentals of secure relationships and their influence on a child's emotional, social and cognitive development can be explained through the lens of attachment theory. Bowlby (1973) argued that children who possess strong and secure attachments with his/her primary caregivers tend to have better emotional control, resilience and trust towards others. In education, attachment-based approaches focus on the teacher and school staff's constant and supportive relationships and care that establishes safety and a sense of belonging to the students (Schore, 2001). "One Good Adult" (Dooley et al, 2019) is a concept that highlights the role of at least one consistent, caring adult in children's lives, especially in the context of adversity. Children who have trusting relationships with the adults in school are more likely to become active learners, have healthy relationships with their peers, and deal with challenges in a positive manner.

For some students, especially those with adverse childhood experiences, attachment ruptures are likely to result in increased stress responses, problems with emotion regulation, and difficulty with trusting others (Felitti & Anda, 1997). Hence, schools

need to support the development of secure attachments and simultaneously work to reduce the effects of trauma on development. Trauma-Informed Education (TIE) expands on the principles of attachment theory by incorporating the trauma's impact on brain development, emotional regulation, and learning. It translates the concepts of attachment security into school-wide systems that provide safety, trust, relationships, regulation, and safety for all students (Clemens et al., 2020). Section examines trauma-informed education as an approach that combines principles of systematic intervening with those based on attachment theory that ensure schools are structured to be stable, nurturing, and healing places from which students can emerge ready to thrive and succeed (Dooley et al., 2019).

Attachment theory is concerned with healthy, nurturing relationships which facilitates the students' emotional and psychological development , some students may need more support to cope with trauma. Such situations call for the expansion of attachment-based strategies to take into account the far-reaching consequences of trauma on learning, emotional control, and social behaviour. TIE provides a comprehensive, school-wide set of emotional supports based on safety and trust. When trauma-informed approaches are employed, schools establish environments that promote safe relationships. In doing so, they strengthen students' ability to withstand hardships while also offering healing to those who need it.

2.5.2 Trauma-Informed Education

Trauma-informed education (TIE) has emerged as one of the primary methods of helping children with adverse childhood experiences. The impact of trauma can profoundly disrupt an individual's cognitive functions, emotional health, and social connections. It most frequently leads to the young person becoming disengaged from school, underperforming academically, or developing mental health challenges (Carrion & Wong, 2012; Felitti & Anda, 1997). TIE focuses on a child-friendly approach which constructs safe, compassion-filled, and trusting frameworks for supporting students. The TIE approach, as described by Culshaw and Bodfield (2024) aids in the development of academic, emotional and social success of students enabling holistic development.

TIE is guided by six principles outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2014): 1) safety, 2) trustworthiness and transparency, 3) empowerment, voice and choice 4) peer support, 5) collaboration and mutuality and 6) cultural sensitivity. These principles empower educators to create inclusive classroom environments and deepen their understanding of how trauma affects students. Safety prioritises physical and emotional wellbeing in schools. Trustworthiness and transparency build trust through open, consistent communication among students, teachers and peers. Peer support and collaboration foster mutual learning and shared accountability. Empowerment, voice and choice encourage students to take an active role in their learning. Cultural sensitivity focuses on appreciating diverse backgrounds and ensuring educational practices are inclusive and equitable (O'Toole & Simovska, 2022).



Figure 2.3: The six principles of trauma-informed practice (Source: SAMHSA, 2014)

Compassion-focused teaching, as described by Culshaw and Bodfield (2024), aligns with trauma-informed principles by encouraging students to replace shame and self-criticism with empathy and understanding. Based on Gilbert's (2010) Compassion-Focused Therapy, this teaching method builds emotional resilience and self-compassion. However, O'Toole and Simovska, (2022) have critiqued traditional trauma-informed practices for being overly deficit-focused. They advocate for a holistic approach that acknowledges the influence of systemic disparities, such as

poverty and racism, on how individuals respond to trauma. This perspective reframes students' behaviours as survival strategies shaped by their environments, urging educators to consider systemic factors both within and beyond the school context.

Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) is a programme that provides schools with a model for implementing TIE principles in changing school culture (Dorado et al, 2016). As part of a multi-tiered framework, teacher training and restorative practices within the HEARTS programme support the transition away from punitive discipline. The programme also includes therapeutic interventions that are modified for high-need students (Dorado et al., 2016). Examples include group work activities, asking students to give their thoughts and allowing them to design their own learning activities. Trustworthiness is heightened when schools develop regular routines and maintain open communication lines.

While TIE is promising, it also has several challenges. Scholars note the need for rigorous testing to examine whether TIE effectively improves academic and socio-emotional development over the long term (Maynard et al., 2019). Another critique was provided by O'Toole and Simovska (2022), who criticised TIE for failing to account for social justice in its application. The researchers argued that ignoring inequities might cause TIE to unintentionally increase disparities. Therefore, there is a need to situate trauma within broader societal structures and employ interventions that prioritise equity and inclusion (O'Toole & Simovska, 2022). A further integration of social and emotional learning within TIE strengthens its relational focus. Mahoney et al. (2021) believed that SEL frameworks can facilitate emotional regulation, interpersonal growth, resilience and self-esteem as a response to trauma. This helps to establish inclusive schools that serve all students, particularly disadvantaged students.

Through Ginwright's lens (2018), we also gain an alternative view on trauma informed education which revolves around the trauma informed approach's singular focus on individualistic pathologisation rather than healing, empowerment, or collective frameworks. Trauma-informed strategies focus on recognising and

alleviating the impact of hardship; however, there is a risk that students may be approached primarily through a traumatic lens, reinforcing a deficit-based approach. Ginwright (2018) proposes a shift toward healing-centred engagement. By focusing exclusively on trauma, educators tend to ignore the distressing structural and systemic realities of poverty and racial inequity, along with the myriad ways students are constrained from thriving at a holistic level. Thus, 'a healing-centred model' may respond more profoundly and equitably to these realities by integrating wellbeing and empowerment into how support is framed for students, rather than relying on a trauma-informed perspective which predominantly focuses on harm alleviation. Overall, TIE shows that authentic learning relies on relationships and care. It aims to mitigate the negative impacts of trauma while helping students build resilience and foster equity through trauma-informed care. Its success depends on inclusion, systematic support, employee training and addressing inequalities. As a result, TIE can be a highly effective and transformative approach for students and communities alike.

2.5.3 The Science of Safety and Polyvagal Theory

Building on TIE (SAMHSA, 2014), Polyvagal Theory, introduced by Stephen Porges (1995, 2022), explains how safety helps people control emotions, learn and connect with others. Polyvagal Theory explains how the autonomic nervous system processes safety and threat cues through *neuroception*. Neural systems are informed by past experiences, so Polyvagal Theory offers insight into activation of fight or flight responses by reacting to seemingly safe environments and events (Ryland et al., 2021)

This automatic, unconscious process decides whether an individual feels safe enough to interact socially, learn well, or switch to a defensive response. At the core of Polyvagal Theory is the ventral vagal complex, a component of the parasympathetic nervous system that supports the social engagement system. When individuals feel safe, this system helps them stay calm, connect with others and maintain balance, which boosts thinking and emotions (Porges, 2022). Conversely,

when threats are detected, the body switches to fight-or-flight or freeze modes and prioritises survival and disrupting learning and relationships.

In educational settings, these autonomic states significantly influence student behaviour and readiness to learn. When safety is compromised, students may exhibit signs of hyperarousal (e.g., aggression and anxiety) or hypoarousal (e.g. withdrawal and dissociation). These responses are often misinterpreted as defiance or disengagement. However, Polyvagal Theory realises these behaviours as survival strategies that help students respond to threats (Dahlen et al., 2022; Porges, 2022). This view illustrates the necessity of fostering schools as safe spaces. Schools need to integrate predictable routines and transitions, compassion, and consistent reactions to support students emotionally and at a cognitive level. An example of this is "Co-regulation", where teachers use gentle and nurturing words to assist students in modulating their nervous systems, is integral to the establishment of safety. Porges (2022) states that safety cues or anchors that also provide this co-regulation. This can be through language, a soothing voice, neutral facial expressions or a calm demeanour by an attuned adult which can all facilitate co-regulation. This enables students to shift from a state of fight, flight, freeze to a more calm state that enables them to be ready for learning. This is consistent with trauma-informed approaches rooted in a focus on safety within relationships in education.

TIE illustrates the application of Polyvagal Theory and the interplay between system-level factors and individual physiology. Prolonged exposure to adversity results in ‘retuning’ the nervous system of the traumatized students to a state of defensiveness hyper-arousal or hyper-vigilance. These students, as highlighted by Porges (2015), require perpetual safety cues to allow them to feel secure enough to trust their environment. Incorporating the science of safety into educational practices not only addresses immediate needs but also supports long-term resilience and wellbeing. Educators can activate students’ higher-order brain functions by focusing on safety and connection. These functions are critical for thinking, problem-solving and regulating emotions. This approach, rooted in both TIE principles and Polyvagal Theory, shows how powerful relational safety is in schools (Butler, 2024)

Polyvagal Theory discusses the interplay between feeling physiological safety, emotional self-regulation, and learning as a deeply interconnected relationship. It offers an explanation of the student's behaviours and the need for co-regulation in classrooms by describing the biological influences of safety and threat on the functioning of the nervous system (Porges, 2022). Students who feel unsafe due to trauma, volatile settings, or social disintegration become locked in a survival mode. Their autonomic nervous system shifts into fight, flight or freeze. Although this response is biologically sensible in life-threatening situations, it greatly impedes learning because, with the brain entrenched in survival mechanisms, it is incapable of reaching advanced decision-making processes. Using these understandings as a foundation, educational neuroscience stressors and trauma influence neural development and learning ability. Perry's (2014) Neurosequential Model of Education illustrates the hierarchical development of the brain, from survival mechanisms rooted in the brainstem to reasoning capabilities located in the cortical brain. Students who are in an elevated state of stress will have their ability to think critically, solve problems, and interact socially severely disrupted. Educators can shape how students learn by applying Polyvagal Theory merged with the Science of Learning to build systems that calm the nervous systems of students, enabling regulation of emotions, healthy relationships, and attention focus. This section attempts to clarify these bases by explaining how strategically, consistently, and positively responsive teaching can "switch on" the brain primed for learning, stimulating resilience, wellbeing, and attaining desired academic outcomes.

2.5.4 Neuroscience, Wellbeing and the Science of Learning

The field of educational neuroscience reveals key links between brain development, emotional health and optimal learning environments. A central focus of this field is the brain's hierarchy, as described by (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006) in the *Neurosequential Model of Education*. Perry (2014) outlined the sequential nature of brain development. It starts with areas that control survival and progresses to those that enable reasoning, critical thinking and self-regulation. This process shows that

stress and trauma can block brain growth, which is why safe environments are needed to activate the ‘learning brain’.

The lower brain, or brainstem, regulates basic survival functions, including the fight-flight-freeze response, which activates during stress or perceived threats. While this response is adaptive in dangerous situations, chronic stress can keep the brainstem in a heightened state of alertness, leading to maladaptive behaviours. In such cases, children operate primarily from this survival-focused region, making it challenging for them to engage in social interactions or higher-order thinking. Perry (2017) referred to this as a ‘stress continuum,’ where increasing stress shifts individuals away from calmness and rationality toward states of alarm, fear, or terror. In this heightened state, students may exhibit behaviours often misinterpreted as defiance or disinterest, which are, in reality, manifestations of an overwhelmed survival system (**Figure 2.4**).



(Beacon House, 2019)

Figure 2.4: The hierarchical organisation of the brain (Source: Beacon House, 2019)

The limbic system, located above the brainstem, governs emotions, memory and social connections. When safety is established and the brainstem is regulated, the limbic system becomes more available for relational interactions (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010; Perry and Szalavitz, 2017). Perry's (2014) Neurosequential Model of Education underscores the value of repetitive, rhythmic activities such as breathing exercises, walking, or listening to music to calm the brainstem, thereby enabling the limbic system to support emotional connection and "would likely diminish anxiety and impulsivity" (Perry, 2009, p. 243). These interventions align with co-regulation principles, where educators model calmness and provide consistent relational cues to help students stabilise their nervous systems.

The cortical brain, or 'learning brain,' represents the highest level in the brain's hierarchy and is responsible for abstract thinking, planning and decision-making. However, these functions remain inaccessible when the lower regions of the brain are dysregulated due to stress. Perry (2017) and Goldberg et al. (2022) emphasised that students can fully access their cortical capabilities only when they feel safe and emotionally connected. This understanding aligns with the Science of Learning and Development framework, which underscores emotional safety and relational trust as prerequisites for academic engagement and cognitive growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Goldberg et al. (2022) tied these neurodevelopmental ideas to what makes learning environments enriched. He argued that environments fostering safety, predictability and positive relationships can enhance neuroplasticity. This enables students to reorganise or 'rewire' neural pathways in their brain which can lead to improved learning and resilience. As a result, learning environments that have regular predictable routines, positive reinforcement and cultural humility that acknowledges students' different backgrounds and experiences can have a positive impact on brain development. The Science of Learning and Development framework supports this view and asserts that learning should include cognitive, emotional and social aspects (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

The 3 R's model or 'Regulate, Relate, Reason' developed by Perry (2017), provides a practical application of these neuroscience insights (Figure 6). Regulation involves

calming the survival brain through rhythmic and sensory activities. This is followed by relational interventions that build trust and connection. Only after these steps can reasoning, or engagement with the higher-order cortical brain, effectively occur. This sequential approach ensures that students are supported holistically, addressing their immediate emotional needs while fostering long-term academic and personal growth.

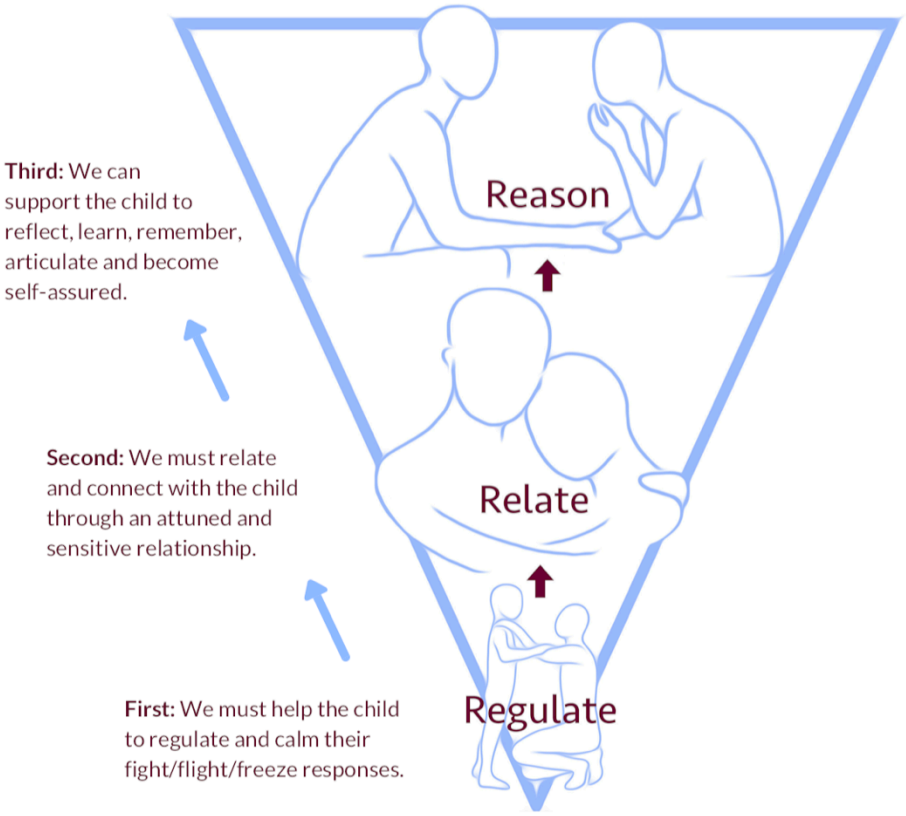


Figure 2.5: The 3 Rs model (Source: Beacon House, 2019).

In conclusion, neuroscience offers a framework for integrating wellbeing into education. By addressing the brain's needs, educators can create environments that support learning, resilience and emotional stability. This alignment with the Science of Learning shows how brain-informed practices transform education into a fairer, more effective and compassionate system.

2.5.5 The HEARTS Model

The HEARTS programme is a multilevel, evidence-based educational programme launched by the University of California, San Francisco in 2016. It is

trauma-informed and its main objective is to support affected students while fostering safe, supportive schools. HEARTS implements a multitier framework based on the Response to Intervention model. This model (see **Figure 2.6**) addresses students, caregiving adults and the school system itself. Interventions are delivered at three levels of intensity: universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3; Dorado et al., 2016).

LEVEL	TIER 3: Targeted/Intensive Supports (Tertiary Intervention)
Students	School-based, trauma-specific individual, group, and family therapy services for students with trauma-related mental health difficulties; includes intensive collateral work with students' teachers, as well as consultation around Individualized Education Program (IEP) assessment and plans when IEP is warranted
Adults (staff and caregivers)	Brief crisis support for trauma-impacted school staff, and referral for more intensive services if needed
	Engaging and supporting parents/caregivers as part of their children's psychotherapy
System	Consultation around central district office personnel efforts to improve the district-wide Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) process
	TIER 2: Selected Supports (Secondary Intervention)
Students	Psychoeducational skill-building interventions for at-risk students
Adults (staff and caregivers)	Wellness (non-treatment) support for school staff that addresses stress, burnout, and secondary trauma (e.g., teacher wellness groups)
	Participating in Coordinated Care Team meetings that address the needs of at-risk students and coordinate integrated responses, as well as; respond to school-wide concerns
System	Consultation to school or district efforts to re-examine and revise discipline policies and procedures, and alternatives to suspension
	TIER 1: Universal Supports (Primary Prevention)
Students	Classroom training for students on coping with stress
Adults (staff and caregivers)	Training and consultation for all school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff, paraprofessionals, and school medical and mental health staff) around (a) trauma-sensitive practices, and (b) addressing stress, burnout, and secondary trauma
	Psychoeducation and skill-building workshops for parents/caregivers on coping with stress
System	Providing a trauma-informed lens to school staff in their implementation of school-wide supports and interventions (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice/Practices, social emotional learning curricula)

Figure 2.6: HEARTS Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Source: Dorado et al, 2016)

The universal tier of HEARTS aims to transform school culture by adopting trauma-informed practices. HEARTS helps educators and staff understand how trauma impacts students' learning and behaviour. Professional development sessions emphasise the neurobiology of stress and trauma, equipping educators with strategies to create safe spaces. The programme encourages teachers to use a

trauma-informed lens and ask, ‘What has happened to you?’ instead of, ‘What is wrong with you?’ (Dorado et al., 2016).

At the targeted level, HEARTS gives extra support to struggling students and works to change school discipline policies. HEARTS clinicians partner with schools to design custom behaviour plans and adopt restorative discipline approaches. This tier prioritises replacing punitive discipline especially the kind that marginalises students already affected by trauma with approaches that build protective factors such as resilience and inclusivity (Dorado et al., 2016).

The intensive tier of HEARTS provides focused therapeutic support for students dealing with severe trauma. These services are rooted in the Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency framework. They focus on trauma recovery by improving emotional regulation, attachment building and self-competency. Caregivers and educators are actively involved in therapy, creating a collaborative and holistic approach to student wellbeing (Dorado et al., 2016; Dorado & Merchant, 2020).

Programme evaluations have demonstrated the effectiveness of the HEARTS programme in developing teacher knowledge regarding trauma-informed practices, supporting student engagement and reducing disciplinary referrals and trauma symptoms. Schools implementing HEARTS achieved significant results: disciplinary actions decreased by as much as 87% over five years (Dorado et al., 2016). These outcomes underscore the ways that trauma-informed approaches can foster school climates and prevent the 'school-to-prison pipeline'. Overall, HEARTS focuses on relationships, cultural humility and collaboration and provides schools with a strong basis for meeting their communities' needs and supporting holistic wellbeing.

Building strong relationships is vital for good teaching and learning, especially when it comes to student wellbeing. Attachment theory helps us understand how important it is to have secure and safe environments when it comes to building self-control and ready to learn (Bowlby, 1973; Ainsworth, 1989). Trauma-informed education takes a step further as it recognises the effects of adversity and advocates for a whole school

approach towards creating safety, trust, relational connectedness, and caring (Clemens et al., 2020; Dorado et al., 2016). Neurobiological frameworks (Perry, 2014; Porges, 2022) detail the extent to which, and how, emotions and physiological states affect cognitive functioning and development, emphasising the importance of low stress and high-engagement areas.

Nonetheless, for systems change to happen, a school must have an organisational culture where teachers collaborate and support each other and have a shared belief in their capacity to enact change. Accordingly, collective teacher efficacy, or the shared belief of teachers in their ability to have a meaningful effect on students and their achievement, has emerged as one of the most significant factors affecting student achievement (Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2016, 2019). Eells' (2011) meta-analysis showed that the impact of collective efficacy on achievement is greater than the impact of a student's socio-economic status or home environment. Hattie (2016, 2019) ranked collective teacher efficacy as the most impactful influence on student learning, surpassing long recognised factors such as socio-economic factors and prior achievement.

When moving beyond a model of care that nurtures only the teacher-student relationship, we need to investigate how the relationship between teachers. In particular, it is important to look at the impact of trust, collaboration, and mutual responsibility, and see how this influences the climate of the school. The synergy that occurs when teachers share ideas as well as a positive attitude towards working together greatly enhances their ability to positively influence students' wellbeing and academic performance. The following subsection details the role of collective teacher efficacy as a vital component of student achievement, wellbeing, and resilience at school.

2.5.6 Teacher Relationships and Collective Efficacy

Bandura (1977, 1993) defines collective teacher efficacy as 'a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to

produce given levels of attainment' (Bandura, 2007, p. 477). Bandura (2007) found that when teachers believe in their collective ability to impact student outcomes, students' academic achievement increases significantly. Goddard et al. (2004) validated these results by showing that differences in collective teacher efficacy between schools had a greater effect on student achievement than socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Hoy et al. (2002) found that stronger collective teacher efficacy encourages individual teachers to use their existing skills more effectively.

Eells's (2011) meta-analysis of studies on educational achievement revealed that teachers' beliefs about the school's collective ability are 'strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations' (p. 110). Hattie (2016) ranked collective teacher efficacy as the most important factor influencing student achievement based on Eells's (2011) research.

It can therefore be argued that the themes of care and relationships could potentially be encapsulated in an equation combining collective efficacy, attachment theory and the concept of 'one good adult'. If every teacher in a school were guided by a collective commitment to provide attachment-based relationships and serve as the 'one good adult' for each child, the resulting positive social outcomes for students could be profound. To put it simply, imagine that every adult in the school fulfilled the role of the 'one good adult' that every child needs.

2.6 Social and Emotional Wellbeing

In Irish education, the growing attention to social and emotional wellbeing reflects its importance in shaping outcomes for students, teachers and school leaders. Schools are working to help young people strengthen their resilience, emotional understanding and social skills. Studies consistently demonstrate that wellbeing is strongly linked to academic outcomes and long-term success. This focus is not only about fixing mental health issues but also about building schools that are inclusive and caring.

Research, such as the Children's *School Lives Study (*Sloan et al., 2024), shows that creating environments of belonging, care and emotional support reduces bullying

and improves relationships in schools. The Irish education system focuses on embedding wellbeing into schools to help students develop the emotional skills necessary for navigating a complex world. At the same time, it focuses on the professional wellbeing of teachers and school leaders, which is very important to the process. The following sections focus on the experiences of pupils, teachers and school leaders while analysing the challenges and opportunities of advancing social and emotional wellbeing in schools.

2.6.1 Pupil Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Cannon et al.'s (2013) study estimated that a third of adolescents develop a mental disorder by the age of 13 years. One in eight adolescents, as reported by Cannon et al. (2013), experience anxiety and one in seven experience depression by the age of 13. In addition to this, Sadler et al. (2018) found one in eight children and young people have a clinically diagnosable mental health issue. Furthermore, half of those who have lifetime mental disorders express symptoms by age 14, according to Kessler et al. (2005). Depression is estimated to be the foremost cause of disease burden in high-income nations by the year 2030, as stated by the WHO (2015). The MWS-1 (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) and the MWS-2 (Dooley et al., 2019) are two of the biggest global surveys of young people's mental health. The MWS-1 questioned 14,306 individuals back in 2012, while the MWS-2 questioned 18,749 in 2019. The data collected in the surveys indicated quite an increase in depression and anxiety among teenagers and young adults from the first to the second survey. The MWS-2 individuals were more inclined to be in the moderate, severe, or very severe ranges of anxiety and depression than MWS-1.

Moreover, during the pandemic, protective factors for mental health such as self-esteem and optimism declined, leading to reduced resilience. During this time, girls reported higher levels of anxiety compared with boys and experienced worse self-esteem, body image and lower resilience, along with fewer mental resources. Consistent with the literature, exposure factors such as poor sleep quality, lower levels of physical activity, time spent on social networks, frequency of social media use and exposure to pornography were identified as predictors of the increase in depression and anxiety rates (Dooley et al., 2019).

These statistics emphasise the critical role of schools as ideal environments for promoting wellbeing. Schools have the unique ability to reach large numbers of children and young people during a pivotal stage in their development when habits and attitudes are being shaped. Moreover, emotional wellbeing is the strongest predictor of a successful and fulfilling adult life, surpassing other factors such as educational attainment, income, family status, physical health or employment (Layard et al., 2014).

Research demonstrates that schools prioritising emotional wellbeing benefit in multiple ways. They exhibit higher overall quality of school life (Karatzias et al., 2019), greater levels of critical thinking and intrinsic motivation (Pekrun et al., 2002) and increased student engagement, along with adaptive school satisfaction and functioning (Lewis et al., 2009). Research demonstrates that schools prioritising emotional wellbeing benefit in multiple ways. They exhibit higher overall quality of school life (Karatzias et al., 2019), greater levels of critical thinking and intrinsic motivation (Pekrun et al., 2002) and increased student engagement, along with adaptive school satisfaction and functioning (Lewis et al., 2009).

2.6.2 Teacher: Social and Emotional Wellbeing

The widely accepted view that teacher wellbeing is closely connected to student wellbeing and vice versa is strongly supported by research. For example, evidence suggests that students taught by teachers with lower stress levels and high job satisfaction are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes compared with their peers taught by less satisfied or more stressed teachers (Day et al., 2007). Similarly, Sisask et al. (2014) reported that teachers with high wellbeing are more likely to provide support to students dealing with mental health difficulties.

However, teaching is among the professions reporting the highest levels of occupational stress (Billehoj, 2007). In Ireland, research highlights significant stress levels among primary school teachers and principals (Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Morgan & Nic Craith, 2015; Nic An Fhailghigh, 2014). Stress is considered a major occupational hazard for teachers, responsible for nearly 40% of work-related illnesses and absenteeism (Condon, 2011). A study by Morgan and Nic Craith (2015) revealed that teaching has become increasingly stressful over the past five

years. Of the 332 participants (82% female, 18% male, including 21% principals), over 93% believed that the demands of the profession had intensified. Among the factors contributing to this rise in teacher stress, school improvement plans and the increased need for documentation were identified as major stressors. Additionally, the expectation for schools to address broader societal issues was cited as a significant challenge (Morgan & Nic Craith, 2015).

To enable teachers to effectively support the mental health of their students, it is crucial to ensure they are provided with a positive school environment, recognition of their psychological wellbeing and adequate training to fulfil their role as gatekeepers (Roffey, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012; Tyson et al., 2009).

2.6.3 School Principal: Social and Emotional Wellbeing

The critical role of school leaders and principals in influencing student outcomes is well-documented. Leithwood et al. (2006) emphasised this impact in their *report*. They argued that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its effect on student learning. Additionally, they highlighted that the ways in which leaders implement leadership practices such as using distributed leadership has a greater impact on the school and students. Furthermore, school leaders indirectly and powerfully enhance teaching and learning by shaping commitment, staff motivation and working conditions.

Despite their pivotal role, work-related stress among school leaders remains a significant concern across educational systems. Riley (2015) noted that while principals often possess traits associated with high wellbeing and quality of life, they report lower overall wellbeing compared with the general population. Similarly, Rahimi and Arnold's (2022) *study* revealed that over 43% of respondents experienced high or severe levels of burnout. Stress levels among school leaders have continued to rise, with only 29.3% reporting low stress in 2023, down from 37% in 2022.

Arnold et al. (2023) and the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) highlighted the pressures faced by school leaders. These include unmanageable workloads,

insufficient time for leadership tasks and poor systemic support. These pressures contribute to poor mental health outcomes, including depressive symptoms, somatic stress and cognitive stress. These were shown to be significantly more prevalent among school leaders than in the general working population. Both Riley (2015) and Arnold et al. (2023) called for systematic interventions to address these issues. In social work and psychology, professional support and debriefing are standard practices. However, similar supports remain underdeveloped in education. To address this gap, targeted professional learning and wellbeing programmes are needed to help school leaders handle emotional and cognitive demands.

This growing body of evidence shows an urgent need for proactive policies and practices that focus on school leaders' wellbeing. Supporting school leaders' mental health is important for their wellbeing and for sustaining effective and thriving schools. Professional development, reduced admin tasks and shared leadership are critical steps to help prevent school leader burnout.

As schools increasingly recognise social and emotional wellbeing as an important goal for students achievement, there is a need to put in place systemic strategies that integrate these practices into standard day-to-day teaching frameworks. Schools have an important part to play in developing emotional strength, social connectedness and constructive psychological safety. At the same time, to bring about real and sustainable change, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) needs to be framed within a coherent and sound policy. The CASEL Framework (2020) provides an example of a model which incorporates SEL in schools, supporting students in coping with academic, social, and personal challenges. The CASEL framework is able to provide the equity-oriented holistic approach that addresses the needs of all students. This is done through the development of skills including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making,

2.6.4 The CASEL Framework

The CASEL framework provides an organised approach to including SEL in education systems, focusing on its use in schools. SEL involves developing students' abilities, knowledge and attitudes to regulate their feelings, build strong

relationships and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020a; Mahoney et al., 2021). The core elements of CASEL's (2020) work comprise five closely interconnected competencies: self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills (**Figure 2.7**). The competencies help students grow personally and socially and enable them to manage complex social situations and reach academic and personal goals. The CASEL framework connects SEL to equity-based practices, which promote inclusion and respect for diversity (CASEL, 2020b).



Figure 2.7: The CASEL framework (Source: CASEL, 2020)

Systemic SEL, as described by Mahoney et al. (2021), is a multilevel instructional system integrating opportunities for students' social and emotional skill development. The curriculum integrates SEL lessons and cooperative learning structures, extends a positive school climate and aligns SEL with behavioural support systems. Family and community organisation partnerships extend SEL's impact, enabling the students to apply their skills in different settings.

There is evidence that supports the effectiveness of SEL programs, with meta-analyses showing large positive impacts on academic performance, emotional wellbeing and social behaviour (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018). CASEL's SAFE model (Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit) is also critical to successful SEL implementation, ensuring efforts are well-planned, age-appropriate and evidence-based (Mahoney et al., 2021). CASEL stresses continuous monitoring and revision. Its systems framework offers a uniform structure for bringing SEL to education practice and policy. It prepares students for success in an interdependent, multicultural world by building resilience, advancing equity and improving lifelong learning and active citizenship (CASEL, 2020a, 2020b; Mahoney et al., 2021).

Despite the positive impact of social and emotional wellbeing in relation to student development, it continues to be only one part of a greater approach to wellbeing. Physical wellbeing is also equally significant, as it is essential for the maintenance of general health, cognitive, and emotional effectiveness. Without paying adequate attention to physical health, efforts directed to social and emotional wellbeing may get negated. In education, the promotion of physical wellbeing means not only participation in physical exercises, but also development of healthy habits that are conducive to achievement of long-term goals and academic success. The next section discusses the relevance of physical wellbeing in schools, the tremendous problems of inactivity and obesity, and the suggestions on how to encompass physical health in the policies and practices of education.

2.7 Physical Health

The discussion over physical health in education is framed within a wider public health framework characterised by increasing concerns over physical inactivity and obesity. The statistics in Ireland are very concerning. By 2025, the nation is anticipated to be among the most physically inactive and obese countries in the European Union (NCD Risk Factor Collaboration, 2016). According to data from the WHO's (2020) European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative, 27.3% of girls and 31.8% of boys aged 7 in Ireland are overweight, while 7.7% of girls and 11.6% of boys are categorised as obese. The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (Woods et al., 2022) revealed that 15% of students in the

Republic of Ireland reported meeting the physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. In addition, 11% of girls met the national physical activity guidelines compared to 19% of boys. . Furthermore, fewer primary school children with disabilities (15%) met the physical activity guidelines than those without disabilities (24%). More primary school children from rural schools (24%) met the physical activity guidelines than those from urban schools (18%) (Woods et al, 2022).

These concerning numbers highlight the imperative to prioritise physical welfare in education. Physical wellbeing is essential for both public health and whole child development. Physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour have extensive repercussions, increasing the risk of obesity-related disorders and hindering cognitive and emotional development. The discussion on physical health in schools has evolved from solely addressing inactivity to incorporating larger concepts such as physical literacy, cognitive development and emotional regulation. The subsequent sections examine this process and its ramifications for education

2.7.1 Physical Literacy

Physical literacy has redirected educational attention away from the exclusive preoccupation with inactivity to building lifelong participation in physical activity. Whitehead (2013) defined physical literacy as an integration of motivation, physical capacity, self-confidence, knowledge and understanding that enables individuals to appreciate and persist with physical activity throughout their lives. Similarly, Sport Ireland and the All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus Statement (2022) has provided a definition of Physical Literacy as “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that enables a person to value and participate in physical activity throughout life”. The definition connects physical health with general educational and societal objectives. Ireland's Move Well, Move Often program (Professional Development Service for Teachers, 2017) is an example of this alignment. Move Well, Move Often targets fundamental movement skills of running, throwing and balancing. The objective is to build movement confidence and competence in children at an early age. These skills underpin

participation in a range of physical activities, fostering physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

Literature recognises the relationship that exists between physical activity and cognitive function, with the evidence showing that movement improves academic performance (Mahar et al, 2006; Hoffman et al, 2012). Physical activity improves cerebral blood flow, which supports neural activities such as attention, memory and problem-solving (Donnelly et al., 2016). This is especially important in making sure that movement is included in daily classroom activities, not only in physical education but also through programs such as active and brain breaks.

Active breaks, as outlined in the Move Well, Move Often model, are brief, structured activities that rejuvenate and refocus students. Brain breaks combine mindfulness, creativity and movement to provide a mental reboot, reduce cognitive fatigue, enhance behaviour and boost classroom engagement (Jensen, 2005; Mrazek et al., 2013). These interventions address sedentary behaviour and cognitive overload, which aligns with the goals of holistic education.

The incorporation of physical literacy into the curriculum emphasises the nurturing of movement skills and the confidence and motivation needed to actively support participation in physical activity throughout one's life. Aside from the physical aspects, there are cognitive benefits that are directly related to movement and increased physical activity such as enhanced concentration, memory, and problem-solving skills. However, movement also has an impact on emotional self-regulation and resilience. In a similar way to active and brain breaks enhancing attention and engagement, movement-based strategies promote effective self-regulation and stress management, social bonds, and cohesion in the classroom. The next section focuses on movement and self-regulation exploring how movement supports the promotion of emotional regulation and fosters wellbeing.

2.7.2 Movement and Emotional Regulation

Evidence still suggests the role of physical activity in contributing to emotional regulation and resilience. Mindfulness and movement offer students tools for managing stress and developing self-regulation skills (Bockmann et al, 2023).

Incorporating mindfulness into brain breaks helps students transition between activities more effectively, enhancing a more relaxed and focused classroom environment (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Movement activities also facilitate social relationships within the classroom. Group activities, such as cooperative games or imaginative physical challenges, promote collaboration, communication and empathy, building a sense of community and belonging (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). These benefits are key factors in enhancing emotional resilience, a key factor in both academic success and personal wellbeing.

2.7.3 Challenges in Implementation

Despite growing endorsement of physical literacy and practice creation, schools recognise a challenge in implementing physical wellbeing programs. Teachers, who are often at the centre of the implementation of such programs, may be under-resourced with the necessary training and materials (Grauduszus et al., 2024). Competing academic demands and time constraints also discourage frequent utilisation, specifically in schools with restricted outdoor space or equipment. Systemic barriers, such as unfair resource distribution, impact disproportionately on disadvantaged groups and reinforce health inequities (Bopp et al., 2019). Such issues necessitate targeted policy reform, teacher professional development and investment in infrastructure to support equal access to physical wellbeing initiatives for all students.

2.7.4 Teacher and School Leader Physical Health

As discussed in sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3, occupational stress has become increasingly prevalent among teachers and school leaders (principals). Kidger et al. (2016) reported that UK teachers report elevated levels of stress, emotional distress and anxiety. Stressors, regardless of their source, contribute to overall stress levels and can negatively impact work outcomes. Empirical studies have demonstrated that teachers' occupational stress predicts burnout and emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Burnout refers to a state of emotional overextension and exhaustion caused by one's work (Minahan et al, 2022). It is

characterised by feelings of being psychologically and emotionally ‘drained’ and experiencing physical fatigue (Zohar, 1997). Notably, burnout intersects with themes of social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

For principals, the evolving demands of their role have also been linked to heightened stress and deteriorating health. Headteachers (principals) report stressors such as those faced by teachers, including heavy workloads, pupil misbehaviour and staff conflicts (Chaplain, 2001; Phillips & Sen, 2011). According to a 2018 National Principals Forum survey involving 1,166 respondents, 68% reported that the demands of their jobs had negatively affected their physical health. The Irish Primary Principals Network (Riley, 2015) reports that 60% of principals in Ireland are teaching principals. Teaching principals must fulfil two demanding roles: (1) they have full-time teaching responsibilities, often in multi-grade classrooms and (2) they serve as full-time school principals (Riley, 2015). Words such as ‘guilty’, ‘stressed’, ‘exhausted’, ‘suffocated’ and ‘overloaded’ are frequently used by teaching principals to describe their daily experiences (Riley, 2015). Furthermore, the National Principals Forum survey found that 96.2% of teaching principals identified inadequate release time as a significant challenge.

International research highlights the cascading impact of declining wellbeing among school principals. Reduced wellbeing adversely affects student engagement, school functioning and whole-school wellbeing (Leithwood et al., 2008; Ten Bruggencate et al., 2012). Friedman and Miles (2002) compiled a comprehensive list of stressors faced by principals, identifying ongoing relational stress such as interactions with staff and parents as a key contributor to burnout. These stressors compound the effects of role overload and administrative constraints. Similarly, Maxwell and Riley (2017) found that the emotional stress of engaging with teachers, parents and other stakeholders significantly predicts burnout among principals.

The discourse of physical health and wellbeing draws particular attention to societal challenges around physical inactivity, the health risks related to it and lifelong participation in movement through the concept of physical literacy. Aside from benefits to individual health, exercise is associated with fostering environmental sustainability. Sport Ireland (2022) noted that physical literacy is concerned not only

with the individual's growth but also contributes, through active travel and interaction with natural outdoor spaces, to the sustainable development goals. Encouragement for traveling by active means such as walking, cycling or scootering reduces motor vehicle use, carbon emission, and air quality deterioration. In the same way, the promotion of physical activities performed in natural outdoor environments enhances personal wellbeing, as well as point toward the appreciation and protection of the natural world.

The intersection of physical wellbeing and sustainability outline a more holistic view on human flourishing, as it integrates an individual's health and their responsibility towards the environment. Schools contribute in important ways towards integrating these aspects so that learners develop not only movement skills, but also an awareness of the environment. This following section investigates sustainability in more detail as an emerging yet fundamental aspect of wellbeing, social equity, and the necessity for school systems to adopt approaches that promote environmental sustainability in their teaching and policy framework.

2.8 Sustainability

The connection between sustainability and human flourishing was clearly articulated by Helliwell and Wang (2012), who stated,

> *If we act wisely, we can protect the Earth while raising quality of life broadly around the world. We can do this by adopting lifestyles and technologies that improve happiness (or life satisfaction) while reducing human damage to the environment. 'Sustainable development' is the term given to the combination of human wellbeing, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. We can say that the quest for happiness is intimately linked to the quest for sustainable development. (p. 4)*

Spratt (2016) argued that the relationship between sustainability and wellbeing extends beyond education, highlighting how inequality is perpetuated in society. Marmot (2010) further emphasised the connection between ill health and poverty, as well as the disproportionate impact of climate change on different socioeconomic groups. Marmot (2010) noted that affluent individuals often have higher

opportunities to live in more advantageous environmental conditions. ‘The fair distribution of health, wellbeing and sustainability are important social goals. Tackling social inequalities in health and tackling climate change must go together’ (Marmot, 2010, p. 15).

In exploring the connections among wellbeing, sustainability and education, Knight (2009) suggested that schools should encourage children to build a stronger appreciation for the natural world through outdoor learning and practical, nature-based experiences. Outdoor play and learning not only promote sustainability experiences but also have the potential to enhance wellbeing, specifically within key aspects of social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development (Løvoll et al., 2020; Løvoll & Torrissen, 2020; Løvoll & Sæther, 2022). Unstructured and adventurous play, including risky play, allows children to explore, imagine and challenge themselves, further highlighting the holistic benefits of engaging with nature. Baena-Morales et al. (2023), offers a practical framework for integrating the principles of sustainable development in a way that aligns with children’s cognitive and emotional development, thereby addressing a critical shortfall in the existing literature and practice. This comprehensive approach fosters the development of skills, autonomy and resilience, ultimately supporting sustainable behaviours and individual flourishing.

2.8.1 The Role of Education in Connecting Sustainability and Wellbeing

Education is a significant catalyst in connecting sustainability and wellbeing by providing students with the opportunity to engage actively with the natural world. Knight (2009) emphasised the powerful role of schools in shaping environmental stewardship through outdoor learning and direct experience. Outdoor learning in schools encompasses play, teaching and learning in the natural world, thereby extending traditional classroom-based learning into school grounds, local communities and beyond (Waite et al., 2021). This direct method of education underpins multiple curricular aspirations while enhancing cognition and stimulating ecological consciousness (MacQuarrie, 2016). Denmark and Finland have led the way by example with nation-wide adoption to augment educational successes

through outdoor education (Mygind et al., 2019; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019). By incorporating the outdoors in teaching, schools become capable of addressing sustainability initiatives as well as furnishing student abilities to grow proficient in resilience as their surroundings remain dynamic.

Outdoor play and learning offer numerous benefits for children's physical, mental and social wellbeing. Unstructured play that is spontaneous, self-directed and self-determined encourages physical activity, social interaction and the development of creativity and problem-solving skills (Gray, 2011; Houser et al., 2016). Research demonstrates that outdoor play reduces stress, improves mood and fosters resilience, thereby enhancing overall health and emotional stability (Stixrud & Johnson, 2018).

Risky play, a self-directed form of adventurous activity, further bolsters children's autonomy, self-esteem and risk assessment abilities (Brussoni et al., 2015). Similarly, loose parts play which involves using materials such as tools, recycled items and natural objects creatively promotes physical activity, imagination and social engagement (Houser et al., 2016; Nicholson, 1971). Despite its proven importance, opportunities for unstructured and risky play have diminished due to modern societal constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic (Gray, 2011; Kourti et al., 2021). Interventions that prioritise these forms of play are critical to supporting physical literacy and optimal developmental outcomes. The following section explores how outdoor play serves as a vital foundation for environmental awareness and responsibility. Specifically, it discusses how outdoor learning and engagement with outdoor play are closely linked to environmental stewardship in later life.

2.8.2 Outdoor Play and Environmental Stewardship

Outdoor play is a powerful driver of positive emotions, which are vital for mental health, wellbeing and the development of environmental stewardship. Positive emotions, a key element of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2012), contribute to wellbeing by expanding thought-action repertoires and fostering long-term personal resources. Outdoor play naturally evokes emotions such as curiosity, excitement, awe and contentment, laying the groundwork for resilience and holistic wellbeing.

Studies indicate that early interactions with nature play a crucial role in shaping environmental stewardship and a sense of place in adulthood, promoting a lasting commitment to sustainability through enduring behaviours (Dowdell et al., 2011; Louv, 2008; Sobel & Kushnir, 2013; Williams, 2017).

Outdoor play fosters autonomy and self-direction by providing children with opportunities for self-initiated activities. This freedom promotes creativity, enhances problem-solving skills and cultivates a sense of agency (Kellock, 2015; McCree et al., 2018). The outcomes correspond with the 'Achievement' component of the PERMA framework, highlighting the significance of outdoor play in improving overall wellbeing.

2.8.3 Designing Inclusive Outdoor Spaces

Well-designed outdoor areas facilitate unstructured play and outdoor learning. Children's self-directed play activities are encouraged by play spaces including natural elements, free objects and movable components (Aminpour et al., 2020; Houser et al., 2016). These play areas support sustainability and wellness as well as creativity, social contacts and physical exercise. Playworkers, such as educators and facilitators, are crucial in managing play spaces by balancing safety with the freedom for risky play (Clements & Silver, 2000). They are in charge of encouraging play, supporting child-led activities and ensuring that play areas are safe and challenging (Hughes, 2012). Children's involvement rises and they develop a sense of ownership when they help to design play environments. This sense leads to spaces where they can ‘live, learn and grow together’ (Bates et al., 2020).

However, systemic obstacles such as limited outdoor time and other cultural attitudes hinder the use of outdoor learning (Cevher Kalburan, 2022). Overcoming these issues involves concerted efforts to give outdoor environments high precedence in the classroom, thereby promoting equitable access and optimising students' developmental gains. Through purposeful design and facilitation skills, outdoor settings can become critical spaces for sustainability, wellbeing and lifelong learning.

2.8.4 Forest School: An Example of Outdoor Learning in Primary Schools

Forest school is an example of a methodology that integrates outdoor learning into primary education by offering structured yet flexible methods for engaging with nature. Inspired by Scandinavian educational traditions, it emphasises consistent interaction with nature, experiential learning, environmental responsibility and personal development (McCree et al., 2018). Examples of activities in a forest school session include shelter building, plant identification and crafting with natural material. These activities develop a sense of curiosity, creativity and environmental care in pupils (Smith et al., 2018). These experiences enhance also have been shown to support emotional regulation and resilience, particularly supporting children with social or emotional challenges (Tiplady & Menter, 2020). Furthermore, activities such as tree climbing and tool use encourage calculated risk-taking, fostering independence, improving risk management and boosting self-esteem (Harper & Thompson, 2011). Forest School takes a child-centred philosophy and serves as an exemplary model for outdoor education, aligning with educational objectives while promoting sustainability and overall wellbeing.

As analysed in prior sections, wellbeing in education has a multifaceted theoretical and conceptual framework integrating philosophy, psychology, systems theory, and implementation. These discussions have highlighted the wellbeing construct's ambivalence, complexity, and its dual potential, revealing both an optimal flourishing and consistent challenges across models and educational settings.

While Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2012), Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2001), Contextual Wellbeing (Street, 2018), and other frameworks offer helpful perspectives on the nature of wellbeing, the absence of comprehensive school-wide wellbeing initiatives remains a prominent gap. There needs to be a systematic way for schools to integrate wellbeing into daily work, policies, and curricula in a manner that is sustainably contextualised. In the absence of clearly defined operational blueprints, wellbeing risks remaining an education practice concept rather than a pragmatic measurable construct.

This next section looks at integrating systematic approaches to operationalise wellbeing in education. It examines international wellbeing initiatives at the school level, such as Positive Education and the Scottish Governments (2004) Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework, and other structured programs aimed at shifting wellbeing in schools from isolated initiatives to fundamental educational experiences.

2.9 Wellbeing Applied in Education

The integration of wellbeing into education is now being positioned at the centre of global education reform, with a focus on developing learners holistically. The reason for this is the understanding that academic achievement and personal wellbeing are complementary and interdependent. Examples of best practices highlight the synergy between wellness and education, offering valuable lessons for schools adopting inclusive, caring approaches.

Conceptual models such as Positive Education and policy-based responses such as Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) illustrate successful implementations. Positive Education has achieved significant success in varied settings (Adler & Seligman, 2016). The national education policy of Bhutan integrates wellbeing as part of the GNH aspiration (Adler & Seligman, 2016). The Geelong Grammar School in Australia has become an international leader of Positive Education via the integration of the PERMA model into its culture and curriculum. The Berry Street Model also demonstrates the flexibility of Positive Education, operationalising its theory into practice for traumatised students. Scotland's GIRFEC initiative offers a policy-driven model of wellbeing integration into education. Unlike the conceptual foundation of Positive Education, GIRFEC explicitly prioritises wellbeing in all learning activities. The two models illustrate the flexibility and efficacy of wellbeing interventions in diverse cultural and institutional contexts, paving the way to innovative practices facilitating holistic student growth alongside academic success (Scottish Government, 2004).

2.9.1 Positive Education

Positive Education involves evidence-based interventions and programmes derived from positive psychology aimed at improving student wellbeing (Brunwasser et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2009; White & Waters, 2015). More generally, Positive Education describes the implementation of positive psychology in schools (Green et al., 2011). Founded on Seligman's (2012) PERMA model, Positive Education focuses on building five key elements of wellbeing: positive emotions, engagement, meaning, relationships and accomplishment. In schools, they form a dual foundation that cultivates both academic success and student wellbeing (Seligman, 2012). As defined by Norrish et al. (2013), Positive Education is the combination of effective teaching and positive psychology to cultivate thriving in individuals and schools. One such example of how Positive Education has been operationalised to great effect is Geelong Grammar School which is outlined in the following section.

2.9.1.1 Geelong Grammar

Geelong Grammar School (GGS) in Australia is a world leader in the integration and application of the concept of Positive Education within its school model (Norrish et al., 2013). GGS's implementation of Positive Education is founded on Seligman's (2012) PERMA model, which concentrates on positive emotions, engagement, meaning (Purpose), relationships and achievement, with the supplement of positive health. A strong focus on character strengths also informs this model. Norrish et al. (2013) described how GGS uses three levels to put wellbeing into practice in schools: Live it, Teach it and Embed it (**Figure 2.8**).

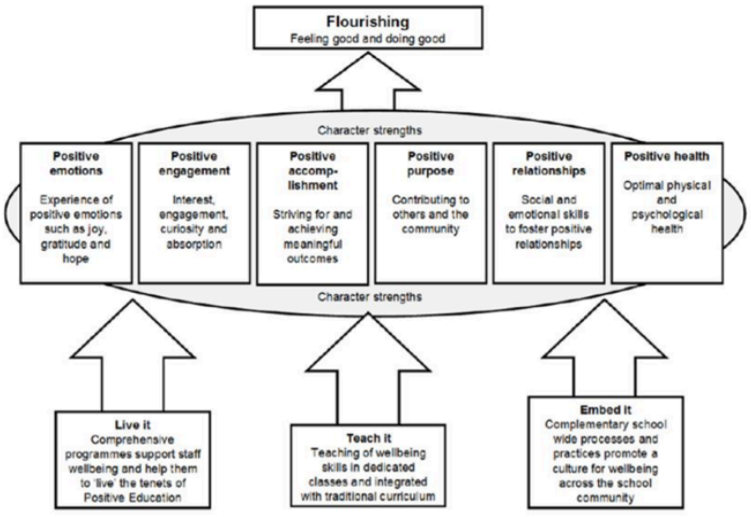


Figure 2.8: The Geelong Grammar School model for positive education (Source: Norrish et al., 2013, p. 151)

Vella-Brodrick et al. (2014) assessed the effectiveness of the Positive Education curriculum in improving students' wellbeing at GGS. In their study, they reported that wellbeing among Year 9 students improved significantly, stabilised in Year 10 and declined somewhat in Year 11. The wellbeing improvements during Year 9 included broad mental health and wellbeing measures, character strengths and the six domains of the GGS Model for Positive Education. These improvements were not observed in the control group, which consisted of students from closely matched comparison schools (Vella- Brodrick et al., 2014).

A three-year longitudinal study (2014–2017), later extended to evaluate PosEd implementation in government schools, tracked 162 Year 10 students at GGS and a comparison group of 83 students (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2015; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2017). Over two years, GGS students consistently reported higher baseline wellbeing levels and greater life satisfaction across four measurement intervals. Compared to the control group, they also showed significant improvements in social relationships, mental health and mindfulness (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2017).

The GGS model offers a valuable example for developing contextually appropriate Positive Education frameworks. It integrates hedonic elements (e.g., positive emotions) and eudaimonic elements (e.g., meaning and engagement), while also prioritising social and emotional wellbeing through a focus on relationships.

Additionally, the model incorporates physical health, aligning with Seligman's (2012) PERMA framework.

2.9.1.2 Positive Education in Bhutan

Bhutan, a Himalayan country, has formulated the world's initial Positive Education programme. Bhutan's Ministry of Education designed its education system on the GNH principles with the goal to 'Educate for Gross National Happiness' (Adler et al., 2016). Alongside the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Centre, the ministry collaboratively designed a GNH curriculum for students in secondary education using 10 positive life skills (Adler et al., 2016). Adler et al.'s (2016) study involved seven control schools covering 3,138 students and 11 treatment schools covering 5,347 students. The two groups of principals and teachers were informed they were receiving training to introduce teaching the GNH curriculum. As special training on the GNH curriculum, a 10-day retreat was conducted especially for the teachers and principals of the 11 treatment schools.

Students' wellbeing and national standardised exam scores were evaluated 15 months post-implementation of the programme and again 12 months thereafter. The findings indicated that students in the treatment schools exhibited a notable enhancement in wellbeing relative to their counterparts in the control schools. Academic achievement showed significant improvement and consistently remained elevated in the treatment schools (Adler et al., 2016). Analysis indicated that increased student engagement and perseverance were significant factors contributing to these enhanced outcomes (Seligman, 2019). Bhutan has implemented this transformative curriculum in all schools nationwide.

2.9.1.3 Berry Street Education Model

One notable gap in many wellbeing definitions, models and intervention programmes is the lack of consideration for children and adults who have suffered childhood trauma. Felitti and Anda (1997) surveyed 17,000 adults and documented how many adverse childhood experiences (up to 10) that participants had experienced. The study’s demographic primarily consisted of middle-aged, white, middle-income adults. The study showed that two out of three had experienced at

least one adverse childhood experience and 12% of them had four or more. Many children who have experienced trauma cannot find safety through social engagement and often move directly to the basic, primitive instincts of 'fight, flight or collapse' (Porges, 2011).

The BSEM addresses this gap as a trauma-informed PosEd initiative (Brunzell et al., 2016a, 2016b). BSEM is a strengths-based conceptual framework designed to guide teacher practices and enhance student engagement, learning and psychosocial functioning. It provides a whole-school strategy for teaching and behaviour management, ensuring consistency across classrooms and throughout the school. This approach allows educators to teach any subject area while simultaneously addressing students' SEL needs (Stokes, Kern et al., 2019; Stokes, Turnbull et al., 2019). As depicted in Figure 10, the BSEM curriculum comprises five domains: body, stamina, engagement, relationships and character.

The *body* domain focuses on activities that promote students' awareness of their physical and emotional states, enabling them to recognise their stress responses and assess their readiness to learn (Stokes, Kern et al., 2019, p. 6). The *relationship* domain serves as the foundation of the BSEM, emphasising the belief that struggling students are more likely to try their best for teachers they like, respect and trust to support them even during their most challenging moments (Brunzell et al., 2015).

The *stamina* domain assists students in overcoming adversity by fostering growth mindset, emotional intelligence and resilience (Stokes, Turnbull et al., 2019, p. 6). The engagement domain stresses the need for learning experiences that are interesting, purposeful and aligned with students' ambitions, career goals and abilities (Stokes, Turnbull et al., 2019, p. 6). Finally, the *character* domain outlines 24 key character strengths that belong to six main virtues. Explicit instruction on these character strengths has been shown to improve students' academic achievement and wellbeing (Shoshani & Slone, 2013).

Although BSEM accommodates individual schools and offers a trauma-informed, strength-based response to the needs of vulnerable children, there is a gap in education policy and practice that requires systemic approaches to wellbeing. In

Scotland, this is the specific domain of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). As a national framework, GIRFEC is designed to be used in conjunction with school-level initiatives to place wellbeing alongside child-centred services at the core of public service design and delivery. While BSEM deals with trauma at the relational and pedagogical levels, GIRFEC systematically allocates responsibility to the system so that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to develop, learn, and thrive within a nurturing environment.

2.9.2 Getting It Right for Every Child

The GIRFEC approach (Scottish Government, 2012) serves as a foundation for promoting wellbeing for all children. GIRFEC represents a government-led, whole-society initiative designed to ensure that children grow up feeling loved, safe and respected, while realising their full potential. It ensures that children's wellbeing remains central to decision-making in schools and beyond through a structured framework supported by government policy. According to the GIRFEC framework, every child and adolescent should be *safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included* (SHANARRI; Scottish Government, 2012). **Figure 2.9** shows how the visual representation of the 'wellbeing wheel' creates an impression of authority and completeness. In this context, GIRFEC and SHANARRI effectively form a 'model' that reinforces the theme of care.

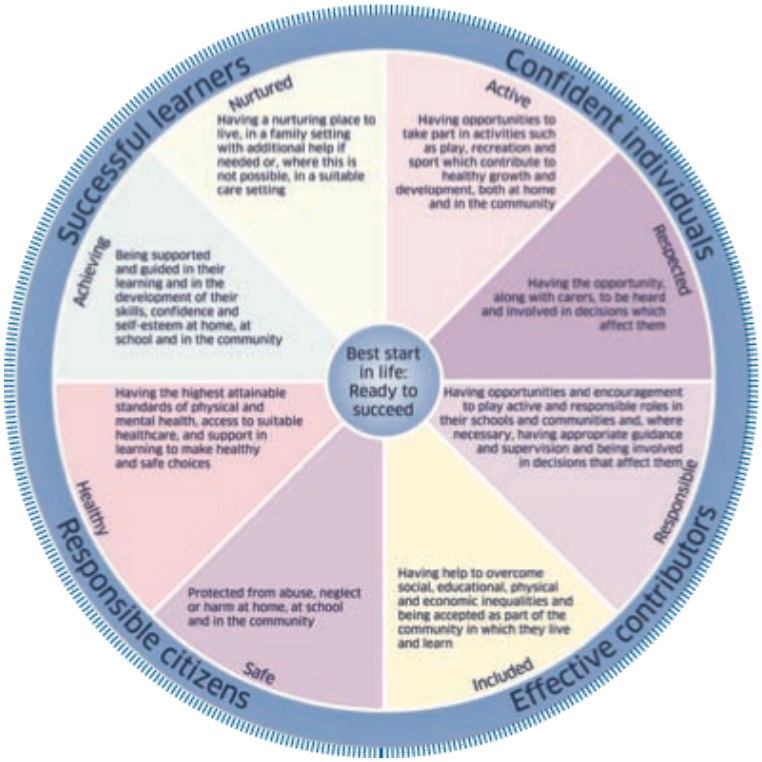


Figure 2.9: The SHANARRI Wellbeing Model (Source: Scottish Government, 2004).

GIRFEC naturally aligns with Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*, the national education framework. The overarching aim of the Scottish curriculum lies in its 'four capacities,' aiming to enable every child or adolescent to become a 'successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor' (Scottish Government, 2004). Spratt (2016) argued that education in Scotland goes beyond acquiring knowledge or developing skills; it emphasises learning to become a specific kind of person (p. 18).

The *Curriculum for Excellence* uniquely links wellbeing and learning by mandating a shared responsibility for health and wellbeing across all teachers. Teachers are presumed to always prioritise children's health and wellbeing (Scottish Government, n.d.). This framework provides definitions to help teachers understand key concepts, including *resilience, mental health, mental wellbeing, social wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, self-esteem/self-worth and physical wellbeing.*

Spratt (2016) noted that it is revealing to observe what the government believes teachers need to know to carry out their duties. However, Spratt (2016) also argued that the framework places a disproportionate emphasis on the emotional and social

dimensions of wellbeing, creating challenges for schools and other agencies. This issue is similar to the *Wellbeing Guidelines 2015* (Department of Education and Skills [DES] & Department of Health and Children, 2015), which prioritise social and emotional wellbeing for primary schools while overlooking other important dimensions of wellbeing.

2.9.3 Streets Model of Contextual Wellbeing

Street (2018) argued that many schools focus on implementing wellbeing programmes or initiatives, which are unlikely to achieve the desired effect if the social context of the school does not support wellbeing. This view is supported by Weare and Nind (2011), who assert that, without considering the school's context, even well-researched wellbeing programmes fail to deliver the positive outcomes that are both expected and needed. As they note, 'without consideration of (school) context, well-researched wellbeing programmes and initiatives do not produce the positive impact that is expected and needed' (Weare & Nind, 2011, p. 26). This perspective is further reinforced by Ecclestone and Brunila (2015) and Ecclestone (2019), who concluded that wellbeing programmes are often a waste of time and resources.

In response to these challenges, Street's (2018) Contextual Wellbeing model divides the school context into four interrelated domains: the people in the school community, the physical environment, ingrained policies and practices and the social norms embedded in the school culture (Figure 3). The framework aims to promote the healthy development of each of these domains to ensure that *Contextual Wellbeing* is supported throughout the entire school community. Street's (2018) model shifts the responsibility for fostering wellbeing from isolated programmes or initiatives to the broader school system.

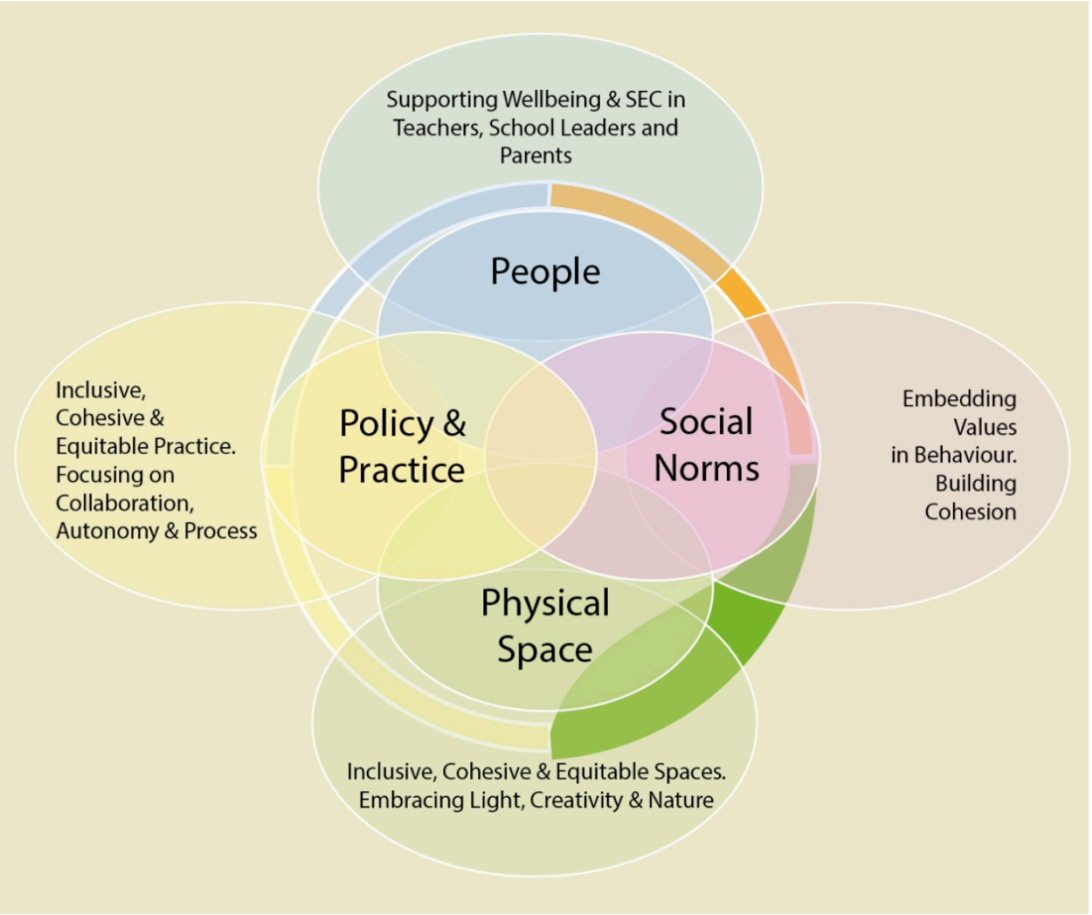


Figure 2.10 Street's Model of Contextual Wellbeing. (Source: Street 2018, p. 137)

The model acknowledges that schools function as social and ecological systems and that the individuals within these systems are inherently social beings. Consequently, the Contextual Wellbeing model focuses on fostering a school environment that is equitable and supportive for all members. This approach aims to enable every individual within the school community to thrive both academically and socially, as well as emotionally (Street, 2018).

In the context of this research, the SHANARRI mode and Streets Contextual Wellbeing (2018) can be viewed as a potential example of good practice, particularly in addressing the discursive themes of care and relationships. While the importance of wellbeing in education is widely acknowledged, its integration into educational policy and practice is often overshadowed by competing priorities. The discourse on wellbeing highlights the holistic development of learners, addressing their emotional, social and psychological needs. However, as education systems

increasingly adopt performance-driven frameworks influenced by global benchmarks such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study and the PISA, wellbeing risks being marginalised in favour of measurable academic outcomes. This tension reflects broader trends in education policy, where economic and market-oriented objectives often take precedence over the less quantifiable aspects of student development. To understand why wellbeing is frequently overlooked, it is essential to explore the systemic components and ideological frameworks that drive contemporary educational reforms. In the next sections, we will look at the most important barriers associated with the implementation of wellbeing at schools, especially the overfocus on academic achievements, standardised tests, and educational business marketing reforms.

2.10 What hinders the implementation of wellbeing in education?

Sahlberg (2011, 2023) argues that changes in educational policy are often driven by performance in international academic tests and market-driven neoliberal reforms. He identifies these shifts as part of a broader *Global Educational Reform Movement* (GERM). According to Sahlberg (2011), this movement is characterised by six key features and their corresponding impacts on education (p. 180):

- Standardisation of teaching and learning
- Increased focus on literacy and numeracy
- Teaching geared toward pre-determined goals
- Adoption of market-oriented reforms
- High-stakes, test-based accountability policies
- Centralised control

Ball (2017) characterised GERM as consisting of five closely interrelated features, each of which can arguably be observed within the Irish education system. First, Ball (2017) highlighted the standardisation of education, which emphasises learning outcomes, performance metrics and centrally defined curriculum targets. This approach is grounded in the belief that implementing performance standards improves the quality of educational outcomes (Ball, 2017).

Historically, the philosophy of education in Ireland was shaped by three primary goals: addressing the demands of religious education, supporting the Gaelicisation process (the process of making something Gaelic or Irish) and providing a 'general education' appropriate for entry into professional training, clerical occupations and managing life's general challenges (O'Donoghue, 1999, p. 89). This framework, described as the 'theocentric paradigm,' positioned education policy within principles informed by a Christian worldview of humanity and society.

Since the late 1960s, however, the theocentric paradigm has been supplanted by the 'mercantile paradigm,' which O'Sullivan (2009) defined as the preparation of workers for the labour market. It can be argued that economic interests continue to drive Irish education policy today, with schools increasingly aligning education with economic planning and tailoring curricula to meet labour market demands (Fuller, 1990, p. 172, cited in Gleeson et al., 2004, p. 108). Additionally, the 'banking' model of education (Freire, 1970) in which students are treated as receptacles to be filled persists in Irish schools. This persistence is attributed to the significant cultural transformation Irish education has undergone over the last 50 years (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 123). O'Sullivan (2009) describes this transformation as a 'transition from a theocentric to a mercantile policy paradigm from one which had God at its centre to one with trade/exchange at its core' (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 123).

Ball (2017) identified an overemphasis on core skills in numeracy, literacy and science as the second key element of the GERM movement. International assessments, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, the PISA and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, are often used as indicators of the success or failure of national education systems. This reliance on such tests often reduces attention to other subjects and broader content knowledge (Ball, 2017).

There is evidence of policymakers reacting to PISA results, particularly when outcomes are perceived as negative, by implementing changes to educational policy. For instance, in Irish primary education, the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* strategy (DES, 2011) exemplifies such a response. Shiel et al. (2014) noted that the DES strategy was informed since the 1980s by a 'lack of improvement' in

National Assessments, alongside lower-than-expected performance in literacy and numeracy in the 2009 PISA results. This prompted an increased focus on and reliance upon standardised testing in Irish education.

Despite their influence, the contexts and assumptions underlying PISA assessments are rarely scrutinised by policymakers or the wider public, yet these tests are often treated as definitive indicators of a country's educational performance (Eivers et al., 2010; Resnik, 2006). This unquestioned reliance has led to adjustments in educational policy. For example, it could be argued that Ireland's recent policy changes regarding wellbeing in education were triggered by lower-than-expected outcomes in the 2018 PISA assessment of student wellbeing. Specifically, only 61% of students in Ireland reported being satisfied with life, a figure notably lower than the OECD average of 66.9%.

Ball (2017) also argues that another key feature of the GERM movement is the pursuit of confirmed 'gold standard' approaches to learning commonly referred to as 'what works'. This emphasis fosters a culture of low-risk teaching practices. A link can be drawn between this and the phenomenon of initiative overload within the Irish education system. Sugrue (2004) questioned whether the child-centred vision of the Irish curriculum has been overshadowed by the extensive focus on content objectives and expected outputs. The continued pressure of an overloaded curriculum, he argues, has diluted the child-centred approach into a 'less extravagant version' characterised by greater emphasis on subjects and more structured teaching (Sugrue, 2004, p. 193).

Ball (2017) also highlighted the adoption of corporate management models within education as further evidence of the GERM movement (Ball, 2017, p. 8–9). According to Ball, these models prioritise productivity and performance metrics over humanity and moral values. Central to this element of GERM is the ideology of neoliberalism. While a detailed exploration of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is useful to consider its definition as a lens for understanding how wellbeing has been deprioritised in favour of literacy and numeracy in education. Connell et al. (2009) observed the following:

> *Markets are hungry for new sources of profit and under neoliberalism, expand into new domains. Needs formerly met by public agencies on a principle of citizen rights, or through personal relationships in communities and families, are now increasingly likely to be met by companies selling services in a market. Neoliberals have had astonishing success in creating markets for things whose commodification was once almost unimaginable: water, body parts, pollution and social welfare among them. (p. 331)*

The effects of neoliberal policies in education involve the deprofessionalisation of teachers' work (Ross & Vinson, 2006), significant cuts to education budgets (OECD, 2019) and curriculum changes that prioritise literacy, numeracy and employability. This trend is evident in the OECD's *Education at a Glance 2024* report, which highlights that Irish primary schools have larger class sizes and lower funding compared to European averages. Ireland's total public spending on education as a percentage of GDP has decreased from 3.6% in 2015 to 2.9% in 2021, placing it below the OECD average of 4.9%. These funding disparities contribute to larger class sizes and resource constraints at the primary level, limiting the capacity of schools to deliver a holistic education that extends beyond core academic subjects (OECD, 2024).

Ball (2017) identified another hallmark of GERM policies: the prevalence of test-based accountability systems. According to Ball (2017), these policies associate school performance, reflected in pupils' achievements, with accreditation processes and school inspections, ultimately leading to practices such as 'teaching to the test' (Ball, 2017, p. 8–9). In Ireland, this is clearly reflected in the role of the Leaving Certificate examination, which determines third-level placements through a competitive points system. Trant (2007) argued that this system promotes 'two prominent values: individualism and competition' (Trant, 2007, p. 12). While test-based accountability has traditionally been limited at the primary level, Circular 0138/2006 (DES, 2006) mandated compulsory assessments in English reading and mathematics, which took effect in September 2007, for students in second, fourth and sixth classes. Schools are currently required to report aggregated standardised test scores to the DES, their boards of management and parents/guardians via report

cards. Additionally, primary schools must provide information about students' standardised test scores for these classes to secondary schools.

O'Leary et al. (2019) provided insightful data from a survey of primary teachers (n=1564), revealing that 76% of participants reported significant levels of anxiety about standardised tests among some of their students. Furthermore, 76% reported that certain pupils, due to learning difficulties, are unable to participate effectively in these assessments. This suggests that test-based accountability practices embed values of individualism and competition in children from an early age. These practices are also tied to the discursive theme of social and emotional wellbeing, as standardised testing often leads to 'unintended consequences' (O'Leary et al., 2019, p. 82).

The multidimensional construct of wellbeing in education and how it is influenced by philosophical traditions, psychology, and systemic thinking has been discussed in previous sections. Irrespective of the extensive models aimed at defining and promoting wellbeing, it is still considered nebulous, contested, and differs in interpretation based on discipline and policy context. This lack of consistency poses difficulty for educators and policymakers who want to incorporate wellbeing into the school culture in a structured and sustainable way.

Sartori's (1970) Ladder of Abstraction provides insight into disentangling the multifaceted definitions that exist around the term school wellbeing. The ladder's hierarchical nature allows wellbeing to be accurately situated within its underlying principles while simultaneously considering effective educational interventions. This approach is applied in the following section in an attempt to balance theory and practice where school wellbeing is defined, understood, and implemented.

2.11 Uncoupling the Core Meaning of School Wellbeing

Sartori's (1970) *Ladder of Abstraction* helps to describe how concepts change in scope and usefulness over different levels (See **Figure 2.11**). It consists of three

primary levels: 1.low-level (narrow-gauge theory) 2. medium-level (middle-range theory), and 3. high-level (global theory) categories.

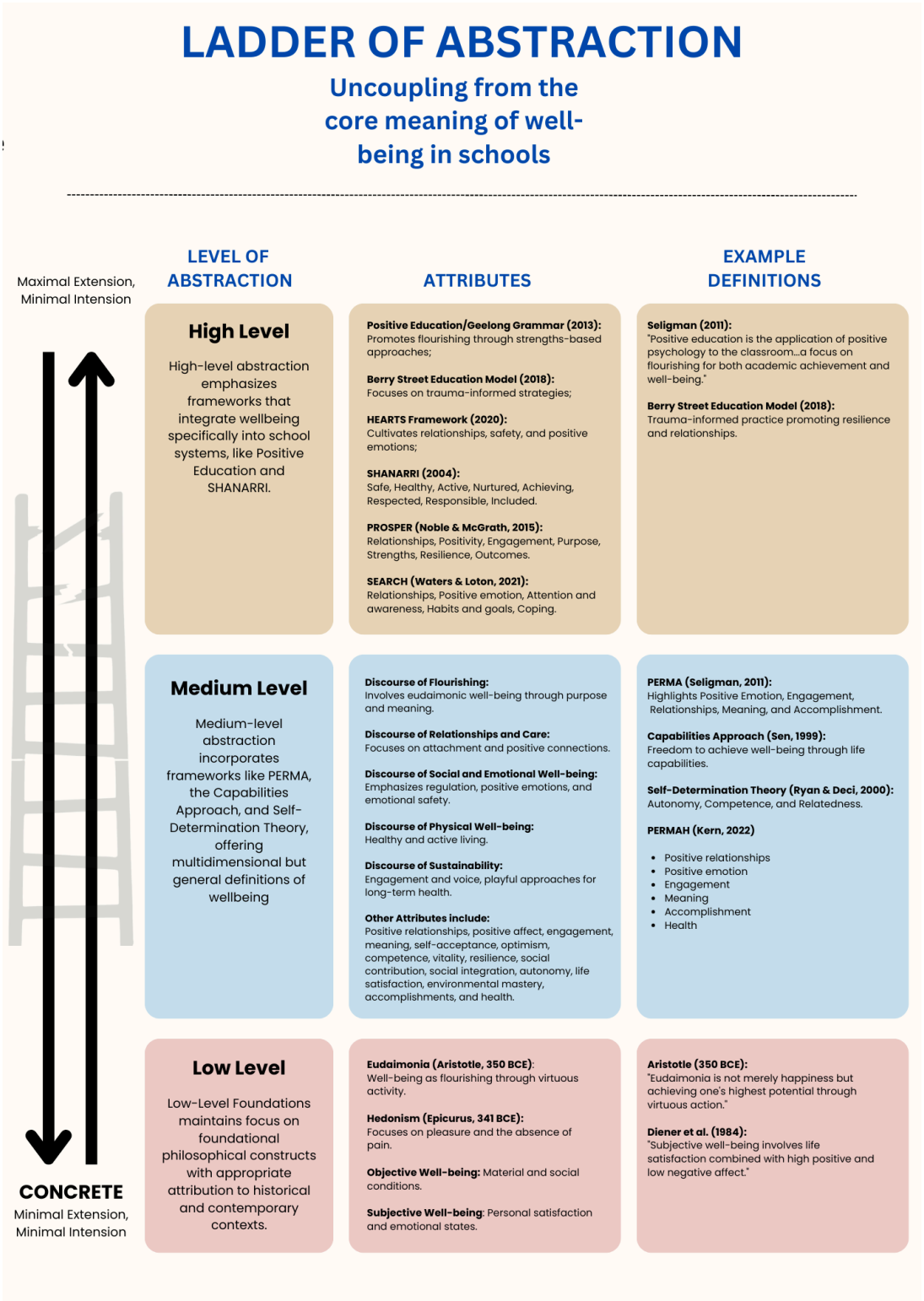


Figure 2.11: Ladder of abstraction (Source: Created by author)

Ascending involves resolving core meaning features, particularly their intension or attributes of a concept and extension meaning instances or examples it covers (Maggetti et al., 2015, p. 9). In the case of middle-range categories, intension is balanced by extension and for high-level, broad extension, fewer intentions. Low-level concepts, like those found in case studies, have the least extensions but the most intentions (Sartori, 1970, p 1044). Definitions, at the simplest possible level, become extremely confined to a handful of particular instances. As one ascends the ladder, concepts become more generalised and widely applicable.

In the context of school-based wellbeing, Sartori's (1970) ladder is a useful tool for examining how foundational definitions of wellbeing adapt to policy, practice and research demands, exploring wellbeing at the three levels of abstraction. School wellbeing is a multidimensional construct with varying degrees of intension (defining attributes) and extension (applicability), depending on its conceptualisation. While this dynamic nature allows for flexibility, it also challenges the coherence and clarity of its application and theoretical development.

2.11.1.1 Low-Level Abstraction: Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations

At the base of Sartori's (1970) ladder, school wellbeing derives from multidimensional philosophical and theoretical foundations such as eudaimonia, hedonic wellbeing, Objective Wellbeing and Subjective Wellbeing (**Table 2.1**). These perspectives place wellbeing as a deeply human activity, intertwined with flourishing, moral excellence and harmonisation of internal affect and external condition, offering a broader vision than narrower conceptions of mental health or academic engagement.

Eudaimonia (Aristotle, c. 350 B.C.E./1998) views wellbeing as living in harmony with one's potential and moral virtues and stresses purpose, moral excellence and holistic development (Ryff, 1989; Whitehead, 2010). In education, it provides holistic support of students' potential, with Ryff (1989) envisioning it as ideal psychosocial functioning that fosters self-actualisation and meaning. Hedonic

wellbeing focuses on pleasure and freedom from pain, prioritising emotional safety in school settings (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Diener et al., 2018). Objective Wellbeing puts emphasis on measurable elements such as material conditions, health and access to resources, framing wellbeing as a thing that can be quantified (Sen, 1999). Subjective wellbeing, in contrast, focuses on individual emotional satisfaction and life satisfaction.

These elements form an inclusive vision of school wellbeing, addressing philosophical profundity and diverse human needs. This richness, however, can make immediate translation into policies or curricula unfeasible, calling for a shift to more to a higher level on the ladder of abstraction for operationalisation at the expense of theoretical integrity.

2.11.1.2 Medium-Level Abstraction: Practical and Context-Specific Adaptation

At the medium level of abstraction, school wellbeing becomes more adaptable and practical by shedding some philosophical complexity for broader application. Frameworks such as PERMA, PERMAH, the Capabilities Approach and SDT emphasise measurable components of wellbeing while maintaining ties to foundational theories. These frameworks are particularly valuable for schools seeking effective and scalable ways to integrate wellbeing into curricula and policies.

Seligman's (2012) pillars (positive emotion, relationships, engagement, accomplishment and meaning) distil wellbeing into measurable domains. Kern's (2022) addition of "Health" acknowledges physical wellbeing's role. The Capabilities Approach, proposed by Sen (1999) and extended by Nussbaum (2011), adds a social justice lens and emphasises equal individuals' opportunities to achieve valuable functionings. It aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, highlighting systemic factors and the importance of equitable school policies. SDT identifies three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness as vital for motivation and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In educational contexts, this translates to environments that empower students to make choices, develop mastery and build meaningful relationships.

This level balances theory with application. It acknowledges the richness of philosophical ideas about wellbeing while offering frameworks schools can implement. It makes wellbeing more measurable and scalable. Nonetheless, this flexibility may lead to the fragmentation of wellbeing into distinct components, which could undermine its holistic nature. Individual components of wellbeing may be selectively adopted depending on school priorities. Educators and policymakers must achieve a balance between coherence and adaptability to maintain a multidimensional approach to school wellbeing while responding to the community's changing needs.

While medium-level frameworks maintain a commitment to theoretical integrity, the push for systemic integration has led to the adoption of high-level, instrumental models of wellbeing. These frameworks prioritise clarity, scalability and policy alignment, sometimes at the expense of the conceptual richness found at lower or medium levels of abstraction

2.11.1.3 High-Level Abstraction: Simplified and Instrumental Use

At the highest abstract level, school wellbeing is put into pragmatic frameworks such as Positive Education, BSEM, SHANARRI, HEARTS, PROSPER and SEARCH to allow speedy and large-scale implementation. The concept is certainly reduced by these frameworks into palpable practices so that implementation is made simpler. SHANARRI aligns wellbeing with policy aspirations, offering an overarching and organised framework (Scottish Government, 2004). Similarly, HEARTS focuses on relational safety and trauma-sensitive practice (Dorado et al., 2016). These two models are flexible and inclusive but maybe over-simplify wellbeing for applicability. PROSPER (Noble & McGrath, 2015) and SEARCH (Waters & Loton, 2021) foreground strengths, relationships, purpose and psychological processes such as coping and goal-setting. These evidence-based frameworks provide adaptable approaches but risk reducing wellbeing to quantifiable constructs, overlooking cultural and contextual nuances.

While open to access and scale, such programs are likely to privilege measurable effects and short-term outcomes, which can oversimplify wellbeing and separate it

from its philosophical roots. Emphasising metrics such as resilience and attendance could eclipse deeper aspects of flourishing and holistic personal growth, forming fragmented or prescriptive understandings that do not engage with wellbeing's complexity in entirety.

2.11.2 Challenges and Implications: Toward a Balanced Approach

Using Sartori's Ladder to examine school wellbeing reveals it as a dynamic construct along a continuum of abstraction. Low-level abstractions prioritise foundational depth and theoretical precision, which are essential for theory development and scholarly debate. High-level abstractions prioritise accessibility and ease of use but risk becoming too generalised, leading to a loss of coherence and distinctiveness. A balance between theoretical depth and practical utility is necessary to avoid conceptual dilution and in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of school wellbeing.

A clear declaration of intentions and interpretation contexts can help researchers, policymakers and educators to minimise conceptual blurring. School wellbeing is both a profound philosophical construct and a set of practical, outcome-focused interventions. The main challenge is to reconcile the transformative potential of lower-level abstractions with the workability of higher-level models. Future research should attempt to marry philosophical depth with operational clarity. For example, mid-level models such as PERMA must be applied with an understanding of their theoretical underpinnings, while high-level models must be capable of sustaining the dynamic and holistic nature of wellbeing.

Sartori's ladder of abstraction (1970) in the context of wellbeing in education highlights the difficulty of capturing an ambiguous concept that spans diverse theoretical frameworks, policy frameworks, and pedagogical underpinnings. This conceptual stratification of Sartori's model has not gone unchallenged. Collier and Levitsky (1997) argue that more rigid hierarchies like the ladder of abstraction do not account for constructs that are hybrid or dependent on context. Resultantly,

Goertz (2006) proposes the addition of grey zones to capture better the complexity of concepts and their boundaries. In the words of Collier and Adcock (1999, p 562), such an approach allows definitions of concepts to be flexible and evolve with the changing research aims and contextual shifts without becoming conceptually chaotic.

In considering wellbeing in education, the complexities of intertwining policies and psychological dimensions of wellbeing may be neglected when applying Sartori's ladder too rigidly. For example, the OECD's wellbeing indicators do not appear to reside comfortably within any single tier of abstraction. This is due to the difficulty in mapping the interconnectivity of various discourses and points to the need for additional mapping to explore the fluidity of wellbeing.

In this way, while Sartori's ladder of abstraction can serve as heuristic for structuring the conversation at hand in the consideration of wellbeing in education, it needs to be augmented with other forms of visualisation that embrace hybridisation. The addition of stakeholder analysis and networks, as well as multidimensional mapping, portray expressions of wellbeing more accurately. This enables moving from simplistic categorisation towards a more sophisticated and therefore useful framework of conceptual understanding of wellbeing in education.

2.12 Venturini's Cartography of Controversies

In this doctoral thesis, I have used Venturini's (2010) 'cartography of controversies' as an applied version of actor-network theory (ANT)(Latour, 2005) to better understand the conceptual nature of wellbeing schools. This combines theory, method, and findings to explore, map, and visualise social phenomena that are subject to constant transformation or controversy, such as wellbeing in education. The cartography of controversies is a way 'to live, to know, and to practice in the complexities of tension' (Law, 1999, p 12). It stems from earlier work (Latour, 2005) on the 'tracing of associations' as a means to carefully observe and reassemble the steps taken by heterogeneous actors in developing social controversies (Marres, 2015). The application of cartography of controversy in this study is not intended to construct a definitive or exhaustive depiction but to highlight the multiple layers of

the wellbeing controversy. In this chapter, we specifically use the first four observational lens of Venturini's cartography of controversies which is from statements to literature (Venturini, 2015). Accordingly, this helps us to outline where we identify competing school wellbeing statements from literature. This section aims to show that statements in controversies are never isolated but always connected in a dialogue made of endorsements and oppositions. Among the many ways to do so, the most popular among the students of controversy mapping is the 'tree of disagreement' (Venturini et al., 2015). In the following section, I have mapped a tree of disagreement using Venturini's Cartography of Controversies (2015) (see **Figure 2.12**) to illustrate the various disagreements, debated and connections illustrated in the literature around wellbeing and wellbeing in schools.

2.12.1 The tree of disagreement

Disagreements and debates are rarely straightforward and are rarely a matter of choosing between two opposing sides. They instead involve a web of interconnected questions. Even within this complexity, it is possible and necessary to map how ideas, arguments, and influences are structured. Similar to the branching patterns of a tree, a position taken on one issue inevitably shapes and limits the range of possible stances on others. This interconnectedness can be visualised in various ways, but hierarchical trees, also known as Porphyrian trees, have proven particularly effective in illustrating complex disputes. These structures allow us to see how even the smallest disagreements can be linked to much larger ideological divisions.

In the context of school wellbeing, an intricate network of relationships exists. The following 'tree of disagreement' (Venturini, 2015) captures the interconnected nature of policies, psychological frameworks, and educational practices, showing how different elements influence one another. This helps to clarify the structure of disagreements and provides a visual representation to shed light on how global policies, social and emotional wellbeing, sustainability, and physical health all intertwine to shape the broader discourse on wellbeing in schools.

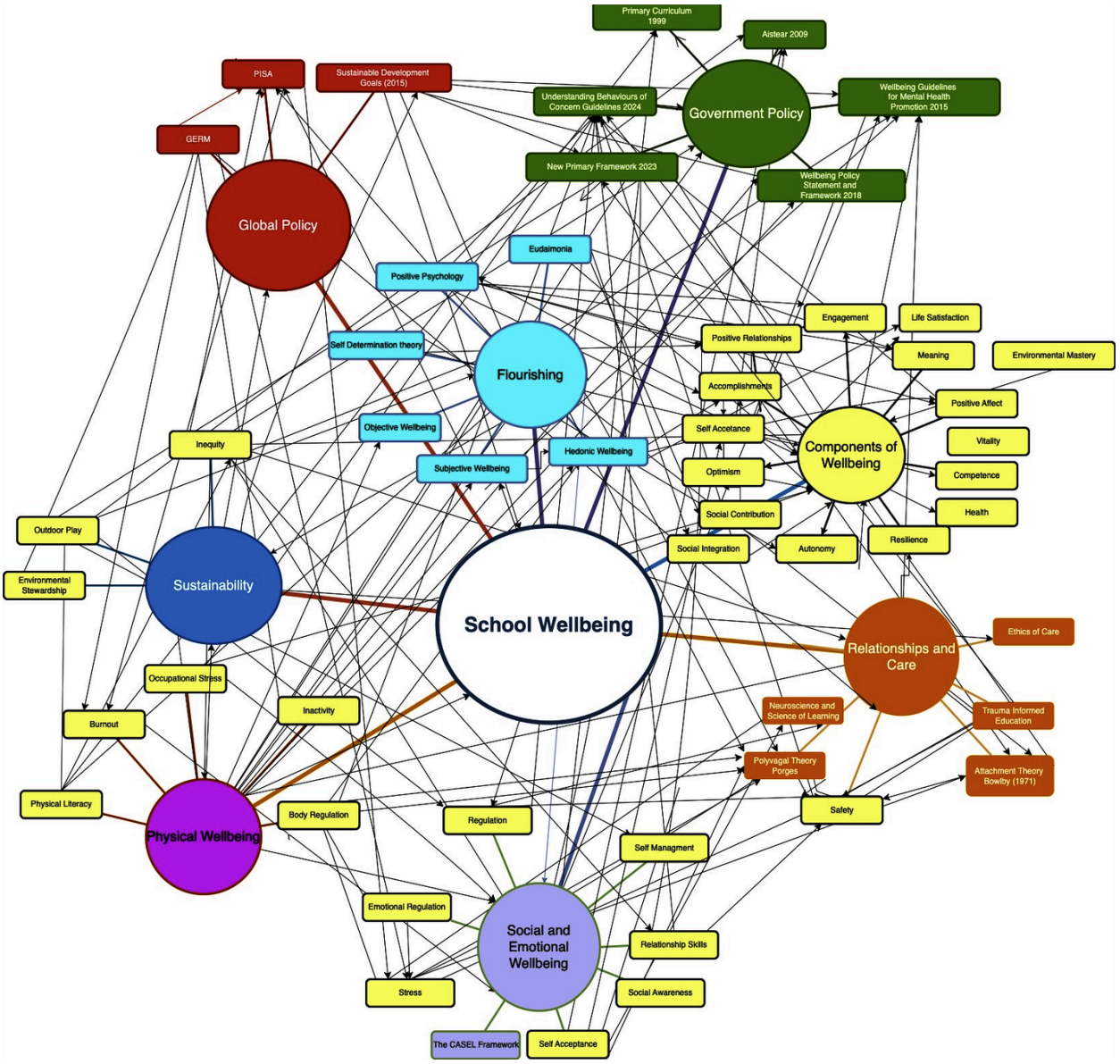


Figure 2.12: Tree of disagreement (Source: Created by author)

The tree of disagreement intentionally visualises what Venturini (2015) refers to as the first movement of controversy design. In doing so, **Figure 2.12** visualises the messiness and entanglement of school wellbeing as it exists in real-world practice. This visual representation reflects a core argument of my thesis: that wellbeing in schools is not linear or siloed but rather a web of interdependent actors. This includes policies, frameworks, relationships, emotional domains, sustainability, and physical domains which are constantly influencing and redefining one another. Thus, the "messiness" is not a design flaw but a deliberate artefact of Actor-Network Theory, which prioritises the mapping of all relevant associations, regardless of whether they are tidy or hierarchical

Unfortunately, the tree of disagreement design in **Figure 2.12** does not result in an improvement in our capacity to engage with the stakeholder and to simplify the controversy of wellbeing in schools. The tree shows a confusion and remains too difficult to read or too messy in content. To rectify this, we used what Venturini et al (2015) describe as the First Movement of Controversy Design. This is referred to as extending the Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off (Venturini et al, 2015, p 76) (See **Figure 2.13**). This allows all school stakeholders to move along the imaginary continuum illustrated in **Figure 2.13** from complexity to simplicity. This movement is threefold because it can go from the centre to the ends or from each end toward the centre.

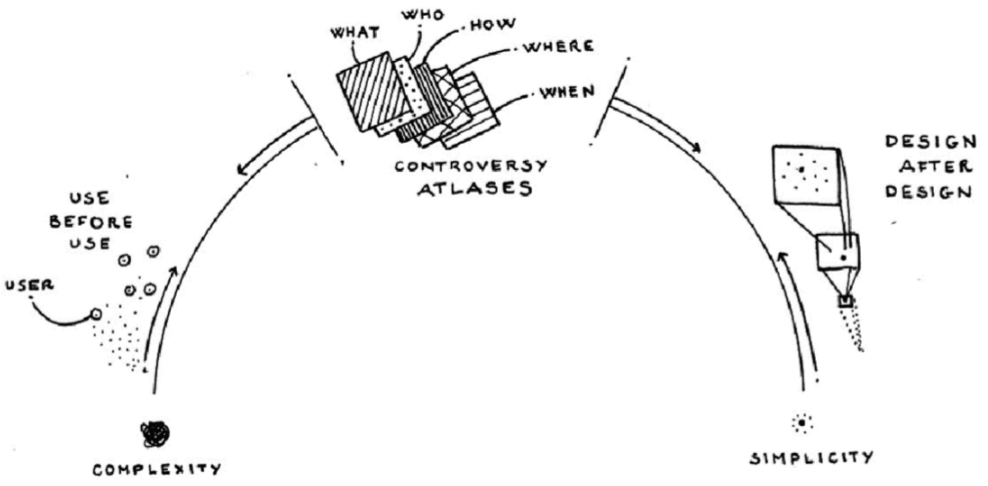


Figure 2.13: The Complexity/Legibility Trade Off (Source: Venturini et al, 2015)

2.12.2 The Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off

Accordingly, we used the Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off outlined by Venturini et al. (2015), to develop the first iteration of the Krebs Cycle of School Wellbeing (See Fig 3). This trade-off is visualised in **Figure 2.13**, which outlines an epistemological continuum between complexity (rich in nuance but difficult to interpret) and simplicity (clear but potentially reductive). Venturini's model positions design as the bridge that allows movement between these poles. Initial visualisations, such as controversy atlases and the tree of disagreement, fall into what he terms "design before use," enabling stakeholders to grasp the depth of an issue (Venturini et al., 2015, p. 76). However, they must then be followed by a move toward "design after design," where the same complexity is reorganised in ways that are actionable, accessible, and meaningful to users within specific contexts (Venturini et al., 2015).

In response to this design imperative, and building upon the complex actor-network mapping, we developed the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) (see **Figure 2.14**). This model represents an effort to synthesise diverse wellbeing domains and individual components into an integrative, theory-informed framework. It draws conceptually from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which underscores the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments, and methodologically from Venturini's design principle (Venturini, 2015). In addition as outlined in our literature review, the Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC), (Oxman, 2016) assists to provide a structure on this simplification. The controversy around 'Wellbeing' mirrors the ambiguity of Neri Oxman's (2016) Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC), suggesting that an interdisciplinary, interconnected and fluid framework is essential in addressing student wellbeing effectively. This interconnectivity aligns with the essence of Oxman's KCC, where elements are not static but constantly in flux and exchange, embodying the dynamic and ecological nature of wellbeing. Accordingly, the KCW becomes a conceptual framework that maps the interconnectivity of various wellbeing domains.

This extends the continuum between complexity and legibility allowing for a more nuanced understanding of school wellbeing. Just as controversy mapping enables

movement between broad, interconnected ideas, this framework synthesises key dimensions of school wellbeing while maintaining clarity and coherence.

2.13 The Development of the Iteration 1 of the Krebs Cycle of School Wellbeing: A Theoretical and Contextual Framework

Iteration 1 of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (**Figure 2.14**) is an integrative, multidimensional model aimed at addressing the complexities of school wellbeing. Grounded in including Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, the model provides a cohesive approach to understanding and implementing school wellbeing. It emphasises the dynamic interactions among physical, relational, emotional and systemic dimensions, creating environments that support both flourishing and achievement. Inspired by the Krebs Cycle of Creativity (Oxman, 2016), the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing highlights the interconnectedness of different components of wellbeing, and places collective efficacy as a cornerstone for sustainable school wellbeing.

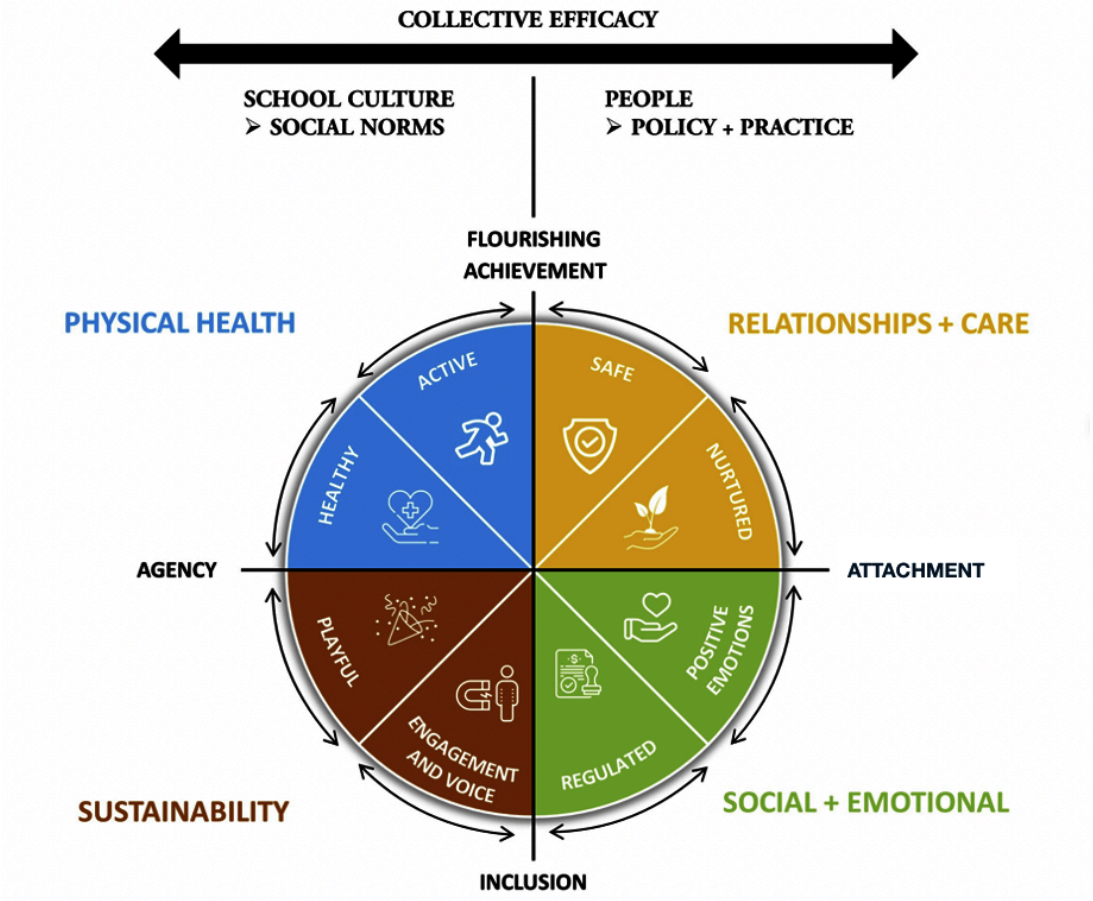


Figure 2.14: Krebs cycle of school wellbeing (Source: Created by author)

2.13.1 Emergence of the Model in the Context of Entangled Systems

Oxmans “Krebs Cycle of Creativity” defies traditional disciplinary boundaries, by promoting integrated, interdisciplinary responses to complex problems (Oxman, 2016). The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing aligns with this vision, synthesising the disciplines of relationships, social-emotional learning, physical health and sustainability within a regenerative system. Oxmans Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC) serves as an illustration of diverse human creativity domains of Science, Engineering, Design, and Art and how they interrelate or interact “communally.” The KCC was inspired by the metabolic “Krebs Cycle”, a life supporting process that operates through energy conversion and regeneration. Oxman’s cycle attempted to break down transcendence of disciplines or a division between fields of study. Oxman asserts that "Science converts information into knowledge, engineering converts knowledge into utility, design converts utility into culture, behaviour, and context, and art converts the behaviour and question[s] our perception of the world” (Oxman, 2016, p 3). This highlights that creative work is always interrelated and involves the interaction and transformation alternation of each field (Oxman, 2016).

In the spirit of entanglement, Oxman (2016) placed these domains side-by-side allowing the domains to interact and transform or “bump off each other,” in a form of metabolic pathway. This aligns with the anti-disciplinary hypothesis which claims that knowledge production not confined to a set academic discipline. Instead, the KCC conceptualises creativity as a circular and regenerative process in which one domain catalyses another in what she calls “Creative ATP” (CreATP). This model contradicts dominant frameworks of knowledge encouraging a flexible and iterative way towards problem solving and innovation (Oxman, 2016).

In this spirit, the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) adopts three key design principles inspired by Oxman’s model. First, it applies systems thinking by conceptualising school wellbeing as an ecosystem of interacting domains each with its own individual components. Second, it embodies interdisciplinarity, rejecting the

individual silos that force wellbeing into individual policy or curricular areas. Instead it embraces the entanglement of relationships, care, curriculum, sustainability, and physical health. Thirdly, it commits to integrated, iterative problem-solving, allowing for continuous adaptation across school contexts. Just as Oxman's KCC visualises creativity as a regenerative force, the KCW operates as a living system, designed not to fix wellbeing in place, but to continually reconfigure its components in response to changing educational realities. In doing so, it provides a conceptual model for navigating the controversies of the "knotty problem" of wellbeing in schools, offering a structure that is both fluid and grounded. Schools face these problems daily, including socio-economic inequalities and cultural misunderstandings, that demand holistic solutions to long-term wellbeing. In this regard, the following section outlines the components of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing

2.13.2 Components of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing

Four interconnected dimensions are outlined in the model, which when combined, promote flourishing achievement. Informed by attachment theory and collective efficacy, the first dimension, Relationships and Care, highlights the significance of relationships in the model (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1973). Empathetic and nurturing environments foster both individual and group wellbeing, laying the groundwork for long-term success. Resilience, emotional regulation and the creation of supportive social environments are elements of the second dimension. This dimension, which has its roots in Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, highlights how important it is to match instructional strategies with staff and student developmental needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

To promote engagement and resilience, the third dimension, physical health, emphasises a systems-thinking approach that emphasises the value of physical activity, active learning environments and health promotion. By highlighting wellbeing as a key component of success, integrating health initiatives into teaching practices positions schools as change agents (Capra, 2002). The last dimension, Sustainability and Agency, places a strong emphasis on inclusive and equitable

practices that enable staff and students to significantly impact their communities. This strategy encourages sustainability as a shared responsibility by fusing environmental stewardship with participatory decision-making. Schools help people actively shape their social and environmental contexts by creating frameworks that support agency.

The '12 o'clock Cinderella moment,' a pivotal moment when flourishing takes place, is the focus of the model. The interactions between the dimensions have culminated in this moment, resulting in a state of collective efficacy and wellbeing. The peak moment in the regenerative cycle of the Krebs Cycle of Creativity facilitates renewal and advances the system, thereby maintaining a continuous loop of achievement.

2.14 Application and Adaptation

The School Wellbeing Krebs Cycle is a fluid, dynamic model that is designed to be adaptable to the specific needs of the individual school. Its open nature allows it to be personalised contextually without altering its fundamental principles. Schools can focus on differing aspects based on their unique cultural, demographic and systemic circumstances. For instance, a school facing severe socio-economic challenges can focus on relational and emotional wellness, while one striving for long-term systemic change can emphasise sustainability and student agency. Such flexibility is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) demand for fitting strategies to specific contexts.

2.14.1 Concluding Thoughts

The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing embodies the interdisciplinary approach promoted in the 'Age of Entanglement' (Oxman, 2016). The model offers a thorough framework for supporting wellbeing by combining ideas from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Oxmans Krebs Cycle of Creativity (2016). The KCW views schools as dynamic ecosystems, where physical, relational, emotional and systemic dimensions work together to support collective success and whole-person development. Through its focus on adaptability and inclusivity, the Krebs Cycle provides a clear pathway to include wellbeing in the culture, policy and

actions of modern schools. However, this pathway is not possible without stakeholder or key actor representation. Similarly, our research questions 2 and 3 below cannot be answered without actor network analysis (Latour, 2005).

RQ2: What is a reconceptualised definition of wellbeing that reflects its multi-faceted and relational nature within the Irish primary school context?

RQ3: How can a systems-informed, ecological conceptual framework for wellbeing be designed, implemented, and evaluated in Irish primary schools?

As a result, chapter 4, 5 and 6 include research that illustrates the experience of wellbeing of principals, teachers and students in developing schools. These perspectives allow the researcher to observe wellbeing through Venturini's (2009) next three observational lenses. Furthermore, this allows for further iterations of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing model that is evidence informed by the key actors. Therefore, Chapter 4, 5 and 6 look at the observational lens from literature to actors. This consisted of three individual studies to analyse the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for Principals (n=12), Teachers (n= 20), and Students (n=16) (Cashman, O'Brien and Chambers, 2025). Finally, in Chapter 7, we observe through the observation lens from actors to networks. This involved using the Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off outlined by Venturini et al. (2015), to develop iteration 2 of the Krebs Cycle of School Wellbeing allowing for a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing within educational settings. Furthermore, in Chapter 7 we observe from networks to cosmoses which involved exploring ideological clusters which in turn assisted in the third iteration of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing.

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Chapter 3 Transmethodology

In this thesis, the concept of transmethodology is explored as a dynamic and forward-thinking approach to research within the humanities and social sciences. Transmethodology arises from the need to engage with the entangled, fluid, and continuously transforming nature of human and social processes (Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021). It is based on the concept of 'driving the paradigm' and it asks researchers to confront uncertainty with courage, flexibility and willingness (Wolgemuth, 2016). Transmethodology aims to help researchers deal with the multitude of social concerns that define the relationship between human subjects and material objects, emotions and technology, space, time and place. It acknowledges the entwined natures of relational and contextual research phenomena and promotes nonlinear research processes. Springgay and Truman (2018) put it most succinctly, "we need to move away from a conception of methods as data gathering processes to a conception of methods as becoming entangled in relations" (p. 204). This challenges proceduralism and offers methodological suggestions that suit the process of research as social engagement. Transmethodology emerged from Engage Research Program located at Aarhus University, Denmark where it endeavoured to create transformative and transgressive research practices (Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021). Transmethodology promotes a holistic view which is multi-layered and does not entail an epistemological or ontological framework. This has been made possible, particularly by bringing together feminist theory, poststructuralism and new materialism (Barad, 2015; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). This set of ideas sees research as developing methods not only as a means of collecting data but as techniques that shape the research field and its outcome. Framing a research question around transgression and innovation, results in the very questioning of issues such as wellbeing which entail complexity and inter-connectivity. This research utilises a transmethodological approach in considering the ways that wellbeing in education could be achieved and positions the research in the context of relational and transformative inquiry. Transmethodology underlines a significant shift from the traditional notion of research methods being neutral to regarding them as co-constructing forces on the field of research. Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) is one such viewpoint that calls for the exploration of networks comprising of

both human and non-human elements without a vertical hierarchy over them (Latour, 2005). This is consistent with Barad's (2007) conception of agential realism according to which social and material factors act in synergy to produce forms of knowledge. Together, these frameworks illuminate the interconnectedness and interdependence inherent in research contexts, rejecting the perception of methods as external to the research process. Transmethodology has been given more applications in education research since the modern world is a complex and ever evolving environment that necessitates such methodological approaches. For instance, researchers in studies about digitalised youth culture applied it by combining the subjective, social and technological aspects of the performance of practices such as sexting (Rasmussen, 2021). Furthermore, while developing an indicator of wellbeing, transmethodology was deployed to challenge and analyse the design of a survey on wellbeing through the lenses of assemblage, and actor–network theory (O'Toole and Simovska, 2021). Sheils et al (2022) also explored, participation and access for students with traumatic brain injury in higher education using an innovative transmethodological approach. Transmethodological approaches have informed critiques of trauma sensitive pedagogies in schools through an analysis of transcorporeality and relational ethics (Springgay and Truman, 2017). Such applications demonstrate the versatility of transmethodology in grappling with challenging educational issues, ranging from social inequities and technological dependencies to student wellbeing. Transmethodology stands out as an interdisciplinary and contextualised methodology, which makes room for researchers to reconstruct educational research to encompass inter-relation and change. Transmethodology is understood as a radical change, which creates the prerequisites for embracing the inclusiveness, emergent properties, and multidimensionality of knowledge production. Treating research methods as entangled, this approach guarantees precise exploration of wellbeing as an intricate and relationally embedded concept. This thesis employs the research concept of transmethodology as a powerful means of addressing these complexities. It offers a (trans)methodological lens to help comprehend the processes by which wellbeing is created and maintained across the fluid environments of human and social processes.

This thesis chooses a 'flat ontology' perspective when studying the nuances of wellbeing in primary school settings. Flat ontologies are self-organising systems. They self-organise by using the dynamic and relation-building properties of matter and its ability to create singularities. These can result in the genesis of novel events and entities or the establishment of routine orders and practices (Marston et al., 2005). Flat ontology rejects the compartmentalisation of the world into neatly segmented object types, while seeking to unravel the woven tapestry of situations or sites—a symbiosis of bodies or things, orders and events, activities, and utterances that collectively cohere (Marston et al., 2007). Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 1994, 2005), Assemblage Theory, (DeLanda, 2006, 2011, 2016) and Affect Theory (Massumi, 2002) are all considered to have flat ontological assumptions. Notably, ANT epitomises a flat ontology by joining the physical and social worlds. It argues that entities obtain their attributes by virtue of their positions within a network that is deeply shaped by processes and power relations (Latour, 2005). Thus, each actor, whether physical, human, or social, is positioned as a flexible participant in the network (Murdoch, 1997). Within a school context, a flat ontology can be applied to explore how wellbeing emerges from the interconnected relationships between students, teachers, classroom environments, and institutional practices. For example, the arrangement of a sensory-friendly classroom, the teacher's use of inclusive language, peer interactions, and the accessibility of wellbeing resources all interact as equal participants in shaping a student's sense of belonging and emotional regulation, highlighting the relational and dynamic nature of wellbeing. Müller and Schurr (2016) expand on this ontology by explaining a relational world view, wherein actions emerge from the blending of different components and serve to promote the interrelated whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This viewpoint is supplemented by topological understanding of space where closeness of elements is determined by the strength of their relationships and not by geographical distances. Such an approach brings to the fore the criticality of socio-material associations, which include both human and non-human elements. In the context of primary schools, a well-considered design must consider ecological thinking that extends beyond the confines of the natural ecosystems. It must encompass the myriad of relationships between people, objects, and the broader educational milieu. The ontological perspective that has been proposed as part of

this research is encapsulated by what is termed "Onto-Cartography" (Bryant, 2014), a methodological tool for mapping the assemblage of factors affecting wellbeing. Onto-Cartography delineates how elements within a school setting interact to form a complex ecology, integral to shaping the motions and potentialities accessible to students, educators, and stakeholders. This ecological web is pivotal in understanding and harnessing the enablers and mitigating the inhibitors of wellbeing in primary schools.

In applying this ontological perspective, the research aims to map the contours of wellbeing within primary schools, identifying how various factors collectively enable or inhibit the flourishing of all members within the educational assemblage. This ontological position underpins the methodological choices and guides the interpretation of findings within the study, aiming to enhance the wellbeing of the primary school community through a comprehensive, nuanced, and relational understanding of its constituent elements.

3.1 **Researcher Positionality**

As principal of one of the participating schools, I occupied a complex insider–outsider position. From a posthumanist pragmatist perspective (see **section 1.5**), this positionality is understood not as a fixed identity but as an ongoing negotiation within a network of human and non-human actors. This includes institutional policies, school cultures, material environments, and my own professional history.

My insider status afforded situated access to the everyday practices, relationships, and infrastructures that constitute wellbeing in schools. This enabled a sensitivity to the subtle ways in which wellbeing was enacted and negotiated across different settings. However, it also meant that my presence was already entangled with the very systems and actors I sought to study, potentially shaping how data emerged and how participants responded.

Pragmatically, this role was managed through deliberate reflexive strategies: maintaining transparent communication with participants, documenting

decision-making processes, and engaging in critical dialogue with supervisors and peers outside the participating schools. These practices helped me remain attentive to how my leadership role, material positioning, and professional relationships influenced the flow of the research.

Rather than attempting to control out my influence, this approach acknowledges that knowledge in this study emerged from within the relational and material conditions of practice. My positionality was therefore not a variable to be controlled, but part of the ecology of the research and a productive entanglement that shaped the interpretation, application, and utility of the findings.

3.2 Ethics

Ethics involves the study of what should be done transparently in terms of evidence, values, and procedures across various domains, including research (Carter et al., 2011). In alignment with this principle, the University College Cork (UCC) Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) approved this study, ensuring adherence to ethical standards and participant protection. Ethical approval (Log 2021-90) was granted in July 2021 after minor revisions to the original application submitted in May 2021. Permission to conduct the research was also secured from senior management within the selected educational settings involved in the study. This dual approval process underscores the importance of institutional and ethical oversight in research involving human participants.

The study adhered to the UCC Child Protection Policy**,** given that some of the participants were under 18 years old. Safeguarding procedures ensured that all interactions with children were conducted in a manner that prioritised their wellbeing and safety. Additionally, the researcher obtained Garda vetting before any direct contact with participants, fulfilling child protection requirements.

To strengthen my understanding of ethical research practices, I completed an online course entitled **“**Research Integrity - Social and Behavioural Sciences,” provided by UCC and delivered by Epigeum. This training was undertaken to upskill in research ethics and integrity, aligning with the UCC Code of Research Conduct, which

advocates for “periodic training in ethics and research integrity” (University College Cork, 2021, p. 10). The following is a summary of ethical procedures which will be addressed table in the following sections.

Table 3.1: Summary of Ethical Procedures

Participant Group	Ethical Approval & Permissions	Consent Process	Safeguarding	Data Handling & Anonymity
Principals	University ethics approval; permission from Boards of Management	Written informed consent	No safeguarding concerns beyond general duty of care	Pseudonymised transcripts; encrypted storage
Teachers	University ethics approval; principal and BOM permissions	Written informed consent	No safeguarding concerns beyond general duty of care	Pseudonymised transcripts; encrypted storage
Students	University ethics approval; principal and BOM permissions; parental consent and student consent and assent	Written parental consent; verbal and written student assent following multiple child centred presentations outlining the research process	Activities in school under teacher supervision; Childrens First Child Protection safeguarding policy followed. Researcher Garda Vetting	Pseudonymised transcripts; images anonymised; encrypted storage

3.2.1 Informed Consent

Central to the ethical integrity of the study was the principle of informed consent**,** originally established in the Nuremberg Code (1947) and emphasised in subsequent ethical standards (Shuster, 1997; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). Each

participant received a comprehensive plain language statement and information sheet (see **Appendices)** detailing the study's objectives, methods, data collection procedures, and the purpose of the intervention programme. Participants were assured that their decision to participate or withdraw would not affect their standing in the programme or their relationship with the researcher.

When working with children, consent processes were carefully designed to be child centred. Children were encouraged to ask permission before taking photographs of others, and discussions about consent were made age-appropriate to ensure understanding. Additionally, the informed consent documentation included a specific protocol regarding photo ownership, as clarified by the Office of Corporate and Legal Affairs (OLCA) at UCC. The outcome confirmed that children owned the copyright to their photos, which was communicated to participants and their guardians.

Permission was also sought from school staff regarding their consent to allow children to take photos during the study (See **Appendices**). Any photographs containing images of staff members who did not consent were deleted. The researcher took responsibility for managing the consent process to minimise the burden on children.

3.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

To protect participant identities, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research. Participants were anonymised using pseudonyms, and any identifying details within the data were modified or excluded. For instance, principals were referred to by pseudonyms, while names appearing in transcripts were altered to preserve privacy (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). Similarly, the study also employed Photovoice as a participatory method, where children took photographs to represent their experiences and perspectives. The researcher ensured that precautions were taken to avoid any photos that included individuals who had not consented to participate. Photos with identifiable features or potentially sensitive content were deleted following visual data analysis to maintain privacy.

The study was designed to minimise any potential harm to participants. There was no intrusion by the researchers, and the publication of research results did not have the potential to harm individuals or the community. Children were offered printed copies of their photos to keep after the project ended, providing a positive and tangible outcome from their participation.

3.3.1 Data Collection and Platform Knowledge

Data collection was conducted using Microsoft Office 365 Forms**,** a platform designed for secure online surveys. The researcher accessed the platform using UCC credentials to ensure compliance with GDPR and UCC's data management standards. No data scraping techniques were used, and the ethical acquisition of data was prioritised throughout.

All data was securely stored on UCC OneDrive, accessible only via password-protected devices. Data from different participants was stored separately to prevent unauthorised access or cross-referencing. These measures aligned with UCC's Code of Research Conduct and relevant legal frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights (1953) and the Irish European Convention on Human Rights Act (2003)**.**

3.3.2 Reporting and Dissemination

The reporting of research findings was guided by the principles of transparency, accuracy, and originality (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). Participants were informed that the findings would contribute to a PhD thesis and might be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. This dissemination aims to inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders about inclusive leadership and wellbeing in educational contexts.

3.3.3 Recruitment

Participants in this study were principals, teachers, and pupils from 15 primary schools, representing a geographical spread across Cork, Dublin, Wicklow, Mayo, and Kildare. These schools included 2 DEIS schools and 13 non-DEIS schools. 13 Educate Together schools and 2 Community National schools participated, which provided a diverse and representative sample of developing schools. After the primary schools had agreed to participate in this research, child and adult participants were informed that participation was entirely voluntary, and they had complete freedom to opt in or out of the research at any time. Informed parental/guardian consent and child assent were required to partake in the study (See **Appendices).**

Before commencing data collection, I visited or had a video conferencing call with school principals and teachers in each participating school to outline the complete data collection process. Following approval from school principals, consent forms and information sheets were distributed to each student class group and eligible participants.

3.3.4 Insider/Outsider Status

I am a qualified primary school teacher and principal recognised by the Teaching Council of Ireland. As the existing principal of one of the schools at the centre of this study, I maintained impartiality and performed my day-to-day principal duties with absolute professionalism, as required by my post of responsibility. I have connections with the principals working in the other recruited schools, providing cultural and social capital (Putnam, 1995) that facilitates access. However, triangulation was employed to mitigate against subjectivity in this study. According to Heale and Forbes (2013), the objective of triangulation is to use two or more methods in research to construct a more comprehensive view of the study findings. This research utilised multiple methodological procedures (interviews and focus groups) with various participants (principals, teachers, and pupils) to enhance the depth and quality of results, thus mitigating subjectivity. Additionally, I was awarded the Employment-based PhD Scholarship by CACSSS in 2020 due my research being conducted within my profession i.e., acknowledging that I used my

school as a primary data collection site. Guidelines for addressing 'insider' status in this research are also documented in the next section.

3.3.5 Guidelines for Insider Research

There are challenges for the researcher when interacting with peers, colleagues, and study participants (e.g., students, teachers, and other principals) that must be addressed. The researcher is also responsible for the people involved in this project while ensuring high-quality research. Of particular importance is addressing the power relations and the potential for bias in the research (Costerly et al, 2010).

There are many steps an insider can take to guard against researcher bias in the work, such as paying careful attention to participant feedback, carrying out an initial evaluation of data, ensuring triangulation in the methods of gathering data and being aware of the issues represented in the project. This is facilitated by an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience (Kincaid, and Gironda, 2008).

3.3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a cornerstone of qualitative research, and it is pivotal in facilitating culturally sensitive investigations (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Yardley, 2008). It necessitates a researcher's critical reflection on the influences shaping their worldview to ensure a nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives (Choudhuri, 2005). The practice of reflexivity is particularly essential when the researcher has a background that may impact their interpretation of the data. As a school principal with seventeen years of teaching experience, nine years of which have been in a leadership role, the researcher's professional background provides a unique perspective on the enablers and inhibitors of the wellbeing of schoolteachers. The researcher's extensive experience in the educational sector enables the identification of many of the complexities of the teaching environment, which is beneficial for this research.

Guidance from Braun and Clarke (2021a) and Milner (2007) on reflexivity was instrumental in structuring the researcher's approach to ensuring that the analysis was culturally responsive and sensitive to the varied experiences of teachers. As a principal, the researcher is aware that their leadership role and interactions with staff has the potential to influence their responses and subsequently, the researcher's interpretations. Recognising this, the researcher strove to maintain an objective stance throughout the research process, consciously reflecting on their potential biases and the power dynamics at play.

In conducting interviews and analysing data, the researcher continuously engaged in reflexivity to challenge any preconceptions and ensure a balanced representation of the teachers' experiences. The researcher provided a platform where the voices of all participants could be heard without the overlay of personal interpretations unduly influencing the narrative. This reflexivity extends to acknowledging the broader social contexts within which these experiences occur and how these contexts may affect the wellbeing of teachers.

The principles of reflexivity espoused by scholars, such as Braun & Clarke (2022) and Choudhuri (2005), were essential in guiding this process, ensuring that the research remained sensitive to the complexities of the educational environment and the diverse experiences of teachers. Specifically, reflexivity towards personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual issues in the research guided my approach. This approach enriched the research and aligned with ethical standards that respect and acknowledge the participants' realities and the influence of the researcher's positionality (Olmos-Vega et al, 2022).

3.4 Data collection methods

3.5 Follow the Actors

In the context of Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), which serves as the methodological core of exploring school wellbeing and the application of positive education, every component and influence, including literature, policy, and existing frameworks, are considered as an actor within the network. As underscored by Latour (1987, 2005) and supported by Kerr (2016), the directive to "follow the

actors" entails a comprehensive investigation that extends beyond human agents to include these non-human elements. They, too, are 'actors' as they influence and shape the educational landscape and thus are integral to understanding a network's construction and evolution.

This approach is not incessant but focuses on pinpointing and mapping pivotal moments where the actors' presence and interactions become notably significant in the narrative (Michael, 2000). Such critical moments pertinent to school wellbeing and positive education are observed, as detailed in **Chapter 3**. These foundational methodologies, expanded in **Chapters 5** through to **7**, provide enhanced insights into the dynamics of actor relationships within educational settings.

The ANT research process, illustrated in **Figure 3.1**, diverges from linear research models. It encompasses repetitive cycles of actor identification, data collection through interviews, and scrutiny of networks and alliances. This non-linear progression necessitates recurrent reassessment to identify new actors or alliances, uncover "translations" or shifts as technologies are assimilated, and detect any missing network links. Throughout this iterative process, the researcher transitions from preliminary analysis to identifying critical moments for ANT application, ultimately creating an extensive socio-technical landscape representation (Latour, 2005). The culmination of this process involves a comprehensive analysis and the presentation of findings, recognising that comprehending complex networks are an evolving task where initial results inform further exploration.

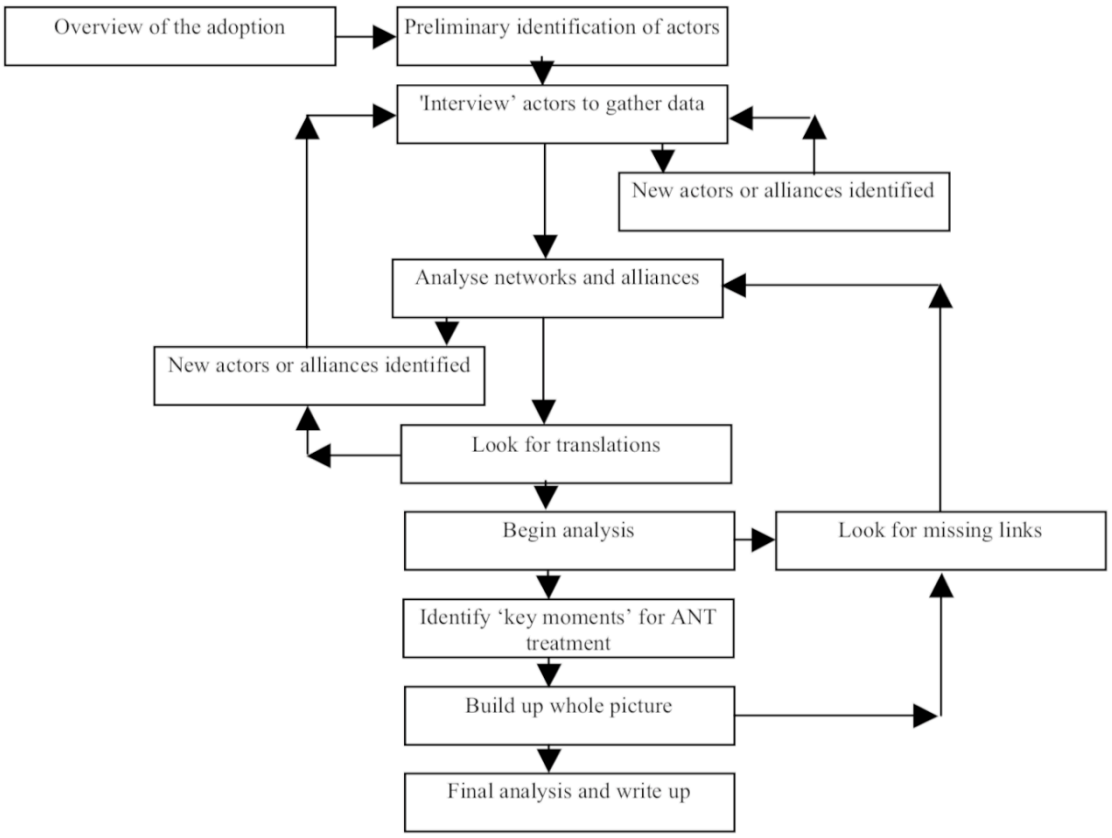


Figure 3.1: Flow diagram depicting the ANT research process.

The research stages as part of this PhD thesis highlights the ANT principle of "following the actors":

1. **Literature Review:** The initial phase of the research, as outlined in Chapter 2, engages in a systematic literature review, identifying the foundational texts, prevailing policies, and established wellbeing frameworks as actors. This phase scrutinises the current discourse, establishing a base of knowledge from which to trace the interactions and transformations within the network. The literature review, combined with the analysis of existing policies and frameworks, sets the stage for understanding the context in which school wellbeing is situated and provides a backdrop against which new data and interactions are observed.
2. **School Principals Wellbeing**: This study actively follows these essential educational actors' experiences and perceptions by interacting with principals at newly established schools, positioning these school leaders as pivotal within the wellbeing network.

3. **The Teacher Voice**: Teachers, vital within the educational landscape, are followed through a series of focus groups, capturing their insights, and delineating another essential point (or key stakeholder) within the wellbeing actor network.
4. **The Student Voice**: Acknowledging students as a core pillar within the centre of the educational system, their perspectives offer valuable reflections on the effectiveness wellbeing initiatives and programmes within schools. A children's rights framework is employed to regard students as proactive network agents, thereby following the younger actors.
5. **Ecological Conceptual Model for Wellbeing**: This stage merges data from all actors (principals, teachers, and students) to develop a model representing their collective interplay.

Each stage continues to manifest the principle of "following the actors," as the research methodologies actively involve stakeholder contributions, thereby observing and engaging in the dynamic interactions within the culture of wellbeing in the school community. This methodology facilitates a profound comprehension of the network co-constructed by its participants which is galvanised in Chapter 7 which uses Venturini's Cartography of Controversies (2010) to reiterate multiple versions of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing.

3.6 Reflexive Journals

Reflexive journals (see **Figure 3.2**) were used within this reflexive practice, serving as spaces where the researcher was able to jot down thoughts, decisions, and emotional responses throughout the research process. These journals are more than simple records; they are critical to understanding how methodological choices are made, how relationships with participants evolve, and how personal biases may influence the interpretation of data (Thorpe, 2010). In studies that involve complex methodologies like Actor-Network Theory (ANT), reflexive journals become particularly valuable. They allow researchers to trace how their interactions with various actors, both human and non-human shape the dynamics of the research network (Latour, 2005).

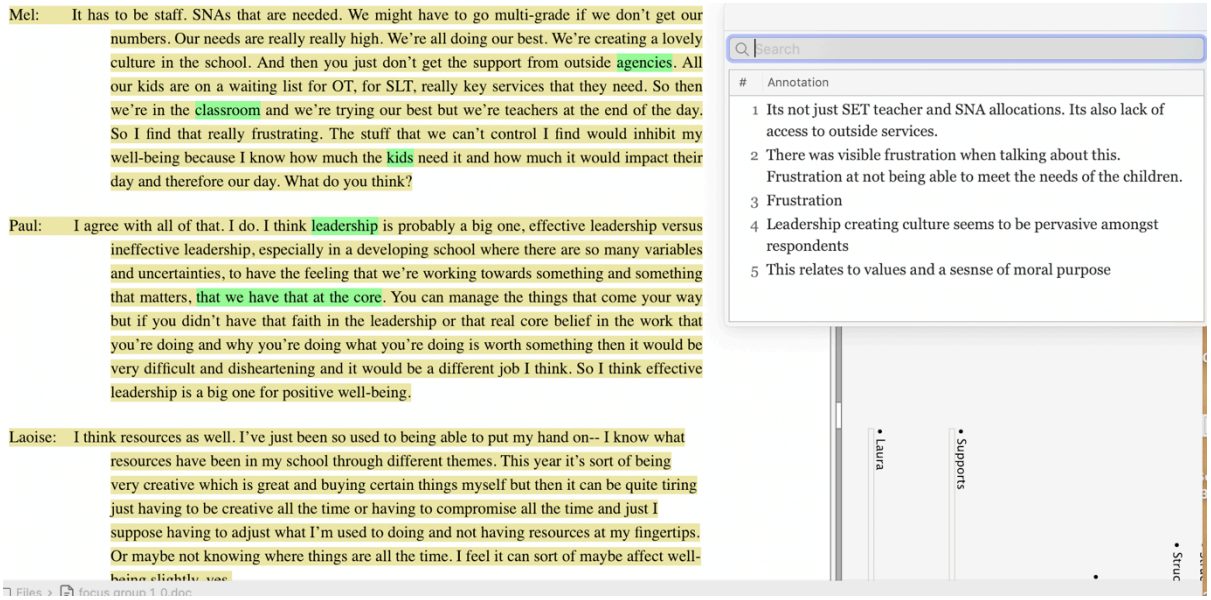


Figure 3.2 : Reflexive Journal via NVIVO annotations.

Moreover, the integration of reflexive journals within qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, is highly recommended by scholars like Vicary, Young, and Hicks (2016). They suggest that maintaining a research diary directly within Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) can enhance the efficiency and organisation of the reflexive process. In this current research, NVivo 11, offered the researcher capabilities to facilitate the seamless documentation and analysis of reflexive notes alongside other data types, ensuring that reflexivity is deeply embedded in the analytic process. The researcher also completed a three-day Nvivo Training module (PG6008) which greatly supported the researcher data analysis skills.

This approach aligns with the broader methodological principles advocated by Braun and Clarke (2022), who emphasise that reflexivity should be a continuous thread throughout the research journey. By embedding reflexive practices within CAQDAS, the researcher was able to effectively manage and reflect on their influence on the data, with the intention of producing more robust and transparent findings.

3.7 Stage 2: Follow the Actor: The School Principal

3.7.1.1 Population and Sample

A clustered, convenience sample of new school principals (n=26) were invited to participate in this study (October 2021) (reported further in chapter 4). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has opened 58 new schools since 2013. A sample of Educate Together principals was chosen based on accessibility to the research participants. Recruitment procedures involved networking via the Educate Together Principals Support Group (ET Beag) to provide the researcher with an opportunity to carry out the data collection. The ET Beag group was set up by the principals of new Educate Together schools to support new school principals. From the invited principals (n=26), a 34.6% response rate was achieved, and a final research sample size of 9 participants (11% male; 89% female) participated in three focus groups. A convenience sample size of three further principals (33% male; 66% female) participated in semi-structured interviews (**See Table 3.2**) Two of these principals are principals of Community National Schools and were recruited through a local principal's network. This was to ensure that the experience of principals of other patronages (in this case, Cork ETB) was reflected in the research. Participants have been assigned pseudonyms, as seen throughout this paper. Personal details have been removed to protect the identity of participants.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of participants of the focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews with principals (Source: Created by authors)

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Experience as Principal	Patronage	Focus Group /Interview Number
Mary	F	Teaching Principal	3	Educate Together	1
Ben	M	Teaching Principal	8	Educate Together	1
Noelle	F	Teaching Principal	3	Educate Together	1
Grace	F	Admin Principal	1	Educate Together	2

Tessa	F	Teaching Principal	1	Educate Together	2
Patricia	F	Teaching Principal	6	Educate Together	3
Sarah	F	Teaching Principal	4	Educate Together	3
Marie	F	Admin Principal	3	Educate Together	3
Brian	M	Admin Principal	9	Educate Together	4
Kate	F	Admin Principal	5	Community National School	5
Rose	F	Admin Principal	2	Community National School	6

3.7.2 Focus Group Interview with Principals

A focus group interview is utilised in this doctoral project to elicit principals' perspectives in developing schools. A focus group interview is a flexible, unstructured dialogue between the group members and a facilitator/moderator that meets in a convenient location (Brockman, Nunez, & Basu, 2010; Jayawardana & O'Donnell, 2009). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis state, "Focus groups have allowed researchers to explore the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observations" (2005, p.902).

The focus group approach was piloted in October 2021 via the Microsoft Teams platform. This pilot consisted of three new school principals. The focus group guide questions elicited detailed and thoughtful responses and an excellent stimulus for conversation. The pilot focus group allowed the researcher to troubleshoot potential difficulties with the focus group questions. As a result, the researcher scaled back the volume of questions to seven and included prompts for every question. The questions each had a rationale, including biographical information, knowledge of wellbeing, collective efficacy, physical wellbeing, relationships/care, and

philosophical discourse of flourishing and social and emotional wellbeing based on the discourses of wellbeing identified by Spratt (2017).

The study was framed within the theoretical bounds of ANT (Latour, 2005). Reflexive thematic analysis, which involves a process of constant reflexivity and revisiting the data, enabling the emergence of patterns and the development of initial codes, was chosen as the analytical method (Braun and Clarke, 2022). While not all initial concepts transitioned into categories, this coding process facilitated an in-depth exploration of various themes. The development and refinement of the reflexive thematic analysis procedure ensured that the major themes identified were recurrent across multiple interviews and resonant with current literature. This methodological rigour helps validate the themes' relevance and guards against potential researcher bias, providing a robust foundation for the study's findings (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

3.7.3 Interviews With Principals

After initial focus groups that included only principals from Educate Together schools, the study was extended to include principals from Community National Schools. This expansion was crucial to understanding the wellbeing experiences among principals across different school patronages, particularly in developing schools. For this part of the data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted using an 'interview guide' approach, as described by Patton (2002). This method was selected for its balance of structured data collection and the flexibility to explore specific areas in-depth. The interview guide, which defined the general discussion areas, was Table prepared before the data collection phase (see **Table 3.3** for the interview guide).

Table 3.3: Focus Group and Interview schedule plan

Questions	Prompts	Rationale
Personal and School		
Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your teaching experience?	-	Biographical Information

What support was provided when you joined the staff of a developing school?	In hindsight, is there anything in addition which you would have liked? (e.g., handbook, online resources, etc.)	The individual stage of change
What does wellbeing mean to you? **Can you comment on what aspects of working in a developing school inhibit your wellbeing?**	What does an ideal level/condition of wellbeing at work look like to you? What is your ideal experience of wellbeing at work?	Knowledge of wellbeing
What wellbeing programmes are currently implemented for pupils, staff, and parents in your school?	Can you tell me why you decided to use these programmes and the training involved?	Collective Efficacy
Environmental wellbeing		
Describe how the school's physical environment promotes staff wellbeing.	To what degree can you take breaks when you need them during the day? To what degree can you use lunchtimes as free time for yourself?	Physical Wellbeing
How would you describe your relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and guardians? Give an example to showcase this.	Do you feel that you are fully able to support your colleagues? Why? Why not?	Relationships/care collective efficacy
Describe your job satisfaction.	How far do you feel energised at work? How far do you feel stress-free at work? Describe how you manage/cope with stress at work	Philosophical discourse of flourishing Social and emotional wellbeing

The rationale for utilising in-depth individual interviews was to gather detailed and complex data, particularly suited for reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis requires rich, nuanced data, and Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend regularly reviewing interviews during data collection to ensure that they provide meaningful insights with adequate depth.

3.7.4 Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted individually. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, accommodating the geographical spread of the participants and preferences for remote communication amid ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. Each interview lasted between 45 and 55 minutes.

Researchers like Deakin and Wakefield (2014) suggest that while there are differences in building rapport and managing ethical considerations, online interviews are a viable alternative to in-person interactions, capable of maintaining the integrity of data collection. Notable concerns about online interviews include presence and containment (Carter et al., 2021; You, 2021). Adaptations were made to enhance engagement and mitigate potential drawbacks associated with virtual settings to address these concerns. These were mitigated in the following ways:

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher introduced their role and the research objectives, emphasising the study's development and aims. This introduction was designed to build rapport (Patton, 2002) and ensure participants were fully informed and comfortable before providing consent. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time and were instructed to avoid mentioning identifiable details about people or locations to safeguard confidentiality. This approach facilitated focused discussions and upheld the ethical

3.7.5 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2021; 2019; 2006) advocate for thematic analysis as a robust methodological framework that addresses the complexities inherent in qualitative research. The inherent flexibility of thematic analysis is one of its greatest strengths, permitting researchers to tailor their analytic procedures to the intricacies of their data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nonetheless, Braun and Clarke (2021), along with other scholars (Clarke, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; Freeman & Sullivan, 2019; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Thomas, 2017), who stress the importance of a detailed

methodological exposition to substantiate the thematic construction process, enhancing transparency and analytical rigour.

Through continuous refinement since their initial publication in 2006, Braun and Clarke have evolved their methodology from basic thematic analysis to what is now termed reflexive thematic analysis. This method emphasises a thoughtful, critical engagement with the data, encouraging researchers to remain cognizant of their theoretical biases and to make deliberate, analytical choices (Braun & Clarke, 2020; 2021).

A frequent critique of reflexive thematic analysis pertains to insufficient methodological detailing, which can expose research to heightened scrutiny and potentially undermine its rigour (Nowell et al., 2017; Willig, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). To address this, the current research outlines the application of Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis across multiple phases, emphasising the initial stages as delineated in the accompanying codebook (**see Table 3.4 and Table 3.5**).

3.7.5.1 Phase 1 - Familiarising with the Data

The 'familiarisation' phase is a crucial part of qualitative analysis, involving extensive reading and re-reading of the dataset to become thoroughly acquainted with the data. This deep immersion is essential for identifying relevant information for the research questions. Recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013), manual data transcription enhances this process by allowing the researcher to note important nuances such as inflexions and breaks. Additionally, listening to or watching the original recordings can provide a richer contextual understanding of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In this study phase, the researcher actively listened to each interview recording to grasp the primary discussion areas before transcribing them. This initial engagement helped the researcher to recall non-verbal cues and set a comprehensive groundwork for accurate transcription. After transcribing, the researcher reviewed each transcript multiple times, taking preliminary notes directly in NVivo software through memos (**see Figure 3.3**). This approach facilitated the organisation of thoughts and

observations and ensured that these initial insights were integrated seamlessly into the analytical framework. This systematic approach ensures a rigorous and transparent analysis process.

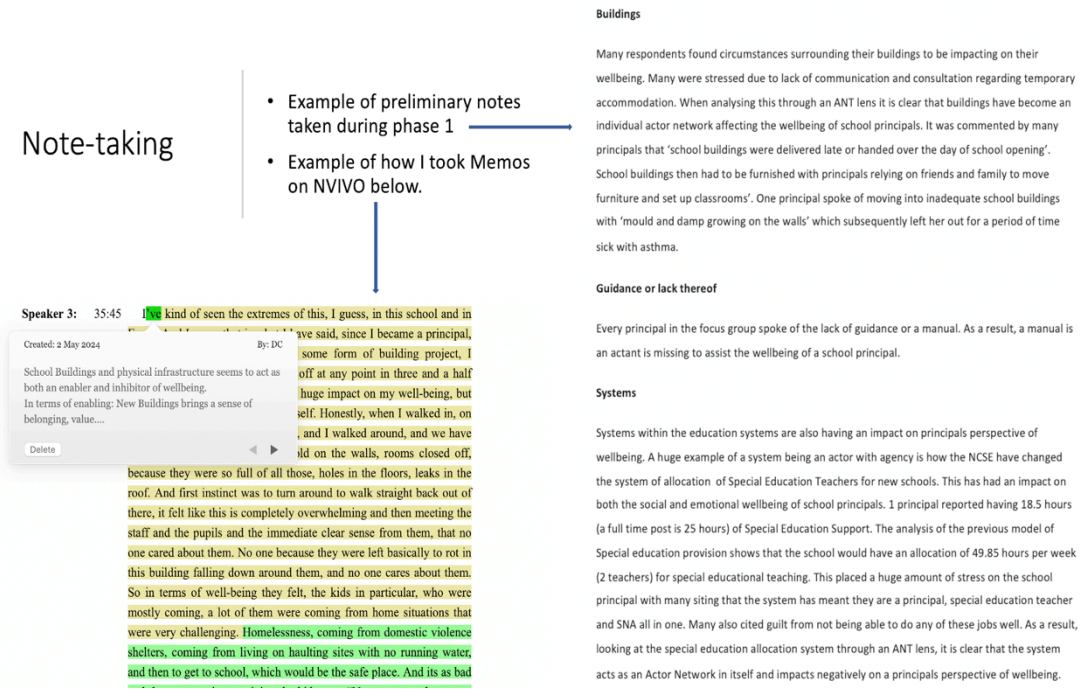


Figure 3.3: Example of notetaking during Phase 1 and memo-keeping in Nvivo.

Given the diversity and volume of data from interview transcripts and visual materials to reflective notes, the need for an efficient, systematic approach to data management and analysis was paramount. To this end, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 was employed to enhance efficiency and ensure transparency in data handling. While NVivo facilitated data storage, coding, retrieval, and connection, it is crucial to acknowledge that the hermeneutic task of analysis firmly remained within the researcher's control, as qualitative analysis is inherently a human endeavour (Patton, 2002).

As Fielding and Lee (1998) emphasise, qualitative researchers seek tools that support analysis but leave the analyst in charge. NVivo served this purpose well, providing a transparent mechanism for tracking the analytical process, thus enabling a clear audit trail. This was vital for maintaining the integrity and coherence of the analysis, ensuring that each stage from the initial coding to the final thematic

development was traceable and transparent. All stages of the analytical process, as detailed in **Table 3.3** and **Table 3.4** of the thesis, were systematically displayed to illustrate a clear and accountable methodological approach, moving away from manual mapping to a more structured and accessible format.

3.7.5.2 Phase 2 - Systematic Data Coding (Open Coding)

In this phase, 41 initial codes such as "Autonomy," "Belonging," and "Job Satisfaction" were identified and derived from the focus group and semi-structured interviews (**Table 3.3**). This stage involved systematically deconstructing data beyond its original sequence into a set of initial, non-hierarchical codes directly informed by the data and the overarching research questions. Coding was systematically conducted using NVivo 11, which greatly facilitated the organisation and tracking of data. Codes, the foundational elements that later evolved into themes, were applied to data segments that provided insight relevant to our research questions. This coding process was iterative, involving a careful examination of the data to ensure that each piece was considered for its potential to inform theme development.

Table 3.4 : Phase 2 codebook for identifying initial codes in research with Principals.

Systematic Data Coding - 41 initial codes identified	Files	References
Administration	2	3
Balance	4	8
Bank Account	1	1
Board of Management	1	1
Boundaries	1	2
Buildings	5	21
Check-In	2	2
Complexity of the role	3	5
Covid	1	1
CSL Coaching	1	1
Culture	3	6
Definition of Wellbeing	3	8
Department of Education	4	7
Ethos	2	3
Finances	2	3
Identity	1	3
Inspectorate	1	1

Job Satisfaction	4	9
Lunch Breaks	1	1
Management Style	2	2
Manual Needed	2	5
Patron Support	2	5
Patronage	1	3
Peer Support	3	8
Physical Health	4	9
Relationships and Care	4	14
School Manager	2	2
Secretary	1	1
Social and Emotional Wellbeing	1	7
Special Ed Resources	5	8
Stress	4	7
Structures	3	4
Culture	1	1
Suggestion for improvement	2	3
Support	3	6
Sustainability	1	2
Teaching principals	2	5
Wellbeing	1	5
Wellbeing programmes	4	17
WhatsApp Principals Group	2	7

The coding was done directly in NVivo, allowing for dynamic and flexible data management. Preliminary codes were noted directly alongside the text using NVivo's coding stripes and code features (**see Figure 3.4**). This method ensured that all aspects of the data, including participant statements and interviewer observations, were captured comprehensively. For example, during the coding process, factors such as check-ins, culture, management style, peer support, relationships, care, and boundaries were identified and coded for their bidirectional impact on wellbeing.

The iterative process involved revisiting and revising the codes through multiple rounds of analysis to refine their definitions and ensure coherence. Each coding round was documented within NVivo, providing a clear audit trail of how codes evolved, and themes were developed. This approach maintained analytical rigor and ensured transparency in how conclusions were drawn.

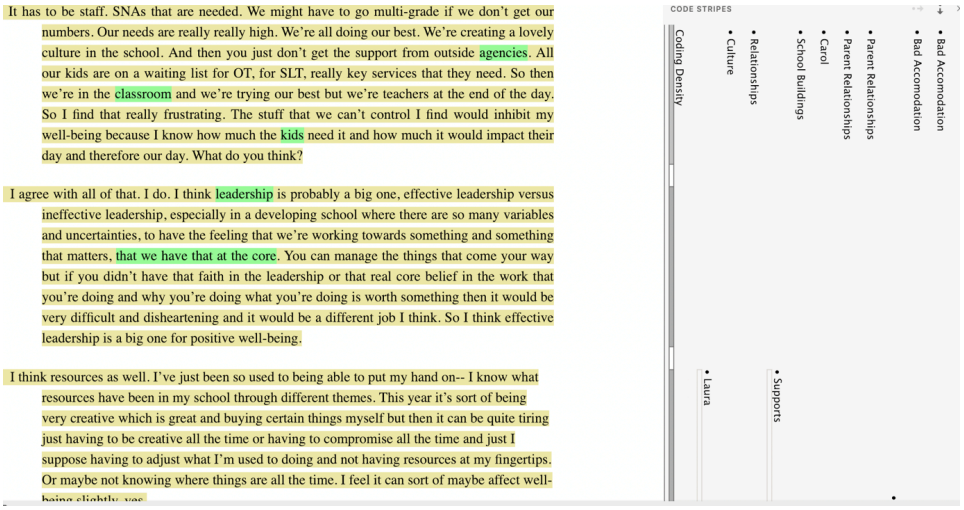


Figure 3.4: Coding using NVivo's coding stripes and code features

As the analysis progressed, it became clear that some initial codes needed refinement or reorganisation into more defined themes to represent the data more accurately. For instance, preliminary codes around "relationships" were expanded to elucidate specific dynamics within "peer support" and "management style," reflecting the complex interplay these factors have with principal wellbeing. This re-evaluation and reorganisation of codes into thematic structures were crucial in understanding the factors influencing wellbeing in developing schools.

3.7.5.3 Phase 3: Generating Initial Codes

Five principal categories were formulated to synthesise the initial codes into broader thematic groupings (**Table 3.5**).

Table 3.5: Phase 3 codebook for generating initial themes and developing categories from coded and collated data in Principal's research.

Five categories of codes developed from 41 initial codes	Files	References
Occupational Health		
Covid	1	1
Lunch Breaks	1	1
Physical Health	4	9
Social and Emotional Wellbeing	1	7
Stress	4	7
Sustainability	1	2
Teaching principals	2	5
Relationships		
Boundaries	1	2
Check-In	2	2

Culture	3	6
Management Style	2	2
Patronage	1	3
Peer Support	3	8
Relationships and Care	4	14
Buildings/Physical Environment		
Buildings	5	21
Supports and complexity of the role		
Administration	2	3
Bank Account	1	1
Complexity of the role	3	5
CSL Coaching	1	1
Ethos	2	3
Finances	2	3
Inspectorate	1	1
Manual Needed	2	5
Patron Support	2	5
School Manager	2	2
Secretary	1	1
Special Ed Resources	5	8
Suggestion for improvement	2	3
Support	3	6
WhatsApp Principals Group	2	7
Wellbeing and wellbeing programmes		
Definition of Wellbeing	3	8
Structures	3	4
Culture	1	1
Wellbeing programmes	4	17

These categories include:

1. Relationships,
2. Job satisfaction,
3. Buildings,
4. Support,
5. The complexity of the role and Occupational Health.

This phase comprised of the amalgamation, rebranding, and grouping of the interconnected codes into expansive categories. This reorganisation enables a clear and systematic interpretation of the data.

3.7.5.4 Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

In phase four of the data analysis, the researcher conducted a recursive review of the candidate themes relative to the coded data items and the entire dataset, as described by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2020). The researcher critically evaluated each theme during this process to determine its validity and relevance to the originally set research questions. This involved assessing whether a theme truly captured the essence of the data or if it was merely a code.

Significant revisions were often necessary; some themes initially identified did not provide meaningful interpretations or were incongruent with the coded data, requiring adjustment or elimination. For example, themes that were too broad or lacked coherence were broken down into more defined themes, enhancing the clarity and applicability of the findings. This reflexive approach, supported by Braun and Clarke's guidance, involved evaluating themes for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity to ensure they distinctly and comprehensively addressed the research questions.

For example, one re-evaluation involved the theme "relationships," which initially appeared as a singular overarching theme. Upon deeper analysis, this theme was found to encompass various interacting variables such as check-ins, school culture, management style, peer support, relationships, care, and boundaries. Each of these factors demonstrated a bidirectional impact on wellbeing, influencing and being influenced by the school environment and staff dynamics. To accurately represent these complex interactions, "relationships" was subdivided into more specific sub-themes that detailed how each aspect contributed to the overall wellbeing of principals. This restructuring allowed the researcher and the research team to capture the nuanced ways in which different relationship dynamics affect and are affected by the wellbeing of school leaders. Overall, this phase was crucial for refining our thematic framework to ensure it accurately represented the complex dynamics affecting principal wellbeing in developing schools, aligning closely with the research objectives and questions.

3.7.5.5 Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes

The final phase of the thematic analysis process involves integrating reflexivity into the review and finalisation of themes. Reflexivity, as emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2022), is a critical practice that ensures the researcher's influence on the data interpretation is acknowledged and addressed. During this phase, the researcher engaged in a thorough reflection on how their positionality, experiences, and potential biases may have shaped the development of themes, as outlined in the next section.

To maintain transparency and rigor, the researcher documented their reflections in a reflexive journal, utilising NVivo's built-in memo feature to link these insights directly to specific data segments. This approach not only provided an audit trail but also facilitated a deeper engagement with the data, allowing me to revisit and critically assess the thematic structures I had developed. Vicary, Young, and Hicks (2016) highlight the advantages of integrating reflexive practices within qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, where researchers can seamlessly combine their reflections with the coding process.

Throughout this phase, the researcher revisited the identified themes, considering how their interpretations might have been influenced by the prior assumptions or the context in which the data was collected. This reflective process led to the refinement of certain themes, ensuring they accurately represented the data while also accounting for the potential impact of their own perspective. By continuously engaging with reflexivity, the researcher was able to produce a thematic framework that not only aligned with the research objectives but also demonstrated a conscious effort to mitigate bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

The final themes were thus not only the result of systematic data analysis but also of a deliberate and ongoing process of reflexive engagement. This practice ensured that the validation of the findings was both robust and ethically sound, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the wellbeing of principals in developing schools

3.8 Stage 3: Follow the Actor: The Teacher

3.8.1 Population and Sample

This phase of data collection (reported further in chapter 5) utilised a convenience sample of twenty teachers (15% male and 85% female) actively teaching in developing schools. These participants were recruited for four focus groups conducted between April and May 2022. They were selected based on their affiliation with the Educate Together Principals Support Group, alongside their accessibility to the researcher. Out of the 47 support group members, teachers from four schools volunteered for three focus groups. The fourth focus group participants were recruited from a local community national school and contacted through an Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) principals cluster. The participation of different school patronages ensured a diverse representation of teacher experiences in developing schools. Participant characteristics are detailed in **Table 3.6** in the Appendix.

Table 3.6: Demographic characteristics of focus group participants for Teacher Chapter

Focus Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Experience as Principal (Years)	Patronage
1	Mary	F	Teacher	3	Educate Together
	Pat	M	Teacher	8	
	Carol	F	Teacher	3	
	Laura	F	Teacher	14	
	Tara	F	Teacher	12	
	Olga	F	Teacher	11	
	Caoimhe	F	Teacher	6	
2	Anna	F	Teacher	4	Community National School
	Nicki	F	Teacher	4	
	Ava	F	Teacher	3	
	Jane	F	Teacher	16	
	Ciara	F	Teacher	5	Educate Together
3	Garreth	M	Teacher	5	Educate Together

	Cian	M	Teacher	1	
	Roisin	F	Teacher	5	
	Patricia	F	Teacher	10	
4	Kathleen	F	Teacher	4	Educate Together
	Donna	F	Teacher	13	
	Kate	F	Teacher	3	
	Ann	F	Teacher	6	

Like the data collection with principals, a pilot focus group was conducted. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined below:

3.8.1.1 Phase 1 - Familiarising with the Data

This phase capitalises on integrating audio and visual data sources, a practice that became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation, the researcher undertook personal transcription of the interviews, which deepened the familiarity with the data and facilitated preliminary identification.

3.8.1.2 Phase 2 - Systematic Data Coding (Open Coding)

In this phase, detailed in the attached codebook, 27 initial codes such as "Culture", "Leadership", "Physical Environment "," and "Job Satisfaction" were identified. This stage involved systematically deconstructing data beyond its original sequence into a set of initial, non-hierarchical codes directly informed by the data and the overarching research questions (**Table 3.7**).

Table 3.7: Phase 2 codebook for generating initial codes. Generating Initial Coding involved deconstructing the data from its original chronology into an initial set of non-hierarchical codes.

Systematic Data Coding - 27 initial codes identified in Phase 2	Files	References
Autonomy	2	2
Bad Accommodation	4	26
Belonging	3	6
Covid	1	3
Culture	4	10

Good Accommodation	2	3
Guilt	2	2
Induction Meeting	2	2
Job satisfaction	3	11
Mentoring	3	5
Negative Job Satisfaction	1	1
Outdoor Learning	1	1
Padlet	1	2
Parent Relationships	4	14
Peer Support	4	21
Principal	4	16
Reflective Supervision	1	1
relationship with kids	1	1
Resources	2	2
Routine	1	1
Safety	1	1
SET Support	4	22
Staff Absences	2	3
Structures	3	6
Support	2	5
Valued	2	3
Wellbeing Statements	1	1

3.8.1.3 Phase 3 - Generating Initial Themes

Seven categories were established to consolidate initial codes into broader thematic clusters such as "Culture," "Relationships," and "School Buildings." This process involved integrating, renaming, and clustering related codes into broader categories, allowing for a coherent and structured interpretation of the data (**Table 3.8).**

Table 3.8: Phase 3 codebook for generating initial themes and developing categories from coded and collated data. Searching for Themes – involved merging, renaming, distilling, and clustering related codes into broader categories of codes to reconstruct the data into a framework that makes sense to further the analysis.

Seven categories of codes developed from 27 initial codes	Files	References
Culture	4	29
Autonomy	2	2
Belonging	3	6
Culture	4	10
Mentoring	3	5
Outdoor Learning	1	1

Safety	1	1
Valued	2	3
Wellbeing Statements	1	1
Job Satisfaction	3	12
Job satisfaction	3	11
Negative Job Satisfaction	1	1
Leadership	4	21
Mentoring	3	5
Principal	4	16
Relationships	4	41
Mentoring	3	5
Parent Relationships	4	14
Peer Support	4	21
Relationship with kids	1	1
School Buildings	4	29
Bad Accommodation	4	26
Good Accommodation	2	3
Special Education Allocation	4	25
Guilt	2	2
Safety	1	1
SET Support	4	22
Supports	4	16
Guilt	2	2
Induction Meeting	2	2
Padlet	1	2
Reflective Supervision	1	1
Resources	2	2
Routine	1	1
Structures	3	6

This systematic approach ensures that each analytical phase is clearly justified and transparently presented, adhering to the principles of reflexive thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke. By documenting the analytic process, this research adheres to rigorous methodological standards and strengthens its defence against critiques concerning methodological integrity.

3.8.1.4 Phase 4: Reviewing and Developing Themes

Braun and Clarke emphasise the evolving nature of theme development in qualitative research, noting that as researchers process and interpret data, it's natural

for themes to be adjusted to better align with the research narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Clarke, 2021c). During my analysis, I revisited the interview transcripts and assessed my initial thematic categorisations. Some themes initially identified did not fully capture the underlying codes or contribute meaningfully to the overarching research story. Following Braun and Clarke's advice to "be prepared to let things go" (as cited in Clarke, 2021c, 00:37:04), I refined the thematic analysis by merging similar codes and omitting those that did not align with the research aims.

This iterative process led to the identification of more cohesive themes, enhancing the organisational structure of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Freeman & Sullivan, 2019; Thomas, 2017). The final themes were refined to leadership, peer support and relationships, the school's physical environment, allocation of special education resources, and culture and values. These themes were confirmed through discussions with my research tutor, who reinforced that the theme names should encapsulate the core narratives captured in the transcripts. This process underscores that the construction of themes is not just about data sorting but about interpreting the data within the context of the research questions, informed by a social constructionist lens (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2021; Freeman & Sullivan, 2019). This approach aligns with criterion No.15 for conducting robust thematic analysis, ensuring that the themes authentically represent the theoretical and analytical stance of the research.

3.8.1.5 Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes

In phase five of the thematic analysis, the focus was to refine the theme names to ensure they clearly communicated the essence of the collected data and directly addressed the research objectives. Each theme was revisited and described briefly to ascertain if the chosen titles effectively captured their respective narratives (Clarke, 2021c; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This refinement process was crucial to ensure that the theme names were not only compelling and concise but also resonant with the significant insights of the data.

Following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006, p18), who suggest theme names should be "concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about", I engaged in a thoughtful review of the names. The process was

iterative and required balancing clarity with the need to evoke the right contextual nuances within each theme. The finalised names emerged through this meticulous scrutiny and effectively mirrored the vibrant elements within the data, illustrating the narrative woven through the research.

Moreover, a critical discussion with my supervisor inspired the integration of direct quotes from NVivo into the theme names, adding a layer of authenticity and immediacy to the themes. The final themes crafted through this process include: "Leadership that 'has your back'", "'Open and Welcoming': Relationships", "The juxtaposition of school buildings: 'Cold and Miserable' Versus 'a sense of school'", "'I have to see it': School Culture", and "'Totally unfair': Developing School Special Education Allocations and Supports for the Complexity of the Role". This approach helped anchor each theme in the participants' lived experiences, directly linking the empirical data and the thematic expressions.

This stage of analysis not only involved naming the themes but also involved a deeper engagement with the data. I did not just list what was discussed; I constructed a comprehensive research narrative by interpreting the data, applying theoretical frameworks, and integrating relevant academic discourse. This methodological approach is aligned with Braun and Clarke's criteria for good thematic analysis, specifically criteria No.7-9, and demonstrates sensitivity to the contextual complexities as emphasised by Yardley (2000). This thorough process ensures that the thematic structure of the research captures the essence of the data and contributes meaningfully to the broader academic dialogue in the field.

3.9 Stage 4: Follow the Actor: Using Photovoice for Student Voice

3.9.1 Photovoice and Participatory research

This study's methodology (reported further in Chapter 6) in qualitative research primarily employs Photovoice (Sutton-Brown, 2014), a method distinguished by its use of visual techniques to delve into the intricate lived experiences, values, and norms of individuals. This approach resonates with seminal established research

(Gibbs et al., 2002, Schell et al., 2009, Wang, 1999), emphasising the critical role of visual imagery in offering broader cultural insights.

Photovoice, as conceptualised by Wang and Burris (1994). and further developed in other empirical studies (Devine and McGillicuddy, 2019, Luttrell, 2010, Luttrell, 2019), empowers participants, especially those from vulnerable groups, to articulate and enhance their community experiences through photography. PhotoVoice is rooted in feminist theories, Freirean education for critical consciousness, and participatory action research, as discussed by Pain (2012) and Wang *et al.* (2016), and prioritises participant agency and fostering dialogue among all involved parties. It shifts the research perspective from adult-centric interpretations to student-driven expressions, facilitating a dialogue that can shape wellbeing education and policy. This allows the integration of children's viewpoints in a systems-informed positive education model.

The current research implementation of Photovoice adheres to Von Unger's comprehensive seven-step framework (Von Unger, 2012), as described in Table 8 (see **Table 6.1).** In line with Harrison's perspective, this study utilised these visual narratives to gain access to more comprehensive cultural viewpoints and the children's conceptions of their educational environment (Harrison, 2002). This comprehensive methodological approach, combining the theoretical underpinnings of Photovoice with Von Unger's structured framework, ensured that the research was participant-centred, empowering, and yielded rich, insightful data.

This study's chosen methodology was also framed within a children's rights lens, following Article 12 of the Convention of Rights for the Child (CRC), integrating the 'Mosaic approach' to blend traditional observational methods with participatory ones, thus promoting a collaborative knowledge-building process between adults and children (Clark and Moss, 2011). The study setting, a primary school environment, was provided with diverse visual resources and methods such as talk and draw, photo-elicitation, and dialogic interactions, ensuring a rich and varied data collection process. The study's environment allowed for capturing genuine and unaltered children's expressions for four weeks.

3.9.2 Research Sample

The participants for this study were children (n =16) attending a developing school, specifically those from the 2nd and 3rd class, all of whom were under the age of ten. They were recruited through a principal's network connecting various regional schools. The research methods and language employed were meticulously designed to be age-appropriate, considering the participants' cognitive, language, emotional, and social skills at this developmental stage. The research was conducted in a familiar school environment to ensure the comfort and ease of the participants. The continuous assent and wellbeing of the children throughout the research project were maintained with crucial guidance from schoolteachers, who, through daily interactions and established trust-based relationships, played an invaluable supportive role.

3.9.3 Research Ethics while working with Children

Paramount to our approach was the protection of participant privacy, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, particularly in sensitive matters concerning children and their families. This extended to observing child protection norms within the educational settings of the study e.g., Garda (police) vetting for individuals working with children in professional settings. The researcher's obtained Garda clearance in December 2021.

Data collection focused on ethical practices in children's participation, specifically in photography. Comprehensive measures were taken to ensure images were only captured with explicit consent, and children were guided on the importance of seeking permission. Non-consented photographs were promptly deleted to alleviate consent burdens. Publications ensuing from this research will exclude any potentially identifying images unless expressly allowed. Additionally, I adhered to copyright advice from the OLCA, integrating their guidance into our consent

procedures and ensuring the ownership rights of any photographs taken by the children are appropriately managed.

3.9.4 Research Schedule and Sessions

This study's methodology closely mirrored the research conducted by Martin and Buckley's (2020) study. This data collection process spanned four weeks and occurred within the primary school setting.

Session 1: The researcher initiated the introduction of the research project within the primary school context. During this inaugural session, the researcher sought informed consent from the participating children. Informed consent was obtained from the children through informing and consenting. Children could only provide their consent if they fully understood their role in the study and the purpose of the study. To inform the children about the study, the researcher created a picture book detailing the research project, introducing the researcher, and explaining the study's purpose in a visually engaging and child-friendly manner (**see Figure 3.5**). The European Commission Guide was used to inform the development of creating child-friendly versions of written documents (EU, 2012) in a picture book format.

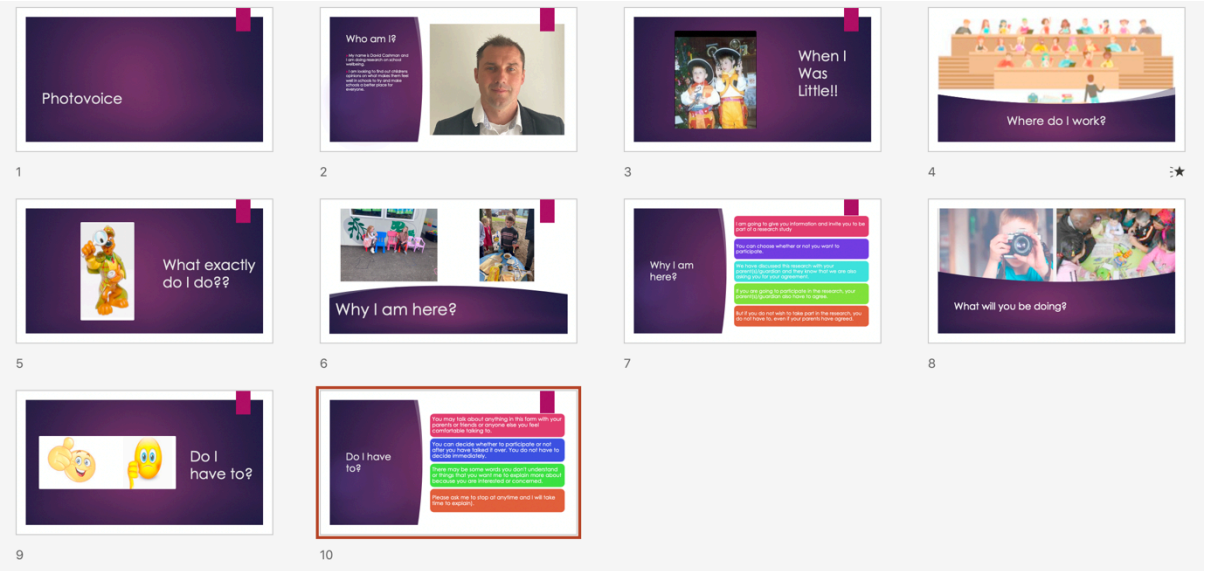


Figure 3.5: Child-Friendly Picture Book.

This approach follows the 'narrative non-fiction' method, which has been recognised as an ethical way to provide information, where the researcher establishes the research context and purpose, outlines the rules of participation, and presents information in the form of a factual narrative, supported by real photographs of people, places, and events (Mayne et al., 2016).

Session 2: Subsequent sessions commenced with a review of the previous session's narrative. In these sessions, I introduced the research themes to the children using photo elicitation. This involved presenting stock photos illustrating caregiver interactions and photographs of the primary school taken by the school's staff (as **Figure 3.6** below). This session's primary objective was to acquaint the children with our research team further and cultivate a sense of comfort with our presence within the primary school environment.



Figure 3.6: Introduction of the research themes to the children using photo elicitation.

Session 3: During this session, I conducted a talk and draw session, implementing the well-established talk and draw method (Hanley et al., 2004). The advantages of such activities include child-friendliness, by-passing the limitations of language, and engagement in an activity (drawing) with which children are familiar (Angell et al., 2015, Horstman et al., 2008). I aimed to elicit the children's nuanced perspectives on their everyday experiences while acclimating them to our presence in the primary school setting. Notably, I used posters as effective prompts for the children, and provided markers, consistent with their prior use in the primary school classroom, to evoke enthusiasm. The session comprised three distinct groups, each consisting of 4-5 children, accompanied by their teacher. Each group was allocated a 20-minute time slot for participation. After completing their colouring and drawing activities, I encouraged the children to affix their drawings onto their preferred photos displayed on the wall (**see Figure 3.7**), originating from the prior photo-elicitation session.



Figure 3.7: Display of the Talk and Draw session.

Session 4: The children were entrusted with digital cameras and received basic instructions on their operation. Their task entailed capturing photographs of anything that made them feel well within the confines of their primary school over two days. The primary school staff provided support in addressing any technical challenges that arose during the execution of this activity.

Session 5: This session involved a 'gallery walk' with printed copies of the photographs captured by the children (**see Figure 3.8**), serving as the primary source of empirical data for our research study (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2007). The children were then invited to participate in a ranking 'activity.' Children were provided with stickers to mark their preferred five photographs. This approach enabled children to select and prioritise their preferred images and facilitated the inclusion of non-verbal children in the discourse. The ranking could be organised vertically, horizontally or a mix of both. This is a thinking skill tool (Rockett and Percival, 2002).



Figure 3.8: Gallery walks with printed copies of the photographs captured by the children.

Session 6: One-on-one interviews were conducted in the school resource room, with one adult researcher per child in these sessions. Following the completion of the task, group discussions ensued, guided by a set of carefully formulated questions, by adapting the questioning into child-friendly versions (Wang and Burris, 1994). For example, questions such as 'What do you perceive within this image?', 'What narrative is being depicted here?' and 'What motivated the capture of this particular image?' (Luttrell, 2013) were reframed as 'Why did you take that photo?', 'What's happening in the photo?', 'What are you doing in the photo?' and 'Did you like having the camera?'

This facilitated the articulation of participants' interpretations of the visuals and encouraged peer-based discussion. I recorded and subsequently transcribed these verbal exchanges. Additionally, follow-up individual interviews were conducted with each of the sixteen case study children to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the children's daily experiences within the school and home environments.

3.9.5 Data Analysis

Unlike the data analysis techniques employed with the principal and teacher datasets (mentioned previously), this study was anchored in grounded theory, beginning in tandem with the data collection protocol, as recommended by established researchers (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Grounded theory is a qualitative research method where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and iteratively to develop a theory "grounded" in the data. It's an inductive approach, meaning a theory emerges from the data rather than being tested against a pre-existing hypothesis (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014, Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Corbin and Strauss, 1990). This data analysis approach ensured immediate immersion into the data, which is crucial for capturing the full spectrum of nuances in classroom settings.

3.9.6 Initial Coding

The initial coding phase involved naming data segments with succinct labels that summarise and categorise the data (Charmaz, 2006). As part of this initial coding stage, the researcher created two frequency tables from both the student talk and draw session, and the photograph sessions (See **Table 3.9** and **Table 3.10**). A comparative analysis, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was then conducted, resulting in 9 common codes.

Table 3.9: Frequency of objects during talk and draw sessions.

Objects/People Drawn	Number of occurrences
Friends	21
School Staff	12

School Physical Environment, including yard and garden	16
Literacy and numeracy Activities, including books, library, and work samples	13
Outdoor Learning Areas	11
PE	10
Artwork samples or utensils	7
After School Program	7
Music (piano, drums, ukuleles)	0

Table 3.10: Frequency of objects photographed.

Objects/People Photographed	Number of occurrences
Friends	29
School Staff	28
School Physical Environment including sensory room, nurture room and outdoor areas	28
Literacy and Numeracy Activities, including books, library, and work samples	13
Outdoor Learning Areas	8
Artwork samples or utensils	8
Music (piano, drums, ukuleles)	4

3.9.7 Focused Coding

Following the methodology proposed by Charmaz (2015), focused coding was then employed to elevate significant codes into conceptual categories. This iterative process involved re-interrogating the data across all nine classes and refining categories through triangulation, which included methodological triangulation across different data forms such as transcripts and visual data (photographs, drawings, and posters). This phase was pivotal for conceptualising the data from varied analytical perspectives.

Table 3.11: Methodological triangulation across different data forms such as transcripts and visual data (photographs, drawings, and posters).

Row Headings	Talk & Draw	Gallery Walk & Photographs	Child Interview	Child Focus Group	Researcher Observation
Friends	21	29	·	·	·
School Staff	12	28	·	·	·

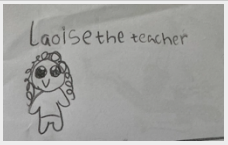
School Physical Environment (including sensory room, nurture room, and outdoor areas)	16	28	·	·	·
Literacy and Numeracy Activities (including books, library, and work samples)	13	13	·		·
Physical Education	10			·	·
Outdoor Learning	11	8	·		·
Artwork samples or utensils	7	8			
Music (piano, drums, ukuleles)	0	4			

In **Table 3.11**, by gathering the data sets from each method, a visual theme that reveals what activities the child is most frequently interested in based on data from talk and draw, gallery walk and photographs, child interviews and focus groups. Finally, it is pertinent to acknowledge the researcher as a visible part of the process by including researcher observations (Clark & Moss, 2001).

3.9.8 Mosaic Approach

The Mosaic approach is a form of participatory learning through an action-based way of "listening," acknowledging children and adults as co-constructors of meaning. It is an integrated approach combining both visual and verbal aspects (Clark & Moss, 2011). The idea behind the Mosaic approach is that researchers collect data through various means. These are what Clark and Moss consider "individual tiles." The researcher then puts these individual pieces together to form one big picture, just like how many little tiles are formed into one big mosaic.

Table 3.12: The mosaic approach was used to link "individual tiles" of data into one big mosaic.

Theme	Subtheme	Photo	Key Points	Quotes/Specific Findings
Relationships	Pupil-Teacher/ SNA Relationships		• Nurturing dynamics • Positive learning environment • Academic engagement and outcomes	"Staff make me feel safe in school and help me learn as well," "Teachers make me feel safe in school." "A very nice principal."
	Peer Relationships		• Social skills development • Impact on learning • Contribution to wellbeing	"Friends make me feel happy and help me when I am sad." "My friends make me feel happy."
	Safety		• Personal Safety • Psychological Safety	"Staff make me feel safe in school and help me learn as well."
Space and Physical Environment	Sensory Space		• Sensory exploration • Self-regulation • Emotional wellbeing.	"Sensory room help me calm down."
	Nurture or Calm Space		• Security • Comfort • Emotional support.	"I love going to the nurture room. I love the freedom there and that you can bring some snugglies, so you have a calm space to do your work."

	Outdoor Learning		• Nature bond • Ecological consciousness • Hands-on learning	"The garden and the plants make me feel happy." "The outdoors is my favourite thing in school because I love forest school."
Learning and Curriculum	Academic Curriculum		• Curriculum structure/subjects • Child-centric teaching approach • Practical application of curriculum • Student engagement and satisfaction	"Learning makes me feel good." "Helps me and helps me learn things."
	The Arts and Music		• Creative expression • Emotional investment • Therapeutic benefits	"[Piano] sound and music listening experience." "Art as a calming activity."
	Physical Education		• Physical activity • Social development	"I like to be outside so I can run and do athletics."

In this research study, various categories of data were merged into four primary conceptual themes, with accompanying subthemes delineated in an accompanying table and represented metaphorically by interlocking 'tiles' (**Table 3.12**). These tiles symbolise the distinct facets of a child's communicative methods and school experiences, contributing to their wellbeing. Themes such as pupil-teacher interaction, peer relationships, and the learning environment are explored in detail, illustrating the interconnectedness of these factors in shaping young learners' educational journeys.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the data

Creswell (2003) recommends that researchers acknowledge eight validation strategies, advising that researchers should engage in at least two verification processes. These verification strategies include prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review and debriefing, negative case analysis, clarification of researcher bias, member checking, rich, thick description, and external audit. There are four validation strategies relevant to the current research, including:

3.10.1 Triangulation

The objective of triangulation is to use two or more methods in research to build a more comprehensive view of the study findings (Heale & Forbes, 2013). As a result, this research used multiple methodological procedures including interviews, focus groups, and participatory photovoice) with various participants principals, teacher and pupils to extend the depth and quality of results in the overall findings to mitigate against subjectivity.

Table 3.13: Critique of Methods Used

Actor Group	Data Collection Method	Critique (Strengths and Limitations)	Mitigation Strategies Used
School Principals	- Focus group interview (n=9) - Semi-structured 1:1 interviews (n=3)	✅ Rich insight from experienced professionals ✅ Focus group enabled collective reflection ⚠️ Dominant voices **could potentially** influence discourse ⚠️ Quieter participants risked marginalisation ⚠️ Group dynamics shaped interpretation ⚠️ Insider status required heightened reflexivity	- Used active facilitation techniques to draw out quieter voices - Allowed space for silent reflection, then follow-up individually - Triangulated focus group themes with 1:1 interviews - Maintained a reflexive journal to track positionality and reactions

Teachers	- Focus group interviews (n=20)	✅ Nuanced insights into policy-practice tensions ✅ Focus groups supported theme triangulation ⚠️ Time constraints limited some focus groups ⚠️ Overpowering participants occasionally dominated ⚠️ Body language signalled discomfort not always voiced	- Carefully structured focus group protocols - Used equal-turn-taking strategies - Reflected on non-verbal cues in analytic memos - Follow-up interviews helped clarify emerging silences or uncertainties
Students	- Participatory Photovoice (n=16) - Talk & Draw sessions - Gallery Walks with Focus Groups	✅ Method promoted child agency and expression ✅ Visual tools accessed tacit and emotional knowledge ⚠️ Risk of adult interpretation overshadowing child voice ⚠️ Limited verbal elaboration among some participants	- Used child-friendly prompts and visuals to scaffold expression - Allowed co-interpretation of images with students when possible - Validated interpretations with multiple researchers - Included artefacts (photographs, drawings) to anchor analysis in the child's own lens

Each method offered strengths and limitations. These were shaped by factors such as participant power dynamics, age, context, and the relational positioning of the researcher. As a result, careful consideration was given to how each approach was designed, implemented, and analysed. **Table 3.13** outlines the data collection and analysis strategies used with each actor group. I also included a critical appraisal of their strengths and limitations. Importantly, the final column details the mitigation strategies adopted to uphold trustworthiness, amplify quieter voices, to try to uphold the integrity of findings. This approach reflects the relational and emergent nature of the research, guided by both Actor-Network Theory and posthumanist pragmatism.

3.10.2 Peer review or debriefing

Throughout this study, my research supervisors, Dr Wesley O'Brien, and Professor Fiona Chambers were the researcher primary peer debriefers who supported developments and data, as they emerged. At every supervision meeting, minutes were kept ensuring records detailing each stage of the research (See **Figure 3.9**).

PhD Meeting (David Cashman) Minutes

Venue	Coffee Dock		
Date of Meeting	24th January 23		
Minutes taken by	Dave		
Apologies (initials)			
Present (initials)	DC, WOB,		
Time Meeting Opened	3.00	Closed	4.00

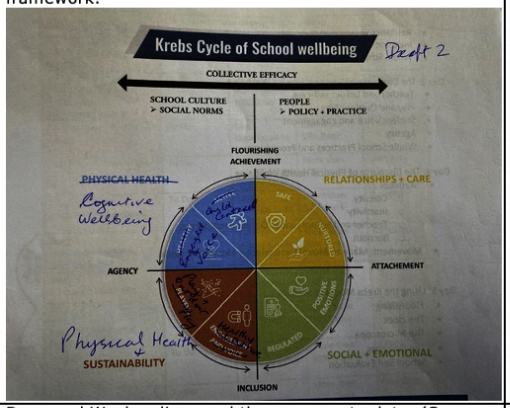
ISSUE:	DECISION/ACTION:	BY:
Progress	• Dave outlined the framework as a "Systems Informed Model of Positive Education. • The Data has informed the latest draft of the conceptual framework.  	Dave
Progress	• Dave and Wesley discussed the progress to date. (See Below). Wesley noted that the pilot might not be needed in light of the amount of data collected so far. This is to be discussed with Fiona over the next 2/3 weeks. • Wesley suggested a timeline to have first draft submitted in December 23. • ACTION: Dave to put a realistic timeline together this week. • Paper accepted for the CACSS conference. • Paper to be submitted for EERA Conference Glasgow by Feb 1st.	Dave

Figure 3.9 Notetaking/minutes from Supervisor Meetings

In addition, the research was presented at University College Cork Research Roundtable where academics from the school of education provided a forum for debrief. This allowed the research to gain much support and indeed a suggestion to

iterate a 3D model evident in chapter 7. Furthermore, chapter 6 in this thesis is a published peer-reviewed article and therefore underwent the peer-review process with experts in the field of health and wellbeing education, further establishing the validity of the presented research. Chapters 4, and 5 have been extensively reviewed by both PhD supervisors and are currently under review for peer reviewed academic journals.

3.10.3 Clarifying researcher bias

As a principal, in one of the schools at the centre of this study. I attempted to ensure the highest levels of professionalism as a principal and a researcher. I took very concrete steps to achieve this goal while also carrying out 'day to day' Principal duties with absolute professionalism. However, I have also included guidelines for dealing with insider status in this research. In relation to bias, I also took many steps as an insider can take to guard against bias as per **section 3.3.4**. This is facilitated by an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience. There is also a responsibility to understand where the researcher is positioned and to explore how their status may affect the research process and its outcomes. In relation to this latter point, Costerly (2010) emphasises the importance of articulating one's own perspective or premise clearly; "Your insights as an insider are valuable because of your depth of knowledge, but you should also demonstrate that you understand alternative perspectives" (p. 33). As a result, I also critiqued my data collection methods to see some of the limitations which may cause bias (see **Table 3.14**). I also outlined how I could try to mitigate against subjectivity and bias.

Table 3.14: Limitations of research methods

Method	Limitations	Researcher Reflexivity
Focus Groups	Risk of dominant voices and peer pressure: outspoken participants can overshadow quieter ones, and some individuals may conform to group opinion (groupthink)	I was critically aware of how my prompts and behaviour influence group dynamics and who speaks (Morgan, 1997; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). As a result, I remained *humble* facilitating discussion

	potentially skewing the data (Kitzinger, 1995). Confidentiality, power and sensitivity concerns: participants might be hesitant to share sensitive information in a group, and confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed among group members (Morgan, 1997; Nyumba et al., 2018).	rather than dominating it, and ensuring all voices are heard (Barbour, 2008). I also reflected on how group context shaped the data, acknowledging that apparent consensus might reflect social dynamics (Nyumba et al., 2018).
One-on-One Interviews (semi-structured)	**Potential for bias and influence** Leading questions or even subtle cues (tone, body language) can influence how participants respond (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviewees may also tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, a form of social desirability bias, especially if power dynamics are at play (e.g. interviewer is an school principal). **Resource intensive & limited breadth** Conducting interviews is time-consuming with only one person heard at a time. Transcribing and analysing lengthy conversations is laborious (Patton, 2015). The sample size in interview studies is often small, so findings offer depth but not broad generalizability. Additionally, interviews rely on participants' verbal ability and willingness to	**Interviewer reflexivity** I reflected on my role as the research "instrument" and acknowledged my own positionality (e.g. status, gender, insider/outsider) and interviewing style might shape participants' responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Practicing humility here means approaching each interview with genuine openness and listening actively, rather than imposing my own assumptions. Keeping a reflexive journal after interviews and noting moments where a question may have led the interviewee or where my feelings might have influenced the conversation helped in identifying biases (Seidman, 2019). **Ensuring participant voice** I used techniques like member checking or at least follow-up clarification: summarising what the interviewee said and asking if that interpretation is correct (Patton, 2015). I was also cautious about overinterpreting – staying close to the participant's actual words and meanings. I also tried to acknowledge where my own perspective might be colouring the interpretation.

	share; not everyone is equally articulate or open, which can lead to uneven data quality (Seidman, 2019).	
Photovoice	**Ethical and practical challenges:** Requires careful attention to ethics such as obtaining consent for any people appearing in images and protecting privacy (See **Appendices**). The method is also resource and time intensive. **Interpretation difficulties:** Photos don't speak for themselves. Without participant narratives, researchers might misinterpret images. There is a risk of researchers imposing their own meanings on photographs (Packard, 2008). Inconsistency in how images are discussed can affect data depth, and not all participants may be equally expressive in explaining their photos	**Participatory reflexivity:** I tried to maintain a facilitative stance acting as partners rather than leaders. It was crucial to let the students drive the narrative and meaning of their photos, with me critically reflecting on power dynamics (Packard, 2008). **Interpretation with humility:** In analysis, I continuously checked my own interpretations against participants' explanations, acknowledging that participants are the experts on their own images (Wang & Burris, 1997). I also maintained reflexive journals to remain aware of their biases and ensure the participants' voices remain central in theme development (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Following Costerly's (2010) guidance, I sought to balance the depth of my insider insights with an openness to alternative perspectives. To further strengthen the credibility of this study, external mechanisms of validation were also employed. The following section outlines the role of internal and external audit procedures in safeguarding the trustworthiness and academic integrity of the research process.

3.10.4 Internal and External audit

The researcher consulted various external agents throughout data collection and data analysis to review the qualitative procedures used. Over three years, the lead researcher presented and opened the research to external critique at approximately eleven formal presentations. The study was also subjected to an academic review at

the beginning of year 3 of the PhD and in semester two of year 4, as per new university procedures. Six university academics attended in year 3 and critically reviewed the research progression and direction. In year 4, two university academics from the School of Education attended to review progression, who were not part of the supervision team.

3.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe and align the researcher's theoretical undercurrent with the methodological decisions made throughout each stage of this research. Adopting a transmethodological approach has allowed us to do this and in doing so "make space for and bring to light the often messy, non-linear, and complex research processes that form our methodologies" (Khawaja and Kousholy, 2021, p 2). This allowed us to become entangled in multiple forms of data collection with each stakeholder which was analysed rigorously. Within this complexity, I was enabled to understand our reality in relation to wellbeing in schools.

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Chapter 4 The enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for developing school principals: An actor network analysis

Preamble

The following article reports on the enablers and inhibitors for students in a developing primary school context. This is manuscript is currently under review in the Taylor and Francis Irish Education Journal. The following is the citation for this article:

Cashman, D., O'Brien, W. and Chambers, F.C. (2025), "The enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for developing school principals: An actor network analysis".

Statement of authorship

I hereby declare that I, David Cashman, am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

1. I was the principal investigator responsible for all the data collected (2022) in this chapter. I organised all stages of data collection consisting of, contacting all primary school principals, equipment preparation, data storage, data cleaning and data inputting.
2. Organised each stage of the data collection which was an important component of this baseline study.
3. Made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data for the work.
4. Wrote the first draft of the full article and contributed significantly to the subsequent redrafts until submission.
5. Final approval of the version to be published, and agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

4.1 Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the complexities of 'wellbeing' among developing school principals in Ireland through the lens of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 1987; Latour and WooIgar, 2013). Given the varied interpretations of wellbeing across different disciplines, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for principals. It investigates the interplay between personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of students, staff, and the broader school community within the unique context of new/developing schools.

Methods and Data Sources: Data were collected through three focus groups and three semi-structured interviews with 12 school principals in Ireland, conducted online via Microsoft Teams in November and December 2021. The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA).

Findings: The study found that school structures and cultures significantly impact the wellbeing of the school community. Positive relationships and supportive school cultures were deemed more effective for wellbeing than commercial programs. Challenges such as special education allocation and inadequate school buildings were highlighted. The lack of guidance for new school principals was a recurring concern.

Originality/Value: This research reveals the complex networks influencing wellbeing in developing schools, offering insights into how these networks can be realigned to improve the overall wellbeing of the school community.

Keywords: Wellbeing, Education, Schools, Education leadership, Principals, Actor-Network Theory, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

4.2 Introduction

School leadership is increasingly complex, demanding principals balance educational guidance, administrative tasks, staff oversight, and community relations

while managing their own wellbeing (Fullan 2014; Heffernan and Selwyn 2021; Rahimi and Arnold 2022; Arnold et al. 2023). Well-documented complexities include heavy administration, frequent interactions, unexpected events, and out-of-hours demands, leading to significant mental health impacts and job effectiveness challenges (Stone-Johnson and Weiner 2020; Bush 2022; Arnold et al. 2023). Recent studies have highlighted the profound challenges faced by principals, with over 45% experiencing high to severe stress levels (Rahimi and Arnold 2022; Arnold et al. 2021). The unsustainable nature of their roles, characterised by excessive workload and rapid pace, detracts from their core duties in leadership, teaching, and learning (Tintore et al. 2022). Despite some supportive elements within the work environment, principals only occasionally experience high-quality leadership support and social solidarity from colleagues, with prominent stressors including the volume of work and insufficient focus on educational leadership, leading to high stress and burnout rates (Rahimi and Arnold 2022; Arnold et al. 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, as school leaders navigated the return to in-school education with new COVID-19 control measures, staff shortages, and concerns over community health (Arnold, Rahimi, and Riley 2021; Diliberti, Schwartz, and Grant 2021). The added pressures from these unprecedented times have heightened concerns about the impact of leadership duties on principals' mental health and overall wellbeing (Burke and Dempsey 2020; Riley, Rahimi, and Arnold 2021). The rate of work-related burnout experienced by Irish primary principals compared to a variety of professionals in multiple international studies pointing to a significant imbalance that adversely affects their wellbeing (McHugh 2023).

Given these challenges, the discourse around principal wellbeing has evolved from focusing predominantly on stress and burnout to embracing a comprehensive framework that includes self-realisation and recognising a variety of contributing factors (McLeod and Wright 2016; Brady and Wilson 2020). Wellbeing is now regarded as the interplay of numerous elements, advocating for a holistic approach that encompasses managing occupational stress to prevent burnout, satisfying basic

psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and minimising need frustration (McHugh 2021, 2023). Additionally, work motivation, mindful engagement, job satisfaction, and the perception of fairness in employment procedures and conditions are critical components that collectively enhance overall wellbeing in the principal's workplace. This shift is increasingly prominent in educational leadership research and policy, recognising principal wellbeing as multifaceted and influenced by a complex set of factors (Schleicher 2018; Harris and Jones 2020).

This study aims to further explore principal wellbeing in newly established or developing[4] schools in Ireland through Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 1987; Latour and WooIgar 2013). ANT posits that ideas, practices, and perceived realities are constructed through networks of relationships among various actors, referred to as 'assemblages' (Law and Singleton 2013). By examining how wellbeing is perceived and shaped within the Irish educational system, this research seeks to uncover how interconnected relationships and practices impact principals' wellbeing, thereby enhancing our understanding of the dynamics at play in educational leadership. The dual presence of such inhibitors, alongside limited enabling factors, calls for an in-depth examination of the conditions that promote or hinder the wellbeing of school principals, proposing strategies to enhance support structures and resource allocation to help school principals manage their roles more effectively and sustain their health and wellbeing.

4.3 Aims of the study

This research paper focuses on stage 1 of a PhD research study concerned with the design and evaluation of a conceptual wellbeing framework for Irish primary schools. The conceptual framework will be informed by the data from key actors involved in developing schools (such as Principals, Teachers and Pupils). This stage involves three focus groups with nine principals, and three semi-structured interviews with three principals of new/developing schools. The aim of this study

[4] A developing school is defined as a school where the enrolment on 30th September of a given year, exceeds the enrolment on 30th September of the previous year by a numerical minimum of 1 class stream plus 5. In the context of this research, developing schools are noted to be new schools established after 2013 as they are still growing by 1 class stream every year.

was to ascertain the experience of wellbeing in the context of a new/developing Irish primary school. Specifically, the researcher sought to explore (i) how wellbeing in developing schools is constructed within the Irish context, alongside (ii) exploring the challenges that principals experience and (iii) the 'issues' or actors that help to enable or inhibit wellbeing.

4.4 Methodology

This study investigates the wellbeing of developing school principals in Ireland, exploring the complex interplay of various factors through the lens of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 1987; Latour and WooIgar, 2013). Several elements shape the principals' experiences of wellbeing, including social interests, existing networks or network formations, power structures within a network, influence structures, the political nature of the network, and attitudes (Carroll, 2002). In this research, wellbeing comprises several physical, psychological, and philosophical discourses identified by Spratt (2015), such as physical health promotion, social and emotional literacy, care, flourishing, and sustainability. The framework aims to incorporate insights from principals, teachers, pupils, and parents as key stakeholders involved in school development. To comprehensively understand the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing among school principals, it is essential to examine the specific factors and dynamics at play within newly established or developing schools in Ireland. The following sections will detail the aims of this research, the methodology employed, and the conceptual framework designed to capture the multifaceted nature of principal wellbeing. By incorporating insights from key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, pupils, and parents, this study seeks to provide a holistic view of the conditions that influence wellbeing and propose strategies for enhancing support structures within the educational environment

4.4.1 Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

ANT posits that ideas, practices, and 'facts' are effects of heterogeneous webs of relations between actors or 'assemblages' (Law, 2008). It diverges from conventional theories by not seeking to explain 'why' but to narrate 'how'

connections or relationships occur or fail, emphasising the intricacies of relationality and materiality (Law, 2008a). By tracing these intricacies, ANT describes the complex practices through which ideas can materialise, systems develop, and actors become powerful (Gorur, 2014). Interviews using an ANT-informed methodology are designed to learn about the performative entanglement between humans and non-humans (Thompson, 2012). ANT-inspired studies trace the micro-interactions through which diverse elements or "actants" are performed into being REF.

4.4.2 Population and sample

Fifty-eight new schools have been opened by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) since 2013. A clustered, convenience sample of new school principals (N=26) were invited to participate in this research study (October 2021). The specific sample of Educate Together[5] principals were chosen based on accessibility to the research participants due to my position as a school principal. This also brought the issue of the insider status. An insider-researcher is an individual who conducts research within their own organisation or community. This insider status presents specific challenges, particularly in interactions with peers, colleagues, and study participants, such as students, teachers, and other principals. These challenges necessitate careful management to uphold the integrity of the research. According to Costerly et al. (2010), the researcher bears a significant responsibility to those involved in the research, ensuring both high-quality research outcomes and the ethical management of power relations. Addressing potential bias is crucial; researchers must employ strategies such as attentively considering participant feedback, conducting initial evaluations of data, and ensuring triangulation in data collection methods (Costerly et al., 2010).

Recruitment procedures involved the lead researcher networking via the Educate Together Principals Support Group (ET Beag). The ET Beag group was set up by the

[5] In the Irish national school system, each school has a patron/patronage. The patron typically sets up the school, defines the characteristic ethos of the school and manages the school on behalf of the Department of Education. Individual schools are managed by Boards of Management on behalf of the patron. Educate Together is an example of a Patron.

principals of new Educate Together schools in Ireland to support Developing school principals.

Table 4.1: Background Information of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Experience as Principal	Patronage	Focus Group /Interview Number
Mary	Female	Teaching Principal	3	Educate Together	1
Ben	Male	Teaching Principal	8	Educate Together	1
Noelle	Female	Teaching Principal	3	Educate Together	1
Grace	Female	Administrative Principal	1	Educate Together	2
Tessa	Female	Teaching Principal	1	Educate Together	2
Patricia	Female	Teaching Principal	6	Educate Together	3
Sarah	Female	Teaching Principal	4	Educate Together	3
Marie	Female	Administrative Principal	3	Educate Together	3
Brian	Male	Administrative Principal	9	Educate Together	4
Kate	Female	Administrative Principal	5	Community National School	5
Rose	Female	Administration Principal	2	Community National School	6

From the invited principals (N=26), a 34.6% response rate was achieved, with a final research sample size of 12 participants involved in either the focus groups or semi-structured interviews. Two of the recruited principals were principals of Community National Schools[6], and were recruited through a principals' network.

[6] Similar to Educate Together, Community National Schools are schools defined by a Multi-denominational ethos. Local Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are the patrons of

This was to ensure that the experience of principals of other patronages[7] were represented in the research. Participants have been provided with pseudonyms throughout this paper, and all personal details have been removed to protect the identity of participants (see **Table 4.1**).

4.4.3 Piloting Focus Groups

Before conducting the focus groups on MS Teams, a pilot focus group interview was carried out to refine the process. This pilot, conducted in October 2021 via the MS Teams platform, included three new school principals and was preceded by the design of preliminary interview schedules. The pilot served several purposes. It helped troubleshoot potential difficulties with the focus group questions and anticipate problems that could emerge during the interview process. Potential difficulties include the researcher talking too much rather than letting participants talk or asking questions in inappropriate ways that participants could not understand. The pilot also allowed the researcher to calculate the length of interviews and gain initial insights on potential areas to further explore during the online interviews. As a result, some questions were reformulated, while others were added or removed (Adams and Cox, 2008).

The focus group guide questions in the pilot elicited detailed and thoughtful responses, providing a stimulus for conversation. Based on the outcomes of the pilot, the researcher scaled back the number of questions to seven and included prompts for each question. These questions each had a rationale, covering biographical information, knowledge of wellbeing, collective efficacy, physical wellbeing, relationships and care, philosophical discourse of flourishing, and social and emotional wellbeing.

4.4.4 Interview Procedure

Community National Schools. ETBs are state bodies with responsibility for education and training in Community National Schools.

[7] In the Irish national school system, each school has a patron/patronage. The patron typically sets up the school, defines the characteristic ethos of the school and manages the school on behalf of the Department of Education. Individual schools are managed by Boards of Management on behalf of the patron.

The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, ensuring convenience and accessibility for all involved parties. The interview protocol included several key steps. Initially, participants received detailed information sheets explaining the study's aims, methods, and ethical considerations. They were also asked to sign consent forms, acknowledging their voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time. The focus group sessions, each lasting between 40 to 50 minutes, were facilitated using a semi-structured interview guide. This guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences and perceptions of wellbeing. Key topics covered in the focus groups included biographical information, knowledge of wellbeing, collective efficacy, physical wellbeing, relationships/care, and the philosophical discourse of flourishing and social and emotional wellbeing. These sessions were recorded with participants' consent to maintain accurate records and facilitate in-depth analysis. The University College Cork (UCC) Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) approved the study Log 2021-090 in September 2021.

Table 4.2: Principal and Teacher Interview Schedule

	Questions	Prompts	Rationale
	Personal and School		
1	Can you tell me a bit about yourself and teaching experience?		Biographical Information
2	What supports were provided when you joined the staff of a developing school?	In hindsight, is there anything in addition which you would have liked? (e.g. handbook, online resources etc.)	Individual stage of change
3	What does wellbeing mean to you? Can you comment on what aspects of working in a developing school inhibits your wellbeing?	What does an ideal level / condition of wellbeing at work look like to you? What is your ideal experience of wellbeing at work?	Knowledge of wellbeing
4	What wellbeing programmes are currently implemented in your school for pupils, staff and parents?	Can you tell me why you decided to use these programmes and well as training involved?	Collective Efficacy
	Environmental wellbeing		
5	Describe how the school's physical environment promotes wellbeing for staff?	To what degree are you able to take breaks during the day when you need them? To what degree are you able to use lunchtimes as free time for yourself?	Physical Wellbeing
6	How would you describe your relationships with: Students/colleagues/parents/guardians? Give an example to showcase this?	Do you feel that you are fully able to support your colleagues? Why? Why not?	Relationships/care collective efficacy
7	Describe your job satisfaction	How far do you feel energised at work? How far do you feel stress free at work? Describe how you manage / cope with stress at work	Philosophical discourse of flourishing Social and emotional wellbeing

4.4.5 Data Analysis

I transcribed the focus group (FG) sessions, capturing the discussions verbatim. NVivo software facilitated the organisation of data into categories. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2021), underscored the analysis process. This approach emphasises a deep immersion in qualitative data and highlights the critical role of researcher reflexivity. Initially, the process entailed

extensive readings and subsequent re-readings of the FG transcripts, which allowed for a thorough familiarisation with the nuanced contexts presented. This step was followed by a detailed coding phase, where data were methodically categorised into coherent segments. At stage 3 of the coding process, 39 initial codes were identified, which were subsequently refined down to 6 main themes, considering the influence of the researcher's theoretical and subjective perspectives on these interpretations. To ensure robustness and mitigate researcher bias, themes were corroborated with existing literature, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The thematic refinement stage involved reviewing and confirming the themes, ensuring each was robustly supported by the data and coherently presented. Throughout the analysis, a reflexive journal was developed using NVivo's memo function, which was instrumental in recording insights on how the researchers' perspectives might have influenced the analysis. This practice was pivotal in highlighting the interplay between researcher and data, a core component of RTA. Such reflexivity ensured that the themes were not only representative of the data but also meaningful and contextually relevant to the study's aims. This process provided a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing principal wellbeing in developing schools.

The study utilised a roadmap of various phases to understand how social actions influence wellbeing, relevant to the research methodology. These phases, outlined in **Table 4.3** and adapted from McBride (2000), served as the foundation for this study's research methodology. This structured approach facilitated the emergence of themes, or "problematizations," as Latour (2005) described, allowing theoretical concepts to subsequently shape these themes.

Additionally, an ANT Analysis Diagram (AAD) (Payne, 2016) was employed to observe actor interactions and construct an Actor-Network Model that encompasses both human and non-living entities. This model examined their impact on the participants' perspectives of wellbeing. Payne's notation uses distinct box styles to represent the three types of objects (fluid, immutable mobile, and fire) within a

network. Solid lines represent fluid objects; double lines depict immutable mobiles, which are fixed; and dashed lines indicate fire, representing absent-presence objects that may not always exist but have an impact (Payne, 2017). Payne (2017) also introduced a lozenge box to symbolise relationships. An AAD was constructed based on the analysed data, as depicted in **Figure 4.1**.

Table 4.3: Phases of Adopting the ANT Approach (adapted from McBride, 2000)

Stage 1	Description
Identify the actors	Comprise of human or non-human actors which influence or becomes influenced by other actor's policies and practices.
Investigate the actors	Understanding the character of the stakeholders through interviews with network representatives, accessing documentation, understanding their attitudes, interactions, interests, etc.
Identify actor interactions ('Follow the Actors)	Tracing interactions between stakeholders to explore the level of influence between stakeholders (e.g. trust and control).
Construct an actor-network model	Construct an actor-network model to determine for example, the networks complexity, cohesion, strength, and influence.
Examine irreversibility	Determine to what degree it is difficult to make a change, e.g. through understanding the culture and the nature of acceptance in the network.
Source of inhibitors and enablers	Determine who enables and inhibits actions to shape wellbeing and the network under investigation, e.g. wellbeing attitudes, resistance, or network infrastructure.
Tracing actions	Identify what activities led to the alignment of the actor network, for example, training.
Reporting on the actor-network	Report on the overall nature of the network and explain how social actions shapes wellbeing within the network.

The analysis of focus group discussions, supported by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), revealed a complex interplay of enablers and inhibitors to a principals wellbeing in developing schools. The following section presents the study's findings, identifying

the enablers and inhibitors of principal wellbeing . By drawing on participant narratives and visualisation through ANT, the findings provide a nuanced understanding of the lived realities of developing school principals.

4.5 Findings:

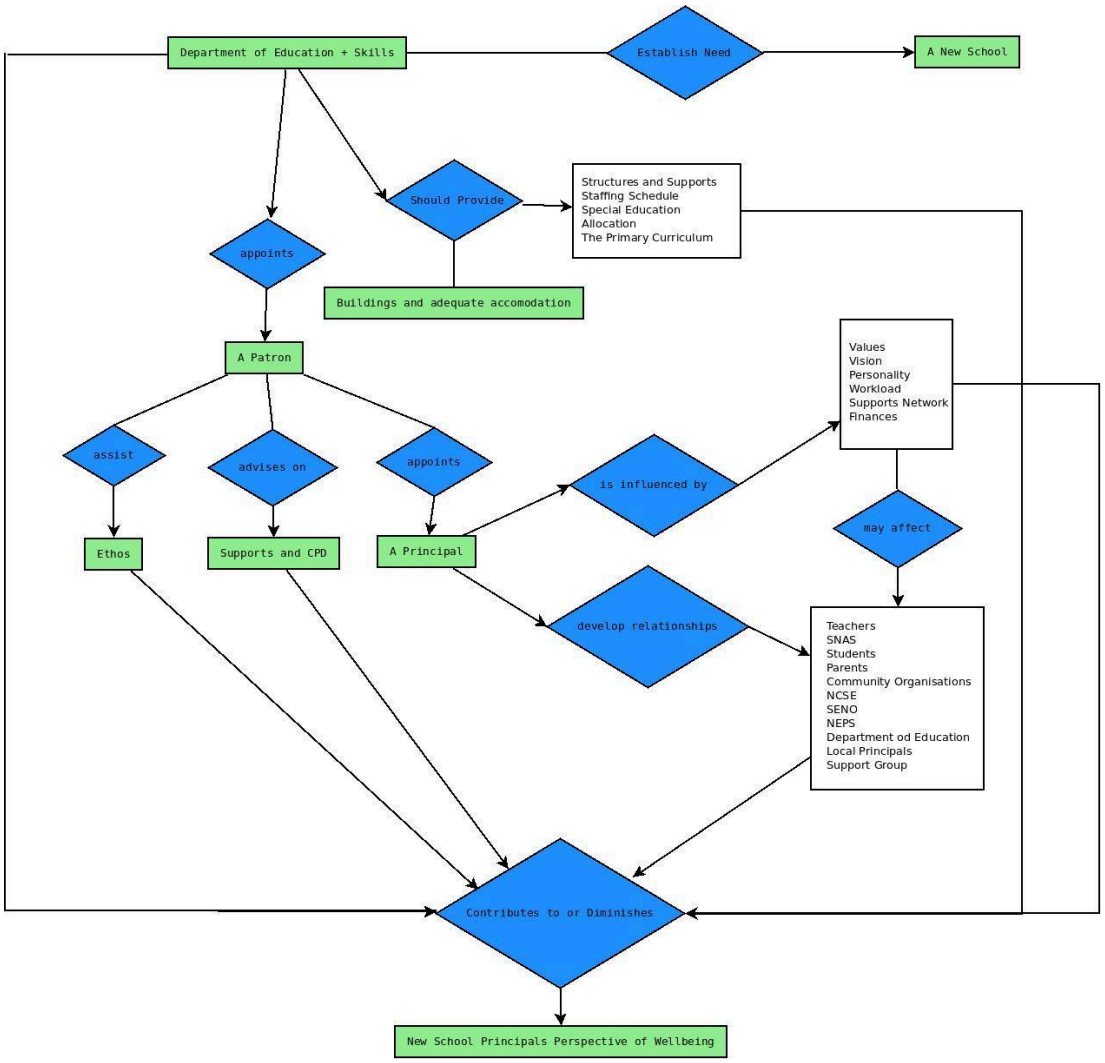


Figure 4.1: ANT Analysis Diagram of New School Principals Perspective of Wellbeing

This study investigated the wellbeing of principals in developing schools, utilising Actor-Network Theory (Latour 1987; Latour and WooIgar 2013) to uncover various factors that enhance or undermine their wellbeing. ANT provides a nuanced framework to understand the complexities of wellbeing by examining the interconnected relationships among various actors. These actors include human

participants such as principals, teachers, and students, as well as non-human elements like policies, resources, and school infrastructure.

The research identified significant enablers of principals' wellbeing, including autonomy, which empowers principals and provides them with a sense of control over their work. Supportive relationships and a positive school culture foster an environment where principals feel valued and connected. Mentoring offers guidance and reduces feelings of isolation, while job satisfaction is heightened by the ability to positively influence educational outcomes. However, the study also highlights several inhibitors to wellbeing. Superficial wellbeing initiatives often serve as mere tokenism and do not address the underlying issues principals face. Inadequate school buildings and resources, particularly in temporary settings, impose significant stress on principals. Additionally, the lack of support for administrative and educational needs further exacerbates the challenges they encounter.

The findings reveal the dual nature of these factors, demonstrating that each can simultaneously act as an enabler and an inhibitor depending on the context. For instance, while leadership roles can provide direction and purpose, they can also lead to high stress due to overwhelming responsibilities, especially when resources are lacking. Similarly, while positive school cultures can enhance principals' wellbeing, insufficient infrastructure and administrative support can significantly detract from it. By tracing these intricate networks of relationships and interactions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing principal wellbeing in newly established schools. This insight is crucial for developing effective support structures and policies that can better address the needs of school principals, ultimately enhancing their wellbeing and effectiveness in their roles.

4.5.1 'Relationships are the most important thing bar nothing'

The discursive theme of relationships was identified as a major theme in data analysis. Caring relationships and school culture emerged as major enablers of

wellbeing for principals. Findings revealed that each school has its own culture, demonstrated by relationships, behaviours and interactions. According to both focus group and interview accounts, developing schools appear to develop a unique bond with their stakeholders, where all the teachers, students, parents, and wider community are very much invested in the development of a relational culture within developing schools. (Grace, FG2, 20th October 2021) described a whole school approach to the development of relationships stating ‘we’re a school where relationships are at the heart of everything we do. The same participant elaborated further by stating that ‘relationships are the most important thing bar nothing, and to be honest, and in terms of wellbeing, if you don’t have a relationship with somebody, they’re not going to come to you if they’re not feeling great or things aren’t going well. (Grace, FG2, 20th October 2021)

The primary relationship noted for the principals were the relationships with school staff. Tessa added that ‘when you have a developing school, there’s a great sense of camaraderie and closeness and working together, so I would say there probably isn’t a huge degree of separation between me as principal and the general staff’ (Tessa, FG2, 20th October 2021). Grace followed up stating that when first taking over as principal building ‘relationships with everybody that was the goal, but particularly with the staff. They’re a lovely group, they really are, they’re very dedicated, very hard working, and there’s a great fun about them’ (Grace, FG2, 20th October 2021). Principals also noted the extraordinary role of the school secretary in enabling their wellbeing. Brian outlined how his ‘secretary has been an absolute unbelievable help, just she’s like the fountain of all knowledge, and even just for support, and she’s the one that kind of says to me, ‘You’re doing okay. things are going well’ (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022). In certain cases, respondents noted how relationships with staff had the potential to inhibit wellbeing. This was particularly relevant for Sarah who noted how ‘one or two people that can kind of stir the pot and make things into such a huge deal that it’s nearly impossible to come back from it’ (Sarah, FG3, 21st October 2021).

The relationships that proved to be particularly beneficial to the wellbeing of developing school principals were the relationships the children. Many principals

shared stories about developing relationships with the children by being involved extensively and specifically ‘I greet them at the gate every morning, work at various stations throughout the year, visit classrooms, and read stories. This helps me build close relationships and know every child well’ (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021). This was important because it creates a culture whereby ‘every child and every staff member are valued for who they are’ (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022).

Relationships with parents was also deemed as very important in the context of a developing school. However, the relationship with parents was also shown to be both an enabler and inhibitor of a principal’s wellbeing. For example, it was noted that initially when a developing school first opens parents play a huge role and are invested in the school. This was illustrated by Kate, a principal, who commented that ‘parents chose our school at the start, it was because it was small and they felt they’d like that sense of community’ (Kate, I2, 17th January 2022). However, as the school grows it becomes more difficult and Rose elaborated ‘now as 300 children plus, parents are picking the school based on reputation and they’re not expecting the community feel, necessarily’ (Rose, I3, 12th January 2022). Brian also felt a similar sentiment noting how he ‘found it hard to maintain the close relationships I once had with all the parents. COVID didn’t help either. Initially, many parents were new to Ireland, and the school was their first community link. However, as we’ve expanded, these connections have weakened, especially with newer parents. (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022). The research also showed that relationships with parents were also complicated by the COVID lockdowns. Grace spoke about relationships with parents in the context of COVID stating ‘we’ve worked hard but for Covid, very hard. We want to do coffee mornings, and we can’t. so, I do my best’ (Grace, FG2, 20th October 2021). This is further illustrated by Rose who thought ‘parents are reluctant to come in as well because of COVID and with signs up everywhere about making an appointment and all of that, so I do think when the pandemic is over, I think that will improve again’ (Rose, I3, 12th January 2022).

Every principal interviewed commented on the benefit of informal relationship development with other school principals. This is seen to be a significant enabler of wellbeing for principals of developing schools. Tessa spoke passionately about the

support from the ET Beag support group, which is an informal group of developing school principals all over the country through a whatsapp group that also meet face to face termly.

> *'Support is somebody caring when you're having your really bad day. You can go on to the WhatsApp group and say, look, lads, I'm really struggling with this. And within about 30 seconds, you're gonna get a phone call. There's just somebody on the other end, not even giving advice... So, to me, it's support from others around you when you're at your worst or your lowest'. (Tessa, FG2, 20th October 2021).*

Finally, the principals interviewed also acknowledged the role of the multi-denominal ethos in providing an inclusive ethos that supports a relational approach. Thus, a multi-denominal ethos is also seen as a huge positive enabler of wellbeing. 'For us being an ET school, it's the most important thing about the school. We're providing an equality-based education to the families in this community, and for me, Educate Together is all about wellbeing. It's all about understanding children and their families about inclusion and respect for diversity and celebrating children's lives. So, like if you have a school that's set up in those principles and understands those principles, everything else comes from that' (Ben, FG1, 8th October 2021). Kate, a Community National School principal further emphasised this point 'in terms of allowing a sense of belonging or promoting a sense of equity, multi-D schools have the upper-hand in that because that's just who we are. From the very start of when we created the school, I think that sense of kindness and warmth and welcome was more important to me than maybe other aspects of education. So that sense of acceptance for staff and for students and for families feeling they are welcome' (Kate, I2, 17th January 2022). This demonstrates how wellbeing is at the core of a multi-denominal ethos with a particular connection to the theme of relationships.

While the strength of relationships with staff, children, parents, and fellow principals was a consistent enabler of wellbeing for principals in developing schools, these relational networks often operated despite significant systemic and logistical

challenges. One of the most pressing of these challenges relates to the physical environment in which these relationships unfold. The findings reveal that buildings and accommodation are deeply entangled with a principals' sense of wellbeing. The following section explores how the condition, availability, and uncertainty of physical spaces can impact the wellbeing of school leaders.

4.5.2 Buildings falling down versus the most beautiful building

All respondents emphasised that circumstances surrounding their physical space, buildings and accommodation impacts on their wellbeing. More specifically, the analysis shows how physical space and logistics with respect to the provision of buildings and accommodation has a major impact on principals social and emotional wellbeing due to stress, physical health, and a diminishing sense of belonging and being valued.

Many developing school principals experienced stress due to a lack of communication and consultation regarding temporary accommodation. This has led to schools being uncertain of when temporary school prefabs will arrive and/or if they will arrive at all in time for the beginning of the term in every September. This is a very contextual stressor for principals in developing schools because when developing schools grow every September, they also need new classrooms. When analysing this through an ANT (Latour 1986) lens it is clear that buildings have become an individual actor network, which negatively affect the wellbeing of school principals. It was commented by many principals that school buildings were delivered late or handed over the day before school opening schedules, which left principals working all summer without the ability to switch off and have holidays. School buildings then had to be furnished, with principals relying on friends and family to move furniture and set up classrooms. Patricia speaks about how building projects every year in a developing school has had a detrimental impact on her wellbeing dues that the fact that 'since I became a principal, I haven't had a summer without some form of building project. I haven't had more than two weeks off at any point in three and a half years at this point… that has had a huge impact on my

wellbeing' (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021).' Marie also points out that you 'don't get (temporary) buildings until the very last second or even a few days late. So, your summers, your holidays, all the times you're supposed to recharge and rejuvenate are gone because you're working on various different projects and so on' (Marie, FG3, 21st October 2021).

Furthermore, when schools have been provided accommodation, many principals were left appalled and upset by the condition of the school buildings provided. For example, Tessa spoke about their school building which 'is not safe to be in, but we're here. It's not up to code. It was taken by NAMA (National Asset Management Agency) because it broke all planning laws. So, it's constantly trying to deal with rats everywhere. There are three floors we're not allowed to go to. Rentokil are here every other week' (Tessa, FG2, 20th October 2021).

Patricia who displayed genuine upset and concern for the school staff and children also recalled the first morning she walked around their school building.,

> *I walked around…black mould on the walls…rooms closed off because they were so full of holes in the floors, leaks in the roof. My first instinct was to turn around to walk straight back out of there. It felt completely overwhelming and then meeting the staff and the pupils and the immediate clear sense from them, was that no one cared about them. They were left basically to rot in this building falling down around them, and no one cares about them (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021).*

Both Tessa and Patricia outlined above both the stress and diminishing sense of belonging that is created by the provision of temporary school buildings in developing schools. They also illustrated the health and safety concerns with mould, mice, and rats. However, Sarah further comments on how the temporary school set up made her physically unwell and sick over a prolonged period. Sarah states that 'in our setup, where we've been given four rooms and an ancient 100-year-old building…. for the first two months after we moved in, after a summer of it being renovated, I was physically unwell for two months due to the grinding of the dust and the damp in an old building' (Sarah, FG3, 21st October 2021). These excerpts

illustrate how the physical space that a school provides has an impact on both the social and emotional wellbeing of a developing school principal while also contributing negatively to a principal's physical health.

When schools, however, are finally provided with appropriate permanent school buildings, the opposite is noted. Rose is principal in one of 3 schools that are in new school buildings. She describes the contrast of moving from prefabs to a new school where 'the old building was prefabs above and the GAA pitch…. the cold and the mice, there were constant mice above there. So, our (new) building is a lovely brand-new building, it's warm, it's nice…. we can be very inclusive, we have wheelchair ramps, we have a wheelchair door, we have a lift in the school, we have a sensory room, a purpose-built sensory room, which has been fantastic. We have two ASD classes and purpose-built yards for the ASD classes as well, and a huge hall that is the size of a basketball pitch.' (Rose, I3, 12th January 2022). This is echoed by Marie who moved into a new building this year

> *'Not having had a building project over the summer absolutely positively impacted my wellbeing. I certainly could forget about school for sometimes over the holidays. The visual aspect of coming around the corner in the morning and seeing the building is extremely powerful. And we have the most beautiful building where we're very, very lucky, it's gorgeous. And it really creates identity and a sense of belonging for people.' (Marie, FG3, 21st October 2021).*

As highlighted through an ANT lens, buildings themselves act as key actor both enabling and inhibiting the wellbeing of school leaders depending on context. Yet, buildings are not the only non-human actors at play. The structures and systems of special education resource allocation also play a role in shaping principals' experiences of wellbeing. The following section explores how the 'fight for resources', in relation to SET and SNA support, significantly weighs heavily on principals, exacerbating stress and diminishing their capacity to lead effectively.

4.5.3 Special education allocation to developing schools

Structures within the education systems are also having an impact on principals' perspective of wellbeing. Patricia states that the wellbeing of principals is defined and seriously impacted by the lack of proper structures in place for the principals of developing schools…'the whole definition of what that wellbeing is? ……it's actually about putting structures and your cultures in place, cultures of support, cultures that actually alleviate the key problems'. 'I think if I was looking to know what wellbeing would look like for principals in schools? And I don't think this is just in developing schools, I think it would be across the board, I think its support structures and an understandable sort of system of an allocation of supports, Like I'm not talking about support, as in like coaching or mentoring. More like, what causes stress for principals is the fight for resources, the fight for the SNA, the fight for the Special Education Teaching (SET) areas, the fight for the class teachers, the fight for every single thing, every time you have to do anything you, you have to go and ask for it and prove that you need it'. (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021).

> *'The other massive issue we've had is S.E.T because developing schools are understaffed when it comes to S.E.T. Both support teachers and SNAs. You can't clone people or magic up hours, you can't split yourself so many ways and it brings a huge amount of guilt to the staff, massive guilt and I had that myself. I was in a support teaching world for one of my years before I became an admin principal and so I understand it'. (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022).*

The extract above illustrated the lack of structures for developing schools using the system of allocation for Special Education Teachers (SET) and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) as an example. This has had a profound impact on both the social and emotional wellbeing of school principals. This placed a huge amount of stress on the school principal with many citing that the system has meant they are a principal, special education teacher and SNA all in one. Many also described a huge amount of occupational guilt from not being able to do any of these jobs well and also not being able to provide an equitable Special Education provision

4.5.4 High stress, high satisfaction

The common consensus from all the principals interviewed showed that there was a high level of job satisfaction. This sense of job satisfaction appears to have a significant impact on principals overall social and emotional wellbeing. Every participating principal, however, did also describe that their individual stress levels were extremely high. From an ANT (Latour, 2005) perspective, job satisfaction demonstrates the dimension of *Ambivalence,* which shows contradictions and uncertainties at play within and among networks (Fenwick and Edwards 2013). Teaching principals noted an unsustainable level of stress and potential burnout.

> *'So, stress at work would probably be around a seven or eight out of 10. But satisfaction at work will be a 10 out of 10. I'm totally satisfied with my job, but I find it very, very stressful. Being a teaching principal is a totally impossible job, especially when you're starting from the ground up and you haven't a policy and you haven't the curricular area sorted…asking you to do that and teach is ridiculous'.*

The excerpt above is illustrative of the common responses from the participants. This is especially difficult for teaching principals who must juggle teaching a class as well as the administrative and leadership tasks of principal. It seems that being a teaching principal of a developing school is an arduous task comprising of high levels of stress. The ability to be creative and shape a whole school culture from the beginning, however, brings about a rewarding sense of accomplishment which results in high levels of job satisfaction.

Three principals did note that their job satisfaction peaked and troughed and was dependent on the type of day or week they experienced.

> *'It (job satisfaction) varies, to be honest to you. It goes up and down. Like some days if you're rating out of 10, I'd be a 20, I'd be thinking this is the best job in the world and I love it. Those are the days that are very, really involved with the children where you like myself are involved doing something with them, or I can see something we've put in place really*

working that's so rewarding…Sometimes if you ask me on a scale of one to 10 what I'm at, I'd be on minus 10' (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022).

The extract above highlights the highs and lows of principalships in a developing school. The job changes on a day-by-day basis which also has an impact on principals' social and emotional wellbeing. Importantly, the above theme illustrates how wellbeing is contextual and is dependent on the different things that happen on a daily basis.

4.5.5 'The need to reconceptualise wellbeing'

The need to reconceptualise wellbeing was identified as an overarching theme across all principal focus groups. Principals felt that the concept wellbeing that is being promoted by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is ambiguous, which often leads to illbeing. Our findings show that principals in developing schools see the many references to wellbeing in recent DES policies (Department of Education and Skills 2015,2018, 2020) as tokenistic at best. Patricia stated

'I think it's (wellbeing) a buzzword. At this point it's meaningless, because it's thrown in the same (DES) documents, which are clearly negatively affecting wellbeing... (the DES Wellbeing document states) you should be looking after your wellbeing, while you implement all this stuff that's negatively affecting actual wellbeing? So I think in the education sphere at the moment, it's (wellbeing) more a stick to beat people with than it is an actual positive thing' (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021).

Similarly, it was recognised that the DES have placed a huge emphasis over the last number of years on wellbeing with several publications, such as the Wellbeing Statement (2018) and several wellbeing publications during COVID 19. Principals, however, viewed the focus on wellbeing as a distraction from the lack of support structures that should be in place for principals of developing schools. This is illustrated by Noelle who states 'you're overloaded and…stress, burnout is the

reality for principals. I think, when you do become cognitively overloaded, it's difficult to get back to the school environment and say, 'Okay, I'm going to teach the children; physical, emotional, mental wellbeing' when you yourself as a teacher and a principal are on that precipice, overlooking the cliff all the time, edging back. But at any stage, I could dive right down, and who is there to catch me at the end? My wellbeing statement?' (Noelle, FG1, 8th October 2021).

One word that was consistently used across focus groups in relation to principals' wellbeing was balance. Noelle describes wellbeing for her as 'A balance; being able to balance everything, being able to balance professional, personal, being able to have a healthy balance of everything…even in terms of school there is balance of academics learning, hands on (learning)…. you're trying to find a balance that works for most people' (Noelle, FG1, 8th October 2021). Brian reinforced this feeling of balance by stating 'you got to have to a balance between the mental side of things and the physical side of things, both are obviously linked. But from a physical side of things, I found it particularly last year, very hard to manage physical exercises myself. I put on a ton of weight over the school closure period because there was just no time for myself to get out and go for run or play game of ball and you're missing the simple things there' (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022). Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for a more authentic and supportive approach to wellbeing that transcends tokenistic policies. Principals require tangible resources and structural support to effectively manage their roles and promote genuine wellbeing. Addressing these needs will not only benefit the principals but also foster a healthier, more balanced school environment for students and staff alike.

Further reconceptualisation of wellbeing is also needed to move away from what Farrell, Doyle, and Murphy (2024) describes wellbeing as 'something you do'. Principals in our research found wellbeing is more effectively promoted when it is embedded within a school's culture or climate, rather than through standalone commercial wellbeing programmes. While many principals do use wellbeing workbooks, they believe that true wellbeing lies in the culture that exists within the school. Principals reported that general 'levels of school wellbeing are high when staff feel regulated and understand what is happening, which has a more significant

impact than individual interventions with children' (Tessa, FG2, 20th October 2021). Principals supported the idea of educating the staff on self-awareness of their own nervous systems. When staff are regulated, it positively influences children's wellbeing, allowing them to self-regulate, de-escalate, and reduce stress, subsequently easing the impact *on the staff'* (Sarah, FG3, 21st October 2021).

Although embedding a positive school culture is a priority for many participants, various wellbeing programmes are still utilised within schools. For instance, the Berry Street Model has been highly effective in the three schools where it is implemented. Similarly, nurture rooms have successfully created safe spaces for children with challenging behaviour (Sloan et al, 2020). The Educate Together Patron runs a nurture schools programme that many of its schools find beneficial. In an evaluation of the Nurture programme findings indicate that students enjoy participating and show increased school attendance and improved relationships with teachers and peers. Teachers also report enhanced capacity to support students with socio-emotional difficulties, suggesting that the programme has positive impacts and merits wider implementation across the Educate Together network. (Educate Together, 2023). Other programmes mentioned, such as Zones of Regulation, Weaving Wellbeing, Zippy's Friends, and Friends for Life, are typically run-in individual classes rather than being adopted on a whole-school basis. However, the participants of this study align with previous research stating the success of wellbeing initiatives in schools largely depends on their integration into the overall school culture (Weare and Nind 2011).

Despite the widespread promotion of wellbeing by the Department of Education and Skills, the lived experiences of developing school principals reveal a stark disconnect between policy rhetoric and practical reality. For these leaders, wellbeing is not a standalone programme or a buzzword it is directly shaped by the demands, responsibilities, and systemic support (or lack thereof) embedded within their daily work. The complexity of the principal's role emerges as a primary inhibitor of wellbeing for all the principals in our sample. The following section explores how insufficient support, lack of time, and the sheer scale of duties leave principals

overwhelmed and unsupported. This fundamentally acts as an inhibitor to wellbeing and impedes their capacity to lead effectively.

4.5.6 'It just takes over': Complexity of the Role, supports and sheer lack of time

Lack of training, resources, and support in opening a developing school were identified as a strong theme across all groups. Principals often felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of duties associated with the role and were frequently left frustrated by not having any tangible supports. Noelle illustrates this stating 'No other CEO would have to figure out how the hell to get a phone and a line for a phone and who I needed to talk to, so I could actually make phone calls?' No one else would ever have to do that and the stuff that we must do and tendering. There's absolutely zero support for us on all of that. I've had to learn this'. (Noelle, FG1, 8th October 2021). The complexity of the principal's role, encompassing a wide range of responsibilities such as administrative, educational, and leadership tasks, as well as child protection duties, significantly inhibits their wellbeing. The lack of effective administrative processes and support staff often leads to overwhelming workloads, making it difficult to manage the school's daily operations smoothly. Furthermore, inadequate financial management support, including budgeting and resource allocation, adds to the stress, as principals struggle to ensure the school operates within its means.

Principals identified that not having a manual or guidance of any sort was particularly challenging for setting up a developing school. Specifically, they felt that a manual should contain information with contact details for all of the departments in the Department of Education, National Council for Special Education, mandatory policies and even the resources that one would need when establishing a developing school. Tessa summarises what was stated by all focus groups stating

> *'I would have liked a manual (that contained) the things you need to have in your school building. These are the protocols that need to be followed in*

> *your school building. These are the mandatory policies you need to have ASAP. Even having a list of grants and when they come in would have been handy, because I didn't know when any of that was happening. So, something to set up a principal who's setting up a developing school or even arriving to a developing school to be able to check off'. (Tessa, FG2, 20th October 2021)*

Noelle summed this up stating 'that question is what did you get when you started the school? Literally nothing, like nothing. Not even a place to sit down, you know, there's nothing, nothing at all, like there should be some sort of operational manual' (Noelle, FG1, 8th October 2021).

Principals found the complexity of the role and the huge time demands of the job to have a huge personal toll on their general wellbeing as they found it difficult to switch off.

> *'Like, but it (school) just takes over. There's almost no end to the day. You know, everyone goes home, the children go home, the teachers go home at the end of their day. The finish of your day doesn't happen. Because you're still at the end of a phone call, particularly about staff absences, you're still at the end of emails from the department, which tend to come at five or six o'clock in the evening time…so like there's no end to the job, even when you're on holidays, you're on call and that's very difficult'. (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022).*

Some of the supports that were helpful in reducing the workload and stress of principals in developing schools were particularly present in the Community National Schools whose patron is the Educational Training Boards (ETBs). Kate revealed that the ETB 'would've provided a lot of the structural support for me in because they look after all of the financial work, and they have an IT department and a buildings department' (Kate, I2, 17th January 2022). Rose also noted that Community National Schools have the added benefit of a Director of Schools who she describes as 'kind of my safety net as well. If I have kind of a bad gut feeling

about something and I ring him up and I say, look, this is my gut feeling on this, that I do want to do this, or I don't want to do this' (Rose, I3, 12th January 2022).

The overwhelming workload and constant state of being on-call make it challenging for principals to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to increased stress and burnout. The persistent lack of formal guidance and comprehensive support systems exacerbates these issues, underscoring the urgent need for structural changes. Implementing effective administrative processes, providing detailed operational manuals, and enhancing financial management support are crucial steps toward alleviating the burden on principals. Addressing these challenges is essential to improve the wellbeing of school principals and ensure they can effectively lead their schools. Furthermore, recognising and integrating supports like those provided by the Educational Training Boards (ETBs) in Community National Schools can offer a blueprint for more robust support structures. By addressing these key areas, we can foster a more sustainable and supportive environment for school leaders.

4.6 Discussion

This study highlights the significant commitment of developing school principals to ensuring the wellbeing of their school community. However, the findings reveal that this commitment often comes at a considerable personal cost, impacting the stress levels and overall wellbeing of principals and their families. Much of this stress stems from inadequate support structures for the development of developing schools. Participants expressed deep frustration regarding the DES, citing a lack of adequate structures, governance, or guidance, which leaves principals of developing schools feeling isolated and exhausted. These findings resonate with previous research by O'Toole and Simovska (2021) and Burke and Dempsey (2021), which emphasise the need for better professional support systems for school leaders.

The IPPN Sustainable Leadership Report (2023) aligns with our findings, revealing that the expanding role of school principals, compounded by increased administrative burdens and lack of support, significantly impacts their sustainability and wellbeing. The report indicates that principals rated the sustainability of their roles very low, with a significant portion highlighting the overwhelming number of

tasks that divert them from their core purpose of leading teaching and learning. Additionally, Rahimi and Arnold (2022) underscore the significant job demands faced by school leaders, including high levels of stress and burnout. Their survey revealed that 45% of Irish primary school leaders reported high or severe levels of burnout, and 19% experienced high or severe stress. These figures align closely with the experiences of our participants, who reported similar stressors due to the extensive workload and insufficient support.

The wellbeing of school principals is profoundly influenced by the structures within the educational system, particularly in relation to resource allocation. Patricia's perspective underscores that the wellbeing of principals is intrinsically linked to the presence of robust support structures. She articulates that wellbeing is not merely about personal support mechanisms like coaching or mentoring, but about institutional structures that mitigate the chronic stressors faced by principals (Patricia, FG3, 21st October 2021). These stressors include the constant struggle to secure necessary resources, such as Special Education Teachers (SET) and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), which is a pervasive issue across both developing and established schools.

The absence of an equitable allocation model for Special Education Teachers (SET) and teaching staff has led to frustration among principals, who feel discriminated against based on their school's establishment year. Developing schools require a fair distribution of resources to address their unique contexts, as highlighted by the chronic understaffing and insufficient supports reported by school management bodies, which ultimately impacts the ability to support students with additional needs effectively (Educate Together, 2021). Addressing these disparities could substantially enhance the wellbeing of developing school principals. Brian's experience further illustrates this point, describing the immense pressure and guilt associated with trying to fulfil multiple roles due to insufficient staffing (Brian, I1, 10th January 2022). This multifaceted role not only dilutes the effectiveness of educational leadership but also undermines the emotional and social wellbeing of principals. The constant need to advocate for every resource, coupled with the guilt

of not being able to provide equitable education, creates an unsustainable work environment.

The new funding model introduced in 2017, which allocates resources based on school profiles rather than individual diagnoses, was intended to create a more equitable system. However, as Kenny, McCoy, and Mihut (2020) point out, the practical implementation of this model has been fraught with challenges, particularly for developing schools. These schools often find themselves understaffed, lacking adequate SET and SNA support, which exacerbates the stress and guilt felt by principals who are unable to meet the diverse needs of their students effectively. The insights from Raftery and Brennan (2021) support this view by indicating that the success of inclusive education heavily relies on effective leadership and adequate resource allocation. Travers et al. (2010) emphasise that school leaders play a critical role in fostering inclusive practices, but they need sufficient resources and structural support to do so. The lack of clarity and consistency in resource allocation policies further complicates this issue, leaving principals in a perpetual state of advocacy and justification for necessary supports.

Moreover, the articles highlight the importance of a comprehensive support system that includes professional development and collaborative planning time. Brennan et al. (2019) note that effective inclusion requires continuous professional learning opportunities, which are often hindered by the lack of non-teaching time allocated for planning and collaboration. This gap not only affects the implementation of inclusive practices but also adds to the workload and stress of school leaders.

Several tangible supports emerged from this research as recommendations. An operation manual or guidance document is seen as a simple solution to many needs. This could address key questions that principals of developing schools have. Developing school principals consistently acknowledged that relationships have helped enable their positive experiences of wellbeing. Informal support from other principals with experience in setting up developing schools was particularly important. Many principals had positive experiences with coaching or mentoring. Effective coaching can improve relationships and teamwork between staff at

different levels while increasing job satisfaction (Fielden 2005). Mentoring can profoundly impact the professional and personal wellbeing of both the mentor and mentee (Forde 2018). However, in the context of developing schools, principals noted that while coaching and mentoring were positive, they did not fully address the specific challenges of founding a developing school. Therefore, formal coaching or mentoring by someone with relevant experience of developing schools would be beneficial.

Positive relationships with parents and the school community were also evident in the study. Research has shown that a positive school climate, characterised by connectedness, a sense of belonging, and collaborative relationships among staff, students, parents, and professionals, promotes wellbeing outcomes (Weare and Nind 2011; Thapa et al. 2013; Aldridge and McChesney 2018). Various authors argue that these factors are more crucial for mental health promotion than policies and structures (Thomas, Allen, and Vella-Brodrick 2016; Allen et al. 2018; Brown and Shay 2021).

4.7 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that developing school principals are deeply committed to ensuring the wellbeing of their school communities. However, this has a significant toll on their personal and family life and their own health. This is highlighted by the significant levels of stress and overall impact on their wellbeing and that of their families. The lack of adequate support structures, guidance, and resource allocation from the DES leaves principals feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

These findings are further supported by the research of Rahimi and Arnold (2022), which highlighted the detrimental effects of inadequate support systems and the overwhelming administrative burdens on school leaders. Their research indicated that school leaders often work in challenging environments characterised by heavy workloads and insufficient resources. The strong association between work-life conflict and both stress and burnout identified in their survey is consistent with the

experiences of our participants, who struggle to balance professional responsibilities with personal wellbeing.

The IPPN Sustainable Leadership Report (2023) echoes these sentiments, revealing that the expanding roles and responsibilities of school principals, combined with insufficient support, significantly impact their sustainability and wellbeing. This is compounded by the constant need to advocate for essential resources, such as Special Education Teachers (SET) and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), which is a pervasive issue across both developing and established schools. The absence of an equitable allocation model for these resources has instilled a sense of guilt and frustration among principals, further exacerbating their stress levels.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including the implementation of robust support systems, equitable resource allocation, and formal mentoring or coaching programs tailored specifically for developing school principals. Additionally, fostering positive relationships within the school community and providing structured guidance can help mitigate stress and promote the wellbeing of school leaders.

In conclusion, while the commitment of developing school principals is commendable, there is an urgent need for systemic changes to effectively support the role of school principals. Enhancing the support structures and resource allocation, along with providing targeted professional development and mentorship, will not only improve the wellbeing of school principals but also ensure the successful leadership and inclusivity of their schools.

4.8 Limitations

This study provides an in-depth exploration of the wellbeing of developing school principals in Ireland, offering valuable insights into the complexities and challenges they face. Through the application of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 2005) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) Braun and Clarke (2021)), we have found that critical factors that influence the wellbeing of these educational leaders.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualise the findings and suggest directions for future research.

Firstly, the relatively small sample size of 12 school principals limits the generalisability of our findings. While the insights gained are rich and detailed, they reflect the specific experiences of this cohort and may not be representative of all school principals. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of this study captures data at a single point in time, which restricts our ability to observe changes in wellbeing over time or to understand the long-term impacts of the identified factors.

The qualitative methodology employed, while providing deep and nuanced understanding, is inherently subjective. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recollection. Furthermore, the specific focus on developing school principals in Ireland, particularly within the Educate Together and Community National School systems, may limit the applicability of our findings to other educational contexts or more experienced principals. The period during which data collection occurred amid the COVID-19 pandemic also presents a unique limitation. The exceptional stressors and challenges of this time may have significantly influenced the wellbeing of the participants, making it difficult to separate pandemic-related issues from more general wellbeing concerns.

While this study sheds light on important aspects of developing school principals' wellbeing, the limitations highlight the need for further research. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and comparative analyses to build on our findings. Additionally, exploring the impact of external factors and developing more robust theoretical frameworks will enhance our understanding of the multifaceted nature of principal wellbeing. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) note that 'School leadership improves teaching and learning, indirectly and most powerfully, by improving the status of significant key classroom and school conditions that further enhance student success at school'. As a result, research on the importance of principal wellbeing is of vital importance. By addressing the limitations of this paper, future research can better inform policies

and practices that support the wellbeing of school leaders, ultimately benefiting the broader educational community.

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Chapter 5 An Actor-Network Analysis of Teachers Experience of Wellbeing in the Context of a Developing School

Preamble

The following article reports on the enablers and inhibitors for students in a developing primary school context. This is manuscript is currently under review in the Emerald Journal of Health Education Special Edition (Advancing equity, voice and sustainability in School Wellbeing) The following is the citation for this article:

Cashman, D., O'Brien, W. and Chambers, F.C. (2025), "An actor-network analysis of teachers experience of wellbeing in the context of a developing school".

Statement of authorship

I hereby declare that I, David Cashman, am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

- I was the principal investigator responsible for all the data collected (2022) in this chapter. I organised all stages of data collection consisting of, contacting all primary schools and teachers, equipment preparation, data storage, data cleaning and data inputting.
- Organised each stage of the data collection which was an important component of this baseline study.
- Made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data for the work.
- Wrote the first draft of the full article and contributed significantly to the subsequent redrafts until this submission.

5.1 Abstract

Purpose: This study uses Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005) to investigate teachers' experiences, enablers, and inhibitors of wellbeing within the context of new or developing Irish primary schools. In addition, the study aimed to understand how practices, assemblages, and interconnected relationships between human and non-human elements impact teachers' wellbeing.

Methodology**:** Four focus group interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes, were conducted in April-May 2022 with a convenience sample of 20 teachers actively teaching in developing schools via Microsoft Teams. Qualitative data from the focus groups were transcribed, and emergent themes were identified using ANT. A seven-phase roadmap targeting teachers in developing schools in Ireland was adapted to understand how social actions shape wellbeing.

Findings: The study highlights four wellbeing enablers for teachers: leadership, relationships/school culture, mentoring, and job satisfaction, with the first two being crucial. However, these enablers can become inhibitors if perceived as tokenistic or if support and resources fail to address the complexity of teaching roles. Inadequate facilities and lack of support undermine teachers' sense of value, especially without special education resources. These dynamics are notably impactful for teachers at schools established post-2013.

Originality*:* The findings reveal how many actor networks impact the wellbeing of developing school communities.

Keywords: *Wellbeing, Education, Schools, Teacher Wellbeing, Education leadership, Actor-Network Theory.*

5.2 Introduction

Teaching is an intricate and stressful profession that requires educators to balance curriculum delivery, address diverse student needs, foster productive relationships, and harmonise work obligations with personal life. This complexity is well-documented (Smak and Walczak, 2017; Herman *et al.*, 2017; Spilt *et al.*, 2011). Recent studies highlight a notable increase in teacher stress due to growing workloads and the pressing demand for schools to address societal issues (Morgan and Craith, 2015). Consequently, the effectiveness of teachers' instruction and practice is jeopardised, as those who are stressed or burnt out are less capable of functioning effectively in the classroom (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009; Albulescu *et al.*, 2018). Given these challenges, it is no surprise that teachers' wellbeing is now a significant focus of policy discussions and public discourse (Schleicher, 2018). This has led to diverse conceptualisations of wellbeing stemming from different disciplinary and methodological viewpoints (McCallum *et al.*, 2017). Definitions range from general wellbeing encompassing life satisfaction and affect (Cenkseven Önder and Sari, 2009) to mental health (Capone and Petrillo, 2018) and a balance between work enthusiasm and emotional exhaustion (Aldrup *et al.*, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical nature of teacher wellbeing, as educators faced unprecedented challenges of remote instruction amid personal responsibilities, leading to increased stress and reduced job satisfaction (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020; Dempsey and Burke, 2021). The vital role of teacher wellbeing in educational effectiveness and student achievement (Maricuțoiu *et al.*, 2023) contrasts the scarcity of focused research in this domain (Sharrocks, 2014; McCallum *et al.*, 2017).

The historical narrative around teacher wellbeing has shifted from predominantly deficit terms, such as stress and burnout, towards a comprehensive framework that encompasses self-realisation and a complex network of contributing factors (Orsila *et al.*, 2011; McLeod and Wright, 2016; Brady and Wilson, 2020). Current discourse views wellbeing as an intricate interplay of several factors rather than the absence of negative emotions and, therefore, advocates for a holistic approach. The importance

of teacher wellbeing as multifaceted, influenced by an intricate set of factors, is now paramount in educational research and policy.

Accordingly, this study investigates teacher wellbeing in developing Irish primary schools[8] using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 1987; Latour and WooIgar, 2013) to identify enablers and inhibitors of teacher wellbeing. ANT suggests that ideas, practices, and perceived "facts" emerge from complex webs or networks of relationships among various actors, referred to as "assemblages" (Law, 2008b; Law and Singleton, 2013). Thus, we explore how wellbeing is perceived and shaped within the Irish educational context, considering how practices, assemblages, and interconnected relationships between human and non-human elements impact teachers' wellbeing.

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 Theoretical framework

Several factors shape teachers' experience of wellbeing, including social interests, existing networks or network formation, power structures within a network, influence structures, the political nature of the network, and attitudes (Carroll, 2002). In this research, wellbeing comprises several physical, psychological, and philosophical discourses identified by Spratt (2015), such as physical health promotion, social and emotional literacy, care, flourishing, and sustainability. The framework aims to incorporate insights from principals, teachers, pupils, and parents as the key stakeholders involved in school development.

Landri (2023) argues that ANT is not a complete theory that can be applied but is a ‘sensibility’ and a ‘set of tools’ to understand the semiotic of materialities. It diverges from conventional theories by not seeking to explain 'why' but to narrate 'how' connections or relationships occur or fail, emphasising the intricacies of relationality and materiality (Law, 2008a). By tracing these intricacies, ANT

[8] A developing school is defined as a school where the enrolment on 30th September of a given year, exceeds the enrolment on 30th September of the previous year by a numerical minimum of 1 class stream plus 5. In the context of this research, developing schools are noted to be new schools established after 2013 as they are still growing by 1 class stream every year.

describes the complex practices through which ideas can materialise, systems develop, and actors become powerful (Gorur, 2014). Hence, interviews using an ANT methodology are designed to learn about the performative entanglement between humans and non-humans (Thompson, 2012). ANT-inspired studies trace the micro-interactions through which diverse elements or "actants" are performed into being. ANTiES (ANT in Education Studies) has emerged as a gradual process over time (Landri, 2023). Fenwick and Edwards (2013) argue that ANT provides a language that uncovers the multifaceted complexities in education and can be instrumental in revealing contradictions and ambiguities, allowing us to understand how networks shape various phenomena, from knowledge to policies.

5.3.2 Pilot Focus Group

A pilot focus group (FG) was conducted in March 2022 via Microsoft Teams to identify 1) FG question issues, like interviewer dominance or unclear phrasing, 2) ideal interview duration, 3) topics for deeper investigation, and 4) the need to improve interview questions. Three teachers from developing schools contributed, leading to a more effective set of seven main questions, prompting rich dialogue on topics from biographical data to wellbeing dimensions and philosophical discussions on flourishing. The refined interview protocol is detailed in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1: Interview schedule plan

Questions	Prompts	Rationale
Personal and School		
Can you tell me a bit about yourself and teaching experience?		Biographical Information
What supports were provided when you joined the staff of a developing school?	In hindsight, is there anything in addition which you would have liked? (e.g. handbook, online resources etc.)	Individual stage of change
What does wellbeing mean to you? Can you comment on what aspects of working in a developing school inhibits your wellbeing?	What does an ideal level / condition of wellbeing at work look like to you? What is your ideal experience of wellbeing at work?	Knowledge of wellbeing
What wellbeing programmes are currently implemented in your school for pupils, staff, and parents?	Can you tell me why you decided to use these	Collective Efficacy

	programmes and well as training involved?	
Environmental wellbeing		
Describe how the school's physical environment promotes wellbeing for staff?	To what degree are you able to take breaks during the day when you need them? To what degree are you able to use lunchtimes as free time for yourself?	Physical Wellbeing
How would you describe your relationships with: Students/colleagues/parents/guardians? Give an example to showcase this?	Do you feel that you are fully able to support your colleagues? Why? Why not?	Relationships/care collective efficacy
Describe your job satisfaction.	How far do you feel energized at work? How far do you feel stress free at work? Describe how you manage / cope with stress at work	Philosophical discourse of flourishing Social and emotional wellbeing

5.3.3 Population and sample

A convenience sample of 20 teachers (15% male and 85% female) actively teaching in developing schools were recruited for four FGs conducted in April and May 2022. Participants were self-selected based on their affiliation with the Educate Together Principals Support Group and their accessibility to the researcher. Out of the 47 support group members, teachers from four schools volunteered to participate in three FGs. Participants for the fourth FG were recruited from a local Community National School, which was contacted through an Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) principals cluster. Including different patronages[9] ensured a diverse representation of teacher experiences in developing schools. The characteristics of the study participants are described in **Table 5.2.**

Table 5.2: Background Information of Participants

Focus Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Experience as Teacher (Years)	Patronage

[9] In the Irish national school system, each school has a patron/patronage. The patron typically sets up the school, defines the characteristic ethos of the school and manages the school on behalf of the Department of Education. Individual schools are managed by Boards of Management on behalf of the patron.

1	**Mary**	F	Teacher	3	Educate Together
	Pat	M	Teacher	8	
	Carol	F	Teacher	3	
	Laura	F	Teacher	14	
	Tara	F	Teacher	12	
	Olga	F	Teacher	11	
	Caoimhe	F	Teacher	6	
2	**Anna**	F	Teacher	4	Community National School
	Nicki	F	Teacher	4	
	Ava	F	Teacher	3	
	Jane	F	Teacher	16	
	Ciara	F	Teacher	5	Educate Together
3	**Garreth**	M	Teacher	5	Educate Together
	Cian	M	Teacher	1	
	Roisin	F	Teacher	5	
	Patricia	F	Teacher	10	
4	**Kathleen**	F	Teacher	4	Educate Together
	Donna	F	Teacher	13	
	Kate	F	Teacher	3	
	Ann	F	Teacher	6	

5.3.4 Interview procedure

The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, ensuring convenience and accessibility for all involved parties. Before engaging in the FG, each participant was provided with a comprehensive information sheet elucidating the purpose and nature of the study, and written consent was obtained. All eligible participants invited to participate in the research study were duly informed of their right to withdraw their involvement at any phase of the proceedings.

Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent to maintain accurate records and facilitate in-depth analysis. Stringent measures were implemented to safeguard the anonymity of the participants and their respective schools. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants throughout the analysis, and personal details were omitted to safeguard the identity of participants,

5.3.5 Data Analysis

I transcribed the FG sessions, capturing the precise verbatim accounts of the discussions. NVivo software was utilised for data categorisation. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was used following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2021), which emphasised deep immersion in qualitative data and the pivotal role of researcher reflexivity. The process began with extensive familiarisation, involving thorough readings and re-readings of FG transcripts to absorb the nuanced contexts of the data. This was followed by a detailed coding phase, systematically categorising data into coherent segments. Themes were then generated by identifying patterns and connections among these codes, considering the influence of the researchers' own theoretical and subjective positions on these interpretations. The emergent themes were corroborated with the existing literature. This enhanced validity and minimied researcher bias (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

The thematic refinement stage involved rigorously reviewing and confirming the themes, ensuring each was robustly supported by the data and coherently presented. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the analysis to record insights on how the researchers' perspectives might affect the analysis, highlighting the interaction between the researcher and data as a critical component of RTA. This

reflective approach ensured the themes were representative of the data, meaningful, and contextually relevant to the study's aims, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing teacher wellbeing in developing schools.

This study embraced a roadmap of various phases to comprehend how social actions shape wellbeing, which is relevant to the research methodology. The phases outlined in **Table 5.3** were adapted from (McBride, 2000) and served as a foundation for this study's research methodology. By following this process, themes, or what Latour (2005) referred to as "problematizations," initially emerge from the data, subsequently allowing the theoretical concepts to shape these themes.

Table 5.3: Phases of Adopting the ANT Approach. Adapted from (McBride, 2000).

Stage	Theme	Description
1	**Identify the actors**	Comprise of human or non-human actors who influence or become influenced by other actor's policies and practices. These actors were then investigated through focus groups to understand attitudes, interactions, and interests using the theoretical resources from ANT.
2	**Investigate the actors**	Understanding the character of the stakeholders through interviews with network representatives, accessing documentation, understanding their attitudes, interactions, interests, etc.
3	**Identify actor interactions *("Follow the Actors")***	Tracing interactions between stakeholders to explore the level of influence between stakeholders (e.g., trust and control).
4	**Construct an actor-network model**	Construct an actor-network model to determine the network's complexity, cohesion, strength, and influence.
5	**Source of inhibitors and enablers**	Determine who enables and inhibits actions to shape wellbeing and the network under investigation, e.g., wellbeing attitudes, resistance, or network infrastructure.
6	**Tracing actions**	Identify what activities led to the alignment of the actor network, such as training.
7	**Reporting on the actor-network**	Report on the overall nature of the network and explain how social actions shape wellbeing within the network.

In addition, an ANT Analysis Diagram (AAD) (Payne, 2016) was employed to observe actor interactions and construct an Actor-Network Model encompassing both human and non-living entities, examining their impact on the participants' perspective of wellbeing. Payne's notation uses distinct box styles to represent the three types of objects (fluid, immutable mobile, and fire) that can exist within a network. Solid lines represent fluid objects; double lines depict immutable mobiles, which are fixed; and dashed lines indicate fire, representing absent-presence objects that may not always exist but have an impact (Payne, 2017). Payne (2017) also introduced a lozenge box to symbolize relationships. An AAD was constructed based on the analysed data, as depicted in **Figure 5.1**.

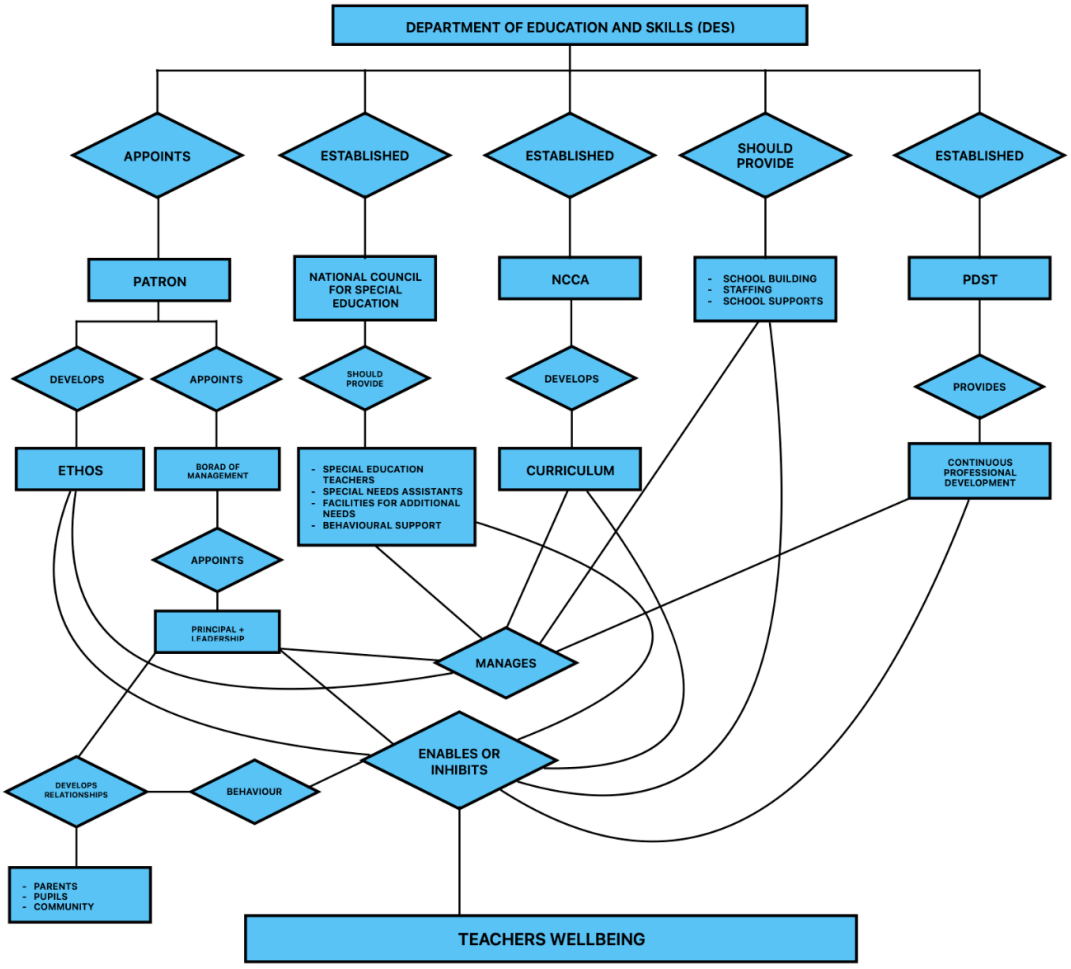


Figure 5.1: ANT Analysis Diagram of Teachers Perspective of Wellbeing at Developing School (Source: Created by author)

5.4 Results

In this study, controversies, as defined by Latour (2005), influenced teacher wellbeing in new schools. Such controversies represent "shared uncertainty" (Macospol, 2007) and are crucial before being resolved or dismissed as "a matter of indifference" (Callon and Latour, 1981).

Our RTA identified four wellbeing enablers: leadership, relationships/school culture, mentoring, and job satisfaction. It also uncovered three inhibitors: wellbeing as tokenism, inadequate school buildings and/or resources, and support for additional needs. Contextually, the controversy uncovered in this research showed that every enabler of wellbeing identified in the research had the capacity to also inhibit wellbeing and vice versa. For instance, school buildings served as an inhibitor of wellbeing in temporary settings but was an enabler in new, permanent structures that had appropriate facilities.

5.4.1 Leadership that 'has your back'

Establishing teacher wellbeing as a priority is a critical initial step in school-wide wellbeing programs (Quinlan, 2017; Slemp et al., 2017). Therefore, educational leaders must address teachers' wellbeing to fulfil the school's goals. In the context of this research, all participants attributed school leadership as a significant enabler of wellbeing in their schools. School leaders create a vision and a sense of purpose based on a strong value base to enable wellbeing. This was elucidated by Pat (Teacher, FG1, 19 May 2022*)*, who described having

> *"the feeling that we're working towards something that matters, that we have that at the core. You can manage the things that come your way. If you didn't have that faith in the leadership or that real core belief in the work that you're doing and what you're doing is worth something, it would be very difficult and disheartening, and it would be a different job, I think. So, I think effective leadership is a big one for positive wellbeing."*

Pat's comments are consistent with measures of subjective meaningful work, which identifies one component of meaningful work as integrity to self. This happens when personal and work values are aligned (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012).

Participants also reported that school principals trusted them and ‘had their back’ (Ava, Teacher, FG2, 24 May 2022). The leadership team in their school developed a sense of community among the staff where they felt heard and in it together. Ava (Teacher, FG2, 24 May 2022) spoke of "feeling like somebody has your back in school. Your year band is your team. Your principal is on your team. Our deputy is on our team. I think that safeguards all our wellbeing because if you feel like people are on your side, it makes things easier. It's kind of a cultural thing, isn't it?"

This instilled a sense of trust among teachers and the principals in developing schools. The participants reported that their principals emphasised the wellbeing of staff and appreciated that it was an authentic effort from principals to care for their staff. Tara (Teacher, FG1, 19 May 2022) reported how her “principal is big into wellbeing, and it's not just for the kids, and it's not just words that you throw out there to kids and parents. You start with the staff, and I think that's important. That then will naturally filter naturally throughout the school."

It was also evident that teachers in developing schools expressed genuine concern for their principals. Mary reported, "I just feel for any principal in a start-up school. There's no one for them. They're at the top even though we try not to have that kind of hierarchy. But it does exist because they are the principal. And there's no one for them to go. I'm having a really bad day, or I need some time, or I'm really struggling here. I feel bad that sometimes I go home thinking about I left poor [principal's name] there, and she's going to be there until 6 or 9 tonight (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022)." This links with the stresses expressed by principals in the previous chapter and is also in line with recent research by Rahimi et al. (2022), who noted that 52% of Irish school leaders experience significant stress and 66% have experienced burnout.

5.4.2 ‘Open and Welcoming’: Relationships

Building a collegiate environment through staff relationships is fundamental to fostering wellbeing among school staff, as teaching is an inherently collaborative profession. Teachers are part of an intricate network, engaging with various stakeholders, from students, parents, and colleagues to specialised staff like psychologists and speech therapists. These relationships are vital, as the frequency and quality of these interactions have a significant impact on teachers' wellbeing, as noted by Wang *et al.* (1997).

Participants echoed the sentiment that peer relationships are crucial for wellbeing. These relationships span from formal professional bonds to personal friendships within the school community. A formal mentoring system for new teachers was highlighted as particularly beneficial. (Anna, teacher, FG2, May 24, 2022), described the mentorship experience:

> *"a mentor/mentee system for new teachers. I never felt like I couldn't ask a question. Questions were always encouraged. There was no such thing as a stupid question, and I just felt very comfortable saying I have no idea how to go about this or I don't know what this is. Everyone was very open and very welcoming, and from the beginning, I didn't have to go to them. They came to me first."*

This sense of openness and encouragement appears pivotal for newcomers navigating the complexities of their new role. In addition to formal mentoring, the importance of an informal mentoring approach centered around a collaborative school culture was also identified. Cian (Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022) spoke highly of such a culture:

> *"We do a lot of work collaboratively. So, the idea behind that obviously is that if you walk into any classroom in senior infants on any given day that, we're all generally doing the same thing, to do the same lessons. So, we do meet together in our groups every Thursday to plan, and that hour is great for. So we are, in that sense, for the most part, very much together."*

This culture of collaboration goes beyond shared tasks to reflect a collective mindset of continuous improvement and support. It underscores that wellbeing is fostered through structured programs, everyday interactions, and shared experiences. The importance of collegial support in teacher wellbeing is echoed in numerous studies. Aelterman *et al.* (2007) demonstrated that a supportive school culture is closely linked to teacher wellbeing. Furthermore, peer and principal support has been found to correlate with teachers' sense of professional wellbeing, self-efficacy, and a focus on student-centered needs. This support also aids teachers in managing work stress and external pressures, as Travers (2017) and Vangrieken et al. (2015) reported. Additionally, strong relationships with coworkers can mitigate stress and increase job satisfaction, with peer and supervisor support as recognised predictors of job satisfaction (Yuh and Choi, 2019; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009).

However, relationships can be complex, serving as both enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing. For instance, many teachers initially form close bonds with parents in developing schools, but these relationships can become strained as the school grows. Carol (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022) said:

> *"The first class was so small, and I got to know all the parents very well, and I live in the area as well, and I'd meet them around the place. So, I feel like the first year, I just bonded and knew all the parents very well. But I think I gave too much that year, and it had more of a negative impact. It's just I kind of had to back pedal a little bit."*

Deeply committed teachers who forge strong bonds with the school community may find that these enriching relationships can also lead to increased stress. A recent study by Burke and Stets (2023) highlighted that finding meaning in work, while linked to higher job satisfaction, could also raise stress levels. This commitment can translate into a profound sense of purpose, often associated with heightened engagement and resilience (Van Wingerden and Poell, 2019), but can also result in overwork if boundaries are not maintained. Oelberger (2018) noted that meaningful work could lead to neglecting personal boundaries, causing erratic work behaviours and stress. Across the FGs, participants expressed a deep attachment to their work

and school, indicating their dedication. However, this dedication sometimes came at the cost of personal wellbeing, as they tended to overlook their own limits.

5.4.3 The juxtaposition of school buildings: 'Cold and Miserable' Versus 'a sense of school'

The Holistic Evidence and Design (HEAD) Project investigated how the classroom environment affects primary students' academic progress in the UK (Barrett *et al.*, 2015). Data from 153 classrooms revealed that 16% of students' academic progress over one year correlated with the classroom's quality (Barrett *et al.*, 2015). "Naturalness" factors like air quality, temperature, and light accounted for 49% of this impact, emphasising the importance of natural light. "Individualisation" factors, including ownership and flexibility, contributed 28%, while "stimulation" balanced visual complexity and warmth without causing distraction, rounding out the findings (Barrett *et al.*, 2015).

In line with the findings of the HEAD Project, participants in this study found the physical school environment to be either an enabler or inhibitor of wellbeing, depending on whether the developing school was in temporary buildings or a permanent purpose-building school. Participants spoke of 'naturalness' factors noted above in temporary buildings where "People were getting sick...were cold and just miserable. It was kind of my first time in a school (as a teacher). It really did just have an impact on the overall wellbeing" (Cian, Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022)). Tara (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022) reinforced this point, recalling, "We got two new prefabs one year, and for the first two months, there was no electricity and no heating. So, that would seriously inhibit a sense of wellbeing. Teachers were stressed. Kids were wearing coats all day long. Parents were giving out. When you don't have adequate accommodation, it really does impact on your teaching and children's wellbeing in the school as well."

In the context of ownership, flexibility, and connectedness, participants who were based in temporary buildings spoke of a lack of flexibility, particularly storage being an issue. "A lot of the resources and stuff in the classroom are stored in these big clear boxes. And even though they are out of the way in the box, I still find it looks like there's just boxes everywhere of stuff. A cluttered environment leads to a cluttered mind. I find that's definitely one thing that impacts us being in the classroom" (Nicky, Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022). This was reinforced by Olga (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022), who stated that "cramped, crowded classrooms affect your wellbeing, and I kind of found it hard to get job satisfaction because you can't teach effectively because of the environment."

Similarly, sensory problems associated with the school environment were identified in schools based on temporary accommodation. Sensory Spaces are beneficial for students to manage sensory overload and enhance calmness for learning (Middletown Centre for Autism, 2021). They provide essential stimulation for those needing help with sensory and emotional regulation (Lynch *et al.*, 2020) and support skill development, self-care, and resilience (Champagne, 2006).

Due to many developing schools being in temporary accommodation, participants in this research noted having "no indoor space for kids to go like a hall or anything like that. Our classroom faces out onto the main road, which is an extremely noisy environment" (Anna, Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022). Ann (Teacher, FG4, 1 June 2022) shared a similar experience regarding the lack of sensory space for a child in her class who "has special needs that might need a bit of (sensory) space now and again, and we don't have it. That's another compromise, and it has an impact on their happiness in school and their ability to access the curriculum and build relationships as well as the other children in the class and then me, and the SNA. We're all sort of making do."

However, staff spoke of a sense of belonging when temporary schools moved to permanent buildings. Tara (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022) spoke of her experience in another developing school that has moved into their permanent building and referred to the

"sense of school around the place. It felt like a school. Everything had a place. Everything was established. It just felt tidier. It was easier to navigate. It felt good. And the facilities that come with that. We had a big hall. We had spaces. That meant then that it was raining, and we had a place to go. We had special outdoor areas. Different age groups had their own yard, so there was definitely more structure, and that definitely impacts positively, especially for children who need structure more than others, for children with special educational needs."

5.4.4 'I have to see it': School Culture

Rehal and van Nieuwerburgh (2022) state that a flourishing educator feels seen, trusted, valued, treated as a professional, and encouraged to be authentic. They experience autonomy, integrity, agency, positive relationships, and ongoing personal and professional growth. They further noted that flourishing educators "feel consistent alignment with their values" (p. 44). Similarly, school culture led by core values helps establish social norms, policies, practices, and behaviors in schools. Participants spoke of wellbeing in the education system as tokenism; generally, there was skepticism around wellbeing statements. Mary (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022) referred to how she hates all these statements about wellbeing. "It just annoys me. It must be action. I have to see it."

Rather than wellbeing statements and wellbeing discourse in education at present, participants in this study referred to school culture as a critical enabler of wellbeing. Mary described this as follows:

"It's like a whole school approach, a culture. Our kids see us being empathetic to each other as well as the kids. So, it's not just you sit, and you do a 30-minute lesson. I think it should really be across the whole school in who you are and what you do, and you're the role model. Again, it's not wellbeing just to be written down, a statement, and you tick a box and it's done. Real wellbeing is we're open and vulnerable with each other. They see us being empathetic with each other. We have bad days, but it's that openness."

Furthermore, participants also alluded to teachers' autonomy in developing schools as an enabler of wellbeing. Worker autonomy, which encompasses the 'discretionary freedom to organise one's job' as defined by (Evers et al., 2017), refers to a teacher's ability to select teaching methods, educational strategies, and curriculum content as constrained by national guidelines (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009). Research shows that the degree of perceived work autonomy predicts teachers' wellbeing (Bermejo-Toro *et al.*, 2015) and directly affects job satisfaction (Simbula, 2010; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009). Pat (Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022) indicated how autonomy and having a tangible impact enable wellbeing while stating,

> *"Being in the first developing school I've been in, I feel the job satisfaction is much higher than I have had at other jobs. I enjoy coming to school and feel that there's a tangible impact on what I'm doing and what we're doing. I haven't always had that. So, it's a real breath of fresh air to be part of something that you know your influence and your effort is going to a good place."*

While school culture has an obvious impact on the wellbeing of teacher, one area that greatly impact the overall wellbeing is the provision of Special Education resources. The following section discusses how the provision of special education resources and supports for the complexity of the role inhibits the wellbeing of teachers.

5.4.5 'Total unfair': Developing School Special Education Allocations and Supports for the Complexity of the Role

The most significant wellbeing inhibitor was inadequate support from the Department of Education and Skills for children with additional needs. Participants were frustrated by the allocation system for special education staff and the lack of essential resources. As a result, teachers often take on roles they are not trained for, such as Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist. Mary (Teacher, FG1, 19 May 2022*)* describes this as follows:

"Our needs are really, really high. We're all doing our best. We're creating a lovely culture in the school. And then you just don't get the support from outside agencies. All our kids are on a waiting list for OT, for SLT, really key services that they need. So, then we're in the classroom, and we're trying our best, but we're teachers at the end of the day. So, I find that really frustrating. The stuff that we can't control, I find, would inhibit my wellbeing because I know how much the kids need it and how much it would impact their day and, therefore, our day."

Again, Ciara (Teacher, FG2, 24 May 2022) describes the allocation system as

"Totally unfair. We try our best, and then you get the SET allocation of 22 hours, and you're like, right, okay. There's just so many little barriers that come up against developing schools that do not necessarily come up against more established schools.

Roisin (Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022) added,

'We have 400 odd students to teach. We have five support teachers. And we're going to have 500. We have one support teacher for 100 children. We don't have enough adults in the building to provide the education and the care that is needed."

Ciara (Teacher, FG3, 30 May 2022) further added that it has a

"massive impact on your wellbeing. It's awful. You just come home so deflated some days, and that's where I was talking about having to strip everything back. A lot of the nice things that would boost the kids' wellbeing, they have to go because you literally can just about get through the day."

Given that teacher wellbeing is a product of individual and systemic factors, educational policymakers should strategically enhance support. Examining methodologies for developing educational environments that actively cultivate teacher wellbeing is imperative. Prioritising pragmatic methodologies, training, resource equity, and policy reform can improve teacher resilience, job satisfaction,

and overall health, benefiting educators and students alike. Addressing these facets is a response to the proximate requisites of teachers and a foundational step towards a sustainable educational system that optimally serves educators and students.

5.5 Discussion

Stress and burnout within the teaching profession have reached alarming proportions (Education Support, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2008; Foley and Murphy, 2015). According to Stoeber and Rennert (2008), teachers experience higher stress levels than any other profession. This global trend is characterised by the growing complexity of teachers' roles and responsibilities in the aftermath of educational reforms implemented in numerous countries. Furthermore, the burden on teachers and school leaders has escalated due to the heightened workload of principals (DeMatthews *et al.*, 2021; Beausaert *et al.*, 2016). Coleman (2009) underscored the importance of educators' wellbeing in addressing school-wide wellbeing, arguing that addressing students' emotional wellbeing in school is impossible without acknowledging and recognising teachers' emotional wellbeing. Our study highlights that teachers in developing schools are extended professionals who are deeply devoted to the students and families they work with. It also outlines how the complexity of a developing school has led to increased stress, vulnerability, or concern for teachers themselves or their own families.

This heightened stress can be attributed to various factors, such as the demanding nature of their tasks and institutional stressors. Curry and O'Brien (2012) indicate that teachers struggle to cope with escalating responsibilities and overloaded initiatives, making it challenging to meet the growing social and emotional demands within schools. In today's educational landscape, schools increasingly incorporate social and political inclusivity globally (Khochen-Bagshaw, 2020; Ianes *et al.*, 2020; Ito *et al.*, 2022). However, this transformation places unrealistic expectations on teachers to meet these diverse needs (Ito *et al.*, 2022; McCallum and Price, 2010). The findings of this study shed light on the disproportionate ramifications stemming from the inadequate provision of special education resources in developing schools after the implementation of the New Special Education Model in 2016.

Moreover, the inclusive ethos of multi-denominational and equality-based schools, as evident in Educate Together Schools and Community National Schools, contributes to a significant population of students with additional needs. Consequently, the insufficient allocation of special education teachers and special needs assistants in developing school's results in teachers' frustration at being unable to meet all the needs in their schools. This study illuminates how teachers in such educational settings demonstrate resourcefulness and ingenuity as they seek alternative strategies to meet the diverse requirements of their students. The findings underscore the central driving force of a strong commitment to fostering caring relationships. However, as the size of the developing schools expands, teachers are compelled to prioritise students with the most pressing needs, evoking a sense of occupational guilt among educators.

In addition, social support from peers and principals can significantly affect teachers' wellbeing (Bermejo-Toro *et al.*, 2015; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009) and help them cope with the growing professional demands. Peer support directly influences wellbeing and job satisfaction and has an inverse relationship with burnout (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009). Among the various forms of social support, principal support is vital in motivating and engaging teachers (Bird *et al.*, 2009; Finnigan, 2010); it is the most influential factor in enhancing job satisfaction and reducing burnout risk (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Hakanen *et al.*, 2006).

As Cherkowski *et al.* (2018) highlighted, educational leaders are responsible for fostering positive school environments and ensuring the wellbeing of teachers, staff, students, and school families. Prioritising teachers' wellbeing and enabling their growth impacts classroom climates positively and leads to high-quality teaching, ultimately benefiting students (Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018; Louis and Murphy, 2018). Doran *et al.* (2023) found that teacher wellbeing is significantly influenced by management's implementation of support strategies and the perception of management's concern for teacher welfare. These factors highlight the crucial role of effective leadership in creating a supportive work environment that promotes employee wellbeing, consistent with existing research that links leadership behaviors to positive outcomes in employee wellbeing (van der Vyver *et al.*, 2020;

Cherkowski *et al.*, 2018; Briker *et al.*, 2020). This is consistent with our study, where teachers acknowledged the leadership role of principals in creating a vision, establishing a culture, and setting the tone in the school. They also emphasised the importance of principals and leadership as a support system, fostering a collaborative culture and “having the teachers' back” (Tara Teacher, FG1, 22 May 2022). Rehal and van Nieuwerburgh (2022) define a flourishing educator as: "an educator who feels seen, trusted, and valued. They are treated as a professional and encouraged to be authentic. They have autonomy, integrity, and agency and experience positive relationships along with personal and professional growth (p. 36)” in the Ecological Model of Educator Flourishing. Therefore, school leaders in developing schools must be given specific support and continuous professional development to support the teachers in their schools.

In addition to peer support and collegiality, this study also identified the poor physical school environment, particularly in developing schools in temporary accommodation, as an inhibitor of wellbeing among teachers and students. Hakanen *et al.* (2006) reported a significant correlation between an unpleasant physical environment and teacher burnout, which aligns with our findings. An unpleasant physical learning environment encompasses inadequate thermal comfort, ventilation, or lighting, lack of cleanliness in the classroom or restrooms, and limited availability of specialised facilities, which can all decrease the sense of belonging, connectedness, and flexibility. Similarly, exposure to high noise levels can reduce teachers' job satisfaction, decrease energy levels after work, and heighten the inclination to leave the job (Kristiansen *et al.*, 2011).

On the contrary, certain school facilities, such as the ability to regulate classroom temperature and appropriate lighting, contribute positively to teachers' wellbeing (Buckley *et al.*, 2005; Earthman *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended that the Department of Education address the issue of school accommodation before opening a developing school. Alternatively, additional financial support should be provided for developing schools to ensure a school environment conducive to the wellbeing of staff and students.

Schools and education systems are complex, with multiple dynamic, interconnecting parts that form webs of interdependent relationships. Kern and Taylor (2021) refer to "school change initiatives view change through the lens of individual parts, rather than seeing the whole living system. Education systems are comprised of many interconnected elements, including students, teachers, parents, curriculum, legislation, policy, funding, and buildings. These are each connected together with a range of other related elements, including perceptions, priorities, norms, beliefs, and values" (p.28). As a result, the findings of this study reassert the need for a systems-informed approach to wellbeing in schools where wellbeing is embedded in relationships, norms, policies and practices, culture, curriculum, and space.

5.5.1 Limitations

ANT's context-specific approach means the findings may not be widely applicable and thus should be applied to other settings with caution. The generalisability of our findings is further limited by the modest, self-selected sample size of 20 teachers from developing schools, which may not reflect the diversity of teacher experiences in different schools even though this sample size yields rich qualitative data. Moreover, ANT and qualitative data inherently carry a degree of subjectivity and a risk of bias based on the participants' shared experiences. Thus, some contrasting perspectives may remain unexplored, potentially skewing the study's themes. Finally, ANT's focus on relational dynamics is insightful but may neglect systemic factors or causal relationships, which are vital for crafting effective interventions.

Therefore, future research on teacher wellbeing should integrate data from qualitative and quantitative approaches and involve diverse voices, especially those less likely to engage in research, for greater validity and generalisability of the findings across various educational settings.

5.6 Conclusion

This research delves into the complexities of educator wellbeing within the context of newly established primary schools in Ireland, leveraging ANT to intricately analyse the factors that influence teachers' mental and emotional health. The

investigation pinpointed school leadership, the quality of relationships within the school community, and the prevailing school culture as central pillars supporting teacher wellbeing. It illuminates the critical nature of nurturing networks and the provision of mentorship as key to creating a positive work environment for educators. Conversely, the study also brings to light the detrimental effects of superficial wellbeing initiatives, insufficient infrastructural resources, and the glaring gap in special education support, which collectively erode teachers' sense of value and belonging.

The significance of this study extends beyond education, critiquing systemic dynamics impacting teacher wellbeing. It calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of how educational stakeholders, from policymakers to the broader community, conceptualise and support the wellbeing of educators. Our findings emphasise a holistic approach to transforming educational institutions for enhancing the experiences and outcomes of both teachers and students.

5.7 References

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Chapter 6 An analysis of primary school student's holistic wellbeing using PhotoVoice

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Health Education

An analysis of primary school student's holistic well-being using PhotoVoice

David Cashman
School of Education, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
Wesley O'Brien
Sports Studies and Physical Education Programme, University College Cork National University of Ireland, Cork, Ireland, and
Fiona Chambers
School of Education, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to capture children's interpretation of holistic well-being within Irish primary schools and add to the development of a comprehensive systems-informed positive education model.

Design/methodology/approach – This study utilized visual participatory research methods, including PhotoVoice and one-on-one interviews, to assess children's (n = 16) well-being, guided by Von Unger's comprehensive seven-step framework. Data analysis was anchored within grounded theory, beginning with data collection, initial coding, focused coding and culminating in identifying themes and subthemes. Data were interpreted using the mosaic approach by integrating visual and verbal data.

Findings – This analysis uncovered three primary themes that affect student well-being: relationships, space and physical environment and learning and curriculum, each with detailed subthemes. For instance, student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, safety, learning spaces, the creative curriculum including arts and music and the experiential richness of outdoor learning are crucial to students' educational growth and well-being. These aspects are seen as interconnected, shaping a holistic educational experience beyond academic learning to encompass students' comprehensive well-being. The students' narratives demonstrated that learning is not merely an academic exercise but a vital component of their well-being.

Originality/value – This study significantly departs from traditional educational research by advocating for a dynamic, action-oriented understanding of "well-being." It challenges the static, possessive interpretations of well-being and introduces the concept of well-being as a fluid and ever-evolving process. This reconceptualization positions well-being as a complex construct, influenced by an intricate web of relationships, spanning human and non-human interactions, organizational and environmental structures, personal desires, behavioral practices and broader societal and cultural frameworks.

Keywords Well-being, School, Students, Student voice, Participatory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Well-being in schools encompasses cultivating positive relationships among students, teachers, and the wider school community while fostering a supportive environment that

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Preamble

The following article reports on the enablers and inhibitors for students in a developing primary school context. This is a published manuscript which has been peer- reviewed and published in the Emerald Journal of Health Education online [February 20th, 2025]. The following is the citation for this article:

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Statement of authorship.

I hereby declare that I, David Cashman, am the principal author of this article. The following statements outline my contributions to the work:

1. I was the principal investigator responsible for all the data collected (2022) in this chapter. I organised all stages of data collection consisting of, contacting all primary schools' principals, teachers and students and their parents, equipment preparation, data storage, data cleaning and data inputting.
2. Organised each stage of the data collection and participatory research which was an important component of this baseline study.
3. Made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the work, the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data for the work.
4. Wrote the first draft of the full article and contributed significantly to the subsequent redrafts until submission.
5. Final approval of the version to be published, and agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

6.1 Introduction

Wellbeing in schools encompasses cultivating positive relationships among students, teachers, and the wider school community while fostering a supportive environment that promotes social, emotional, and academic development (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). It involves creating a culture where everyone feels secure, connected, and valued and where there are ample opportunities for learning, personal growth, and handling challenges constructively (CASEL, 2015; Department of Education and Skills, 2019; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). It includes students' perceptions (positive and negative) towards school, people in school, and the school environment (Hascher, 2003). Furthermore, Farrell *et al.* (2024) identified three wellbeing conceptualisations: being happy, staying safe and healthy, and something you "do."

Students' wellbeing has been associated with positive mental health (Hill et al., 2020), social relationships (Graham et al., 2016; Holfve-Sabel, 2014; Suldo et al., 2019; Navarro et al., 2015), learning (Holfve-Sabel, 2014), and academic achievement (Bucker et al., 2018). In addition, du Toit et al. (2022) identified authenticity, self-esteem, self-support for autonomy, emotional repair, and the ability to regulate distress and despondency as outcomes of positive student wellbeing. Over the past twenty years, positive education (PosEd) has evolved, incorporating positive psychology as conceptualised by Seligman's PERMA model (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) with educational methods to foster student wellbeing (Slemp, 2016; White and Kern, 2018). Kern and Taylor (2021) expanded this through Systems Informed Positive Education (SIPE), weaving in systems science to enhance individual and educational system health. Similarly, Waters and Loton (2019) developed The SEARCH meta-framework within PosEd, providing an overarching structure for its application and study.

Earlier research on students' wellbeing predominantly focused on adolescents/older teens (Ramadan, 2021; Schmidt and Hansson, 2018; Howell, 2009; du Toit et al., 2022). However, in the past decade, there has been a growing interest in the wellbeing of primary school students (Holfve-Sabel, 2014; Graham et al., 2016; Liu

et al., 2014; Graetz et al., 2012; Chiva- Bartoll et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2010). While various methodologies have been developed to assess older students' wellbeing, such as the student wellbeing questionnaire, anxiety questionnaire, and the seven-domain (Having, Being, Relating, Feeling, Thinking, Functioning, and Striving) student wellbeing model (Soutter et al., 2013; Hascher, 2007), the wellbeing assessment of primary school students have relied heavily on alternative tools such as subjective wellbeing in school scale (Liu et al., 2014), and the student's social well- being at school questionnaire (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2020).

Engaging students in understanding their wellbeing can be effectively achieved through participatory methods such as photo-elicitation interviews, talk and draw discussions, sorting activities, and PhotoVoice. These methods extend beyond younger age groups and offer an authentic way to involve all students in discussions about their lives, catering to their developmental need for autonomy and self-expression (Honkanen et al., 2017; Kellock, 2020). Traditional methods like questionnaires, while commonly used, often fall short in eliciting candid responses from students. The structured format of questionnaires may lead to a lack of truthful reporting due to social desirability bias or the reluctance to engage in self-disclosure (Abma and Schrijver, 2019; Coyne et al., 2021). Participatory approaches, by contrast, create a dynamic space for students to articulate their experiences more freely and creatively, providing a richer, more honest insight into their wellbeing (Leavy and Hourigan, 2017; Montreuil et al., 2021).

This study utilised visual participatory research methods to capture interpretations of holistic wellbeing within Irish primary schools. Specifically, the current research aimed to explore (1) the authentic views of students on how they experience wellbeing in school and (2) how their voices impact the development of a systems-informed PosEd model.

6.2 Methodology

6.2.1 Theoretical foundations of pupil wellbeing

This study is grounded in the principles of Positive Education, a pedagogical approach rooted in Positive Psychology that seeks to integrate academic learning with the promotion of wellbeing. At the heart of Positive Education is the belief that schools should not only equip students with intellectual skills but also provide opportunities to develop their emotional, social, and psychological skills necessary for a flourishing life (Seligman, 2011; Norrish, 2015).

The philosophical discourse surrounding Wellbeing, dating back to Aristotle's exploration of hedonism (Kahneman et al., 1999) and eudaimonia (Waterman, 1993), underscores the dualism inherent in wellbeing discussions: the pursuit of pleasure versus a flourishing life.

Indeed, Jenkins et al. (2022, p. 2) also found that "experiencing and integrating both types of wellbeing contribute to what psychologists have termed 'flourishing.'" This fundamental debate informs the educational approach to wellbeing, influencing the overall purpose of wellbeing initiatives within schools. Moreover, the identification of several philosophical approaches to Wellbeing in education highlights the varied lenses through which Wellbeing can be conceptualised and integrated into educational settings (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2002, 2011; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Keyes, 2002; Diener et al., 2010; Roffey, 2012; Huppert and So, 2013; Street, 2018; Waters and Loton, 2019; Peill, 2022).

In the wider field of wellbeing in education, there are several frameworks that consider wellbeing from multiple perspectives (Konu and Rimpela, 2002; Scottish Government, 2004; Seligman et al., 2009; Brunwasser et al., 2009; Norrish, 2015; Stokes et al., 2019; Brackett et al., 2012; Street, 2018; CASEL, 2017; Waters and Loton, 2019; Peill, 2022). Among them, Seligman's PERMA framework (2011, 2018), which includes positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, is well established. This model has been adopted by two leading schools, St Peter's College, Adelaide (White and Murray, 2015) and Geelong

Grammar School (Norrish et al., 2013), with the latter adding a sixth element to the framework: positive health. Kern et al. (2015) conducted a study in St Peter's College with over 500 male students to examine the efficacy of the PERMA framework. I found that each component of the PERMA framework is linked to different wellbeing outcomes. Positive emotion and relationships, for instance, were associated with life satisfaction, hope, and gratitude. However, positive emotion alone was connected to physical vitality, and relationships alone were linked to spirituality. This study led the researchers to conclude that evaluating subjective wellbeing through multiple lenses allows schools to understand and foster wellbeing in a more systematic and effective way.

This study, utilising the PhotoVoice methodology, seeks to explore how students' experiences within an educational setting align with the principles of Positive Education, particularly how they perceive and contribute to their own wellbeing. By using positive education as a guiding theoretical lens, this study aims to identify the multiple dimensions of wellbeing that emerge from students' lived experiences. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of research advocating for a more holistic approach to student wellbeing in schools, one that fully integrates academic achievement with personal growth and wellbeing. Study setting and participants. Sixteen students aged 8–10 years old (six males and ten females) were recruited from second and third classes in an urban, co-educational developing primary school using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling. The purposive sampling criteria were carefully considered to ensure a diverse representation of students in terms of gender, social background, and learning abilities. This approach allowed the study to capture a broad and representative range of perspectives on wellbeing, while remaining feasible given the researcher's proximity to the school.

The research methods and language were specifically tailored to be age-appropriate, considering the students' cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social skills. The study was conducted within a familiar school environment to help maintain participant comfort and ease. A 4-week time frame was selected to allow students sufficient time to engage with the research process and gradually deepen their understanding of wellbeing.

In line with the participatory nature of the PhotoVoice methodology, participants played an active role in the coding and meaning-making process through their involvement in the gallery walk. By sharing their images and narratives, they contributed to the co-construction of themes, effectively positioning them as co-researchers. A team-based approach to coding was also employed, with the involvement of the teacher and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) in each class. These individuals provided invaluable support throughout the research process, given their established trust-based relationships with the students, and their daily classroom interactions with the students.

6.2.2 Study design

The study setting, a primary school environment, was supplemented with diverse visual resources and methods such as talk and draw, photo-elicitation, and dialogic interactions, ensuring a rich and varied data collection process for four weeks to allow the capture of genuine and unaltered children's expressions.

The methodological design adheres to the Lundy model of child participation (Lundy, 2013), underscoring the importance of children's perspectives as articulated by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The methodological framework is geared towards accessing and reflecting children's wellbeing experiences in primary schools through ethical participation (Harmon, 2020). Recognising the complexity of children's viewpoints, PhotoVoice empowers children as cultural researchers, revealing themes adults may overlook (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Komulainen, 2016; Luttrell, 2010; Burke, 2005). The research tackles child-adult power dynamics, guiding children's contributions in data analysis and interpretation (Luttrell, 2010; Wang and Hannes, 2020). We applied the seven-step PhotoVoice framework according to Von Unger (2012) to facilitate participant-centric, empowering research, yielding insightful data, as detailed in **Table 6.1** below,

Table 6.1 : Research aligning with von Unger's 7- step framework (Source: Created by authors)

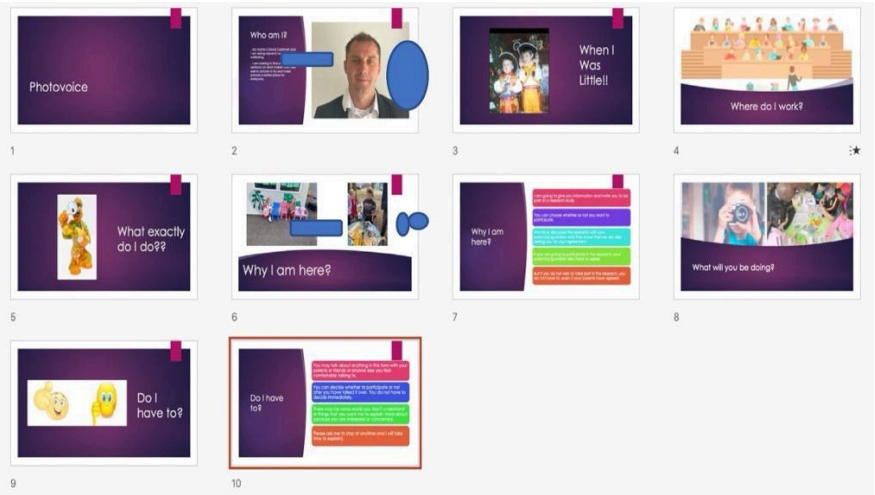
von Unger's 7-step framework	Research sessions

Establishing a Thematic Focus Identifying key themes and issues pertinent to the participants' experiences within their educational settings	**Session 1** • Informing and consenting using picture books **Session 2** • Stock Photos to acquaint the children with the research topic
Engagement in Talk and Draw Sessions Encouraging children to accompany their photography with reflective journaling, further elucidating their perspectives	**Session 3** • Talk and draw sessions
Fundamentals of Photography Educating participants, in this case, children, about basic photography skills to adequately capture their environment	**Session 4** • Basic photography instruction and photo-taking
Conducting Group Dialogs Facilitating discussions centered around the photographs taken, fostering a deeper understanding of the children's views and experiences	**Session 5** • Gallery Walk • Ranking Activity
Thematic Analysis of Photos and Discussions Analysing the collected photographs and dialogs to identify prevalent themes and insights	**Session 6** • Child-led interviews
	Data Analysis • Initial Coding • Focused Coding • Mosaic Approach
Formulating Actionable Recommendations Develop practical and insightful recommendations based on the analysis to address identified issues or enhance the studied environment	**Results and Findings**
Reflective Evaluation of the Process	**Future Directions**

Our research methods closely mirrored the research previously conducted by Martin and Buckley (2018), which sought to include the voices of young children in an

ongoing evaluation of a community-based prevention and early intervention program. The data collection process spanned four weeks and unfolded exclusively within the primary school setting.

Session 1: introducing the researcher. During this inaugural session, we sought informed consent from the participating children. Children could only provide their consent if they fully understood their role in the study and the purpose of the study. To inform the children about the study, the researcher created a picture book detailing the research project, introducing the researcher and explaining the study's purpose in a visually engaging and child-friendly manner (**see Figure 6.1**). The European Commission Guide to Creating Child-Friendly Versions of Written Documents (European Union, 2012) was used to develop the picture book. This approach follows the "narrative non-fiction" method, which has been recognised as an ethical way to provide information, where the researcher establishes the research context and purpose, outlines the rules of participation, and presents information in the form of a factual narrative, supported by real photographs of people, places, and events (Mayne *et al.*, 2015).

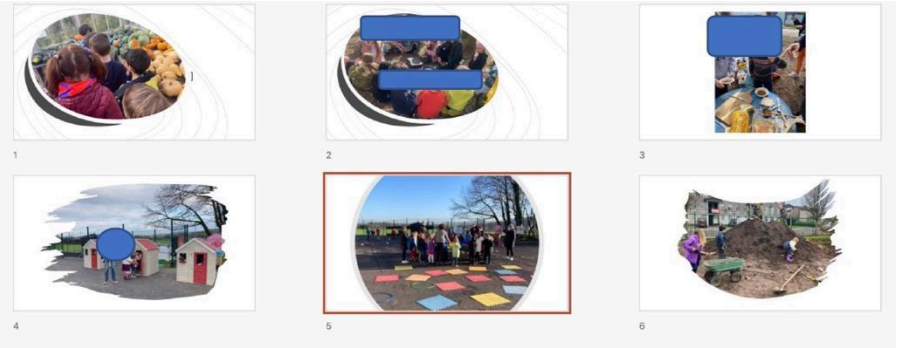


Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.1: Picture book describing research study

Session 2: introduction to wellbeing. This session commenced with introducing the concept of wellbeing in school to the children using photo elicitation, followed by a review of the previous session's narrative. This involved presenting stock photos

illustrating caregiver interactions and photographs of the primary school taken by the school's staff (**see Figure 6.2**). This session's primary objective was to further acquaint the children with our research team and cultivate a sense of comfort with our presence within the primary school environment.



Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.2: Stock photographs

Session 3: talk and draw. A talk and draw session were conducted with the children, implementing the well-established talk and draw method (Hanley *et al.*, 2004). The advantages of such activities include child-friendliness, bypassing the limitations of language, and engagement in an activity (drawing) with which children are familiar (Angell *et al.*, 2014; Horstman *et al.*, 2008). This aimed to elicit the children's nuanced perspectives on their everyday experiences while acclimating them to our presence in the primary school. Notably, posters were used as effective prompts for the children, and markers were provided, consistent with their prior use in the primary school classroom, to evoke enthusiasm. The session comprised three groups, each consisting of 4–5 children, accompanied by their teacher. Each group was allocated a 20-min time slot for participation. After completing their coloring and drawing activities, the children were encouraged to affix their drawings onto their preferred photos displayed on the wall, originating from the prior photo-elicitation session (**see Figure 6.3**)

Session 4: learning how to use cameras. The children were entrusted with digital cameras and received basic instructions on their operation. Their task entailed capturing photographs over two days of anything that made them feel well within the confines of their primary school.



Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.3: Talk and draw drawings

The primary school staff provided support in addressing any technical challenges that arose during the execution of this activity.

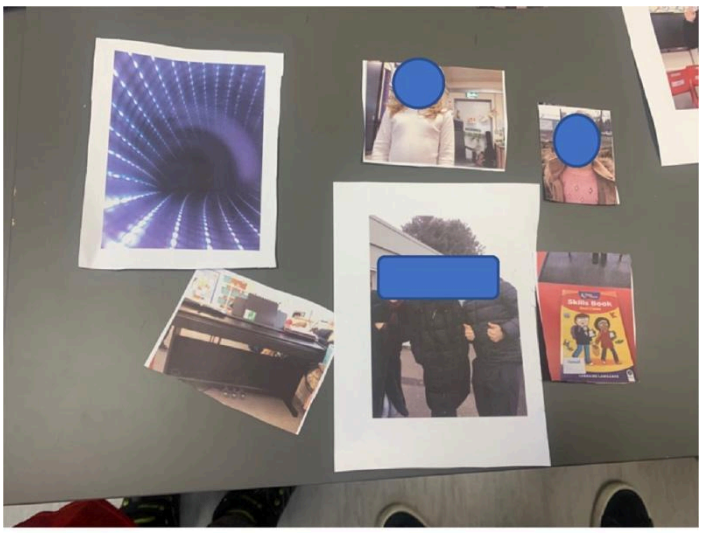
Session 5: gallery walk. This session involved a "gallery walk" with printed copies of the photographs captured by the children (**Figure 6.4**), serving as the primary source of empirical data for our research study (De Jaegher and Di Paolo, 2007).



Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.4: Gallery walk

The children were then invited to rank their five most preferred photographs. This approach enabled children to select and prioritise their preferred images and facilitated the inclusion of non-verbal children in the discourse. As a thinking skill tool (Rockett and Percival, 2002), the ranking could be organised vertically, horizontally, or in a mix of both (**see Figure 6.5**)



Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.5: Ranking activity

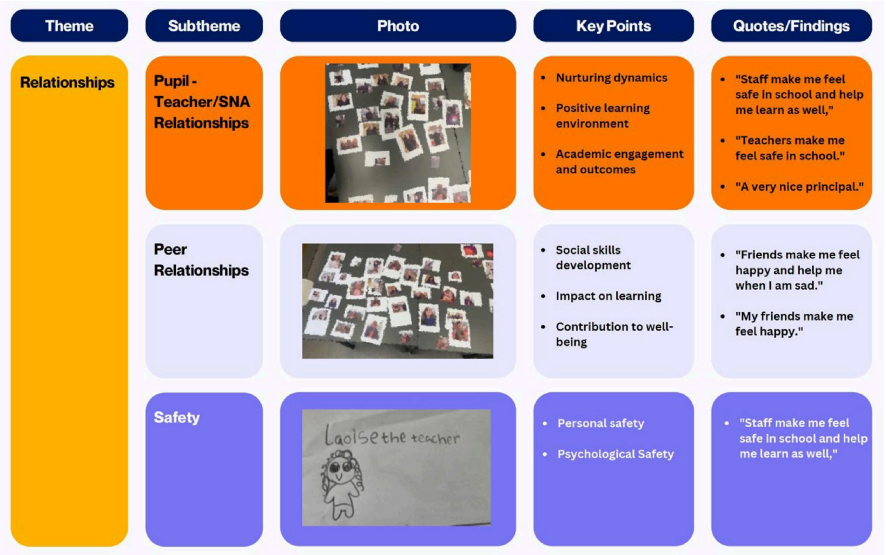
Session 6: one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted with the participants individually in the school's resource room to comprehensively understand the children's daily experiences within the school and home environments. Subsequently, group discussions were conducted, as guided by child-friendly questions adapted from Wang and Burris (1994). Our questions were reframed as "Why did you take that photo?" "What is happening in the photo?" "What are you doing in the photo?" and "Did you like having the camera?" This facilitated the articulation of participants' interpretations of the visuals and encouraged peer-based discussion. These interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Session durations ranged from 7 to 15 min, tailored to each child's level of engagement. Variability was noted in both the communicativeness and the focus on individual photographs contributed by the students.

Data analysis. Data analysis was anchored in grounded theory, beginning in tandem with data collection, as recommended by Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), Corbin and Strauss (1990), and Corbin and Strauss (2008). This method guaranteed a direct and deep engagement with the data from the start, which was essential for grasping the subtle details in classroom environments. In the initial coding phase of the study, the analysis began with the artifacts from the talk and draw sessions, followed by an examination of the photographs. This process entailed assigning descriptive labels to data segments to encapsulate and classify the information, as suggested by Charmaz (2006). Additionally, frequency tables were created to track how often certain objects or people appeared in the drawings and photographs (see **Table 6.2**). A subsequent comparative analysis, as described by Glaser and Strauss (2017), was conducted, resulting in nine common codes. Focused coding was employed to elevate significant codes into thematic categories, as described by Charmaz (2015). This iterative process involved interrogating the interview data across all nine classes and refining categories through methodological triangulation (Heale and Forbes, 2013) across different data forms, such as transcripts and visual data. This phase was pivotal for conceptualising the data from varied analytical perspectives.

Table 6.2: Frequency of objects/people drawn during the talk and draw sessions and the objects/people photographed during photograph sessions (Source: Created by author)

Variables	Number of occurrences during sessions	
	Talk and draw	**Photograph**
Friends	21	29
School staff	12	28
School physical environment, including the sensory room, nurture room, yard, and garden	16	28
Literacy and numeracy activities, including books, library, and work samples	13	13
Outdoor learning areas	11	8
Physical education	10	—
Artwork samples or utensils	7	8
After school program	7	—
Music (piano, drums, ukuleles)	0	4

By analysing data from talk and draw sessions, photographs, gallery walks, ranking activities, and child interviews, we employed the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) as the final data analysis stage. This integrated approach combines the visual with the verbal (Clark and Moss, 2011). The idea behind the Mosaic approach is that researchers collect data through various means. These are what Clark and Moss (2011) consider "individual tiles." The researcher then combines these pieces to form one big picture, like many little tiles forming one big mosaic. Our mosaic tiles are included in **Figure 6.6**.



Source(s): Figure created by authors

Figure 6.6: Sample of mosaic tiles for the theme of relationships

6.2.3 Research ethics

This study was approved by University College Cork's Social Research Ethics Committee (Log, 2021–090) in September 2021, aligning with the 2011 Department of Children and Youth Affairs ethical research guidelines involving children. Utmost care was taken to protect the children and their families' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Explicit consent was mandatory for all images taken, and any photographs captured without consent were immediately deleted. Identifying images have been excluded from this publication unless specific permission was granted. We rigorously

followed the copyright and ownership guidance issued by the university's Office for Corporate and Legal Affairs for photographs taken by children.

6.3 Results

Three primary conceptual themes were identified, each with three subthemes highlighting the distinct facets of a child's communicative methods and school experiences contributing to their wellbeing.

6.3.1 Theme 1: relationships

Student-teacher relationships. The role of student-teacher/SNA relationships in shaping the educational experience within the primary school setting was a prominent sub-theme that emerged in our study. A detailed analysis of the various forms of data, including the photographs taken by students and their drawings, provided a multifaceted perspective on these relationships.

Our analysis of the visual data revealed a substantial number of photographs taken by pupils that featured school staff, indicating the prominence of school staff in the students' school experiences (see **Table 6.2**). Every child also created a drawing of their teachers during the talk and draw sessions, which further emphasised the importance of these relationships. These interactions contribute significantly to a positive and conducive learning environment, strongly indicative of the teachers' roles as mentors and guides.

Integrating children's artwork and photographs in our analysis allowed for a comprehensive and participatory exploration of the children's experiences and perceptions. This collectively illustrated a pervasive theme of the essential role that school staff play in fostering a secure and supportive learning environment. The convergence of visual and verbal data through the Mosaic approach revealed a clear narrative: the teacher's role in the primary school context is profoundly influential, extending beyond educational instruction to encompassing emotional support and providing a secure learning atmosphere.

Peer relationships. In assessing the role of peer relationships within the primary school setting, our study explored the dynamics of child-to-child interactions, yielding significant findings that underscore their importance in pupils' educational and social development. Children engaged extensively in socialisation and collaborative activities with their peers. This consistent interaction was instrumental in fostering a sense of community belonging and was essential for developing critical social skills. The influence of peer relationships extended beyond socialisation, significantly impacting the children's learning experiences. Collaborative and peer-assisted learning activities were common, reinforcing the notion that peers play a crucial role in sharing knowledge and developing new skills.

The data from the *talk and draw sessions* and photograph analyses revealed a unanimous sentiment among the children: friendships at school contributed positively to their wellbeing. This was a pervasive theme across all visual and verbal expressions collected during the study. The children explicitly conveyed the emotional significance of these peer relationships. Student P remarked, *"Friends make me feel happy and help me when I am sad,"* highlighting the supportive nature of peer relationships. Student J plainly stated, *"My friends make me feel happiness,"* capturing the joy peers bring to her school experience.

The unanimity of children's reflections on peer relationships, evident in their drawings and photographs, clearly indicates the collective value placed on friendships for their overall well- being in school. This consensus underscores the critical role that peer connections play in creating a nurturing and emotionally supportive school environment.

Safety. The significance of safety within the school setting emerged as a prominent theme from our research, particularly through student interviews. Agbenyega (2011) defines safety within children's learning environments as spaces where they feel secure and are free to explore without excessive adult interference. This concept of safety extends beyond physical security to include psychological comfort, fostering autonomy, trust, and engagement in learning activities. The study emphasises that such environments are crucial for cognitive and emotional development, supporting

the notion that effective educational practices must prioritise creating and managing these safe spaces to enhance children's learning experiences (Agbenyega, 2011). In our study, the prominence of student's relationships with teachers and SNAs was first noted in their drawings and photographs, illustrating a collective appreciation for the role of the school staff. These expressions by the pupils underscored the value they placed on staff in enhancing their wellbeing at school.

It was, however, the child-led interviews that brought this theme to the forefront. In these discussions, students articulated a sense of security fostered by school staff. For instance, Student B stated, *"Staff make me feel safe in school and help me learn as well,"* encapsulating the dual role of school staff as both protectors and educators. Student D further complemented this sentiment with his remark, *"Teachers make me feel safe in school,"* pointing to the critical need for a protective environment that shields students from physical and emotional harm. These first-hand accounts by students highlight the essential role that school staff play in creating a nurturing and emotionally supportive learning environment. As expressed by the students, safety is not merely a background condition but a fundamental aspect of their daily educational experience.

6.3.2 Theme 2: space and physical environment

Sensory space and nurture room. Our research corroborates the findings of recent studies by Wang *et al.* (2020) and Kaya and Erdem (2021), supporting the critical role of the school environment in promoting student wellbeing. In our study, 23.7% of photographs captured featured school spaces, emphasising their significance in the student's everyday experience. The school where our research took place was equipped with nurture [1] and sensory [2] rooms, each serving a distinct purpose. However, on closer examination, many photos included classroom displays, art displays, samples of children's work on the walls, and many classroom items. This suggests that the school environment is a backdrop and an active participant in the educational process. These elements contribute to a sense of community and personal identity among students and are essential components of wellbeing. Classroom displays and student work on the walls reflect a learning culture that values student contributions, enhancing their sense of achievement and belonging.

This visual and physical engagement with the school environment reinforces the pedagogical relationship and mirrors the "situatedness" of learning (Fenwick, 2014) and "place-belongingness" (Antonsich, 2010). Furthermore, it highlights vital yet generally overlooked relationships between the learning environment, student learning, and wellbeing. This reveals the potential of participatory, values-based design approaches to create learning spaces that respond to contemporary learners' needs (Hughes *et al.*, 2019).

Interviews with the students themselves provide a clear narrative of these findings. Student F articulated a positive relationship with the school's sensory spaces, stating, *"Sensory room help me calm down*," illustrating the importance of such rooms for students needing to manage sensory input and find emotional balance. In addition, Student J expressed affection for another key area designed for emotional support, saying*, "I love going to the nurture room. I love the freedom there and that you can bring some snugglies (soft toys), so you have a calm space to do your work."* This personal testimony highlights the nurture room as a place of comfort and autonomy, vital for students who benefit from a calm environment to support their learning and emotional needs.

The convergence of visual data from our photographic evidence and the authentic voices of students like Student F and Student J strengthens the argument for deliberately creating special spaces within schools while highlighting the necessity for schools to consider all areas as potential wellbeing spaces. It becomes evident that while nurture and sensory rooms serve their specialised purposes, the ethos of wellbeing should permeate every corner of the school environment. Hallways, libraries, classrooms, and even outdoor areas should be designed with the same intentionality to support emotional and educational needs. This holistic approach acknowledges that every space where a student interacts has the potential to impact their well- being, thereby contributing significantly to holistic student development.

Outdoor learning. Outdoor learning was a significant component of our school research site, especially for the younger students in the junior and senior infant classes who participate in a structured outdoor learning program. Our study is

consistent with a growing body of evidence suggesting that spending more time outdoors in nature benefits young people's well- being (McCormick, 2017). Outdoor environments offer numerous benefits for children's learning, health, and development. These include supporting emotional regulation and enhancing overall wellbeing (Louv, 2005). A longitudinal study of over 40,000 pupils found that outdoor lessons significantly enhanced students' enjoyment and wellbeing, with 95% reporting more enjoyment and 90% feeling healthier and happier (Waite *et al.*, 2013). Our research showed that students associate outdoor learning with enhanced wellbeing and calmness. This positive effect of outdoor learning activities was a dominant theme throughout the study's talk and draw activities, photographs, and interviews. The children emphasised the soothing and regulatory impact of the outdoor environment on their emotions and how happy outdoor learning made them feel.

Student C's observation, "The garden and the plants make me feel happy," showcases the joy of direct contact with nature. This individual reflection is part of a broader enthusiasm for experiential learning outside the classroom. Student L's enthusiastic comment, "The outdoors is my favorite thing in school because I love forest school," echoes this sentiment. Adding to these perspectives, Student H noted, "Outdoor learning makes me feel free; the birds singing make me feel calm," capturing the essence of the peace and autonomy students feel when learning amidst nature's sounds and sights. These insights collectively affirm the profound impact that outdoor learning has on students' happiness and self-regulation during their educational journey.

6.3.3 Theme 3: learning and curriculum

Academic curriculum. This research uncovers a nuanced student perspective in challenging the conventional adult conceptualisations of wellbeing in educational settings, which Farrell *et al.* (2024) describe as predominantly associated with feelings of happiness and wellbeing as something you "do." According to the children's experiences, wellbeing is deeply embedded in the learning process. This paradigm shift suggests that students perceive their wellbeing not as a separate

by-product of education but as a core experience that unfolds through their academic endeavors.

This reframing is evident in how the students engage with the curriculum. There is an enthusiasm for activities that require mental agility and practical engagement. This can be seen in photos of mental math exercises and hands-on scientific experiments. These activities, which necessitate a tactile and investigative approach to learning, resonate strongly with the students. The eagerness and commitment displayed by the children in these learning scenarios suggest that wellbeing is closely tied to the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment derived from mastering new concepts and skills. Visual evidence from the students, comprising circle time sessions and outdoor educational activities, illustrates the curriculum's practical application. These student-generated images display an array of learning techniques, from conventional literacy and numeracy aids to innovative visual frameworks for writing, which they navigate in stages.

Personal quotes from the students further underscore this sentiment. The repeated phrase from student A, "Learning makes me feel good," conveys a sense of enjoyment in their educational journey. Furthermore, student F's statement, "learning helps me and helps me learn things," signifies the perceived personal growth associated with their learning. These expressions, directly from the students, reflect their academic engagement and a broader satisfaction with their educational environment.

The arts and music. Our study also underscores the arts and music as integral elements of the curriculum, as evidenced by their frequent mention in the talk-and-draw sessions and the photography analysis (see **Table 6.2**). These disciplines were instrumental in fostering the children's creative expression, providing avenues for personal articulation, and encouraging exploration within artistic realms. The engagement with arts and music was related to increased emotional investment and excitement, thus enhancing the students' comprehensive educational experience. Student A's reflection on a picture of the piano, utilised daily by their teacher, encapsulates this sentiment, expressing a fondness for the

instrument's sound and the overall experience of listening to music. Student A states, "This is a picture of the piano, and sometimes (teacher's name) plays the piano when we have choir, and I like the sound of music." Similarly, Student K's perception of art as a "calming activity" exemplifies the dual role of art and music as conduits for self-expression and exploration and as regulatory practices that provide solace and stability for the students. These insights affirm the multifaceted contribution of the arts to the student's wellbeing and educational enrichment, which is consistent with Nohilly *et al.* (2023), who argue that arts education, which includes disciplines like music and visual arts, has gained recognition for its potential to bolster student wellbeing, *Physical education.* The essential role of physical education in educational programs was evident through our investigation, especially in the *talk and draw sessions* and interviews. A systematic review by Andermo *et al.* (2020) indicates that school-related interventions that promote physical activity can reduce anxiety, increase resilience, increase wellbeing, and improve the positive mental health of children and young people. Furthermore, there is a worldwide call to action for enhancing children's physical activity (Kraus *et al.*, 2015; Woods *et al.*, 2010; World Health Organisation, 2016). Although physical education and physical activity are distinct concepts with different influences, the role of physical education in schools is critical for fostering a commitment to lifelong physical activity. Specifically, school-based physical education is recognised as a fundamental and structured component of academic life, where children's physical training and growth occur (Fahey *et al.*, 2005).

Our research identified physical education classes as critical environments for fostering social development and positive emotions. Student L's direct quote, *"I like to be outside so I can run and do athletics,"* exemplifies the children's affinity for the physicality and freedom offered by such activities. This sentiment is supported by the recurring appearance of games, yard play, and physical education sessions (see **Table 6.2**) in the talk and draw activities, emphasising their regular integration into the school's routine. In the talk and draw sessions, children included annotated pictures of Rinka [3], yoga, athletics, and yard games, emphasising the importance of looking at data from multiple perspectives.

6.4 Discussion

Insights from learning and developmental sciences to guide educational practices emphasise nurturing environments that support cognitive, social, and emotional development (Darling- Hammond *et al.*, 2019; Osher *et al.*, 2018; Cantor *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, these studies advocate for personalised and active learning strategies, highlighting the importance of adaptive teaching methods and the pivotal role of teacher-student relationships in fostering an inclusive and supportive educational atmosphere. Our study's comprehensive exploration of primary education echoes Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2019) by presenting a multi-dimensional perspective approach to investigating student wellbeing, and the research is underpinned by the profound interplay between student-teacher and peer relationships, space and environmental considerations, alongside curricular structures. These components coalesce to form the backbone of children's educational experience, each influencing and enhancing the other synergistically. Echoing the assertions of (Burke and Giraldez-Hayes, 2022), we found that these relational dynamics are foundational for wellbeing, constituting a vital aspect of PosEd, focusing on and reinforcing individuals' physical and mental health within educational settings. This was vividly demonstrated in the photographs and drawings depicting the positive engagement between pupils and educational facilitators with photos including teachers, special needs assistants, and principals (Taylor, 2009).

The photographs depict the school's environment, illustrating interactions indicative of a culture of support and empathy among individuals, suggesting a pronounced degree of relatedness within the school community. This is crucial for psychological functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2006). Moreover, this sense of relatedness is bidirectional, as Klassen *et al.* (2012) suggest that teachers' wellbeing is tied to their relationships with students. Thus, the nurturing interactions evident in our findings enhance the student's educational experience and contribute to the educators' job satisfaction and emotional health. Supporting these relational dynamics, Powell *et al.* (2020) argued for the importance of such connections in fostering the wellbeing of both students and educators. Our findings align with this view, suggesting that

educational frameworks should strongly emphasise relational care and interpersonal connectivity.

This study also sheds light on the critical role of the school environment in supporting student wellbeing (Pillay *et al.*, 2005). As highlighted by the children's narratives and visual data, sensory spaces and nurture rooms provided essential emotional and sensory regulation opportunities. This aligns with sensory integration theory (Ayres, 2016), which advocates for environments that cater to the sensory needs of children. The concept of "safe space" transcends mere physicality, reflecting a more profound need for spaces that offer emotional security and comfort, resonating with the principles of environmental psychology and how the physical environment impacts child development (Nair and Minhas, 2022).

Our findings underscore the significance of a well-rounded curriculum beyond traditional academic subjects. Including the arts, music, and physical education in the curriculum fosters creative expression and emotional investment in students. Such curricular elements contribute to cognitive development and offer therapeutic benefits, supporting the notion that education should cater to multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2015) and provide diverse pathways for student engagement. Physical education stands out as a crucial component for enhancing physical health and social skills, reinforcing the importance of peer relationships and supportive environments. This is important in the context of research by Carlin *et al.* (2024), which states that in the 2022 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity, fewer than 20% of children and adolescents with disabilities are meeting the current PA recommendations, with less than half of children and adolescents achieving the guideline of <2 h of screen time per day.

The interconnection of these themes is further exemplified in the structured outdoor learning program, which fosters a bond with nature and supports hands-on, experiential learning. The enthusiasm for outdoor activities expressed by the pupils underscores the value placed on interacting with the natural environment, aligning with outdoor education philosophies (Waite *et al.*, 2013; Morgan and Waite, 2017). Therefore, the current study significantly departs from traditional educational

research by advocating for a dynamic, action-oriented understanding of "wellbeing." It challenges the static, possessive interpretations previously held and introduces a conception of wellbeing as a fluid and ever-evolving process. This reconceptualisation positions wellbeing as a complex construct influenced by an intricate web of relationships spanning human and non-human interactions, organisational and environmental structures, personal desires, behavioral practices, and broader societal and cultural frameworks.

Notably, the students' narratives expressly demonstrated that learning is not merely an academic exercise but a vital component of their wellbeing. The children articulated that their learning experiences contribute significantly to their sense of wellbeing and that wellbeing extends beyond the confines of the classroom and encompasses their entire school experience, including their relationships with peers and teachers and their interactions with the school environment. This critical insight emphasises integrating the students' voices while developing educational practices and policies. The children's reflections on how learning activities make them "feel good" and the joy they express in learning provide compelling evidence that educational wellbeing is multifaceted and deeply rooted in their learning experiences. This contrasts with adult conceptualisations of wellbeing by Farrell *et al.* (2024), who emphasised how neoliberal interpretations of wellbeing as an object, a tradable commodity based on notions of individuality, have infiltrated the education system, affecting even the youngest learners.

6.5 Limitations of this study

This study focuses on just one school, which limits the generalisability and applicability of the findings to other schools with different resources, cultural backgrounds, and educational practices. The context-specific nature of the results necessitates careful consideration when attempting to extend these findings to different settings, which may require adaptations to fit other school environments.

Additionally, the research engaged only a small group of students (n =16), which may not adequately capture the full range of student experiences and perceptions of the school's student population, which is crucial for a comprehensive understanding

of student wellbeing. The convenience and purposive sampling methods may introduce potential biases as they rely on the availability and willingness of participants, which might not yield a balanced representation of the broader student body. Such sampling can skew the data, reflecting more about those who chose to participate rather than the entire student population. Furthermore, the research methods employed, including visual participatory techniques, might have been influenced by the presence of the researchers. This interaction could affect how participants respond, potentially leading them to highlight certain aspects of their experience over others due to the researcher's influence.

Thus, future research should recruit a larger population from multiple schools with varied demographic characteristics to enhance the reliability of the findings and allow for a better assessment of the variability in student experiences. Employing randomised sampling methods would help mitigate selection bias and provide a more accurate reflection of student experiences across different educational settings.

6.6 Conclusions

Aligned with the evolving visual participatory research that positions children as active participants and co-researchers in their own lives (Bruner, 2004; James, 2008), this research contributes to a deeper understanding of generational orders and children's unique perspectives on social realities (Honkanen *et al.*, 2017; Kellock, 2020; Abma and Schrijver, 2019; Coyne *et al.*, 2021; Leavy and Hourigan, 2017). In synthesising these findings, it becomes apparent that the educational experience is an interconnected system where relationships, the environment, and the curriculum play interdependent roles. Each aspect is vital to the wellbeing and development of the pupils and the professional fulfillment of the educators.

In addition, the findings from this study contribute to an enriched understanding of well- being in educational settings, emphasising the necessity for a systems-informed model of PosEd that is responsive to the voices of its primary stakeholders, the children. Educators and policymakers can develop more holistic educational practices by incorporating the children's insights into how learning shapes their wellbeing. These practices will not only teach but will also nurture the

wellbeing of children, ensuring that the educational environment is one where wellbeing is dynamically pursued and realised through a synergy of teaching, learning, and participatory engagement.

6.7 Notes

"A nurture room sets out to provide a safe, welcoming and caring environment for learning and will replicate the home environment with a comfortable seating area, a kitchen facility for preparing food and a working area to address formal curriculum demands." (Sloan et al., 2020)

Sensory rooms, are tailored spaces that caters to students' sensory needs, helping them self-regulate through individualised sensory experiences to enhance readiness for learning and social interaction. It engages primary senses such as sight, hearing, touch, and smell, along with vestibular and proprioceptive senses. This space may also be known as a sensory room, calm space, chill-out room, multi-sensory room, or sensory garden (National Council for Special Education, 2021).

An integrated physical education programme, which incorporates athletics, gymnastics, dance, drama and fundamental movement skills.

6.8 References

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Chapter 7 The Design of The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing

This chapter galvanises this thesis by bringing together each of the prior chapters to iterate the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing. Specifically, the chapter introduces the design of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW). The KCW is a systems-informed model developed in response to the complexities revealed through this study's core research questions:

How is wellbeing understood, enacted, and experienced by principals, teachers, and students in Irish primary schools?

How can a relational, systems-based framework better support whole-school wellbeing?

Using a transmethodological design (Khawaja & Kousholt, 2021) rooted in Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Venturini, 2010) and posthumanist pragmatism, this study mapped wellbeing across multiple stakeholder perspectives (principals, teachers, students) using interviews, focus groups, and Photovoice. Findings confirmed the importance of relationships, environment, care, and contextual complexity as central to the lived experience of wellbeing in schools.

Inspired by Oxman's (2016) Krebs Cycle of Creativity, the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) was developed as an interdisciplinary framework which aims to reflect the entangled, relational, and adaptive nature of wellbeing in school. The following chapter outlines the theory and methods behind its construction

7.1 Introduction

Venturini (2010) defines controversies as "situations where actors disagree (or better, agree on their disagreement)" (Venturini, 2010, p 4)". "In the widest sense, controversies begin when actors discover that they cannot ignore each other, and controversies end when actors manage to work out a solid compromise to live together (Venturini, 2010, p 10)". A controversial issue, therefore, exists along a spectrum between these two extremes.

According to Venturini (2010), social controversies share five key characteristics: They involve human and non-human actors, such as policies, frameworks, theories, or physical objects; (2) They are highly dynamic, with actors coalescing with heterogeneous networks that can function as a single actor; (3) They are highly dependent on context (Hence, when a controversy arises, it is often due to the inability of actors to agree on the questions themselves rather than disagreements on the answers); (4) Controversies involve challenging existing paradigms and are thus highly debated; and (5) Although not necessarily confrontational, controversies are conflicts or power struggles between actors to transform or preserve social values and opinions.

The concept of school wellbeing exemplifies a *'live controversy'* as it continues to evolve and generate debate among stakeholders, exhibiting all five traits of social controversy. Further, it involves multiple actors, both human (e.g., educators, policymakers, psychologists, parents, and students) and non-human (e.g., educational policies, assessment frameworks, and wellbeing interventions). The fact that the word is spelled differently 'wellbeing', 'well-being', 'well being' or even 'Wellbeing' shows its conceptual fluidity and lack of stability (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008). The ambiguity surrounding the spelling of "wellbeing" versus "well-being" arises from both linguistic and regional variation. Well-being with a hyphen is traditionally favoured in formal writing, especially in North America. However, the one-word "wellbeing" format is increasingly common in the UK, Australia, and online usage. (Fiorini, De Giacomo, & L'Abate, 2016). Similarly, Wellbeing with a

capital W is used in academic and policy documents particularly when denoting a curricular area. Resultantly, the absence of a standard definition for wellbeing has led to diverse interpretations across various disciplines (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2015). Furthermore, the controversy surrounding school wellbeing is significantly enhanced by the range of differing theoretical models that offer structured frameworks for embedding wellbeing into educational practices. For example, Bronfenbrenner's established work (1974, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1994) on the bioecological model explains that school wellbeing occurs in systems that connect individuals, families and communities. Complementary frameworks, such as Scotland's Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included (SHANARRI) wellbeing indicators (Scottish Government, 2004), Seligman's (2012) Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) model and the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model (Hellison, 1985, 2010), highlight multiple components that are all associated with wellbeing. Furthermore, these frameworks draw on extensive psychological studies (Maslow, 1954; Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 1999; Dweck, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bowlby, 1973; Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 2007), highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of wellbeing. The plethora of theoretical frameworks underscores the complex character of school wellbeing (Danker et al., 2019; Svane et al., 2019) and firmly establishes school wellbeing as a controversy. However, as Latour (2005) argues, a controversy's depth and range cannot be fully comprehended without an exploratory investigation and this is consistent with the controversy of school wellbeing. The dynamic interaction of changing definitions, differing theories, and a wide range of human and non-human participants illustrates wellbeing in education as not merely contested, but rather, profoundly complex. Such an intricate network of relationships, requires systematic strategies to disentangle and make sense of the competing and interwoven perspectives present.

As a result, this chapter describes the development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) as a whole systems model through which school wellbeing can be better understood. By employing the cartography of controversies (Venturini, 2010) as a methodological lens, the KCW attempts to respond to complex questions pertaining to wellbeing within educational settings. Mapping the key actors, debates, tensions,

and controversies allows the KCW to systematically address the multifaceted nature of school wellbeing. As both a doctoral researcher and an experienced school principal, the PhD student holds an “insider” status (Minichello, 2021), offering deep contextual insight and enhancing the practical relevance of the research within contemporary educational settings. While this dual role provides a unique vantage point, it also presents challenges in maintaining critical distance. These are navigated through ongoing reflexivity, supervision, triangulation and the incorporation of multiple data sources to ensure balanced and rigorous analysis as seen in **Section 3.9**.

7.2 Methodology

This paper uses transmethodology as a dynamic approach to research school wellbeing. Transmethodology arises from the need to engage with the entangled, fluid, and continuously transforming nature of human and social processes (Kousholt & Khawaja, 2021). It is based on the concept of ‘driving the paradigm’ and asks researchers to confront uncertainty with courage, flexibility and willingness (Wolgemuth, 2016). It acknowledges the entangled nature of relational and contextual research phenomena and promotes nonlinear research processes. Springgay & Truman (2017) put it most succinctly as a “move away from a conception of methods as data gathering processes to a conception of methods as becoming entangled in relations” (p. 204). This is particularly important in the context of the researcher’s philosophical stance of posthumanist pragmatism outlined in **section 1.5**. Within posthumanism, the human is only one of many 'things' that have agency. All these human and non-human things contribute to whatever is educative about any experience. In other words, posthumanism gives matter and materiality equal regard in knowledge-making practices.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005) and specifically Venturini’s applied version of ANT (Venturini, 2010), serves as the methodological core of exploring school wellbeing. Every component has influence whereby even physical resources, literature, policy, and existing frameworks, are considered as actors within the network. The directive to "follow the actors" (Latour, 2005) entails a comprehensive

investigation that extends beyond human agents to include non-human elements. They, too, are 'actors' as they influence and shape the educational landscape and thus are integral to understanding a network's construction and evolution.

7.2.1 Analytical Framework

Venturini's (2010) 'cartography of controversies' is an applied version of Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT), which combines theory, method, and findings to explore, map, and visualise social phenomena that are subject to constant transformation or controversy, such as school wellbeing. The cartography of controversies is a way 'to live, to know, and to practice in the complexities of tension' (Law, 1999, p 12). It stems from earlier work (Latour, 2005) on the 'tracing of associations' as a means to carefully observe and reassemble the steps taken by heterogeneous actors in developing social controversies (Marres, 2015). This helped influence the structured development of the KCW, which is based on three core principles: (1) observation should not be confined to a single theory or methodology; (2) multiple viewpoints must be considered; and (3) the perspectives of actors should take precedence over preconceptions (Venturini, 2010). In this thesis, while tracing associations and steps of heterogeneous actors, we also ensure that the research was methodologically rigours through triangulation (see **Section 3.9.1**), debriefing and peer review (see **Section 3.9.2**) having guidelines to mitigate against insider bias (see **Section 3.9.3**) and through external audit (see **Section 3.9.4**)

The application of cartography of controversy in this study is not intended to construct a definitive or exhaustive depiction but to highlight the multiple layers of the school wellbeing controversy. Accordingly, this study uses the first four observation lenses that Venturini (2010) described (see **Figure 7.1)** to map and visualise the KCW. Through this structured mapping process, the KCW is developed as a response to the intricate and evolving discourse on school wellbeing. This design journey is guided by the research- informed base of this doctoral journey to-date.

By embracing the complexity of school wellbeing and systematically analysing its various dimensions, this framework offers a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to advancing school wellbeing.

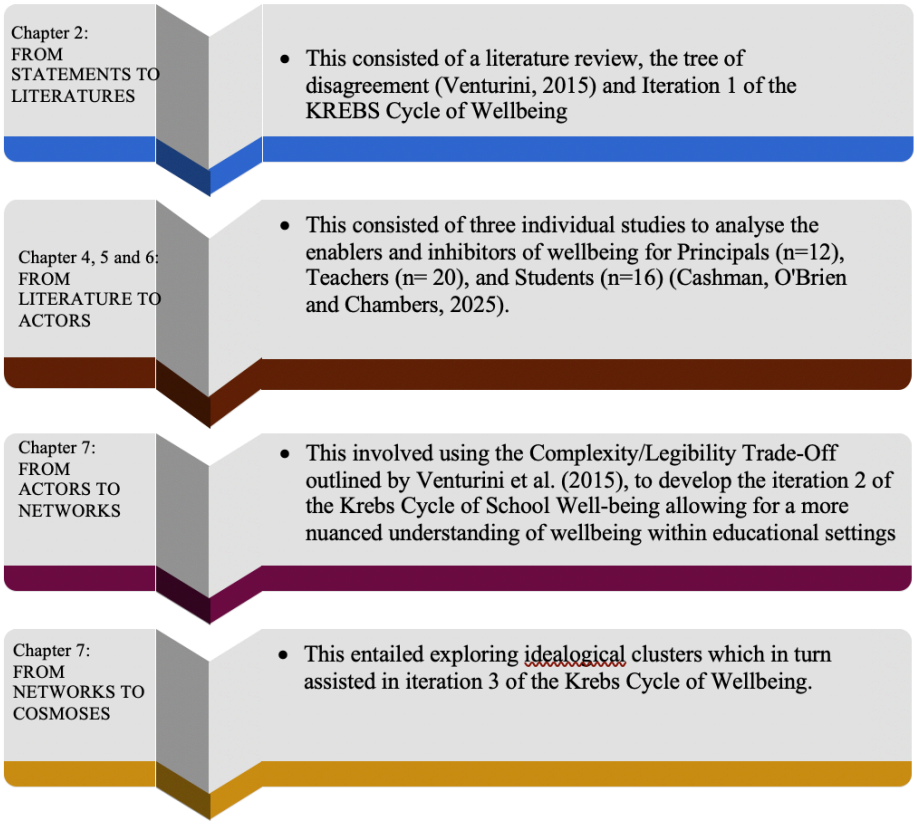


Figure 7.1: The first four observational lenses described by (Venturini 2015)

The four observational lenses outlined in **Figure 7.1** scaffold the conceptual framework of this research, guiding the progression from theoretical constructs to empirical inquiry. Each lens builds upon the previous, tracing a path from abstract literature through to concrete actor experiences and networked ideologies. This layered approach enabled the development and refinement of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing across iterative stages.

Drawing directly from this framework, the following section outlines the study setting and participants, detailing the sample drawn from each of the school stakeholders involved in the empirical phases of the research.

7.2.2 Study Setting and Participants

Following a comprehensive literature review, this study employed a clustered convenience sample of developing school principals, teachers, and students across developing schools. A total of 26 new school principals were invited to participate in October 2021, with recruitment facilitated through an *Educate Together Principals Support Group*. This network, established to support new Educate Together principals, enabled participant accessibility. From this group, n=9 principals (11% male, 89% female) participated in three focus groups, yielding a 34.6% response rate. Additionally, n=3 further principals (33% male, 66% female) from Community National Schools (CNS) were recruited via a local principal's network to ensure patronage diversity. This led to an overall sample of n=12 principals.

Building on this, n=20 teachers (15% male, 85% female) actively teaching in developing schools participated in four focus groups conducted between April and May 2022. Participants were drawn from a principal support network and an *Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) cluster* to include perspectives from different patronages. The recruitment ensured a representation of experiences across various patronage models.

Finally, the study included n=16 children (aged under 10) from 2nd and 3rd class participated in Photovoice participatory research that included Talk and Draw, a Gallery Walk, Photo Capture, Ranking Activities and Child-led Interviews (Cashman et al., 2025). Research methods were tailored to be developmentally appropriate, and teacher support ensured ethical engagement and participant wellbeing. To maintain confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, and personal details were omitted. Additional participant characteristics are detailed in **Table 3.1** and **Table 3.5**.

7.3 Results

7.3.1 Lens One: From statements to literature

The observational lens from statements to literature outlines where we identify competing school wellbeing statements from literature. This section aims to show that statements in controversies are never isolated but always connected in a dialogue made of endorsements and oppositions. Among the many ways to do so, the most popular among the students of controversy-mapping is the 'tree of disagreement' (Venturini et al., 2015).

The philosophical underpinnings of wellbeing and positive education reflect diverse perspectives on human flourishing. This discourse on wellbeing, deeply rooted in psychological research, emphasises subjective wellbeing (SWB), psychological wellbeing (PWB), and the conditions conducive to a flourishing life (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989). These models highlight the importance of positive emotions, life satisfaction, personal growth, and social connectedness as central elements of wellbeing. Similarly, positive education integrates these wellbeing concepts within educational settings to enhance students' holistic wellbeing. Notably, Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) has been influential in shaping positive education practices by fostering an environment where positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement thrive. Furthermore, the flourishing model (Diener et al., 2010) and public health approaches to wellbeing (Huppert, 2014) expand the scope by incorporating societal and community-level factors that influence individual wellbeing. These comprehensive frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of wellbeing beyond traditional educational outcomes.

Currently, most of the existing frameworks focusing on positive education tend to concentrate on the various components of wellbeing in isolation. For instance, the Ruler Framework is designed to improve emotional intelligence (Hagelskamp et al., 2013), the Penn Resiliency Program aims at building resilience (Brunwasser et al., 2009), and the CASEL Framework is centred around developing social and emotional skills (Casel, 2019). The evolution of positive education models, exemplified by the Geelong Grammar School journey (Norrish & Seligman, 2015) and the Strath-Haven Positive Psychology program (Seligman et al., 2009), integrates the principles of positive psychology directly into the educational

curriculum. Further, developments in positive education have looked at systems informed models of Positive Education that "*explicitly incorporates aspects of the systems sciences into positive education practice and pedagogy to cultivate optimal learning environments that bring out the best in each individual and of the school community as a whole"* (Kern & Taylor, 2021, p 111). Similarly, Allison et al., (2021) have developed the Flourishing Classrooms model to illustrate how a systems-informed perspective allows classrooms to create collective school wellbeing.

In addition to seeking academic achievement, the positive education approach seeks to enhance students' wellbeing and personal development, fostering an environment where happiness and academic success are interconnected. While these research-based frameworks offer practical solutions and focus on the essential elements of wellbeing, they do not fully capture the broad range of components that constitute wellbeing that's was captured in the current doctoral literature review (see **Table 2.1).** This limitation was further highlighted by Chodkiewicz & Boyle (2017) in their review of positive education, where they criticised the reliance on frameworks that focus on a limited number of wellbeing aspects, which restricts the skills and techniques available to students.

Consequently, research often encounters challenges in pinpointing which elements of positive education interventions directly contribute to desired wellbeing outcomes. This ambiguity warrants a robust, evidence-based methodology in designing and implementing such interventions (Waters and Loton 2019). With this in mind, I mapped a tree of disagreement (**see Figure 7.2)** to illustrate the various disagreements, debates, and connections described in the literature around wellbeing and in particular, school wellbeing.

7.3.1.1 The tree of disagreement

Disagreements and debates are rarely straightforward. They are not simply a matter of choosing between two opposing sides but instead involve a web of interconnected questions, each shaped by nuanced perspectives. Few issues can be resolved with a simple yes or no; a broader context always influences people's positions. Yet, even

within this complexity, it is possible and necessary to map how ideas, arguments, and influences are structured.

Like the branching patterns of a tree, a position taken on one issue inevitably shapes and limits the range of possible stances on others. This interconnectedness can be visualised in various ways, but hierarchical trees, also known as Porphyrian trees, have proven particularly effective in illustrating complex disputes. These structures allow us to see how even the smallest disagreements can be linked to larger ideological divisions.

In the context of school wellbeing, an intricate network of relationships exists. The following 'tree of disagreement' (Venturini et al. 2015) depicted in **Figure 7.2** captures the interconnected nature of policies, psychological frameworks, and educational practices, showing how different elements influence one another. Just as hierarchical trees help clarify the structure of disagreements, this visual representation sheds light on how global policies, social and emotional wellbeing, sustainability, and physical health intertwine to shape the broader discourse on wellbeing in schools.

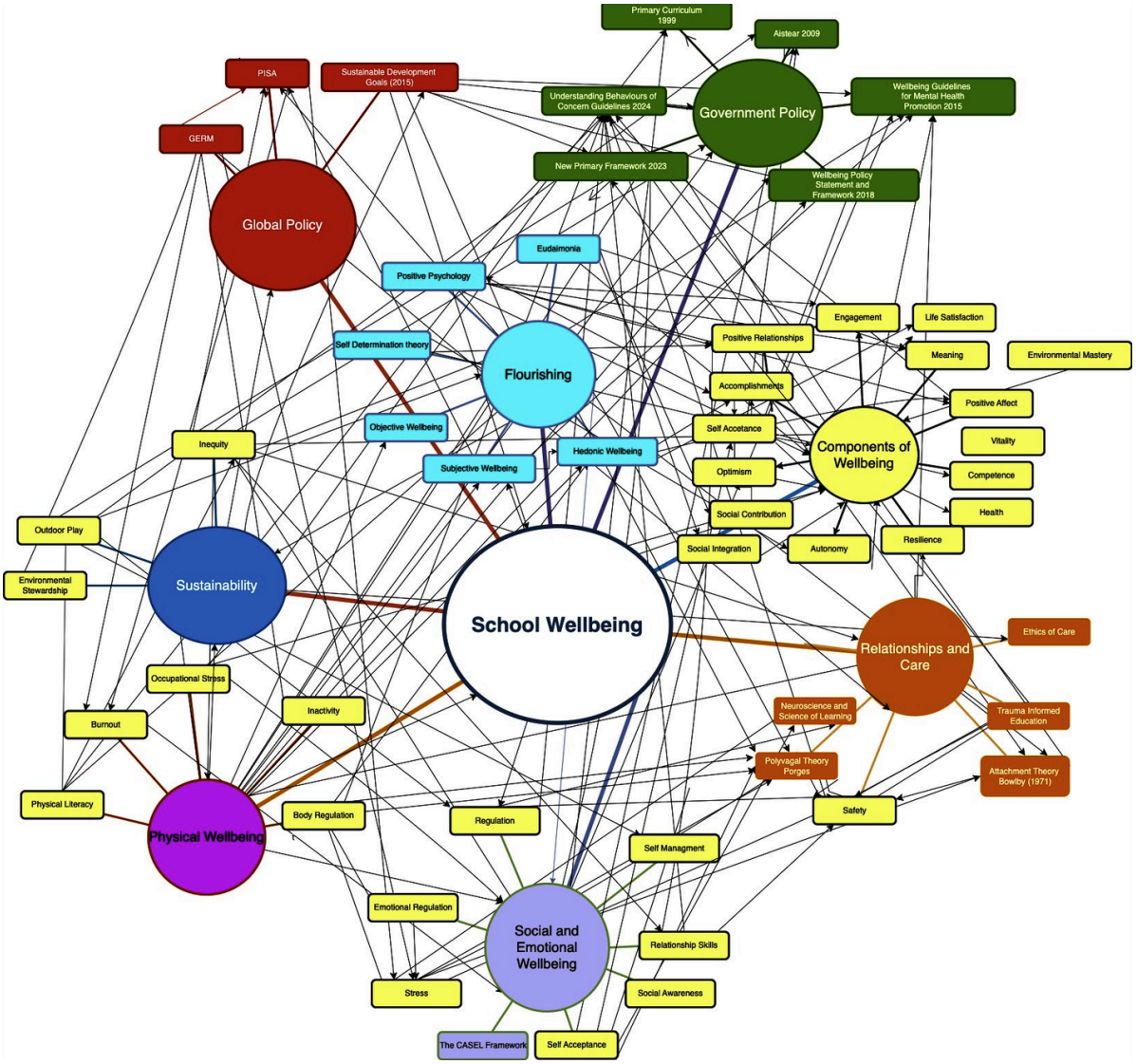


Figure 7.2: Tree of disagreement (Source: Created by author)

In an effort, to describe the tree of disagreement, **Table 7.1** outlines the various nodes and how they connect.

Table 7.1: Key for the Tree of Disagreement

Layer / Colour	Description	Examples of Nodes
Central Node (White)	The hub of the map; conceptual convergence of multiple frameworks, discourses, and policy layers into the term "School Wellbeing".	School Wellbeing

Global Policy (Red)	Represents international frameworks influencing wellbeing discourse at a macro level.	PISA, Sustainable Development Goals (2016), GERM
Government Policy (Dark Green)	Captures national education and wellbeing policies shaping how wellbeing is implemented in schools.	Primary Curriculum, Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA 2015), Aistear (2009), SPHE Curriculum, New Primary Curriculum (Draft 2023)
Discourses of Flourishing (Sky Blue)	Theoretical frameworks and constructs underpinning psychological and philosophical understandings of wellbeing.	Positive Psychology, Self-Determination Theory, Eudaimonia, Subjective Wellbeing
Relationships and Care (Orange)	Emphasises relational and ethical discourses around care, attachment, and trauma-informed practice.	Attachment Theory (Bowlby), Ethics of Care, Trauma-Informed Education, Safety
Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Light Green)	Rooted in SEL and emotional regulation frameworks; maps core personal and interpersonal skills.	CASEL Framework, Self-Acceptance, Relationship Skills, Emotional Regulation, Stress
Physical Wellbeing (Dark Orange)	Focuses on embodied wellbeing, including movement, regulation, and physical health.	Physical Literacy, Gymnastics, Body Regulation, Occupational Stress
Sustainability (sky blue)	Highlights ecological and environmental wellbeing, linking sustainability to holistic education.	Outdoor Play, Environmental Stewardship, Greening Initiatives
Components of Wellbeing (Yellow)	Represents individual traits or components frequently measured or promoted in wellbeing models; tied to specific discourses.	Autonomy, Resilience, Health, Competence, Life Satisfaction, Optimism, Positive Affect, Social Contribution
Lines/Edges (Connecting Arrows)	Show interconnections, influences, or conceptual overlaps between nodes and clusters.	E.g. Links between Global Policy and Government Policy, or Positive Psychology to Components of Flourishing

The tree of disagreement intentionally visualises what Venturini (2015) refers to as the first movement of controversy design. In doing so, **Figure 7.2**, visualises the messiness and entanglement of school wellbeing as it exists in real-world practice. This visual representation reflects a core argument of my thesis: that wellbeing in schools is not linear or siloed but rather a web of interdependent actors. This includes policies, frameworks, relationships, emotional domains, sustainability, and physical domains which are constantly influencing and redefining one another. Thus,

the “messiness” is not a design flaw but a deliberate artefact of Actor-Network Theory, which prioritises the mapping of all relevant associations, regardless of whether they are tidy or hierarchical.

Unfortunately, the tree of disagreement design in **Figure 7.2** does not result in an improvement in our capacity to engage with the stakeholder and to simplify the controversy of wellbeing in schools. The tree shows a confusion and remains too difficult to read or too messy in content. To rectify this, we used what Venturini et al (2015) describe as the First Movement of Controversy Design. This is referred to as extending the Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off (Venturini et al, 2015, p 76) (See **Figure 7.3**). This allows all school stakeholders to move along the imaginary continuum illustrated in **Figure 7.3** from complexity to simplicity. This movement is threefold because it can go from the centre to the ends or from each end toward the centre.

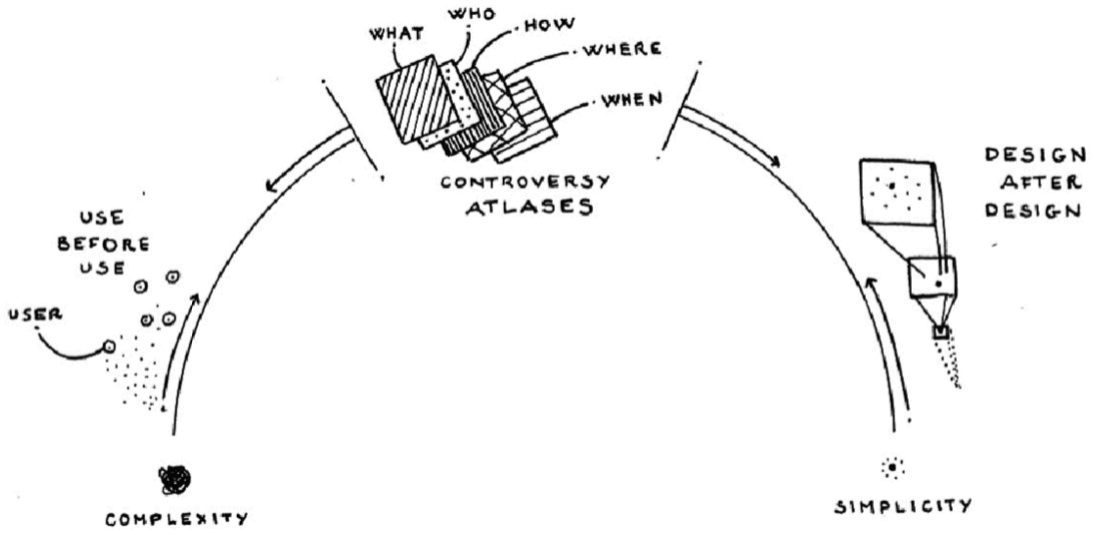


Figure 7.3: The Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off (Source: Venturini et al, 2015)

Accordingly, we used the Complexity/Legibility Trade-Off outlined by Venturini et al. (2015), to develop the first iteration of the Krebs Cycle of School Wellbeing (See Fig 3). This trade-off outlines an epistemological continuum between complexity (rich in nuance but difficult to interpret) and simplicity (clear but potentially reductive). Venturini (2015) positions design as the bridge that allows movement between these poles. Initial visualisations, such as controversy atlases and the tree of

disagreement (**Figure 7.2**), fall into what he terms “design before use,” enabling stakeholders to grasp the depth of an issue (Venturini et al., 2015, p. 76). However, they must then be followed by a move toward “design after design,” where the same complexity is reorganised in ways that are actionable, accessible, and meaningful to users within specific contexts (Venturini et al., 2015).

In response to this design imperative, and building upon the complex actor-network mapping, I developed the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) (see **Figure 7.4**). This model represents an effort to synthesise diverse wellbeing domains and individual components into an integrative, theory-informed framework. It draws conceptually from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which underscores the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments, and methodologically from Venturini’s design principle (Venturini, 2015). In addition as outlined in our literature review, the Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC), (Oxman, 2016) assists to provide a structure on this simplification. The controversy around 'Wellbeing' mirrors the ambiguity of Neri Oxman's Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC), suggesting that an interdisciplinary, interconnected and fluid framework is essential in addressing student wellbeing effectively. This interconnectivity aligns with the essence of Oxman's KCC, where elements are not static but constantly in flux and exchange, embodying the dynamic and ecological nature of wellbeing. Accordingly, the KCW becomes a conceptual framework that maps the interconnectivity of various wellbeing domains. This extends the continuum between complexity and legibility allowing for a more nuanced understanding of school wellbeing. Just as controversy mapping enables movement between broad, interconnected ideas, this framework synthesises key dimensions of school wellbeing while maintaining clarity and coherence.

Specifically, the first iteration of the KCW illustrated in **Figure 7.4** integrates the fundamental components identified in our literature review. The KCW framework places 'Flourishing' at its 'Cinderella moment' (Oxman, 2016) at 12 o'clock when viewing the KCW as a clock. For Oxman (2016), the *‘Cinderella Moment is where Art meets Science and changes in our perceptions affect the way capture data’*. For the context of this research, the Cinderella Moment is where a school moved a full

twenty-four hours around the KCW and adopted each of the five wellbeing domains into practice.

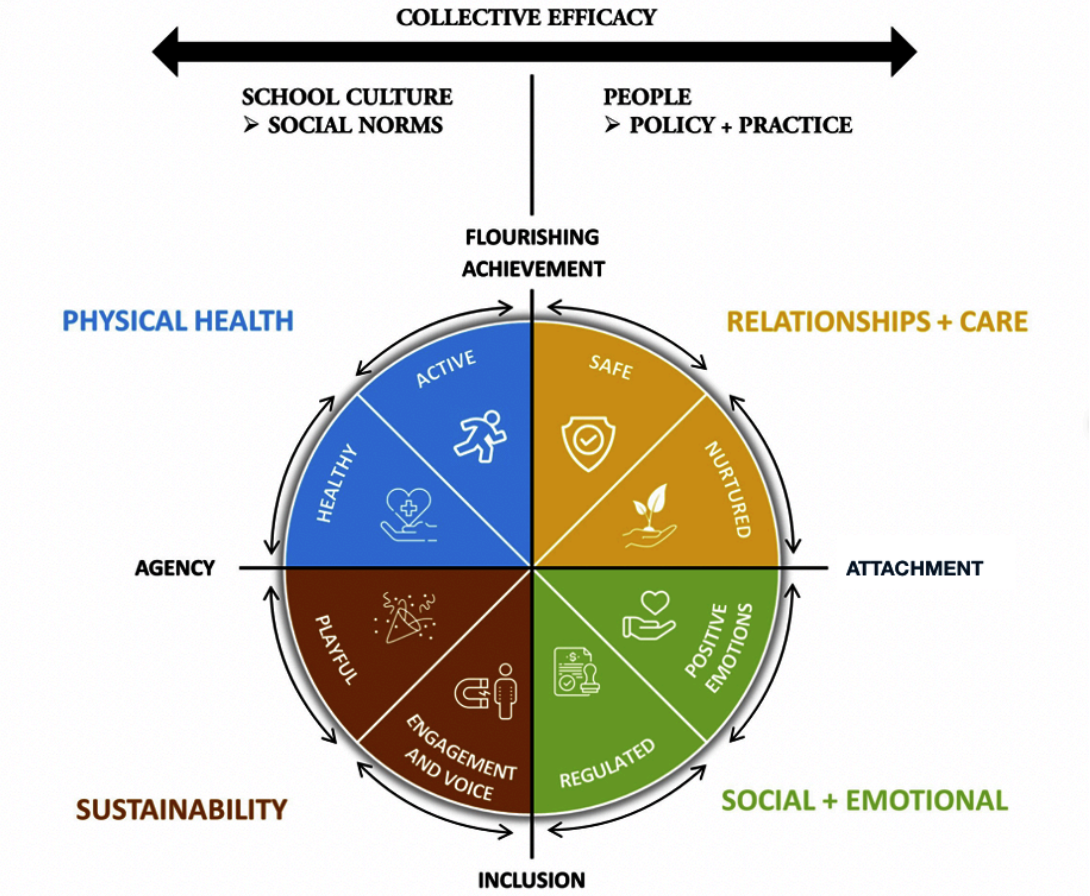


Figure 7.4: Iteration 1 of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (Source: Created by author)

It is further encapsulated by holistic wellbeing domains of relationships and care, social and emotional wellbeing, sustainability, physical wellbeing, and cognitive wellbeing. Within each domain are elements that act as indicators for the domain. For example, to contribute to the wellbeing domain of relationships and care, the internal indicator is that schools need to be safe and nurturing. For social and emotional wellbeing, schools must provide opportunities for students to experience positive emotions and support regulation. As a result, the KCW offers a metaphor for understanding the complex nature of school wellbeing.

7.3.2 Lens Two: From literature to actors

Since statements within the 'literature' always belong to broader networks of actors, the next task involved identifying the key actors encompasses human participants, school environments, systems, and frameworks enmeshed in the controversy (Venturini, 2010). The central human actors aligning with specific viewpoints on the school wellbeing controversy were identified with principals, teachers and students. Based on this, a comprehensive examination of each human actor's experience of school wellbeing was conducted, outlining the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for principals, teachers, and students. The examination aimed to dissect and understand the multifaceted elements that contribute to overall school wellbeing, focusing on the interconnectedness of these elements and their collective impact on the school community. Analysis of the human actors found how humans and non-humans interact to enable or inhibit school wellbeing. Non-humans were observed in the physical buildings, government agencies such as the Department of Education, National Council for Special Education, Patron bodies, and the Irish Primary Principals Network (e.g.,), as well as policies and frameworks. Categorising these factors strictly as *enablers* or *inhibitors* of school wellbeing proved problematic. Rather than existing as fixed, these elements shift in their role depending on context, presence, or absence. For example, supportive peer relationships can function as powerful enablers when present, offering essential emotional and professional support for principals. Yet, in their absence, the lack of such networks exacerbates feelings of isolation and overwhelm, thus acting as an inhibitor. Similarly, school building serves as another fluid actor. Inadequate, outdated buildings inhibit wellbeing by fostering unsafe and stressful environments. A new purpose-built building can significantly enhance both morale, sense of belonging and school identity. Thus, rather than assigning factors to static categories, this analysis recognises the relational and contextual nature of wellbeing actors.

The outcomes of these examinations are succinctly presented below:

- **High stress levels due to inadequate supports**

- Principals in developing schools experience high job satisfaction but also unsustainable stress levels due to dual teaching and leadership responsibilities.
- Lack of structured guidance for new principals increases stress and workload.
- Peer support networks like the ET Beag group provide vital emotional and professional support.

- **Challenges in the provision of adequate physical infrastructure inhibits wellbeing**

  - Many principals work in unsafe, inadequate school buildings with poor facilities (e.g., mould, rats, outdated structures).
  - Uncertainty about school accommodation causes stress and impacts wellbeing.
  - Transitioning from prefabs to permanent buildings improves identity, structure, and wellbeing.

- **Special education resource challenges create guilt and stress**

  - Developing schools are underfunded for special education teachers (SETs) and special needs assistants (SNAs).
  - Principals struggle to advocate for proper allocations, adding to their stress.
  - Many feel they must act as SET, SNA, and principal simultaneously.

- **Wellbeing needs to be part of school culture**

  - Principals reject commercial wellbeing programs, advocating instead for embedded cultural approaches focused on relationships and emotional regulation.
  - Wellbeing should be integrated into school culture, not treated as an external initiative.

Our second study in chapter 5 involved four focus groups with n= 20 teachers, data was again analysed using reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021; 2019; 2006). The following enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing were identified:

- **Impact of Leadership on Teacher Wellbeing**
    - Supportive leadership improves teacher wellbeing, fostering trust and security.
    - Principals' wellbeing directly affects teachers' morale.
    - Teachers value having autonomy in their teaching methods.
- **Relationships as a Protective Factor**
    - Peer support and mentorship (both formal and informal) help prevent burnout.
    - Collaborative culture enhances teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction.
    - Parental relationships are positive in the early years but become more challenging as schools grow.
- **School Infrastructure and Teacher Wellbeing**
    - Poor infrastructure and inadequate facilities negatively impact wellbeing.
    - The lack of sensory spaces and quiet areas makes managing student behaviour and emotional regulation difficult.
    - Better learning environments reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.
- **Challenges with Special Education Resources**
    - Teachers often take on additional roles, acting as special education teachers, therapists, and behavioural support.
    - Lack of SETs and SNAs increases stress and feelings of helplessness.

    - Underfunding of special education resources leads to frustration and guilt when student needs are unmet.

- **Wellbeing as Embedded Culture**

    - Teachers find "tokenistic wellbeing policies" ineffective.
    - A whole-school approach is preferred, focusing on relationships, autonomy, and support.
    - Teachers in developing schools report higher wellbeing due to their influence on school culture.

Our third stakeholder study in chapter 6 was a published paper by (Cashman, O'Brien, and Chambers 2025). The results of that study showed that:

- **Relationships serve as a Foundation for Wellbeing**
    - Positive relationships with teachers, SNAs, and peers are central to wellbeing.
    - Teachers are seen as mentors who provide emotional and academic support.
    - Peer relationships contribute to a sense of belonging and happiness.
- **The Importance of Space and Environment**
    - Sensory and nurture rooms help students self-regulate emotions.
    - Classroom displays and artwork create a sense of belonging and identity.
    - Outdoor learning is preferred, as it provides calmness, freedom, and engagement.
- **Wellbeing as Part of Learning**
    - Students do not see wellbeing as separate from education but as part of their learning experience.
    - Interactive, hands-on activities foster a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.
    - The arts and music are viewed as calming, joyful, and expressive.
- **Physical Education and Movement**

- Physical education supports physical health, social skills, and emotional regulation.
- Students associate movement and sports with enjoyment and wellbeing.

Based on these observations, the researcher mapped the enablers and inhibitors to wellbeing for all the central actors in the stakeholder studies in **Table 7.2**. This enabled a comparison across all the actors to see where components of wellbeing overlap and entangle. It also allowed the identification any gaps in the conceptual model. As a result, this allowed the KCW to be iterated further in the following section.

Table 7.2: Interactions between the actors and triangulation

Stakeholder Analysis	Enabler or Inhibitor of Wellbeing	Relationships and Culture	Physical Space and School Buildings	Job Satisfaction	Complexity of the Job	Special Educational Needs Provision	Multi-denominational Ethos	The Curriculum
Principals	**Enabler**	x	x	x			x	x
	Inhibitor	x	x	x	x	x		x
Teachers	**Enabler**	x	x	x			x	x
	Inhibitor	x	x	x	x	x		
Student Wellbeing	**Enabler**	x	x	n/a	n/a			x
	Inhibitor	x	x	n/a	n/a	x		

7.3.3 Lens Three: From actors to networks

The observational lens from actors to networks is where the interactions among actors were analysed to reveal dynamic networks. With the actors identified, the interconnectivity between the actors was explored and represented through **Table 7.2**. When various enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing between each of the human actors were analysed, we found that Iteration 1 of the KCW (see **Figure 7.4**) covered many of the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing outlined by the central actors such as relationships, social and emotional wellbeing, and physical wellbeing (see **Table 7.2**). However, while I identified that the curriculum and learning was an area that was present for all the central actors, it impacted the students in a different way. According to the student experiences, *"wellbeing is deeply embedded in the learning process. This paradigm shift suggests that students perceive their wellbeing not as a separate by-product of education but as a core experience that unfolds through their academic endeavours"*(Cashman et al., 2025). Accordingly, iteration 2 of the KCW added Cognitive Wellbeing as a domain to the development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (**see Figure 7.5**). This allowed student voice have influence through the inclusion of cognitive wellbeing in the KCW (Lundy, 2007).

When moving from the analysis of individual actors toward the analysis of their relationships, it was clear that these networks had a function and structure, but also meaning and value, guiding interactions and shaping priorities. While the earlier versions of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing were useful to illustrate how wellbeing domains such as social, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing interrelate, within the subsequent layer of analysis it became clear that the networks are organised by more than just relational dynamics. Venturini (2009) refers to these ideological frameworks as cosmoses. These cosmoses offer balance to the networks by controlling specific narratives of wellbeing and validating school practices. In the following section, I look toward the actor-network's underlying ideologies that present the ideal conditions for school wellbeing.

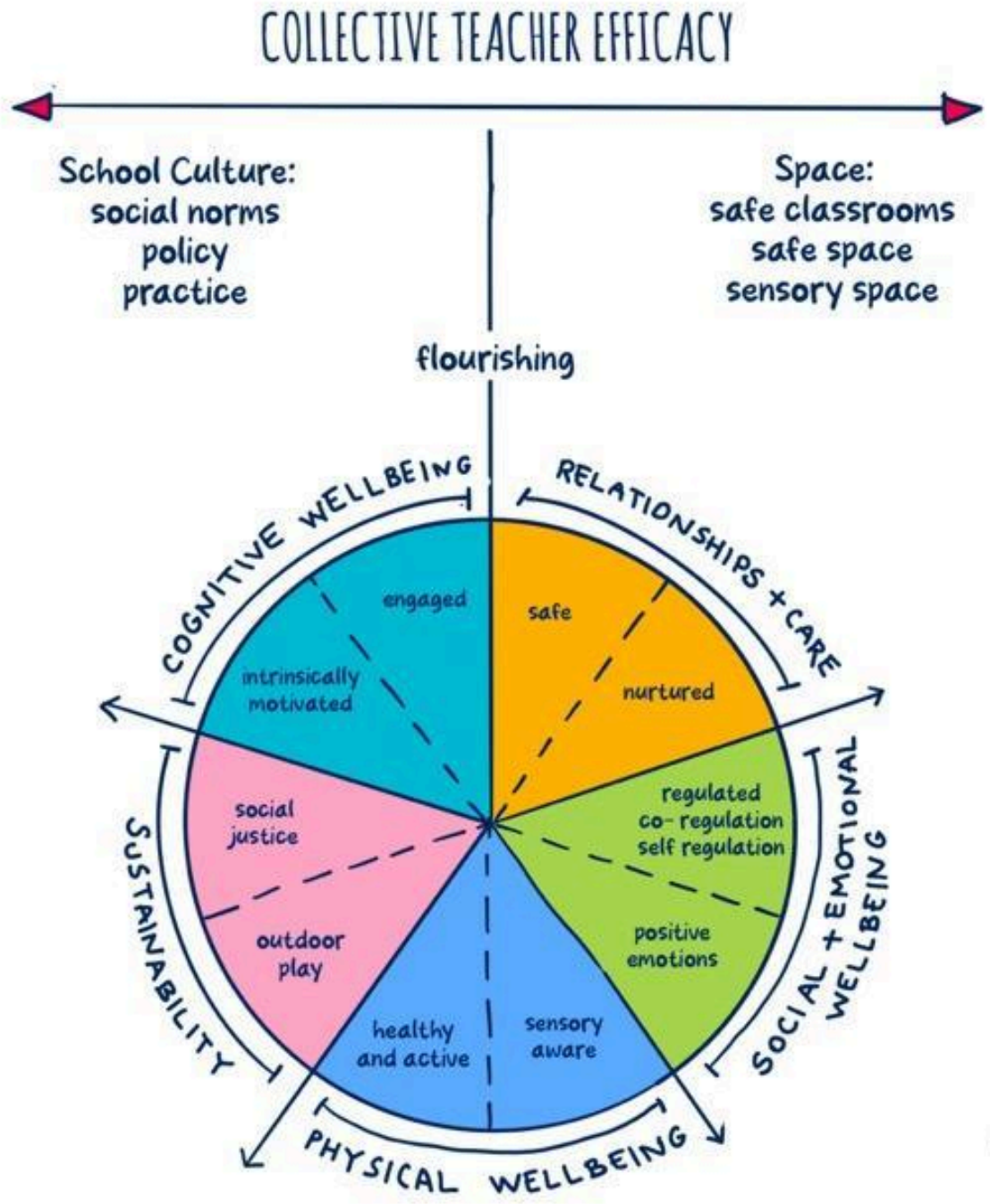


Figure 7.5: Iteration 2 Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (Source: Created by author)

7.3.4 Lens Four: From networks to cosmoses

From networks to cosmoses refers to where I explored the formation of ideological clusters (cosmoses) that shape and stabilise these networks. The underlying

ideologies that organise the actor-network(s) were identified (see **Table 7.3**). Through an ANT lens, 'cosmoses' or ideologies are expressed by the meaning actors ascribe to the statements, viewpoints and motivations related to a controversy (Venturini 2009). They are not 'descriptions of the world as it is' but instead 'visions of the world as it should be' that are often 'orderly and harmonious' (Venturini 2009, pg. 267).

Table 7.3: Table of cosmoses (Source: Created by author)

Spheres	Cosmoses (Ideologies)	Actors
Education Sphere	Wellbeing is embedded in school culture and relationships.	🔴🔵🟢
	Wellbeing is shaped by student-teacher and peer relationships.	🔴🔵🟢
	Student wellbeing is interconnected with physical, emotional, and social factors.	🔴🔵🟢
	Learning itself is a key component of wellbeing.	🔵🟢
School Environment Sphere	Safe and nurturing spaces (e.g., sensory rooms and outdoor learning) support wellbeing.	🔴🔵🟢
	School infrastructure (physical space) plays a crucial role in emotional regulation.	🔴🔵🟢
	Outdoor learning enhances emotional and cognitive wellbeing.	🔵🟢
Curriculum Sphere	Arts and music contribute to emotional regulation and self-expression.	🔵🟢
	Physical activity and movement breaks enhance student wellbeing.	🔵🟢
	A holistic curriculum (academic, arts, sport, emotional learning) supports wellbeing.	🔴🔵🟢
Leadership & Policy Sphere	Principals' and teachers' wellbeing directly impacts school culture.	🔴🔵
	Wellbeing policies should be embedded, not tokenistic add-ons.	🔴🔵
	Schools need structured support and training for wellbeing implementation.	🔴🔵

Legend: 🔴Principals, 🔵Teachers, 🟢 Students

In this data set, ideologies were considered according to what the actors deemed school wellbeing should be. Based on this, iteration 3 (**see Figure 7.6**) was developed to underscore that no single wellbeing domain can function in isolation.

Each domain feeds into and is influenced by the others in a continual process of transformation and adaptation.

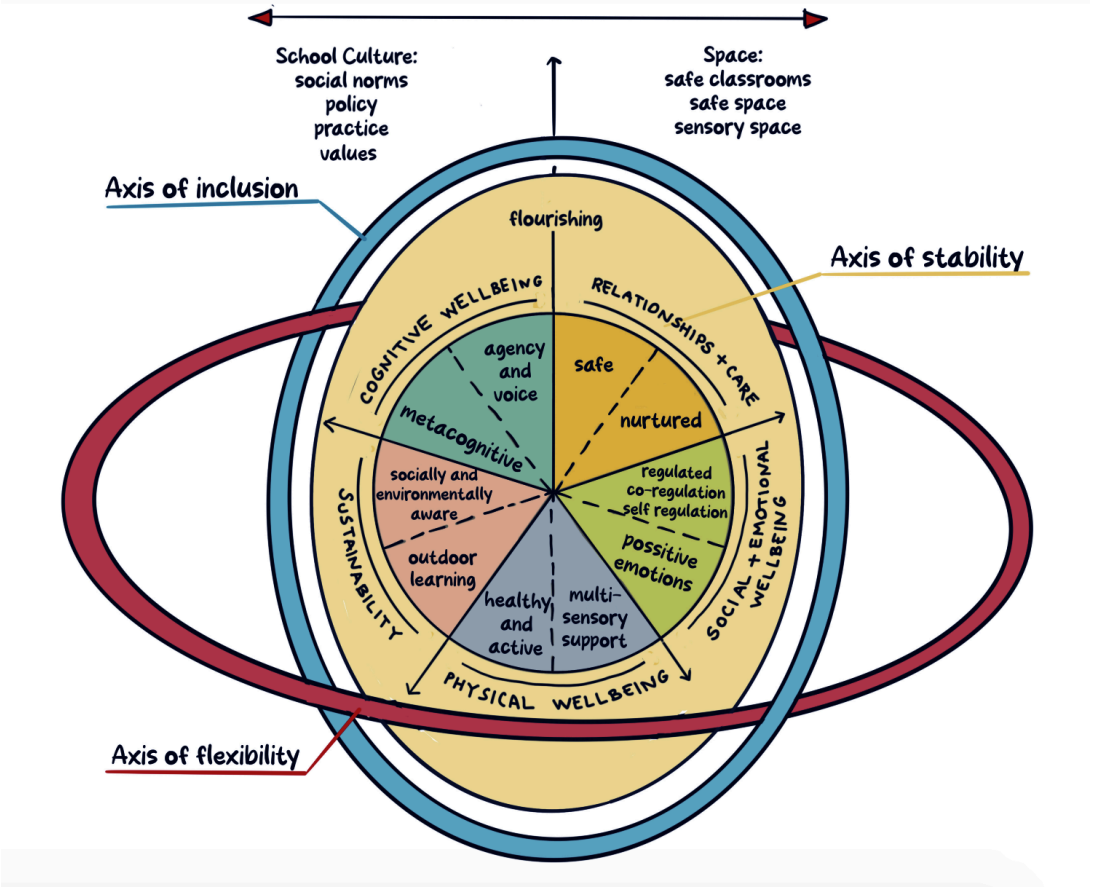


Figure 7.6: Iteration 3 Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (Source: Created by author)

Furthermore, it outlines the KCW as a 3D model comprising a clock, microscope, and compass with multiple applications. As a clock, the KCW suggests that wellbeing domains are not linear but can move forward and backwards in time. A student for example may have high quality relationships yet not be healthy and physically active. Similarly the opposite can be the case. As a microscope, the KCW allows us to zoom in on specific domain of wellbeing, to examine minute student experiences. This is important in the context of School Self Evaluation whereby schools are required to identify wellbeing areas that require improvement by 2025. Lastly, as a compass, the KCW directs us towards the outcomes we strive to achieve. This guides decisions and initiatives designed to optimise wellbeing at system levels. Thus, the third iteration of the KCW framework captures a system's dynamic

model of school wellbeing in its complexity within educational ecosystems. By approaching the multidimensional nature of wellbeing with adaptable, anti-disciplinary perspective, educational systems can better prepare students for academic achievements and a life of flourishing in which they are fully engaged, resilient, and capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world.

7.3.4.1 Three-Dimensional Model - The Gyroscope of Wellbeing

Iteration 3 of the KCW introduces a three-dimensional model for conceptualising educational wellbeing (**see Figure 7.6**) This further enhances our understanding by applying the metaphor of a gyroscope. With its ability to maintain orientation amidst changes, a gyroscope aptly symbolises the dynamic equilibrium required for maintaining school wellbeing. This gyroscope model illustrates how wellbeing can be both maintained and oriented proactively within the educational setting, as well as shift and turn seamlessly due to the dynamic nature of the education system.

The three axes in the *Gyroscope of Wellbeing* model are directly inspired by the conceptual metaphors outlined in Neri Oxman's work, particularly in *The Age of Entanglemen (2016)*. Oxman conceptualises the Krebs Cycle of Creativity (KCC) not only as a circular metabolic map of creative energy (which she refers to as CreATP) but also reimagines it through four speculative visual metaphors: the Clock, Microscope, Compass, and Gyroscope. Of these, the gyroscope is particularly relevant here, as it represents a multidimensional, dynamic system that maintains orientation amidst complexity and change (Oxman, 2016).

The gyroscope metaphor in the current research was chosen specifically for its ability to convey balance, adaptability, and multidirectionality, reflecting the lived realities of school wellbeing. According to Oxman, the gyroscope serves as a plan-projection for navigating entangled domains (Science, Engineering, Design, and Art), where disciplinary boundaries dissolve. Similarly, in the *Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW)*, wellbeing domains do not function in isolation but are in constant flux, rotating, shifting, and interacting depending on the school context.

The three axes of Stability, Flexibility, and Inclusion, were derived by aligning Oxman's conceptual framing with the thematic data emerging from this research:

(1) Axis of Stability: The first dimension is like the spin axis of a gyroscope. This axis represents the core principles and values of wellbeing and anchors the culture of a school. This supports the school efforts in building an inclusive community, developing resilience, and nurturing personal growth.

(2) Axis of Flexibility: The second dimension aligns with the rotational axis which provides a gyroscope freedom to respond to forces outside itself. Responding to a student's changing and diverse needs must become a social norm within the school. This axis guarantees changeable circumstances such as personal, family, socio-economic, or cultural, and the balance shifts can be well accommodated.

(3) Axis of Inclusion: The third dimension, represented by the precession axis of a gyroscope, symbolises the integration of wellbeing into all aspects of school life. This dimension encourages embedding wellbeing across curricula, extracurricular activities, school policies, and community engagement. This ensures that wellbeing is not a standalone program but a pervasive and intrinsic aspect of the educational experience

Thus, both the metaphor and its operationalisation into three axes are grounded in Oxman's *KCC* framework while being tailored to the educational context through iterative stakeholder engagement and thematic analysis.

7.3.4.2 Applying the Gyroscope Model

Utilising the gyroscope model, schools can maintain a balanced approach to wellbeing that recognises the complexity of factors influencing student life. It represents a sophisticated tool for educators and policymakers to visualise and navigate the multidimensional aspects of wellbeing: When schools face disruption or change, the gyroscope's stability axis reminds them to hold firm to core values,

providing a steady reference point. The flexibility axis empowers schools to remain flexible, adjusting practices to maintain or restore equilibrium, much like a gyroscope adjusts to maintain its orientation. Finally, the inclusion axis compels schools to ensure that wellbeing is not siloed, advocating for a systemic approach that aligns with the broader mission of education.

The gyroscope model offers a refined framework for the implementation of wellbeing strategies in schools that are both adaptable and firmly anchored, enabling a sustained commitment to holistic wellbeing amidst the complex and evolving challenges of contemporary education. It emphasises the importance of continuous monitoring, feedback, and adjustment, much like a gyroscope constantly reorients itself, ensuring that wellbeing initiatives are proactive, reactive, tailored, and comprehensive.

In future explorations of student wellbeing, this three-dimensional gyroscope model can be used to assess the balance and orientation of wellbeing practices and to guide the development of resilient, responsive, and integrated strategies into the fabric of educational environments. It offers a powerful visual and conceptual tool for keeping the multifaceted nature of wellbeing in steady focus, ensuring that educational ecosystems are prepared to support students academically and in all aspects of their growth and development.

7.3.5 Discussion: Iterative Development of the Krebs Cycle: A Reflexive Narrative

The development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) was an iterative process developed across three distinct research phases. Each phase engaged different key stakeholders in the educational system, first school principals, then teachers, and finally students. This yielded successive insights that shaped and refined the model. By incorporating the findings, the model evolved to capture a comprehensive understanding of wellbeing within the school context. Accordingly, a narrative account is provided below for each iteration, explaining what changed and why,

which data source prompted the change, and how ANT or systems theory informed each decision.

Iteration 1 established four primary wellbeing domains: relationships and care, social and emotional, physical and the discourse sustainability reflecting the various literature on school wellbeing based on a narrative literature review. This was envisioned as an interconnected ecological model rather than isolated factors. This design was inspired by Oxman's Krebs Cycle of Creativity (2016), which emphasises interdisciplinary fluidity and the regenerative "metabolic" interplay of elements. Accordingly, collective efficacy was positioned as a key pillar for sustainable school wellbeing. The initial model was also informed by Venturini's concept of the complexity–legibility trade-off (Venturini et al., 2015). This guided the visualisation to balance nuanced complexity with clarity. In summary, Iteration 1 provided a theory-driven foundation, using systems thinking to map out key wellbeing components and their relationships before any stakeholder data were collected. This established a baseline framework that was comprehensive yet adaptable, ready to be refined through empirical findings.

The second iteration of the KCW incorporated insights from the empirical studies with school stakeholders (Chapters 4–6), marking a significant shift from a purely theoretical model to an evidence-informed framework. As the research moved "from actors to networks" (Venturini, 2009), data from principals, teachers, and students illustrated how wellbeing components interacted in practice, revealing gaps and opportunities in the initial model. A critical change in Iteration 2 was the addition of a "Cognitive Wellbeing" domain. This was prompted largely by the student voice findings. While Iteration 1 had captured relational, physical, social and emotional aspects, the qualitative data indicated that learning and cognitive engagement were experienced by students as core to their wellbeing, not merely ancillary. Students articulated that "wellbeing is deeply embedded in the learning process" (as evidenced by student voice data Chapter 6), suggesting that academic experiences contribute fundamentally to their sense of wellbeing. In response, the cognitive/learning dimension to the KCW, ensuring that the model acknowledges

learning (e.g. curiosity, mastery, flow in learning activities) as a wellbeing component in its own right. This change was also a way to give students' voices due weight in the framework, aligning with Lundy's (2007) emphasis on genuine student participation in educational design. In addition to the new cognitive wellbeing domain, Iteration 2 further refined the existing domains' content based on stakeholder data. For instance, principals underscored the role of leadership and policy supports (affirming the importance of the systemic domain for creating a supportive culture), and teachers highlighted classroom practices and environmental factors (e.g. the use of outdoor spaces, arts, and physical activities) as critical enablers of student wellbeing. These insights did not necessitate entirely new domains but they did prompt re-emphasis and richer description of those domains. Through this iterative refinement, the KCW evolved to better mirror the lived reality of wellbeing in schools. The ANT perspective was influential here. By "following the actors" (Latour, 2005) and mapping the network of relationships among principals, teachers, and students, I identified which connections in the wellbeing network were strong, which were strained, and which were previously underrepresented in the model. ANT's relational lens thus informed the decision to broaden the model's scope (e.g. adding the cognitive domain) and to illustrate more clearly the links between domains (for example, how the curricular experiences connect with emotional and social wellbeing).

Iteration 2, in sum, was a direct result of stakeholder engagement and network analysis, blending these empirical insights with the model's original systems-theoretical structure. The outcome was a more nuanced and contextually valid KCW framework that maintained clarity (per the complexity–legibility balance) while embracing the complexity revealed by real-world data.

The third iteration of the KCW is developed in the following chapter after further analysis that moved "from networks to cosmoses" (Venturini, 2009), introducing a deeper layer of reflexivity about the underlying ideologies and system dynamics shaping wellbeing in schools. In this phase, ANT and systems theory converged to inform a holistic re-conceptualisation of the model's structure. Through Actor-Network Theory's lens, the research examined the ideological clusters or

“cosmoses” expressed by the stakeholders that outlined the shared narratives and values about what school wellbeing should entail.

7.3.6 Closing Commentary

In this research chapter, I adopted Venturini's cartography (Venturini, 2009) to map and illustrate a systems-informed model of positive education and wellbeing tailored for school systems in Ireland. The framework proved instrumental in ensuring our approach was both theory-driven and evidence-based, addressing the multifaceted and interconnected nature of wellbeing at a systemic level.

The initial literature review played a crucial role in identifying effective methodologies and frameworks within educational settings, helping to identify components that could operate at multiple levels of the school system. Stakeholder involvement was a core element of the modelling phase. This phase involved focus groups, semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers, and staff, and participatory visual methods such as Photovoice. These engagements provided critical insights into the practical challenges and contextual nuances of wellbeing at a school systems-level. While these efforts yielded meaningful results, including additional stakeholders, such as policymakers or representatives from school patron bodies and parents, could have further strengthened the relevance and scalability of the framework.

Despite the structured and participatory approach, I encountered challenges characteristic of multi-stakeholder research. One key difficulty lay in addressing the variability across schools, including differences in staff readiness, existing school cultures, and resource availability. This limitation underscores the importance of developing more precise mapping components to outcomes, which should be a focus of future research phases. Additionally, I recognise the need to refine the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating systemic change, particularly in capturing the interactions between individual, relational, and organisational components of wellbeing.

The iterative nature of intervention development posed another challenge. Although stakeholder feedback was integral to the process, navigating the non-linear phases of refinement required substantial time and resources. Employing digital tools or decision-support frameworks in future research may help streamline this process while retaining the depth of stakeholder engagement crucial for systems-level interventions. Future research and practice should continue to explore and refine this model, ensuring it remains responsive to the changing landscapes of education and the needs of students as they prepare for the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century. Future research should also focus on operationalising the KCW, testing its applicability in various school settings, and refining it based on empirical findings to ensure it remains a robust tool for enhancing student wellbeing.

In conclusion, this study successfully employed the Venturinis Cartography of Controversies (2015) to develop a systems-informed, evidence-based, and theoretically coherent approach to wellbeing at school level. While the study demonstrated strengths in integrating participatory methods, theoretical frameworks, and diverse components, areas for improvement remain. These include expanding stakeholder representation, refining the mapping of components to systemic outcomes, and optimising iterative processes to enhance efficiency. Acknowledging these limitations reflects the complexity inherent in systems-level research and highlights the need for ongoing critical reflection. The subsequent phases of this research will involve detailed feasibility testing, rigorous evaluation, and thoughtful implementation guided by a logic model to elucidate the relationships between systemic components and their outcomes. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the research contributes to advancing positive education and wellbeing, providing a foundation for transformative change within school systems.

7.4 Limitations and Future Directions

In this chapter, the first four lenses of the cartography of controversies have been applied to help identify the actors, viewpoints, relations and ideologies involved in the construction of wellbeing in schools. Due to the extensive analysis necessary, the fifth lens is recommended for future studies. This would involve the systematic

design, implementation, and evaluation of a KCW-informed intervention. This would involve initial steps such as refining programme theory, identifying uncertainties, and assessing context. A final step would be to conduct feasibility testing and evaluation phases of research.

Furthermore, the development of a Logic Model is recommended to designing the connections between inputs such as (including training, resources) and stakeholder engagement activities like wellbeing initiatives and policy alignment to student wellbeing, staff retention, and a positive school climate. This model would assist with planning, monitoring, and evaluation by illustrating the processes through which change is anticipated to take place.

Finally, implementation testing of the KCW framework in different schools for relevance and impact. The first case study may focus on how some schools will work with the framework at their own pace using already established school culture and identify what will enable or inhibit its implementation. A further randomised control trial could add rigor to the research.

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Chapter 8 Conclusion

This PhD research study is a unique investigation into the complex entanglement of wellbeing in Irish primary schools, addressing both conceptual understandings and practical implementations of wellbeing. In recent years, wellbeing has become a central focus in Irish education policy (NCCA, 2023). Despite this, it remains inconsistently understood, conceptualised and applied in school settings (Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2018). As a result, this study explored how various human and non-human actors (e.g., policies, school leaders, teachers, students, and resources) interact to shape wellbeing experiences in schools (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). Actor Network Theory (ANT) provided a novel framework to trace these interactions and relationships. ANT assisted in describing how wellbeing is co-produced through networks of actors in and around the school environment (Venturini, 2010). By taking this sociomaterial approach, the objective of the research was to address the divide between educational policies and the practical efforts made towards cultivating wellbeing at the primary school level.
The introduction of this chapter outlines the overall approach and sets the stage for a summary of the thesis, followed by discussions of its strengths, limitations, future directions, and implications.

8.1 Thesis Summary

Chapter 1 is an introduction to this thesis, providing information on the author, background, theoretical perspective as well as the significance of this research study.

Chapter 2 critically reviews the literature in the areas of wellbeing in education. This chapter summarises, synthesises and discusses the literature, providing a comprehensive overview of the research in these areas to date. Furthermore, it uses a Sartoris Ladder of Abstraction to conceptually analyse wellbeing in education. Finally, the chapter uses Venturini's Cartography of Controversies (2010) to develop iteration 1 of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing.

Chapter 4, the first study in this thesis, gathered data on the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for principals (n=12) in developing schools. Following three focus

groups with n=9 teachers and three interviews with n=3 principals, data was analysed using reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021; 2019; 2006). The following enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing were identified:

- High stress levels due to inadequate supports
- Challenges in the provision of adequate physical infrastructure inhibits wellbeing
    - However, moving from prefabs to permanent buildings improves identity, structure, and wellbeing.
- Special education resource challenges create occupational guilt and stress
- Wellbeing needs to be part of school culture

Chapter 5 gathered data with teachers in developing schools. Four focus groups were conducted with n=20 teachers. Data was analysed using reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021; 2019; 2006). The following enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing were identified:

- Positive/Negative Impact of Leadership on Teacher Wellbeing
- Peer relationships and formal mentoring as a Protective Factor
- School physical environment leading to enhanced belonging and sense of value
- Challenges with Special Education Resources lead to feelings of occupational stress and guilt
- Wellbeing needs to be as embedded as part of Culture.

Chapter 6 is a peer reviewed and published paper. (Cashman, O'Brien, and Chambers 2025), that included Photovoice participatory research with n=16 primary school pupils ages 8 and 9. The results of the study showed in relation to the enablers and inhibitors of wellbeing for students:

- Relationships with teachers, SNAs and peers serves as the foundation for Wellbeing

- Physical Space (both sensory and calming) and the outdoor Environment is an essential enabler of wellbeing
- Wellbeing is Part of Learning and students do not see wellbeing as separate from education but as part of their learning experience.
- Physical Education and Movement are key enablers of wellbeing

According to the research questions set out in chapter 1, these (Chapters 1 to 5) studies link to the first two research questions;

1. **How is wellbeing conceptualised, understood, and operationalised within the Irish primary school system?**
2. **What reconceptualised definition of wellbeing can reflect its multi-faceted and relational nature in the Irish primary school context?**

For RQ1, the study found that wellbeing in Irish primary schools is understood in diverse ways and often implemented in piecemeal fashion. There is no single uniform definition or practice. Instead, wellbeing is constructed through a network of relationships, activities, and institutional policies. For example, key factors influencing student wellbeing identified in this research include positive relationships (particularly student–teacher and peer relationships), the school environment (physical and emotional safety, inclusive spaces, opportunities for play and creativity), and the learning and curriculum experiences (a broad, engaging curriculum including creative arts and outdoor learning) (Ryan & Deci, 2006; Ayres, 2016; Nair & Minhas, 2022; Gardner, 2015; Waite et al., 2013; Carlin et al., 2024).

These findings highlighted that wellbeing is deeply contextual and relational. It emerges from daily interactions and the school's culture and social norms, not merely from standalone programs. The analysis also uncovered various enablers and barriers: for instance, strong community support and a collaborative school culture can enable wellbeing initiatives, whereas inconsistent policy directives or resource constraints can hinder them.

In answer to RQ2, the thesis proposes a reconceptualised definition of wellbeing tailored to the primary school context. This definition, synthesised from the data and literature, characterises wellbeing as a holistic, multi-faceted state of being that

arises from supportive interactions between individuals and their environment. It encompasses relational, emotional, social, physical, and cognitive, dimensions of children's development while also acknowledging environmental stewardship and sustainability, viewing these as interdependent. Crucially, the definition emphasises wellbeing as a collective responsibility and a relational construct or something co-created by students, staff, school leaders, families, and policies working in concert. This means that wellbeing is not treated as an individual trait or a static outcome, but as an emergent property of the school system (Osher et al., 2018). By integrating ecological and cultural considerations, the new definition ensures relevance to Ireland's unique educational context (for example, valuing inclusivity, child voice, and community connection) (NCCA, 2023). This shared understanding provides a foundation for stakeholders to work towards common wellbeing goals. It fills a gap in the literature by moving beyond narrow or fragmented definitions, proposing instead a unifying concept that can guide practice and policy in a more consistent way.

In chapter 7, the multiple iterations of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing were explained using Venturini's Cartography of Controversies (2010). The chapter combines the voices of the literature, the school leaders, the teachers, and the students to explain the complex landscape of the dynamics involving actors, policies, and practices about wellbeing in education.
Following Venturini's 2010 and 2012 cartography of controversies, the KCW is developed through four central observational perspectives:

1. From Statements to Literature.

2. From Literature to Actors.

3. From Actors to Networks

4. From Networks to Cosmoses

These perspectives are helpful in framing and building strategies aimed at

responding to and promoting wellbeing at a whole school level in a more adaptable manner. As detailed in the research questions in chapter one, the third research question is addressed here, particularly;

1. How can a systems-informed ecological conceptual framework for wellbeing be designed, implemented, and evaluated in Irish primary schools?

Resultantly, in relation to RQ3, the research culminated in the design of a systems-informed framework for school wellbeing, which I named the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW). This was developed through the contributions of the various stakeholders (principals, teachers, and students) who helped co-create and refine this framework alongside ANT analysis and Venturini's cartography of controversies (Venturini, 2010). The KCW model illustrates the complex relationships between the actors, policies, and practices that are integral to a school's wellbeing. This is achieved through several lenses developed as part of ANT starting from identifying the most important people, mapping their interactions, and subsequently the ideologies that guide the enactment of wellbeing in schools (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992; Callon, 1986).

By applying these lenses, the framework captures the complexity of wellbeing in a practical diagrammatic form, helping schools visualise how different elements (for example, national curriculum guidelines, school-level initiatives, teacher practices, student voice, and community partnerships) connect and influence one another. These outcomes point to the potential of the framework to support systemic change in how wellbeing is conceptualised moving from ad-hoc interventions to a coordinated strategy woven into the fabric of school life.
In summary, the thesis answers its research questions by revealing the current challenges in conceptualising wellbeing and offering a robust new definition to provide an actionable framework that links theory to practice.

8.2 Strengths of the Research

Acknowledging that this study contained various shortcomings, which will be

discussed in the limitations section, there is strong evidence presented that the design and development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing was based on rigorous research considerations, evident throughout the PhD journey. The strengths of this study include:

- The study leveraged a novel combination of methods under an ANT-guided transmethodology. By integrating qualitative interviews, focus groups, participatory Photovoice, and network mapping techniques, it captured the sociomaterial complexity of wellbeing in a school setting. This approach extends beyond traditional qualitative studies by not only gathering perspectives from different stakeholders (students, teachers, principals) but also examining how documents, policies, and physical spaces act as influential actors (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005).
- The use of ANT in an educational context is a methodological contribution, demonstrating how tracing actor-networks can yield insights into intangible concepts like wellbeing. Moreover, involving children through creative methods (drawings and photography) provided rich, child-centered data, often missing in policy-driven wellbeing research (Lundy, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2007). This participatory element strengthened the study's validity and ethical depth, ensuring that the voices of those most affected i.e., students directly informed the findings.
- The thesis advances the conceptualisation of school wellbeing by offering a reconceptualised definition that is holistic and relational. Drawing on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), relational sociology, and ANT's focus on connectivity (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992), the research reframes wellbeing as an emergent property of interdependent networks.
- This bridges individual and systemic levels, showing how policy changes or shifts in school culture ripple down to affect individual student wellbeing, and vice versa. The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) provides a concrete theoretical model that operationalises this concept, translating wellbeing into a schema of components and processes.
- The KCW helps visualise wellbeing as a "wellbeing assemblage" (Fenwick, 2011), extending theoretical discourse on how to study and improve

wellbeing. The research also demonstrates how ANT can complement existing educational theories, such as trauma-informed practice, social-emotional learning, and inclusive education, adding a sociomaterial dimension that accounts for the role of non-human factors in shaping human experiences.

- The findings have direct implications for schools and policymakers. The identification of core themes: relationships, environment, and curriculum as vital to student wellbeing provides evidence-based priorities for schools (Barry et al., 2017). The research also revealed barriers (fragmented implementation, resource limitations) and enablers (strong leadership, community engagement) that can inform improvement strategies.
- The Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing framework serves as a tool that schools can adopt to map their context, ensuring that efforts in policy, teaching, support, and partnerships are aligned. The stakeholder participation in developing the framework offers a replicable model for collaborative change, increasing ownership and contextual fit. These insights are valuable for practitioners working to enhance wellbeing, as well as for trainers and consultants supporting school wellbeing programmes.

  In sum, the strengths of this research lie in its innovative methodology, theoretical advancement of wellbeing in education, and tangible contributions to practice. It adds to academic knowledge while producing tools and insights that can improve primary education in Ireland and beyond.

8.3 Limitations

Despite the numerous strengths identified in the current study, it is important for future research to also consider the limitations of the study, albeit some of which were outside the control of the researcher. The limitations of this study include:

- The research was conducted within a limited sample of Irish primary schools, which constrains the breadth of inference. ANT's context-specific approach means findings may not be generalisable to all schools, particularly

those differing in size, demographics, or resources (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Future studies involving broader and more diverse samples will be necessary to test and refine the transferability of the conclusions.

- As with all qualitative research, the researcher's role could influence processes and outcomes. The researcher's immersion in the field enabled rich insights but raises potential for bias, where personal perspectives could subconsciously shape data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexive journaling and triangulation mitigated this, but readers should consider the interpretive nature of findings.
- The study provides a snapshot in time, limiting assessment of long-term sustainability and impact of the framework. While the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing was conceptually developed and initially applied, the project could not track long-term outcomes such as sustained improvements in wellbeing or academic performance. Future longitudinal studies are needed to examine these aspects.
- ANT's symmetrical treatment of actors can obscure power dynamics, such as the disproportionate influence of government policies over teacher practices (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005). While the research addressed this through critical reflection and by integrating broader socio-cultural theories, ANT analysis prioritises mapping over evaluation, which can limit causal interpretations. The framework presented should be seen as one possible lens, which could be complimented by other approaches focusing on structural or psychological dimensions.

  These limitations do not detract from the significance of the findings but highlight the need for further research to build upon and extend the work in new contexts

8.4 Future Directions

At present, the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) represents the primary output of this thesis providing a conceptual and practical framework for understanding the complex nature of wellbeing in Irish primary schools. While this model has been developed through engagement with key stakeholders and informed by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), it has not yet been operationalised into a structured

intervention, nor evaluated through implementation in school settings. Accordingly, the next phase of this research should focus on developing upon the KCW to develop a systems-informed intervention using established frameworks.

As a result, future directions for this research should include:

- For this thesis, the first four lenses of the cartography of controversies have been applied to help identify the actors, viewpoints, relations and ideologies involved in the construction of wellbeing in schools. Due to the extensive analysis necessary for the fifth lens is recommended for future studies. This would involve the systematic design, implementation, and evaluation of a KCW-informed intervention. This would involve initial steps such as refining programme theory, identifying uncertainties, and assessing context. A final step would be to conduct feasibility testing and evaluation phases of research.
- For future research, the development of a Logic Model is recommended to designing the connections between inputs such as (including training, resources) and stakeholder engagement activities like wellbeing initiatives and policy alignment to student wellbeing, staff retention, and a positive school climate. This model would assist with planning, monitoring, and evaluation by illustrating the processes through which change is anticipated to take place.
- Furthermore, implementation testing of the KCW framework in different schools for relevance and impact. The first case study may focus on how some schools will work with the framework at their own pace using already established school culture and identify what will enable or inhibit its implementation. A further randomised control trial could add rigor to the research.
- It is also recommended that engagement with a broader range of stakeholders, including policymakers, teacher educators, and parent representatives, to ensure that the future intervention reflects the complex actor-networks involved in school wellbeing. Their input will be essential in

shaping tools and resources that are contextually appropriate and practically feasible.

- In order to benefit at national policy, an examination of the ways in which the KCW model may assist schools in achieving national wellbeing policies. This might involve congruence with the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education, 2019)) as well as the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA,2023) and ensuring that wellbeing policies are both evidence-based and aligned.
- Subsequently, there may be further scope to develop opportunities for international collaboration and adaptation. The KCW model may be relevant to other countries grappling with issues of wellbeing, even though it was created with Irish circumstances in mind. Comparative research could study the model's use in various cultures and policy contexts.

To conclude, the KCW model captures the advanced integration of wellbeing as a systemic, relational concept; however, it is still captured within a framework. The model's strength lies in developing further into a defined mechanism of control. The next steps in this process will be to the design and frame school-level wellbeing in a coherent, sustainable, and contextually responsive manner.

8.5 Concluding Thoughts

This thesis set out to unravel the entangled nature of wellbeing in Irish primary schools and I believe the KCW can make significant contributions to both scholarship and educational practice. By employing Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the research placed a spotlight on the often-overlooked connections between policy, people, and place, demonstrating that wellbeing in schools is not the product of any single programme or actor, but the emergent outcome of multiple elements working together within a complex, sociomaterial system (Latour, 2005; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). This systems-informed and relational perspective challenges linear conceptions of wellbeing and offers a new language and framework for understanding and enacting wellbeing as a collective , dynamic, and co-produced process.

In a time when Irish education is prioritising wellbeing, evidenced by recent developments such as the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 and the Primary Curriculum Framework 2023 (Department of Education, 2018; NCCA, 2023), this research provides a timely and in-depth analysis of what wellbeing means in practice and how it can be effectively embedded in school life. One of the central messages of this work is that wellbeing must be everyone's responsibility and benefit within the school community. The findings demonstrated that when students feel heard, teachers feel supported, and policies align with practice, the network stabilises in a way that promotes positive outcomes for all. Conversely, if any of these links are weakened and if policies and more importantly human resources are disconnected from classroom, the wellbeing of all stakeholders within the school community is greatly inhibited.

This holistic insight feeds into the national conversation by cautioning against piecemeal solutions and advocating for integrated, coordinated strategies. It also resonates with global discourses in education, where there is growing recognition that academic success is inseparable from student wellbeing, and that schools are central in nurturing healthy, resilient young people (WHO, 2021; OECD, 2021). By situating wellbeing within Ireland's unique cultural, social, and policy landscape, the research validates international theories such as ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and sociomateriality (Fenwick, 2011) and adapts them for the specific context of Irish primary education.

The development of the Krebs Cycle of Wellbeing (KCW) represents a novel contribution, both theoretical and practical, that is likely to have value beyond this study. It demonstrates how complex concepts like wellbeing can be operationalised into actionable frameworks, allowing educators and school leaders to visualise, plan, and implement wellbeing initiatives that are context-sensitive and systemically integrated. While developed within an Irish context, its flexible and participatory design makes it adaptable for broader application, including international settings where similar challenges in conceptualising and implementing wellbeing exist.
In conclusion, the significance of this research lies in its affirmation that wellbeing in schools is complex, but manageable. Complexity need not be a barrier. With the

right frameworks, collaborative approaches, and commitment to inclusivity, even intricate networks of actors and influences can be understood, navigated, and aligned towards positive change. The thesis offers a vision of primary schools as caring ecosystems, where policies, pedagogies, and people coalesce to support the flourishing of every child. This vision not only aligns with Ireland's evolving educational goals but extends them, proposing that to truly educate a child means to attend to their holistic wellbeing alongside academic development.

As Irish education continues to evolve, integrating wellbeing as a foundational element, this research stands as a building block for further innovation, collaboration, and systemic improvement. It invites educators, leaders, and policymakers to reimagine wellbeing not as an add-on, but as integral to the mission of education itself. By embracing the interconnected, network-oriented approach advocated here, schools in Ireland can become environments where kindness, health, learning, and happiness are not occasional aims but woven into the everyday experience of education. This would be the ultimate legacy of this research—a sustainable culture of wellbeing that benefits current and future generations of students across Ireland.

On a personal level, this study has refined my practice, while writing this PhD thesis has helped clarify my thinking. This journey has been challenging, relentless, but above all else, a fruitful learning experience. As a PhD candidate and as I mentioned in chapter 1 a pracademic working as a school principal in school, I have been in the advantageous and privileged position to see research in practice on a daily basis. Ultimately, I see it as my responsibility to continue to communicate this research, and that of others, to advance wellbeing in schools and to support the development of schools that place an emphasis on the wellbeing of their whole community.

8.6 References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Plain Language Statement



Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools.

UCC Researcher: David Cashman

This study is a PhD study concerned with the design and evaluation of a conceptual wellbeing framework that will be used as a driver when setting up new Irish primary schools. The data collected in this study will be used in the researchers dissertation. You are being invited to take part in this focus interview because your school is a new school that has opened since 2013. This Plain Language Statement is to provide you with details of this research project, as openly and as clearly as possible. You are advised to read it carefully so that you can make a fully informed decision regarding your participation in the study. Should you require clarity on any information provided in this document, please do not hesitate to ask questions. Once you have come to an understanding of what this project entails and you agree to participate in it, you can then sign the consent form provided.

What is the purpose of the study?
This study is concerned with the design and evaluation of a conceptual wellbeing framework for setting up new Irish primary schools by collected data from the multiple stakeholders involved. It contains five stages. You will be participating in Stage 2.

Stage 1: School Principals and wellbeing
This stage involves a focus group of 12 principals of new schools (a new school in this study is a school that has been set up since 2013) to ascertain the perceptions of principals of wellbeing in primary school.

Stage 2: The Teacher Voice
This stage involves a focus group of 12 teachers who teach in a new/developing school (a new school in this study is a school that has been set up since 2013) to ascertain their experience of wellbeing in a new school.

Stage 3: The Student Voice
The child's voice study is guided by a children's rights framework and is informed by Article 12 of the Childrens' Rights Charter (CRC). The methodology will draw on the 'Mosaic approach' which acknowledges adults and young children as co-constructors of meaning and combines traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with participatory methodologies (Clark & Moss, 2011).

Stage 4: The Parent Voice
The Parents Voice will be reflected in a focus group to gain insights on the parent's experiences of wellbeing in a new school.

Stage 5: The Pilot
Based on Data analysed in stage 1 to 4, an ecological conceptual model for wellbeing will be developed for the Irish Primary School context. This will then be piloted across three Irish Primary Schools and evaluated it to generate conclusions. The quantitative data will involve a pre and post-pilot online survey, and will involve a survey of teachers, principals, students and parents of the proposed three schools participating in the study.

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What are the benefits of taking part?

The possible benefits of the study include improving the real-world applicability and translatability of the wellbeing in Irish primary schools, particularly for the development of new schools, and contributing to the current body of knowledge on principals' practice regarding wellbeing as a multifaceted entity.

What are the potential risks?

There are no foreseeable or known risks for participation in the present study.

What will happen if I decide to take part

Teachers

Teacher's participation will be comprised of a focus group on your experience teaching in a new school, its impact on your wellbeing, your perceptions on wellbeing and how you feel wellbeing could be used as a driver for school development.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so, you can refuse to answer specific questions, or decide to withdraw from the interview. Once the interview has been concluded, you can choose to withdraw at any time in the subsequent two weeks.

If you do decide to take part, please keep this Plain Language Statement and complete the Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. To withdraw, please contact the lead researcher (contact details are provided below).

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with Irish and European Data Protection legislations. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are fully anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. Your data will only be viewed by all members of the research team listed in this document. Once the focus group is completed, the recording will immediately be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. The data will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the audio- recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on a University College Cork supported cloud storage platform MS OneDrive, MS Teams (in the associated default MS SharePoint), MS SharePoint, Google Drive, and G-Suite Shared Drive. The data will be stored for minimum of ten years.

Data Protection Rights

University College Cork is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with Irish and European Data Protection legislations. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.dataprotection.ie . Questions, comments and requests about your personal data

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can also be sent to UCC's Information Compliance Manager: Office of Corporate & Legal Affairs, University College Cork, Western Road, Cork. [email: foi@ucc.ie; telephone 0214903949.

What will happen with the results of this study?
The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs.
If you have any queries about this research, you can contact David Cashman at 101390180@umail.ucc.ie or my research supervisors Dr. Wesley O'Brien at wesley.obrien@ucc.ie or Dr Fiona Chambers at F.Chambers@ucc.ie.
If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by completing the consent form at this link.

Many thanks,
David Cashman

Appendix B: **Consent Form for Principals**

Consent Form for School Principals–

Full Project Title: Full Project Title: Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools.

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of assessing the implementation of a pi project to use wellbeing as a core driver for the development of a new school.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Plain Language Statement.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about a aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or r you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statemer and then signing and dating the form as participant.

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions	Yes	No
2	I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Plain Language Statement	Yes	No
3	I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially	Yes	No
4	I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers, other formal research outputs and the researchers PhD dissertation.	Yes	No
5	I as Principal provide consent for pictures to be used in this study	Yes	No
6	I agree for our school to take part in the above study	Yes	No
7	I agree to take part in this study	Yes	No

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Participant's Name	Date	Signature

Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix C: **Consent form for Teachers**

Consent Form for Teachers

Full Project Title: Full Project Title: Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools.

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of assessing the implementation of a pilot project to use wellbeing as a core driver for the development of a new school.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Plain Language Statement.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as participant.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions**	**Yes**	**No**
2	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Plain Language Statement**	**Yes**	**No**
3	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially**	**Yes**	**No**
4	**I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs**	**Yes**	**No**
5	**I agree to take part in the above study**	**Yes**	**No**

Appendix D: **Consent Form for Parents for Pupil Participation**

Consent Form for Parents for Pupil Participation

Full Project Title: Full Project Title: Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools.

Your child is invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of assessing the implementation of a pilot project to use wellbeing as a core driver for the development of a new school.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Plain Language Statement.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as participant.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions**	**Yes**	**No**
2	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Plain Language Statement**	**Yes**	**No**
3	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially**	**Yes**	**No**
4	**I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs**	**Yes**	**No**
5	**I understand that my child must assent also**	**Yes**	**No**
6	**I am the child's parent/legal guardian and have the right to consent. I agree for my child to take part in the above study**	**Yes**	**No**

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Appendix E: **PhotoVoice Research Information for Children**

Research schedule and sessions

Data collection with the children – all data collection will take place in the children's school over a 4-week period.

Session 1: The researcher will introduce the research to the children in their school setting and through this session, informed consent will be sought from the children. This is done through a picture book about the research project and which introduces the researcher and the purpose of the study in a visual and child friendly way

Session 2: This session will be started by reminding children of the story from session 1. The researcher will introduce the research themes with the children using Photo elicitation (stock photos of caregiver interactions and photos of their school taken by the school staff).

Session 3: Talk and draw methods – the researcher will conduct a talk and draw session with the children. The aim of this session is to elicit the views of the children on their everyday experiences and again to allow the children to become familiar and comfortable with the researcher in their school setting. The posters are used as a prompt for children. Groups of 4–5 children with their teacher will come into the room and each group stay for 20 minutes. After they finish colouring and drawing, they are invited to stick their picture onto their favourite photos which are posted on the wall from the photo-elicitation session. The children's discussions are recoded and transcribed from this session.

Session 4: Children are given the digital cameras and given some basic instruction on how to use them. They are asked to take photos in their school of things which they find interesting over a two-day period. The school staff support them in this activity with any technical issues they have.

Session 5/6: During these sessions the children are shown the printed copies of the photos which they took in session 4, and these photos form the basis of a discussion with the children using the PhotoVoice methods. These sessions produce the main source of data for the research study. Children are given stickers to identify their favourite 3–4 photos during the session and sad faces to identify photos they did not like. This allows the children to select their favourites and give additional opportunities for non-verbal children to contribute their ideas. Children are asked questions such as:

- Why did you take that photo?
- What's happening in the photo?
- What is the teacher doing in the photo?
- What are you doing in the photo?

Appendix F: **PhotoVoice Consent Form for Children**

- Where are you when you took the photo?
- Did you like having the camera?

Each session takes 5–12 minutes depending on how much time the child feel they wanted to participate.

Pupil consent form

Introduction

My name is David Cashman and I am doing research on school wellbeing. I am looking to find out children's opinions on what makes them feel well in schools to try and make schools a better place for everyone.

I'm going to share some information with you and invite you to take part in a research study with Dave Cashman. It's completely up to you whether you want to take part or not.

We've already talked to your parent(s) or guardian about the study, and they know we're also asking for your agreement. If you decide to take part, your parent(s) or guardian also need to say yes.

But if you decide *not* to take part, that's totally okay – even if your parent(s) or guardian have said yes. It's your choice.

You may talk about anything in this form with your parents or friends or anyone else you feel comfortable talking to. You can decide whether to participate or not after you have talked it over. You do not have to decide immediately.

There may be some words you don't understand or things that you want me to explain more about because you are interested or concerned. Please ask me to stop at any time and I will take time to explain).

Right to refuse or withdraw

You don't have to be in this research if you don't want to be. It's up to you. If you decide not to be in the research, it's okay and nothing changes. This is still your school; everything stays the same as before. Even if you say "yes" now, you can change your mind later and it's still okay.

Confidentiality: Is everybody going to know about this?

We will not tell other people that you are in this research, and we won't share information about you to anyone who does not work in the research study.

Information about you that will be collected from the research will be put away and no-one, but the researchers will be able to see it. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. Only the researchers will know what your number is and we will lock that information up with a lock and key

Sharing the findings:

When we are finished the research, I will sit down with you and your parent, and I will tell you about what we learnt. Afterwards, we will be telling more people, scientists, and others, about the research and what we found. We will do this by writing and sharing reports and by going to meetings with people who are interested in the work we do.

Who can I talk to or ask questions to?

You can ask me questions now or later. I have written a number where you can reach us. If you want to talk to someone else that you know like your teacher or parents or auntie, that's okay too.)

Consent

I understand that parts of my interview (e.g. my name / location won't be used) may be used in presentations and publications (article, book chapter, student thesis, social media publicity of the study's findings, etc.), if I give permission below (please tick one box):

I agree to participate in this study ☐

I do not agree to participate in this study ☐

I.....agree to participate in **David Cashman**'s research study.

I understand what the study is about and it has been clearly explained to me.

I am participating voluntarily.

Signed: ..... Date: .....

PRINT NAME: .....

Or

Thumb print of participant

Appendix G: **Principal and teacher interview/focus group guide**

Questions	Prompts	Logic
Can you tell me a bit about the school and its context	size, student population	Introduction and context
Can you tell me a bit about you and your role at the school?	experience, how long at school	Introduction and context
Can you tell me about your vision in setting up a start-up school? **(Principal Only)**	What are your core values in relation to education?	Individual stage of change

Questions	Prompts	Logic
What supports were provided in the setting up of a new school? **(Principal Only)**	In hindsight is there anything in addition which you would have liked? (e.g. handbook, online resources etc.)	
What does wellbeing mean to you?	What does an ideal level / condition of wellbeing at work look like to you? What is your ideal experience of wellbeing at work?	Knowledge of wellbeing
To what degree do you have regular access to a comfortable work space/office/classroom?	To what degree are you able to take breaks during the day when you need them? To what degree are you able to use lunchtimes as free time for yourself?	Physical Wellbeing
Can you talk me through any wellbeing programmes currently in use in your school?	Can you tell me why you decided to use these programmes and well as training involved?	Collective Efficacy
Which do you think are the essential components of the project, what are the non-negotiables in terms of implementing wellbeing programmes?		Fidelity
Describe the availability / access that you have to resources at work How does this affect your teaching duties? How far do you feel that your students have all the resources they need to achieve?	Do you feel that students make good use of the facilities available to them? Why? Why not? assistance? If so, what could they be?	Physical Wellbeing

Questions	Prompts	Logic
If things go wrong at work, what types to level of support do you receive from your leadership/management?		Relationships and care
To what degree do you feel that you have the support from other leadership/management staff when you need it?	Do you have the support of leadership/management staff when needed? Do you feel that relevant information about students is easily accessible to you?	Relationships and care
Do you think that Management have a good understanding of teaching staff's overall working needs? Why? Why not?	To what extent do you feel that your work is valued by Senior Management?	Participant need and engagement
How do you feel about working in a team? How do you feel about working with the people within your department? Do you feel that you are fully able to support your colleagues? Why? Why not?	How far do you feel that your opinions are valued by Senior Management? How far do you feel that your work is valued by your colleagues? To what extent do you feel that your work is valued by Senior Management?	Relationships/care and collective efficacy
Do you always have someone to go to at work when you need to talk about your problems? Why? Why not?	How far do you feel trusted by your employers? How much do you trust your employers?	Social and emotional wellbeing

Questions	Prompts	Logic
Do you have close friends at work?	To what extent do you co-operate with my management team/employer?	
Are there formal structures and systems in place that provide compassionate and helpful support when needed? Are there informal structures and systems in place that provide compassionate and helpful support when needed?		Social and emotional wellbeing Sustainability
How would you describe your relationships with students? How would you describe your dealings /relationships with senior management? How would you describe your dealings /relationships with colleagues? How would you describe your dealings /relationships with parents/guardians?		Relationships/care
Describe your experience of job satisfaction How far do you feel energised at work? How far do you feel stress free at work? Describe how you manage /	Are you aware of counselling services available to talk to about personal or professional problems? Would you feel comfortable to speak to a counsellor	Philosophical discourse of flourishing Social and emotional wellbeing

Questions	Prompts	Logic
cope with stress at work	about your personal problems? Would you feel comfortable to speak to a counsellor about your professional problems?	

Appendix H: **Plain Language Statement for parents for pupil participation**

Plain Language Statement for Parents for Pupil Participation in Photovoice Research

Date:

Full Project Title:

Reconceptualising Wellbeing: An Ecological Framework For New Irish Primary Schools.

UCC Researcher: David Cashman

This study is a PhD study concerned with the design and evaluation of a conceptual wellbeing framework that will be used as a driver when setting up new Irish primary schools. The data collected in this study will be used in the researchers dissertation. This Plain Language Statement is to provide you with details of this research project, as openly and as clearly as possible. You are advised to read it carefully so that you can make a fully informed decision regarding your participation in the study. Should you require clarity on any information provided in this document, please do not hesitate to ask questions. Once you have come to an understanding of what this project entails and you agree to participate in it, you can then sign the consent form provided.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is concerned with the design and evaluation of a conceptual wellbeing framework for setting up new Irish primary schools by collected data from the multiple stakeholders involved. It contains five stages:

Stage 1: School Principals and wellbeing

This stage contains a focus group of 12 principals of new schools (a new school in this study is a school that has been set up since 2013) to ascertain the perceptions of principals of wellbeing in primary school.

Stage 2: The Teacher Voice

Teachers will be asked to complete an online Workplace Wellbeing Survey. This survey comprises of a combination of Kerns (2014), Workplace PERMA (based on Seligman (2011), 5 pillars of wellbeing, PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment) Profiler, the Organisational Virtuousness Scale (Cameron, Mora, Leutscher and Calarco, 2011 and the Organisational Commitment Scale (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979)

Stage 3: The Student Voice

The child's voice study is guided by a children's rights framework and is informed by Article 12 of the Childrens' Rights Charter (CRC). The methodology will draw on the 'Mosaic approach' which acknowledges

adults and young children as co-constructors of meaning and combines traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with participatory methodologies (Clark & Moss, 2011).

Stage 4: The Parent Voice

The Parents Voice will be reflected in a focus group to gain insights on the parent's experiences of wellbeing in a new school.

Stage 5: Based on Data analysed in stage 1 to 4, an ecological conceptual model for wellbeing will be developed for the Irish Primary School context. This will then be piloted across three Irish Primary Schools and evaluated it to generate conclusions. The quantitative data will involve a pre and post-pilot online survey, and will involve a survey of teachers, principals, students and parents of the proposed three schools participating in the study.

What are the benefits of taking part?

The possible benefits of the study include improving the real-world applicability and translatability of the wellbeing in Irish primary schools, particularly for the development of new schools, and contributing to the current body of knowledge on wellbeing practice in schools?

What are the potential risks?

There are no foreseeable or known risks for participation in the present study.

What will happen if you let your child participate?

The researcher will use the Photovoice methodology to carry out research with the children. Photovoice is a creative method that helps children easily assess strengths or concerns about their community and to communicate these ideas both visually and verbally with policymakers, city leaders or researchers (Dacet al., 2013; Gant et al., 2009; Goodhart et al., 2006). A detailed description is provided below:

Data collection with the children – all data collection will take place in the children's school over a 4-week period.

Session 1: The researcher will introduce the research to the children in their school setting and through this session, informed consent and child assent will be sought from the children. This is done through a picture book about the research project and which introduces the researcher and the purpose of the study in a visual and child friendly way

Session 2: This session will be started by reminding children of the story from session 1. The researcher will introduce the research themes with the children using Photo elicitation (stock photos of caregiver interactions and photos of their school taken by the school staff).

Session 3: Talk and draw methods – the researcher will conduct a talk and draw session with the children. The aim of this session is to elicit the views of the children on their everyday experiences and again to allow the

children to become familiar and comfortable with the researcher in their school setting. The posters are used as a prompt for children. Groups of 4–5 children with their teacher will come into the room and each group stay for 20 minutes. After they finish colouring and drawing, they are invited to stick their picture onto their favourite photos which are posted on the wall from the photo-elicitation session. The children's discussions are recoded and transcribed from this session.

Session 4: Children are given the digital cameras and given some basic instruction on how to use them. They are asked to take photos in their school of things which they find interesting over a two-day period. The school staff support them in this activity with any technical issues they have.

Session 5/6: During these sessions the children are shown the printed copies of the photos which they took in session 4, and these photos form the basis of a discussion with the children using the PhotoVoice methods. These sessions produce the main source of data for the research study. Children are given stickers to identify their favourite 3–4 photos during the session and sad faces to identify photos they did not like. This allows the children to select their favourites and give additional opportunities for non-verbal children to contribute their ideas. Children are asked questions such as:

- Why did you take that photo?
- What's happening in the photo?
- What is the teacher doing in the photo?
- What are you doing in the photo?
- Where are you when you took the photo?
- Did you like having the camera?

Each session takes 5–12 minutes depending on how much time the child feel they wanted to participate.

Issues with the production of visual data: As the data collection will involve the children taking photographs precautions will be taken to ensure no photos of people or children who have not consented to participate in the project will be taken. Children will be encouraged to ask permission before taking photos of others and the issue of consent will be discussed with children in a child-centred manner during the research sessions. In addition, the researcher will ensure that any photos that may be taken by the children which include children or staff who have not given consent for their participation in the study will be deleted and not included in the study. This is to ensure that children are not overly burdened with the issue of consent and the researcher will take the main burden of responsibility on the issue of consent. Subsequent publications arising from the research will not make use of any photos which identify people, faces or places which only include photos