

Summary

Wellbeing Literacy: A Capability Model for Wellbeing Science and Practice

What is wellbeing literacy?

Wellbeing literacy is formally defined as “*the capability of comprehending and composing wellbeing languages, across various contexts, that may be intentionally used to maintain or improve the wellbeing of oneself, others or the world*”.

At its core, wellbeing literacy is understood as a **capability**. This concept is derived from Sen’s Capability Approach, an economic theory that focuses on what people are able to **be** and **do**. In the context of wellbeing, having this capability promotes freedom and choice in the wellbeing experience. It gives people the freedom to choose what **wellbeing means to them** and the **choice in how that is maximised** via language and knowledge. Wellbeing literacy acts as a mediator or moderator in the wellbeing experience, allowing individuals more options to “convert” the wellbeing opportunities available in their internal or external environment into meaningful wellbeing achievements or “functionings”.

What are the components of wellbeing literacy?

As shown in figure 1, wellbeing literacy is comprised of five interacting components. Literacy is seen as a **practice** with a **purpose**.

Knowing words and basic facts about wellbeing

Knowledge and Vocabulary

To understand information about wellbeing presented through various means, such as reading, listening, or viewing. Multimodal language includes alphabetic, pictorial, visual, aural, or combinations of these systems

Intentionality

Comprehending Skills

Habit of intentionally using language to maintain or improve wellbeing of self or others. Includes ethical considerations

Wellbeing Literacy

Context Sensitivity

Composing Skills

The ability to express ideas or experiences about wellbeing through different modalities, such as writing, speaking, or creating messages

Adjusting communication to suit context e.g. communicating about wellbeing to a 12-year-old versus a 60-year-old, or in a school versus on a beach

Figure 1: The five components interact to create wellbeing literacy

How can educational leaders apply wellbeing literacy?

1. Recognise Schools as a Key Context

There is growing focus on wellbeing as an aim of education. Educational leaders can therefore approach wellbeing initiatives through the lens of language and communication, understanding its importance in this specific environment.

2. Cultivating Wellbeing Literacy as a Capability

Wellbeing literacy is described as a capability i.e. "what people are able to be and do", that promotes freedom and choice in experiencing wellbeing. For educational leaders, this means aiming to empower students, staff, and the wider school community to define and pursue what wellbeing means to them through language and knowledge. It's about enabling individuals to have more options to use the opportunities available in the school environment to achieve wellbeing experiences.



3. Focusing on Language as a Lever

Educational leaders can utilise the idea that language is a ubiquitous systemic lever for wellbeing. They can focus on how language is intentionally used within the school environment to cultivate and sustain wellbeing over time and across contexts. This involves being aware that the language used (by leaders, teachers, staff, and students) can influence conceptions and levels of thriving.

4. Applying the Five Components of Wellbeing Literacy

Educational leaders can integrate the five core components into their strategies and practices within the school:

- **Vocabulary and Knowledge:** Leaders can work to ensure a shared understanding and vocabulary around wellbeing concepts among staff and students. This involves introducing and discussing words and basic facts related to wellbeing.
- **Comprehension:** Leaders can encourage and facilitate the ability for staff and students to understand information about wellbeing from various sources (e.g., reading articles, listening to talks, viewing videos or materials).
- **Composition:** Leaders can promote opportunities for individuals to express their ideas and experiences related to wellbeing through different means (e.g., speaking, writing, creating art or messages).

- **Context Awareness and Adaptability:** This is crucial in a diverse school environment. Leaders must be aware that how they communicate about wellbeing needs to be adapted depending on the audience (e.g., communicating with a 12-year-old is different from a teacher or parent) and the specific situation or setting within the school. Being wellbeing literate means being able to make these adjustments.
- **Intentionality for Wellbeing:** At the heart of the application is the purposeful and mindful use of language. Wellbeing leaders use language with the clear intention of maintaining or improving the wellbeing of themselves, their staff, their students, or the school community as a whole.

5. Shaping the School's Discourse

By intentionally focusing on language, educational leaders can actively shape the "dominant discourses" around wellbeing within the school. They can promote a discourse that is empowering, supportive, and reflective of the value placed on wellbeing.

6. Creating Enabling Environments

Educational leaders can contribute to creating an internal and external environment within the school where wellbeing literacy can flourish. This might involve providing resources, fostering open communication channels, and encouraging practices like active listening, which is highlighted as a relevant capability (wellbeing comprehension) that builds relationships and promotes positive experiences in other contexts such as families.



References

Oades, Lindsay & Aaron, Jarden & Hou, Hanchao & Ozturk, Corina & Williams, Paige & Slemp, Gavin & Huang, Lanxi. (2021). Wellbeing Literacy: A Capability Model for Wellbeing Science and Practice. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 18. 719. [10.3390/ijerph18020719](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020719)